

## Assessing Student Strengths and Educational Needs

I worked with a student who was beginning to have difficulties at school. This student was succeeding through the first two and a half years of high school (on track to graduate) and then began failing to attend school regularly and thus struggling academically. My supervising counselor and I contacted home to gain more information about what might be happening for this student. At the same time, we met with the student to create a plan for the remainder of the year that would allow them to be at school regularly. The student expressed a strong desire to transfer to one of the school district's alternative schooling options. The student was on an IEP so our process required us to have a meeting to reassess eligibility and discuss alternative placement options with the student's IEP case manager.

In the IEP meeting I talked with the student about what they felt their strengths and struggles were and what educational, social or emotional needs were not being met at the school. I learned that the student had many strong social skills and academic skills but that they felt the school was not the right socially supportive place they need to succeed. I learned that the recent struggles with attendance stemmed from an emotional crisis in processing the death of a friend. A year before a friend had died in a car accident and the student's struggles came on the anniversary of the accident. The student had not processed the death and was triggered by the remembrance of their friend during the anniversary. The larger class sizes and lack of personalized connection to teachers was a significant barrier to the student in being able to focus on academic work. They thought they would be more successful in a smaller learning environment.

I talked with the student about how individual counseling could be helpful for them in processing the difficult emotions surrounding their friend's death. I referred them to our school-based community mental health counselor. I worked with the student to assess how we could better serve their academic needs at the current school while I also advocated for an alternative placement for the student where they would have a smaller learning environment which the student identified as a need for their educational success.