



High School Advisory Programs

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Summary

Key Observations

Allow advisors flexibility in delivering curriculum to maximize teacher engagement. Administrators at profiled schools use flexible advisory curricula. In other words, administrators or advisory committees at all profiled schools provide advisors with curriculum guidelines and resources but allow advisors leeway to deliver the content they find impactful. Contacts report that administrators favor flexibility because much of advisory’s value derives from the relationships students and advisors develop during advisory. With flexible curricula, teachers can select activities that align with their strengths and interests and those of their students, which helps advisors to form relationships. In addition, contacts at profiled schools report that flexible curricula minimize advisor prep time and thus increase teacher engagement.

Structure advisory programs so that advisors remain with the same group of students for multiple years to build strong advisor-student relationships.

Administrators at School A, School B, and School C designed their advisory programs so that advisors stay with the same group of students throughout all four years of high school. Administrators at these schools assign advisors to a group of freshmen students, and each advisor stays with that group of students as those students advance from freshmen to senior year. After those students graduate high school, administrators assign each advisor to a new group of freshman students. Contacts at all three schools note that multiyear continuity between advisors and students helps students build meaningful, positive relationships with their advisors.

Schedule advisories to ensure that advisors and students meet daily to further foster advisor-student relationships.

Administrators at all profiled schools except School B schedule advisory so that students and advisors meet every day for each grade. Advisors at School B hold advisory meetings every day for freshman and sophomores but only twice a week for juniors and once per week for seniors to allow upperclassmen more flexibility and freedom—upperclassmen may use non-meeting advisory time to catch up on work, meet with teachers, or complete other tasks. Contacts at all profiled schools assert that frequent advisory meetings build relationships among students and between students and their advisors.

Ask advisors to schedule multiple one-on-one student meetings each year.

Contacts at all School A and School B note that one-on-one student meetings help advisors both build relationships with their students and assist their students with postsecondary and academic planning. Advisors at School A hold one-on-one academic check-ins with each student at least once a quarter. In these check-ins, students reflect on their academic performance, identify growth areas, and suggest improvement strategies.

Advisory programs improve students’ sense of connection and foster a sense of school community.

Contacts at three out of the four profiled schools report that students feel more connected at school due in part to advisory. Contacts at School D report that students speak articulately about the sense of community they derive from advisory. In addition, survey results from School C show an increase in the proportion of students who feel as though they have at least one trusted adult in the building and the number of students who feel connected at school since advisory’s implementation. However, contacts at profiled schools caveat that increases in connectedness and community cannot be attributed solely to advisory—administrators made other significant structural changes concurrently.

2) Structure, Purpose, & Goals

Schedule

Schedule Multiple, Brief Advisory Periods Each Week to Facilitate Relationship Building

Administrators at all profiled schools schedule advisory meetings every day for their underclassmen, and administrators at three out of the four profiled schools hold advisory every day for every grade. Contacts at all profiled schools maintain that frequent advisory meetings facilitate strong relationships between students and their advisors.

Advisory Schedules at Profiled Schools

Administrators at School C and School D hold advisory in the mid-to-late morning to give students a break between classes and ensure all students are present—some students may not attend early courses.

School	Advisory Schedule
School C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Advisors host eight-minute advisory meetings every day for advisors to check in on students and stay informed about student affairs. Contacts note that brief advisory meetings preserve instructional time, but still allow advisors to complete activities and get to know their students.Advisors host 30-minute advisory meetings once per month in which they deliver more in-depth interventions (e.g., a cross-advisory game of Kahoot!).
School D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Advisors host 25-minute meetings on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday.Advisors host a 45-minute meeting on Wednesday.Thursday's 45-minute advisory period serves as an academic flex period during which students may seek academic support.
School A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Advisors host daily advisory meetings, for either eight or 25 minutes. Meetings alternate between eight and 25 minutes every other day.
School B	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Advisors host a 25-minute advisory meeting every day for underclassmen.Advisors host a 25-minute advisory meeting twice per week for juniors and once per week for seniors.

Consider Incorporating Academic Flex Time into Advisory Schedule to Support Student Academic Progress

Administrators at both School B and School D incorporate academic flex time into advisory programs. At School D, students do not attend an advisory meeting on Thursdays, but instead use that 45-minute period as academic flex time. At School B, administrators schedule academic flex time for every student for the 20 minutes following advisory. Juniors and seniors, who do not attend advisory every day, receive an additional 25 minutes of academic flex time on days their advisories do not meet.

At both schools, students can use academic flex time to access academic support as needed. For example, students can make up tests, access tutoring, meet with teachers, or complete homework assignments. To facilitate connections between

teachers and students, administrators at School B use a software portal through which students and teachers can request meetings with each other during academic flex time.

Example Student Schedules from *School B*¹

Monday		Tuesday	
<i>Freshman</i>	<i>Senior</i>	<i>Freshmen</i>	<i>Senior</i>
Block 1 8:40-9:55	Block 1 8:40-9:55	Block 1 8:40-9:55	Block 1 8:40-9:55
Advisory 10:00-10:25	Advisory 10:00-10:25	Advisory 10:00-10:25	Flex Time 10:00-10:45
Flex time 10:25-10:45	Flex time 10:25-10:45	Flex time 10:25-10:45	
Block 2 10:50-12:05	Block 2 10:50-12:05	Block 2 10:50-12:05	Block 2 10:50-12:05
Block 3 12:10-2:00 A lunch: 12:10-12:40 B lunch: 12:45-1:15 C lunch: 1:30-2:00	Block 3 12:10-2:00 A lunch: 12:10-12:40 B lunch: 12:45-1:15 C lunch: 1:30-2:00	Block 3 12:10-2:00 A lunch: 12:10-12:40 B lunch: 12:45-1:15 C lunch: 1:30-2:00	Block 3 12:10-2:00 A lunch: 12:10-12:40 B lunch: 12:45-1:15 C lunch: 1:30-2:00
Block 4 2:05-3:20	Block 4 2:05-3:20	Block 4 2:05-3:20	Block 4 2:05-3:20

Forming Advisory Groups

Consider Organizing Advisories so that Advisors Teach Advisees in Their Courses

Administrators at three of the four profiled schools randomly assign advisory groups to an advisor. At School D, administrators assign advisory groups to advisors to ensure that advisors teach their advisees in other courses. School D operates a Small Learning Communities (SLC) model in which administrators divide the school into a “lower division”—which includes 9th and 10th grade—and an “upper division” of 11th and 12th grade. Administrators further subdivide the lower division into four houses and the upper division into three houses. Administrators assign incoming freshman to one of the four lower houses— each of which contains approximately 108 students—randomly and heterogeneously. These students take core courses together across the two years, which helps them to form a community within the larger high school. At the beginning of junior year, administrators reshuffle students into upper houses.²

At School D, administrators assign a team of four subject area teachers to each lower division house. These teachers teach all core courses within the house and serve as advisors to students within the house. Under this system, each student within a lower division house will see their assigned advisor in at least one of their core courses as well as in advisory. Contacts at School D report that their SLC structure increases the opportunities for students and their advisors to interact, which strengthens student-advisor relationships.

1) “[School B] Daily Schedule,” School B, accessed December 11, 2019,

2) “[School D Learning Environment Description Document],” School D, accessed December 10, 2019.

Structure Advisory to Ensure Advisors Stay with the Same Advisory Group for Multiple Years

Contacts at School B, School C, and School A report that advisors stay with the same group of students throughout all four years to facilitate strong, continuous student-advisor relationships. Administrators at these schools assign advisors to a group of freshmen students, and each advisor stays with that group of students as they advance from freshmen to senior year. After that group of students graduates, administrators assign each advisor to a new group of freshman students. Due to School D's SLC structure, students meet with the same advisor during freshman and sophomore year, then switch to a new advisor for junior and senior year after administrators reshuffle them into upper division houses.

Contacts at all profiled schools stress that multiyear continuity is critical for advisors to build strong relationships with their students. Multiyear continuity allows advisors to use in-depth knowledge about their students' goals, personalities, and academic performance to both support individual students and deliver activities and/or interventions that align with group-specific student needs.

Consider Crafting Advisory Groups Based on Student Characteristics to Maximize Advisory Harmony

Administrators at both School D and School C assign students to advisory groups randomly. Contacts at School D note that random selection creates heterogeneous groups—administrators do not separate students based on academic achievement or other factors.

Rather than rely on random selection, administrators at both School A and School B design advisory groups to ensure students with past tension do not end up in the same advisory. At School A, administrators also avoid assigning pre-existing friend groups to the same advisory so that students can form a cohesive community without interference. In addition, administrators at School A intentionally craft advisory groups to reflect the school community—administrators create advisory groups that incorporate students from both feeder middle schools and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Administrators at School A first create preliminary advisory groups based on students' home middle schools and socioeconomic data the spring before incoming freshmen arrive. After administrators draft the groups, they meet with middle school teachers to collect feedback and adjust group membership as necessary. Contacts note that because middle school teachers know their students well, they can identify potential problems more effectively than can high school administrators.

In case frictions do arise within advisory groups, administrators at School C devised an advisory opt-out system. If a student has difficulties with either other students in their advisory or their advisor, they may opt out of their advisory after a conversation with their guidance counselor. Their counselor then randomly assigns the student to a new advisory. A similar process exists for advisors in case there is friction between a student and an advisor. Advisors may not discharge their entire advisory, but they can request to move individual students. This advisory opt-out system helps ensure that tensions do not preclude a strong advisory community.

Administrators at three of the four profiled schools assign between 10 and 15 students to each advisory group to facilitate advisor-student relationship building.



Organize Advisory Groups so that Students within an Advisory Have the Same Guidance Counselor

Administrators at School C, School D, and School B sort advisories so that each student in an advisory has the same guidance counselor. At School C, each student within an advisory reports to the same assistant principal as well. Contacts at School C report that this strategy helps advisors quickly know who to contact if students need additional support.

Purpose

Profiled Schools Use Advisory Primarily to Build Relationships and Provide Academic and Postsecondary Support

Administrators at profiled schools use advisory for a variety of purposes including community and relationship building, postsecondary support, academic support, SEL and character development, wellness, discipline, and support in moments of crisis. Contacts at School D and School B specifically stress relationship building as a central purpose of advisory. For example, contacts at School B highlight that the main purpose of their advisory program is to give students a place where they feel understood by both adults and their fellow students. Advisors pair activities and games designed to build community with SEL interventions such as mindfulness activities and reflection to help students form relationships through advisory.

All profiled schools except School C also use advisory for academic and postsecondary support. At School C, counselors provide postsecondary and academic support through a dedicated program. Advisors at other profiled schools provide academic and postsecondary support in advisory through one-on-one academic check-ins, structured goal-setting activities, and career planning workshops.

In addition, administrators at School C use advisory to deliver school-wide messages in times of crisis or tragedy, when it is imperative that every student receives the same message. Contacts note that advisory is ideal to deliver such messages because it provides a familiar, structured environment where students can discuss their feelings with peers who know them well. Contacts also note that all students attend advisory and therefore administrators guarantee that all students will receive correct messaging.

Lastly, administrators at School D use advisory as the first layer of discipline. Advisors handle small student infractions through conversations, restitution, and reflection in advisory. Further, advisors at School D teach lessons on bullying, equity, and tolerance to prevent disciplinary infractions.³

Consider Creating an Advisory Mission Statement to Clarify the Purpose of Advisory to Teachers and Students

Administrators at both School A and School B composed mission statements to clearly define advisory's purpose. To create their mission statement, administrators at School A created a focus group composed of teachers, students, administrators, and parents.

3) "Schools of Opportunity Nomination Form," School D, provided November 11, 2019.

The focus group wrote three iterations of their purpose statement before settling on a final version. By collecting stakeholder feedback, administrators could help ensure that advisory interventions aligned with perceived needs in the school.

Components of *School A's* Advisory Mission Statement

Advisory at School A will focus on...



Academic advising and advocacy



Community conversations



Recreation and team building

Contacts note that students in the focus group asked that advisory incorporate recreation, fun, and downtime alongside academic support.

3) Interventions & Curricula

Curriculum Design

Tailor Advisory Themes and Curricula to the Needs of Each Grade Level

Contacts at all profiled schools report teaching different social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula, academic curricula, and postsecondary curricula at each grade level to address varying student needs. For example, 9th grade advisors at School D focus activities on topics such as goal setting, academic identity, and learning styles, as 9th grade students need to identify how they learn best and transition into high school. In 12th grade, advisors focus on FAFSA workshops, financial planning lessons, and postsecondary checklists to help seniors with the college application process. Administrators at all profiled schools can tailor advisory program curricula to each grade’s needs because all profiled schools maintain single-grade advisories rather than mixed, multi-age advisories.

To help map out recommended, grade-by-grade curricula, administrators at School D wrote a preliminary scope and sequence document.

Abridged Curricular Themes and Units from the Advisory Scope and Sequence at School D⁴

Grade Level	Essential Question and Outcomes	Sample Curricular Units
9 th	<p>Essential Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who am I as an individual? What does it mean to be a student? <p>Outcomes</p> <p><i>Wellness and SEL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can reflect on their social identity Students identify their own wellness and SEL needs and can identify wellness and SEL supports on campus <p><i>Academic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can reflect on their academic identity Students can identify academic supports and resources Students can explain the graduate profile and track their progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to high school module Community building activities Goal-setting instruction Introduction to growth mindset lessons Instruction related to healthy choices, including bullying and internet safety Study group and peer-tutoring facilitation Activities to help students identify their learning styles and strengths (e.g., Learning Styles Inventory)
10 th	<p>Essential Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role do I play in my school and larger community? <p>Outcomes</p> <p><i>Wellness and SEL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can reflect on their social identity Students can identify their own wellness and SEL needs and seek out wellness and SEL supports on campus <p><i>Academic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can reflect on how their academic identity connects to postsecondary plans Students can proactively seek out academic supports and resources on campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instruction and practice on oral presentation skills Naviance personality and career exploration Career exploration activities College field trip Equity lessons that focus on privilege

4) "Advisory Committee Scope and Sequence Discussion," School D, provided November 11, 2019.

11th	<p>Essential Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who am I now? How am I continuing to transition toward my independence? What are my post-graduation choices? <p>Outcomes</p> <p><i>Wellness and SEL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can identify their emotions and the root causes of their emotions, explain how their emotions impact them and their community, and identify the resources or practices that can help support them <p><i>Academic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can identify their skills, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and needs to develop <i>possible</i> postsecondary plans. Students can study effectively in a group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student-led conferences College planning exercises Naviance career interest survey Interviewing and resume projects and workshops
12th	<p>Essential Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I ready for life after high school and where am I going? <p>Outcomes</p> <p><i>Wellness and SEL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can identify their emotions, the root causes of their emotions, explain how those emotions impacts them and their community, and independently access the resources or practices to support them <p><i>Academic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can identify their skills, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and needs to <i>choose and articulate</i> a postsecondary plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Portfolio defense Instruction related to the college application process Instruction related to life after high school, finance, and decision-making skills. Lessons on activism and social power structures

Provide Curriculum Suggestions and Resources, but Allow Advisors Flexibility in Delivering Content

Contacts at all profiled schools report a highly flexible advisory curriculum. Administrators or advisory committees at all profiled schools provide advisors with curriculum guidelines and resources but allow advisors leeway to deliver the content they find most relevant and impactful. Contacts at profiled schools favor flexibility because they report that much of advisory’s value derives from the organic relationships that develop among students and between students and advisors. Flexible curricula allow advisors to tailor their advisory offerings directly to the needs of their students, which can also help advisors foster stronger relationships. In addition, contacts report that flexible curricula minimize advisor prep time and thus increase teacher engagement—teachers can select among pre-made activities that align with their strengths and interests.

However, contacts at School D and School C report that it is sometimes critical for all students to learn certain information, receive consistent messaging around an issue, or complete specific tasks. If administrators allow advisors too much flexibility, some students may not receive critical training related to postsecondary planning or wellness strategies. To solve this problem, administrators at School D created a preliminary list of critical practices—called common assurances—that all advisors must perform with their students. Contacts note that administrators plan to revisit the common assurance list to ensure that required tasks do not overly increase advisor workload.

Sample Common Assurances at School D⁵



Weekly check-ins

Advisors conduct check-ins to assess student wellbeing and academic progress. Check-ins can be written, one-on-one, or in small groups.



Community Circles

Advisors encourage group-wide discussions and reflection on a regular basis.



Long-term plans

Advisors and students co-create long term academic and/or postsecondary plans (length of plan dependent on grade) and embed follow ups to assess the plan.



Cross grade-level activities

Advisors plan activities with advisories in other grades to promote school-wide bonding and cohesion.



Consider Offering a Credited Course to Help Design Advisory Curricula

Administrators at School A offer a credited course to juniors, seniors, and teachers (for graduate credit) in which participants research advisory best practices. Administrators then integrate these practices into advisory curricula.

Consider Forming an Advisory Committee to Design Advisory Curricula

Administrators at School C formed an advisory committee primarily to provide curriculum suggestions and resources to advisors. Contacts report that the advisory committee developed some curricula independently but pulled other advisory activities from external sources. For example, School C's advisory committee sourced their Open Session social and emotional learning tool from [CASEL](#). Administrators at other schools also develop in-house curricula—at School D, administrators developed a 10-lesson growth mindset curriculum in house.

Advisory Committee Structure at School C



Activities

- Edit curricula and identify useful resources for advisors
- Maintain advisory website
- Plan and lead advisor trainings



Members

- Assistant Principal
- Three volunteer teachers



Frequency

The committee meets once every 14 school days



Compensation

Teachers receive \$1,800-\$2,000 stipend

5) "Advisory Common Assurances," School D, provided November 11th, 2019.

Relationship Building

Consistent, Frequent Advisory Meetings Build Relationships Between Advisors and Students and Among Students

Importantly, contacts at multiple profiled schools report that advisory builds relationships simply by virtue of meeting frequently in a small group over multiple years. Contacts report that students naturally form strong bonds with their advisor and advisory group over time, particularly if advisors engage consistently in advisory activities. Contacts at School B note that advisor engagement level can be more important than specific advisory interventions to help advisors form positive relationships with advisees.

Structural Components of Advisory that Facilitate Relationship Building



Small groups (i.e., less than 15 students)



Frequent Meetings (i.e., every day)



Multiyear consistency



Positive adult-student relationships

That said, contacts at all profiled schools ask advisors to conduct team-building activities to strengthen community ties within and among advisory groups. A common team building strategy is recreation. At School B, advisories will often play name games and complete other icebreakers in 9th grade. To facilitate cross-advisory relationships, advisors at School C will often pit one advisory against another in games of bingo or Kahoot!.

Team-Building Activities at Profiled Schools



Food Fridays

Students at School D bring in a food item that is important to them, explains why to the class, and then share it with the class.



Slow Tag⁶

Students play tag but may only take one step when "it" calls out "step." All other rules of regular tag apply.



Human Knot⁷

Students stand in a small circle (no more than 10 students), reach in with a right hand and grab a random hand, then reach in with left hand and grab a random hand. Students must then untangle themselves to form a circle without letting go of any hands.



Two Truths and a Lie⁸

Advisors ask students to come up with two truths and a lie about themselves. Students present their "facts" to the group and the group tries to decipher which one is a lie.

Ask Seniors to Facilitate Underclassmen Advisory to Promote Whole-School Community

Administrators at School B, School A, and School C ask seniors to help advisors facilitate freshman advisory to strengthen whole-school community. At School B,

6) "50 Energizers," School B, provided November 8, 2019
7) "50 Energizers," School B.
8) "50 Energizers," School B.

Social and Emotional Learning and Wellness

The article [Giving Thanks Can Make You Happier](#) from Harvard Health Publishing cites research to support the link between gratitude and wellbeing.

seniors can apply to take a class in which they learn skills and techniques to facilitate advisory.

At School C, juniors and seniors mentor freshman and sophomores in advisory. About once a week, two to three juniors/seniors will visit underclassman advisories and deliver lessons that range from backpack-packing strategies to course-selection strategies.

Contacts at School B report that involving upperclassmen in underclassmen advisories strengthened the feeling of community in the school. Contacts also credit this intervention with reducing social division between the grades—upperclassmen and underclassman interact more frequently in the hallways than they did previously.

Incorporate Gratitude and Mindfulness Interventions to Promote Wellbeing and Manage Student Stress

Administrators at multiple profiled schools incorporate advisory interventions designed to help students manage stress and improve their mental wellness. At School A, contacts report that advisory focuses on gratitude, as they cite research that suggests that gratitude and mental wellness are linked. Administrators design specific activities to help students understand the importance of gratitude and demonstrate gratitude toward others. For example, administrators plan to require students in ninth-grade advisories to identify a person for whom they are thankful and write a letter to them expressing their gratitude. Administrators also designed a specific activity to signal gratitude's importance to the school and create a more thankful community.

Gratitude Demonstration Activity at School A

1

Advisors deliver a lesson on gratitude that defines gratitude and illustrates its importance for wellbeing. Advisors also play a short video to visually illustrate the importance of gratitude.

2

Advisors ask students to reflect on their own gratitude individually. On a piece of paper, students write down a person for whom they are grateful and write the reason for their gratitude.

3

Advisors pin student responses on the wall of the cafeteria to publicly display examples of student gratitude. Contacts hope that these displays promote a more thankful community in the school.

To further support student wellness, administrators at School A ask advisors to deliver lessons on stress management and mindfulness. Specifically, advisors at School A use content from [yoga4classrooms](#) to lead 5-minute movement and mindfulness exercises to decrease student stress. In addition, advisors at School A and School C lead activities that help students to identify healthy behaviors. Advisors at School A lead a time and stress management intervention wherein advisors ask students to rate their level of stress, determine factors that contribute to that stress, and devise strategies to mitigate that stress. Advisors at School C incentivize healthy behaviors with bingo. Students may check off a box on their bingo square for

completing activities such as getting 8 hours of sleep or leaving their phone at home for a day.



Create a Wellness Center to Provide Counseling and Support Services

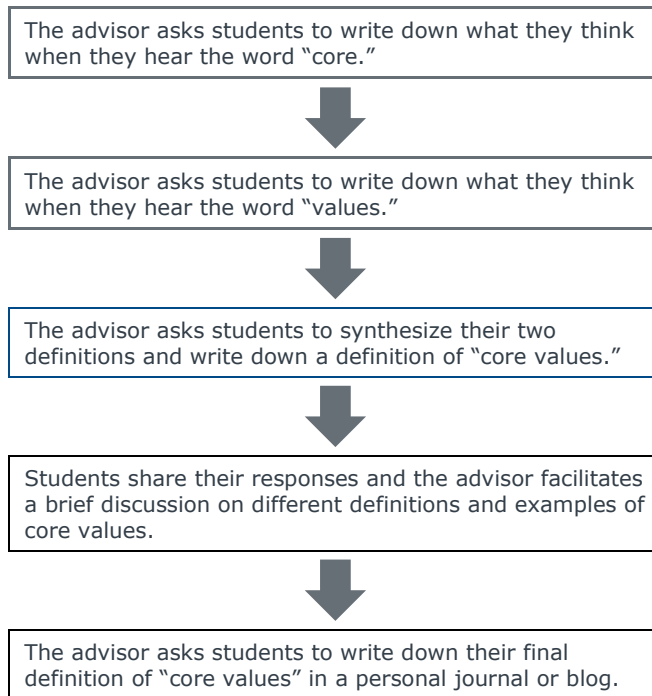
Administrators at both School A and School D opened wellness centers for their students to provide counseling and support services. Advisors at School A teach students about the function of the wellness center and flag helpful wellness resources for students. At School D, advisors identify students who may need additional support to wellness counselors.⁹

Incorporate Reflection Interventions to Promote Student Self-Awareness

Advisors at multiple profiled schools ask students to reflect on personal and academic subjects to promote student awareness and thoughtfulness—two important SEL skills. Specifically, advisors at both School A and School B ask students to reflect on their core values to help students identify their priorities and plan thoughtfully for their future.

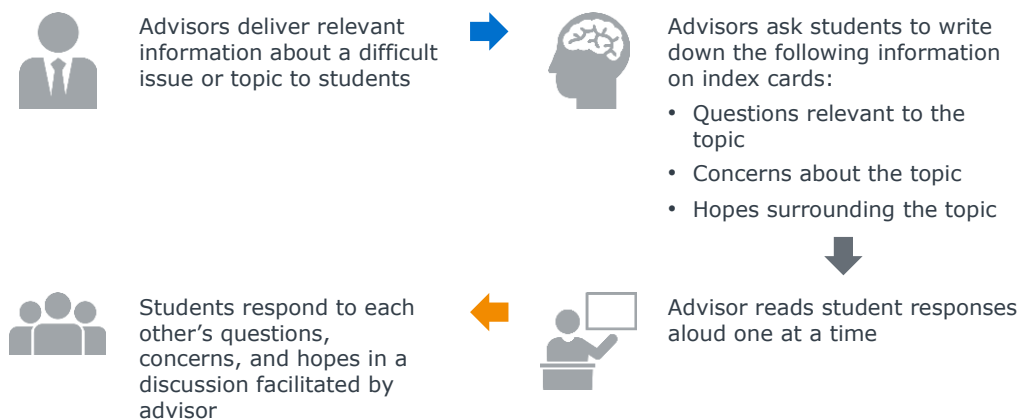
9) "Schools of Opportunity Nomination Form," School D, provided November 9, 2019.

Core Values Reflection from School B¹⁰



Rather than focus on values specifically, advisors at School D and School C ask students to participate in reflective discussions which focus on topics that range from equity to trauma. At School D, advisors ask students to meet in community circles and reflect on topics such as gender identity and bullying.¹¹ At School C, advisors often use a structured discussion tool known as Open Session after difficult events in the school community. This activity allows students to express their concerns, hopes, and questions in a structured format. Contacts also note that this tool helps advisors feel more comfortable facilitating difficult conversations.

Open Session Tool in Use at School C



10) "PLP Resource Guide," School B, provided November 9, 2019

11) "Schools of Opportunity Nomination Form," School D, provided November 11, 2019



Consider Delivering Growth Mindset and Healthy Relationships Lessons During Advisory

At School D, advisors and counselors worked together to develop an 11th grade curriculum which consists of lessons, facilitated conversations, and videos on healthy relationships. Advisors deliver these lessons during advisory. Contacts at School D also highlight the school's growth mindset curriculum, which advisors introduce in 9th and 10th grade but deliver primarily through 10 lessons in 11th grade. The curriculum includes a series of lessons, videos, and readings that describe a growth vs. fixed mindset and what it means to be a learner.

Academic and Postsecondary Planning

Complete Postsecondary Preparation Activities during Advisory Meetings

All profiled schools except School C incorporate postsecondary preparation and planning into their advisory curriculum to help students prepare for college and to minimize student stress surrounding postsecondary processes. School C operates a separate guidance seminar program, which fulfills the same function.

Administrators at School A and School B create postsecondary checklists with accompanying dates and information to detail each step a student must complete to reach college, the military, or the workforce. Contacts report that postsecondary checklists decrease student stress surrounding postsecondary processes—checklists reduce the ambiguous college process into concrete actions.

At School D, administrators use workshops and interventions to facilitate steps in the postsecondary planning process. For example, advisors take students on college field trips to expose them to college options in 10th grade, which is when many students begin to explore colleges. Similarly, advisors run FAFSA workshops for 12th graders to provide students with the requisite knowledge and time required to complete the FAFSA.

Advisors at School D also design interventions to impart critical postsecondary skills regardless of whether students choose to attend an institution of higher education. For example, some advisors teach lessons on interview strategies, resume writing, and financial planning.

Incorporate Short- and Long-Term Goal Setting Activities into Advisory Curricula

Contacts at most profiled schools ask student to perform goal setting activities to instill positive academic behaviors and promote student academic success. For example, many advisors at School D ask their students to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) goals for the week in a written check-in each Monday to help students track their academic progress. Advisors review student check-ins, but only follow up in-person with concerning or anomalous responses. Similarly, students at School B set academic goals at the beginning of each year and meet with their advisors midway through the year to perform goal checks.

In addition to short-term goals, administrators at School D encourage students to focus on long-term goals through an intervention called the Two-Path Project. In this activity, advisors ask juniors to imagine where they want to be in five years. Advisors

then ask students to create two different plans, both of which would lead students to their five-year goal. This activity catalyzes forward thinking and encourages deliberate decision making.

Ask Advisors Meet One on One with Each Student to Monitor Student Academic Progress

Contacts at School B and School A note that one-on-one meetings serve as important academic and postsecondary progress checks and contribute to student-advisor relationships. Advisors at School A hold one-on-one academic check-ins with each student at least once a quarter. In these check-ins, students reflect on their academic performance, identify areas for growth, and suggest strategies to improve performance. Advisors hold check-ins over the course of one week, during normal advisory meetings. During one-on-one meetings, other students in the advisory group prepare for their own reflection meetings, complete homework, or interact with other group members.

Advisors at School B also use one-on-one meetings to assess students' academic progress. Students at School B first set academic goals at the beginning of each year. Advisors use one-on-one meetings during the year to reflect on these goals and potentially set new goals. Contacts at School B report that advisors vary the number of one-on-one meetings they hold with each student depending on advisee grade-level and advisee level of need. For example, contacts at School B report that one advisor holds three one-on-one meetings with each senior to provide individualized postsecondary planning support, but only holds two meetings with juniors.

4) Implementation & Assessment

Teacher Engagement

Hold Teacher Trainings Focused on the Importance of Advisory to Increase Advisor Engagement

Contacts at School A report it is important to communicate the rationale behind advisory to engage teachers. At School C, contacts report that teachers respond positively to advisory rationales that connect advisory directly to student need. Contacts report that teachers engage with messaging related to strong advisor-student relationships because they recognize students' need to feel connected at school. Contacts at School C also report that teachers often support the communication of consistent information in times of crisis, as they recognize students' need for full and accurate information in such times.

To communicate the rationale behind advisories to teachers, administrators at School A require advisors to attend a one-and-a-half-day advisor training the summer before they begin with a new freshmen cohort. As part of this training, advisors read two articles that reinforce why advisory is important and how it meets student needs. Advisors then participate in a structured discussion of the articles based on the Four A's protocol from the [School Reform Initiative](#).

Four A's Text Protocol for Teacher Engagement¹²

1

The facilitator asks the group to read the text silently. Each teacher should highlight and make notes on the text. The facilitator directs teachers to pay attention to the following four questions:

- What **assumptions** does the author hold?
- What do you **agree** with?
- What do you want to **argue** with?
- What parts of the text do you wish to **act** upon?

2

The facilitator asks each participant to identify and discuss one assumption in the text, then identify one piece of information with which they agree, with which they want to argue, or upon which they want to act. Facilitators move the discussion along swiftly so that everyone has time to participate.

3

Facilitators help the group transition into an open discussion about how the information within the text applies to teachers' work with students.

4

Facilitators debrief the experience through a reflective discussion.

To further engage teachers with advisory, administrators at School A highlight an impactful relationship mapping activity which emphasizes the need for advisory by illustrating how few students have strong connections to adults in the school. Administrators can then highlight advisory as a strategy to build relationships between students and teachers to encourage teacher support.

¹²"Four A's Text Protocol," School Reform Initiative, accessed December 10, 2019, https://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/4_a_text.pdf

Adult-Student Relationship Mapping Activity

For more information on adult-student relationship mapping activities, consult EAB's [Promoting Positive Adult-Student Connections Toolkit](#).

Activity facilitators lay out separate pieces of paper—one for each student in the school—on the floors and/or walls of the meeting room. Organizers lay out students' papers by grade to help teachers identify their students.



Facilitators ask teachers to briefly write down any piece of nonacademic knowledge they possess about a student on that student's piece of paper.



Once teachers have finished filling out what information they know, facilitators direct teachers to review student's papers and identify students with little to no information on their sheets. Facilitators should then emphasize that those students may lack meaningful connection to adults in the school. Facilitators can then highlight advisory as a strategy to address this gap.

Highlight Advisory as a School Priority in Teacher Interviews to Ensure New Teacher Engagement

Contacts at School C note that despite teacher engagement strategies, some teachers refuse to engage with advisory. To minimize this problem in new teachers, administrators at School B stress advisory as a school priority in teacher interviews. Interviewers ask advisory-focused questions in their interview process and communicate that they hire faculty as both teachers and advisors. Contacts report that this process helps to ensure new hires engage with advisory.

Replace Low Priority Teacher Responsibilities with Advisory to Maximize Teacher Engagement

Contacts at School B note that school administrators often foist new responsibilities on teachers without removing any demands on teacher time, which can cause teachers to resent new responsibilities. When administrators at School B implemented their advisory, they allowed teachers to trade one of their duties—such as study hall, lunch duty, or open gym duty—for advisory. Contacts report this practice encouraged teacher engagement.

Rather than present advisory as an additional responsibility, administrators at School A factor advisory time into teachers' required instructional minutes to signal that advisory is as important as a normal course. Similarly, administrators at both School C and School B incorporate advisory responsibility into teacher contracts to demonstrate advisory's importance and set expectations that all teachers advise.

Consider Providing Common Planning Time for Advisors to Prepare for Advisory

Administrators at School D and School A provide dedicated time for advisors to prepare for their advisory. Administrators allot advisors with prep time both to ensure that advisors can complete required work within normal teaching hours and to ensure that advisors can adequately deliver advisory content. Profiled schools vary, however, in the amount of planning time they provide their teachers.

At School D, advisor teams within a house share the same planning block every day (50 minutes three days per week and 88 minutes twice a week), which they use to plan classes and advisory. Typically, advisor teams dedicate one 45-minute planning block per week to prepare lessons for advisory. In addition, advisor teams dedicate the 50-minute Friday planning block to a “Kid Talk” meeting, in which advisors discuss concerns about specific students and collaborate to select potential interventions (e.g., one-on-one meetings). The students’ guidance counselor (all students within a house have the same advisor) also attends “Kid Talk.”

Administrators at School A provide teachers with a 30-minute period every five to six weeks to prepare for advisory. Specifically, administrators at School A provide extended learning opportunities (ELO) for staff professional development for 60 minutes every five to six weeks—they now dedicate half this time to advisory planning. However, contacts report that they would provide more planning time for advisory if they could adjust the schedule further.



Provide Advisors with Curricula and Resources to Minimize Planning Time and Maximize Teacher Engagement


Contacts at School C also stress the importance of providing advisors with curricular material to minimize advisor planning time. Contacts note that, because they provide advisors with pre-made lesson plans and activity suggestions, advisors can lead advisor meetings with minimal prep time. For example, administrators at School B provide advisors with a list of 50 team-building activities.¹³ Administrators at School B also send an email each week with suggested advisory activities to reduce necessary planning time.

Consider Implementing Advisory over the Course of Multiple Years to Demonstrate the Impact of Advisory to Reluctant Teachers

Administrators at School B and School A implemented advisory programs over the course of multiple years (i.e., gradual implementation). Administrators at School A implemented their advisory grade-by-grade over four years. Administrators at School B operated only a freshman advisory for several years before implementing advisory across other grades. Administrators at School C, on the other hand, implemented advisory in all grades at once (i.e., direct implementation). Contacts cite both advantages related to both strategies.

¹³) “50 Energizers,” School B, provided November 8, 2019

Advantages of Gradual vs. Direct Advisory Implementation



Gradual Implementation	Direct Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contacts at School B report that gradual implementation allowed reluctant teachers to see the impact of advisory on students firsthand. Contacts report that these teachers were the more likely to support advisory when administrators implemented it in other grades.• Contacts at School B report that gradual implementation allowed administrators to assess and refine advisory at each grade level before implementing in other grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contacts at School C report that direct implementation provides advisory to all students at once, which is benefits to the entire student body as opposed to only one grade.• Contacts at School A report that direct implementation allows administrators to place engaged advisors in every grade. Contacts report that if administrators implement advisory grade-by-grade with a teacher opt-in strategy, the last year of advisory implementation will involve the least engaged advisors.

Consider Allowing Initial Advisors to Volunteer, But Require All Teachers to Serve as Advisors After Implementation

Administrators at School B, School C, and School A require all teachers to serve as advisors. Contacts at School A cite workload equity as the primary motivation behind their advising requirement, but also note that because advisory is a school priority, all teachers should participate.

When administrators at School B first implemented advisory, however, administrators asked teachers to volunteer to be advisors.

Reasons for Initial Volunteer Advisor Structure at School B



Administrators sought to begin advisor implementation with the most engaged advisors to help improve the quality of initial advisory interventions.



Administrators initially implemented advisory only for freshman students, and therefore did not need all teachers to serve as advisors.

As administrators at School B expanded their advisory to encompass all grades over the course of many years, administrators began to require teachers to advise in order to maintain small advisory group sizes. Administrators now incorporate advisory into School B's teaching contract.

Contacts at School B report that teacher pushback to mandatory advising was minimal due, in part, to this volunteer, phase-in structure. Teachers who did not initially participate could still see the impact of advisory firsthand. When administrators implemented advisory in the other grades, teachers were not hesitant because they already understood the importance of advisory.



Full Institutional Commitment Is Key to Advisory Program Success

Contacts at both School B and School A stress that—for advisory to be successful—school administrators must fully support advisory. Contacts at School A report that administrators should signal advisory’s importance by talking about advisory during faculty meetings. Administrators also should not repurpose advisory time for other school priorities (e.g., school assemblies, professional development).

Teacher Training

Organize Advisors in a Hierarchical Structure to Facilitate Advisor Training

Administrators at School A and School C use a hierarchical structure to organize, train, and disseminate information to their advisors. Administrators at School A organize their advisors by grade level. One advisor from each grade level serves as a lead teacher-advisor (TA), who acts as a liaison between advisors in their grade and the head of School A’s advisory program. TAs facilitate communication between the administration and advisors and lead advisor trainings.

Similarly, when implementing their advisory, administrators at School C organized their advisors in faculty advisories to mimic the structure of normal advisories. Administrators used this structure to facilitate advisor training. Administrators scheduled six faculty advisory sessions during normal faculty meeting time each year. In these faculty advisories, members of the administration and advisory committee members delivered trainings on advisory activities, lessons, and group facilitation techniques. Lead advisors then asked faculty to implement these activities and lessons in their own advisories. School C administrators ran faculty advisories for the first three years of advisory implementation to ensure all advisors receive training. Once most advisors gained experience advising, administrators stopped regularly scheduling faculty advisory.

Ask High-Performing Advisors to Deliver Advisor Trainings During Faculty Professional Development Time

Faculty at School B meet in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) twice per month for two hours. Administrators dedicate some PLC meetings specifically to advisor training. At these meetings, administrators ask high-performing advisors to deliver presentations on advisory strategies and facilitate discussions on effective and ineffective advisory practices.

In addition to trainings throughout the school year, three out of the four profiled schools dedicate time to advisor training during summer in-services. At School A, advisors complete one and a half days of paid advisor training in the summer before they take on a new group of freshmen advisees (i.e., once every four years). The head of School A’s advisory program—with support from TAs—delivers the training. First, training leaders expose the advisors to a wealth of advisory resources such as games, activities, and discussion tools. Then, the leaders and advisors together

complete the most valuable activities in an abbreviated fashion to demonstrate how an advisor might lead activities with their advisees.

Assessment & Improvement

Survey Students to Assess the Impact of Advisory and Solicit Improvement Ideas

Contacts at School A note that advisory assessment is a growth area. Administrators at most profiled schools assess advisory effectiveness through surveys, but contacts at School A report that they would like to launch additional, targeted surveys related to advisory.

To assess the impact of advisory and other school interventions on student stress and social and emotional learning, School C participates in multiple school climate and wellness surveys, including a survey developed by [Challenge Success](#). Administrators also analyze student responses to a culture survey that students complete when they take their statewide annual exam. Administrators at School C use longitudinal data from these surveys to measure both student wellness in terms of social and emotional wellbeing, risk behaviors, drug use patterns, and student attitudes about school climate and culture from year to year. Contacts acknowledge that they cannot attribute improvements in survey results solely to advisory, but report that they look for improvements in survey results after advisory implementation.

Administrators at multiple profiled schools also develop student feedback surveys aimed specifically at advisory to gather opinions and solicit ideas to improve advisories. Specifically, administrators at School A ask their students to rate the effectiveness of specific advisory activities (e.g., one on one check-ins). Administrators use this data to prioritize specific advisory activities and adjust offerings to align with student needs.



Assess and Improve Advisory with Focus Groups

Every three years, administrators at School D create an advisory committee focus group composed of students and teachers to assess advisory through surveys and brainstorm improvement strategies. For example, administrators learned through focus groups that students enjoy their relationships with their advisors, but sometimes dislike the additional work associated with advisory (e.g., writing a resume).

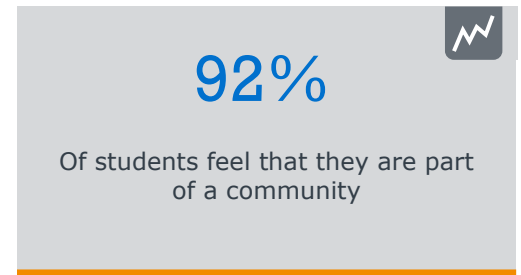
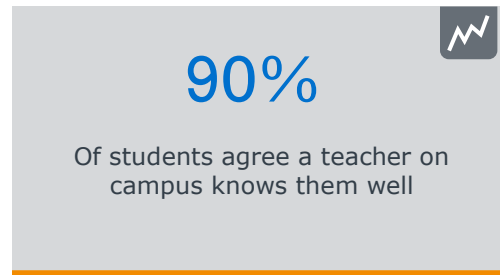
Outcomes

Advisory Programs Contribute to Increased Connectedness within Schools

Contacts at three out of the four profiled schools report that students feel more connected at school due to advisory. Contacts at School D report that students speak articulately in focus groups about the sense of community they derive from advisory. Similarly, contacts at School B report that they feel a greater sense of community in the hallways since administrators implemented advisory. Survey results from School C show that since administrators implemented advisory, the proportion of students who feel as though they have at least one trusted adult in the building increased. Contacts at School C note, however, that these gains are likely in part due to the school's commitment to social and emotional learning alongside the school's advisory program.

Student Survey Results at School D Post Advisory Implementation¹⁴

From a 2012 self-study student survey



Academic Improvements at School D May Be Linked to Advisory

Standardized test scores, AP course enrollment, STEM course enrollment, class passing rates, and college eligibility rates significantly increased at School D after administrators implemented advisory and SLCs. Contacts note, however, that these improvements cannot be contributed solely to advisory since SLC implementation was concurrent.

¹⁴) "Schools of Opportunity Nomination Form," School D, provided November 11, 2019.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenges

Leadership at a partner district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- For what purpose do contact districts use advisory time?
- What activities, interventions, or curricula do contact districts deliver to students during advisory time?
- Do contact districts incorporate interventions designed to foster character development, reduced student stress, and/or social and emotional learning? If so, how?
- Do contact districts incorporate interventions designed to facilitate positive relationships between students and their advisors? If so, how?
- Do contact districts incorporate interventions designed to help students plan their academic and extra-curricular activities? If so, how?
- How do contact districts incorporate advisory time into school master schedules?
- Do contact districts provide additional time for advisors to prepare for advisory meetings? If so, how?
- How do contact districts assign students to specific advisors?
- How do contact districts select and train advisors?
- How do contact districts encourage teachers to support advisory programs?
- How do contact districts assess the impact and effectiveness of advisory programs?

Project Sources

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Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed school-level administrators at high schools that operate advisory programs designed to facilitate academic and postsecondary planning, social and emotional learning, and/or relationship building.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Region	Approximate Enrollment
School A	Northeast	500
School D	Pacific West	1,500
School B	Northeast	1,000
School C	Northeast	1,500