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Essential components of middle school advisory programs

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Essential components of middle school advisory programs

Abstract
This review investigates the essential aspects of middle school advisory programs. Advisory is an innovative approach to counseling that involves teachers as advisors to groups of 12 to 15 students. Groups meet at some time within the school day to explore a variety of affective issues involving young adolescents. Advisors are also expected to be advocates for the students in their groups. The review examines several important components of the advisory program, and explains why these issues should be carefully considered when implementing such a program. The aspects investigated are: needs of young adolescents, grouping arrangements, scheduling considerations, attitudes of those involved with advisory, and maintenance of viability within the program.
Essential Components

of

Middle School Advisory Programs

A Graduate Review

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Daniel F. Guinan

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Abstract

This review investigates the essential aspects of middle school advisory programs. Advisory is an innovative approach to counseling that involves teachers as advisors to groups of 12 to 15 students. Groups meet at some time within the school day to explore a variety of affective issues involving young adolescents. Advisors are also expected to be advocates for the students in their groups. The review examines several important components of the advisory program, and explains why these issues should be carefully considered when implementing such a program. The aspects investigated are: needs of young adolescents, grouping arrangements, scheduling considerations, attitudes of those involved with advisory, and maintenance of viability within the program.
INTRODUCTION

At the core of middle level education is the belief that a student's personal development is just as important as his or her academic development. The young adolescent years of life are a time when children are building the foundation for what they will become as adults. During this stage of development, middle level students desperately need guidance and support to help them cope with the changing world and their changing selves (Gill & Read, 1990). Because of this, many middle schools have instituted advisory programs that focus upon the students' emotional and social well being.

Advisory programs have over 100 different names (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990), with advisor-advisee, homebase, teacher-advisory, and "Prime Time" being some of the more common. All advisory programs have a central philosophy which reflects the importance of the whole child, with affective issues being explored, such as self-concept, values clarification, and moral and social development. Advisory programs are also designed to reduce the isolation and anonymity that many students feel as they move out of self-contained elementary classrooms and into middle and junior high schools. This move usually involves
students going from class to class, experiencing more teachers
and a greater number of classmates (Myrick, 1990). In Turning
Points (1989), the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development
advocated that middle schools have small group advisories
that ensure that every student is known well by at least one
adult. When children reach the middle grades they tend to
move from teacher to teacher; this increases the chance of
students having no school adult who really knows them or
cares about them. Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) believe that if
students think no one is aware of their problems and progress,
they are more likely to withdraw from school activities or
waste time.

Though difficult to institute and maintain, advisory
programs meet a known need of young adolescents and have
become a characteristic of many middle schools (Lounsbury,
1991). Schools that have advisory programs are, in effect,
attempting to attend to the social and emotional needs of
students at a time in their lives when they most need it. The
exact framework of how schools structure their advisory
programs can vary greatly from school to school. These
differences usually are due to the types of activities and
experiences the school determines to be most appropriate for meeting the needs of the students in that school. While these differences occur between schools, all advisory programs should be similar in that they should have a written curriculum outline and a singleness of purpose for the program and its outcomes (Bergmann, 1991).

This review identifies some essential components of advisory programs. The similarities and differences that exist in advisory programs of various middle schools are examined and reasons for differences are explored. Conflicting viewpoints among researchers and practitioners who have studied and have implemented models of advisory programs are investigated.

This review strives to answer several questions regarding advisory that schools who are contemplating implementing such a program might have. These questions are:

1. What are the needs of students at the middle level and what can an advisory program do to address the needs of students at various grades within the middle school? If the needs of young adolescents are not clearly understood by the advisor, the value of advisory toward that student may be limited.
2. Can the needs of students be met best by heterogeneous grouping or same-grade grouping within advisory programs? Do schools feel that by having students of different ages and interests in one group, the benefits of advisory are maximized? Other schools may feel that same-grade groups allow for a program in which age-appropriate topics can best be explored.

3. How should an advisory program be structured into the school day? Is it better to have it at the beginning, somewhere in the middle, or at the end of the day? Also, how long should each advisory period be? Scheduling considerations may be critical to the success or failure of advisory programs.

4. How important are the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and students to the success of an advisory program? Why do negative attitudes toward advisory exist, and can negative attitudes be overcome? Attitudes may play a decisive role in the success or failure of the program.

5. Once an advisory program is instituted, how is viability within the program maintained? After a successful program has been in existence for a few years, do the original goals and objectives for the program become distorted due to varying
factors? Schools should be aware of changing factors that can affect the overall health of the program. These factors may be teacher turnover within the school, administrative and parental support, and changing student needs.

**Rationale**

Many middle schools it seems, have advisory programs in name only. Teachers are uncertain of what is expected of them as advisors. Administrators can see the benefits of an advisory program but still fail to support it by failing to allowing the proper amount of staff development or by not permitting an adequate amount of time in the school day for the program to function efficiently.

It is my hope that by doing this review I will be able to accomplish two things. One would be to become a better advisor to those in my advisory group and secondly I would like to take more of a leadership role in transforming our advisory at our school into a program that truly functions with the needs of students being served and not just as an advisory program in name only.

**Methodology**

In this review of middle school advisory programs, an ERIC
search was conducted at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The following descriptors were used:

- teacher advisory
- advisor-advisee
- middle school advisory
- middle level advisement

From this search, abstracts were read to determine which pertained to the research questions posed by the review. Monographs, reports, and journal selections that contained relevant information were located, copied, and read for more specific information.

Sources containing information on middle level guidance and advisement were also obtained from the professional library of Millard Public Schools in Omaha, Nebraska. The rationale for selecting the specific sources to analyze, and the criteria for evaluating the information was again based upon how the information related to the research questions.

Additionally, information specifically related to middle school advisory programs was gathered using texts and materials from previously attended University of Northern Iowa graduate classes.
The preparation of this review in reference to organization, structure, and editorial style was based on the contents of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association - Third Edition.

Definitions

In order to provide a common understanding and a clear means of communication, the following terms are defined:

Advisory program--A program in which students have the opportunity to interact with peers and staff about school and personal concerns. The program may address the social, physical, intellectual, and emotional needs of young adolescents.

Affective issues--Issues dealing primarily with feelings and emotions.

Developmentally appropriate activities--Activities which are based upon a thorough understanding of the normal growth and development of a child.

Early adolescence--The developmental stage that young people go through as they approach puberty; usually between the ages of 10 and 14.

Heterogeneous grouping--A grouping pattern that distributes
students into groups of varying ages and abilities, with similar numbers of males and females within each group. **Young adolescent**--A 10- to 14-year-old, experiencing the developmental stage of early adolescence.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This review will focus upon, what this researcher considers to be the most essential aspects of a middle school advisory program. These essential aspects of advisory programs are based upon the opinions and findings of middle school experts and practitioners. The literature will point out some ambiguous and conflicting components of advisory in various middle schools. The review will investigate the importance of the following components when implementing an advisory program or overhauling an existing program: student needs, the structural design of the program within the school, attitudes of teachers, and how to establish and maintain viability within an advisory program.

**Needs of Young Adolescents**

Next to interdisciplinary team teaching, teacher advisory programs have become the most frequently cited characteristic of a true middle school (Hoversten, Doda, &
Lounsbury, 1991). While advisory programs in various middle schools differ greatly in structure and organization, they are all similar in that they strive to attend to the social and emotional needs of young adolescents. The middle level child has needs that are unique to their stage of life. It is important at this stage for the child to develop "significant other" adult relationships (Bergmann & Baxter, 1983). In advisory programs, it is the advisor who becomes this "significant other." One of the goals of an advisory program is that it provides a mechanism for addressing the needs of young adolescents. In middle schools with no advisory program, many of these social and emotional needs go unmet as schools attempt to have one counselor assist as many as 500 students (Bergmann, 1991).

Emphasizing the need to recognize the social and emotional development of young adolescents, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) stated the following:

Human beings continuously strive to have five basic needs met. These needs are survival, love (respect), pride (in work and play), freedom (to choose what one does and pursue that which one enjoys), and fun. Students hungry,
sick, troubled, or depressed cannot function well in the classroom, no matter how good the school. (p.32)

Sometimes described as the "forgotten age", young adolescents begin to experience pressures that were previously unknown to them, such as: being pushed too hard academically and/or socially; peer pressure to engage in sex, alcohol, and drugs; concerns about diseases or other health related matters; and physical safety in school (Allen, Splittgerber, & Manning, 1993).

Any educator who has taught at the middle level understands that students at this age often feel the need to test the limits and assert their independence. But, does this mean that they are all at-risk? Scales (1991) said, "Developmentally about 80 percent of 10- to 15-year-olds do not experience a turbulent early adolescence, but all trends point to a growing number of young adolescents who are in fact at high risk of being under prepared and unsuccessful in the modern social and economic world" (p.3).

Middle schools that either have advisory programs or are in the process of implementing an advisory program are attempting to address the needs of their students. These
schools recognize, that, for whatever the reason, the needs of many students are not being met at home by parents who are spending more time, for financial reasons, on careers. Nor are the needs of students being met by school counselors who are spending an increasing amount of time on more severe student problems. When an adolescent's individual needs are not met within the confines of an institutional structure, they will eventually seek and find a place where their needs can be met (Byrnes, Cornesky, & Byrnes, 1992).

The needs of young adolescents are not singular. Because these needs are so dynamic, diverse, and changing, the middle level school culture is extremely complicated (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988). Different schools address needs in various ways. Schools with poor, predominantly black student populations in big cities are more likely than others to establish group advisory periods that frequently provide social and emotional support to students (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Some schools put more focus on needs that are related to study skills and academic assistance, while others focus on career planning or community service activities.

The unique characteristics of young adolescents puts them
in a social and emotional category that is neither totally child
or young adult. It is at this stage in a child's life that
concerns about physical development such as; height and
weight, hormonal changes, perspiration problems, and nutrition
come to the forefront. In addition to physical development
young adolescents are also very concerned with their sexual
development (Van Hoose and Strahan, 1988). The need to
understand these changes are extremely important to young
adolescents, and when handled discretely, this need can be
accommodated within an advisory setting.

While it might be true that not all young adolescents have
the exact same needs of other students their age, most have
similar needs. Scales (1991) described seven developmental
needs of young adolescents. They are: (a) positive social
interaction with adults and peers, (b) structure and clear
limits, (c) physical activity, (d) creative expression, (e)
competence and achievement, (f) meaningful participation in
families, schools and communities, and (g) opportunities for
self-definition. (p.13-14)

The social development of young adolescents has a direct
effect on how they think, feel and act. How well students of
this age do in school is often directly related to how they perceive themselves socially. If a young adolescent feels accepted by peers and adults they are more likely to do well in school. If they feel rejected, they may spend more time and energy on social matters to make up for their feeling of inadequacy (Van Hoose and Strahan, 1988). The need for young adolescents to feel socially accepted and to have a positive self-image is often a goal of many advisory programs.

The emotional and intellectual needs of young adolescents are also important to consider when establishing the goals of an advisory program. Middle school-age children are beginning to see things in new ways. Students are beginning to move from concrete to abstract in their thinking. Young adolescents need opportunities to express to the external world who they are on the inside (Scales, 1991). Advisory programs can often serve as an outlet for students when expressing new feelings and ideas.

In summary, all middle school advisory programs should take into account the needs of young adolescents. The middle level child has needs that are similar to people of all ages, but many are unique to their stage of development. Middle level
advisory programs that focus upon the social, physical, intellectual, and emotional needs of young adolescents are providing a mechanism for addressing these needs.

**Structural Organization of Advisory Programs**

One of the ambiguous aspects of advisory programs is how they are organized. There appears to be no absolute or standard way. Many factors come into consideration when structuring an advisory program into the middle school's curriculum. These factors include: (a) how often and when should the groups meet?, (b) how large should the groups be?, (c) how are students grouped?, and (d) what will be a part of the advisory curriculum? There are many options schools can choose when implementing a program, each option has advantages and disadvantages. How an advisory program is designed is up to the individual school.

**Scheduling**

The first consideration in an advisory program's structure is to decide when and how long the groups will meet. (Hoversten, Doda, & Lounsbury (1991) suggest a utopian arrangement would be ten times a week, twice a day, first thing in the morning for about 25 minutes and the last thing in
the day for about 7 minutes. A much-less than satisfactory minimum would be once a week for 25 minutes. Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) found in a survey of middle schools that of all middle schools, 66% had one homeroom or group advisory daily and 9% had two such periods. Twenty five percent had no homerooms, group advisory or similar structure. They found that when schools have one period they schedule it daily for 20-25 minutes on average; when two periods are scheduled, the second one is added once or twice a week and it lasts between 30-35 minutes.

Many schools schedule advisory for the first 10 minutes at the beginning of every day for administrative purposes such as, attendance and lunch count. The period is extended one or two days a week for about 35 minutes for advisory lessons.

Other schools have advisory groups that meet every day for 20-30 minutes, with a "group activity" or "lesson" every day. However, this daily effort to engage middle level students in significant personal discussion may be too frequent for sustained success (Coe, 1992). Regardless of the time structure and placement in the school day, one thing is certain, if not given enough time, advisors will rush, lose patience and
give up on group activities. When this occurs, the needs of students will most likely not be met (Cole, 1992).

**Group size**

If there is consensus about anything regarding advisory, it is group size. The smaller the group the better. To facilitate an atmosphere of intimacy a group of 12-15 students is widely recommended (Hoversten, Doda, & Lounsbury, 1991). By using virtually every professional staff member, including media specialists, physical education teachers, certified assistant teachers, special education teachers, and art teachers, a ratio of 12 to 15 students per staff member can be obtained (Raebeck, 1992). Groups having higher numbers of students can be successful but the larger numbers limit the effectiveness of many affective activities that are at the heart of group advisory.

**Grouping**

How students are grouped may be the one aspect of advisory with the least unilateral agreement among experts and practitioners. Groups can be composed of students within the same grade or across grades. The students can be arranged heterogeneously by administrators, or advisors can select
their own advisees. Advisory groups may be formed with students who have common interests or career goals. Additionally, advisors in some schools stay with their advisees throughout the student's middle school years. Each arrangement has advantages and disadvantages that must be weighed when implementing the program.

An advantage of multi-grade groups is that older students can help younger students in matters of orientation to the school at the beginning of the year and also may help in academic tutoring. The disadvantage is that, affective issues that eighth graders are dealing with may be too advanced for sixth grade students. Conversely, issues that are important and necessary to sixth graders may seem "trivial" and "beneath" eighth grade students. In regards to grouping students according to interests rather than heterogeneously, Myrick (1990) states:

It might make sense to group students with special interests, but keeping exceptional education students together is not necessarily a good idea. These students need to be mainstreamed in developmental guidance.

Likewise, keeping all band students together or others
interested in a particular career goal may be defeating in the long run. Students need a heterogeneous group of peers in their advisory group (p.18).

When an advisor has the same advisees for three years, the obvious advantage is that the advisor gets to know his or her advisees quite well. With this knowledge, the advisor can adjust the curriculum and activities of the group to fit the strengths and weaknesses of the students who make up the group. The negative aspect of this arrangement is the possibility of personality conflicts between group members, or between the advisor and one of their advisees. Also, there is a real possibility of students being in a group which has an advisor who is not willing or able to enter into the kind of relationship with students that is needed for an effective advisory program (Cole, 1992).

Curriculum

When deciding upon an advisory curriculum, organizers need to decide what is the best way to meet the needs of the students who make up their school. Again, there is no standard "best" way to do this. Some schools elect to go with a ready-made curriculum such as, Treasure Chest: A Teacher Advisory
Source Book. Other schools organize their programs by picking and choosing activities and topics from a variety of sources and putting them together themselves.

Most advisors prefer to have some sort of curriculum they can follow. According to Cole (1994) about one-third of teachers want a defined program with activities. Other teachers like to have freedom to select activities with which they feel comfortable. Generally, these activities and topics are structured around common themes which may change from week-to-week or month-to-month. Monthly themes may have to do with self-esteem and self-evaluation, getting acquainted, study skills, issues such as drug abuse and the environment, or other issues that are of concern to young adolescents.

Many schools have a rotation pattern to their advisory curriculum, in which they focus on specific skills or activities throughout the entire year. The first year may involve interpersonal skill-building activities. The second year, the curriculum may revolve around activities dealing with positive self-concept. The third year could relate to any other topic or issue that is deemed important in the school or community.
Schools that have same-grade advisory groups often have a differentiated curriculum for the various grade levels. Many teachers feel that some of the affective issues associated with advisory may not be developmentally appropriate for sixth and seventh graders as it is for students in eighth grade. In middle schools with differentiated advisory curriculums, the needs of students at various grade levels are addressed.

At the very least, all advisory programs should have a written curriculum outline. There must be a singleness of purpose for the program and its outcomes (Bergmann, 1991).

**Attitudes of Teachers**

Clearly one of the most difficult parts of implementing an advisory program in schools across the nation rest in the knowledge, attitude and commitment of teachers (Myrick, 1990). Does being a middle school advisor require a certain type person? Should only some middle school teachers be advisors? Hoversten, Doda, and Lounsbury (1991) suggest that all middle school teachers "are" advisors. They state:

It cannot be otherwise, for the developmental needs of young adolescents are pressing and omnipresent. It is impossible to establish the comfortable student-teacher
relationship that is needed for successfully conducting the academic business of middle schools without also being concerned with the social, emotional, and physical development of the students. (p.2)

The success of any advisory program depends upon the commitment of the advisors to the philosophy behind advisement. The attitudes of the advisor toward the program are easily detected by the advisees. If the advisor depicts an attitude of indifference or disdain toward the program, the students in that group will likely reflect this. We tend to copy the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of people we respect, especially if those people are in the position of authority (Squires, Huitt, & Segars, 1983, p.73). In all middle schools there will be some teachers who will not support advisory, despite its apparent value. Myrick (1990) found that, in general, 20% of the teachers will be supportive of advisory. Another 20% will be clearly resistant, the middle 60% will make the critical difference. If within this 60% there is support for the program, it will make a positive contribution. If the majority of these teachers are against it, the program will not survive, it will be sabotaged. Bergmann and Baxter
(1983) described these factions as those who "buy into" the concept, those who are "lukewarm", and those who would like to see the program end.

Why do some teachers have negative attitudes toward advisory? Many instructors regard advisory as essential, yet an equal or greater number see it as beyond the scope of their teaching responsibility, or as an additional duty for which they have not been prepared (Bushnell & George, 1993). Telling traditional, secondary-oriented teachers that their role includes a guidance-oriented advisory function has been known to cause violent eruptions in previously placid staff development meetings (George, 1988). Other reasons teachers resist advisory programs according to Van Hoose (1991) are:

- Most teacher have had little formal preparation for service as advisors.
- Teachers do not understand the goals of the endeavor.
- Advisory takes time; time that many teachers believe could be invested more effectively in preparing to teach their subject(s).
- Some teachers do not want to engage in a program that requires personal sharing.
Many administrators are not really concerned about it. Parents do not understand the concept and may oppose it. When it is implemented incorrectly and with little staff development and leadership, students do not provide positive feedback. (p.2-3).

What can be done to overcome teachers' negative attitudes toward advisory? One good way would be to try to prevent them in the first place. The inadequate training of advisors is often a source of concern. Training usually occurs during inservice days at the beginning of the school year or one or two days in the summer (Ayres, 1994). When training is done hastily it often leads to teachers who do not have a real understanding of the social and emotional needs and characteristics of young adolescents.

Often times, administrators fail to fully support the indoctrination of the advisory program, both in time and resources. This leads many teachers to feel that the program is of little significance. Adequate training of advisors is paramount to the success of the advisory program. More importantly, if done correctly it can alleviate many concerns teachers have about the program. This can go a long way in
ensuring the success and viability of advisory.

In the beginning, many teachers ask "Do I have to do this"? When the answer is "yes", many advisors simply go about the task of doing the best job they can. Myrick noted that some outstanding teachers, who made positive differences with students who needed their help, may have wanted to say "no" in the beginning (1990).

Resistant Advisors

Even when training of advisors is at its best, there are bound to be some teachers who are still negative and resistant. Many middle school staffs are composed, to a large extent, of secondary-trained (and oriented) teachers who view themselves primarily as content specialists. These teachers typically believe that it is the job of the guidance counselor, not the teacher, to counsel students (White & Greenwood, 1991). What, if anything, can be done with these teachers?

Negative teachers, who are unwilling to change their attitude or to learn new skills, may be a good match for students who are disruptive or are discipline problems during teacher advisory periods (Myrick, 1990). Putting uncooperative students with negative teachers may not be the
best solution, but it might be better than forcing them to be in a situation in which they may cause more harm than good.

**Effective Advisors**

What kind of an attitude should an effective middle-level advisor portray to his or her advisees? Generally speaking, there is no specific, correct attitude or formula for advisors. Every quality that makes one a skillful and caring teacher, also makes one an effective advisor. Bushnell and George (1993) describe five characteristics of effective advisors. They say that effective advisors:

1. care about students in their advisory group,
2. are able to relate to the individuality of various advisees,
3. are available for their advisees,
4. have a positive attitude toward advisement,
5. have their own unique styles of advisement, (p. 11)

Most teachers readily display their liking and respect for young people. Just as these professionals make the best teachers they also make the best advisors (Cole, 1992). The more the advisor can become a regular member of the group, sharing in developmentally appropriate activities, the better.
The advisor must not overdo involvement and dominate, but establishing an atmosphere of intimacy is essential (Hoversten, Doda & Lounsbury, 1991).

Questions and concerns that teachers have about advisory programs should not be dismissed as unimportant or uncaring. The issues and philosophy surrounding advisory programs need to be explained in a complete and comprehensive manner. Unless teachers are comfortable with their roles as advisors and committed to the philosophy behind advisories, teachers will fail to perform or their performances will be ineffectual (Ayres, 1994).

Reaching and Maintaining Viability

Why is it that advisory programs in so many middle schools are advisory programs in name only? A majority of advisory programs are in place on paper, but few are functioning well (White & Greenwood, 1991). What can be done to ensure that viability within the program can be both reached and maintained? These questions should be seriously considered when middle schools are in the planning stages of implementing an advisory program. Educators designing an effective advisory program should: allow sufficient lead time
for the planning and implementation, design programs that differ clearly from academic classes, involve parents, and include appropriate in-service training for all participants (James, 1986).

Probably the most critical factor for success of advisory is staff development. Staff development and training workshops are needed so staff members can become familiar with, and practice some of the activities that are associated with advisory programs. This is the place teachers can get answers to some of the basic questions about the concept of advisory. These questions generally revolve around the role of the advisor, types of activities involved, and how to handle delicate issues.

Ayres (1994) states that staff development is the place where teachers can be assured that, as advisors, they are only intended to be student advocates who establish a caring attitude with students outside of an academic setting. Teachers must be reassured that the advisory relationship is intended to help pick up on problems before they become serious issues.

Probably the biggest cause of failure, according to Cole
(1992), is failing to explain clearly the goals of advisory and to gain full teacher acceptance of the program. When teachers belatedly discover that the advisory program described in such glowing terms in an earlier meeting was in fact poorly conceived, disastrously scheduled, unevaluated and unsupported by parents, the life of the teacher-based guidance effort is imperiled (George, 1988).

Reaching viability and maintaining viability in the advisory program are two very different entities. In order to reach viability, all aspects of the program need to be thoroughly investigated. Most schools do this by forming an advisory committee. The committee's make-up usually includes counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents. It is the job of these people to decide how to structure the program, how teachers will be prepared, and what materials and activities will be used. The committee should allow staff flexibility in the advisory curriculum and should be responsive to the needs of students (Cole, 1992).

If and when viability is reached, the next step that the advisory committee needs to be concerned about is how to maintain viability from year-to-year. An advisory program
does not stay healthy without attention and commitment of those involved (Cole, 1992). Student and teacher evaluations are essential in providing data upon which to make decisions and select new directions for the program. Most experts agree that formal and periodic evaluation is necessary (Myrick, 1990; Cole, 1992; Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994). Often times, questionnaires are used to get information from teachers, students, and parents. Committee members sometimes put together surveys that gather information in areas such as, incidents of discipline problems, rate of student and teacher attendance in school, rate of student transfers, attendance and involvement in school sponsored activities, and academic achievement in the classroom (Cole, 1992). From the results of the surveys, committee members can adjust the direction of the advisory program to keep the program viable and more attuned at meeting student needs.

An often overlooked and yet critical aspect of maintaining viability is having strong administrative support. If administrators are supportive, then teachers will try harder. If they are indifferent, then teachers find other places to invest their time and energy (Myrick, 1990). If administrators
are not really concerned with advisory, or fail to show leadership in the implementation of the program, many teachers will see this as a part of the middle school curriculum that is not really important. Van Hoose (1991) said that this is one of the reasons some teachers resist advisory programs.

In summary, the research indicates certain factors are important for an advisory program to be successful. One of these factors is the need for comprehensive staff development. If staff development is given the proper time and resources, advisors are more likely to understand the goals and philosophy of the program. Negative attitudes of teachers toward advisory can be dealt with at this time, and in some instances be alleviated. During staff development, teachers can discuss what their students needs are and which needs will be addressed by the advisory curriculum.

Another factor pointed out by the research is the importance of having a way to evaluate and assess the program. When evaluation and assessment are a part of advisory, changes can be made which can lead to a program that is viable.
CONCLUSIONS

One of the most fundamental differences between middle level education and secondary or elementary education is the emphasis on affective growth of students, both socially and emotionally. While there can be many different facets to advisory it is this middle school program that is best suited to achieving this purpose.

From the literature, it is clear there is no exact "blueprint" for what an advisory program should look like. The program can vary in its design from school to school. Every middle school involved in the implementation or overhaul of an advisory program must decide how their program will operate and what purposes it will serve.

While there is ambiguity in the design and purpose of advisory, the literature points to some essentials that all schools should consider. One of these essentials is that every middle school advisory program should be built around the developmental needs of young adolescents. The middle level child has needs that are unique to this phase of life. One of the main goals of any advisory program is that it should strive to address these developmental needs. A variety of
circumstances determine what needs are most important and which needs should be addressed by the advisory curriculum. Socioeconomic and other environmental factors should be considered when establishing what needs an individual school's advisory program will address.

Agreement within the literature on grouping arrangement and structure within the school framework is difficult to find. However, there is agreement on the size of groups. The smaller the group the better. The advisory group should be considerably smaller than the typical academic class. This small class size is achieved by utilizing every possible adult in the building as an advisor.

Whether groups should be same-grade or multi-grade, needs to be decided by the individual schools. Both have advantages and disadvantages. I believe that the success or failure of an advisory has less to do with grouping arrangements and more to do with other essential factors. Schools should make a firm decision on what their advisory groups will look like and then move on to more important factors.

Another essential within the literature is the need for comprehensive training of advisors. When the training of
advisors is done thoroughly, and the goals of advisory are accurately communicated, advisors are less likely to have negative attitudes toward the program. When training of advisors is done haphazardly, without adequate time to answer questions and alleviate concerns regarding the program, there can be serious consequences. Teachers need to know that, as advisors, they are not acting as school counselors, but as advocates for the children in their group (Ayres, 1994). If the advisory program starts out with even a small number of advisors with negative attitudes, the program will not achieve the success it should.

Another important aspect of training is, how to handle the induction of new teachers into the school. Incoming teachers who are unfamiliar with that schools' advisory program need to understand the goals and objectives of the program. Many teachers who are new to the middle school are often unaware of unique needs of middle school students. Schools need to have a system in which new teachers are adequately trained.

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect for continued success of an advisory program is periodic evaluation and updating. Both the review of the literature and the discussions with
fellow middle level educators indicate it is this lack of fine-tuning that can lead to stagnation within the program. Maintaining viability within the program can be improved by simply surveying advisors for their opinion on what is working within the program and what is in need of fixing.

An advisory committee needs to be established in order to maintain viability within the program. The committee should consist of counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It is important that each committee member be seen as being equally important to making the program look and operate effectively. Other teachers or staff members outside of the committee, should not see the advisory program as administrator or counselor driven.

The most critical factor for success of an advisory program in any middle school, is strong administrative support. When teachers and other staff members see that the advisory program is considered a high priority by the chief administrator, most of them will strive to do a good job of being an advisor. When the building administrator is perceived as being indifferent towards the program, advisors will tend to give a low priority to advisement. When not given the
attention it deserves and needs, the advisory program will never reach its full potential.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The literature contained relatively little information about how the views of administration influence the effectiveness of the program. For this reason, I believe the views and attitudes of administrators toward advisory could be used as a topic for future research on advisory programs.

Additionally, how to make teachers accountable for their role as an advisor could be used as a topic of further study. While teachers are periodically observed and evaluated in their curricular area, it appears there are very few if any middle schools which hold their teachers accountable for what takes place in the advisory program. I believe that information based on how to infuse accountability into the advisory program would be extremely helpful to all middle schools.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Schools that are planning the implementation of an advisory program or the modification of an existing program should consider several factors that I think are essential.

First, schools should determine what student needs will be
targeted by the advisory curriculum. While there are similar needs common to all young adolescents, varying factors can determine which needs are more important to individual schools or communities. Factors that can influence which needs are targeted may be due to socioeconomic conditions within the community, social concerns, such as at-risk behaviors among young adolescents, or academic demands of the community.

Schools also need to decide what the structural design of the program will be. Scheduling within the day and grouping arrangements can be done in any number of ways. It is best for the individual schools to decide when the advisory period will be, and what the make-up of the groups will be like. I believe that the most important factor in this regard is that advisory periods be about twenty minutes in length. When the advisory periods are too short, it becomes difficult to carry out an advisory lesson. Advisors may become frustrated and give up on group activities. Conversely, advisory periods that are too long may be counterproductive to conducting discussions on affective issues with any sustained success.

Finally, schools need to establish and maintain viability
within their advisory program. This is best accomplished by having an advisory committee made up of teachers, parents, counselors, administrators, and students. The evaluation and assessment of the program should be the responsibility of the advisory committee. The committee should also be responsible for any training and staff development of advisors. When the training of advisors is thorough and comprehensive, with the goals and objectives for the program explained, the advisory program can reach its potential with the needs of young adolescents being met.
References


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