

Examining Beliefs About Poverty

As educators, we must be sensitive to the effects of poverty on our students' states of mind and ensure that we separate their developing sense of self from their living conditions.

-William Parrett and Kathleen Budge, Turning High Poverty Schools into High Performing Schools

We often carry certain attitudes about people experiencing poverty without realizing it, even if we have experienced poverty. To best serve students identified as "economically disadvantaged", teachers and paraprofessionals/paraeducators must examine underlying beliefs they may have that could impact student success. The following questions do not constitute an exhaustive list, but may help to begin a reflective process related to examining beliefs about poverty:

- To what degree do I believe that experiencing poverty is due to a moral failure?
- To what degree do I believe "being poor" also means being uneducated, backward, troublesome, etc.?
- To what degree do I realize students experiencing poverty may be more vulnerable to bullying and abuse by adults and students at school because they may not have a visible advocate?
- To what degree do I believe that all students—even those experiencing poverty—deserve a challenging educational experience?
- To what degree do I realize that students experiencing poverty possess assets (strengths, skill sets, attitudes, talents) and that I have the power to recognize and appreciate such gifts?
- To what degree do I "see" and validate students experiencing poverty?
- To what degree do I realize that students experiencing poverty do not need to learn "grit" rather, they may need support in developing and/or sustaining the belief they **deserve** to succeed in school?

Students don't care what you know until they know that you care. - John C. Maxwell

and

Love is not enough for students experiencing poverty to succeed in school. They must be challenged, believed in, and afforded multiple opportunities for success.