Challenging Assumptions Reflection

Examining our beliefs about families is a critical component of REAL Family Engagement. When educators operate with asset-based beliefs about families, they are more likely to build successful academic partnerships with families. Conversely, when educators operate with deficit-based beliefs about families, they are more likely to limit communication and information sharing, thus limiting a families' ability to play the Five Essential Roles.

The table on the next page is a tool to spark a conversation about how our assumptions can influence our actions, and examine ways in which we can question ourselves, or others when we find biased or negative beliefs about families are emerging. The table on the next page can be completed individually as a personal reflection or facilitated in a group setting, such as a team or staff meeting.

*Reflection Stems to Challenge Negative Beliefs About Families

- Whose voice is missing? Whose voice needs to be heard?
- What would the family/student say about that? What would ___ say if they heard that/about that?
- Who is this actually true for and how do you know? Can you identify someone for whom this is not true?
- How true would this be through ___'s eyes?
- We have heard your story about [a family, situation, circumstance, etc.]. What do you think their [i.e., the family] story is about [a family, situation, circumstance, etc.]?
- What does this mean for students' opportunities at your school?
- How can you think about supporting this student/family differently?
- Let's say you decide not to address this mindset where it exists? What are the implications of that decision?

Example Negative Beliefs about Families	What assumptions are being made about what it takes or what it looks/sounds like to support a child's learning?	How could this belief potentially impact an educator's actions?	What would you say to yourself/ask yourself (or someone else) if you were challenging this belief?*
Families aren't invested here.	Investment is when families attend school events, participate in the PTO, and volunteer to chaperone field trips. If parents aren't doing these things, then they are not invested.	If we operate from the belief that families aren't invested, we may limit communication and information sharing with families. We might stop trying to engage.	What are some of the invisible investments families might be making in their child's schooling? Who is this true for and how do you know? What would families say about that belief that they are not invested? Would they agree? What reasons might families have for not "showing up" in ways that we, as educators, hope they will?
"Families here are functionally illiterate, so they can't support distance learning."			
Families don't have the capacity to support learning at home.			
"Families don't care."			