

# STRENGTH-BASED COLLECTIVE BRIEF



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## HOW DOES DEFICIT THINKING SHOW UP IN SCHOOLS?

Deficit thinking—viewing and interpreting situations or individuals through a lens of deficiency or weakness (Dweck, 2006), can have harmful effects on both individuals and communities. In schools, deficit thinking can manifest in a number of ways, such as lower expectations for subgroups of students due to their family background, race/ethnicity, or socio-economic status (Osterman, 2000). This belief can ultimately result in a self-fulfilling prophecy where students don't achieve their full potential due to lack of support and opportunities (Dweck, 2006).

Deficit thinking can also show up in the way that educators approach teaching and learning. For example, if an educator believes that a particular student is not capable of learning a certain subject or skill, they may not put in the effort to find creative and effective ways to teach that student (Paris & AlimoMetcalfe, 2009). This can lead to a lack of engagement and motivation for both the student and the teacher.

To shift away from deficit thinking, there are several strategies that can be implemented. Reflecting on one's own biases and assumptions (Dweck, 2006) and seeking out professional development opportunities (Paris & AlimoMetcalfe, 2009) can help educators learn more about inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices and strategies for challenging deficit thinking. Operating from a strength-based approach that allows all students to contribute something meaningful to the classroom allows educators and students alike to chip away at deficit beliefs. Setting high expectations for all students (Dweck, 2006) and using inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices (Osterman, 2000) can also help to foster a growth mindset and create a welcoming and inclusive classroom culture.

To learn more about how to shift away from deficit thinking in schools, check out *Hacking Deficit Thinking: 8 reframes that will change the way you think about strength-based practices and equity in schools* by Byron McClure and Kelsie Reed.

## REFERENCES

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.

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Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), 323-367.

Paris, S. G., & AlimoMetcalfe, B. (2009). The role of self-beliefs in learning and achievement. *Educational Psychologist*, 44(2), 96-116.

