

# The Twelve Touchstones of Good Teaching

## TWELVE THINGS TO DO EVERY DAY: WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT

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The book *The Twelve Touchstones of Good Teaching* touches on the main problem we have faced as a district, school and in our grade-level/FLA teams—Information Overload. We have looked extensively at research and articles concerning what makes “good teaching”. We have studied and discussed many practices that would increase student achievement. In the book, Goodwin is quoted as stating:

In some ways, the countless studies, articles, and reports on education seem to create a phenomenon similar to what radio broadcasters refer to as signal-to-noise ratio, a measure of how much the true signal—be it Beethoven’s *Moonlight* sonata or late-night talk radio—is corrupted by static. Like the crackles and whistles that break up the signal of a faraway AM radio station, the preponderance of reports, information, and ideas in the field of education may have the effect of drowning out the big ideas—the key underlying principles of what’s most important when it comes to improving the odds for life success for all students.

It is for this reason that the authors distilled the research down to three main categories—**Be Demanding, Be Supportive, and Be Intentional**—that are a Do-Confirm list rather than a Read-Do list. It is meant as a resource to refer back to in order to make sure you have not missed anything important rather than a step-by-step “to do list”. The checklist to be helpful in the following ways:

- Developing a theory of action
  - Develop a theoretical framework into which to put things—not only content but your approach as well. This will help you to filter and assimilate the barrage of new ideas coming at you all the time. Some teachers express feelings of being overwhelmed or confused about how to assimilate new ideas. The checklist is aimed at helping you to sift through the information and, instead of being overwhelmed and feeling you have to start over with new teaching practices, you will be able to see how new ideas can enhance what you’re already doing.
- Staying focused on what matters most
  - Time is a valuable commodity in schools and in a classroom. If you say “I can’t possibly do all 12 of the items on the checklist every day. There is just not enough time”, you should ask yourself: If I can’t do all of the important things I should be doing, what should I stop doing? This is a difficult negotiation with yourself. There are a number of things you feel you need to do during your time with students, so negotiating a “stop-doing” list is an important first step. Use your grade level/FLA teams to help you create the list. Brian would be more than happy to help in this process as well.
- Supporting professionalism among colleagues
  - Utilize this checklist to “embrace a culture of teamwork and discipline” Use this as a jumping off point to discuss what good teaching looks like and successes and setbacks you have experienced. This sharing of best practice can help us to standardize successful practices across grade levels and subject areas.

## Be Demanding

	Checklist Item	What it Looks Like	Why It's Important
	<b>Item 1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I use standards to guide every learning opportunity	Teachers unpack standards to identify what students need to know and be able to do and also identify big ideas within them to guide unit and lesson planning. They view standards not as a one-size-fits-all approach but as a platform for creative lesson planning and self-directed student learning.	The strongest school-level correlate of student success is the opportunity to learn—the extent to which curriculum is aligned to standards and assessments. Aligning lessons and units to standards ensures students are challenged and no gaps or redundancies exist in their learning experiences.
	<b>Item 2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I ensure students set personal learning objectives for each lesson	Teachers help students challenge themselves by setting ambitious long-term goals for learning and short-term learning objectives that break learning goals into achievable, bite-sized chunks. Teachers begin with the end in mind, using learning objectives to guide the planning of every lesson and unit.	One of the strongest predictors of student success is fate control—a belief in their ability to control their own academic destinies. By setting and achieving small goals, students develop fate control, learned optimism, and a willingness to take on new challenges. Research suggests teacher effectiveness largely boils down to deliberate teaching of learning objectives.
	<b>Item 3</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I peel back the curtain and make my performance expectations clear.	Teachers use performance rubrics and other methods to ensure students know how their performance will be judged. They use rubrics to guide student improvement and shift the role of the teacher away from a “giver-outer” of grades to a coach who is helping them accomplish their learning goals	Research shows that clear performance rubrics improve student achievement by helping focus student learning. Rubrics may also support intrinsic motivation by helping students find and work through their own “Goldilocks zone” of challenge—where work is neither too easy nor too difficult.
	<b>Item 4</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I measure understanding against high expectations	Teachers ensure that course grades reflect actual academic performance, minimizing the proportion of nonacademic factors, such as effort, behavior and homework, that contribute to course grades. They also use appropriate assessment methods to encourage critical thinking and challenge students to meet high expectations.	Studies suggest that grade inflation remains a real phenomenon, giving students the false impression that they are prepared for the rigors of later learning opportunities. One reason for this may be that course grades often incorporate a hodgepodge of nonacademic factors, which, in effect, lower expectations for the student.

# Be Supportive

	Checklist Item	What it Looks Like	Why It's Important
	<b>Item 5</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I engage student interest with every lesson	Teachers hook student interest at the start of lessons and use a variety of techniques to motivate learning throughout lessons and units, including providing choices in learning activities, framing lessons around mysteries or puzzles, and using novelty and variety in the classroom	Student motivation accounts for more variance in student success than ability. Studies have found, however, that student interest in core subjects declines as they progress through school. Providing students with learning choices can boost intrinsic motivation. In addition, our brains are hardwired to pay attention to novelty, puzzles, and problem solving.
	<b>Item 6</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I interact meaningfully with every student.	Teachers interact with students, getting to know them and demonstrating interest in them as individuals and as learners. They also bring a positive personality (or persona) to the classroom, displaying enthusiasm for learning and modeling for students how their particular subject areas can be worthy of lifelong pursuit.	Research shows that students with weak relationships with teachers are more likely to disengage from school. Conversely, strong positive links have been found between student performance and teacher-student relationship variables, such as empathy, warmth, nondirectivity, and sensitivity to students' social and emotional needs.
	<b>Item 7</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I use feedback to encourage effort	Teachers provide students with frequent and timely feedback that links to learning objectives. Teachers also keep feedback noncontrolling and growth oriented, helping students see how their efforts are the key to success and giving students opportunities to self-and peer assess. Teachers also ensure their feedback is actionable and tailored to individual student needs.	Effective feedback has among the strongest influences on student success of any instructional practice. Feedback is most effective when it is linked to learning objectives and is noncontrolling. It should also help students develop a growth mindset, seeing intelligence as a malleable trait
	<b>Item 8</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I create an oasis of safety and respect in my classroom.	Teachers establish clear rules for behavior and consequences for misconduct, ensuring that all students feel safe to learn and contribute to classroom discussions. Teachers also display "withitness," quickly responding to infractions or concerns as they arise. Teachers enlist students in creating positive environments, calling out positive behaviors.	Many students find their schools to be unwelcoming places. Until more basic needs of safety and respect are met, students will find it difficult to learn. The most effective behavior management techniques balance punishments for misconduct with rewards for good behavior and also enlist the entire school community in enforcing clear expectations for behavior throughout the school.

# Be Intentional

	Checklist Item	What it Looks Like	Why It's Important
	<b>Item 9</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I make the most of every minute	Teachers plan lessons to ensure bell-to-bell learning for students. They also establish routines to ensure efficient transitions and classroom logistics. They work with colleagues to minimize interruptions to instructional time due to announcements, assemblies, and other distractions	A few wasted minutes per class period can add up to weeks of lost learning time. Time of instruction has a greater effect on student achievement than socioeconomic status. Even more important is academic learning time—the actual time students are on task learning
	<b>Item 10</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I help students develop deep knowledge	Teachers introduce new knowledge by helping students connect it prior knowledge. They help students make meaningful patterns, assembling disparate bits of information into coherent patterns. They consider what students will think about with each assignment and aim to focus thinking on deep knowledge.	The goal of learning is deep knowledge—the ability to connect ideas, see patterns, and apply leaning in novel situations—which, in turn, is key to memory. Effective teaching strategies do not always work; they must be applied with intentionality according to the knowledge teachers are helping students develop.
	<b>Item 11</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I coach students to mastery.	Teachers use frequent checks for understanding to know which concepts or skills students are struggling to master and reteach as needed to help students develop mastery. They also provide students with opportunities for deliberate practice, focusing on developing the skills and knowledge they are struggling to master.	Research shows one key to elite performance is having a coach pressing performers to concentrate their practice on areas where they're needed most. Research has also found a much stronger effect for practice than homework, which suggests that homework assignments should be constructed as opportunities for deliberate practice.
	<b>Item 12</b> <input type="checkbox"/> I help students do something with their learning.	Teachers use structured classroom discussions and writing assignments to help students extend their learning. They use project-based learning and complex or heuristic problem-solving assignments to help students integrate and apply new knowledge in novel situations. Such assignments do not replace but, rather, build on content knowledge	When students do not have opportunities to extend and apply what they have learned, their new knowledge tends to fade from memory.. The ability to solve complex problems or heuristic tasks is prized in the work world and by students, who are more engaged when given opportunities to learn through real-world application.