

Advisory Programs in High School Restructuring

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Over the past ten years, school reformers have paid particular increasing attention to restructuring the American high school, recognizing shortcomings of the traditional organization and size of most high schools. One strategy that has gained momentum during this period is the development of new small schools (400-600 students) and breaking down larger schools into smaller units—learning communities or academies—or individual autonomous schools sharing the same building. An aspect of the movement for small schools has been an emphasis on creating school environments that support the healthy social, as well as academic, development of all students. Responsibility for counseling students is distributed across a “team” of teachers, administrators and counselors working with the same cohort of students. This concept of “distributed counseling” contrasts to the more typical arrangements of high schools, in which responsibility for counseling students lies primarily with the guidance counselors.

In practice, distributed counseling takes a number of forms, including case conferences, in which team meetings are dedicated to discussing individual student needs, which may lead to developing intervention strategies based on an analysis of student needs and/or meeting as a team with students and/or parents, and integrating social development concepts and skills into the school’s core curricula, for example, sexuality, conflict resolution. One common form of distributed counseling is the establishment of an advisory program, that is, a system that matches teachers (and other educators) on a team with a small group of students (typically, 8-15) for ongoing academic support, mentoring, and guidance. While the structure and content of advisory differs across reform models, as well as within individual schools, the system is nonetheless a significant component of recent reform efforts, including the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Institute for Student Achievement model.

The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) is a non-profit educational intermediary organization based in Lake Success, New York with a 15 year history of working with high school students in need of academic and social support (*Institute 2003*). For the past four years, ISA has focused on developing and implanting a comprehensive reform and development model for small high schools, or small learning communities (SLC) within larger high schools, serving students at risk of failure (usually serving 400 students or fewer). The ISA model includes seven guiding principles such as college-preparatory instructional program rich in opportunities for inquiry, literacy, and numeracy; dedicated staff of teachers and a counselor; extended learning opportunities for students (e.g., afterschool programs); ongoing professional development for teachers and other members of the team; and “distributed counseling” for all students.

The principle of distributed counseling is based on the belief that it is the responsibility of all the adults in the school to provide a caring, safe, and supportive environment for students. The principle envisions a counselor working with a cohort of students and

supporting their teachers to share responsibilities for both the academic and social-emotional development of the students. Most of the ISA schools or SLCs have established an advisory system as part of their distributed counseling.

Since the inception of its high school reform initiative, ISA has partnered with the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University, a research center with a long history of supporting and documenting the development of small public high schools, to undertake a thorough documentation of the reform's progress. In its documentation of the development of the ISA programs, NCREST has identified the advisory system or distributed counseling component as one of the areas that is most difficult to successfully implement.

This study seeks to better understand the challenges that small high schools and SLCs face in the implementation of the advisory system; to describe some successful strategies school leaders have developed and implemented to confront these challenges; and to provide a framework of design considerations for schools and districts to apply to the development of effective advisory program. Throughout the paper, questions for consideration are posed to help guide school leaders in planning and assessing their advisory programs. This is intended as a resource for administrators, coaches, intermediary organizations, school staff, and others in leadership position to foster the development and emergence of successful advisory programs.

The study bases its analysis on a review of literature on small schools, distributed counseling, and advisory models; review of data collected over three school years in 24 ISA schools or SLCs, including interviews with teachers, administrators, students, and parents, as well as observations of ISA classrooms, advisory groups, and team meetings. In addition, key ISA and NCREST staff members were interviewed, as well as a number of ISA coaches supporting the development of distributed counseling in ISA schools or SLCs.

Part I of this paper reviews the existing literature on small school reform, distributed counseling, and the advisory system. In Part II, we discuss the range of goals of the advisory systems within the ISA project. In Part III, we outline a framework six important dimensions to consider in planning and implementing an advisory system. In Part IV, we provide case studies from two ISA schools currently implementing an advisory system, as well as a cross-case analysis of how these developing programs address the dimensions in our framework. We will conclude with recommendations for schools developing advisory systems within their reform models.

I. Literature Review

Recent high school reform efforts have focused on the creation of small schools (Toch, 2003; Ancess, 2003). Proponents point to the academic benefits that students gain from small learning communities such as improved academic performance, higher graduation rates, and lower dropout rates (Center for Collaborative Education, 2003). However, the

advantages of a small high school environment are not merely academic; there is significant evidence that small learning environments foster closer student-teacher relationships, leading to many social, emotional, and psychological benefits for young people (Cotton, 1999).

Students at smaller high schools manifest more positive attitudes about being in school, as well as less of a sense of alienation than students in larger schools (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Small schools also report proportionally fewer disciplinary problems and incidences of violence compared to large schools (Wasley et al., 2000). Students in small schools are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and to hold important positions in school groups than are similar students at large high schools (Cotton, 1996). In general, students in small schools report a greater sense of belonging, leading to more positive social behaviors (Center for Collaborative Education, 2003).

Merely reducing school size, however, is not sufficient on its own to achieve positive academic and social outcomes for students. Structurally, small schools often foster close student-teacher relationships. Evidence in child development and school counseling research supports the belief that students learn best in a close-knit, nurturing environment in which no child can “fall through the cracks” of the large, impersonal, bureaucratized high school (Sizer 1984). These environments are conducive to students developing “relational trust” with other adults and students in the building (Wilson, Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Historically, educators have often viewed the aim of providing social and emotional support as separate from addressing academic goals; however, recent research suggests that both components are needed to achieve high level academic achievement, especially among low-income students. In a study of Catholic high schools for disadvantaged urban youth, Bryk et al. (1993) maintain that strong “academic press” coupled with intense social relationships were key components of the schools’ effectiveness with their students. In a study of sixth and eighth grade public school students in Chicago, Lee et al. (1999) showed that academic success is based on both social support and academic press. In their responses to a survey, students understood “social support” as the frequency with which the teacher: (1) related the subject matter to the students’ personal interest, (2) “really listened to what the students had to say,” (3) “knew the students well,” and (4) “believed that they could do well in school. Lee et al. found that indicators of both academic and social success increased with high levels of social support.

The typical high school, however, is organized in such a way that creates a false dichotomy between social and academic development. The fragmented structure of high schools (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985) rarely makes place for sustained consideration of the social, psychological, and emotional issues affecting young people, locating such issues strictly within the purview of guidance counselors. Despite the well-documented needs of adolescences for social-emotional learning (Cohen, 1999; Gardner, 1983), guidance counselors typically function with unmanageable caseloads and largely isolated from the school’s teachers, instruction, and curriculum.

Teachers and administrators charged with students' academic and social growth are themselves deprived of the conditions and resources that support their own capacity to support students. The isolation of the teachers from each other—even when working with the same students—denies them opportunities to discuss individual students' needs, develop appropriate curriculum, or solve problems. Teachers are asked to work with large numbers of students, cover an ever-expanding curriculum, oversee extracurricular clubs and activities, and raise their students' test scores (Sizer, 1984). Moreover, teachers are not provided with enough resources and professional development to realize such objectives (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2002). Given these realities, it is little wonder that teachers are typically unprepared to deal with issues of social and emotional development and limit to their professional activities to the academic sphere.

Faced with limited resources and increasing enrollments, many large high schools do not have adequate school counseling staff to meet student needs. School reform initiatives have reacted to such a shortage with different innovative models of counseling. One such model that some small high schools have adopted to address the need for counseling is the system of “distributed counseling.” Under this system, responsibility for counseling students is “distributed” across a team of academic teachers and counselor(s) that plans and provides education and counseling for a relatively small number of students, for example, four teachers and a counselor might work with 100-150 students.

One common component of a distributed counseling program is “advisory,” in which each teacher (or other staff member) serves as an advisor to a group of students, often smaller than typical class size, that meets several times a week to provide the “social supports” described by Bryk et al (1993). To enable greater “academic press,” social supports can include a range of approaches and activities such as: discussions of academic and social issues relevant to students' lives; including academic goal-setting; college preparation and counseling; study skills; and adolescent development issues and concerns. Advisors are often in frequent contact with their advisee's counselor, other teachers, and parents or guardians. In some cases, the advisor also helps the student choose courses, makes sure she has fulfilled necessary requirements, and helps her prepare for post-secondary education.

In many advisory models, the advisor works with the same groups over the course of their high school career. For this reason, Wasley and Lear (2001) argue the advisory program is “the single most important design element for making possible a high level of personalization...” The teacher can “confront and challenge students about their performance in ways not typical in large high schools” (p. 23).

Many well-regarded school reform models explicitly include or encourage advisory systems in their high school models. For instance, in many schools that adopt the common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national school reform movement, advisory is a key mechanism for ensuring that each student will be “known well” (Sizer, 1984) by at least one adult in the school. High school reform efforts in New York City and other regions, such as those promoted by New Visions for New Schools have also integrated the advisory system into its model for successful small schools. The

Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) maintains that advisory, along with other measures, such as team meetings focused on student issues, is one promising form to implement distributed counseling.

II. Methodology

Although distributive counseling consists of multiple components, this study is focused on the implementation of the advisory system in ISA high schools. Over the period of September, 2002 to the present, NCREST researchers have conducted week-long documentation visits to all new and returning ISA schools and SLCs in New York and Virginia. During week-long visits, researchers interviewed administrators, teachers, counselors, students, and parents; observed team meetings, classrooms, and afterschool activities. For this study, data collection and analysis focused on data collected from September, 2002 to February, 2005. Data was surveyed from documentation of all 24 current ISA programs; ten programs were examined more closely during the first phase of this research. At that point, this program sample provided the most amount of data to analyze. From these ten, two programs were selected as case studies because they best reflected the development of advisory programs at different points in a school's history.

Interviews and observations were focused on the participants' understanding of the ISA principles; how the principles were translated into practice; and the subjects' participation in the initiatives and programs reflecting the principles. Interview subjects were asked to describe the goals for distributed counseling at their school or SLCs and how distributed counseling was operationalized, e.g., through an advisory system. In programs implementing an advisory program (the majority), subjects were asked to assess the benefits of the advisory program, as well as the challenges of implementing such a program. In many of the schools, researchers also observed team meetings discussing implementation of advisory and advisory group meetings.

Researchers interviewed four veteran ISA coaches, all with prior experience as school leaders in successful small high schools, many of which incorporated advisory programs. In addition, researchers also interviewed the executive director of ISA and co-director of NCREST about the goals for distributed counseling. .

The first stage of data analysis consisted of review of data from interviews and observations from the site visits to the 10 schools in the sample. From these data, as well as existing literature on advisory (above), we identified two critical areas for further study: (1) the range of goals, across and within programs, for implementing an advisory system; and (2) critical dimensions to consider in structuring an advisory system. In response to these concerns, we developed a provisional framework of design considerations for schools implementing advisory as part of a distributed counseling program.

During the fall semester, 2004, the authors focused data collection on two small school sites with advisory programs, one school in its first year and one school (in the sample) entering its fourth. At these sites, the authors conducted additional interviews and

observations. The analysis of data from these sites provided the data for the case studies included in the paper.

In the sections that follow, we address the two key concerns identified above: (1) Goals for advisory programs, and (2) Design dimensions for advisory programs. For each, we provide a set of questions for school and district administrators to consider as resource in developing, implementing, and supporting effective advisory programs.

IV. Goals of Advisory

From our interviews, five primary goals for advisory programs emerged from our research, with many respondents identifying multiple goals. Beginning with the most frequently stated, these goals are:

- 1) Developing interpersonal relationships among staff and students
- 2) Providing academic support to students
- 3) Enriching the curriculum
- 4) Providing college preparation
- 5) Building a school culture.

1. Developing interpersonal relationships

Each of the interviewed coaches identified developing positive relationships among staff and students as the central goal of advisory. A key element in this relationship is developing a degree of student trust that allows teachers to work closely and individually with students to support their growth and success, socially and academically.

Teachers also recognized that relationships between teachers and students are vital in creating a sense of community. As one teacher commented, “Advisory is a place for student to know an adult.” Another teacher described how developing relationships with advisees allows teachers to work more effectively with their students:

In developing relationships with their students, teachers are gaining for themselves, emotional capacity. They have a “bank.” It helps them to be able to be more honest with students and for students to be honest with them.... It's hard to receive criticism or any words that are disciplinary if a relationship hasn't been built.

An assistant principal, who also serves as an advisor to a group of students, recognized the value of building relationships with students and their families:

The success of advisory is that we have formed deeper relationships with some students, and we have a more systematic way of contacting parents which leads to greater responsibility to families.

Teachers discussed how advisors take on many of the traditional functions of the guidance counselor, many of which depend on a degree of interpersonal trust, including providing a nurturing, caring listener to each student; helping students mediate conflict with other teachers and students; and providing personal counseling in the case of crisis.

(2) Providing ongoing academic support to students

Many teachers view advisory as a method of providing academic support for students by creating the time, space, and attention to a student's academic progress. One teacher commented:

My role is primarily academic counseling, whether it's reviewing for and giving feedback from an exam, or specific intervention strategies in order to get the students focused and to help them pass their class.

Another teacher described how advisory is used to address academic challenges faced by the students:

Academically we have discussions about how they're doing in their classes and what are some strategies they use to overcome some of the challenges they have in their classes.

Some teachers likened the advisor's role to that of an academic advocate for students, monitoring the student's progress in each of her classes and communicating this progress with the parents:

For [advisory], we act as intermediaries and advocates for the kids. We are supposed to keep an eye on failing students and why they have gotten low grades. We are then supposed to call the homes and so on. We also check their planners and binders to see if they're writing down their homework. The idea of [advisory] is that if 15 kids are given to a teacher, you can monitor the kids through the years to graduation.

Some of the strategies we observed, or interview subjects described, for providing academic support, include: academic goal setting; regular review of students' transcripts; teaching study skills; and dedicated time for sustain silent reading.

(3) Enriching the curriculum

Some teachers saw advisory as supplementing the traditional high school curriculum. Respondents discussed how advisory is a chance for students to learn about topics outside their academic topics such as: conflict resolution, character education, and current affairs.

I try the group model even with 17-18 kids. I present issues to students, such as: "These two students had an argument... How could it be solved?"

I talk to the students about the importance of getting an education, and during advisory I talk about discipline issues and character development.

Students also recognized this aspect of the advisory curriculum. One student commented:

The best part of advisory is when we talk about political issues in the real world... We talk about real world issues in our journals. We talk about those a lot.

In one advisory group we observed, the advisor (the school's principal) passed out a recent newspaper article about a conflict between a principal of a small school in a larger high school and security guards in the large high school. He led a discussion about responsibility for the conflict.

(4) Providing college preparation

A number of school staff viewed their role as advisors as providing students with the information, through materials and discussions, that will prepare them for college, including college admissions processes, financial aid processes, and necessary academic preparation for college:

Next week in advisory we are doing a special computer program called "Choices." Students can sit at a computer and answer a set of questions on their interests, personality traits, and job descriptions. The computer then provides the students with appropriate jobs and information of the academic paths needed to achieve those jobs. The goal is to start even in 9th grade to inform students of their options.

At one school, the guidance counselor outlined these expectations for her role in supporting advisory over the course of a year:

Students will receive weekly college orientation from guidance counselor. Students will get prepared for the PSAT/SAT. Students will visit colleges and universities. Visitors from colleges will speak in school. Students will attend college fairs. The guidance counselor will arrange these activities.

Some of the observed activities used in advisory that focus on college preparation include: guided reading of college guides; guidance counselor presentations about scholarships and other financial aid processes; individual advisor-advisee meetings to revise college admissions essays; hosting a college fair at the school; and fieldtrips to local colleges and universities.

(5) Building school culture

An important goal for advisory, articulated by ISA coaches and teachers is the development of a school culture that reflects values of the school or SLC, for example, collaboration and community. One teacher commented:

Advisory is ideally the heart of [this school]. Many schools have an advisory, but it's a cookie cutter class that doesn't serve the school at all. [Here] it has to do with building a culture of respect, building a learning community, and having an adult [who] delivers a positive message each day.

The coaches noted that in order to create a community, staff and students must collaborate and communicate. One coach stated:

In short, the small school is a whole village where everybody has to communicate...distributed counseling allows for personalized instructions and creates a community, a learning community to support and instruct.

Some of the ways schools or SLCs have used advisory as a component of distributed counseling to build a community, is to involve advisory groups in planning schoolwide events and celebrations and develop aspects of a school's policies, for example, discipline policies.

Analysis

The interviews and observations revealed a range of laudable goals for advisory. In many cases, subjects expressed more than one goal for the program. However, we also found that goals for advisory varied within, as well as across, programs. While many of the advisors interviewed valued a degree of flexibility in determining the content and focus of advisory group meetings, many also expressed frustration with a lack of clarity about the purposes and content for advisory. In the dimensions that follow, we address the role "scope and content" for advisory play in developing an effective advisory program. These flow directly from a common, shared understanding of the goals for advisory.

Some of the questions school leaders may want to consider in developing an advisory program include:

- | What will be the school or SLC's common goals for advisory?
- | How will the goals be determined by the team (administrators, teachers, counselors)?
- | How will the goals be communicated to staff? To students? To their families?
- | What other mechanisms for distributed counseling will help achieve these goals (in concert with the advisory program)?

V. Dimensions of Advisory

In examining ten advisory programs at schools implementing the ISA principles, five key dimensions of advisory structures emerged. The dimensions are:

- (1) Scheduling
- (2) Scope and content
- (3) Roles for staff
- (4) Participants and groupings
- (5) Support systems

In the sections below, we provide an analysis of how ISA schools have addressed the dimensions in developing their advisory. We also include guiding questions for school leaders who are developing an advisory system or revising an existing system.

1. Scheduling

Scheduling applies to how often advisory group meetings are scheduled each week and when they occur in the students' (and teachers') daily and weekly schedule. Across the ten programs advisories were incorporated into the school schedule in a number of different ways.

Nine of the ten schools we studied held advisory meetings at least once a week, and the majority of those schools held multiple meetings per week. In terms scheduling meetings during the school day, eight of the ten schools built advisory classes into their schedule; for example, in one program, advisory is scheduled as a class which meets twice a week for 40 minutes per meeting. In one school, advisory time is scheduled during lunch twice weekly, and students have the option to attend. In another, advisory meets periodically, about every three weeks, during "flex" period, i.e., shortened periods built in to a rotating schedule.

In interviews, ISA team members consistently mentioned how the scheduling of advisory affects its success. Indeed, teachers in schools where advisory was not part of the regularly weekly schedule of classes commented:

Advisory should be part of the everyday schedule as a regular period and not during lunch as it is now

If it is in the schedule, students will be less likely to skip. Advisory is being taken advantage of by our best students and ignored by everyone else.

Another factor to be taken into consideration is how scheduling will affect the students' course load and the teacher's preparation and teaching load. Making advisory a regularly scheduled class with mandatory attendance will have significant implications for teachers and students. Students may feel that they are losing free time they value, and teachers may feel they are being given an additional class to teach, often without the necessary preparation and curriculum. As one teacher commented:

[Advisory] makes for a long day and it's exhausting because it puts in an extra period for us to teach.

Related to scheduling is how schools plan to hold students accountable for advisory participation. Some schools record regular student attendance. Other schools have made advisory a credit-bearing class with grading procedures similar to academic subjects.

Questions for Consideration

- l How much time will be devoted to advisory each week?
- l When will advisory meetings be scheduled during the school day?
- l What accountability measures will be adopted for students in advisory (i.e. mandatory or voluntary attendance, will grades be given?)

2. Advisory Scope and Content

Given a set of common, shared goals, advisory *scope* refers to what area(s) advisory is intended to address to support those goals, for example, organization and study skills, college preparation; social/affective issues. Six of the ten schools in the study focused on both affective and academic issues, while four primarily addressed affective issues such as relationship-building.

Some teachers recognized the value of a scope for advisory that allowed them to delve into non-academic issues such as ethical behavior, character development, conflict resolution, and sexual education. Teachers interviewed commented:

[Advisory] is a positive thing and we are able to do activities that help their self-esteem and reinforce social values. It's really nice and the students' academics will improve if other things are in place.

Some students will open up and talk about the beginning of a conflict with a student and I'll be able to squash the problem before it becomes physical.

Content refers to specific curricula, programs, materials, and activities that are addressed or employed in advisory. The content of advisory meetings differs among the ten ISA programs. One significant factor in explaining how content varies is how schools determine content. Five schools used grade-level meetings, common planning time, or a committee to determine the content of advisory meetings. Four programs utilized individualized approaches to advisories, allowing each teacher to create the curriculum and content.

In schools in which individual teachers primarily determined the content for their own advisories, some teachers commented that their autonomy to develop their own advisory curriculum allows them to create lessons that address the issues as they arise. However, not all respondents supported individually planned curriculum for advisory. Teachers

with less experience in serving as advisors often felt that there was too much autonomy in the advisory curriculum and that it should be more standardized. In other cases, when the content of advisory was relatively unstructured, teachers felt students often viewed the advisory time as free time:

Advisory is very unstructured and the class is very chaotic so the kids don't listen and nothing gets done.

There is an advisory period of a half hour every Monday morning, but this time is mainly viewed as "free time" by both students and teachers.

Many teachers, especially in first-year ISA schools believed that having a standardized curriculum, set by the team, would be helpful

The interesting part of advisory is that it's so open-ended and yet for some teachers they think, what should I do with it? What should I prepare for the kids?

We never came up with a cohesive curriculum which is what I was told would happen during the interview. I would love long term curriculum advising so I could see what someone has done [with their advisory session] over the course of the year. I worry I am running out of ideas.

The content of advisory should be better supervised. Students should have outside speakers, special assemblies, [and] special projects not part of the curriculum.

In some cases, advisory content has been planned by a team in response to emerging issues within the school. For example, in one new ISA school, students and staff used advisory to establish school rules and policies:

Early on in advisory we realized that we needed to work out some of the school policies. For example, it soon became apparent that we needed to institute some type of dress code. So we spent time in advisory discussing the importance as a school community, of creating a common set of rules for dress, the kids ultimately got to decide on, pass, and write the final product, and now we have dress code. But this was something that came up and the advisory system provides a forum to discuss these issues.

It is important that the scope and content of an advisory program is clear and well defined. One of the commonly observed barriers to student "buy-in" for advisory has been a lack of student understanding of the scope and content. Students in some programs have indicated that they were unclear of advisory's purpose.

I don't see the purpose of [advisory]. It's a period where we're supposed to talk about problems, but sometimes they give us homework. We did this one activity where there was a page with a mirror and you were supposed to see yourself in 10 years and write down your emotions.

Questions for Consideration

- l What will be the goals of the advisory program?
- l What will be the scope of the advisory program as related to the goals? (for example, academics, study skills, social issues, and/or college preparation)
- l Will advisory scope allow advisors to address significant issues in students' lives (and the school community) as they arise?
- l How will content for advisory be determined? Will it be up to individual teachers or will it be planned by a committee?
- l What kinds of curricula, activities, and events will best support the school's scope for advisory?

3. Advisor Roles

Being an advisor often means taking on academic and affective counseling duties that are typically unfamiliar to most teachers (and many administrators), including fostering personal relationships; planning for and facilitating discussions to address social/affective issues; interpreting student transcripts; and communicating with students about non-instructional problems. Each of the interviewed coaches noted that one of the biggest challenges in implementing advisory programs is helping staff members adjust to their new roles as advisors. One coach commented:

Teachers and administrators are trained to deliver instruction. Traditionally, education is content based; the culture of the school must be changed and that makes people uncomfortable. Teachers may need help embracing broader roles, beyond instruction, that focus on the whole child. Teachers must also contribute to building a learning community and providing a positive tone and environment for the school...All of the above requires discussion, training, and thought.

Some teachers, especially at newer ISA schools, expressed frustration with the new role of advisor and attendant responsibilities, for which they may not feel adequately trained and supported.

I'm not exactly comfortable as an advisor, yet. I don't have a lot of experience so far. I've tried to help the incoming freshmen by hooking them up with sophomores.

In establishing an advisory program, it is important to recognize that not all teachers will feel prepared immediately to work with students on non-academic issues:

Social and behavioral counseling kind of goes with the territory of being a teacher, and I feel that it's draining and takes away from time spent on academic counseling.

Guidance counselors also play new roles within the advisory system. Some of the roles they play include developing advisory curriculum, training teachers, and leading advisory sessions. One guidance counselor described the supports in place:

I have to be supportive of advisors who aren't used to advisory – model and give lessons, come in once a month to give activities and support teachers in advisory, but advisory is teacher driven.

Questions for Consideration

- l How will the school clarify roles and responsibilities for advisories, including roles for teachers, counselor(s), advisors, and administrators?
- l How will advisory affect teachers' preparation and teaching load?
- l What professional development opportunities do teachers (and other staff) need to effectively play the role of advisor?

4. Advisory Participants and Groupings

Several important decisions must be made about who will serve as advisors and how students are assigned to a particular advisory. In six of the ten programs examined, only teachers acted as advisors. In the four other programs, other staff members served as advisors as well. In one school's advisory structure, core subject teachers along with special education teachers, physical education teachers, and the guidance counselor act as advisors. In another program, both teachers and administrators have advisor responsibilities; administrators co-lead advisory groups with teachers.

Another difference in how advisory groups are composed has to do with the consistency of groups: In eight programs, the advisor is expected to work with the same group of students for at least one year. In the other two programs, advisors periodically work with different students and groups; in one of these programs, the teachers in each subject area department will rotate advisory responsibilities for each grade over an eight-day cycle, meeting with students during a "flex" period.

Another aspect of advisory group composition has to do with how students are assigned to a group and/or advisor. In some cases, students are intentionally assigned to an advisor who teaches them in a core academic class; in other cases, this is not a factor. Some teachers felt that the success of advisory was dependant on having his/her advisees for another academic class. For those who did not have any of their advisory students in any of their other classes, it was difficult to know how these students were performing academically.

Most of the kids that I have in my [advisory group], I don't teach but I taught them last year. I think it would be less of a burden and more effective if I had kids

that I teach because then I already know how they're doing in their school work... I would already be calling my kids' parents and have a relationship with them.

Questions for Consideration

- l Which staff members will serve as advisors? (i.e., teachers, administrators, counselors, others)
- l Will students stay with their same advisory group over the course of a year (or more)?
- l Will students be assigned to an advisor who also teaches them in a core discipline class?

5. Support for Advisory

Interviews with ISA team members demonstrate the importance of a fifth component in building a successful advisory program—structural, administrative support systems. As many team members report that in order to embed advisory into the culture of the school and achieve “buy-in” from important constituents, it is important for the school leadership to implement support structures. Support structures vary across schools; some of the most common we identified include:

- l visible administrative support for advisory as a schoolwide priority
- l faculty meeting time devoted to discussing advisory
- l planning/preparation time for advisors
- l training/professional development devoted to advisory
- l orientation for students to the advisory program

Administrators and school leaders play a critical role in setting the priorities and functions of school community. Because school leaders face competing demands and hectic schedules, how each chooses to prioritize program goals, such as advisory, will affect how these goals are perceived and implemented by others. In order to have a successful advisory program, therefore, it is critical for school leaders to embrace the goals and implementation of the model. In one new ISA school, for example, the incoming principal expressed his support of advisory:

We have a lot of goals for our new ISA school: excellence in teaching and learning, authentic assessment, parental involvement, working with outside partners. We have a million things to do now to start up the school but advisory is my central concern. This will define our school culture and community. We need to focus on building this program first, and then our team goals, values, and dynamics will emanate from advisory.

Not all teams, however, have experienced the same level of support from their administrations. This may result in inconsistent or weak implementation of the advisory goals and content.

A second, related form of support is time allocated at school meetings to discussion of advisory and other components of distributed counseling. Often, allocating time to school meeting demonstrates the value school leaders place on building advisory. In one ISA school, with a relatively successful advisory system, the school counselor devotes one team meeting per week to discussions on advisory and for planning advisory meetings. She commented:

It is crucial that we set aside time at team meeting to solely discuss advisory. Otherwise, in the hectic, crisis-driven atmosphere of schools, we don't work on building the system. In our school, I lead a meeting once a week where we discuss advisory. I use the meeting time to train teachers on important counseling skills. This is the essence of what it means to have "distributed counseling."

A third support structure is the need for planning time for teachers to prepare for advisory lessons. Because schools often devote advisory time to lessons on social-emotional issues such as substance abuse, health, sexual education, violence prevention, etc. schools should consider the preparation time needed for teachers to create effective lessons. In one new ISA school, advisory period is considered one of the five teaching periods, and teacher prep time is specifically devoted to advisory. Additionally, in the summer planning time, the team is creating a curriculum for advisory, and creating complete sets of lesson plans and materials for advisory for use throughout the year. Considering the hectic, overwhelming demands made on teachers, it is important for school leaders and the team to recognize the time required to plan for an effective advisory system.

A fourth important support structure, related to the idea of sufficient staff development time, is the need to provide appropriate professional development for advisors. Because many of the roles of the advisors falls outside the traditional domain of classroom teaching, teachers need staff development in counseling, college advising, health, substance abuse, and other issues that the team includes in the scope of its advisory program. Often, the counselor is involved and providing staff development to his/her teammates; however, other workshops and staff development opportunities may be required.

In one ISA school's advisory system, the lead teacher stresses the importance of getting to know each advisor's strengths and implementing a teacher-as-trainer (for peers) model:

Professional development for advisory, and in general, for that matter, works best when you sit down and try to understand the strengths and personality of your team members. Then you realize that each brings a skill as an educator. I ask my teachers to lead professional development workshops for each other on different skills—talking to parents, assessment, college guidance, writing essays, etc.—we learn best not only from outside "experts" but from each other.

A final, important support structure is creating an orientation program for students to advisory. Most students come to high school with little knowledge and experience in an

advisory program. Many see advisory as time taken away from free time and socializing. It is critical to introduce to students and parents to the goals and functions of the advisory program as early as possible. An introduction to advisory can be accomplished in many formats, for example, a meeting with incoming students and their parents during the summer or during the first few weeks of school. The goal of an orientation for students and parents is ultimately to create more student buy-in towards the importance of advisory.

Questions for Consideration

- l How will the leadership establish advisory as a priority for the staff and students?
- l How will team planning time be devoted to discussions of the advisory program?
How much time?
- l What kinds of professional development and training will team members receive on different aspects of being an advisor?
- l How will the team orient students and parents to the goals and procedures for advisory?

VI. Case Studies

To illustrate the key decision points for advisory programs, two schools are described in case studies below. The schools were chosen because their advisory programs are central to the organization of the schools. The first program, School for Excellence, is in its third year of operation. Its advisory system has undergone two major sets of changes and continual minor changes to better address their stated goals. The second, Bronx Lab, is in its first year, and the advisory program, called “colleges,” is a core component of the school’s curriculum.

The case studies are organized around the five dimensions of advisory introduced earlier: 1) scheduling; 2) scope and content; 3) roles for staff; 4) participants and grouping; and 5) support systems.

Case Study # 1: School for Excellence

School for Excellence (SFE) is a small high school located in the South Bronx, New York City. It opened to students in September of 2002 as part of the conversion of Morris High School into five autonomous small high schools. The first class of students included roughly 100 ninth grade students and 60 tenth grade students who had attended Morris the previous year. During the first year, SFE also began its partnership with ISA. The principal has noted that the collaboration with ISA came about because “our goals were the same... [to build] a small school to prepare students for college.” The school began with an advisory program that was consistent with ISA’s distributed counseling principle.

There have been two instances of major change in the structure of SFE's advisory program: the first occurred half-way through the first year; and the second following the first year when a new guidance counselor succeeded the original. Both sets of changes addressed a number of pressing issues in the implementation of advisory, particularly scheduling and content. The following table charts these changes along the lines of the dimensions of advisory.

**Changes to the Advisory Program at School for Excellence,
2002-2005**

Year	Fall 2002	Spring 2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Scheduling	Five times per week	Two times per week	Three times per week	Three times per week
Scope & Content	No formal curriculum; advisor driven planning	No formal curriculum; advisor planning with limited guidance counselor collaboration	Guidance counselor develops two curricula: college counseling and team-building; one period for sustained silent reading	Advisors work from two set curricula: college counseling and conflict resolution; one period for sustained silent reading
Roles	Teachers serve as advisors	Teachers serve as advisors	Teachers serve as advisors	Teachers serve as advisors
Participants & Grouping	Students grouped by grade level; 25 per advisor	Students grouped by grade level; 25 per advisor	Students grouped by grade level; 18-20 per advisor	Students grouped by grade level; 18-20 per advisor
Supports	Advisors state need of professional development to support work as advisor	Some advisors collaborate with guidance counselor to plan; advisors state need of professional development to support work as advisor	Grade level teams meet to discuss advisory activities and planning; administration and advisors states need for professional development	School schedule limits team meeting time; school-wide professional development time dedicated to advisory

Scheduling

SFE originally scheduled advisory meetings for each school day; administrators felt it was a vital component of the school and would support their broader academic goals. In the first semester, though, many teachers serving as advisors felt daily meetings were excessive, as one advisor stated, “We are running out of things to do” in terms of productive activities. In part, this was addressed by first major change in the program at SFE: advisory was scheduled for twice a week in the second semester.

To start the second year, the new guidance counselor, administrators, and advisors collaborated on a new schedule for advisory. Advisories met three times per week for 50 minutes per meeting on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday with one meeting dedicated to sustained silent reading (supported by new classroom libraries). In effect, this preserved the schedule of two weekly meetings to address the advisory curriculum. The current staff of advisors report that these two meetings are sufficient time to address the program's goals and content.

Scope and Content

The twin goals of SFE's advisory program have remained constant: Through advisory meetings and interaction with their advisor, students will receive college and career counseling as well counseling for affective issues. What have changed are the curricula and activities employed to reach these goals.

With the help of the administration, the new counselor compiled two curricula over the course of the 2003-2004 year: one for college and career counseling and one for team-building. The curricula grew out of resources identified by the counselor, such as the game AD101; activities already employed by advisors, such as journal writing; and college and career lessons developed by the counselor with help from the school's ISA coach. For the current year, journal writing has become a common and consistent activity across advisories. The team building curriculum, also implemented across advisories, has been expanded to include activities on conflict resolution.

To begin ninth grade, advisors generally address issues concerning the transition to high school, and the year's content focuses more on team building and conflict resolution than on college and career counseling. The curriculum is intended to articulate across grades so that twelfth grade advisories focus more heavily on college and career issues and less on affective issues. With the first class graduating this June, the guidance counselor intends assess the grade-level curricula to determine where improvements can be made.

Roles

Since the middle of the first year, the guidance counselor's role has been to support advisors in their work as stated in the *Scope and Content* section. The current guidance counselor is also active in college and career counseling; she organizes activities and implements advisory lessons with the assistance of the ISA coach. The counselor also addresses individual student's pressing academic and affective student issues.

Teachers have always served as advisors at SFE, but the range of responsibilities concomitant with the role has varied. Over the past three years, some advisors have considered themselves to be an advisee's advocate within the school, the contact person in the school if a student-advisee is failing a course, and the primary contact for parents. Other advisors have limited their role to implementing the advisory curricula and referring students with pressing needs to the guidance counselor.

Advisors are supported by the counselor in implementing the curricula and adapting them to meet their group's needs. At the outset of the program, advisors were charged with developing activities and content to meet the program goals. Over the course of the first year, though, the guidance counselor became increasingly involved in helping advisors plan. By the spring semester, the counselor's personal goal was to "help advisors set expectations for the students and develop an organic process to being an advisor." This included collaborating with some advisors to develop advisory lessons as well as identifying materials for all advisors to use.

Advisor Grouping

Over the past three years, the grouping strategy at SFE has remained constant. Advisories are divided among grade levels; ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades are grouped together. Each group generally maintains the same students across grade levels, though advisors have arranged transfers when it served student needs. The strategy behind this approach is that each grade level should have a distinct focus, and each group within that grade should have lessons adapted to their concerns. Advisors have not stayed with the same group of advisees across years due to teacher turnover and the expansion of the school according to staff and administrators. The school's growth has allowed the average advisory group size to drop from 25 in the first year to 15-20 students presently.

Supports

A consistent concern at SFE has been providing professional development to support advisors in their roles. From the spring of 2002 through the present, advisors have reported that they would like, and in some cases need, more professional development to become effective advisors. The administration and the guidance counselor have approached this issue in a number of ways. The first approach was, as stated above, the redefinition of the counselor's role to be a major support for advisors. Initial collaborations between advisors and the counselor to develop lessons plans were followed by formal curricula to address advisor concerns about how to address the program's goals.

In the second year, the administration charged teacher grade level teams with planning for weekly advisory meetings. The principal described this as "distributing counseling responsibilities to the teams....they can talk about students and plan for advisory." A number of teachers reported that this approach was successful and supportive. Grade level teams discussed issues concerning individual students and groups of students at weekly meetings. The teams also shared ideas about how to structure advisory and implement activities. Nevertheless, in year four some experienced advisors still reported a desire for more professional development and new advisors

This year, the school's fourth, scheduling conflicts have eliminated weekly full grade level-team meetings. While there is meeting time set aside each weekly, typically only some advisors attend. These meetings are supplemented by a weekly afternoon

professional development session in the school. The content of these sessions vary, but advisory issues have been addressed. For example, at the beginning of the year, each grade level outlined student performance and behavior goals to address with advisees. Grade level teams also periodically meet during this time and discuss students and advisory issues.

In the future, veteran advisors might be asked to model successful activities and classroom strategies during this time. The school's administration has recently made an effort to renew an advisor responsibility: "interventions" with students failing multiple classes. These interventions, used occasionally in the past, would be organized by the advisor and bring together the student, the student's teachers, and the parent to develop plans to improve academic performance.

Case Study #2 The Bronx Lab School

In 2002, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced its support of the New York City Department of Education small school initiative. The initiative seeks to replace large, failing high schools of approximately 3,000 students with smaller, thematic academies of 400-600 students. As part of the program, the Department of Education has conducted a competitive grant process to teams of educators, parents, and community-based organizations to conceive of and open new, small high schools. Since 2002, over 150 new high schools have opened in New York City, located primarily in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

The Bronx Lab School is one such small high school. Opened in September 2004, the school represents a partnership between the Institute for Student Achievement, a local health and social services agency, and a group of educators who came together in early 2003 to apply for a small schools grant. The school's goal is to provide an intense, academically-rigorous college preparatory model, through hands-on learning, after-school and summer activities, and an internship experience for students. As part of its conceptual model, the school also includes a plan for the development of social support for [affective skills among] the students and an advisory program.

The Bronx Lab School represents a new generation of small high schools that has included the advisory program in its original design as opposed to a supplementary program. The Bronx Lab School (BLS) is currently in its first year of operation and therefore any conclusive findings are premature. However, a description of how Bronx Lab has conceived of and implemented an advisory program will provide a second illustration of how the dimensions we identified have been addressed by a school in its first year of operation.

Scheduling

The BLS advisory, or “the college system,” is a credit-bearing, separate class alongside the other four academic major subjects (English, Social Studies, Art, and Integrated Math & Science). During the planning stage for the school (May-August, 2004), the school team deliberated about the role of advisory. The team agreed that advisory or “college” was central to educational mission of the school and therefore should be considered equal in significance to academic courses. To achieve such a goal, the colleges are scheduled to meet four times a week for 35 minutes each and are a regular part of the student and teacher’s schedule. Student attendance is taken and grades are distributed.

The class meets Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 12:45-1:20. On Tuesdays and Thursdays all colleges engage in sustained silent reading exercises where advisors and advisees read books of their choice and on their individual level. On Mondays and Fridays, the colleges teach a pre-determined set of curriculum objectives based upon curricular units devised over the summer.

	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>
12:45-1:20	College Curriculum	Independent Reading	Independent Reading	College Curriculum

Scope and Content

The scope and content of the BLS college system has two essential and equally important educational goals. The first is to create a time for both students and teachers to engage in independent sustained silent reading, reading a novel of their choice and on their level. Teachers engage in the workshop model of conferencing with students about their books, and exchange letters with students every two weeks about the books they are reading. Students also write letters to their college advisors twice a month describing the books they are reading. The reading program is quite standardized; each college has its own reading library and the protocols for reading during college time are adopted by all college advisors.

To address the second goal, college advisors teach a curriculum that has been developed and published by the school on Mondays and Fridays. The curriculum has four main units of study for the 9th grade. The first unit focuses on goal-setting and study skills. The second unit discusses conflict resolution skills. The third unit is based on a discussion of choices relating to health (including diet, sex education, and drug and alcohol abuse). The final unit of the year focuses around re-visiting the original goals of the year and setting goals for next year. All lesson plans and materials have already been developed for the teachers and teachers are given the materials ahead of time.

The Monday and Friday part of the curriculum is the most open to teacher and student adaptation. Often if a crisis or an issue emerges in the school community, teachers spend the time on Mondays and Fridays discussing the issue. If the students are preparing to go on a school trip, Mondays and Fridays are used to discuss and prepare for the trip. Unlike the Tuesday and Thursday reading program, the Monday and Friday program is less

standardized across different colleges and reflects the individual preferences of the advisors and students. However, there exists a set curriculum for all teachers who need help creating lessons.

During one documentation visit, we observed an instance where students and teachers discussed an issue as it emerged. In a neighboring small school, the principal had been arrested because he intervened as a security officer attempted to grab a student. The students and faculty of BLS were obviously upset about the incident because of the similarly tense relationship between security and student BLS. During college, the advisors brought in a newspaper article about the incident and students and teachers were able to express their perspectives and feelings in a safe, educational atmosphere.

Advisor Roles

At the BLS, the student's advisor is responsible for overseeing the entire development of the student. For example, all report cards and progress reports are distributed to the students from his or her advisor, the advisor meets with the parent during parent conferences, and the advisor is responsible for dealing with any behavioral or academic issues. The college advisor, at BLS, is the point person for both the family and the school, for the given child and the resident "expert" on the student.

Teachers, social workers, administrators, and the after-school director serve as advisors at BLS. The advisor stays with his or her college for four years at a time.

The entire faculty and staff of BLS meet each week on Wednesday afternoon to engage in professional development workshops and discussion. Each meeting begins with a "child study" where the school social worker chooses one student to study. A student's advisor leads the discussion.

One staff member and college advisor articulates the scope and content of the college system:

College is an opportunity for us to get to know a group of kids really well over a four year period. It helps us organizationally a lot because we can divide the responsibilities and focus our energies on a group of students across all of their courses. College also provides a nurturing environment. It's one check to keep kids from falling through the cracks. It's a way for teachers to keep their eyes on a group of thirteen. We're constantly calling their parents. We find that students aren't vocal in class as they are in advisory

The school principal discusses how distributive counseling system, one in which all adults share responsibility is more effective method of school organization:

True to the term, "distributed," the goal is to share the responsibility among the adults in the building the overall well-being of the students in the building. In many schools, the principal or dean does all those things. When the

responsibilities are isolated, then a small school is a lot like a big school. It's not clear to me why we would want that dynamic. When you empower the people to make decisions and be on the front line, it is special. If a teacher comes to me with a problem, the response is how are we going to handle this? We had our first suspension today. We've had only three fights this year, with two off premises...I tend to think it's working.

Advisor Groupings

Students were randomly placed in eight colleges with each college being staffed by the six main subject area teachers as well the two administrators, the social worker, and the director of the after-school program. Groupings are heterogeneous, although they were balanced by gender to make each college relatively equal in its ratio of boys and girls. Two out of the eight colleges have two adult advisors. In the first year, because of the small size of the school, most students are in colleges with their own classroom teachers. However, as the school grows, it may be difficult to maintain such a relationship.

Support for Advisory

Most staff members would acknowledge that running a college is time-consuming and that, like most aspects of working in a small school, there is never enough time for preparation, training, or curriculum development. Because college is considered a separate course, it is counted as instructional time for teachers. Teachers at BLS teach one preparation in their subject area as well as their college. The total instructional time for teachers falls within the district's agreement with the teachers' union on teaching time.

Over the summer, in the initial planning stages for the school, teachers engaged in a series of professional development workshops centered on the college system and the college role. There have been few professional development workshops on counseling or social work skills.

One of the teachers at the school has created a set curriculum for advisory to which teachers may refer. Additionally, in weekly email, the principal includes a "college corner" section for ideas and suggestions for college activities.

The BLS staff has expressed a need for more time to plan for college time as well as more professional development on the role of an advisor.

Directions for the Future

In its first year of operation, the advisory or college system at Bronx Lab School has successfully integrated the idea of advisory into its educational philosophy and model. College has become part of the school culture and terminology as students and staff identify its value and significance. The practice of sustained silent reading and writing

letters has become ingrained in practice and part of the expectation of students and teachers.

As the school prepares for its second year and works to refine the advisory program, it might want to consider how to best make use of the time devoted to curriculum on Mondays and Fridays. Although the is written curriculum, the importance of flexibility, and teacher autonomy might be explored. The school might also consider how to strengthen advisor support as the schools expands to include staff less familiar with the advisory model.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have suggested that, in creating advisory programs, schools consider at least five dimension along which the program will be built: the scheduling, scope & content, advisor roles, advisory grouping, and support systems. We have provided examples of each of these five dimensions as well as questions for consideration (also collected in Appendix A). In planning new advisories and refining existing systems, we hope school leaders and staff will consider these questions and use them to start important discussions about advisory.

The two case studies present two distinct structures for advisory programs. The School For Excellence study is an evolution story; while the school's goals for advisory have remained constant, the system's structure has been reworked to better meet those goals. As issues with curriculum and advisor support arose, SFE designed curricula and continues to organize ongoing supports for advisors. Their advisory system will undoubtedly continue to evolve as challenges arise and new strategies are employed to better counsel students for college, career, and affective issues.

The other case, Bronx Lab School, is a start-up story. From the initial planning stages, BLS has incorporated advisory as a central component of the school. Staff created the curricula and schedule to meet multiple goals: develop literacy skills, college counseling, and provide social supports. As BLS expands, and with it the advisory system, new staff will be integrated and new curricula will be developed to meet student needs.

The popular reform strategy to create small, thematic academies within existing school often includes advisory systems as key components. Behind such a reform lays research data that shows that students learn best when they receive both social supports and academic press from the school community. We hope this paper has made compelling the value of advisories and made evident the key dimensions of implementing such a system.

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Appendix A

Index of Questions for Consideration

We hope that the following questions will be used as a starting point for school leaders and staff as they consider implementing advisory systems within their small schools or small learning communities.

Scheduling

- ┌ How much time will be devoted to advisory each week?
- ┌ When will advisory meetings be scheduled during the school day?
- ┌ What accountability measures will be adopted for students in advisory (i.e. mandatory or voluntary attendance, will grades be given?)

Scope and Content

- ┌ What will be the goals of the advisory program?
- ┌ What will be the scope of the advisory program as related to the goals? (for example, academics, study skills, social issues, and/or college preparation)
- ┌ Will advisory scope allow advisors to address significant issues in students' lives (and the school community) as they arise?
- ┌ How will content for advisory be determined? Will it be up to individual teachers or will it be planned by a committee?
- ┌ What kinds of curricula, activities, and events will best support the school's scope for advisory?

Advisor Roles

- ┌ How will the school clarify roles and responsibilities for advisories, including roles for teachers, counselor(s), advisors, and administrators?
- ┌ How will advisory affect teachers' preparation and teaching load?
- ┌ What professional development opportunities do teachers (and other staff) need to effectively play the role of advisor?

Participants and Grouping

- ┌ Which staff members will serve as advisors? (i.e., teachers, administrators, counselors, others)
- ┌ Will students stay with their same advisory group over the course of a year (or more)?
- ┌ Will students be assigned to an advisor who also teaches them in a core discipline class?

Supports

- l How will the leadership establish advisory as a priority for the staff and students?
- l How will team planning time be devoted to discussions of the advisory program?
How much time?
- l What kinds of professional development and training will team members receive on different aspects of being an advisor?
- l How will the team orient students and parents to the goals and procedures for advisory?