

## Make Advising A Priority: Advisors Assisting Administrators

BY BARBARA DIXON ACKERMAN

Effective advising programs provide support for all constituents of the school. Students, parents, classroom teachers, as well as administrators all benefit from an advising program that is going strong. If you feel that you need additional administrative support in order to strengthen your advising program, you might refer to some of the points below to demonstrate that an active advising program can help to make many aspects of school life run much more smoothly.

- Administrators can be assured that students are less likely to fall through the cracks because there is a specific adult who is responsible for each student.
- The advisor can provide background information that can help administrators to communicate more effectively with students and their parents.
  - The advisor can alert administrators to any changes in the student's family life.
  - In some instances, the advisor can communicate with families on behalf of the administrator.
  - The advisor can provide back-up student records when necessary.
- The advising program can also provide support for individuals in the following positions:
  - Dean of Students: In some instances the advisor can assist the dean with discipline. Sometimes it is helpful for a student to discuss a disciplinary situation with both an advisor and a dean. Sometimes a discussion with an advisor alone will suffice.
  - School Counselor: The advisor can refer a student to the school counselor and provide the counselor with specific background information about the student's life in school.
  - School Nurse: When students are trying to muddle through a day without necessary medical attention, the advisor can recommend that they see the school nurse. Advisors can share helpful information about students' health patterns with the nurse.
  - Director of the Academic Resource Center: If your school has an academic resource center, the advisor can identify students who would benefit from additional academic support.
  - Registrar: The advisor can assist the registrar by making sure that a student has selected her courses thoughtfully and carefully.
  - College Counselor: The advisor can share information about an advisee's strengths and needs which can help the college counselor to suggest schools that will be a good match for the student. The advisor is someone who

knows the student quite well and therefore is a logical person to write a college recommendation for the student.

The advisor can also provide input that the college counselor may want to include in his or her letter of recommendation.

- Director of Admissions: If an advisee is considering changing schools, the advisor can alert the director of admissions to this fact. An appropriate individual can then converse with the student and the family about their decision to stay or to go.

## Advising Resources

Over the last several years, CSEE advisory conference participants have recommended the following advising-related speakers:

- Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*
- Dr. William Pollack, author of *Real Boys and Real Boys' Voices*
- Rosalind Wiseman, author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes* and *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads*
- Michael Thompson, author of *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* (with Dan Kindlon)
- Mikey Fowlin – Diversity
- John Morello – Performs *Dirt*, a one-man show of substance abuse and choices (for Upper School students)
- Brandon Silveria and his father Tony Silveria – The dangers of drinking
- Koh Herlong – Internet safety
- Francis Bok, a former Dinka slave from Sudan and author of *Escape from Slavery: The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity* and *My Journey to Freedom in America*
- Dr. Michael Bradley, author of *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy*, *Yes Your Parents Are Crazy*, and *The Heart and Soul of the Next Generation*
- Katie Koestner – Consultant, date rape survivor
- Dr. Paul Farmer, the subject of *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*
- Juliet Funt – (Yes, Allen's Daughter) Stress management, presentation skills, work-life balance, verbal violence in middle school

## Updating Parents

*Parent: "How was school today, honey?"*

*Child: "Fine."*

*Parent: "What did you learn?"*

*Child: "Stuff."*

As students progress in the school year, parents are eager to hear how their children are doing. The students themselves may or may not provide much information, so advisee progress reports can help to give parents and guardians a picture of the child's academic and social development and role in the school community. Focusing on your advisee's progress and gathering your thoughts on paper, in an email, or even jotting notes for a phone conversation, may also help you to gain insights and discern patterns about your advisee. You may wish to address some of the following topics in your update to the parents.

### Social Development

- How the student is adjusting socially
- How the student relates to peers and to adults in the community
- The student's ability to express him or herself
- Positive comments that you have heard from the student's teachers
- The student's comfort level
- The student's mood and attitude
- The student's level of cooperation, motivation, and enthusiasm
- The student's level of maturity, independence, and self-esteem
- The student's energy level and physical health
- Strides the student has made and skills the student has acquired

### Interests

- Strong interests and talents that the student is developing
- Issues that the student cares about and causes that the student is committed to
- Ways in which the student has distinguished him or herself
- Enrichment opportunities or summer programs that the student might consider for the future

### Role in the School Community

- Ways in which the student supports other students
- Ways the student contributes to the community (Perhaps include an anecdote or quote to illustrate the role the child plays at the school.)
- Participation in extra-curricular and outside-of-school activities
- Leadership ability and the kind of example that the student sets for others

### Academics

- Patterns you detect in terms of academic ability and work habits
- Particular challenges the student has faced and the student's coping strategies
- What the student needs to work on and specific strategies for improvement in academic subjects
- Academic support, such as tutoring or use of a resource center, which the student is taking advantage of or may need to take advantage of
- The student's level of attentiveness and ability to focus
- The student's organizational and time management skills
- What the student will be focusing on in the coming weeks, as well as long-range goals that the student is working toward
- The student's feelings about his or her own progress

### About AQ:

CSEE's *Advisor Quarterly* is a free publication for educators working with young people in schools. Please pass it on.

If you are not on our email list (not shared, used only by CSEE) to receive future issues of *AQ*, email "AQ" to <staff@csee.org>. Please include your name and school.

This issue of *AQ* was edited by CSEE Advisory Consultant Barbara Dixon Ackerman and the CSEE staff. Submissions (also to <staff@csee.org>) regarding innovative programs and other ideas are both welcome and invited.

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## Scenarios: Dealing with Difficult Decisions

Considering responses to different types of situations before they arise can often help students make more thoughtful decisions when they arise. Advisor groups can be a good place to consider a variety of scenarios. Rather than always having adults enforce rules and determine consequences, the students can provide one another with guidance about how to exercise good judgment. In addition to helping students think about how they would handle certain situations, this exercise also allows them to empathize with peers who may be facing different kinds of challenges.

**The following scenarios can be role-played, or simply discussed, whichever feels more natural for your group.**

- You have been assigned a group project and you know that a member of your group has plagiarized a section of the project. What will you do about this?
- You were away on a family trip over the weekend and you have big project due on Monday. Your parents offer to write a note saying that you were sick so that you can stay home, work on the project, and hand it in on Tuesday. Will you accept this offer or consider other options?
- You are staying in a hotel on a school trip and one of your roommates is not back in the room a half an hour after the designated curfew time. What do you do?
- You are a very hardworking but quiet student. Teachers don't always recognize your effort and ability since you don't participate as much as some of your classmates. What can you do about this?
- Parents' Visiting Day is coming up and your parents are recently divorced. You are worried about how your parents will feel when they are at the school together and about how you will spend time with both of them. How will you work this out?
- You have played a particular sport since you were very little. Your parents have invested a lot of time and money to help you pursue this sport. They love coming to your games and you know that they expect you to play this sport throughout your school career, but this season you would really like to take up something new. What will factor into your decision?
- A friend comes to watch you play a game and shouts derogatory remarks about players on the other team. How do you respond?
- Your classmates are planning a skit that makes fun of a teacher. You think that the skit is funny, but you are worried that it may be disrespectful or hurtful. What do you do?

## In The Web

You will find a variety of stimulating advising articles if you go to [www.middleweb.com](http://www.middleweb.com), click on the resources tab, and then scroll down to student advisories on the left sidebar. Two articles by Jim Burns provide innovative ideas for structuring advising programs. He uses the acronym C.A.R.E.S. to outline five goals of advising programs - Communication, Achievement, Responsibility, Exploration, and Service. Burns also poses and responds to ten frequently asked questions regarding advisory. He describes his "designated day" approach, so that the timing of, and time allotted for, each advisory activity helps to ensure the success of that activity. In another article, Five Attributes of Satisfying Advisories, Burns emphasizes advisor authenticity and also urges school leaders to support advising programs by setting high standards and recognizing accomplishments.

In an article entitled "From Advisory Programs to Restructured Adult-Student Relationships: Restoring Purpose to the Guidance Function of the Middle Level School," Howard Johnston explains why some advisory models do not work and then suggests a variety of approaches that do work and can be combined to create a meaningful advisory program. Johnston observes that programs that are interest- and service-based and that focus on school adjustment, as well as developmental needs have a very good chance of succeeding. For a quick and comprehensive list of points about the structure and content of advising programs, see Table 1, Components of Successful Advising Programs: Rationale, Design, and Emphasis in the NMSA Research Summary from July 2006.

Finally, for a sampling of advising activities ranging from celebrating Math Awareness Week to throwing a baby shower for an advisee's mom, see Education World's Curriculum Article, "Advice About Middle School Advisories." Many of these ideas can also be adapted for use in Upper Schools. It's all at [www.middleweb.com](http://www.middleweb.com)!

## School Spirit Activities

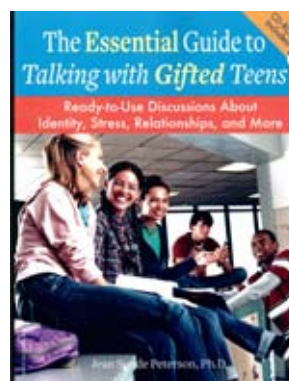
With students returning after the holiday break, it can be fun to have advisees work on projects that promote school spirit. (And the neat thing is that you are promoting teamwork within your advisee group at the same time.) See if your advisees might be interested in working together on one, or a combination, of the activities below.

- Write the Top Ten reasons that you're proud to be a \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in your school's mascot.)
- Create a "how-to" manual for how to be a spirited \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in your school's mascot.)
- Write a new school cheer, song, or rap.
- Write a poem about the school. You might want to start it with the school motto or a line from the alma mater.
- Make up a word search or crossword puzzle with words about the school.
- Come up with challenging, informative trivia questions about the school.
- Make up a comic strip or single frame cartoon about the school.
- Design a t-shirt that shows students' pride in the school.
- Bake cookies or a cake in the shape of something school-related or using school colors.
- Create posters, collages, banners, a quilt, or other decorations for the school.
- Create spirited announcements that can be posted on email.
- Take photographs that capture school spirit and display them, perhaps on the wall, perhaps on the network.
- Film a video that captures the spirit of the school.
- Choreograph a dance that shows school spirit.
- Plan games or relays that promote school spirit.
- Do some research on the school's history and report your findings during an assembly or in a school publication.
- Interview alums about their school memories and share this information in an assembly or in a school publication.
- Look through old yearbooks. Do some scanning or Xeroxing and make a collage that illustrates life at your school "back in the day."

If your school has spirit teams, these activities can also be modified to allow students to show their team spirit!

## The Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens

by Jean Sunde Peterson, Ph.D.



Jean Sunde Peterson coordinates the school counselor preparation program at Purdue University's Department of Educational Studies. She is a licensed mental health counselor herself, with expertise in prevention-oriented small-group work, listening skills for teachers, and the social and emotional concerns of high-ability students like those in most independent schools.

*The Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens* is a great resource for advisors. The book was composed to support the social and emotional development of middle- and high-school students through the kinds of discussions that arise, or can arise, in most advisory groups. The book's discussions aim at helping students become more self aware, such that growth in problem-solving and decision-making skills is enhanced.

The *Guide* contains dozens of student handouts to encourage reflection before discussion. A CD included with the book contains all the handouts, to facilitate making copies for advisory group use.

Available from Free Spirit Publishing (\$39.95)