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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Social-Emotional Learning Playbook* by Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and Dominique Smith.

LEARN MORE about this title!

INVEST IN YOUR STUDENTS' ABILITY TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR STRENGTHS

An asset-mapping project can provide students with a window to see that what they bring to the classroom is valued and respected. Continue that conversation by ensuring that students are able to learn about their own strengths that they possess as individuals. As we discussed in the previous section, the VIA-IS is a tool grounded in the research about character strengths. There is also an online version for students ages 8 through 17 to use in order to identify their signature strengths. The online tool for young people consists of 103 questions and takes 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The questions are further adjusted by age to improve readability for younger students and can be accessed at <https://www.viacharacter.org/surveys/takesurvey>.

It is important for families to see the strengths their child possesses. Families with a child with a history of school failure may have lower expectations because they have not experienced their child's successes. Make sure that your interactions with families include highlights of their child's contributions. Far too often, families report that the only time they hear from the school is when their child is having a problem, often behavioral. Interrupt this cycle by committing to reaching out to the families of every child on your roster regularly to discuss a strength you see, and more often for students who have a history of difficulty. This may come in the form of a short note, phone call, or text. Most schools use a student management information system (MIS) to manage gradebooks, and these systems are accessible by parents. Add a field to the MIS that allows you to add strengths-based comments for families to read.

Students' knowledge of their cultural assets helps them discover their power.

Family interactions often come in the form of parent-teacher conferences. We are fans of a series of questions that can be posed to the child and their family to focus attention on their strengths. We have used similar questions during summer home visits conducted by special educators for incoming ninth-grade students at the school where we work. These questions come from Your Therapy Source (2019), which profiles resources for pediatric therapists, educators, and parents:

1. This student is best at . . .
2. This student has an amazing ability to . . .
3. This student is frequently recognized for . . .
4. This student smiles when . . .
5. This student is happiest when . . .
6. This student participates the most when . . .
7. This student does this better than any other student . . .
8. This student is highly interested in . . .
9. This student is highly motivated by . . .
10. This student always takes pride in their work when . . .

Being a strength-spotter requires deliberate intention to do so. All of us have been caught up at one time or another with a script that seems more intent on

cataloging everything that is wrong without giving attention to what is working, and what strengths that young person possesses. Often, tapping into their strengths is key to changing their learning trajectory.



NOTE TO SELF

Now it's your turn. It's easy to talk about a strengths-based approach in a theoretical way, but more challenging when we're talking about *that kid*. You know, the one that keeps you awake at night as you struggle to make a breakthrough. That child who frustrates you. That young person who causes you to dread third period because you know they came to school today, and you wish they hadn't. Now that you've got that current student in your mind, respond to the following prompts.

1. This student is best at . . .

2. This student has an amazing ability to . . .

3. This student is frequently recognized for . . .

4. This student smiles when . . .

5. This student is happiest when . . .

6. This student participates the most when . . .

7. This student does this better than any other student . . .

8. This student is highly interested in . . .

9. This student is highly motivated by . . .

10. This student always takes pride in their work when . . .

If you are at a loss to answer any of these questions, then it's a signal that you need to learn more about the student. If you were successful in answering these questions as positives, consider how you are going to leverage these strengths.



CASE IN POINT

The preschool educators at Rockdale Community School are meeting to hone their skills at developing strengths-based plans for their young students. The preschool is inclusive of children with and without disabilities, a practice endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Barton & Smith, 2015). They are working through three scenarios based on children in their charge to shift to a strengths-based approach. Help them rewrite these statements using your knowledge of strengths. To prepare you for this, reread the chart in Figure 1.1 on what a strengths-based approach is and is not.

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DEFICIT-BASED STATEMENT	STRENGTHS-BASED TEACHING STATEMENT
Madison has difficulty transitioning to the classroom in the morning and it takes her a long time to settle down.	
Carlos is an English learner and can't communicate his needs in English to his teachers.	
Karina hits and grabs other children to get their attention.	