



SREB

HSTW CONTRACTED
SCHOOLS NETWORK

HSTW URBAN
NETWORK

LEADERSHIP
PREPARATION
INITIATIVE

MAKING
MIDDLE GRADES
WORK

PROJECT LEAD
THE WAY

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Online
HSTW/MMGW
Newsletter

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

592 10th St. N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 875-9211
www.sreb.org

Establishing an Effective Guidance and Advisement System

A good guidance and advisement system is the glue that connects various high school experiences together in a meaningful way for students. An effective system can contribute to students' achievement; help students set goals; find a niche in school; and open up new vistas of opportunity beyond those which students may envision.

Why establish a guidance and advisement system?

Connect students to an adult. Every student in high school needs to be known by an adult who is also known by that student's parents. A student working with an adult is much more likely to finish and see high school as meaningful than is a student literally known by no one. There are large high schools today in which many students, particularly in grades nine and 10, are not known by anyone — and we wonder why those youth are alienated, have high absentee rates or seldom show up in class. For many of us, it was an adult that believed in us and in our potential that inspired us to believe in ourselves. Being known by an adult who has a genuine interest in us, who sees us as worthy individuals with capabilities and is willing to help us achieve our potential, makes all the difference.

Connect students to a goal. We know from HSTW that students who are connected to a goal are more motivated, work harder in school, show up for class and are more likely to be prepared. One of the roles of the adviser is to help every student set a goal beyond high school and create a plan of study for achieving that goal. Goal-driven students walk down the hall with a different attitude compared with students who just see high school as a place to hang out with friends. Connection to a goal motivates students to work harder and become more responsible.

Connecting students and parents to the school is another essential reason for having a guidance and advisement program. Many parents know how to work the system. They keep a score card on all teachers; network; find out who are the best teachers; and insist that their student be placed in those teachers' classes. Parents know which courses matter in high school, which courses will prepare students for the better colleges and which career/technical courses will prepare students for better jobs. They insist that their students take those courses. However, there are many students whose parents may not have finished high school, may not have gone beyond high school or simply do not know how to work the system. They do not feel comfortable being pushy with schools or networking to get the information.

An effective guidance and advisement system is essential because it enables parents to meet yearly with their son's or daughter's adviser to address goals beyond high school and what it is going to take to achieve those goals. Without such a system, many parents remain unconnected to their student's high school studies. These are the students more likely to drop out. They are also the students who said that if their parents had been better connected to the school, they might have stayed in school. Parents want to be partners — some just do not know how. Part of the role of the school is to create a mechanism through which parents can participate and to educate them on how they can.

Every student needs a niche, a place in which he or she belongs. The teacher adviser and his or her cohort of advisees constitutes a family — a setting where students feel comfortable and where they can focus on topics together for all four years of high school. They know that they count, are a member of an important team and matter to their adviser. This group of students has the support of each other and helps each other stay on track.

In interviews with hundreds of students over the years, many report never having had a conversation with a counselor and having no go-to adult on the staff for assistance with curriculum planning or goal-setting. Students often say that their school is only concerned with students going on to the most prestigious colleges. They do not feel they have received good advice on course selection. They are very discouraged to discover that if they go on for further study, they will likely be enrolled in remedial courses — a consequence of having been enrolled in a series of low-level courses that allowed them to graduate but failed to prepare them for further learning.

What is the role of the adviser?

The adviser's role is multifaceted, involving the following responsibilities:

- Plan advisement sessions with advisees on scheduled meeting dates addressing topics germane to students' interests and needs.
- Check how well students are doing every three weeks in all classes. Ensure that students who have failed to master materials and demonstrate at least B- or C-level work get assistance before they fall too far behind, become discouraged and develop a sense of hopelessness.
- Meet annually with each advisee and a parent or guardian to review the progress the student has made the previous year; student's goals beyond high school; student's strengths and weaknesses; and how the school, the student and family can continue to maximize strengths and address deficits, making adjustments as the student's interest and needs change.
- Keep parents informed about challenges students are confronted with in school and about their successes. The adviser truly becomes the trusted conduit between the school and parent.

What are the goals of the adviser/advisee program?

- Every student no later than grade nine needs to have a postsecondary goal and at least a five-year plan for achieving that goal. Parents should be involved and help to develop the goal. The intent is not for this to be sent home and initialed by parents; students' goals need to be developed in face-to-face meetings between the parents, students and advisers.
- Increase annually the percentage of students completing a college-preparatory academic core and either an academic or career/technical major.
- Increase significantly the percentage of students receiving timely extra help and assistance to meet core standards, given in such a way to motivate students to work harder and to earn higher grades.
- Assist students to develop study skills, time management skills, improved relationships with others and those habits of success that result in higher-level achievement.
- Assist students in assessing career and educational options, setting goals and working toward the achievement of those goals.
- Empower students to believe that with effort and support from adults, it is possible for them to achieve their goals.
- Increase the percentage of students leaving high school prepared for postsecondary studies without having to take remedial courses and who are prepared for good jobs.
- Identify students at the end of grade 11 planning postsecondary studies but are not ready. Enroll them in special courses their senior year to get them ready.
- Make better use of the senior year to give students prepared for college a jump-start in postsecondary studies, get students ready who are not ready, and for those not planning postsecondary studies make sure they are in a program leading to an employer certification.
- Ensure students making it to the senior year graduate by making sure they know what is required to meet graduation standards.

These are some of the goals that can be impacted by an effective guidance and advisement system. An effective teacher adviser system means students are more knowledgeable about what it will take to graduate from high school. They will have greater information about courses that really matter to their futures.

Where do you begin with an adviser/advisee program?

An adviser/advisee program can start one year at a time or be implemented through the whole high school at once. It is frequently better to begin the program with the ninth grade and work up through the high school, the same students remaining with the same adviser for all four years. The advantages of beginning with one grade level at a time is it enables a core group of top advisers to set the standards that others can follow who may otherwise be reluctant to participate.

What are the conditions for establishing an effective adviser/advisee program?

Connect the right adviser with the right advisee. Survey the staff for their interests, hobbies, special expertise and knowledge concerning career and educational opportunities. Give an interest inventory to each student to identify special interests and career fields. Identify students interested in outdoor activities such as nature and conservation, or those who like to organize information, have an interest in mechanical devices, have a knack for numbers or prefer more intellectual work.

Based on interest inventory survey results, match students' interests with the professional expertise of faculty. For example, a science teacher who restores old automobiles may be an excellent adviser for students interested in mechanical engineering and the mechanical trades. Teachers of accounting and banking may be good matches for students interested in business studies. For students not native English speakers, assign an ESL instructor. Students should have an option of changing their advisers as their interests and academic performance levels change over time.

Effective teacher advisers require proper preparation. Advisement systems only work if teachers are adequately trained for their role as advisers. Ask the question, "What must teachers know to be an effective adviser?" They need to understand the requirements for graduation and understand which high school courses better prepare students for postsecondary studies. Advisers must understand career/technical offerings and how these serve a broad range of students. Advisers need information about postsecondary institutions, community technical colleges, apprenticeship programs, four-year colleges and universities. Inform advisers about the performance levels required of students to avoid remedial developmental classes in college.

Teachers also need information about how schools provide support and extra help for students to help them meet core standards. Prepare advisers on how to talk with parents, particularly parents of poor students who may feel uncomfortable dealing with school personnel. Help advisers to thoroughly understand their role and mission and what impact advisers will have on students and the overall school program.

Establish a schedule of advisory sessions. At a minimum, advisers should meet with their advisees at least twice a month. This gives them an opportunity to check with students on how well they are doing and determine their need for assistance. In some adviser/advisee programs the adviser and students meet daily for 30 minutes; in others they meet weekly for a 30- to 40-minute advisory period. Other programs can take a full class period in a traditional schedule to meet twice a month or every other week. The best advice is to determine how often the adviser can have a planned, learning experience session with the advisee.

It is important that advisement sessions not be regarded as study hall time. For advisers and advisees who meet daily, there may be a single topic to address each week. The materials might be introduced one day, discussed the next day and applications for the student considered on the third day.

Agree on the topics that advisory sessions will cover. Advisory session topics for grade nine will be different from those for grade 12. It is important for a faculty study committee to identify topics for each year in the advisory program. At grade nine, the emphasis is on study skills, time management, relationship skills, exploring postsecondary goals and opportunities, developing study partners, and exam preparation. In grade 11 the emphasis is much more on exploring college options, postsecondary opportunities, career opportunities, taking the right exams, assessing whether or not the student is adequately prepared for postsecondary studies and making the best use of the senior year. For each grade level there will be a session on taking the right courses in high school.

If at all possible, the school should identify a team of teachers to meet one week over the summer and develop topics for grades nine and 10 using a mini-lesson format. Every lesson format can contain an objective and a list of materials that students need to read to prepare for the session. Each advisory session should include a discussion of the materials, the implications for students, and actions and assignments students need to master, such as applying superior study skills.

Have students report back on how they implemented the ideas and explored some of the materials. Students should keep a diary of their adviser/advisee sessions. The diaries can include students' goals and aspirations; what they are learning about themselves, their habits and successes; and how they are seeking to improve their learning skills.

Teacher advisers should undergo a training session one week before advisory sessions. Provide them with materials for the theme of the week (or the month). The training session should be no longer than 30 minutes. It can be conducted electronically for those who prefer or in person. The materials should already be reasonably well-developed to minimize the time that teachers need for planning and preparation. It is important that there be a weekly reminder to the teacher advised about upcoming advisory sessions, what the topic will be and the materials required.

It is important that all faculty members participate in the adviser/advisee program, including all administrative staff and guidance counselors. Any exception made should be reasoned that the faculty would accept those who have not been asked to participate. It appears that when the principal agrees to take on a set of advisers that does, in fact, require the cooperation of the faculty. The best way to calculate the student/adviser ratio is to divide the total number of professional staff by the total number of students. It usually turns out to be about 15 to 20 students per teacher adviser.

Someone must be in charge of the adviser/advisee system. The basic criteria is choosing someone who believes in and has a passion for ensuring students receive the advisement they need to succeed. Most of all, they must regard advisement as a crucial role and not something to be taken lightly. It is important that they see the benefits gained from being a part of students' lives, helping them see the connections between high school and their futures.

The individual must be organized and command the respect of his or her peers. Many school leaders view the counselor or a member of the guidance staff as the default choice for leading the effort. However, if no one on the guidance staff meets the criteria above, it is important to identify a staff member who does. Some of the most effective advisers have been younger staff who understand how disconnected some students feel, but also understand these students can be engaged in learning.

Being an adviser is a privilege and an opportunity, not a burden. Finally, it is critical that advisers see their role not as an added burden but as an opportunity to make their jobs easier — link every student to an adult, see that the student stays on course and build student responsibility. No job in the school is more essential for ensuring student success than seeing every student placed on the road to learning best suited for that individual and his or her future aspirations.