



Strengths-Based IEPs: Fact Sheet

A strengths-based IEP is...

- ✓ An approach that leverages a student's abilities to help work on weaknesses.
- ✓ A way to combine standards-based IEPs with a [growth mindset](#) that helps students believe they can improve their abilities.
- ✓ A process that can lead to more self-awareness and self-advocacy.

A strengths-based IEP is *not*...

- ✗ A superficial look at strengths. Abilities are thoughtfully woven into IEP goals.
- ✗ An adults-only process. Students are encouraged to help identify strengths and actively participate in IEP meetings.
- ✗ Just about strengths and weaknesses. It also focuses on interests and preferences.

This new kind of IEP reframes how IEP teams talk about—and use—strengths

Too often, IEP teams discuss a student's strengths by saying things like "What I like about this student is...." These comments can be hard to connect to the rest of the IEP in actionable ways. But IEP teams can reframe the strengths discussion so it focuses on abilities: "*What does the student do well?*"

For example, for students who struggle in math, what do they do well in that subject? Are they good at using a calculator? Do they prefer to work independently or in groups? Strengths-based IEPs aim to start with a strength for each of the skill sets described in the student's present level of performance.

Teacher training in strengths-based IEPs can help schools work on...

Using strengths finders to identify abilities, interests and preferences	Preparing students to participate in IEP meetings and self-advocate	Helping weave strengths into IEP goals as a way to set high expectations	Expanding IEP templates to focus on strengths, interests and preferences
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Spotlight: Student-led IEPs

Student participation in IEP meetings can deepen the discussion about strengths, interests and preferences. It can also help students set ambitious goals and meet them. That's what happened at Georgia's [Rutland Middle School](#), where student-led IEPs have had a big impact on kids with dyslexia and other learning issues. These students not only learned about their strengths and weaknesses. Several kids set a goal of no longer needing special education in high school—and a handful reached this goal by the end of the first semester of ninth grade.