

## ADVISORY PROGRAMS

### In support of *This We Believe* characteristic:

- Multifaceted guidance and support services

### Concept/Definition

Advisory programs (also called advocacy programs, homebase, teacher-based guidance, advisor-advisee) are predicated on the belief that every young adolescent should have at least one adult at school to act as the student's advocate. According to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989), "Students should be able to rely on that adult to help learn from their experiences, comprehend physical changes and changing relations with family and peers, act on their behalf to marshal every school and community resource needed for the student to succeed, and help to fashion a vision of the future" (p. 40). In similar fashion, Beane and Lipka (1987) presented a useful description of advisory programs:

Advisory programs are designed to deal directly with the affective needs of [young adolescents]. Activities may range from non-formal interactions to use of systematically developed units whose organizing center are drawn from the common problems, needs, interests, or concerns of [young adolescents], such as "getting along with peers," "living in the school," or "developing self-concept." In the best of these programs, [young adolescents] have an opportunity to get to know one adult really well, to find a point of security in the institution, and to learn about what it means to be a healthy human being. (p. 40)

In some schools, advisory periods are scheduled daily; whereas, in other schools they are scheduled one to three times weekly. When an advisory program is effectively implemented, it can be an important factor in supporting student learning.

### Summary of Current Research

While recent research points to positive results of advisory programs (Anfara & Brown, 2001; Connors, 1991; Mac Iver, 1990; Putbrese, 1989; Vars, 1989), they remain one of the most difficult of the middle grades programmatic components to implement (Fenwick, 1992; Lounsbury & Clark, 1990). Many advisory programs

do not function as they were initially intended and have simply taken the place of homeroom.

While there is still a need for considerably more research about the effectiveness of advisory programs (Clark & Clark, 1994), some of the most frequently mentioned purposes of advisories include

- Promoting opportunities for social development.
- Assisting students with academic problems.
- Facilitating positive involvement between and among teachers and administrators and students.
- Providing an adult advocate for each student in the school.
- Promoting positive school climate. (Clark & Clark, 1994, pp. 135–136)

Recognizing this variance in purpose, Galassi, Gullede, and Cox (1997) identified a typology of advisory purposes that included advocacy, community, skills, invigoration (e.g., activities to help students recharge or relax), academic, and administrative functions.

Regarding the effectiveness of such programs, Mac Iver (1990) found a strong relationship to the reduction of dropouts when advisories focused on social and academic support activities. Connors (1986) found evidence that advisory programs helped students grow emotionally and socially, contributed to a positive school climate, helped students learn about school and getting along with their classmates, and enhanced teacher-student relationships. George and Oldaker (1985) suggested that when advisory programs are combined with other components of the middle school concept student self-concept improves, dropout rates decrease, and school climate becomes more positive. Finally, Ziegler and Mulhall (1994), in a three year longitudinal study in Canada, found an improvement in students' decision making, sense of belonging to school, and in teacher-student relations.

While these studies all point to the possible positive effects of advisory programs, schools have a very difficult time both implementing and sustaining this component of middle school reform (Fenwick, 1992;



#### National Middle School Association

4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300  
Westerville, Ohio 43081  
Phone: (800) 528-NMSA  
Fax: (614) 895-4750  
[www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)

Lounsbury & Clark, 1990). A number of studies (Batsell, 1995; Bunte, 1995; Dale, 1993; Lee, 1995; Mosidi, 1994) addressed the issue of implementation of advisory programs. Findings from these research projects noted that successful implementation must address issues related to staff capacity, technical/administrative support, limiting the number of students (10 to 20) in each advisory, differing expectations on the part of teachers and administrators, the allotment of time to advisory periods and to teacher planning, a well-defined advisory curriculum, a feedback/maintenance loop for program review and revision, the transformation of the school's cultural norms, and the management of organizational politics.

Some researchers provide their readers with sample program development time lines (Ayres, 1994), a listing of the "Ten Steps to a Successful Advisory Program" (Hertzog, 1992; Spear, 2005), or suggestions for revamping ineffective programs (James & Spradling, 2001). Others indicate the critical program features (see Table 1) and ways to prepare teachers for their role in an advisory program (Gill & Read, 1990; James, 1986; Spear, 2005).

Despite an expanding amount of literature on advisory programs, few researchers have systematically probed the subjective experiences of participants in advisory programs, as disclosed by both students and teachers.

Sardo-Brown and Shetlar (1994) acknowledged that "more investigations of both teacher and student perceptions of the advisor-advisee period need to be done in a variety of different types of schools" (p. 23). In response to that call, Anfara and Brown (2001) conducted qualitative research between 1997 and 2001 in which teachers noted that advisory responsibilities tend to become the responsibility of the women on a school's faculty, that many teachers fear stepping into the realm of the affective domain, and that school administrators do not sufficiently support the program after the first couple of years of implementation. In relation to this lack of administrative support and the issue of program maintenance, teachers noted that advisory periods took on the burden of an additional class preparation, which resulted in few activities being planned for advisory and students being given detentions because of misbehavior (see "From Attention Provider to Detention Giver" in Anfara & Brown, 2001, pp. 20-21).

When well implemented and sustained, advisory programs potentially allow educators and students to develop strong relationships that support student learning (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Too frequently, though, advisory programs have been implemented in a perfunctory fashion with the potential for little, if any, positive effect.

Table 1

*Components of Successful Advisory Programs: Rationale, Design, & Emphasis*

**Rationale for Advisory Programs**

- Promote small, caring communities of learners.
- Promote mutually respectful and meaningful relationships.
- Provide individual attention to students.
- Provide each student with an opportunity to "belong."
- Allow teachers to be actively involved in the affective development of students.
- Emphasize the social and emotional development of every young adolescent.
- Assist students with interpersonal communication skills development.

- Need teachers/advisors trained and committed to teaching young adolescents.
- Need relevant, ongoing professional development opportunities.
- Need regularly scheduled meeting times.
- Length of advisory meetings—20 to 40 minutes, uninterrupted.
- Number of students assigned to advisory groups—10 to 20 students.

**Design of Advisory Programs**

- Need careful organizing, planning, preparing, implementing, and monitoring.
- Need guidance department, administration, and district-level support.
- Need teacher, parent, and student input and active involvement.

**Emphasis of Advisory Programs**

- Based on teacher and student input.
- Based on the affective domain.
- Address needs of specific school and community.
- Social/communication/positive interpersonal relationships.
- Respect for self and others/good citizen.
- Accept responsibility for education and actions.

- Develop group, team, and school spirit.
- Academic monitoring/assistance/motivation.
- Study, test-taking, and note-taking skills instruction.
- Self-esteem activities/self-awareness growth.
- Appreciate talents, health, and potential.
- Understand and make commitments.
- Decision making/coping skills/problem solving.
- Career education/guidance/future planning.
- Set and achieve goals/organize time.
- Intramural activities/community service projects.
- School issues and concerns/adjustments.
- Substance abuse/current adolescent issues.

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## ANNOTATED REFERENCES

Ayres, L. R. (1994). Middle school advisory programs: Findings from the field. *Middle School Journal*, 25(3), 8–14.

Although middle school students benefit greatly from well-planned, effectively delivered advisory programs, teachers remain uncommitted because of inadequate preparation, fear, and lack of experience. Subject-centered teachers often fear dealing with students in the affective domain. This article presents sample program development, staff development, and parent education plans underlying sound advisory programs.

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Galassi, J., Gullede, S., & Cox, N. (1997). Middle school advisories: Retrospect and prospect. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(3), 301–338.

This article presents a critical analysis of middle school advisor-advisee programs and a review of the history and rationale for these programs. A typology is offered distinguishing different advisory programs and a conceptual framework for identifying potential barriers to advisories at inception, implementation, and maintenance stages. Suggestions for overcoming these barriers are offered. Finally, alternative educational practices for achieving the goals of advisory are considered.

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James, M., & Spradling, N. (2001). *From advisory to advocacy: Meeting every student's needs*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

No longer a separate program during a specified part of the school day, advocacy should permeate every minute and every activity. Advocacy refers to the conscious, ongoing relationship of every adult to every student. In this book, the authors provide a compelling rationale for student advocacy, list implications and challenges, and provide specific activities for consideration. If your school is thinking about revamping an existing advisory program or thinking about starting one, this book is an important read.

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Spear, R. C. (2005). *Taking the lead in implementing and improving advisory*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

This book, part of National Middle School Association's Middle Level Leadership Series, provides essential information about advisories, including specifics about getting started and maintaining advisory. Additionally, it assists readers in understanding the connection between advisory programs and student success in school, deals with effective implementation, scheduling issues and advisory curricula, offers suggestions for the professional development of teachers, offers 10 qualities that characterize successful advisors, and assists in the assessment and revision of current advisory programs.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Forte, I., & Schurr, S. (1997). *A to Z active learning: Advisory and affective education*. Nashville, TN: Incentive.

Hoversten, C., Doda, N., & Lounsbury, J. (1991). *Treasure chest: A teacher advisory sourcebook*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

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## AUTHOR

**Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.** is associate professor of educational administration and supervision at The University of Tennessee. He is currently the chair of NMSA's Research Advisory Board and is the column editor for What Research Says in *Middle School Journal*.

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National Middle School Association (NMSA) produces research summaries as a service to middle level educators, families and communities, and policymakers. The concepts covered in each research summary reflect one or more of the characteristics of successful middle schools as detailed in the NMSA position paper, *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*. Further research on each topic is available in the book *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*. Both books are available at the NMSA online store at [www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)

