

## Advisory

### Description:

Over 20 years ago, a school's effective advisory was framed as an "educational program designed to focus on the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, psychological, and ethical development of students; a program providing a structured time during which special activities are designed and implemented to help adolescents find ways to fulfill their identified needs; intended to provide consistent, caring, and continuous adult guidance at school through the organization of a supportive and stable peer group that meets regularly under the guidance of a teacher serving as advisor."<sup>1</sup> In many ways, this still describes what a well-designed advisory could look like today. Although the idea of advisory is not new, many schools have struggled to implement it successfully. While the structure of advisory can vary widely depending on its purpose, one of the things that distinguishes highly effective from less effective advisory programs is the deliberate allocation of resources—for example, that the time in the student schedule and group size is aligned with the intended approach and that teachers have the time and expert support to plan for effective use of student time. This template provides guidance on how people, time, and money can be used to fully support an advisory program and ensure that it fulfills its desired purpose.

**Rationale:** When implemented effectively, advisory can deepen personal relationships within the school community to help students feel known. This feeling of being known by adults and other students in the school can dramatically increase students' academic success.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, advisory helps support the development of social-emotional skills, which play a pivotal role in students' academic success.

### KEY COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Building successful advisory programs requires the following building block components:

1. **Deliberate student and teacher assignment** to advisory group, aligned to the program's purpose(s) and ideally in ratios of 16:1 or less
2. **A high-quality curriculum** to ensure advisory time is used well
3. **Dedicated time** for advisory groups to meet, matched to the curriculum and approach
4. **Start-up professional learning opportunities** that prepare advisors to facilitate advisory effectively
5. **Clearly defined outcome measures** and **collaborative planning time** for advisors to monitor student progress, problem-solve, and review future advisory sessions

1. Forte, I., & Schurr, S. (1993). *Definitive Middle School Guide: A Handbook for Success*. Nashville, TN: Incentive.

2 Manning, M.L., & Saddlemire, R. (1996). Developing a Sense of Community in Secondary Schools. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80(584), 41-48.

### District-Level Enabling Conditions

Effective implementation of advisory programs is best supported by the following district conditions:

1. **Flexible collective bargaining contracts** that ensure advisory can be included in standard teacher responsibilities
2. **District-provided curriculum, training, and tools** to support advisors in delivering or adapting an advisory curriculum and monitoring its effectiveness over time
3. **District-provided prototypes** that show how advisory might be included in the school schedule effectively
4. **Flexibility to reallocate time and funding** and make schedule/staffing changes in support of an advisory program

**Clarify purpose:** Before making decisions about how to organize resources around an advisory program, clarify its purpose in your school.

The primary goal of advisory is to deepen personal relationships within the school community. These relationships are the foundations from which an advisory program can be designed to meet different purposes, including but not limited to:

- Advising students about academic and career decisions and academic achievement
- Fostering supporting relationships between school and home
- Building language and communication skills
- Creating student ownership of learning
- Encouraging supportive peer relationships and conflict resolution
- Undertaking community service, and
- Preparing students for post-secondary life transitions

Use academic and behavioral data from your school and feeder schools to identify trends in the most pressing needs of your students and to determine what needs will be met through an advisory program.

- *What are your students' most pressing social-emotional needs?*
- *Aside from strengthening personal relationships, what additional purposes do you intend to accomplish with advisory? Please see the bulleted list above for examples.*
- *What are one or two high-level goals that you might use to measure success annually? What quantitative targets would indicate whether or not you have met these goals, and over what span of time do you expect to meet them? For example, if advisory intends to strengthen personal relationships and reduce bullying or conflict between students, a school could consider monitoring the percentage of relevant student discipline referrals.*

## MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

**Creating an advisory program will have implications for people, time, money, and other resources in your school. Specific decisions to make during the planning process with regard to these implications are noted below, organized by the building block components listed above.**

- 1. Deliberate student and teacher assignment to advisory groups,** aligned to the program's purpose(s) and ideally in ratios of 16:1 or less which translate into specific expectations for student and adult behavior

An advisory program's purpose should guide whether or not it will be school-wide, how students get assigned to groups and advisors, and for how long teachers are assigned to a given advisory group. For example, if advisory is intended as a key venue to practice building relationships despite interpersonal differences, minimal changes to the group composition would take place during the school year. If consistency over the high school experience is also desired, a school would also consider keeping advisory groups grade-specific and relatively fixed over a four-year period.

Alternatively, if the advisory's purpose is to ensure incoming freshmen have access to peer mentors and role models, advisory could be set up to mix students from across Grades 9–12. If the advisory program's purpose is to undertake community service both within and outside the school, then it may also make sense to group students across grades and based on similar interests.

## Key Questions:

- *Based on advisory's purpose in your school, will it target specific student groups (e.g., grades), or be school-wide? If the target is student groups, which ones?*
- *Will advisors remain with students for four years or receive a new group of students each year?*
- *Who will assign students to advisory groups? Who will assign advisors to those groups? On what basis will students be assigned to advisors (e.g., advise only students they teach, common interests, previous relationship, self-selection, random)?*

Most effective advisory programs' class sizes include no more than 16 students, in order to foster personal relationships.<sup>3</sup> Those that focus on intensive social-emotional support may aim for group sizes of less than 10 students per advisor. The desired advisory class size will drive the number of staff that are needed to act as advisors. For advisory programs focused on building stronger peer relationships, an "all hands on deck" approach may be utilized to reduce class size as much as possible, including the use of all teachers, administrators, and non-instructional staff such as counselors, librarians, and custodians. If your desired group size is smaller than projected staffing will enable during a single class period, creative alternatives to consider might include integrating peer mentoring for a portion of advisory or staggering advisory throughout the day with push-in support from dedicated staff. Advisory programs that have a stronger focus on academic content, such as college readiness efforts directed towards students in Grade 12, may require support primarily from teachers and counselors.

## Key Questions:

- *What are the key aspects of the advisor role? Which staff members will be advisors?*
- *What is your desired group size for advisory, and should it be the same for all advisory classes? Does your current staffing plan allow you to achieve desired group sizes? If not, in what ways will you need to adjust your staffing plan and/or schedule to do so?*

## 2. A high-quality curriculum to ensure advisory time is used well.

Teachers and other staff should be supported in facilitating advisory effectively through access to high-quality curriculum and training. The curriculum may vary based on advisory's purpose, but typically includes a scope and sequence of topics for advisors to cover with students, suggested lessons or activities for students to participate in, and relevant materials. Advisors usually have

3. Myrick, R.D., et al. (1990). *The Teacher Advisor Program: An Innovative Approach to School Guidance*. Ann Arbor, MI: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services.

the discretion to adapt lessons or topics to meet student needs or interests, given they continue to meet advisory's original purposes. Schools acquire a relevant curriculum through purchase from a vendor, development in-house, or via a hybrid approach wherein a purchased curriculum is adapted to meet a school's context. Most comprehensive, evidence-based curricula available from vendors tend to center on strengthening students' social-emotional competencies (e.g., RULER or Responsive Classrooms). If a school seeks to use advisory to meet a more unique purpose (e.g., as a complement to a community service program), a baseline curriculum may need to be developed in-house.

#### Key Questions:

- *Based on how frequently your school's advisory program will meet and its purpose, what curriculum will you use? What type of "coverage" will the advisory curriculum require (e.g., daily lessons versus monthly discussion topics)?*
- *Will you likely be able to purchase this type of curriculum from a vendor, and if so, at what cost? If you will need to develop in-house, which individuals will be responsible for doing so, and what is the likely time investment?*

### 3. **Dedicated time** for advisory groups to meet.

How often advisory meets and for how long will depend on its purpose and the deliberate assignment of students and teachers. If advisory is designed to teach core social-emotional competencies, short daily or weekly sessions may be preferable. Advisories aimed at providing academic or college readiness coaching, however, may be effective in the context of biweekly or even monthly working sessions. A mixed or hybrid option could also be considered, wherein advisors meet with students for shorter, more frequent sessions that are punctuated by longer sessions that occur less frequently.

At what time advisory is scheduled during the school day or month will also depend on the desired approach to student and teacher assignment. Schools may elect to hold advisory for all grades at the same time in order to facilitate cross-grade grouping of students or to ensure all teachers are available to serve as advisors. Alternatively, advisory could be staggered throughout the day to make it easier for some staff members (e.g., guidance counselors) to support multiple advisory groups and further lower group size.

A school that wishes to introduce advisory into the schedule will need to determine how to find the necessary time. Typically, advisory periods are short enough that schools can find a way to reallocate time away from other activities, which might include decreasing all class periods by a few minutes to create a new block of time, reducing excessive passing time between periods, or converting

an existing elective or study hall. If these options are undesirable or impossible, a school could consider adding time to the overall school day. Because this would extend both the teacher and student day, a school would need to consider implications for teachers' pay, adjustments to student transportation, and other operational costs. If extending the day and/or introducing additional responsibilities for your teaching staff conflicts with the current teachers' contract in your district, you may also need to seek an exemption from your district and/or school board.

Key Questions:

- *What is the frequency and length of advisory periods?*
- *When will those periods occur in the schedule for students? Will advisory be scheduled at the same time for all advisory groups?*
- *If you plan to reallocate existing time to advisory, where will it be reallocated away from and what trade-offs does this introduce?*
- *If you plan to add time to the student and teacher day, by how much and when during the week or month? What additional costs will this likely introduce, and will you need to secure special permission from your district and/or school board?*

**4. Start-up professional learning opportunities** that prepare advisors to facilitate advisory effectively.

In order to maximize the available curriculum and learn relevant facilitation techniques, advisors will need start-up training before the start of the school year as well as ongoing support. This type of support may be especially important if a school is using an "all hands on deck" approach to advisory, and depending on advisors who have not previously acted in formal teaching roles with larger groups of students (e.g., guidance counselors who have traditionally provided only 1:1 support). Rigorous training for advisors is also particularly important in school contexts where students have experienced high levels of trauma or conflict and will be using advisory as a venue to build social-emotional competencies.

Key Questions:

- *What type of training will advisors need at start-up?*
- *When will start-up professional learning occur?*
- *Who will plan for start-up professional learning and facilitate it?*
- *Will start-up professional learning be sourced from an external provider? If yes, at what cost? If it will be developed and delivered internally, how much time will be required for planning?*

**5. Clearly defined outcome measures and collaborative planning time** for advisors to monitor student progress, problem-solve, and review future advisory sessions.

Successful advisories tend to evolve over time because advisors and administrators regularly assess student progress and adjust the structure and/or content of advisory based on students' needs. Progress indicators will depend on advisory's unique purpose, but may include evidence of better relationships/less conflict between teachers and students and between students, or evidence that students are making regular progress against personal goals. Advisors will need regularly scheduled time, supported by experts (e.g., social workers, guidance counselors, and/or school administrators) to review student progress, share challenges and successes, problem-solve collaboratively, and review and refine how future advisory sessions should be structured. Depending on how the advisory program is structured, this may only be necessary once per month. Alternatively, this time could also be part of a shared student team meeting in which advisors discuss school culture more generally.

Key Questions:

- *What will you measure to determine the effectiveness of advisory? Who will be responsible for collecting and synthesizing relevant data (e.g., discipline referrals)?*
- *Are there costs associated with developing or acquiring tools that track parent/student/advisor surveys and measurable outcomes (e.g., grades, attendance, discipline referrals) and present easily accessible information to advisors and administrators?*
- *What expertise will be available during collaborative time to help advisors problem solve challenges that have arisen during advisory, and determine how to adjust advisory content moving forward? Who will be responsible for facilitating these meetings and ensuring participants keep to the agenda and relevant objectives?*
- *How much time will advisors need for collaborative planning time, and when will it occur in the schedule? Please consider your approach in conjunction with any existing collaborative time among teachers who share students.*

## SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE PLANNING PROCESS

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

---

- What are your students' most pressing social-emotional needs?

### STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

---

- Aside from strengthening personal relationships, what additional purposes do you intend to accomplish with advisory? Please see the bulleted list above for examples.
- Based on advisory's purpose in your school, will it target specific student groups (e.g., grades), or be school-wide? If the target is student groups, which ones?
- Will advisors remain with students for four years or receive a new group of students each year?
- What is your desired group size for advisory, and should it be the same for all advisory classes? Does your current staffing plan allow you to achieve desired group sizes? If not, in what ways will you need to adjust your staffing plan and/or schedule to do so?

### MASTER SCHEDULE

---

- What is the frequency and length of advisory periods?
- When will those periods occur in the schedule for students? Will advisory be scheduled at the same time for all advisory groups?
- If you plan to reallocate existing time to advisory, where will it be reallocated away from and what trade-offs does this introduce?
- If you plan to add time to the student and teacher day, by how much and when during the week or month? What additional costs will this likely introduce, and will you need to secure special permission from your district and/or school board?
- When will start-up professional learning occur?
- How much time will advisors need for collaborative planning time, and when will it occur in the schedule? Please consider your approach in conjunction with any existing collaborative time among teachers who share students.

### JOB AND TEACHER ASSIGNMENT

---

- What are the key aspects of the advisor role? Which staff members will be advisors?

## BUDGET AND STAFFING

---

- Based on how frequently your school's advisory program will meet and its purpose, what curriculum will you use? What type of "coverage" will the advisory curriculum require (e.g., daily lessons versus monthly discussion topics)?
- Will you likely be able to purchase this type of curriculum from a vendor, and if so, at what cost? If you will need to develop in-house, which individuals will be responsible for doing so, and what is the likely time investment?
- Who will plan for start-up professional learning and facilitate it?
- Will start-up professional learning be sourced from an external provider? If yes, at what cost? If it will be developed and delivered internally, how much time will be required for planning?
- Are there costs associated with developing or acquiring tools that track parent/student/advisor surveys and measurable outcomes (e.g., grades, attendance, discipline referrals) and present easily accessible information to advisors and administrators?

## ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

---

- What type of training will advisors need at start-up?
- What expertise will be available during collaborative time to help advisors problem solve challenges that have arisen during advisory, and determine how to adjust advisory content moving forward? Who will be responsible for facilitating these meetings and ensuring participants keep to the agenda and relevant objectives?

## STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

---

- What are one or two high-level goals that you might use to measure success annually? What quantitative targets would indicate whether or not you have met these goals, and over what span of time do you expect to meet them? For example, if advisory intends to strengthen personal relationships and reduce bullying or conflict between students, a school could consider monitoring the percentage of relevant student discipline referrals.
- Who will assign students to advisory groups? Who will assign advisors to those groups? On what basis will students be assigned to advisors (e.g., advise only students they teach, common interests, previous relationship, self-selection, random)?
- What will you measure to determine the effectiveness of advisory? Who will be responsible for collecting and synthesizing relevant data (e.g., discipline referrals)?

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Program implementation is highly variable across advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During advisors’ regularly scheduled time, provide PD and expert support to ensure consistent planning progress monitoring</li> <li>• Ensure the curriculum advisors have available to them is clear and high-quality; if advisory lessons are perceived as effective and easy to follow, it’s more likely advisors will use them with fidelity</li> </ul>
Some staff members resist or feel too stretched to take on new roles as advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider staging the implementation approach wherein volunteers first pilot the advisory program. As the program becomes better established, and a model for effective practice is created, it may be easier to get the buy-in necessary</li> <li>• Offering a high-quality curriculum to follow should dramatically reduce the planning work required to facilitate advisory</li> <li>• Creating time in teachers’ schedules for collaborative and supported planning of advisory may help the job feel more doable</li> </ul>

## Design Interactions

Strategic school designs have many interconnected components. A well-designed advisory should be integrated with the following design essential:

- Personalized Time and Attention

## Research

Poliner, R. and Lieber, C. (2004). *The Advisory Guide: Designing and Implementing Effective Advisory Programs in Secondary Schools*. Educators for Social Responsibility: Cambridge, MA.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432.

Osofsky, Debbie, Sinner, Gregg , Wolk, Denise, and Miles, Sherri. *Changing Systems to Personalize Learning: The Power of Advisories*. Providence, RI: Education Alliance, 2003. The Education Alliance at Brown University. Web. <https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/publications/changing-systems-personalize-learning-power-advisories>

## Additional Resources

The Springfield Renaissance School: <http://www.springfieldrenaissanceschool.com/>

Read more about [The Springfield Renaissance School here](#).

## Advisory Through “Crew” Structure at The Springfield Renaissance School

SPRINGFIELD, MA

*“Being together for so long, the people really get to know each other and everyone kind of has each other’s backs.”<sup>4</sup>*

*—Sasha, a student at Springfield Renaissance*

**Context:** Renaissance is a small, lottery school within Springfield Public Schools that serves children in grades 6–12 in Springfield, Massachusetts, where 78 percent of the school-age children live in poverty. Springfield Renaissance is part of a larger school network called EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning). Through EL, Springfield Renaissance focuses on rigor and high expectations, character education, service, leadership, and college preparation.

**Purpose:** Advisement in “crew,” the name for the student advisory structure of EL schools, is one of the key structural supports Springfield Renaissance adopted to achieve a rich and meaningful academic experience for every student and to meet its ambitious goal of 100 percent college acceptance rate.

### MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Focusing resources deliberately around crew had resource implications for people, time, money, and other resources at The Springfield Renaissance School. These implications are noted below, organized by building block components.

#### 1. Deliberate student and teacher assignment to advisory group, aligned to the program’s purpose(s) and ideally in ratios of 16:1 or less

- At Renaissance, all students are assigned to a grade-level crew. At the high school level, the crew classes have 16 students, in contrast to a typical ELA class of 25–30 students.
- When assigning 9th graders to crew, the guidance counselor collaborates with the students’ 8th grade teachers to ensure that the composition of students in the crew is diverse and balanced in terms of need and makeup.

4. Osofsky, Debbie, Sinner, Gregg, Wolk, Denise, and Miles, Sherri. *Changing Systems to Personalize Learning: The Power of Advisories*. Providence, RI: Education Alliance, 2003. The Education Alliance at Brown University

- Teacher assignment largely depends on what experience balance is needed; however, Renaissance aims to have 12th grade advisors become 9th grade crew teachers the following year so they can stay with the same group of students for four years. In addition, although what content the teacher teaches is not taken into consideration during assignment of teachers to crew, Renaissance has found that it is helpful to have one person on a grade-level crew team who teaches the same grade level for communication purposes.

## **2. A high-quality curriculum** to ensure advisory time is used well

- Crew is a credit-bearing class and its curriculum combines social-emotional development with academic goal setting. Most of the curriculum for crew was developed in-house with support from EL Education.
- Given that the model of crew at Renaissance comes from EL Education, the school has created a position for an EL Education lead teacher, whose primary responsibility is to maintain the crew curriculum.

## **3. Dedicated time for advisory groups to meet,** matched to the curriculum and approach

- At Renaissance, crew meets daily during the first period for 30 minutes.

## **4. Start-up professional learning opportunities** that prepare advisors to facilitate advisory effectively

- Teachers receive paid professional development over the summer and as part of their collaborative planning time throughout the year. New teachers get professional development specifically about crew before school starts.

## **5. Clearly defined outcome measures and collaborative time** for advisors to track and monitor student progress, problem-solve, and review future advisory sessions

- Renaissance has adopted a crew teacher requirements checklist. The purpose of the checklist is for teachers to use as a reminder of important crew consistencies. Additionally, it is used by administrators and others to track and share feedback with crew teachers during a team-building meeting that takes place once a week. The checklist for effective crew implementation was developed in-house with support from EL Education.
- In SY 2015-16, crew teachers at Renaissance met in a cohort once a month for an hour. This meeting served as more planning time with some professional development embedded in it. Teachers spent the first half hour on academic intervention, math, homework, and conferencing.

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION

Crew at Renaissance has evolved since it launched in 2005 as Renaissance found it important to:

1. Give teachers the flexibility on lesson plans as long as they are aligned to the social and emotional learning objectives
2. Continue evolving the program's content, accountability structure, and PD time based on feedback from students, teachers, and parents; and
3. Find space in unit plans for crew so that teachers can be reactive to social and world events that may affect students emotionally. In the event of a broad-scale news story or event at Renaissance, the crew structure allows a group of teachers to create a lesson plan and send it out to teachers to help students regain their emotional balance. Without this structure, crew conversations felt devoid of a connection to the outside world.

## RESULTS

- 100% of students from classes of 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 applied and gained admission to a college or university
- An average of \$2 to \$3 million in grants and scholarships were awarded to each of the schools' graduating classes

## ARTIFACTS

### [The Springfield Renaissance School's website](#)

The school website provides a multitude of information, including the student and family handbook, bell schedule, calendar, and details about the seven character traits at Renaissance.

### [What Kids Can Do \(WKCD\) case study on the Springfield Renaissance School](#)

WKCD focuses on providing compelling examples of what young people can accomplish when given the opportunities and supports they need and what they can contribute when their voices and ideas are taken seriously.

### [Crew teacher requirements document](#)

Teachers at Renaissance use the checklist as a reminder of important crew consistencies. It is also used by administrators and others to track and share feedback with crew teachers during a team-building meeting that takes place once a week.