

# Multifaceted Guidance and Support Services

*Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe, 2003*



## *NMSA Research Committee*

While research points to positive results of advisory programs (Connors, 1991; Mac Iver, 1990; Putbrese, 1989), such programs remain one of the most difficult middle level concepts to implement (Fenwick, 1992; Lounsbury & Clark, 1990). Many advisory programs are not functioning as they were initially intended and have simply taken the place of homeroom or have been abandoned.

Beane and Lipka (1987) presented the following description of advisory programs:

Advisory programs are designed to deal directly with the affective needs of transescents. Activities may range from nonformal interactions to the use of systematically developed units whose organizing centers are drawn from the common problems, needs, interests, or concerns of transescents, such as “getting along with peers,” “living in the school,” or “developing self-concept.” In the best of these programs, transescents 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)

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:

- (1) Promoting opportunities for social development
- (2) Assisting students with academic problems
- (3) Facilitating positive involvement among teachers, administrators, and students
- (4) Providing an adult advocate for each student in the school
- (5) Promoting positive school climate. (pp. 135-136)

Regarding the effectiveness of such programs, Mac Iver (1990) found that when teacher advisories focused on social and academic support activities, then a strong relationship existed that promoted the reduction of dropouts. 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) suggest 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.



While these studies all point to possible positive effects of advisory programs, we are warned that schools have a very difficult time implementing and sustaining this component of middle school reform (Fenwick, 1992; Lounsbury & Clark, 1990). A number of studies (Batsell, 1995; Bunte, 1995; Dale, 1993; Lee, 1995; Mosidi, 1994) addressed the implementation of advisory programs. Findings from this research document that successful implementation must address issues related to staff capacity, technical/ administrative support, limits on the number of students (15-20) in each advisory, differing expectations on the part of teachers and administrators, the allotment of time to advisory periods as well as to teacher planning, a welldefined 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.

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 students and teachers. Sardo-Brown and Shetlar (1994) acknowledged that "more investigations of both teacher and student perceptions of the advisor-advisee periods need to be done in a variety of different types of schools" (p. 23). To this end, Anfara and Brown (Anfara & Brown, 2001; Brown & Anfara, 2001) conducted qualitative research that explores the perspectives of teachers. Teachers reported that "caring was women's work," that "battle lines" were drawn when administrators withdrew or withheld the necessary support from advisory teachers, and that a fine line exists between "mingling and meddling" in the lives of young adolescents.

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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 systems.

Cole, C. (1992). *Nurturing a teacher advisory program*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

In recognition of the importance of effective advisory programs at the middle level, this monograph provides specific suggestions for organizing and sustaining a teacher advisory program and presents sample activities to assist program implementation. The first section of the book reviews aspects of early adolescent development that make an effective advisory program essential, while the second section suggests key program elements. Section three examines the roles of advisors, counselors, administrators, community members, and students in the whole advisory endeavor, while section four reviews the important characteristics and qualities of advisors. The fifth section addresses the development of advisory skills, including asking openended questions, restating students' comments, and using silence. The final sections of the book describe and suggest sources for successful activities, discuss administrative considerations, and suggest ways to involve parents and community members.

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 for distinguishing different advisory programs and a conceptual framework for identifying potential barriers to advisories at the inception as well as the implementation and maintenance phases. Suggestions for addressing these barriers are discussed. Guidelines for improving future research on advisories are presented. Finally, alternative educational practices for achieving the goals of advisory programs are considered.

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

No longer just 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 its implications and challenges, and provide specific activities for considering such a change. If your school is revamping an existing advisory program or thinking about starting one, this book is an important read.



Ziegler, S., & Mulhall, L. (1994). Establishing and evaluating a successful advisory program in a middle school. *Middle School Journal*, 25(4), 42-46.

Ziegler and Mulhall describe a principal-initiated advisory program at a Toronto middle school. Successful program elements are summarized, including a six-month planning period; a staff-supported inservice program offering training in team-building and adolescent development; daily advisory group meetings, with a maximum of 15 students, who retain the same advisor until graduation; and a handbook of resource units.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Burkhardt, R. M. (2001). Advisory: Advocacy for every student. In T. Erb (Ed.), *This we believe...And now we must act* (pp. 35-41). Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

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

Galassi, J. P., Gulledge, S. A., & Cox, N. D. (1998). *Advisory: Definitions, descriptions, decisions, directions*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

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

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

MacLaury, S. (2002). *Student advisories in grades 5-12: A facilitator's guide*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

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