

Anything but standard

Writing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) was getting easy—a little too easy. Deb Bradl, a mother of two daughters with IEPs and an administrator in the Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired, says, “Goals were getting generic. You could count on some language showing up every time.”

In 2012, the [Delaware Department of Education \(DDOE\)](#) adopted standards-based IEPs (SBIEPs) to reverse this trend. “They got out in front of this one,” remarks Tina Tsatsaronis, a special education instructional coach for [Christina School District](#). “It was a proactive move.”

With DDOE funding, CDS created [Writing Rigorous IEPs to Teach Educational Standards \(WRITES\)](#), an SBIEP training program. [Steve Smith](#), the project lead, says that by 2016 WRITES had reached every district: “3,200 educators, coordinators, specialists, related service providers and administrators.”

SBIEPs differ from old IEPs by incorporating [Common Core](#) learning goals—“standards.” However, they are anything but standardized. The ultimate purpose is enabling students to access grade-level material by isolating every skill a student needs to meet a standard and tailoring instruction of each one to suit each student’s individual learning style. Students who need to focus on simpler goals, Smith says, can continue to have their IEPs target life and behavioral skills as well as academics.

SBIEPs also require a new level of data analysis. IEP teams look at figures like test scores and classwork grades to track student progress. This caught Bradl by surprise. Suddenly, she says, her elder daughter’s report card featured not just a written assessment of her reading ability, but numbers representing her current level and upcoming benchmarks. “Now I have a better idea how she’s doing,” Bradl says.

Tsatsaronis and Smith note that these more descriptive and detailed SBIEPs take added effort to compose. But that’s to be expected, says Tsatsaronis: IEPs that are more meaningful and better able to make a difference in a child’s life “should be a little hard to write.”



CDS’s Steve Smith (left) trains Richard Felder, a special education teacher at Christiana High School, in standards-based IEP development.