

Prime Time Advisory: Youth Advocacy and Involvement

Middle Ground, Volume 6, Number 4, April 2003



Marjie Atkins and Marita DeBoard

The advisory program at O'Leary Junior High School in Twin Falls, Idaho, provides our youth with the educational opportunities and support systems they need to become knowledgeable and sensitive members of society.

With O'Leary's Prime Time advisory program, students have the opportunity to take learning outside the four walls of the school by participating in community, national, and worldwide service projects. Prime Time also helps improve school relations, student self-concepts, and student awareness of community and world needs.

PRIME TIME ACTIVITIES

Prime Time is held daily, for 20 minutes following first period. The success of our program can be measured on several levels:

School Communication: During Prime Time, a video bulletin, prepared by O'Leary students and aired on the school's cable television system, informs students about sporting events, club meetings, and other school activities.

Self-Awareness and Peer Relations: Many of our Prime Time activities are focused on building student self-esteem and peer relations. For example, one activity we use to build self-confidence and help students get to know each other is called Paper Bag Self.

The students decorate the outside of a paper bag with pictures and words that represent their "outer selves," such as favorite color, sport, food, etc. Then, they put a word or picture inside their bag that reflects a personal concern, such as health, divorce, peer problems, grades, etc.

As a way of introducing themselves to the class, students share the outside of their bag. If they feel comfortable, they are welcome to share the inside of their bag privately with their peers or advisor.

Another advisory group activity that creates the feeling of "family" and focuses on the individual as part of a whole is a puzzle activity. Each member of the class, including the advisor, is given a large cardboard puzzle piece to decorate. The puzzle piece features their name and artwork that reflects their uniqueness. When the pieces are complete, they are joined together to form a puzzle that represents a united advisory group.

Community Involvement: One of the greatest benefits of our advisory program is developing student awareness of the community. This community consists of the classroom/school, the community, and the world.



We first build a classroom community by creating a safe and secure learning environment by engaging students in the getting-to-know-you activities, promoting school spirit, playing cooperative games, and having heart-to-heart classroom discussions.

Although we practice single-grade advisory, to encourage cross-team interaction and relationships, we have developed an Adopt-A-Prime Time activity. An eighth or ninth grade advisory class adopts a seventh grade advisory. Throughout the year, these classes plan breakfasts, games, and special surprises for each other. Building relationships decreases harassment between levels and often fosters new friendships.

We expand into the local community through Helping Hands Day. Our PTSO arranges community projects throughout the city where teachers and students spend the day providing various services. As a school, we collect for the Salvation Army Canned Food Drive and for our local homeless shelter and participate in the March of Dimes Walk America and the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

Students also reach out to the global community and address worldwide needs by participating in Operation Christmas Child and Operation Wish Book.

ADVISOR AS ADVOCATE

The advisory teacher is an advocate for the students on a variety of levels—personal, peer, and academic. The advisor discusses problems with individual students, helps them develop self-confidence and leadership skills, and facilitates discussions about academic, family, and peer group issues.

The advisor plays a key role in guiding the students toward academic responsibility. The relationship begins with the advisor/advisee conferences at the beginning of the school year and culminates in student-led conferences. The advisor and student discuss academic goals, review mid-term grades, and work on organizational strategies. Concerns about a student can be addressed at a team meeting where core teachers can work together to implement a plan to ensure student academic success.

An important part of that success is parental involvement. Parents are invited to the team meetings when student concerns arise. In addition, during student-led conferences, students guide their parents through their classes, discussing behavior, grades, and goals. These conferences allow students to take responsibility for their academic success.

Teachers use common team planning time to exchange advisory ideas and plan for upcoming events. A featured topic on the agenda at each faculty meeting is "Prime Time Tidbits," where an advisory teacher shares a successful activity with his or her colleagues.



NO PLACE LIKE HOME

John Lounsbury said, “No other age level is of more importance to the future of individuals and, literally, to that of society, because these are the years when youngsters crystallize their beliefs about themselves and firm up their self-concepts, their philosophies of life, and their values—the things that are the ultimate determinants of their behaviors.”

At O’Leary Junior High School, students feel that they have a “home base.” This home base, Prime Time, provides support and guidance during what can be turbulent times for adolescents, and improves interschool relationships, student awareness, and self-confidence.

Marjie Atkins and Marita DeBoard are teachers at O’Leary Junior High School, Twin Falls, Idaho. They were recognized in 2001 by Prentice-Hall and NMSA as a “Teams that Make a Difference”.

Original publication information:

Atkins, M., & DeBoard, M. (2003). Prime time advisory: youth advocacy and involvement. *Middle Ground*, 6(4), 38-39.