



## Strength-Based Teacher-Driven Change Begins with Individual Greatness

**W**hat does Strength-Based Teacher Driven (SBTD) Change mean in practical terms? How is SBTD thinking different from other school change strategies? What are the differences between strength-based and deficit-based teaching approaches?

SBTD change does not seek to reform public education; its goal is to transform the teaching and learning process from deficits to strengths. The deficit-based model focuses on solving problems in education; problems associated with teaching and teachers, learning and outcomes, and standards and expectation. The goal of deficit-based consultants, politicians, and education bureaucrats is promote solutions to problems they have identified.

Most elected leaders and educational bureaucrats at the state and federal levels view the public schools in deficit terms and seldom focus on individual and school-wide strengths. In addition, most politicians and educational consultants do not believe teachers can improve the schools from the inside out. Rather, the prevailing thinking is school change must be externally driven and focus on specific problems.

SBTD change is grounded in the belief that only teachers, with the support of school-community members, can initiate changes that will ultimately benefit all children and the teaching and learning process. By emphasizing student strengths over weaknesses, what works over failures, and resources over obstacles, we change everything about our schools. In other words, our students, regardless of their status or condition become the centerpiece on what takes place in the teaching and learning environment. Another way of saying this is that you get what you look for: In a strength-based place you look for potential and opportunities and in a deficit-based environment you look for problems and obstacles to success. By rejecting deficits, we focus on the people - teachers - most responsible for knowing "what works" and what needs to be done to create a successful teaching and learning environment.

**T**eachers are Key - Teachers know what has worked in the past and can use this knowledge to innovate and produce schools that challenge students and encourage success. Through strength-based conversations with school-community members, teachers discover what it means to be a successful and what works in our schools. Strength-based thinking requires both a change of heart and mind and by focusing on strengths and positive experiences, every local school-community can generate a body of knowledge to build a great learning place for every child. But this means politicians and educational bureaucrats release their strangle hold on parents and teachers; most important, they stop thinking of children in deficit terms.

**G**etting Started - Becoming a SBTD change advocate is relatively easy. First, ask yourself a simple question: "Why I am a great teacher?" There is a good chance you have never asked yourself such a question. But that's it. SBTD change begins with increasing your awareness of how great you are as a classroom teacher. Focusing on your greatness changes your mindset along with your direction and purpose.

Second, organize a SBTD team of teachers, parents, and school employees. Like any new approach, you need to start with what you have in place: your friends, colleagues, and associates. Your goal as a team is to determine what's great about the people around you and what's great about your classroom, school, or district. Without getting too complicated, this means asking affirmative or strength-based questions and interviewing everyone you can in the system.

Here are some strength-based interview steps: (1) Determine your focus. Which of the seven factors do you want to emphasize: Future Oriented, School Family Relations, School Wide Relations, Student Centered, Work Oriented, Results Oriented, Student Relations, (2) Develop a set of strength-based questions, (3) Determine who should do the interviews and who should be interviewed, and (4) Begin interviewing.

Interviews are not dialogues or conversations. Through SBTD interviews you simply collect strength-based information. During the interviews, you don't debate or argue a point. However, you certainly can ask questions if you need more information or clarification.

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*Once your interviews are completed and information collected, please contact the CTA Institute for Teaching. We will help you move to the next step in creating a Strength-Based learning environment for your students.*

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[www.teacherdrivenchange.org](http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org)  
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**M**oving from Problems to Strengths - We are so used to looking for problems, rather than what works; focusing on what is going wrong, rather than what's going right. And while a strengths approach may not come naturally, SBTD change can have extremely positive and productive results. So, if you're ready to start, here are some questions you can ask teachers and other school-community members to begin creating a strength-based learning environment for your students.

**S**trength-Based Questions - The sample questions below will help get you started. But they are just a beginning. The IFT wants to develop a repository of SBTD questions for CTA members. Please use the comment section below to add your SBTD questions.

1. What works really well around here (classroom, school, district)?
2. What are you doing that is great for kids?
3. Describe what is most exciting about your school-wide relations?
4. Without being modest, describe why you are a great teacher.
5. How have other people contributed to your success?
6. Describe your most powerful strengths as a teacher.
7. What is it about teaching that you enjoy the most?
8. Describe one of your most successful parent-teacher conferences.
9. What does success look like in your classroom?
10. Tell me what a good day looks like for you.
11. As a teacher, what great things are you doing that make you even better?
12. What are you most proud of in your professional life?
13. Thinking about great teaching, what comes to mind?
14. What inspires you to teach?
15. What makes teaching most enjoyable?
16. How do students behave when they believe they have a positive future?
17. How do students behave when they have a powerful work ethic?
18. When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?
19. When things are going well in your teaching, what is happening?
20. What is it about your teaching that helps you stay strong?
21. What do you value about yourself as a teacher?
22. What would other people who know you tell you why you are a great teacher?

23. How would your family and friends describe you as a teacher?
24. Thinking about your ability to overcome challenges, what helps you the most?
25. How does teaching give you a sense of wellbeing?
26. Describe your hopes and dreams as a teacher.
27. How have people around you helped you overcome challenges?
28. What are three things that have helped you overcome obstacles?
29. Describe your most positive experiences with students' parents.
30. What do you enjoy most about being part of a professional community?
31. What is it about the future that gives you confidence?
32. How has the teaching profession improved over the years?
33. How would you describe the strengths, skills, and resources you have in your life?
34. Describe why you are most hopeful about the public schools.
35. What are the most positive factors in your life as a teacher?
36. What are three things that are going well in your life as a teacher right now?
37. What gives you energy as a teacher?
38. What is the most rewarding part of your life as an educator?
39. Describe the contributions you have made to public education.
40. Describe a time when school-community members worked successfully together.
41. Based on your experiences, what do you believe are great parenting skills?
42. What makes you feel excited or useful or satisfied as a classroom teacher?
43. What do you believe encourages positive student-teacher relations?
44. What strength stands out as most important to your success as an educator?
45. How have your needs been met as a teacher?
46. Describe the administrative support you have received as a classroom teacher.
47. Tell me about the creative teaching strategies you have tried in your classroom.
48. What is that "one thing" you enjoy most about teaching?
49. Describe what your school district has done to help you become a better teacher?
50. What resources do you find most helpful in making you a great teacher?

## Add Your Voice

These appreciative questions are designed around strength-based thinking. But they are just examples. IFT needs your suggestions and SBTD questions.

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***Please visit the IFT's strength-based hub. This unique social media platform has no ads, just the voice of teachers and an opportunity to share ideas about building a strength-based school community.***

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**[www.strengthbasedhub.org](http://www.strengthbasedhub.org)**