A “high-leverage practice” is an action or task central to teaching. Carried out skillfully, these practices increase the likelihood that teaching will be effective for students’ learning. They are useful across a broad range of subject areas, grade levels, and teaching contexts, and are helpful in using and managing differences among pupils. The list here is a set of “best bets,” warranted by research evidence, wisdom of practice, and logic. The set of high-leverage practices is intended as a common framework for the practice of teaching that will provide the basis for a core curriculum for the professional training of teachers. Such a core curriculum would make possible collective development of materials and tools for training teachers, common assessments of performance, and agreement about standards for independent practice (from TeachingWorks – see above link)

1. Making content explicit through explanation, modeling, representations, and examples

Making content explicit is essential to providing all students with access to fundamental ideas and practices in a given subject. Effective efforts to do this attend both to the integrity of the subject and to students’ likely interpretations of it. They include strategically choosing and using representations and examples to build understanding and remediate misconceptions, using language carefully, highlighting core ideas while sideling potentially distracting ones, and making one’s own thinking visible while modeling and demonstrating.

2. Leading a whole-class discussion

In a whole-class discussion, the teacher and all of the students work on specific content together, using one another’s ideas as resources. The purposes of a discussion are to build collective knowledge and capability in relation to specific instructional goals and to allow students to practice listening, speaking, and interpreting. In instructionally productive discussions, the teacher and a wide range of students contribute orally, listen actively, and respond to and learn from others’ contributions.

3. Eliciting and interpreting individual students’ thinking

Teachers pose questions or tasks that provoke or allow students to share their thinking about specific academic content in order to evaluate student understanding, guide instructional decisions, and surface ideas that will benefit other students. To do this effectively, a teacher draws out a student’s thinking through carefully-chosen questions and tasks and considers and checks alternative interpretations of the student’s ideas and method.

4. Establishing norms and routines for classroom discourse central to the subject-matter domain

Each discipline has norms and routines that reflect the ways in which people in the field construct and share knowledge. These norms and routines vary across subjects but often include establishing hypotheses, providing evidence for claims, and showing one’s thinking in detail. Teaching students what they are, why they are important, and how to use them is crucial to building understanding and capability in a given subject. Teachers may use explicit explanation, modeling, and repeated practice to do this.
5. Recognizing particular common patterns of student thinking in a subject-matter domain

Although there are important individual and cultural differences among students, there are also common patterns in the ways in which students think about and develop understanding and skill in relation to particular topics and problems. Teachers who are familiar with common patterns of student thinking and development and who are fluent in anticipating or identifying them are able to work more effectively and efficiently as they plan and implement instruction and evaluate student learning.

6. Identifying and implementing an instructional response to common patterns of student thinking

Specific instructional strategies are known to be effective in response to particular common patterns of student thinking. Teachers who are familiar with them can choose among them appropriately and use them to support, extend, or begin to change student thinking.

7. Teaching a lesson or segment of instruction

During a lesson or segment of instruction, the teacher sequences instructional opportunities toward specific learning goals and represents academic content in ways that connect to students’ prior knowledge and extends their learning. In a skillfully enacted lesson, the teacher fosters student engagement, provides access to new material and opportunities for student practice, adapts instruction in response to what students do or say, and assesses what students know and can do as a result of instruction.

8. Implementing organizational routines, procedures, and strategies to support a learning environment

Teachers implement routine ways of carrying out classroom tasks in order to maximize the time available for learning and minimize disruptions and distractions. They organize time, space, materials, and students strategically and deliberately teach students how to complete tasks such as lining up at the door, passing out papers, and asking to participate in class discussion. This can include demonstrating and rehearsing routines and maintaining them consistently.

9. Setting up and managing small group work

Teachers use small group work when instructional goals call for in-depth interaction among students and in order to teach students to work collaboratively. To use groups effectively, teachers choose tasks that require and foster collaborative work, issue clear directions that permit groups to work semi-independently, and implement mechanisms for holding students accountable for both collective and individual learning. They use their own time strategically, deliberately choosing which groups to work with, when, and on what.

10. Engaging in strategic relationship-building conversations with students

Teachers increase the likelihood that students will engage and persist in school when they establish positive, individual relationships with them. Brief, one-on-one conversations with students are a fundamental way of doing this, as they help teachers learn about students and demonstrate care and
interest. They are most effective when teachers are strategic about when to have them and what to talk about and use what they learn to address academic and social needs.

11. Setting long- and short-term learning goals for students referenced to external benchmarks

Clear goals referenced to external standards help teachers ensure that all students learn expected content. Explicit goals help teachers to maintain coherent, purposeful, and equitable instruction over time. Setting effective goals involves analysis of student knowledge and skills in relation to established standards and careful efforts to establish and sequence interim benchmarks that will help ensure steady progress toward larger goals.

12. Appraising, choosing, and modifying tasks and texts for a specific learning goal

Teachers appraise and modify curriculum materials to determine their appropriateness for helping particular students work toward specific learning goals. This involves considering students’ needs and assessing what questions and ideas particular materials will raise and the ways in which they are likely to challenge students. Teachers choose and modify material accordingly, sometimes deciding to use parts of a text or activity and not others, for example, or to combine material from more than one source.

13. Designing a sequence of lessons toward a specific learning goal

Carefully-sequenced lessons help students develop deep understanding of content and sophisticated skills and practices. Teachers design and sequence lessons with an eye toward providing opportunities for student inquiry and discovery and include opportunities for students to practice and master foundational concepts and skills before moving on to more advanced ones. Effectively-sequenced lessons maintain a coherent focus while keeping students engaged; they also help students achieve appreciation of what they have learned.

14. Selecting and using particular methods to check understanding and monitor student learning

Teachers use a variety of informal but deliberate methods to assess what students are learning during and between lessons. These frequent checks provide information about students’ current level of competence and help the teacher adjust instruction during a single lesson or from one lesson to the next. They may include, for example, simple questioning, short performance tasks, or journal or notebook entries.

15. Composing, selecting, interpreting, and using information from methods of summative assessment

Effective summative assessments provide teachers with rich information about what students have learned and where they are struggling in relation to specific learning goals. In composing and selecting assessments, teachers consider validity, fairness, and efficiency. Effective summative assessments provide both students and teachers with useful information and help teachers evaluate and design further instruction. Teachers analyze the results of assessments carefully, looking for patterns that will guide efforts to assist specific students and inform future instruction.
16. Providing oral and written feedback to students on their work

Effective feedback helps focus students’ attention on specific qualities of their work; it highlights areas needing improvement; and delineates ways to improve. Good feedback is specific, not overwhelming in scope, and focused on the academic task, and supports students’ perceptions of their own capability. Giving skillful feedback requires the teacher to make strategic choices about the frequency, method, and content of feedback and to communicate in ways that are understandable by students.

17. Communicating about a student with a parent or guardian

Regular communication between teachers and parents/guardians supports student learning. Teachers communicate with parents to provide information about students’ academic progress, behavior, or development; to seek information and help; and to request parental involvement in school. These communications may take place in person, in writing, or over the phone. Productive communications are attentive to considerations of language and culture and designed to support parents and guardians in fostering their child’s success in and out of school.

18. Analyzing instruction for the purpose of improving it

Learning to teach is an ongoing process that requires regular analysis of instruction and its effectiveness. Teachers study their own teaching and that of their colleagues in order to improve their understanding of the complex interactions between teachers, students, and content and of the impact of particular instructional approaches. Analyzing instruction may take place individually or collectively and involves identifying salient features of the instruction and making reasoned hypotheses for how to improve.

19. Communicating with other professionals

Teachers routinely communicate with fellow teachers, administrators, and other professionals in order to plan teaching, discuss student needs, secure special services for students, and manage school policies. They do this orally, in meetings and presentations, and in writing, in letters, emails, newsletters, and other documents. Skillful communication is succinct, respectful, and focused on specific professional topics. It uses clear, accessible language, generally in standard English, and is attentive to its specific audience.