

# The Seven Pillars of Benchmark Instruction

- 1. Build Motivation, Confidence, and Engagement** All of the knowledge and skill in the world does not matter without the motivation and confidence to put those capabilities into sustained action. Consequently, our first and enduring priority is to create learning environments in which students want to engage and expect to succeed with strategic effort.
- 2. Cultivate Clarity and Focus** When we are trying to engage in an activity, there are a host of internal and external distractions that can divert our attention, cloud our perception, and diminish our performance. We teach students strategies that promote clarity and focus and these strategies help facilitate attention, communication, stress reduction, resilience, and overall performance.
- 3. Foster a Flexible and Inquisitive Mindset** Our mindsets are our fundamental beliefs about ourselves, others, knowledge, and the world. Our mindsets affect how we function every minute of every day. If we believe knowledge and personal qualities are fixed, we perceive the world in a rigid fashion and our actions reflect this orientation. However, if we understand knowledge and personal qualities to be open to change, we perceive the world in a flexible fashion, which is an orientation that supports such qualities as open-mindedness, empathy, creativity, persistence, and resilience.
- 4. Teach Strategies for Thinking and Problem Solving** If we want to become effective at any task, we need to learn the strategies that experts use to complete those tasks. The same is true with learning, thinking, and problem solving. As a result, we immerse our students in strategy instruction so that our students leave Benchmark with an extensive array of tools in their mental toolboxes. Technology provides students with digital tools that extend their capacities, facilitate their functioning, and enable them to rethink what is possible.
- 5. Establish a Well-Structured and Generative Knowledge Base** Our existing knowledge is the foundation for how we understand the world, approach challenges, interpret new situations, remember information, and learn, think, and problem solve, in general. Research has documented that experts' knowledge differs from novices' in that it is organized around central ideas that facilitate understanding and memory. As a result, we help students develop conceptual frameworks around big ideas that help them organize their thinking within and/or across domains. These frameworks create a well-structured knowledge base that promotes critical analytic thinking.
- 6. Advance Social and Emotional Understanding** We are social beings whose emotions are woven through our thoughts and shape our actions. Thus, it is not surprising that literature in education, psychology, and business is filled with statements suggesting that EQ (emotional quotient) is ultimately more important to success and happiness than IQ (intelligence quotient). Therefore, we help our students understand their own and others' emotions and learn to manage their emotions effectively. We also help them develop an understanding of social conventions in our culture (as well as a knowledge and appreciation of social norms in other cultures) in order to facilitate productive collaboration and communication.
- 7. Develop Executive Functioning and Self-Regulation** Executive functioning and self-regulation involve planning, organizing, holding and manipulating information, maintaining focus, being reflective, and flexibly integrating and applying the knowledge and strategies at our disposal to successfully address the situation at hand, even as goals, priorities, information, and contexts change. Toward that end, we help students develop a thorough understanding of their own strengths, challenges, and tendencies as well as an appreciation of what works best for them. Given its centrality in effective functioning, the development of executive functioning and self-regulation are at the core of what we do at Benchmark School.