

The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
Department of Educational Leadership

EXAMINING HIGH PERFORMING ADVOCACY GROUPS IN A LARGE PUBLIC
HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation in
Educational Leadership

by

Craig B. Butler

©2009 Craig B. Butler

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

August 2009

The dissertation of Craig B. Butler was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Nona Prestine
Professor of Educational Leadership
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

William Hartman
Professor of Educational Leadership
In Charge of Graduate Programs in Educational Leadership

Bernard Badiali
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

Patrick Shannon
Professor of Education

* Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This study focused on examining high performing advisory groups in a large public high school to determine the impact the advisory program had on the students and the school. This study will supplement the scarcity of research available on the effect of advisory programs at the high school level. This is a qualitative study which utilized the intensive case study as the research methodology. Data collection sources included interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with five teachers, six counselors, twenty-five students, the building principal, and the program coordinator. The researcher conducted interviews during an intensive one-week visitation period; however ongoing data collection occurred over a three-month time frame. Cite selection was accomplished through a pre-study principal survey combined with the reputation of the school's advisory program. The primary research questions included in this study were, (1) what is the impact of an effective advisory program, and (2) what structural, cultural and content/theme components are present that contributed to the efficacy of the program. Several important conclusions were drawn from this study. First, teacher support and willingness coupled with building-wide enthusiasm and excitement around a compelling need for the program was imperative. An advisory program will be ineffective and stagnant without such support. Teachers and students must be committed to the program and its success. If this element is present it propagates a favorable relationship between the student/advocate and the benefits to the school and its students are unlimited. The student/advocate relationship was the

cornerstone of the program and all efforts were focused on nurturing this relationship. Second, whereas the impact for the students in the effective advocacy groups was clearly positive, the effects on the larger school environment were negligible. The students and advocates reported that the impact on the individual student was measurably greater than the school as a whole. In fact, there was conclusive evidence that some advocacy groups were functioning at a high level while others were stagnant and under-performed. Third, the advisory program affected the professional preparation time required by the teachers. The effective advocates had to devise activities beyond the scripted plans to include activities and curriculum more specifically suited for their advisory group. The effective advocates reported that the program required extra planning to ensure the success of their advisory sessions. The teachers believed the preparation element was overlooked during the implementation phase and that little to no effort had been exerted to address this issue. Fourth, whereas the school thoughtfully planned scripted lessons for advisory, such activities were of less value to the advocates and students than the activities planned by the advocates that were more specifically designed for the needs of each advocacy group. With the exception of the academic progress checks and some college preparatory activities the scripted lessons were deemed invaluable and lacked relevance. The findings from this study augment the literature currently available on the effect of advisory/advocacy programs in large high schools by studying the structural and cultural attributes of effective advocacy groups. Further study is recommended in the area of teacher preparation for the role of advocate versus teacher (as content specialist) and how schools might better

equip teachers of varying experience for this unconventional role, particularly at the high school level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Introduction	1
Perspectives on Personalization	6
Problem Statement and Research Questions	9
Conceptualizing School Climate and Personalization	10
School Climate Defined	10
Personalization Defined	11
Significance of the Study	13
Chapter 2	15
Review of the Literature	15
The Effectiveness of Advisory	15
Student-Teacher Relationships and Social Relationships	24
School Climate	26
Small Schools and Advisory	29
Small Schools – Belongingness/Alienation	31
Summary	32
Chapter 3	34
Research Design and Methodology	34
Introduction	34
The Rationale for a Qualitative Approach	34
Justification for Research Design	36
Site Selection and Access	37
Research Strategies/Instrumentation	40
The Role of the Researcher	40
Data Collection Techniques	42
Interviews	44
Document Analysis	45
Observations	46
Data Analysis Techniques	47
Reliability and Validity	49
Limitations	52
Chapter 4	54
Introduction	54
The Advocacy Session	59

The Impact of an Effective Advocacy Group	61
Relationship-Building	61
Academic Support/College Preparation	64
Meeting Student Needs	66
Identity and Connectedness	71
Liaison to the Family	75
Negative Impact of the Advocacy Program	75
Extra Prep Period/Increased Work Load	75
Inconsistent Effort from Teachers	76
Neutral Effect on School Spirit and Student Involvement	78
Student Engagement	79
Setting/Environment	79
The Impact of the Content/Themes	80
Academic Activities	83
College Preparatory Activities	84
Spontaneous Activities	85
Limitations/Modifications	87
Relationship-Building	88
 Chapter 5 - Introduction	 90
Summary of the Findings	91
Cultural and Social Components	91
Content and Theme Components	93
Conclusions	95
The Critical Role of Teacher Support	95
School-wide Impact	96
Added Work	97
Recommendations	98
Establishing a Compelling Need	98
Dealing with Variability across Advocacy Groups	99
Professional Development	100
What Really Matters (The Advocate/Student Relationship)	101
Developing Curriculum	102
Teacher/Advocate Preparation Time	103
Program Evaluation	104
The Role of the Advocate	104
 References	 105
 Appendix A – Cover Letter	 111
 Appendix B – Advisory Program Principal Survey	 113
 Appendix C – Interview Protocol	 120

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the last decade much discussion has occurred with regard to the need for restructuring our nation's secondary schools. One such reform strategy is the pursuit of enhanced personalization as a means of improving each student's educational experience. Poliner and Leiber (2003) contended that, "the assumption that students' thinking, feelings, and behavior function independently of each other continues to drive the organizational culture of most secondary schools, especially high schools, where the myth of the divided self goes unchallenged" (p. 7). They further pointed out that we can no longer assume that school counselors will take care of the physical, social, and emotional needs of the students while the academic faculty tends to the intellectual needs. Poliner and Lieber concluded that, "improving the quality of relationships among and between adults and young people can stand at the center of an integrated approach to successful prevention and instructional reform" (p. 7). Research shows that as much as sixty percent of all students, regardless of background, feel disengaged and disconnected in our nation's high schools. Makkonen (2004) stated that, "an advisory program can forge connections among students and the school community that create conditions that facilitate academic success and personal growth" (p. 3). Such groups also facilitate discussions regarding academic, social, and personal concerns, while cultivating a sense of social affiliation in the school environment and between an advisor and their advisees.

In recent years a call for enhanced personalization in our nation's schools has brought about minimal response from educational leaders at the high school level. Although many middle level schools have made considerable strides to personalize the school environment, by comparison, relatively little has been accomplished in high schools. One strategy employed in middle level schools is that of establishing "Advisory Programs", in which one adult advisor meets periodically with ten to twenty advisees.

Several exemplary middle school models utilizing advisory as a means of enhancing personalization have common attributes. The Cincinnati Country Day Middle School in Ohio is experiencing success with their advisors monitoring the advisees' social, emotional, and academic growth. The advisors are fully involved in the lives of their advisees and regularly hold a comprehensive overview of each advisee's social and academic progress. Advisors are the primary contact with parents and typically distribute report cards and participate in disciplinary meetings as necessary. The Sacajawea Middle School in Bozeman, Montana views their advisory program as the critical element in establishing connectedness between each student and an adult in the school community. The themes in advisory focus on interpersonal skill-building, respect and responsibility, conflict resolution and diversity, and mediation and communication. They place a heavy emphasis on developing the students' social skills and encouraging each student's participation in creating a peaceful culture in the school. At Park Junior High in LaGrange, Illinois advisors know their students well and are the main contacts for parents. They are also the key advocates for the students' academic needs. Advisors assume a supportive role in any disciplinary proceedings involving their advisees. The broad themes for advisory at the Park School are goal-setting, decision making, team-

building, and personal and interpersonal responsibility. The school's advisory serves as the main mechanism for helping students develop social and emotional skills.

Advisory models typically feature an arrangement whereby one adult and a small group of students have an opportunity to interact on a scheduled basis providing a caring environment for academic guidance and support, everyday administrative details, recognition, activities to promote citizenship, and the emotional and social development of each young adult (increased personalization). Advisory programs attempt to promote self-esteem by recognizing each student and providing time in small groups with a caring adult. Wasley and Lear (2001) argued that, "the advisory program is the single most important design element for making possible a high level of personalization. It allows the teacher to confront and challenge students about their performance in ways not typical in large high schools" (Tocci, Hochman, and Allen, 2005, p. 5)

Cotton (2001) defined personalization as, "teachers knowing their students well and developing relationships that lead to increased student motivation" (p. 22 – 23). Cotton also stated that, "personalization in the school can help teachers become more knowledgeable about the students' learning strengths and needs and identify ways to respond to them in a way that is not possible in the typical large high school" (p. 23). Lear (2001a) said personalization is, "knowing students well" (p. 23). Cotton added that, "schools are filled with individual kids and particular knowledge about each kid and the freedom to act on that knowledge, results in personalization" (p. 23). Dyer (1996) described personalization as, "an environment where every student has an adult advocate who assists the student academically, helps them with social difficulties, and develops a plan for their academic progress" (Meloro, 2005, p. 6). Meloro (2005) identified six

categories of supportive interactions among students and teachers that characterize personalization, including “recognition, trust, respect, acceptance, confirmation, and relevance” (p. 6). Other attributes of personalization include the students’ sense of belonging and sense of connectedness. Personalization often includes school belonging, school membership, school connectedness, school climate, school bonding, school engagement, and school involvement.

School climate can be affected by a number of factors, many of which appear to relate to personalization. Loukas (2007) stated that, “the feelings elicited by the environment in the school are referred to as school climate” (p. 1). Loukas claimed there are three dimensions in the realms of the physical, social, and academic nature of schools that characterize school climate. The physical dimension includes “appearance of the school building and classrooms, school size and ratio of students to teachers in the classroom, order and organization of classrooms in the school, availability of resources, and safety and comfort” (p. 1). The social dimension includes “the quality of relationships between students and teachers, equitable and fair treatment of students by the staff, the degree of competition between students, and the degree to which all stakeholders contribute to decision-making” (p. 1). Loukas said the academic dimension includes “the quality of instruction, teacher expectations for student achievement, monitoring student progress, and promptly reporting results to students and parents” (p. 1). In a Best Practices Brief (2004) publication school climate is described as, “the environment that affects the behavior of teachers and students. It characterizes the organization at the building and classroom level and refers to the ‘feel’ of the school and can vary among schools within the same district” (p. 1). The Brief goes on to state that,

“school climate reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are more susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place” (p. 2). Climate is depicted by the feelings and attitudes about the school expressed by the stakeholders. Simply stated it is, “the way students and staff ‘feel’ about being at school each day” (Best Practices Brief, 2004, p. 2). Therefore, caring, safety, and an orderly environment are key elements in determining school climate. The Brief designated the following eight areas that define school climate:

“appearance of the physical plant, faculty relations, student interactions, leadership/decision making, disciplined environment, learning environment, attitude and culture, and school-community relations” (p. 3). The Brief concluded by defining school climate in terms of four aspects of the school environment, “a physical environment that is welcoming and conducive to learning, a social environment that promotes communication and interaction, and an affective environment that promotes a sense of belonging and self-esteem, and an academic environment that promotes learning” (p. 4).

There appears to be a fairly strong overlap between attributes of personalization and those of school climate. The exploration of this possible relationship between these elements relative to the overall impact of advisory was at the heart of this study. It seems reasonable to assume that knowing students well in the personalization realm might relate directly to the faculty/student interactions critical to climate. Student achievement, a flexible learning environment, teachers and students collaborating about academic plans, and the teachers’ recognition and acknowledgement of each student’s academic needs, appear to be factors of paramount importance in both realms. The six components Meloro identified as determining how the environment is personalized appear to align

very succinctly with the feelings, attitude, and overall perception of equity that are critical to climate. Membership, bonding, engagement, and involvement in the personalization category seem to relate directly to climate factors such as overall appearance of the school, teacher/student ratios, welcoming, orderly, and conducive environment, and shared decision making. While personalization and school climate may be distinct entities, it seems likely that they are not discrete, but rather that they interact in ways not yet understood or clarified. This study seeks to take the first steps in unpacking the impact of highly effective advisory groups.

Perspectives on Personalization

Historically, the Coalition of Essential Schools (1984) played a significant role in the effort to personalize public schools and improve school climate. The coalition identified teaching and learning to be a critical factor leading to increased personalization and improved school climate. In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. One of the ten guiding principles promoted dividing large middle level schools into smaller learning communities. Assigning an advisor to each student was espoused as one key strategy to increase personalization and improve school climate in the smaller communities. *Turning Points* (1989) stated:

Every student should be well known by at least one adult. Students should be able to rely on that adult to help learn from their experiences, comprehend physical changes and changing relations with family and peers, act on their behalf to marshal every

school and community resource needed for the student to succeed, and help to fashion a promising vision for the future. (p. 40)

Turning Points further stated:

Among youth at risk from health or behavioral problems, family dysfunction, poverty, or other stresses, the most important school factor fostering resilience-- defined as 'successful adaptation despite risk and adversity' ...- may be the availability of at least one caring adult who functions as a mentor or role model. (p. 143)

As stated earlier, educational leaders have typically fallen short in their efforts to reform the upper secondary schools through strategies to enhance personalization and improve school climate, especially with regard to the implementation of programs like advisory. In fact, increasing personalization as a separate and distinct reform strategy simply has not been a priority among secondary school leaders in the nation. A few short years after the publication of *Turning Points* the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1995) published *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. This work challenged every high school in the nation to be, "much more student-centered, and above all, more personalized in programs, support services, and intellectual rigor" (p. 6). In its section, "School Environment: Creating a Climate Conducive to Teaching and Learning," it recommended that, "every high school student have a personal adult advocate to help him or her personalize the educational experience" (p. 31). The report also said, "the relationship between the student and advocate should ensure no youngster experiences the sense of isolation that frequently engulfs teenagers during this critical period of their lives" (p. 31). Furthermore, Stevenson (1992) stated that the purposes of advisory in the school environment are:

To ensure that each student is known well at school by at least one adult who is that youngster's advocate (the advisor), to guarantee that every student belongs to a peer group, to help every student find ways to be successful, and to promote coordination between home and school. (p. 293)

More recently, organizations such as the Gates and Carnegie Foundations and federal and state grants such as "Project 720" in the state of Pennsylvania have supported programs that embellish and augment the high school environment through the establishment of small learning communities and programs fostering personalization, such as advisory. In fact, advisory programs are seen as one of the key building blocks for creating small learning communities and restructuring schools to ensure each student's success and individual identity.

It is evident however, that little research exists that focuses on the impact of a highly effective advisory program, particularly at the high school level. In one of the very few studies on high school advisory programs, Meloro (2005), studying eleven high schools in Rhode Island, examined the extent to which the school advisory program promoted personalization. Meloro concluded that, "further research is needed to identify the specific attributes of an effective advisory program that facilitate a sense of school belonging among students" (p. 69). She also added that, "future qualitative research would be advantageous comparing schools with different advisory structures and conducting observations of advisory sessions including interviews with advisory teachers" (p. 70). Meloro emphasized that a reexamination of the characteristics leading to effective student/teacher relationships and an identification of the attributes defining an evidence-based advisory program should be the quest of future researchers. That was the

intent of this study -- to explore and identify the characteristics of an effective advisory program relative to its impact on the students and the school.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine highly effective advisory groups. Although abundant research is available relative to the effects of advisory programs in middle level schools, there is a paucity of research that examines such programs at the high school level. For the purposes of this study the term school environment was used interchangeably with school climate and advisory/advocacy was used to refer to the program itself. The overall research question to be addressed in this study was: What is the impact of a highly effective advisory program?

Subsidiary questions include:

- 1) What are the various structural and cultural components of the school advisory program that contribute to its efficacy?
- 2) What content, themes, and activities of the advisory program appear to most strongly contribute to its effectiveness?

This study was limited to exploring the impact of highly effective advisory groups in a large public high school. The intent was not to provide comprehensive data with regard to all aspects of advisory or to survey the efficacy of several advisory programs.

Conceptualizing School Climate and Personalization

As stated previously, a high degree of personalization appears to be a key ingredient contributing to a supportive school climate. While the two concepts, personalization and school climate, appear to have much in common, they also maintain distinct qualities or characteristics that are important in grounding the purpose of this research.

School Climate Defined. Since this study examines effective advisory groups it was first appropriate to conceptualize the terms personalization and school climate. It was logical then to utilize the constructs of school climate as defined by Coker and Borders (2001) as the conceptual framework for this study. Coker and Borders define school climate as, “an atmosphere consisting of positive teacher attitude towards students, sense of community, and teacher praise” (p. 201). They noted that, “school climate is the overall prevailing (e.g. attitude, mood, ambiance, and spirit) conditions and/or circumstances in the school” (p. 201). They described these conditions as, students getting along with their teachers and peers, real school spirit, teachers interested in the students, sense of belonging, and teachers praising the students. Further research revealed additional constructs impacting school climate including attachment to school, bonding, connectedness, and engagement.

School climate condensed, is an all-encompassing term referring to the general atmosphere, feeling tone, and ambiance in the school. It manifests itself through the observed behaviors of the students and staff. The attributes of climate are three-pronged pertaining to the students (attachment to school, bonding, connectedness, engagement),

the staff (positive teacher attitude toward students, teacher praise, teacher interest in students), and the relationship of both to the climate (sense of community, prevailing mood and attitude, sense of belonging, conditions and circumstances) in the school. It is the harmonic interaction the students and staff maintain with the elements of the school environment that formed the conceptual framework for this study.

School climate is, of course, a complex phenomenon, affected by many other factors in the school environment. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the elements listed above served as the defining parameters for the concept.

Personalization Defined. The term personalization is widely utilized in educational jargon today. Without a firm conceptualization of the term however, the meaning is somewhat arbitrary, elusive, and ambiguous. Most educators would agree that personalization reflects the extent to which students feel known, noticed, valued, and cared for in the school environment. Synonymous with these attributes are descriptors including: students' bonding with their teachers and peers, and students' engagement/involvement in the school. Of equal note, are the components of personalization that pertain to the students' academic well-being. These factors include a flexible learning environment, teacher/student collaboration relative to academic planning, and the teachers' recognition of the students' academic needs.

Dyer (1996), as cited in Meloro (2005) defined three critical aspects of personalization, "every student had an adult advocate, every student had a personal academic plan including goals and expectations, and teachers adapted their instruction based on the learning styles of the students" (p. 6). Clarke and Frazer (2003) identified

six categories that characterize personalization including: “recognition, trust, acceptance, confirmation, respect, and relevance” (p. 183). They stated:

Recognition is allowing the student voice to be heard, relevance is the application of learning to real life situations, respect is the opportunity for students to take responsibility for their futures, acceptance is the students’ need for belonging and acceptance for who they are, confirmation is the opportunity for students to test their competence and interests, and trust is the teacher/student interaction that reinforces mutual commitment to school learning. (p. 184)

The literature related to personalization noted recurring themes revolving around school belonging, connectedness, membership, and social support. Meloro (2005) characterized school belonging as, “a term referring to the study of a student’s relationship to school” (p. 7). Such a relationship included: students’ feeling a part of the school, their attitude towards school, teachers caring for the students, students having friends in school, and students’ involvement in extra curricular activities. Three elements that epitomize school connectedness are social bonding (attachment to peers and school personnel), commitment to academic activities, and belief in established norms for school behavior. Meloro (2005) stated that, “school membership involves multiple elements, but the dominant characteristic is the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation” (p. 9). This need to belong is focused on, not just one meaningful relationship, but a number of lasting and positive interpersonal relationships. The students’ feeling of identification with the school appeared to be quite significant. The school identification factor can best be thought of as a triad involving a connection with peers or teachers, a valuing of academic work, and an active participation in school affairs. The final component is

social support. Meloro (2005) identified this attribute as one involving, “the students’ perception of support from teachers, peers, and family relative to the promotion of positive personal development” (p. 10).

Simply stated, the critical measure of personalization resides in the interactions the students and teachers have with each other in the environment in which they exist. The personalization attributes described in this section appear to be, in many ways, consonant with the afore-mentioned climate descriptors. This study proposed to explore the impact of these elements as they were manifested through effective advisory/advocacy groups.

Significance of the Study

This study examined the perceptions of the teachers (advocates), counselors, administrators, and students with regard to the impact of the school’s advocacy program. It was anticipated that this study would reveal pertinent data that would give educational leaders greater insight into the impact an effective advisory program can have on the students in the school and the school itself. Additionally, it identified those structures of advisory that appear to have the most powerful interactions on the stakeholders of the school.

There are few empirical studies focusing on the impact of advisory. There is especially a notable lack of studies that have examined advisory programs at the high school level. Thus, little comprehensive data exist for practitioners interested in

understanding the possible impact of such a program. This study will provide information that will fill this existing void in the current literature.

Meloro's (2005) study examined, "the types of activities in advisory and the teacher and student perceptions of the overall advisory experience as indicated by their attitudes towards advisory, level of participation, and relationship with each other" (p. 25). She examined the, "students' overall sense of school belonging and their feelings of connection with each other and the frequency of the types of advisory activities" (p. 25). This study expands that research by delving more explicitly into the impact of the constructs, activities, and overall structure of the advisory program relative to the teachers', students', and program leaders' perceptions and feelings.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews the literature on advisory programs, school climate, and small schools innovations with specific regard to personalization efforts. The importance of student/teacher and social relationships in the school environment, school climate, and small schools research relative to belongingness, alienation, and the implementation of advisory programs will also be reviewed. The intent is to develop a synthesis of the literature that will provide a fuller understanding of effective advisory programs and their possible relationship to the larger school climate.

The Effectiveness of Advisory

Recent research relative to resiliency supports the concept of personalization in the school through the establishment of an advisory program *Breaking Ranks II* (2004), known as the blueprint for secondary school reform identified “personalizing the school” as one of its three major reform strategies. This strategy suggests the creation of structures such as advisory programs that would:

Reduce student anonymity and increase a sense of belonging, support students transition to high school, meet student’s physical and mental health needs, provide comprehensive academic and behavioral interventions, and ensure that adults serve as student advocates who know their students well enough to nurture the student’s

strengths, interests, talents, and aspirations. (p. 68)

Simply stated, if students feel they are treated fairly and are respected and supported they will inevitably perform better in school. The same holds true if they are known, noticed, and heard in the school. In particular, personalized adult support is found to have a profound impact on the success rate of students in school as well as in life in general. Studies show that the consistent presence and availability of adults who believe in the students is a primary factor in their eventual success in school.

This burgeoning body of research links student success to improved school climate and the healthy development of each individual student (Poliner & Lieber, 2003; Meier, 1998; Educators for Social Responsibility, 2006; Best Practice Briefs, 2004). This research is particularly relevant to those students who find it most challenging to navigate the dominant culture of secondary schools. As Poliner and Lieber (2003) noted:

If we create safe, supportive, respectful learning environments, personalize young people's learning experience, help them develop social and emotional competencies, and provide opportunities to practice these skills, they grow more attached to school, avoid risky behavior, and achieve more academic success. Effective advisory programs meet all of these goals. (p. 7)

There is clear evidence that initiatives affecting school climate and the learning environment with an emphasis on safety, caring, better management and student participation increase student attachment to school (Poliner & Lieber, 2003; Cotton, 2001; Best Practice Briefs, 2004). Research by The National School Boards Association Council of Urban Boards of Education (2006) clearly emphasized that an over-

concentration on test scores and instruction while ignoring school climate factors caused ill effects in the school.

Students cannot learn well and are not likely to behave well in difficult school environments. Good student development and academic learning are inextricably linked to the school environment. School climate is the learning environment created through the interaction of human relationships, physical setting, and psychological atmosphere. Researchers and educators agree that school climate influences students, teachers, and staff members and affects student achievement.

Similarly, students who are more connected to school show notably better success in performance areas such as attendance, graduation rates, and standardized test scores. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1996) surveyed 75,000 students from 127 schools. The findings were concise in that school connectedness is maximized when the school climate meets core adolescent developmental needs. Such needs include activities that provide for autonomy, the promotion of student competence, caring and support from adults, developmentally appropriate supervision, and acceptance by the student's peers. The implication is that meeting the basic needs of young adults is the core for establishing a school climate that fosters student success. The study claimed that students need to first feel safe (both physically and psychologically), feel like they belong, feel respected, and feel cared about in order to be successful in school and feel good about the school environment. One study revealed that when students sense that their teachers care about them and respect them, they will participate more in class and complete more of their homework.

Despite the lack of empirical data, some narrative accounts are available that attest to the effectiveness of advisory programs. Such research includes Espe (1993), and Totten & Nielson (1994) who noted, “improved relationships between students and teachers” (p. 15). Mulhall & Ziegler (1994) noted, “an increased sense of trust and belonging” (p. 42). Simmons and Klarich (1989) noted, “better communication among all members of the school community” (p. 12). MacIver and Epstein (1991) solicited opinions from approximately two thousand principals when they discovered after controlling such variables as family and student background, region, and grade organization, that effective advisory programs in the middle grades reported “stronger overall guidance programs and lower expected drop out rates in high school” (p. 587). Similarly, Simpson and Boriack (1994) found that by working with parents and conducting a daily advisory period the school was able to achieve positive results in chronic absenteeism among a designated population of students exhibiting poor attendance. “Average daily attendance among the students skyrocketed from seventy-six percent in the first twelve weeks to ninety-five percent for the next twenty-four weeks”(p. 10).

The Journal of School Health (2004) findings showed that students who feel connected to school are less inclined to participate in risky behaviors and are more apt to do well academically. They further recommended that schools should ensure that every student have a close relationship with at least one supportive adult. The Wingspread Declaration on School Connections described connectivity in the school as, “the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals” (p. 233).

Simmons and Klarich (1989) compiled research on successful advisory programs and their influence on school climate by stating that:

Students who have learned to cooperate with and care about others help create a pleasant school atmosphere in which everyone feels a sense of security and belonging. The results are increased concern, trust, and better communication among the entire school community. (p. 526)

Mulhall and Ziegler (1994) conducted a three year longitudinal study on a Canadian advisory program. They discovered, “an increase in decision making, an improved sense of belonging to the school, and improvement in teacher-student relations” (p. 42).

Simpson and Boriack’s (1994) study on a special advisory for seventy chronically delinquent students showed “marked decreases in absenteeism during the implementation period” (p. 10). Hagborg and Yalom’s (1993) research discovered that, “group cohesiveness appears to be a crucial feature of the group advisory experience” (p. 50). They added that, “the student’s satisfaction hinged on their attraction to their fellow participants, the perceived usefulness of the meetings, and their comfort at risk taking among their fellow group participants” (p. 50).

Cumulatively, some of the research reveals a clear connection between the effectiveness of advisory and the extent to which teachers and students experience enhanced personalization in a positive and supportive school environment. Additionally, it clearly delineates the importance of increased personalization and a sense of belonging relative to the extent to which students are successful in schools where advisory programs are present. When students feel known, noticed, and valued in the school they perform better, are more likely to succeed, and routinely exhibit more positive behavior.

Undoubtedly, personalized adult support is a key factor having a profound impact on student success. High schools across the nation are, by nature, complex and difficult environments in which adolescents must navigate during a complex and difficult time of their lives. The presence of an advisory program may serve as an effective strategy to break down such complexity and difficulties into understandable and manageable parts.

Conversely, Meloro's (2005) results in a study of how advisory programs in eleven Rhode Island high schools promote personalization demonstrate far less favorable data than the previous studies cited. Although 81% of the teachers surveyed said, "they liked leading an advisory at least some of the time, more than half (59.8%) of them also felt it was a waste of time" (p. 41). A vast majority of teachers (92%) reported their students participated in advisory activities and discussions only some of the time" (p. 41). Similarly unfavorable were her findings that, "68% of the teachers reported that students provided input only some of the time" (p. 41).

Equally disheartening were the student's perceptions relative to their advisory experience. Meloro (2005) discovered that, "59% of the students reported that they either rarely liked or never liked advisory and almost 75% of students reported that at least some of the time advisory was a waste of time" (p. 42). Although females liked advisory more than males, Meloro noted that, "the females rarely to sometimes enjoyed advisory" (p. 42). Ninth graders reported only a moderate increase over the other grade levels relative to their liking of advisory. Additionally, only 58.1% of the students "reported having input in advisory some of the time, 62.5% reported participating in advisory some of the time, and 78.9% reported having the opportunity to share their opinions only some of the time" (Meloro, 2005, p. 42). Of equal concern were Meloro's findings that:

Only 58.1% of students agreed at least a little that they felt comfortable talking to their teachers about academic issues and only 33.4% agreed at least a little feeling comfortable talking to their advisor about problems with families and friends. (p. 43)

Meloro disturbingly reported that, “only 50% of students reported feeling as though their advisor cared about them and made an effort to get to know them” (p. 43). Meloro used the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) and the School Connection Scale (SCS) to evaluate the degree to which students experienced an enhanced sense of school belonging. Whereas “high scores demonstrated that students felt a higher sense of personal acceptance by classmates, comparatively lower scores demonstrated that students felt lower feelings of teacher and student interaction and support, and acceptance and pride in school” (Meloro, 2005, p. 44). While the SCS indicated, “a stronger sense of school belonging and the student’s social and emotional attachment to others in the school”, lower scores were reported in the area of “usefulness of the school in achieving their goals and their views of the teacher’s ability to meet their needs, and the administrators and teachers willingness to hear the student voice” (Meloro, 2005, p. 45). Overall, Meloro reported that, “females had a higher sense of school belonging and had more positive perceptions of advisory than the males” (p. 46). The PSSM showed that, “ethnic majority students reported a higher sense of school belonging than minority students” (p. 61). Overall, it was the students’ perception of the advisory experience that was the most reliable indicator of school belonging.

Hagborg (1995) revealed further negativity from students about their advisory experience in that his studies showed that, “students viewed group advisory with mixed reactions” (p. 50). Hagborg found that, “students often found the discussions superficial,

felt bored, and, at times, found their classmates to be disruptive” (p. 50). He further reported that, “students generally viewed the group advisory program as only somewhat meeting their needs, resulting in only a modest degree of satisfaction” (p. 50). He found that teachers, “had difficulty finding an effective leadership role and they often found themselves delivering a ‘group lesson,’ typical of their classroom teaching style” (p. 50). This then caused the students to feel as though advisory was just another class. Consequently, Hagborg reported that, “student boredom and disruptive behavior resulted in lower student satisfaction” (p. 50). Ultimately, Hagborg found that, “teachers’ enthusiasm declined and they reported feelings of frustration and inadequacy” (p. 50).

Anfara and Brown’s (2001) research revealed that, “teachers noted that advisory periods took on the burden of an additional class preparation, which resulted in few activities being planned for advisory and students being given detention because of misbehavior” (p. 3).

In a study of several Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) schools and schools with Small Learning Communities (SLC’s) in New York and Virginia conducted by Tocci, et al. (2005), the researchers found that, “advisors often expressed frustration with a lack of clarity about the purposes and content for advisory” (p. 10). Tocci also reported that, “teachers (advisors) felt they were being given an additional class to teach, often without the necessary preparation and curriculum” (p. 11). Many advisors expressed angst with regard to advisory feeling like an extra period, therefore making for an exhausting day. Tocci’s et al. report exposed further negativity regarding advisory with teachers reporting “too much autonomy in the advisory curriculum and the need for more standardized curriculum consequently leading to teachers and students feeling it was a

waste of time” (p. 13). One teacher said, “Advisory is very unstructured and the class is very chaotic so the kids don’t listen and nothing gets done” (p. 13). In the absence of a structured curriculum some teachers reported that, “they were running out of ideas” (p. 13). Tocci, et al. (2005) stated that, “one of the commonly observed barriers to student ‘buy in’ for advisory was a lack of student understanding of the scope and content, in that students in some programs had indicated that they were unclear of the purpose of advisory” (p. 13). Tocci, et al. stated that, “being an advisor often meant taking on academic and affective counseling duties that were typically unfamiliar to most teachers and many administrators” (p. 14). Consequently, teachers feeling uncomfortable in this new and challenging role often led to resistance and negativity.

Although advisory can take on different forms and structures, the intent of such a program is unchangeable relative to its purpose to personalize the school environment by connecting adults to students and providing an adult advocate for each child. Of lesser clarity however, is the extent to which advisory programs are effective, particularly at the high school level. Whereas the citations above point to the efficacy of middle level advisory programs, equivalent high school programs are sparse and have revealed conflicting evidence with regard to their desired ends. Even more ambiguous is the impact the advisory program may have on the individual student and on the larger school environment. The research in this regard is sorely lacking and certainly substantiates further exploration to determine the extent to which such a relationship exists or does not exist.

Student-Teacher Relationships and Social Relationships

A growing body of research in adolescent development offers support for the foundational principles of advisory through positive relationships with the psychological characteristics of students, social responses, achievement, and other variables. Linn and Songer (1991) examined the importance of the social context in the life of an adolescent and discovered that its effect has a powerful influence on student learning. They stated that, “the social context gains importance during adolescence in conjunction with increased awareness of social relationships and social influences” (p. 379). Eccles, Lord, and Midley (1995) on middle level advisory programs concluded that:

The decline in student motivation appears to be linked to specific classroom characteristics, such as declines in the quality of the student-teacher relationships and in opportunities for participation in classroom decision making, and in an increase in classroom ability grouping. (p. 539)

They recommended that, “serious efforts be taken to improve, and expand, the nature of student-teacher relationships in schools that serve early adolescents” (p. 539). Similarly, in Arhar and Kromrey’s (1993) research they “emphasized the importance of social bonding for potential drop-outs and other students who have few quality relationships elsewhere” (p. 2). Clearly, advisory programs address the central issue of the paramount importance of connecting students/students and teachers (advisors)/students (advisees). This is accomplished by providing time and a structure through which students and teachers can interact in a small group environment facilitated by a caring adult. Studies

by Midley and Urdan (1995) show that if left unattended “students’ concern about peer pressure, not wanting to appear able, and the resultant self-handicapping strategies, can result in poor academic performance” (p. 389). Evidence is fairly conclusive in that an effective advisory curriculum can positively support student’s achievement and enhance relationships through the acquisition of personal skills such as: self esteem, attitude, behavior, motivation, well-being and interpersonal skills such as peer relationships, belonging, and acceptance. Ayers (1994) pointed out that:

Relationships are the essence of advisory. These relationships connect students to teachers, students to students, and teachers to teachers. They create a controlled, structured group in a warm, caring, friendly environment where teachers relate to students on a variety of levels. These groups offer adolescents safe harbors in a sea of confusion. These relationships are nurtured through a carefully designed program of activities developed around the characteristics and needs of young adolescents. The activities challenge students to think, stretch and grow, but still provide adequate time to relax and reflect. (p. 8)

In fact, Wentzel (1994) noted that, “children’s academic achievement in middle school is related significantly to their levels of emotional distress and self-restraint” (p. 379).

Meloro’s (2005) results demonstrated that, “students’ relationships with their advisory teacher were significantly and positively correlated with all types of advisory activities. She noted that, “the strongest relationship building took place in conjunction with the advocacy and community building activities” (p. 49).

Meier (1998) stated that, “students in large schools, since they usually do not form meaningful relationships with their teachers, are always in danger of ‘falling

through the cracks' of the system" (Cotton, 1996, p. 13). She noted that, "we've cut kids adrift without the support or nurturance of grown-ups, without the surrounding of a community in which they might feel it safe to try out various roles" (Cotton, 1996, p. 13).

School Climate

Typically, advisory is implemented in high schools to address shortfalls in performance such as poor attendance rates, high drop-out rates, and poor academic performance school wide or within aggregate groups, or evidence of high percentages of at-risk behaviors among the student body. MacIver (1990) stated that, "schools serving large numbers of economically disadvantaged students are more likely than other schools to establish group advisory periods that provide social and emotional support for students" (p. 459). Kessler stated in her article, *The Mysteries Program: Educating Adolescents for Today's World*, (1990) "questions of meaning, purpose, and connection are inevitable spiritual questions that require a different modality, a suitable atmosphere for exploration" (p. 4).

Relative to school climate Kessler told her own students that:

We are here to create a place together that is safe enough for you to talk about what really matters to you, about what is close to your heart. To share your curiosity and wonder, your fears and worries, your hurt and confusion, and your excitement and joy. We must all work together to make this place safe. I can't do it alone, nor can a few of you make this happen. If one here is disrespectful, cruel, or indifferent, then it would be foolish for any one of us to share what is in our heart. It is my job as your

teacher and guide to foster and protect the opportunity for the safety of this group.

(p.7)

Even though this passage speaks primarily to the essence of the atmosphere in her classroom, it is also a testimony with regard to that which represents the focus of a school's work through advisory and how that work may positively affect the overall climate of the school. Kessler added that the climate in the school building and classrooms should be, "warm, alive, spontaneous, connected, and compassionate" (p. 10). Each individual student should be viewed as a potential resource for the development of the school community. Findings compiled by Educators for Social Responsibility (2006) stated the following about the school environment and the developmental of each adolescent:

- Meeting student's developmental needs for safety; clear boundaries; belonging and connection, respect and recognition; and acceptance and affirmation of personal and group identity increases their capacity to learn. The school and classroom climate shape how well and how often these developmental needs are met for each student.
- A school's culture will determine whether all, most, some, or only a few students experience a saturation of learning opportunities that meet an adolescent's need for meaningful participation; choice and voice; and personal power and mastery.
- Positive feelings about school and learning and the belief in one's capacity to succeed and harness a student's motivation is at the heart of affective education. Internal motivation is explicitly linked to a student's effort to succeed and achieve in school. (p. 2)

Research from the Adolescent Health Survey (1996) discovered additional facts relative to school climate, concluding that implementing strategies to improve the climate by enhancing student connectedness to school and increasing student achievement also decreases high risk behaviors among students. The results further indicated that, “adolescent’s sense of connectedness to school is the ‘single most’ important factor associated with significantly lower rates of emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, violence, substance abuse and sexual activity” (p. 7). In further studies of one hundred and sixty five prevention programs findings revealed that, “initiatives creating a more positive environment (climate) decreased the prevalence of delinquency, alcohol and drug use, drop out and non-attendance rates, and behavior problems”(p. 7). Poliner and Lieber (2003) summarized their research stating:

Advisory programs promote healthy student development, support academic success, and provide multiple opportunities to bridge the divide between healthy development and academic success. They help ensure that all young people have an adult who knows them well. Advisory helps create stronger bonds among young people, usually cutting across the typical exclusionary social groups that form in schools. It is the “safe container” for discussing adolescent concerns and provides an ideal setting to teach and practice important life skills. Advisory encourages student voice on school-wide issues. Finally, it establishes a forum for academic, college and career coaching, and advisement that cuts across subject areas. In short, advisory programs encourage both student achievement and healthy development directly through instruction, coaching, and monitoring; and indirectly through increasing attachment to school. (p. 7)

Small Schools and Advisory

A positive school climate and an environment in which students feel empowered, connected, and involved (often found in small school structures), tend to affect student attitudes toward school. The small school movement in this country has encouraged the downsizing and personalization of America's large comprehensive high schools and the accompanying research on small schools and/or "schools within a school" demonstrates improvement in areas such as "attitude towards school in general and towards particular subjects" (Gregory & Smith, 1987, pp. 68-85). This research also showed lower incidents of negative social behavior.

Comparatively speaking, students from small school environments "fight less, feel safer, come to school more frequently, and most importantly report being more attached to their school" (Gottfredson, 1985, p. 13). Research is also concise in presenting clear data revealing the fact that anonymity in large high schools breeds not only contempt and anger, but also physical danger. Advisory is a structure and a set of practices used in the school environment to support student development and the mission of small schools. Educators for Social Responsibility (2006) a consulting and research firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts., identified the following as the purposes for establishing an advisory program in small or large schools:

- All students are attached to an adult advisor/mentor/advocate who supports their learning and healthy development with the goals of increasing academic achievement and developing the skills, habits, and attitudes that lead to success

in school and success in life.

- The structure of advisory ensures equity and access to important youth development opportunities and supports for all students, especially related to academic advisement and college and career readiness.
- The structure of advisory provides a manageable system for tracking and monitoring each student's progress and participation in school life.
- The structure of advisory enables the school to communicate important information to all students or students within specific grade levels.
- The structure of advisory enables students to have a voice and a forum in which to discuss and address issues of school life and issues that matter to them.
- The practices of advisory provide personalized, on-going adult support for each student as they progress through high school and develop and complete their personal learning and post-secondary plans and products.
- The practices of advisory ensure that students engage in regular one-to-one conferencing with their advisors.
- The practices, routines, and rituals of advisory enable a smaller group of students to build a cohesive community of peers who can discuss issues civilly, problem solve effectively, have fun together, and support each other. (p. 2)

Small Schools - Belongingness/Alienation

Researchers often describe the degree to which students experience a sense of belonging in their school as a direct result of smaller school environments. It comes as no surprise then that school size, and the extent to which the school focuses on personalization, has a significant effect on the student's sense of belonging. This is often expressed in terms of a lower level of alienation. According to Lieber (2006), "underachieving, underserved adolescents who perceive school as a hostile, alienating, unsupportive place are least likely to benefit from changes that focus exclusively on instruction" (p. 1). "Feeling alienated from one's school environment is both a negative thing in itself and is often found in connection with other undesirable outcomes" (Cotton, 1996, p. 13). Cotton concluded that:

In a small school, each student can be known and valued. No one gets lost in the crowd. All the adults in the school can know all the students. Small schools can be more flexible in response to individual students and their circumstances. Students have better attitudes when the school is personalized, when all can take part in activities, and when everyone knows their actions will be noticed. (p. 13)

Such benefits of a smaller school environment coincide with the aims of advisory where ideally, students can best become known, noticed, and individual needs can be better met. In such schools, relationships developed between students and teachers positively influence the students' post-high school choices, particularly relative to college attendance.

Those students who are not the star athletes or among the academic elite often struggle to fit in with any positive community in the school culture. Consequently, as a means of social survival, they divert to establishing their own community often directed towards negative ends. Meier (1998) as cited in Cotton (1996), noted that, “very few of these groups regard adults as a significant part of their subculture, and thus a majority of students find themselves in peer groups which are disconnected from the culture that schools are designed to impart” (p. 13).

Small schools are successful in integrating the students into a positive, learning-based culture. “Teachers are able to influence students in such environments, as both teachers and students feel themselves to belong to the same community: the school itself, the sense of intimacy, community, belonging, and common purpose which small schools often impart” (p. 13). Klonsky and Klonsky (1999), in reference to the newly formed Chicago small schools, noted that:

Each teacher has a commitment to knowing each student as an individual and every student is known well by more than one adult in the school and they have an advisor/advocate who works closely with them and their family to plan a personalized program. (p. 38)

Summary

A summary of the aforementioned literature presents convincing evidence with regard to the effectiveness of advisory at the middle level. Elements of school climate, including but not limited to; attachment to school, connectedness, sense of belonging,

student relationships with teachers and peers, decrease in school violence, involvement in school activities, academic achievement, interest in school, and overall attitude towards school were positively impacted by the inclusion of an advisory program. The literature on advisory programs is abundant with regard to implementation in middle level schools. The plethora of information available to these educators has strengthened the knowledge base of those desiring to sustain or implement an advisory program.

Of far less abundance however, and having much more conflicting results, is the research available on the use and effectiveness of an advisory program in high schools. Meloro and Tocci's et al. research, which is the most recent of its kind, demonstrated less than favorable data, or unclear evidence, relative to the effect of advisory in the high school environment. It is evident more research must be conducted to gain additional insight on this topic.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3

Advisory programs (also called advisor/advisee or advocacy) are predicated on the belief that every young adolescent should have at least one adult at school to act as his/her advocate. Advisory serves as a safe place that can strengthen students' attachment to school life and strengthen peer relationships and a sense of group identity. The consistent presence and availability of adults who believe in students – who listen, empathize, encourage, push, and probe is a primary factor in positively affecting students' lives and their performance at school. The use of advisory is widely considered one of the most effective strategies employed in schools to enhance student connectedness. The overall research question to be addressed in this study is: What is the impact of an effective advisory program?

Subsidiary questions include:

- 1) What are the various structural and cultural components of the school's advisory program that contribute to its efficacy?
- 2) What content, themes, and activities of the advisory program appear to most strongly contribute to its effectiveness?

The Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

The research problem encompassed in this study clearly dictates a research design that is holistic, descriptive, exploratory, and inquiry-based such as that typified by a

qualitative study. The research questions employed are stated as what questions, and as a result, give credence to an inductive approach involving three major forms of research: observations, interviews, and document analysis. It was the intent of the researcher to develop a rich and elaborate description as to the impact of an effective advisory program. Owens (1982) said, “the qualitative nature of the resulting description enables the investigator to see the ‘real’ world as those who are under study see it” (p. 7). Creswell (2003) noted that, “qualitative research takes place in the natural setting, it uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, and it is emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (p. 181).

This study involved extensive field work and interaction with the participants to ascertain their views on the impact of the program, yet another rationale for qualitative strategies. Rist (1982) clarified the purpose of field study as, “observing and participating in the natural events of daily life and the settings in which they occur” (p. 442). The researcher collected copious field notes, described by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) as, “observations of what occurs while the researcher is in the field” (p. 348). The field work demands that “researchers record the phenomena salient to the foreshadowed problems, their broader conceptual frameworks, and the contextual features of the interactions” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006, p. 348). Merriam (2002) stated that, “qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (p. 5). She said, “a second characteristic of all forms of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (p. 5). This study involved the researcher as the primary data retriever. The researcher delved into the natural setting of

the school where advisory functioned on a weekly basis with the intent of capturing a plethora of vital information from the participants. Little empirical research has been levied with regard to the impact of advisory, which in turn, substantiates further inductive study to identify such structures, characteristics, activities and content. The intent of this study was to immerse the researcher into the school setting to observe and collect descriptive data from the participants that would illuminate the components of advisory that contribute most consistently to its effectiveness. A qualitative approach is appropriate and essential as a means to achieve these ends

Justification for Research Design

The research design best suited for this study is the single intensive case study. The problem under examination in this study was to explore the impact of an exemplary advisory program and to identify what components, structures, and activities contribute to its efficacy. Yin (2003), noted to be an expert on case studies, clearly delineates the case study as one of the most challenging research strategies. He clarified its purpose when he stated that, “the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (p. 1). Yin further stated that, “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2). Yin argued that the case study has more far-reaching effects than to be just exploratory in nature, rather it offers a very rich and extensive explanatory and descriptive component as well. “The research questions in a case study framed as, “what”, “where”, “how”, and “why” determine the relevant

research strategy to be used” (Tellis, 1997, p. 7). Pertinent to this study Yin (2003) purported that, “‘what’ questions may either be exploratory, in which any qualitative strategies could be used, or about prevalence, in which surveys or the analysis of archival records could be favored” (p. 7). In this study the researcher relied on multiple sources of evidence and information, triangulating the data in an organized and descriptive manner. The content of the research questions encompassed in this study align harmoniously with the strategies of a single case study. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), this approach seeks to describe the entity in depth. Merriam (2002) stated that, “the unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study” (p. 8). The researcher in this case conducted a basic interpretive qualitative study defined by Merriam (2002, p. 6) as, “an understanding of how participants make meaning of a situation”, and by Creswell (2003, p. 15) as, “exploring the depth of a program, an event, an activity or a process of one or more individuals”. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) reiterate the same intent for the case study when they stated, “a case study examines a bounded system, or a case, over time in detail, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting” (p. 26). It is these specific strategies that gave credence to the researcher utilizing this technique for the purposes of this study.

Site Selection and Access

The major emphasis inherent in this study focused on the examination of high performing advisory groups, but it also honed in on the very nature of advisory relative to what elements or components contribute most significantly to its efficacy. Site selection

was essential in that the researcher identified a high school in the state of Pennsylvania known for its excellence in implementing and sustaining an effective advisory program, an exemplary model. As Yin (1984) stated, one of the rationales for the single case study as an appropriate design is “where the case represents an extreme or unique case” (p. 7).

Initial efforts involved a cover letter to the principals “(See Appendix A)” and a detailed screening and survey “(See Appendix B)” of several high school advisory programs statewide. The survey assessed the principal’s evaluation of the school’s advisory program in the following areas, the overall effectiveness, students’ sense of belonging and students’ sense of identity, school climate, student engagement, teacher/student relationships, students’ cooperation and citizenship, students’ sense of worth, the perceived student and teacher support for advisory, and the prevailing ambiance, attitude, mood, and spirit in the school. The survey was created by the researcher with the assistance of the Survey Research Center at the Pennsylvania State University “(See Appendix B).” The Office of Research and Protection at the institution approved the study for compliance to undergo research on human subjects. In addition, the researcher retrieved informal recommendations from other educational leaders in the state and ultimately made site visits to two elite programs prior to selecting the final site. Site selection was also based on the school’s reputation for excellence and its numerous meritorious commendations in recognition of their outstanding advocacy program.

Once the best possible site was selected the researcher immersed himself in the context of the school to conduct extensive interviews and observations with the faculty, administration, and students. The researcher reviewed any pertinent documents and activity plans that helped unveil the essence of the program. It was this very process

accomplished through the case study that unequivocally answered the research questions vital to this study relative to not only the overall effectiveness of the advisory program, but the identification of the structural and contextual elements of advisory related to its efficacy.

Site selection for this study was of paramount importance. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2006), “choosing a site is a negotiation process to obtain freedom of access to a site that is suitable for the research and feasible for the researcher’s resources of time, mobility, and skills” (p. 342). They explained that:

Gaining entry into the field requires establishing good relations with all individuals at the research site. Research permission comes without a guarantee that the participants will behave naturally before an outsider who takes field notes or that the participants will share their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings with the observer. (p. 343)

The researcher gained entry into the site by obtaining permission from the building principal and program coordinator. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) emphasized the importance of establishing trust when they claimed that, “the inquirer’s skill is reflected in whether the participants see the researcher as an interested, respectful, nonjudgmental observer who maintains confidentiality or whether as a rude, disruptive, critical observer who cannot be trusted” (p. 343). They continued by pointing out that, “the researcher must attend to maintaining the trust and confidentiality of the participants constantly throughout the data collection period” (p. 343).

Research Strategies/Instrumentation

Philliber, Schwab, and Samsloss (1980) defined good research design as a, “blueprint dealing with at least four problems: what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyze the results” (Yin, 2003, p. 21). Creswell (2003) identified one strategy as, “that involving visiting a site and observing the behavior of the individuals” (p. 17). He also posited that, “the researcher may collect information in advance of the study or allow it to emerge from the participants in the project” (p. 17). In this case study, the researcher employed both strategies through the collection of initial survey information and subsequently through the site interviews, observations, and artifact analysis. These mechanisms illuminated the emerging data that reflect the thoughts and opinions of the participants.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher for this study is a high school principal at a large suburban high school in central Pennsylvania and has accumulated thirty years as a professional in the field of education, which includes eleven years as a teacher and nineteen years as an administrator. He has an enduring interest in school reform initiatives related to school climate, teacher-student relationships, and student advocacy. He has experience with major school reform strategies including: block scheduling, Small Learning Communities, advisory programs, and a host of instructional strategies including but not limited to: mastery learning, cooperative learning, and performance-based assessments.

In a previous administrative assignment he was successful in restructuring the school day to maximize teacher/student contact time while also redistributing student academic responsibilities proportionately to decrease student stress and anxiety. His long-time interest in student advisory programs stems from his own quest to eliminate the anonymity and seclusion some students experience in the traditional large public high school. This interest combined with his experience as a change agent led him to the eventual implementation of an advisory program in his present school. Although the school was unsuccessful in sustaining the program beyond the first year, he continues to be passionate about the potential benefits of an advisory program.

The researcher networked with several principals statewide and assessed the extent to which the advisory program was functional in their school. Following these preliminary conversations, the principals of the schools received, and were invited to complete, a detailed survey centered on the factors of school climate outlined in the conceptual framework. The researcher compiled and collated data from the surveys and selected a site that represented the epitome of an ideal advisory program. The researcher then contacted the principal to secure approval for the intensive case study. Field research at the site was conducted periodically for approximately two months for the purposes of participant interviews and observations. Thoughts and opinions were gathered from a variety of participants in order to corroborate field notes and observations for accuracy and confirmation.

Creswell (2003) stated that, “inquirers explicitly identify their biases, values, and personal interests about their research topic and process” (p. 184). Stake (1995) claimed

that, “the researcher is forced to make role choices” (p. 102). In this study the researcher assumed the role of a constructivist. According to Stake (1995):

A constructivist view encourages the researcher to provide good raw material for their own generalizing. The emphasis is on a description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events, and people, not only commonplace descriptions but ‘thick descriptions’, the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case. (p. 102)

In this study, the researcher was the sole interviewer and observer and performed all interviews and conducted all observations on site.

Data Collection Techniques

Wolcott (1978) explicitly stated that, “the fieldworker’s essential research instrument has always been himself” (p. 6). He believes that the researcher’s primary responsibility is to walk in the participant’s shoes and tell it like it is while investigating actions and beliefs on a variety of categorical themes and behaviors. Creswell (2003) stated that, “data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured (or semi-structured) observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (p. 185). He also said, “qualitative research typically involves four types of data collection: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials” (p. 185). This study utilized the first three strategies as valid techniques to gather information and to support a qualitative approach. The observations provided firsthand experience with

the participants in the school setting and provided for the recording of information as it was revealed. Creswell (2003) stated that, “interviews are useful when participants cannot be observed directly and when they can provide historical information” (p. 186). Furthermore, the researcher is better able to control the line of questioning in the interview setting.

Upon securing permission from the principal the researcher requested assistance from the program coordinator to identify the high performing advocacy groups in the school. The researcher and program coordinator then cooperatively agreed upon five teachers/advocates to participate in the interviews and observations. Creswell (2003) stated that, “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (p. 185). The principal, counselors, the program coordinator, and students representing a cross section of the school community were interviewed. Creswell stated that, “interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 188). In addition to the interviews, the researcher conducted observations in the advocacy groups of the interview participants during the advisory/advocacy sessions. Creswell declared that, “observation is when the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site” (p. 185). He also stated that, “in these field notes, the researcher records, in an unstructured or semi-structured way, activities at the research site” (p. 188). Lastly, document analysis was incorporated into this case study when the review of such documents produced useful and relevant information.

Interviews

This study utilized face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sampling (composed of five teachers, twenty-five students, six counselors, the principal, and the program coordinator) that enabled the researcher to interact with the interviewees to corroborate information previously gathered through the use of the principal survey. The teacher and student interviewees were preselected by the program coordinator. One teacher who was thought to be highly effective in their role as advocate was selected from each of the participating small learning communities in the school. The student interviewees were then selected from the groups facilitated by the effective advocates. The interviews served as the primary and essential source of data collection. The interview protocol consisted of a combination of open-ended questions “(See Appendix C)”. Topics were outlined in advance and the researcher decided the sequence and wording of the questions during the interview. The sequence of questioning and probing guided the interviewee through the interview in a fluid manner. The open-ended questions allowed the researcher and the interviewee to engage in a guided conversation. The stream of questioning was fluid and the questions were asked in an unbiased manner. The approximate duration of each interview was approximately thirty five minutes. All student interviews were conducted in focus groups composed of four to seven students. Field notes were taken from the recorded interviews and coded for easy transcription. McMillian and Schumacher (2006) stated that, “qualitative field observations are detailed descriptive recordings, presented as field notes, of events, people, actions, and objects in the natural setting” (p. 359). Yin (2003) said, “the interview is one of the most important

and essential sources of case study information” (p. 89). Yin contended that, “the interviews will appear to be guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 89). Following each interview an interview elaboration was completed by the researcher that entailed the interviewee’s comments, extensions of interview meanings, and any additional information pertinent to the problem questions.

Document Analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) stated that, “collecting and analyzing artifacts requires the use of these five strategies: location of artifacts, identification of artifacts, analysis of artifacts, criticism of artifacts, and the interpretation of artifact meanings” (p. 358). Document analysis allowed the researcher to obtain language, curriculum, activity plans, and objectives for the advisory program. Such documents included lesson plans, activity plans, and anecdotal notes as well as official documents (memos, meeting minutes, etc.). Particularly relevant to this study was compilation and review of not only the documents associated with the actual activities and content conducted in advisory, but also notebooks or handbooks that would otherwise provide an overview of the mission, goals, and objectives of the program. Yin claimed that, “when relevant, the artifacts can be an important component in the overall case study” (p. 96). According to Yin (2003):

A final source of evidence is a physical or cultural artifact – a technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence.

Such artifacts may be collected or observed as part of a field visit and have been used extensively in anthropological research. (p. 96)

All documents will be maintained in a notebook and kept secure in the researcher's possession.

Observations

Yin (2003) reported that observations are an essential component of the case study research. He said, "the observations can range from formal to casual data collection activities" (p. 92). In this study the researcher had ample opportunity to visit and observe the advisory sessions as they occur in the school setting. The researcher will assume the role of what Creswell (2003) described as the "complete observer: researcher observers without participating" (p. 186). Observations of teacher/student interactions during advisory and non-advisory time also proved to be beneficial. The observations in this study consisted of the researcher participating as an observer in the advisory sessions at the site. A minimum of three observations were employed involving different advisory groups. The duration of the observations was forty eight minutes. Each observation included examining the behavior of the advisor/advocate and students noting the interactions that occur, and an observation and analysis of the content and themes included in each session.

Stake (1995) said, "during observation, the qualitative case study researcher keeps a good record of events to provide a relatively incontestable description for further analysis and ultimate reporting" (p. 62). Detailed record keeping was maintained on a daily basis during observation periods to code all responses from the participants in a categorical and comprehensible manner.

Data Analysis Techniques

Bachor (2000) said, “there is one fundamental requirement placed on a researcher when reporting case studies; that is, to conduct the case study in such a way that the results can be communicated to the reader” (p. 3). The narrative is a highly readable story that integrates and summarizes key information around the focus of the case study. According to Yin (2003), “high quality analysis is characterized by relying on all relevant evidence, including all major rival interpretations, addressing the most significant aspect of the case study, and incorporating prior and expert knowledge to the study” (p. 41). The researcher must take care in the design and execution of case study research so that the analysis is robust and the audience will have confidence in the results and conclusions. Yin (2003) claimed that, “the best preparation for conducting case study analysis is to have a general analytic strategy” (p. 115). Due to the nature of this study the researcher used a strategy Yin called “developing a case description” (p. 114). Yin identified several strategies to use in case study data analysis, one of which is “explanation building” (p. 120). Simply stated, Yin defined this strategy as, “analyzing the case study data by ‘building an explanation about the case’” (p. 120). Merriam (2002) noted, “data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection” (p. 14). Merriam claimed:

One begins analyzing data with the first interview, the first observation, and the first document accessed in the study. Simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of

redirecting data collection, and to 'test' emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data. (p .14)

Firestone (1987) claimed that, "rich description persuades by showing that the researcher was immersed in the setting thus giving the reader enough detail to 'make sense' of the situation" (p .16).

The following strategies were employed in order to maximize quality data analysis: all data collected through various instruments were included in the data analysis, varied interpretations emerging from the data were included in the findings, and the research questions drove the data analysis. Examination of data from face-to-face interviews allowed for the selection of key words, thoughts, and themes from the original texts relating to the research questions. The key words and phrases were coded into categories or themes. In order to address the research questions, data matrices were utilized in the data analysis process to decipher repeating patterns and themes. A matrix design is a creative, imaginative, and systemic task that researchers use to make sense of the database. Miles and Huberman (1994) said, "the question is not whether the researcher is building the right matrix, but rather that it is meaningful and constructive in developing reasonable and sustained answers to the questions being addressed" (p. 21).

There is no right or wrong way for constructing a matrix design.

Given the magnitude of this study data sorting was essential. Miles (1979) stated that, "data reduction is a form of preliminary analysis, which refines, iterates, and revises frameworks, suggests new leads for further data collection, and makes data more available for final assembly into the case studies" (p. 593). A coding system was utilized that enabled the researcher to effectively maintain and analyze relevant information. This

provided for effective references to common themes and patterns of interest. The ongoing iterative nature of qualitative research was utilized by maintaining a consistent focus on theme-building and analysis throughout the data collection and data analysis stages. Howe and Eisenhart (1990) added that, “to establish coherence, data analysis must be driven by the research questions” (p. 3). In this study the research questions were coherently linked to the conceptual framework and the researcher incorporated them in tandem to solidify the presentation of the data.

In summary, a quality data analysis was achieved through blending all the data into themes. Data reduction was accomplished by maintaining a focus on the research questions and conceptual framework, and employing the intuitive skills, experience, and knowledge base of the researcher in the process of data collection.

Reliability and Validity

The researcher in a qualitative study is seeking to make sense of the massive information collected during the data gathering and analysis periods. The researcher also seeks to conclude the study with credible and understandable information in a written report. Firestone (1987) stated that, “the classical strength of qualitative methods is concrete depictions of detail” (p. 20). In a qualitative study, credibility is synonymous with validity. Yin (2003) grouped the criteria into four categories which included “trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability, and data dependability” (p. 32). Yin identified and categorized four tests upon which empirical social research could be adjudicated:

- Construct validity: establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied;
- Internal validity: establishing a casual relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships;
- External validity: establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized; and
- Reliability: demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results. (p. 34)

In this study external validity and reliability were of paramount importance. Yin (2003) stated that, “critics typically state that single cases offer a poor basis for generalization” (p. 37). Throughout this study the researcher used “analytic generalization” which Yin referred to as, “making inferences about a population on the basis of empirical data collected about a sample” (p. 32).

Yin (2003) referred to reliability as, “the objective that if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same case study all over again, the later investigator would arrive at the same findings and conclusions” (p. 37). To enhance the degree of reliability the researcher developed a case study database inclusive of notes, transcriptions, and various documents. The use of the database will enable future researchers to refer to a bank of information linked to data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation rendered in the researcher's final report.

Owens (1982) referred to six techniques essential to qualitative research that will ultimately provide for maximum credibility. They are: prolonged data collection on site, triangulation, member checks, development of a thick description, engagement in peer

consultation, and the collection of reference materials. All of these methods were used in order to achieve optimal credibility.

Data collection on site occurred periodically over a two month period. All data collection occurred at the school site. The taping and transcribing of interviews allowed the researcher to review the interviews as necessary to develop rich, accurate, and detailed descriptions of the participant's comments. In the compilation of the written report the researcher conducted member checks to ascertain the accuracy in which the investigator reflected each participant's thoughts.

Tellis (1997) declared, "the need for triangulation in a case study arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes" (p. 2). Triangulation was executed by cross-checking the data collected with the interviewees in order to verify authenticity and accuracy. It was essential to use multiple sources of data to provide accurate descriptions that will endure future critique. Wolcott (1987) reported that, "the strength of fieldwork lies in its 'triangulation', obtaining information in many ways rather than relying solely on one method" (p. 110). In this study, triangulation was achieved through cross-referencing data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis. The researcher utilized peer consultation through a doctoral oversight committee that provided guidance and consultation to the researcher in on-going efforts to adhere to strategies and techniques targeted towards valid research.

Limitations

The advantages of the case study method are its applicability to real-life, contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports. “Case studies also appeal to people because they have what might be termed ‘face-value’ credibility” (Bachor, 2000, p. 3). However, Tellis (1997) stated that, “the case study methodology has been subjected to scrutiny and criticism at various times since the 1930’s” (p. 15). Therefore, the limitations of this study are not unlike those of most qualitative case studies. First, retrievability, accessibility, and availability of various documents could be problematic. Second, the interviews (Yin, 2003) could be, “biased due to poorly constructed questions, inaccurate due to poor recall, and subject to reflexivity where the interviewee says what the interviewer wants to hear” (p. 86). Third, the observations have three weaknesses (Yin, 2003), “they are time consuming, they require many hours by the human observer, and they sometimes proceed differently because the event or participants are being observed” (p. 86). The researcher’s ability to commit extended hours conducting research at the site might be a possible limitation. “Fourth, the reader is faced with the task of interpreting the results of published case studies, which can be problematic in part because of the different assumptions that can be brought to case studies” (Bachor, 2000, p. 3). Bachor said, “the most notable source of variability is found in the methods that are used to select, present, and then report evidence” (p. 3). The researcher made every effort to commit the necessary time to conducting interviews utilizing well crafted questions at the research site thus providing for valid evidence substantiating the impact of the school’s advisory program.

Lastly, it is not the intent of the researcher to generalize the findings from this study to all high school advisory programs. Kennedy (1997) stated that, “clearly a study of a single case with no replication limits both the strength and the range of generalized arguments considerably” (p. 12). Nevertheless, it was the hope of the researcher to portray the findings in such a manner that allows educational leaders and educators from advisory schools, or those considering advisory, to internalize and utilize this data to increase their understanding of advisory programs.

The researcher in this study has a vested interest in the development of advisory programs at the high school level. Nonetheless, every effort was made to assure the reader that a non-biased approach was employed through the aforementioned research strategies.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine high performing advisory/advocacy groups. The two subsidiary research questions for this study were as follows:

- 1) What are the various structural and cultural components of the school advisory program that contribute to its efficacy?
- 2) What content, themes, and activities of the advisory program appear to most strongly contribute to its effectiveness?

To address the questions data were gathered from numerous sources including teachers, counselors, students, the advocacy program coordinator, and the building principal.

Observations were conducted during the advocacy group meetings and documents pertaining to lesson plans and activities for advocacy groups were also analyzed.

The site for this case study was a large suburban public high school northwest of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school housed approximately 1950 students grades nine through twelve in a single building complex. The principal was a veteran administrator in the district who had previously served as a middle school principal prior to being transferred to the high school. He was well respected in the district with an outstanding reputation and a proven record for successfully enacting school reform. The principal described the school population as diverse including 38.6% White, 47.9% Black, 11.3% Hispanic, and 2.1% Asian. Accompanying the diversity element was the fact that 43.9% of the students were on free and reduced lunch.

Prior to their reform efforts the school experienced problems with student achievement and a myriad of climate issues. The most notable of these was the gap in

student achievement separating the Caucasian and Asian population from all other ethnicities. Not long after his appointment the principal declared that, “such a gap in achievement could no longer be justified and change was inevitable.” Additionally, relationships between teachers and students and the students themselves were also a concern. These issues substantiated a systemic reform effort to rebuild the academic and social conditions in the school to better ensure the success of each adolescent.

As the school explored possible reform strategies they were fortunate to be selected by the Panasonic Foundation in 2004 as a pilot school for reform. Rather than awarding grants, the Panasonic Foundation forms long term partnerships with public school districts to restructure their educational systems. Such partnerships assumed the form of seminars, consultations, and special teams of all stakeholders of the school striving to design and construct a renewed culture in the school, one that cultivated relationships and high levels of student achievement, regardless of the students’ background. The mission statement for the Foundation stated that its goal was to partner with public school districts and their communities to break the link between race, poverty, and educational outcomes by improving the academic and social skills of all students. The Foundation embarked upon ongoing efforts with the site school through their model called Essential School System Purpose and Responsibilities Protocol. It was the hope of the Foundation that the Protocol would be used continuously to interrogate the gap between the current performance of the school and the school’s eventual long range performance goals. The Panasonic Foundation also embedded eight responsibilities for school leaders within its strategies:

To clarify and promote the core value that all students can and will learn at high levels.

To ensure a culture and climate of care, commitment, and continuous improvement.

To establish and promote rigorous learning standards for all students based on the core value of ALL MEANS ALL.

To establish clear and rigorous expectations for, and to monitor the performance of, all system personnel toward all students achieving rigorous learning standards.

To ensure that all system personnel have the ongoing professional learning necessary to meet the high performance expectations.

To ensure that fiscal and other resources are provided to all schools so that they have what they need to help all students achieve standards.

To implement a shared-accountability system that holds students, staff, and the system itself accountable for all students meeting rigorous standards.

To engage in advocacy, coalitions, and other significant relationships at the local, state, and national levels so that the system can achieve All MEANS All. (1987, p. 1)

The advocacy program coordinator said that, “something radically different had to happen because various measurements of achievement told us that many of our students were not experiencing success.” Such indicators included standardized testing results, subject area grade distributions, and state/local assessment data which revealed

that less than 50% of the student population scored at or above proficient in reading and math on the Pennsylvania State School Assessment (PSSA). The Foundation also performed a needs assessment in the school which identified achievement inequalities among various populations of the school. Unfortunately, after several attempts the researcher was unable to retrieve the needs assessment data from school officials. The Foundation subsequently recommended ten goals for school reform aligned primarily with the mission of the Foundation. In the spring of 2004 the faculty and staff agreed upon and accepted these goals as the thrust of their reform efforts for the years ahead.

To compliment their work with the Panasonic Foundation in 2004 - 2005, the high school also embarked upon a relationship with “First Things First”, a sister organization of the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE). First Things First (FTF) had one goal as its framework for reform - to help students at all academic levels gain the skills to succeed in post-secondary education and obtain good jobs. FTF schools had to commit to a three-pronged reform program: strengthening relationships among students and adults; improving engagement, alignment, and rigor of teaching and learning in every classroom every day; and allocating resources (budget, time, space, and staff) to achieve the first two goals. Additionally, schools partnering with FTF used three reform strategies focused on: implementing small learning communities, initiating a family advocacy system, and improving instruction. The FTF framework was grounded in research about how young people develop and how schools promote students’ engagement and learning.

With the support of the Panasonic Foundation, First Things First (IRRE), and Pennsylvania Project 720 high school reform funds, staff members began reform efforts

during the 2004-2005 school year by implementing several changes in the structure of the school. During the 2005-2006 school year they implemented block scheduling, small learning communities, and a family advocacy program. These reform efforts changed the entire complexion of the school environment. A rotating block schedule was implemented that allowed for more concentrated time on task and fewer class changes during the day. The family advocacy program initiated in October of 2005, connected all students to one adult and established multi-grade level peers through the advocacy structure.

Additionally, the school embraced the concept of small learning communities (SLC) by establishing six smaller theme-based schools within the large school: Business and Finance, Law and Justice, Engineering and Technology, Health Sciences, Performing Arts, and Visual Arts. SLC's cluster small groups of students into broad interest-based units or schools. The intent was to downsize the large school into manageable, organized small learning communities designed to provide a "home base" where every student could feel more connected to the school. The advocacy groups, as previously described in this study, were embedded in each SLC and were comprised of students from that specific learning community. The commonality between the goals of the three reform streams - Panasonic Foundation, IRRE/FTF, and Project 720 - acted as a catalyst for personalizing the school environment by creating a smaller, nurturing, supportive, and academically challenging climate that promoted the students' sense of belonging and connectedness to the school. Through their multi-pronged restructuring efforts, the school strove to achieve an equal emphasis on relationships, student advocacy, and student achievement.

The data show that the high performing advocacy groups had a positive effect on the students. In a 2006 – 2007 teacher survey on the advocacy program only seventeen out of ninety respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program had a positive impact on the students. Relative to the overall research question for this study the data fell into five major impact areas: relationship building (teachers/students and students/students), academic support/college preparation, meeting students' needs, student identity/sense of belongingness/ and connectedness to the school, and liaison to the family.

The Advocacy Session

It is appropriate to provide a rich description of the advisory/advocacy session. In the school under study the advocacy program met once per week for approximately fifty minutes. The teacher/student ratio was no greater than 18:1. Typically one advocate facilitated one advocacy group, however groups would sometimes combine so that two advocates would facilitate a combined group. The teacher/advocate was to follow a prescribed curriculum and agenda for the day, but the highly effective advocates would augment the scripted plan with their original activities. The arrangement of the students in the room varied from having students sit in rows to having students gather in circles or in small clumps depending on the planned activity. The effective advocates were highly engaged with their students from the time the students entered the room. The interaction between the advocate and the students was spontaneous, continual, and genuine. It appeared as though the effective advocates valued every second they had with their

students. Regardless of the activity the advocates circulated about the room and used proximity to engage the students and cultivate relationships. Similarly, the students interacted formally and informally with their advocate and each other continuously throughout the period.

One session was devoted primarily to the advocate asking her advocacy group why they chose their particular small learning community. The advocate asked each student to reflect on that prompt. The general topic for the session was careers. Each student was called upon and the student responses varied. One student said her interest was “in starting their own business”, another responded, “sports marketing.” Following each student response the advocate probed for more information by asking questions and encouraging each student to elaborate on their response. This also allowed the advocate to build individual relationships by interacting with each student. The students interacted with each other as they listened respectfully to the responses and made comments about the various careers mentioned.

This activity was promptly followed by a non-scripted activity designed by the advocate that involved asking every student about their plans for the Thanksgiving holiday. Although a seemingly benign, the students loved this activity and they really enjoyed talking about their holiday plans. Again the format for discussion was a “round robin” strategy that allowed for each student’s participation. Students were very frank and open with their advocate including statements such as, “My real father is coming home, I am going to New York City, and many of my relatives are coming to my house.” The advocate would respond with statements such as, “that sounds like fun, tell me more about your family, how often do you see your father, do you travel very often, and oh I’m

sorry to hear of that situation in your family.” As one would imagine, the comments from the students were not always positive. Often times sensitive topics came up and the advocate just needed to show compassion and genuine understanding, which included statements such as, “I’m sorry, I understand, and I hope things improve.” Clearly the advocate was a conduit who provided a listening ear and caring touch. Above all, the effective advocates were good listeners, effective responders, compassionate, caring, nurturing, helpful, and ultimately believed in and supported each student. The effective advocacy groups were rich with quality student/advocate interactions during which the objective was to build upon the student/advocate relationship.

The Impact of an Effective Advocacy Group

Relationship-Building. One impact of the advisory program related to promoting relationship-building, in particular the relationship between the teacher/advocate and their students. All interviewees recognized and commented on the importance and significance of building lasting, meaningful relationships between the advocate and the individual student as well as between the students themselves. The relationship-building element was one of the strongest cultural components of the program. The counselors characterized the program as a “fail safe” initiative, with a strong emphasis on a one-to-one caring and nurturing component within each advocacy group. From the teachers’ perspective, the intent of the program was to create a “bond” between the teacher/advocate and students that would allow the advocate to get to know the student in a “very different way”, unlike any relationship that could be established in a conventional

classroom setting. The principal deemed the teacher/advocate relationship as integral, citing this cultural element as the “backbone” of the program. The students were unanimous relative to their praise and appreciation for the relationship and rapport with their advocate.

During the observation sessions (conducted only with those teachers previously identified as effective in their advocate role) continual and intentional behaviors were observed that promoted interactions leading to enhanced advocate/student relationships. The teacher/advocates would meet the students at the door and greet them in a warm and welcoming manner while also trying to make casual conversation with each student. There were persistent efforts from the advocates to spend individual quality time with students talking with them and “checking in” on what was happening in their lives. Teacher/advocates made a conscious effort to hear every voice in the room by inviting reticent students to participate and making sure that their opinions were valued and that the other students were respectful listeners. Most importantly they showed a genuine interest in every student by demonstrably making an effort to remember notable facts about each student. The teachers consistently commented on the importance of knowing as much as possible about each student, the importance of making a personal contact with each of them, knowing what was going on in their lives, and making mental notes about each individual. The teacher/advocates knew information about their students as if they were their own sons and daughters. Data supporting the value and impact of the advocate/student relationship was clearly evident. The positive cultural attributes of the program were a direct product of the relationship-building element.

The benefits resulting from these efforts towards relationship-building became more apparent after talking with the students. It was clear that the students held their relationship with their teacher/advocate in very high regard reflecting on the love, admiration, and trust they had for that person. One student commented that, “when I am having a problem I can meet with my advocate to work it out.” Another student noted, “I can talk with my advocate about things that are bothering me.” A third student stated, “I loved my advocate last year, she was the best teacher in the school.” Students reported that they thoroughly enjoyed being in the presence of their advocate and that they had fun with their advocate in the advocacy environment. The environment in the effective advocacy groups was characterized by warmth, compassion, spontaneity, and connectedness, the very attributes espoused by Kessler (1990) relative to the developing adolescent and school climate. The researcher documented examples of teachers extending healthy touches and expressions of praise towards students affirming their relationship by overtly demonstrating care and concern for each individual. The advocates genuinely listened to the students for information gathering and probes to spark discussions with the students. The researcher’s observations corroborated the value students placed on spending time with their teacher/advocate. The students saw their advocate as a person they could seek out or talk to about a problem or in a time of need.

Of equal note however, was the effect of the advocacy program on the students’ relationships with one another. As one student noted, “advocacy was a good way to get to know other people in the school other than the students I knew through sports and activities.” Another added, “it was like being in a big family with the same kids through all four years of school.” These observations supported a notion of family and a sense of

togetherness that seemed so apparent in these groups. One student stated that, “we all work together to talk about things that are bothering us and we support each other.” This component of relationship-building was an extremely important element of the program for all stakeholders, but especially the students. The very structure of advisory/advocacy provided a venue through which teachers and students could meet in a non-academic setting to foster strong connections and build meaningful relationships.

Academic Support/ College Preparation. Another facet of the school program affected by the advocacy/advisory program involved academic support and college and career guidance. One counselor noted, “the program was linked to academic progress”. Advocates assumed responsibility for their students and consequently kids didn’t slip through the cracks and were not ignored. By intent the advocacy program was structured in ways to motivate students normally not inclined to participate in advocacy activities through individualized attention and encouragement. As stated by one teacher, “every student had an adult in their life who cared about them and their progress in school, someone who was giving them information in addition to their academic counselor”. The principal noted that while the school had only one college career counselor the advocates, “provided one hundred and fifty arms to support that person with the students.” Every six weeks the teacher/advocates reviewed the students’ grades, monitored their progress, and strategized with the students to ensure academic success. The advocates also relayed information about PSAT’s and SAT’s and disseminated deadlines and other pertinent information through the advocacy groups. The principal emphatically stated that, “the students in the school just didn’t have this kind of support before the advocacy program was in place.” A teacher stated that, “I got on the students about their grades, but it was

done in a non-threatening manner.” The students wanted to do well academically and they wanted to please their advocate primarily because of the trusting and respectful relationship they had with this individual. This cultural component of advocacy marked a distinguishable difference in how the school intentionally set out to address academic deficiencies.

Most of the teachers were guided by the goal of the program --to keep students focused on post-secondary education and preparing for their future. As one teacher stated, “everything was directed towards the end goal and that was post-secondary education, therefore the teacher/advocates talked a great deal about long term goals.” Not all students felt comfortable approaching the college and career counselor because, in most cases, there was no established relationship between the student and the career counselor. As one teacher reflected, “that is where I stepped in, assisted, and was available to support the students within my advocacy group.”

The structural element of students coaching each other (peer mentorship) in advocacy was another powerful dynamic. One teacher posited that, “it gave the students a sense of confidence when they could help one another.” This played an integral role during scheduling when the upper classmen coached and advised the younger students with the design of their schedule and their academic plan. As one teacher noted:

When they worked on schedules advocacy ran itself. They sat face to face, 9th graders with 10th and 11th with 12th, and talked to each other about their course selections. It was really exciting to see them work together and the respect they demonstrated for each other.

The student response was very positive relative to the impact of the program on their academic progress and post-secondary planning. The students saw their advocate as a person who served as a coach, mentor, and cheerleader. The topics cited by the students included receiving help with tracking their grades, brainstorming strategies on what could be done to improve their performance, consulting with their advocate about how to effectively work with a teacher, and receiving help with college planning and preparation. As one student stated, “my advocate was my ‘life line’. She helped me by pushing me to do better. My advocate was more than just another teacher, she guided me, helped me through school, and bridged the gap between school and home.” The advocate also kept the students well informed about PSAT and SAT dates and deadlines and helped the students with the necessary forms and other preliminary steps. With regard to post secondary-planning one student noted that, “the program helped with goal setting and it helped me plan my future. It helped me identify my interests and how I needed to focus to achieve my goals.” Another student commented that the program helped me, “prepare for college and complete the admission process. It also gave me time to think about what I would be doing in ten years.” Another student noted that, “some students in the school were simply helpless when it came to the college application process.” The advocate was of great assistance with this process and that was a substantial element of the program.

Meeting Student Needs. An additional facet of the school positively impacted by the advocacy program was the extent to which the program met the needs of the diverse student population. This area clearly ranked in the top two categories for effectiveness based on the numerous and extremely positive student and teacher remarks. One teacher

noted, “the intent of the program was to meet the needs of all students.” Another teacher noted, “advocacy was driven by the needs of the students, be it personal or educational.” A third teacher added, “students came to me with needs that they had not shared with anyone else and advocacy was the time when I tended to such needs.” Some students were followers in the large school environment, but in advocacy they flourished because of the individual attention and involvement. During the observations all students participated and seemed to relish the culture in advocacy because they sensed that their advocate cared about their needs and valued their opinions. One teacher/advocate remarked that, “the advocacy time was precious to the students because that was where their needs were met and where they were recognized as individuals.” The principal said, “I was pleased with the evolution of the program and that it was really meeting the needs of the students.” A counselor stated that, “advocacy provided a quiet time during the week when student needs could be addressed and it provided each student with a teacher they could talk to about something besides academics.”

Numerous teachers used the term “responsibility” when expressing their felt need to care for the students and to have that time set aside each week for interacting with their advocacy group. The teacher/advocates referred to personal goals that revolved around the need to, “speak to every student individually during family advocacy” and the teachers talked about wanting the students to know they were the adult in the school their students could come to in times of need. Again, this was congruent with what was observed during the advocacy meetings when students seemed to gravitate towards their advocate like a magnet. They desired to have time with that person and wanted to share every facet of their life with their advocate. There was no inhibition among the students

when talking about personal and school-related matters with their advocate. One teacher/advocate recalled a graduate who still contacted her for advice and often talked about not making it through high school without the program and her support.

The teachers also mentioned the importance of flexibility and spontaneity when working with individual students. One teacher noted that, “I could be conducting a grade check with a student and within moments jump to talking about an issue the student was having at home or in the school.” She continued by noting that, “I was not going to cut the kid short or say I didn’t have time to talk about that. The one-on-one meeting time was an invaluable structural component and needed to be preserved.” Both the teachers and counselors talked about advocacy simply serving the purpose of “down time” during the students’ hectic week when demands came at them from all directions. One counselor said, “it gave the students a chance to ‘breath’ and ‘slow down’ for a few minutes in at atmosphere that was not driven by the acquisition of content.” As one teacher remarked, “given the number of students in the high school, there simply was not enough time for the content area teachers to meet the needs of their students and to communicate with the families.” Family advocacy provided the teachers (advocates) with a window of time when they could communicate with their students. The teachers made consistent references to caring about their students, enjoying being able to help their students, and wanting to tend to their overall needs. They also found it rewarding getting to know a group of students they would otherwise not have known in absence of the advocacy program. One teacher stated that, “the feeling of getting to help the students was fulfilling – that was what my day was about, getting to know students.” The principal added, “if the population of the school was different the program may not have

been needed, but clearly the culture of the school was such that the students needed a program of this nature.” The advocacy program coordinator said that, “the program allowed the advocates and the counselors to work together for the benefit of the students.” The teachers and principal recognized the compelling need for the teachers to serve as surrogate parents and to be guides, mentors, and advocates for the students.

Students corroborated the teacher remarks with a resounding confirmation of the teachers’ willingness to support them through the structure of the advocacy program. They commented on the readiness of the teachers to assist and speak with them about anything of a personal or educational nature and how the teachers really cared about meeting their needs. During the observation sessions a number of very sensitive topics arose that were handled effectively by the advocates. For example, during one observation session the advocate talked with the students about what they were going to do over the holidays. Information surfaced about broken families, parents and siblings in trouble, or situations where students haven’t seen one parent for years. The advocate handled it with grace and dignity allowing the students to share but not be shamed. One student said, “I could talk to my advocate about anything in or out of school, and she helped steer me in the right direction.” Another student remarked that, “I thought my advocate enjoyed helping the students and getting to know us better and advocacy helped the students know their advocate cared.” Finally a third student commented passionately that, “without the program most students would simply be another face and number in the school.”

Teachers noted the difference in the environment in family advocacy and that of the general classroom. The consensus of opinion was that in a regular classroom setting

you cannot reach the students to meet their needs, but you could in advocacy because that was what the program was all about and the advocate/student ratio allowed such to occur. It was not content-driven and the smaller group size provided for personalization. One teacher noted that, “I had an entire year with the students and I could really reach them.” Another teacher commented that, “at least I had the potential of reaching the kids through advocacy whereas in the regular classroom setting I really did not.” The difference in the environment allowed for enhanced communication. Another teacher/advocate stated, “communication was the most beneficial element of advocacy- talking about grades, problems at home, personal issues, and school affairs.”

It was apparent that a critical component of meeting students’ needs was to empower the students to have a voice in their advocacy group. The principal stated that, “the program gave the students an opportunity to speak their mind and have a voice”, a common occurrence noted during the observations. Students’ exercising their right to speak out about a variety of issues was a strong cultural component in the highly effective advocacy groups. Students routinely had the opportunity to voice their opinions, make suggestions, or simply air grievances in the advocacy setting. Numerous students spoke about how much they liked being able to talk about, “things they wanted/needed to talk about.” The teachers were verbose in speaking about the platform family advocacy provided for students to speak their minds and interact with their peers. They recognized the fact that many of the students in the school were not taught how to deal with life’s challenges and their advocacy group provided a forum for discussing such issues. Family advocacy provided a venue where they could sit in circles and bounce issues off each other often talking about conflicts they were experiencing in and out of

school. As one teacher noted, “they wanted to talk about things going on in their social lives, boyfriend/girlfriend issues, and problems at school and home.” The teacher/advocate brainstormed problem solving strategies with individual students and the group. The advocacy program gave students a venue in which they could talk in a comfortable setting with other people they trusted and under the guidance of an adult they trusted. One teacher remarked, “the students just could not do that in the normal classroom setting and it simply was not appropriate.”

Identity and Connectedness. The final significant category involving a positive impact fell under the umbrella of the students’ sense of identity and their feelings of connectedness to their advocacy group and the school. The concept of personalization is incorporated into this realm relative to the students’ sense of belonging, involvement in school, and attachment to their advocate and advocacy group. The advocacy program coordinator and the principal had favorable comments about the structural component of advocacy relative to enhancing school-wide communication. Disseminating information through advocacy enabled all students to receive the same information in a consistent manner. Advocacy was used to inform students about upcoming events (i.e. Homecoming and Spirit Week). Club sponsors also used advocacy to circulate information about their club/activity. The principal believed, “student involvement in school activities and events increased as a result because all students knew when events were taking place and how they could get involved in the various clubs and activities on campus.” The principal professed that, “the students felt a sense of connection to the school as a result of the advocacy program.” He reiterated the notion that, “the advocacy program had improved the school’s ability to communicate with the student body as well

as the individual student.” As a result students felt connected to the larger environment and well informed about what was happening in the school.

Relative to sense of identity, the principal said, “we were sure we had 1000+ students walking the halls of the school anonymously before advocacy-- they weren’t good or bad kids, just unnoticed.” The anonymity was evidenced by teachers not knowing many students by name and the existence of few meaningful relationships between teachers and students. Consistent with the findings in current literature, this school’s advocacy program had a significant impact on dissolving the anonymity typically experienced by most students in public high schools. For example, of significant note was the effect the advocacy program had on connecting students of varying academic ability. The principal noted that, “the high achieving students are much more comfortable in the school than before advocacy because they feel like they blend with the other students. As a result, the academic climate is dramatically different because of the program.” He continued, “the high achievers saw that the goal of the program was to help all students succeed academically not just those naturally inclined to do well in school.” Ultimately, the high achieving population benefitted tremendously. He cited several notable examples of how this came to fruition such as the increase in the number of students who applied for and demonstrated eligibility for National Honor Society. He believed this increase resulted in more students feeling comfortable, supported, rewarded, and recognized in the school.

The student comments were equally as compelling in that one student described the impact of the program as “drawing students together and helping us get to know each other.” The students felt more connected with their advocate and with students in their

family advocacy group they would otherwise not have known. The students also talked about establishing long-lasting friendships through the advocacy program. As one student noted, “advocacy helped the students get more involved in clubs and activities in the school. It drew us together on issues and events in the school.” The students were better informed about school happenings as a result of the improved communication element in advocacy. Many students spoke of the importance of their relationship with their advocate and the fact that some might not have survived in school without that relationship and support. The students were encouraged to do well academically, participate in school activities, and get involved in school events and issues. Numerous students stated that they also liked the multi-grade structure and would not have wanted a single-grade structure for advocacy. To a person they lauded the value of interacting with students across grade levels and how that element of the program contributed to unity in the school. A student stated that, “the program gave us a chance to connect with each other and our advocate.” Many students noted that the underclassmen were better appreciated and treated with more respect. This was observed in the advocacy sessions as the students were clearly a cohesive unit and worked cooperatively together. The researcher consistently noted students from multiple grade levels interacting on various issues. Furthermore, it helped the freshman experience success in school because they received advice and assistance from the upperclassmen. Some students described it as a big-brother/big-sister phenomenon. Students also believed that school spirit had improved due to improved communication through advocacy – they felt like they knew what was happening in the school.

The teacher responses in this area were numerous and compelling. One teacher stated that, "I made a connection with each one of my students and they knew I cared about them. I worked hard to make that student/advocate connection." Another said, "the sense of self and identity was really there in my group. They loved it when I saw them in the hall and said hello or asked them how they were doing; in fact, my students would often initiate such a discussion." She continued, "the teachers really don't know what issues many of the students face out of school so that one friendly face in the school (their advocate) makes a difference." Teachers commented on the difference the advocacy program made relative to their students' self esteem and sense of identity in the school. The manner in which they interacted in advocacy was much different than in the regular classroom setting. They were outgoing and involved, whereas in the classroom they were generally much more reserved. One teacher reflected that, "advocacy gave me a chance to perform in a very different role where I could relax more with my students because I was not driven by content and worried about classroom management." The advocacy program provided the teachers and students with an opportunity unlike the normal classroom environment to interact with each other and create a common bond. One teacher that team-facilitated advocacy stated, "I say all the time that we are a family. The communication element of advocacy helped me create a bond with my students." This was apparent when one of the teachers said, "the students came to me routinely often without a need just to talk and visit about what was going on in their lives." The students often approached their advocate because of the trust that was established and the connection they had with that individual. One teacher noted, "I knew I was bonding with students when they shared personal information with me." Whereas one of the goals of

the program was to create a link to the parents of the students, in reality the strongest and most prominent connection existed between the advocate and the student.

Liaison to the Family. Several interviewees commented on the family liaison expectation of advocacy relative to its structure of enhancing communication with the students' parents. One teacher went door-to-door to meet the parents of his students. As he noted, "the visits gave me a good opportunity to meet the students' parents and provided me with an opportunity to sell education as a priority in the home setting." A student added that, "my advocate communicated with my family but the main emphasis of the program was the connection between the advocate and the student." The results of the teacher advocacy survey showed that sixty-five out of ninety respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they (the advocates) were able to contact the homes of each of their students once per quarter either through a note home, e-mail, or by telephone.

Negative Impact of the Advocacy Program

As strong as the program was, findings revealed some areas of concern. These findings clustered into five categories: extra prep and increased work load, inconsistent effort from teachers, neutral school wide impact, inconsistent student engagement, and the advocacy setting. Although the concerns were relatively minor, they were important to report.

Extra Prep Period/ Increased Work Load. One teacher said, "I couldn't get around the fact that the advocacy program really felt like another preparation. The students would come in and I had to be ready and get my energy level up." Another

teacher remarked that, “I had to be ready for advocacy, I couldn’t just walk in the door and improvise. If I was at school planning lessons until 4:00 before advocacy existed I was there until 4:30 after the implementation of advocacy.” Another teacher commented, “at times I felt like I was working harder with no result – I could not reach the parents, the students, etc.” Another teacher noted:

The phone calls home, increased student load, added students to keep track of (grades, etc.) through advocacy just added to the overall work load. I was stressed out at first – It was a lot – an extra work load. I was able to make it happen, but that did not minimize the additional work.

Although this study focused on the higher performing advocacy groups a significant concern was raised by the teachers interviewed relative to other members of the faculty exerting less than optimum effort towards the advocacy program. This “unwillingness” from some teachers caused friction, resentment, and social issues in the school from students and other teachers. The students who had mediocre advocates were upset because they did not get to do the fun things the high performing groups were doing. They were bored and viewed advocacy as a waste of time, due largely to the apathetic attitude from their advocate. Their advocates were uncaring, disinterested in the students, and lacked commitment to the success of the program. Some teachers viewed it simply as, “another thing they had to do.”

Inconsistent Effort from Teachers. The inconsistency factor was commented upon by all interviewees. This was the most significant negative impact area noted in the data. Unequivocally, the principal said:

The success of the program really depended on the effort and excitement from the teacher/advocate. If the teachers were negative about the program they got their backs up, consequently the students sensed that and it changed the entire environment for the worse.

Some teachers were not cut out for the role of being an advocate. The principal stated that, “some teachers were good content teachers, but they were not effective with building relationships” as evidenced by student discontent and informal observations by the administrators. Some of the teacher interviewees deemed this to be a, “big problem” in the larger school environment because the students dreaded their advocacy group. One teacher commented that, “if the faculty was just more positive the students would buy into the program and the impact would be extremely positive. Some groups were engaged and dynamic and others were simply a glorified study hall.” The principal noted that, “the quality from group to group fluctuated tremendously.” He claimed that, “some teachers were not capable of facilitating a discussion or they simply ran out of material in advocacy and in short order it became wasted time.” He said, “my only remaining frustration is that some groups were clicking but other advocates were giving the program less than their best effort. Unfortunately, those students were not receiving the same benefit as the kids next door.” The coordinator emphatically stated that, “the advocate/student relationship suffered if the advocate was not passionate about the program - that relationship ultimately determined the effectiveness of the group.”

Teacher comments reflected similar sentiments relative to students disliking the advocacy program when their advocate wasn't effective. The effective teacher/advocates often heard negative comments from other students in their regular classes about

particular advocates and the substandard quality of their advocacy group. This had a negative effect on the school and the stability of the advocacy program. Inconsistency caused some resentment amongst the students because admittedly all the students wanted a good advocate. One teacher stated that, “it was all about the teachers’ effort and attitude. Negativity had a detrimental effect on the students.” Another teacher said, “I would have liked to see the teachers put more effort into the program by communicating with the families and talking to the parents a significant number of times by the students’ senior year.” The principal’s comments were most convincing when he said, “I could get the teachers to agree philosophically about the value of the program, but that did not mean they were going to be effective in a non-content setting.” In conjunction with the inconsistency factor, the principal expressed concern with the inability to monitor all the advocacy groups on family advocacy days. He expressed the need to, “keep a check on some of the advocates because nothing meaningful happened in their advocacy group until an administrator walked in the room.” Unfortunately, the administrators were not able to supervise all advocacy groups and therefore the quality in some groups suffered at times.

Neutral Effect on School Spirit and Student Involvement. The effects on spirit and student involvement in the school were difficult to ascertain. Some respondents reported increased student involvement in school events and activities; evidence to support such claims however, was inappreciable. Improved school spirit received conflicting responses from teachers and students as well, therefore effects in this realm were also unsubstantiated. One teacher said, “there was no noticeable change among the students in the school and there was no real effect/impact from the advocacy program on school

spirit or student involvement in the school.” Another teacher claimed that, “the effect on the larger school environment is unknown.” One student commented that, “there was no substantial effect on the school as a whole.” Another student remarked that, “I have no idea on whether or not the advocacy program impacted school spirit.” The effect on the larger school environment therefore appeared negligible.

Student Engagement. Some teacher responses alluded to some difficulty with getting students to engage in the advocacy groups by opening up and sharing their opinions and feelings. A teacher reported that, “often my students would navigate to the group of students with whom they were most comfortable, consequently at times the integration was minimal.” Another teacher commented on a noticeable degree of apathy from seniors resulting in less than favorable levels of engagement from the upperclassmen. However, the researcher observed no evidence of such apathy among the high performing advocacy groups. Nor was there any noticeable evidence of students forming cliques or withdrawing from participation within the effective advocacy groups.

Setting/Environment. The final area of concern resulted from teacher comments referring to the poor setting or location of some advocacy groups. One teacher commented negatively about being located in the gym and competing with all the distractions in that setting. Another teacher reported that, “being in the balcony the first year for advocacy was unproductive and not conducive to good group interaction.” Both said the conditions were less than ideal and ultimately detracted from the students’ experience and the impact of the program.

The Impact of the Content/Themes

An additional area of focus for this study dealt with the content of the program and the extent to which it impacted the students and the school. When the school began its work with First Things First much of the emphasis for family advocacy was on relationship-building. The principal recalled that, “our students got along well in school, but out of school they tended to go to their separate corners.” He thought the culture of the community tended to create a division amongst the students. He recognized however, that the school was not going to change the community element therefore it made no sense for the school to exert the energy to do so. The principal commented that, “we had to move away from the relationship-building activities to something much more concrete which ultimately led to a refocusing on academic support.” In fact, an in-house survey conducted on the family advocacy program in 2006 – 2007 revealed that only thirty-three out of ninety respondents thought that team-building activities were a good way to develop cohesion and trust among advocacy group members. The principal emphasized with the faculty however that, “relationships still needed to come before content and the teachers contribution to the school needed to be much more than just the delivery of content.” Teacher comments and comments from the program coordinator and counselors made it apparent that ultimately some designed content, curriculum, and structure had to be in place. Early concerns from the teacher/advocates revealed uneasiness with activities that were loosely structured thus resulting in their desire to have designed lesson plans at their disposal. An analysis of various documents provided to the researcher uncovered thorough planning and a structured approach on the part of

the advocacy program coordinator and counselors to provide such plans for the teacher/advocates. Assorted materials from FTF and IRRE also surfaced during documentation retrieval as sources from which lessons and activities were formulated. The principal consistently reminded the faculty however that, “the program was not all about content, it was about having someone the students could relate to and someone who cared about them and their education.”

Teacher comments validated that the activities having the most significant impact were those that focused on goal setting and other school wide issues or problems. One teacher said, “the best activities were those about the students and their needs. The activities were even more effective if they were individualized to the needs of each and every student.” Another teacher added, “I spent quality time with each student after I tackled the main topic for the day. It was simply a time for them to vent about what was going on in their lives.” There was no blanket topic or set of topics that covered it all, but the activities had to be about the students and their needs. One teacher remarked about the relevancy of the topics in the later years of the program and how they were much more meaningful to the students than the earlier scripted topics. As she noted, “they gave me topics this year that really mattered to the students. They just scripted anything last year and it just was not relevant.” It was evident through the observations and the student comments that the students liked to discuss more than they liked to write. Too much work and writing made advocacy feel like another class and that was not the objective of the program. The observations revealed a strong indication that discussion and group interaction was of the highest interest to the students. The students appeared to be

energized by such interaction and enthralled about spending quality time with their advocate and peers.

The scripted/mandatory activities were **clearly** a concern amongst the teachers/advocates. Teacher and student comments included negative references to the stagnant nature of the mandatory topics. One teacher commented specifically on how she really did not enjoy the mandated topics; thus she often gave them minimal time and frequently “veered off on her own activities.” Another noted that, “most advocates liked to operate off their own plans not those designed by others.” Another teacher concurred, noting that, “the plans we were given were rather dry and I augmented those with my own ideas to get the students’ attention and make advocacy more interesting.” Summing it up, another teacher passionately stated that, “often times I operated based on the needs of the students and not the scripted agenda and that is why my group was effective. You really had to know your students and what was going to work or not work for the group.”

One student noted that, “the mandatory activities (i.e. internet safety, bullying, etc.) were not enjoyable and simply were a waste of time. We spent five minutes on those topics and then moved to the things we wanted to do and discuss.” This finding was congruent with Meloro’s (2005) findings regarding student opinions about the redundancy and lack of relevance with many advisory topics and activities. The students in Meloro’s study thought the advisory curriculum was repetitive, mundane, often lacked relevancy to the students’ every day life and was disconnected from the issues that they really wanted to discuss in their advisory groups. The notion that the activities were essentially time fillers was prevalent among those students studied. This was not atypical with some of the student comments in this study.

The areas that came to the surface with regard to the impact of the content and themes of the advocacy program were categorized into three groups: academic activities, college preparatory activities, and spontaneous activities.

Academic Activities. The activities having the most significant impact on the students were those designed towards academic progress and support. All interviewees alluded to the importance of these activities. In the school's 2006 – 2007 teacher survey on family advocacy only sixteen out of ninety respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the positive impact of the academic activities conducted in advocacy. The principal and program coordinator deemed the quarterly grade checks and the transcript review as extremely valuable activities. The principal stated that:

To know there was someone in their lives checking up on their grades and recommending interventions was the key. More than anything else was the specifics of the reports and the students knowing that someone was going to say something to them about their grades.

The program coordinator and counselor deemed the grade check activities in advocacy as very helpful. They also mentioned that the peer mentorship element was helpful and was a facet of the program that should increase in usefulness over time. Several teachers reflected on the importance of the grade checks as well. A teacher remarked that, “the grade checks were a major component of the program and most helpful to the students.” Another teacher said, “our mission was to motivate the students to do well in school and teach them to communicate effectively with their teachers.” The teachers also commented on the effectiveness of working on student schedules during advocacy and the value of the peer mentorship element during that activity as well. One student

mentioned that the grade checks, “kept me on top of my game and helped me keep up with all that was going on in my academic courses.” The students mentioned that they enjoyed helping the freshman and that the mixed grade configuration was beneficial. One student, who seemed quite advanced in his thinking, stated that, “I think it would be helpful to incorporate a portfolio component in advocacy to better assist the students with establishing a strong admissions folder for post-secondary education.”

College Preparatory Activities. Another area mentioned by all interviewees was best described as college preparatory or post-secondary planning activities. These activities generally included discussions about what college life was like, how to be successful in college, what to do in high school to prepare for college, how to apply to colleges and seek financial aide, and assistance with writing college essays, which the principal deemed as, “a huge impediment for some of the students.” Often those discussions led to stories the students could share about older brothers or sisters and their experiences in college. A student noted that, “the discussions about college were very helpful and beneficial.” A teacher claimed that, “my goal was to be another adult in the students’ life to cheer them on, encourage them to do well in school, and motivate them towards post-secondary education.” Another teacher added that, “there was a significant emphasis on college readiness and a lot of the students did not get that support at home.” Many interviewees commented that a large number of the advocacy sessions were devoted to what it took to be a good student and reflected on post-secondary plans or other post-secondary aspirations. As one teacher noted, “the college preparation sessions were more enjoyable because they were relevant to the students’ issues.” Another teacher noted, however, that many of the advocacy sessions focused on future planning

and that they needed to keep in mind that a good percentage of their students were not college bound. To that end, the advocacy survey showed that only nineteen out of ninety teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that activities focusing on planning for the students' lives after high school helped them see a connection between the work they did in high school and the work they will do after graduation.

Spontaneous Activities. The most notable effective area relative to the content for the advisory/advocacy program was best characterized by those types of activities that occurred spontaneously. The counselors said that creativity in planning the activities for advocacy was encouraged and that teachers often made their own plans pertinent to the needs of their advocacy group, which typically involved topics and activities of interest to the students. The results of the advocacy teacher survey revealed a stunning seventy-four out of ninety respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the advocates' freedom to plan for the individual needs of their advocacy group, while only twenty-nine respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the value of following the scripted lessons or topics. The teacher interviewees liked to be creative and explore the interests of their students by allowing student issues/topics to guide the activities. They said the involvement of the students was more consistent and natural when the discussions were about the students' needs and not something contrived. There was a plethora of teacher comments supporting the unstructured approach to advocacy and allowing the flow of the group to lead the discussions or determine the activities. One teacher noted, "advocacy was a safe place to just talk about things with the students and more often than not that was all that was needed." Another teacher added, "the activities that established cohesion among the students were most effective and that often involved running with what the

students wanted to talk about. Sometimes the students would share things and that became the focus for that session.” For example, a teacher related that, “a student came to me with a potential abuse situation and that became the focus for my group meeting.” Another teacher added, “the spontaneous activities were at least or more valuable than the planned and scripted activities.” A prime example involved the lessons dealing with conflict or issues that were present in the school. They were perceived as extremely valuable because they taught students how to get along with others and how to communicate respectfully in confrontational situations. A teacher noted that:

What the students wanted to do was talk about things that were going on in their lives. We often jumped on a topic and the session ran itself. Whereas it was not appropriate to discuss such topics in their core classes, advocacy was suited perfectly for these types of interactions.

Another teacher recalled how valuable the advocacy session was following a school-wide assembly during which the speaker focused on very sensitive, yet interesting topics. The advocacy period was a natural follow up to the presentation and offered students a venue for further discussion and debriefing. An additional teacher reflected on the “one-on-one time with students” as something that was unstructured yet an essential part of the program.

The student comments were congruent with the teachers in that the students thought the advocacy program gave them time to discuss issues that were important and meaningful to them like problems between home and school. A student commented that, “the unplanned activities were more valuable than the mandated activities because they

were more meaningful to me and they helped me feel comfortable about discussing anything in advocacy.”

Limitations/Modifications. Some limitations of the program were mentioned by all stakeholders. Lesson planning (the development of the content and themes for advocacy) was mentioned as an area of concern by representatives of all stakeholders. The counselors noted that the program was only as good as the planning that was devoted to each advocacy session. The counselors indirectly alluded to some of the planning occurring at the last minute and consequently the quality of the lessons suffered at times. The issue of grade level relevancy and balancing the needs of each grade level in the lesson planning process was also a fairly significant concern among the counselors. Keeping the content (curriculum) fresh and relevant was an ongoing challenge. The tendency was to repeat themes and content each year in the early stages of the program. One teacher thought there was, “too much rehashing of information and that using the same content four years consecutively was repetitive.” A counselor suggested that not enough emphasis was placed on the preparation for advocacy and that, “the program needed to be treated like everyone cared about it and a clear road map needed to be delineated.” Another counselor mentioned, “the direction, goals, and objectives were a bit of a mystery each year and not having a model for the second and subsequent years after the program’s inception was a problem.” The counselors also thought the advocacy program should have been used more frequently for the dissemination of relevant school-wide information for the students. Some teacher interviewees claimed that if a greater emphasis was placed on student-driven lessons and activities with less emphasis on college-oriented activities the program would have had a more significant impact on the

students. The teachers suggested that more student-initiated topics be utilized in advocacy and, in general, more input from the students was needed in the planning process. The students wanted to incorporate more discussions involving life issues, thus minimizing the goal setting and future planning activities that tended to dominate the curriculum. Consequently, lesson or activity preparation was certainly an area in which modification, clarification, and refinement needed to occur.

Some teachers and counselors also thought that more intentional efforts to provide professional development activities were needed to enhance the teachers' skills as advocates. They mentioned that there was no formal structure to offer advocates ongoing training for advocacy. Additionally, there was little training for new teachers and some interviewees mentioned staff turnover as a minor concern.

Relationship-Building. The final area that arose having mixed response for modification was additional advocacy time to enhance the relationship-building aspect of program. One teacher said that, "more time was needed per week to establish meaningful and lasting relationships." One teacher remarked, "if we are only doing something once a week how important can it be?" Another teacher added that, "two or three meeting times per week would be justifiable and could ultimately result in more purpose and substance while creating more of a family atmosphere in advocacy." Many interviewees said that conflicts in the monthly schedule created havoc with family advocacy and contributed to a degree of inconsistency. A teacher commented that, "even the naysayers were frustrated with the inconsistent meeting schedule." Conversely, one teacher was opposed to additional meeting time claiming that, "my daily schedule is packed and additional time was incomprehensible." She added that, "additional time would be overkill and that

many faculty members would resist the notion of adding time for advocacy.” Another teacher commented that, “I liked meeting only once per week because it gave me a little breathing space between meetings.” Some teachers said when the advocates and students enjoyed advocacy they wanted more time. Other teachers felt that additional time would help because they would often run short on time because the sessions expired very quickly. Another teacher commented that, “additional time would certainly help me better know my students.”

Some students suggested moving the advocacy program to another day of the week because professional development/early release days were conducted once a month on Tuesdays, the same day family advocacy met. The students also suggested longer meeting times or making advocacy an additional block in the schedule. The students looked forward to advocacy but they were disappointed when the meeting schedule was disrupted. Several students thought more meeting times per month would be valuable. One upperclassmen noted that, “the conflicts in the schedule broke the continuity and more regularity in meeting times was necessary.” Another student recommended, “more games and activities among and between advocacy groups as a means to create bonds between students and build school spirit.” It seemed apparent that the students in the high performing advocacy groups wanted additional time for advocacy, whereas the teachers of the high performing groups were opposed due to in large part to the excessive work load and the burden of planning additional activities. The teachers in the high performing groups seemed content with the once per week meeting schedule providing it remained consistent and free from disruptions.

Chapter 5

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine high performing advocacy groups in a large public high school environment. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were integral components of the data collection process. The researcher sought to ascertain the impact of an effective advocacy program on the students, faculty, and the larger school environment. The research questions set the foundation for delving into the school's advocacy program to analyze not only the overall impact of the program, but also what cultural, social, and curricular (content, themes, and activities) elements were present that contributed to its efficacy.

This study revealed useful data that will give educational leaders greater insight into the impact of an effective advisory program. Little comprehensive data exist for practitioners interested in understanding the possible impact of an advisory program at the high school level. This study provided information that will fill this void.

Meloro's (2005) study examined, "the types of activities in advisory and the teacher and student perceptions of the overall advisory experience as indicated by their attitudes towards advisory, level of participation, and relationship with each other" (p. 25). She examined the, "students' overall sense of school belonging and their feelings of connection with each other and the frequency of the types of advisory activities" (p. 25). This study expanded that research by delving more explicitly into the effect of the constructs, activities, and overall structure of the advisory program relative to the teachers', students', and program leaders' perceptions and feelings.

Summary of the Findings

Beyond the overall effect of the advisory/advocacy program, this study determined what cultural and social components and activities (content and curriculum) most strongly contributed to the efficacy of the advisory program. The subsidiary research questions focused on the unveiling of these elements.

Cultural and Social Components. There were many components of school climate and personalization manifested through the cultural and social context of the school's advocacy program. Student responses to the advocacy program were largely dependent on their advocate's attitude toward the program. A positive attitude from the advocate benefitted the students and the environment in the advocacy setting. When the advocate's attitude was positive toward the program the students' felt supported, safe, comfortable, and valued. Praise and encouragement from the advocate was a significant factor resulting in the students' favorable opinions of their advocate and advocacy group. The students had to know beyond a doubt that the advocate had a genuine interest in them, genuinely sought to know as much about them as possible, and valued their opinion and provided opportunities for them to have a voice, three essential components mentioned in the literature about positive school climate.

The relationship between the advocate and student was also of paramount importance and inextricably set the tone for the advocacy environment. A strong advocate/student relationship seemed to create a bond that surpassed building good rapport to establishing a union between the advocate and student that was inseparable;

one based on care, love, and a very genuine concern for one another. Teachers and students alike enjoyed and valued such relationships.

Of slightly lesser importance, but still ever-present was the relationship and cohesion between the students themselves. Although the students in this particular school seemingly lived separate lives outside the school, harmony and diversity prevailed inside the walls of the school and particularly within the confines of the effective advocacy groups. This was especially apparent during the observation sessions when the researcher noted numerous examples of students interacting with one another and working harmoniously towards a unified mission. The students enjoyed one another and seemed quite proud of their willingness and ability to coexist. The relationship element (advocate/student and student/student) was predominately the overriding factor that determined the success of the advocacy group and the ultimate effectiveness of the program. As the principal noted, “relationships must come first.”

The students in the effective advocacy groups were valued by their advocate and the students felt known, noticed, supported, and most importantly cared for. Current literature revealed that the consistent presence and availability of an adult who believes in the students is a primary factor in their eventual success. The extent to which the advocate portrayed these attributes determined the success of the group and the level of trust and cooperation garnered from the students. All interviewees referred to the relationship between the advocate and student as the glue that held the advocacy group together. Students lauded the program and the impact of having an adult advocate in the school. They viewed their advocate as a life-line for success, one who coached, supported, encouraged, and motivated them to do well in school.

The advocates and students deemed academic support to be second only to the advocate/student relationship. Monitoring the students' academic progress was a central focus of the program and was earmarked as a critical component by the students. The students desired to have the academic support, wanted to please their advocate by doing well academically, and certainly valued their advocate's recognition and praise.

Having a lesser impact however, was the extent to which connectedness and belongingness were cultivated in the larger school setting. The interviewees reported decreased impact and generally lukewarm comments with regard to the overall effect of the advocacy program on the larger school environment. The advocacy program's impact on the individual student and each advocacy group was positive, but the effect on the larger school environment was negligible and seldom mentioned by the interviewees.

Content and Theme Components. The impact of the various themes and activities utilized in the family advocacy program was also unclear. Certainly, the activities focusing on academic preparation, academic progress, grade checks, and credit checks were valued by all stakeholders in the school. Students and teachers, in particular, said this was a needed component for the school's population and that all students benefitted from having an adult who routinely checked their grades and consulted with them about their academic progress. Similarly, the one-on-one conferencing, the time during which the advocate and the student could confer on an individual basis, was equally important. Of similar value were the college preparatory activities that aided students in the processes of college admissions and preparation. Although there were reports of redundancy in this realm, overall students appreciated the efforts made by the school and their advocates to prepare them for post-secondary studies.

Conversely, the students and teachers had little regard for the mandatory/scripted activities conducted in advocacy. Although sincere efforts were made on behalf of the school to plan activities for the weekly advocacy sessions, advocates found little use for the scripted activities giving them minimal time and attention. The highly effective advocates covered the mandatory topics but frequently augmented those plans with their own activities which often veered off the scripted plan to something of greater value to them and their students.

One of the most compelling findings was that spontaneous activities, topics, and discussions relevant to the lives of the students were highly valued by the students and advocates. To a person the students consistently spoke of the value of being able to talk with their advocate about school and home life, relationships with their peers, their teachers, challenges and celebrations in their lives, and the practicality of living life each day. The students in the high performing advocacy groups saw their advocate as their confidant, coach, cheerleader, and parent away from home. Although they recognized the school's effort to thoughtfully plan lessons for advocacy what they valued most was the time to interact with their advocate. This was strikingly apparent during the observation periods when the researcher consistently noted times during which the students and their advocate were interacting and enjoying talking and laughing with seemingly no objective other than just being together. As one advocate said, "I became one of the students, interacting and engaging in an array of activities with them resulting in quality time together." The students and advocates wanted to serve each other through mutual admiration and respect.

Conclusions

The Critical Role of Teacher Support. The overarching issue and a sure indicator of the eventual success of the advocacy program focused on the faculty's willingness to embrace, rally behind, and unconditionally support the program. This was the key element for building school-wide cohesion within the program and the glue that held it together. Data showed that students were positive about the program when the teacher/advocate was optimistic, excited, supportive, effective, and conveyed the purpose and goals of the program to the students. From an administrative viewpoint however, this attribute, was the most elusive to achieve. The teacher's willingness and attitude are the most vulnerable elements of the program especially in the high school setting where teachers historically see their role as subject-oriented specialists, not as advisors. Teachers must be recognized as the frontline of the program and their willingness needs to be nurtured, not coerced or demanded. Hagborg (1995) discovered that teachers had difficulty finding an effective leadership style in advisory, thus they often delivered a group lesson in advisory which was ill-received by the students. Consequently, Hagborg found that student boredom and disruption set in among the students which caused a decline in teacher willingness and enthusiasm as the teachers became more frustrated and inadequate. The same was true in this study as evidenced through multiple teacher and student responses relative to the unwillingness and complacency from advocates outside the effective group.

By inclination some teachers were more disposed than others to the role of advocate. The effective advocates naturally bonded and established relationships with

the students and were well-versed in group facilitation strategies. This was noticeably evident as the researcher observed a variety of advocacy groups during a pre-study visit and overheard unsolicited comments from students alluding to the effective versus the ineffective advocates. The students knew those teachers who were struggling, unwilling, passively resistant, or just refused to see advocacy as their responsibility. As the principal noted, “they are the same teachers, average teachers make average advocates, great teachers make great advocates.”

The effective advocates however, commented that in most cases, ineffectiveness was simply a symptom of unwillingness. The effective advocates concluded that a good attitude toward the advocacy program combined with an extraordinary effort to do their best for the students was all it would take from teachers to make the program effective.

School-wide Impact. Although the impact of the program on the individual student in the effective groups was certainly positive, the impact on the larger school environment was minimal at best. Meloro (2005) stated that, in general, students in the larger school environment felt their advisor did not care about their well-being, advisory was a waste of time, students did not feel comfortable talking to their advisor, and that student participation in advisory was inconsistent. The same was true in this case study. The students in the effective groups reported that a greater percentage of their peers in other advocacy groups had a low opinion of their advocate, were not satisfied with their advocacy group, and desired to have a more positive experience in advocacy. Although the principal reported a noticeably positive effect on the larger environment, the advocates were consistent in noting little to no effect on the school as a whole. In the 2006 advocacy survey forty-five out of ninety respondents were undecided, disagreed, or

strongly disagreed that the advocacy program had a positive impact on the students school-wide.

Poliner and Lieber (2003) claimed that students became more attached to school through an effective advocacy program. Although there were specific activities in advocacy designed to impact student attachment and belongingness in the larger school environment, any noticeable effect in that regard was negligible. The *Journal of School Health* (2004) cited that effective advocacy programs demonstrated that the adults in the school care about student learning and about the students themselves. Outside of the effective advocacy groups this element was sorely lacking as well. Meloro's (2005) research reported low scores with regard to the advisory program's effect on school pride. This study revealed similar responses from students and teachers with regard to the minimal effect of the advocacy program on school pride and school spirit.

Added Work. Clearly the advocacy period required extra planning and preparation. Anfara and Brown's (2001) research discovered that teachers considered the advisory period an additional preparation. Tocci (2005) said that teachers often felt like advisory was an extra class to teach without the adequate preparation time. Teachers in Tocci's study also said that many teachers expressed angst with regard to the advisory program reporting that it felt like another class, resulting in an exhausting day. The effective advocates in this study unanimously concurred that as much as they loved the students in their advocacy group and enjoyed advocacy, the program demanded additional preparation which ultimately affected their school and personal time. This was a critical issue that seemed to go unresolved other than to say that the effective advocates

saw advocacy preparation to be a professional responsibility not to be dismissed; consequently they tended to it accordingly.

While the school's effort to carefully plan and devise school-wide lessons for advocacy was intended to relieve the teachers of additional planning; the opposite was indeed the case. Teachers spent a significant amount of time preparing for advocacy augmenting the scripted plans with activities that were more meaningful and relevant to the needs of the students. Teacher preparation time seemed to be overlooked when implementing the advocacy program. Therefore teacher frustration in this regard was strikingly apparent. With regard to the school-wide lessons, students and advocates expressed disparaging thoughts about their effectiveness, thus causing the effective advocates to create and plan additional activities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed to those practitioners in the school who may be responsible for the implementation, design, and effectiveness of the advisory/advocacy program (principals, program coordinators, school improvement leaders, counselors, student advocacy coordinators). While it is not assumed that these strategies can be employed in all schools, they may be of benefit in whole or in part, depending upon the individual circumstances in each school.

Establishing a Compelling Need. The school must first collaboratively determine and establish an indisputable and compelling need for the program. Tocci (2005) reported frustration amongst the teachers resulting from a lack of clarity in the purpose

and goals of the advisory program. This school's need stemmed from the academic gaps between groups of students and the need for a social support mechanism for all students. Establishing a common need/purpose and securing agreement and support from the faculty (teacher/advocates) is absolutely essential. The advocacy program will be ineffective without a shared belief system establishing clear goals and objectives for the program. This should also assist in garnering building-wide support from the teachers. The lack thereof will ineluctably lead to teacher resistance, apathy, mediocrity and inconsistency among advisory/advocacy groups.

It would be advisable for the school to send a broad-based leadership team, department chairmen, or teacher leaders to conferences or seminars where advisory/advocacy and relationship-building is the focus. Generating excitement amongst a large contingency of teachers could result in school-wide support among all faculty members.

Dealing with Variability across Advocacy Groups. As Meloro (2005) discovered, inconsistent effort from the teachers/advisors left the students (advisees) feeling dismayed, disenchanted, and frustrated with advisory. Variability across advocacy groups in this study led to some groups flourishing in dynamic and vibrant cultures while others seemed to stagnate. This is an issue that needs to be reckoned with from the onset of the program. All efforts from the program coordinator and administrators need to be focused on establishing quality in and among all advocacy groups and ongoing supervision and evaluation needs to be in place in order to ensure cohesion and school wide effectiveness..

Professional Development. Initial and ongoing professional development is a key component for any effective advisory/advocacy program. The success of such a program is dependent upon the teachers' ability to comprehend, recognize, and apply a role reversal from teacher to advocate. Professional development is the central element needed to equip teachers with a new skill set to be used in the advocacy role. Thorough and consistently implemented professional development activities will prepare teachers to meet these new challenges. Program coordinators should also be cognizant about identifying potentially weak or resistant teachers and do everything possible to support those individuals in adapting to their new role as teacher/advocate. Ongoing training, preparation, and practice for the faculty to assume the role as advocate versus teacher is imperative. Once the program is on sound footing ongoing training and refinement of the advocate's skills is critical. New teachers should be indoctrinated into the advocacy program with an in-depth review of the program and extensive training upon their appointment to the school. Much of the training should focus on the central goals of the program, namely relationship-building and group facilitation skills. Ongoing discussion in faculty and small group meetings, combined with regular opportunities for faculty to practice advocacy activities among themselves, should become routine to facilitate growth amongst the advocates, foster positive interaction about the program, and enable the teachers/advocates to continually share ideas, activities, and successes with one another.

Hagborg (1993) found that, "teachers had difficulty finding an effective leadership role in advisory and they often found themselves delivering a 'group lesson' typical of their classroom style" (p. 50). Therefore, it may be advisable for the school to

consider teaming strong advocates with colleagues who are not as able, enthusiastic, or willing. Nothing will shatter the advisory program faster than having teachers who are half-hearted and lukewarm about the program working in isolation. By teaming teachers the school can better breed a pervasively positive feeling about the program and allow less skilled advocates to learn from more effective advocates.

What Really Matters (The Advocate/Student Relationship). The advocacy program will only be as good as the advocate's genuine desire to be the students' supporter, coach, mentor, cheerleader, and encourager and in every way demonstrate care and concern for their students. The development of the advocate/student relationship and the extent to which that relationship is nurtured is of paramount importance. Eccles, Lord, and Midley (1995) recommend that "serious efforts be taken to improve, and expand, the nature of student-teacher relationship in schools that serve adolescents" (p. 539). Arhar and Kromrey's (1993) research emphasized the importance of social bonding, teachers/students and students/students. Ayers (1994) claimed that such relationships are the "essence of advisory/advocacy" (p. 10). The success of the program and each advocacy group depends highly on the rapport established between the advocate and their students. The school should make every attempt to create time and design activities during advisory/advocacy that propagate such relationships. Some recommendations for activities include one-on-one conferencing during which the advocate can speak to individual students about their school and personal affairs and the advocate can attain quality time with each student. This strategy was highly touted by the effective advocates in this study as an invaluable mechanism for bonding with each student. One relevant purpose for such conferencing would be the tracking of academic

progress and the monitoring of grades. In addition, designated activities that provide time for students to share personal stories and interests during advocacy would also help enhance each student's worth and contribute to relationship-building between the teacher and the students. Relationship-building is an intangible attribute and activities such as ice-breakers and team-building activities designed to encourage interaction between the students and the advocate are the keys to fostering engagement and attachment for long-lasting, meaningful relationships.

Developing Curriculum. Different from establishing the primary purpose and goals for the program is the aspect of developing content (curriculum/activities) that is relevant, meaningful, and student-centered. Tocci, et al. (2005) found that, "advisors often expressed frustration with a lack of clarity about the content for advisory" (p. 10). Tocci reported that, "in the absence of a structured curriculum some teachers reported that they were running out of ideas" (p. 13). Meloro (2005) found that students were bored and apathetic when they saw little relevance in the activities of advisory. Hagborg (1993) discovered boredom and complacency when the content in advisory seemed superficial. Students must see relevancy in the activities and a key component of the curriculum must include the flexibility for advocates to be spontaneous in their response to student issues, concerns, and celebrations that may arise before, during, and after the scheduled meetings. The freedom to respond to student-related needs and the incorporation of relevant topics associated with the lives of the students is unmatched in importance. Providing teachers with this flexibility would help create a positive attitude toward the program, recognize teachers' potential in their advocacy role, and help defuse criticism regarding redundant, stagnant curriculum.

Ultimately, students need to know that the program is designed to meet their needs and their input into the curriculum is valued. It would be advantageous for the school to devise and maintain a committee comprised of teachers/advocates, students, and counselors to plan advisory activities. The students in this study commented repetitively on the importance of involving the student voice in the design of the advocacy curriculum.

Teacher/Advocate Preparation Time. Another recommendation deals with the teacher/advocate preparation time for advocacy. Anfara and Brown's (2001) research revealed that, "teachers noted that advisory periods took on the burden of an additional class preparation" (p. 3). Tocci (2005) reported that teachers experienced angst with advisory feeling like it was an extra period that demanded added preparation ultimately making the day seem exhausting. There is no disguising this issue; advisory/advocacy is another preparation and will require extra planning from the teacher/advocate. Irrespective of the fact that this school had pre-planned activities/lessons, the teachers/advocates posited that additional preparation was essential to be effective in their role as advocate.

Giving this issue some attention in the planning stages could deter frustration from the teachers/advocates, increase willingness and participation among the faculty, and help avoid a possible fall-out in the early stages of implementation. Some strategies schools may choose to employ are: providing one extra period on one day for individual or group preparation during the week specifically designated for advisory/advocacy prep, providing time during meetings (faculty, team, department) for teachers to plan activities,

and setting aside time during inservice/professional development days for teachers to plan and dialogue with other teachers/advocates.

Program Evaluation. The school should administer an annual evaluation or assessment of the program. All stakeholders should convene on a periodic basis to review the program goals and objectives, discuss the status of the program, assess the effectiveness of the activities, and allow open dialogue to occur that would lead to continuous program improvement. Community members and parents should also be active participants in this process.

The Role of the Advocate. Finally, whereas this study did not delve specifically into the role of the teacher as advocate, it was nevertheless evident that the teachers who displayed an affinity for such a role were more effective with their advocacy group. The natural inclination for any given teacher to assume or develop into the advocacy role is certainly an area deserving of further study and investigation. Furthermore, the degree to which the typical secondary teacher (otherwise trained to be a content specialist) can be trained, groomed, or developed into an effective advisory group leader is a dilemma worth exploring. The vulnerability of this issue clearly places the advisory program at risk from its inception in that anything less than uniform effectiveness from all the teachers/advocates could equate to inconsistency and ineffectiveness in the program.

In closing, the young men and women in our public high schools are the future of this country and each and every student needs an adult advocate in the school who cares about them, supports them, and will go above and beyond the call of duty to work for their success. An advisory/advocacy program, if properly implemented and supported, can be of inestimable worth to the success of every student.

REFERENCES

- Anfar, V. A., & Brown, K. M. (2001). Advisor-advisee programs: Community Building in a state of affective disorder? In V. A. Anfar, Jr. (Ed.), *The Handbook of research in middle level education* (pp. 3 – 34). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Arhar, J.M., & Kromrey, J.D. (1993). *Interdisciplinary teaming in the middle school: Creating a sense of belonging for at-risk middle level students*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA.
- Ayers, L.R. (1994). Middle school advisory programs: Findings from the field. *Middle School Journal*, 25(3), 8-14.
- Bachor, D.G. (2000). *Rethinking case study research methodology*. Paper presented at the Special Education National Research Forum, Helsinki, Finland.
- Best Practices Brief, (2004). *School climate and learning*. University Outreach and Engagement: Board of Trustees: Michigan State University.
- Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York: Council on Adolescent Development.
- Clark, J. & Frazer, E. (2003). *Personalized learning: Preparing high school students to create their futures*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press Inc.
- Coker, K. J., & Borders, D.L. (2001). An analysis of environmental and social

- factors affecting adolescent problem drinking. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 79, 200-207.
- Cotton, K. (1996). School size, school climate, and student performance. *School Improvement Research Series (SIRS)*.
- Cotton, K. (2001). New small learning communities: Findings from recent literature. *Northwest Regional Educational Library*, 1-64.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- Eccles, J.S., & Midley, C. (1991). What are we doing to early adolescents? The impact of educational contexts on early adolescents. *American Journal of Education*, 99(4), 521-542.
- Educators for Social Responsibility, (2006). *The importance of school climate and culture*. Cambridge, MA : Schwadesign, Inc.
- Epstein, J.L.,& Boriack, C. (1994). *Education in the middle grades: Overview of national practices and trends..* Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Espe, L. (1993). The effectiveness of teacher advisors in a junior high. *Canadian School Executive*, 12(7), 15-19.
- Firestone, W. (1987). Meaning in method: The rhetoric of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*, 16(7), 16-21.
- Foster, C.M., & Martinez, I. (1985). The effects of school enrollment size in the middle and junior high school on teacher and student attitude and student self-concept. *Research in Rural Education*, 3(2), 57-60.

- Gottfriedson, D.C. (1985). *School size and school disorder*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools.
- Gregory, T.B., & Smith, G.R. (1987). The case for small high schools. In high schools as communities: The small school reconsidered. Bloomington, IN: *Phi Delta Kappan*, 68-85.
- Hagborg, W.J. (1993a). Middle school student satisfaction with group counseling: An initial study. *Journal for the Specialist in Group Work*, 18, 80-85.
- Howe, K. & Eisenhart, M. (1990). Standards for qualitative (and) quantitative research: A prolegomenon. *Educational Researcher*, 19(4), 2-9.
- Kennedy, M.K. (1997). The connection between research and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 26(7), 4-12.
- Kessler, R. (1990). Passages: Fostering community, heart, and spirit in adolescent education. *New Horizons for Learning*.
- Klonsky, S., & Klonsky, M. (1999). Countering anonymity through small schools. *Educational Leadership*, 57(1), 38-41.
- Lear, R.J. (2001a). *Questions to consider about conversions of large high schools*. Seattle, WA: Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington.
- Linn, M.C., & Songer, M.B. (1991). Cognitive and conceptual change in adolescence. *American Journal of Education*, 99(4), 379-417.
- Loukas, A. (2007). What is school climate? *National Association of Elementary School Principals*, 5(1), 1-4.
- MacIver, D.J. (1991). Meeting the needs of young adolescents: Advisory groups,

- interdisciplinary teaching teams, and school transition programs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 71(6), 457-464.
- Makkonen, R. (2004). Advisory research and evaluation. *Horace*, 20(4).
- McMillian, J.H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence – based inquiry*. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Meier, D. (1998). Can the odds be changed? In small schools, big imaginations: A creative look at urban public schools. *Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform*, 85-92.
- Meloro, P. C. (2005). Do high school advisory programs promote personalization? Correlates of school belonging. Proquest Information and Learning Company. (UMI No. 3188841)
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Midley, C. & Urdan, T. (1995). Predictors of middle school student's use of self-handicapping strategies. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 15(4), 389-411.
- Miles, M.M. & Huberman, A.M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A source book of new methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mulhall, L. & Ziegler, S. (1994). Establishing and evaluating a successful advisory program in a middle school. *Middle School Journal*, 25(4).
- National Association of Secondary School Principals, (1996). *Breaking ranks: Changing an American institution*. Reston, VA: The National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Owens, R.G. (1982). Methodological rigor in naturalistic inquiry: Some issues

- and answers. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 18(2), 1-21.
- The Panasonic Foundation. (1987). Essential school system purpose and responsibilities (ESSPAR). Retrieved February 2, 2009 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.panasonic.com/meca/foundation/esspar.asp>
- Poliner, R.A., & Lieber, C.M. (2003). *The advisory guide*. Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility.
- Rist, R.C. (1982). On the application of ethnographic inquiry to education: Procedures and possibilities. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 19(6), 439-450.
- Simmons, L., & Klarich, J. (1989). The advisory curriculum: Why and how. *NELMS Journal*, 2(2), 12-13.
- Simpson, G., & Boriack, C. (1994). Chronic absenteeism: A simple success story. *The Journal of the Texas Middle School Association*, 2(2), 10-14.
- Stevenson, C. (1992). *Teaching ten to fourteen year olds*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Tellis, W. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(2).
- Tocci, C., Hochman, D., & Allen, D. (2005). Advisory programs in high school restructuring. Paper presented at the American Education Research Association. National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Totten, S. & Nielson, W. (1994). Middle level students' perceptions of their advisor/advisee program: A preliminary study. *Current Issues in Middle Level Education*, 3(2), 8-33.

- Weishew, N. L., & Peng, S.S. (1993). Variables predicting student's problem behaviors. *Journal of Education Research*, 87(1), 1-16.
- Wentzel, K.R. (1994). Family functioning and academic achievement in middle school. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 14(2), 268-291.
- Wingspread declaration on school connectedness (2004). *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 233.
- Wolcott, H.F. (1978). *Criteria for an ethnographic approach to research in schools*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Yalom, I.D. (1985). *Theory and practice of group psychotherapy (3rd ed.)*. New York: Basic.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications.

Cover Letter
Appendix A

To whom it may concern,

My name is Craig Butler and I am the principal at the State College Area High School North building and a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the Pennsylvania State University. I am conducting a study of high school advisory programs.

The overall research question to be addressed in this study is: What is the impact of an effective advisory program?

Subsidiary questions include:

- 3) What are the various structural and cultural components of the advisory program that contribute to its efficacy?
- 4) What content, themes, and activities of the advisory program appear to most strongly contribute to its effectiveness?

I would sincerely appreciate you taking approximately thirty minutes to complete the enclosed survey. The survey is designed with the intent of gathering your perceptions relative to the quality of your school's advisory program. The goal of the study is to examine the impact of an exemplary advisory program.

Research tells us that effective advisory programs contain components that enhance students' sense of belonging to the school, enhance students' sense of identity, increase student engagement in the school, enhance student/teacher relationships, create positive school spirit, foster student cooperation and citizenship, and create positive school climate.

Your completion of the survey is imperative in that a limited number of surveys are being distributed. Please complete the survey and sign page 2 of this letter at your earliest convenience and return it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Please be assured that the confidentiality of data and the identity of all participants will remain secure at all times and be available only to the researcher. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose not to answer certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time. All participants must be at least 18 years of age. Completion and return of the survey will be considered your implied consent to participate, therefore please keep a copy of this form for your records. Thank you for your assistance.

Researcher information:

Craig B. Butler
115 Gregg Street
Spring Mills, Pa 16875
814-422-8851
cxb17@scasd.org

Advisor information:

Dr. Nona Prestine
217 Rackley Building
University Park, Pa 16801
814-865-1487
nap11@psu.edu

PARTICIPATING PRINCIPAL SIGNATURE_____

DATE....._____

ADVISORY PROGRAM PRINCIPAL SURVEY
(Appendix B)

The following survey is being distributed to a limited number of high school principals who have an existing advisory program in their school. The problem under study is the impact of a highly effective advisory program. The following attributes of the program's effectiveness will be explored: students' sense of belonging, students' attachment to school, students' relations with their peers and teachers, positive teacher attitude towards students, sense of community in the school, teacher praise towards students, and the prevailing ambiance, mood, and spirit in the school. The research on this topic is scarce and your participation in this study is absolutely vital. The information you provide will assist the researcher in the initial data gathering about the advisory program in your school.

Please take time at your earliest convenience to complete the survey questions. Please read each question carefully and respond accordingly in the space provided or by circling the appropriate response. Thank you for your participation.

General Information

1. What is the total enrollment of the high school? _____
2. How many full time faculty members are employed at the high school? _____
3. How many years have you been the principal of the school? _____
4. How long has the Advisory program been in existence at the school? _____
5. What grade(s) participate in the advisory program? _____
6. Are the advisory groups mixed across grade levels? Yes _____ No _____
(If No, skip to question #8)
7. If the advisory groups are mixed grade level please specify how they are mixed?
9 – 10 _____ 11 – 12 _____ 9 – 12 _____ Other _____

8. How many days per week does advisory meet? _____
9. What is the duration (in minutes) of each advisory session? _____
10. What is the average size of each advisory group? _____
11. Are the advisors allowed to develop their own activities? Yes_____ No_____
12. Do you have a prescribed curriculum for advisory? Yes_____ No_____
- 13 Do the students have any input on the activities conducted in advisory? Yes__ No__
14. Do you attempt to make sure there is an equal number of males and females in each advisory? Yes_____ No_____
15. Have you recently evaluated the effectiveness of the advisory program? Yes__No__
16. If you have evaluated the effectiveness of the school's advisory program, in what manner was it evaluated? (For example: surveys, teacher and student informal feedback, climate surveys, etc. Please specify and summarize the results).

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Program Effectiveness

17. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the school's advisory program?
- a. Very ineffective
 - b. Somewhat ineffective

- c. Neither ineffective or effective
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

18. How effective is the school's advisory program as it contributes to each student's sense of belonging (i.e. attachment to the school, attitude towards attending school, involvement in clubs and activities, feeling of connectedness to school, commitment to academics, decrease in dropout rate)?

- a. Very ineffective
- b. Somewhat ineffective
- c. Neither ineffective or effective
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

19. How effective is the school's advisory program as it contributes to each student's sense of identity (feeling known, noticed, and valued in the school, exhibiting a sense of self-confidence and self-assurance, increased personalization in the school)?

- a. Very ineffective
- b. Somewhat ineffective
- c. Neither ineffective or effective
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

20. How effective is the school's advisory program as it contributes to the climate in the school (ambiance, mood, attitude, and spirit in the school)?

- a. Very ineffective
- b. Somewhat ineffective
- c. Neither ineffective or effective

- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

21. How effective is the school's advisory program in increasing student engagement and attachment to school (involvement in clubs and activities, participation in class discussions, participation in advisory discussions, interaction with peers and teachers in the school environment, opportunities for students to voice their opinion and participate in decision making)?

- a. Very ineffective
- b. Somewhat ineffective
- c. Neither ineffective or effective
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

22. How effective is the school's advisory program in creating positive school spirit (students treating one another with respect, school pride, students attending after school activities, student involvement in spirit building activities, social bond between students)?

- a. Very ineffective
- b. Somewhat ineffective
- c. Neither ineffective or effective
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

23. How effective is the school's advisory program in contributing to enhanced teacher/student relationships (students and teachers demonstrating respect for one another, increased interaction between teachers and students during non-instructional times, lasting positive relationships with teachers, positive teacher attitude towards students, teachers' praise towards students)?

- a. Very ineffective
- b. Somewhat ineffective

- c. Neither ineffective or effective
 - d. Somewhat effective
 - e. Very effective
24. How effective is the school's advisory program in contributing to improved student cooperation and citizenship (students' overall demeanor in the building, decrease in student disciplinary referrals, students' respect and cooperation with school rules, students receiving fair and equitable treatment)?
- a. Very ineffective
 - b. Somewhat ineffective
 - c. Neither ineffective or effective
 - d. Somewhat effective
 - e. Very effective
25. How effective is the school's advisory program in contributing to a sense of community in the school? (students feeling known, noticed, and valued in the school environment, recognition of student achievement, students feeling respected, safe, cared for, supported and comfortable in the school environment)?
- a. Very ineffective
 - b. Somewhat ineffective
 - c. Neither ineffective or effective
 - d. Somewhat effective
 - e. Very effective
26. How effective are the activities (curriculum) conducted during advisory?
- a. Very ineffective
 - b. Somewhat ineffective
 - c. Neither ineffective or effective
 - d. Somewhat effective
 - e. Very effective

27. How would you rate the extent to which the teachers in the school support the advisory program?
- Very unsupportive
 - Somewhat unsupportive
 - Neither unsupportive or supportive
 - Somewhat supportive
 - Very supportive
28. How would you rate the extent to which the students in the school support the advisory program?
- Very unsupportive
 - Somewhat unsupportive
 - Neither unsupportive or supportive
 - Somewhat supportive
 - Very supportive
29. Does the school conduct ongoing professional training for the faculty in regards to their duties as advisors?
- Yes
 - No
- Comments:
30. Does the school have an individual designated as coordinator of the advisory program?
- Yes
 - No

Comments:

31. Do the counselors perform any specialized role in support of the advisory program?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Comments:

32. Can you please provide a short description of any tangible evidence that would help to describe the overall quality of the advisory program?

Please return this survey in the enclosed self-addressed envelope to:

Craig Butler
115 Gregg Street
Spring Mills, Pa 16875

Thank you!

Appendix C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: Hello. My name is Craig Butler and I would like to talk with you about the advocacy program in your school. I am conducting a study on the impact of an effective advocacy program. I have gathered some preliminary information about your school's advocacy program and your comments will assist tremendously in the compilation of additional information.

Your responses to the following questions will remain anonymous and will be kept in a secure location accessible only by the researcher.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (Teacher, Administrator, Counselor, and Student)

- 1. Please tell me about your experience with advisory/advocacy programs?**
- 2. Your school has been utilizing the advocacy program for several years. Tell me what you see as the greatest strengths of the program?**
- 3. How has it had the greatest impact on the students, staff, or the school as a whole?**
- 4. What do you see as the greatest weaknesses of the program?**
- 5. When you think about the activities that take place in FA, which of those do you think have been the most successful and had the greatest impact?**
- 6. If you change anything about the advocacy program, what would it be and Why?**

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University – adult and student consent

Title of Project: The Impact of an Exemplary Advisory Program

Principal Investigator: Craig Butler, Doctoral Candidate
115 Gregg Street
Spring Mills, Pa 16875
cxb17@scasd.org

Advisor: Dr. Nona Prestine
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pa 16801
nap11@psu.edu

1. Research Questions:

The overall research question to be addressed in this study is: What is the impact of a highly effective advisory program?

Subsidiary questions include:

- **What are the various structural and cultural components of the program that contribute to its efficacy?**
- **What content, themes, and activities of the advisory program appear to most strongly contribute to its effectiveness?**

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in an individual or group interview about the impact of an exemplary advisory program. The interview will be audio taped pending your approval. In the event that a follow up interview is needed such interviews will be conducted at the school site or by phone if personal interviews become prohibitive.

3. **Benefits:** You may benefit from this study by increasing your awareness of the impact of an exemplary advisory program. This study will examine the constructs of advisory that lead to its effectiveness such as: students' sense of belonging, students' attachment to school, student relations with peers and adults,

positive teacher attitude towards students, sense of community within the school, teacher praise towards students, and the prevailing attitude, mood, and ambiance in the school. Your participation will allow you to express your opinions on this topic.

4. **Duration/Time:** The duration of the interview will be no longer than 45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted on-site. If face-to-face interviews are not feasible, phone interviews will be conducted with the permission of the interviewee.
5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Following the completion of the interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed as all names will be replaced with code numbers. The data will be stored in a secure location accessible by only the researcher and all data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.
6. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Craig Butler at 814-777-5566 with questions or concerns about this study.
7. **Participation:** Your participation is voluntary. It is important to note, that you can choose not to answer certain questions during the interview and you can also end your participation at any time.
8. The following is a list from which you can select what aspects of your participation you are willing to share for research purposes. Please circle, **I Do** or **Do Not** give my consent for each question.

Please circle your response:

- a. I Do I Do Not give my permission to be interviewed
- b. I Do I Do Not give my permission to be audio taped
- c. I Do I Do Not permit the data to be archived for the next 5 years (data not archived will be destroyed after three years)
- d. I Do I Do Not want my name to remain on the transcribed interview data
- e. I Do I Do Not want my interview quotes to be used in public venues
- f. I Do I Do Not (parent only) give permission for my son/daughter to be interviewed

9. Audio tapes will be stored in a secure facility and will be destroyed following the completion of the study unless permission has been granted for archival purposes. Only the researcher and the transcriber will have access to the audio tapes.
10. The principal researcher will retain this consent form in a secure location.
Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Parent Signature (if needed) _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

VITA

CRAIG B.BUTLER

Professional Experience:

- 1979 – 1981: Instrumental Music Teacher, Benson High School, Benson, Az.
- 1981 – 1982: Instrumental Music Teacher, Flagstaff High School, Flagstaff, Az.
- 1982 – 1987: Instrumental Music Teacher, Amphi High School, Tucson, Az.
- 1987 – 1990: Instrumental Music Teacher and Athletic Director, Sahuaro High School, Tucson, Az.
- 1990 – 1992: Assistant Principal, Green River High School, Green River, Wy.
- 1992 – 1999: Principal, Green River High School, Green River, Wy.
- 1999 – Present: Principal, State College Area High School, State College, Pa.

Educational Background:

- 1978: Bachelor of Arts, Music Education, University of Arizona
- 1983: Master of Arts, Music Education, University of Arizona
- 2009: Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, The Pennsylvania State University

Professional Service Organizations:

- Wyoming High Schools Activity Association Board of Control
- Pennsylvania Interscholastic Association District VI Committee
- Pennsylvania School Study Council