

# 3 CURRICULAR WAYS TO HIGHLIGHT STUDENT STRENGTHS

## 1. THINK-TAC-TOE

Cater to your student's diverse strengths by designing thoughtful Think Tac Toe products for your next lesson or unit. We've seen teachers allow student to choose one; choose three or even provide individual differentiated Think Tac Toes. The options are as limitless as your student's talents.

## 2. CLASSROOM EXPERTS

Showing off student strengths doesn't always have to be done within a formalized lesson or activity. We love the concept of setting up Classroom Experts. This strategy allows students to choose their "Expertise" and then as the educator you provide meaningful ways for each expert to support peers (and you, don't kid yourself!) in formal and informal ways. For example, Michael was the "Excel Expert" because he was wildly talented at using excel to chart and graph data. Students naturally knew this was, but the teacher also made more formal references to his status throughout the year, such as, "Alright folks, when you're working on Section B of your project you might want to check in with Michael for excel data graphing support."

### MORE GREAT IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM EXPERTS:

- Long-division expert
- History Buff
- Music Buff or DJ
- E=MC<sup>2</sup> Magician
- Problem Solver
- Listener or Helper
- Master Builder
- Class Detective
- Artist
- Tech Wizard

## 3. COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

We love a good collaborative research project. Not only does this type of learning allow students to take on roles that highlight individual strengths and engage them in a variety of diverse activities (e.g., writer, researcher, video creator, interviewer, digital mastermind, artist, choreographer), it also promotes cooperation between students. And while collaborative research projects often take the form of a trip to the school library or computer lab, we particularly love when teachers ask students to go beyond the classroom and into their own communities. This gets students straight to the source of the information and generally addresses a wider variety of learning styles (i.e. visual, kinesthetic, auditory, musical, exploratory, analytical... seriously, y'all this list goes on and on) and strengths. Not to mention it connects them in authentic and meaningful ways to their community.

### HERE ARE JUST A FEW IDEAS FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS:

- Students create a digital story to educate an audience (i.e. their peers) about a current event (i.e. the 2018 Primary Campaign)
- Students create and publish a 4-series podcast on the #BlackLivesMatter movement and interview members from the organized chapter in the student's hometown
- Students write and film a documentary as a way to explore a looming community problem (e.g. the history and future plans for the highly polluted Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn)
- Students write, direct and act in a short play about mitosis and meiosis
- Students create an art installation and present a historical and future examination about why the community needs more reliable public transportation
- Students become Citizen Scientists

### Worried about rigor and/or assessment when it comes to Collaborative Research Projects?

No sweat. Set up learning contracts for each collaborative group. Make sure each student, as well as the group, has defined benchmarks for success and an explicit vision about how their strengths benefit the group. Then, schedule class time for check-ins with you. Following these steps ensures that students are accountable to you and each other, makes it possible for you to assess individual and group progress, and helps students focus on their strengths and how these are valuable to the larger group in very specific ways.