

Shoreham-Wading River Middle School: An Advisory System

As adolescence approaches and peers become more important, it often becomes harder for students to communicate honestly and trustingly with parents and teachers. And yet they need adult guidance. Shoreham-Wading River Middle School has built its entire program around an advisory system that emphasizes support and advocacy for every child. Besides giving adults a context in which they can effectively guide students, the advisory system provides students with a supportive peer group and strengthens communication between school and home.

1. Each student is placed in an advisory group with one staff member and 7 to 12 other students. Advisors include academic teachers; art, music, physical education, and library teachers; and administrators.
2. Every morning, the advisor's job is to meet with his or her group of students for 12 minutes, similar to the familiar homeroom period.
3. The advisor meets again daily with the group for 15 minutes during advisory lunch. The advisory group discusses school issues, shares what has been happening to its members, plans group functions, and discusses current events. The group is a source of identity.
4. Advisors have built into their schedules a conference period three mornings a week specifically for meeting with advisees on a one-to-one basis or in small groups.
5. On a fourth morning the group of advisory teachers meets to discuss students. This conference period is held during the first period when music rehearsals are also scheduled. (There are two bus runs each morning.) This allows each child and advisor to be alone while the other students are still at home. A sixth grade teacher notes: "First period is what makes advisory what it is. Without the first period option the 12-minute advisory would be just like homeroom in the old days."
6. During the conference period, the student and the advisor can discuss academic progress, work on a project together or discuss home or school problems. a) The advisor is responsible for knowing enough about his or her advisees to make proper recommendations to parents and teachers about the children's programs.
7. Emergency conferences may be called by either the advisor or the advisee and take place at lunchtime, after school, or between classes.
8. The advisor keeps the advisee's parents informed of academic progress or problems. Parents appreciate the fact that when they have questions about their child, they know whom to contact at the school.
9. Advisors meet formally with parents three times a year.
10. Advisors have the responsibility of keeping in touch with their advisees' teachers, especially at report card time.

Following implementation of its advisory system, Shoreham-Wading River found that student discipline problems declined, staff morale improved, and parent involvement in the school including parent volunteers increased.