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## 9 CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE & ENGAGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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### 1) **Strong relationships are the center of the classroom**

The [TED talk by Rita Pierson](#) made the teacher rounds this year and for good reason, her words remind us of why we all got into the teaching profession to begin with. Pierson, a spunky 40-year veteran teacher, reminds us that not only do relationships matter, sometimes they're all that matters. "Kids don't learn from teachers they don't like."

### 2) **Students are taught Metacognitive Strategies**

Student ownership increases when we provide the time necessary for them to be aware of their own knowledge and their own thinking. Students who are excited about being in the driver's seat and steering their own learning are well on their way to becoming independent thinkers who can succeed in school, careers, and life.

### 3) **Assessment is authentic, frequent and transparent**

Students know what is being assessed and can articulate why. The focus is on constant formative assessments in many different forms rather than infrequent, larger summative assessments. Students are given numerous opportunities to improve.

#### **4) Questions are valued over answers**

Questions are really crucial for the learning process to work well. If a student enters any learning activity with natural curiosity, the possibility for meaningful interaction with specific tasks or texts greatly increases. There is a shift from the teacher asking questions to the students asking the questions – good questions – as the year progresses.

#### **5) Students are comfortable taking risks**

Students are encouraged to embrace a growth mindset, where taking risks and challenging themselves to try new approaches is celebrated. Regular conversations about learning happen – about grappling with confusion while learning new concepts, about strategies to persevere...

#### **6) There are constant opportunities for practice**

Complex ideas are approached from new angles. Old thinking is revisited. Old errors are reflected on. Different ideas and concepts are contrasted. Students constantly travel up and down Bloom's taxonomy, from the simple to the complex in an effort to maximize opportunities to learn.

#### **7) Students engage in true collaboration**

Much time is spent teaching students how to collaborate meaningfully: teaching, modeling, and practicing how to establish norms, how to listen, how to negotiate, how to work toward expectations, and how to use group brain power. Students have ample opportunities to discuss, possibly debate an issue, make shared decisions, and create products that demonstrate all of this deeper learning.

#### **8) Learning habits are consistently modeled**

Monkey see, monkey do! Cognitive, meta-cognitive, and behavioral "good stuff" is consistently modeled. Perseverance, flexibility, creativity, collaboration, priority and mindset are all great places to start. Sometimes what students learn from those around them is less directly taught, and more observational.

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