

## Strength-Based Learning Plan: A proposal to dismantle normalcy in schools

“If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today’s prototypical culture were possible...such an investigation would needs show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality.”

~ Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

“There is no dis/ability without normalcy.” ~ John Harris Loflin

“The problem’s not the student with learning disabilities; it’s the way normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the learning disabled child.”

~ paraphrased from L. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy”

“I’m not deaf, you can’t sign. You have a signing disability.”

~ paraphrased from L. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy”

## Strength-Based Learning Plan: Normalcy or self-actualization?

A student deemed “Special Ed.” gets an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). Historically, IEP concepts show a pre-determined focus on a student’s weaknesses as compared to the “standards” whether these standards are actual, perceived, or implied.

### Informing our conscience

Also, research exposes the socio-political-cultural agendas which purposely leave out race, class and gender, and strength-based views of humanity when developing Special Ed policies. See links to:

- [Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the 19th Century](#)
- [The Hunt for Disability: The New Eugenics and the Normalization of School Children](#)

Since IEPs are based on deficit models of students (what they “can’t do”), a Strength-Based Learning Plan (S-BLP) is suggested. Including the special education diagnosis, an S-BLP will also “diagnose” a student’s strengths (interests, talents, and uniqueness), emphasizing what they “can do” and thus mandating services to foster each student’s self-actualization.

- Summary of S-BLP  
<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Summary-The-Strength-Based-Individualized-Learning-Plan.pdf>

Dismantling normalcy presents an unprecedented and truly transformational concept which can lead to the reduction of special education referrals and outcomes such as suspensions and expulsions—especially for African American males.

## Why a S-BLP is important for Indiana: In 1907 Indiana legalized white supremacy—creating dis/ability and planting the seeds for the creation of Special Education



- In 1907, Indiana passed the world's first eugenics (scientific racism/racial hygiene) law legalizing "normalcy." This law rationalized white supremacy and the sterilization of "mental defectives" and "criminals."
- Since normalcy perpetuates the myth of the normal child, it defines ableism in schools, and justifies special education placements, especially for Black American students.
  - Therefore, in many ways the S-BLP is a framework helping expose, examine, and challenge the manner in which race/racism clearly impact the special education referral process.
- The S-BLP is a project of achieving racial emancipation and anti-subordination by examining the possibility of transforming the relationship between law and the possible maintenance of white supremacy/racial power over time.
- A S-BLP also focuses exposing race/ableism: shows how forces of racism/ableism circulate inter-dependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways--upholding notions of normality.
- The development of the S-BLP takes place in the shadow of Eli Lilly, a global entity seemingly bent on making pharmaceuticals to normalize all students, especially those with a "sitting disability."

In contrast to past social constructs of race, disability and intelligence based on a deficit model of humanity codified by the 1907 Eugenics Law, the S-BLP challenges the Indianapolis Public Schools and the wider Hoosier community to reconcile its infamous past, and discredit and abandon normalcy, leading the nation to an enlightened view of our human potential.

- Current IEPs focus on deficiencies in order to satisfy the ethos of normalcy that plagues public education. The S-BLP will circumvent and neutralize race, gender, ability, class, and age by creating possibilities for students to leave school with experiences meeting their own standards, developing their passions--fulfilling their uniqueness.

### Here is a 2016 B&LPI commentary on local and national events around Special Ed:

- **Special Ed. Part 1 The untold story about our IPS: A national leader in over-diagnosing Black males as mentally retarded**  
<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Special-Ed-Pt-1-The-untold-story-of-IPS-and-Special-Ed.-Sept-1.pdf>
- **Special Ed. Part 2 A history of special education: Circumventing Brown vs. Board**  
<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Special-Ed.-Pt-2-Circumventing-Brown-vs.-Board-of-Education.pdf>
- **Special Ed. Part 3 Indiana and Indianapolis 1900-2010: Still 2 systems separate and unequal**
  - Indiana, Indianapolis, race and disability, class and ability: From Attucks and Wood to
  - The Sidener Gifted Academy, Tindley Charter School, and New Horizons Alternative HS
  - Eugenics and special education: Attucks HS and Wood HS
  - The gentrification of special education: From race and disability to class and ability:<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Special-Ed.-Pt-3-Indiana-and-Indianapolis-1900-2010-Still-2-systems-separate-and-unequal.pdf>
- **Special Ed. Part 4 It's time to re-invent special education: From normalcy to diversity**  
<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Special-Ed.-Pt-4-Its-time-to-re-invent-special-education-From-normalcy-to-diversity.pdf>

**Proposed Action Item Discredit and abandon normalcy: Building on and validating the strengths of African American students**

*William is an African American male in Special Ed. He has an IEP based on the myth of the normal child and thus what's normal for his age. He is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader reading at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. His IEP prescribes extra tutoring in reading. For argument's sake, let's say William likes bugs that fly upside down. Such insects are not in the state curriculum. Since he does not have a S-BLP in addition to his IEP, his passion for such bugs are not validated.*

*William is now 18. He is leaving school. He still can't read past the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. Since he didn't have a S-BLP, he's leaving school both illiterate and without developing his unique passion.*

*AACI must make sure our public schools build on and regard the strengths of African American students. Many of the personal and cultural strengths of Black students are either not recognized or ignored in Indiana's standard curriculum. To iterate, some Black students will not fulfill the terms of their deficit-oriented IEP. Without an S-BLP, they will leave school with little or nothing regarding their self-actualization.*

AACI will work closely with Merry Juerling (mjwith3@yahoo.com), co-creator of the S-BLP, to organize a committee of 3 parents of Special Ed students, and 2 Special Ed teachers, and 8 Special Ed students to plan a strategy for introducing and actualizing the S-BLP in 1 IPS elementary school and 1 IPS middle school.

Pre and Post analysis to will be conducted in order to see if the S-BLP made a difference in students' engagement in school and the classroom as well as life outside of school. The beginnings of an extended 5 and 10 year longitudinal study will be made to determine positive or negative outcomes.