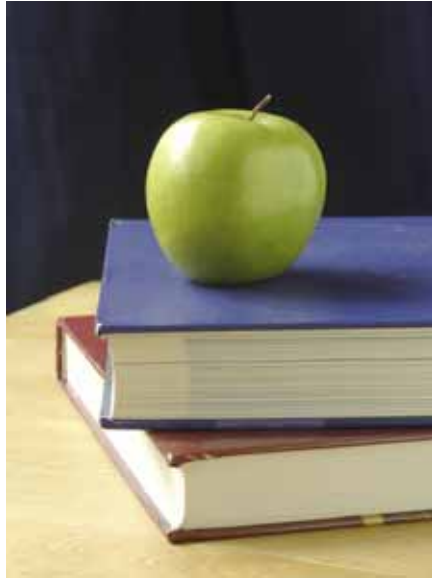


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ADVISORY HANDBOOK

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I. Philosophy

All students at the Albert G. Prodell Middle School are placed in advisory groups. Whenever possible, the following information is considered for the purposes of assigning students to an advisory: the needs and interests of individual students, gender distribution, community origin, school needs, numerical balance, and, where appropriate, parental input. The preliminary composition of the seventh and eighth grade advisory groups is formulated by counselors before the start of the school year with input from prior year advisors. Advisory groups are designed with an eye toward heterogeneous grouping. Advisory groups range in size.

Because of the importance of the advisory groups to the philosophy of the Middle School, a significant amount of time in the school day is reserved for the advisory activities, such as individual conferences between advisor and advisee, advisory group, and advisory lunch.

Advisory is essentially a comprehensive, school-oriented, one-to-one or small group relationship between the advisor and the advisee for the purposes of communication and direction. It is also a home base for announcements, attendance, lunch, and other activities. Advisory provides each student with at least one staff member who has a thorough knowledge of that student's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and personal growth. Advisory enables each student to have an adult advocate in the school; the advisor is a person who can champion the advisee's cause in student-teacher, student-administrator, and student-student interactions.

There are four major areas that define the advisor's role more clearly. These are **advisor-advisee relationships, advisory group functions, advisor-parent contacts, and advisor-staff interactions.**

II. Advisor-Advisee Relationships

The goal of the advisor-advisee relationship is to create a positive working relationship that provides the student with both a person and a structure to help resolve school concerns. This is achieved primarily through the individual advisory conference, which generally occurs during the AM period. At least **five** conferences between advisor and advisee take place during the year. Advisors are expected to have at least one conference with each advisee before the fall parent conferences, two more before the spring parent conferences, and two more before the closing of school.

These regular conferences allow the advisor to keep track of the school activities in which the advisee is participating. Through conferences, the advisor also gains a better understanding of how the student views her/his progress. This information, together with the feedback from staff, gives the advisor a more comprehensive picture of each advisee.

The advisor is responsible for seeing that the student is academically responsible. In many cases, advisors have to help students organize themselves, their time, and their materials to accomplish school tasks. The advisor may also need to act as a mediator

between an advisee and individual staff members when personality conflicts arise which hinder the establishment of a good learning experience.

The first conference of the year between advisor and advisee should set a positive tone for future conferences. In order to help get things going, the following question may prove useful:*

What did you like best about school last year?

What did you do during the summer?

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

How long have you lived in this area?

Where did you live before here?

What do you like to do best?

Do you have a hobby?

Do you have any pets?

What is your favorite TV show?

What are you looking forward to in the Middle School this year?

In many cases, the advisor has been given information from last year's advisor (e.g. academic strengths and weaknesses, personal interests). Other information is available in student files, from the counseling and special services staff, and from the school nurse. The advisor and the advisee can use this information as a starting point for a discussion. It is important that last year's successes be encouraged, and problems be handled positively.

Sometimes an advisee might feel more relaxed with a friend at hand for a conference; therefore, for the first conference, it may be worthwhile to schedule more than one advisee but not more than three, i.e., small groups that could plan or work on:

- Reminding students of specific upcoming academic obligations (e.g., a test, a book to be read by a certain date, a project due, a written assignment, etc.);
- Evaluating aspects of the Middle School program, both orally and in writing;
- Showing progress reports to individual advisees before they are sent home;
- Explaining and re-explaining the what, when, where, why, and how of the Middle School experience;
- An art project for the advisory room.

III. Advisory Group Functions

It is strongly suggested that the advisory sit around a table or in a circle and eat leisurely as a group during advisory lunch. In addition to discussing topics, it is particularly appropriate for the advisory to discuss good nutrition during advisory lunch. Advisors may also engage advisees in activities based on monthly themes (see Appendix). The advisory should not leave the lunch area before the end of the lunch period and not until the area has been cleaned.

Experience has shown that a positive advisory group activity during the first month of school provides much insight and information for the advisor. It also serves to bring the group together. Thus, it is suggested, but not required, that advisors plan an activity with their advisories early in the year. For example:

- Planning a school or community service activity;
- Doing a school project.

IV. Advisor-Parent Contacts

The goal of advisor-parent contacts is effective communication about the growth and progress of the child. The advisor serves as an important resource in the school for information of each advisee. Advisors are urged to make introductory contact with the parents of advisees, either by telephone or in person, during the first month of school. During the fall parent open house, time is set aside for advisors and their advisees' parents to meet.

During the year, when an advisor plans on contacting a parent, it is important to inform the advisee of the reason for the contact. Parents must be made aware that their concerns about their child and the Middle School program should be first addressed to the advisor before other staff members are involved. This does not preclude parents from communicating with other teachers, but serves as a reminder that parent-teacher communications are best served by first taking advantage of the advocacy efforts of the advisor. Advisors should keep in mind that the parent is an important resource in working with the child. Parents can provide useful information or background that is helpful to the advisor in understanding a particular situation. Parents and educators have to work together to encourage maximum growth in each child.

There are two scheduled advisor-parent conferences during the year: one in the fall, and one in the spring. Both conferences are concerned with presenting a comprehensive picture of the child's progress in school. The advisor must be able to talk with parents specifically about their child and his or her relationship to the school. Each advisor receives extensive information from the advisee's teachers to present an accurate picture of the child in the Middle School program.

In general, discipline problems will be handled by the advisor, who will take appropriate measures to deal with the situations as they arise. This may mean calling the parents to inform them about what has happened and what the advisor and the school are doing about the situation. In major disciplinary situations, the advisor should consult with the counselors, psychologist, social worker, and/or administration before final decisions are reached and before parents are called.

Advisors are encouraged to make positive contacts with parents throughout the year (i.e., informing them via telephone or letter of positive experience their child has had; sharing with them successes and honors the child has earned). This is much more important than one realizes, especially if contact is often negative. The advisor is also responsible for seeing that a child who will be, or has been, absent receives school

assignments as soon as possible. A phone call home during a child's illness is often appreciated.

It must be cautioned that advisors are **not** guidance counselors, psychologists, or social workers, and must be careful about how involved they get in the life of a child and family. Although the school must consider whether outside events are affecting the child's academic performance, there are limitations on involvement in a public school setting. The advisor should consult, as appropriate, with the counselor, psychologist, social worker, assistant principal, and/or principal in all sensitive situations.

V. Advisor-Staff Contacts

"Staff" refers to teachers, counselors, the psychologist and social worker, administrators, nurse, coaches, etc. The goals of advisor-staff interactions are:

- Communication and dissemination of information concerning all areas of students' growth;
- Sharing approaches, methods, successes, and failures to increase the effectiveness of advisors.

Advisory team meetings are scheduled weekly to share relevant and appropriate information about students. Advisors should expect teachers to contribute information on specific students and specific problems, if any. Some teachers develop close relationships with students other than their own advisees, and these teachers serve as additional resources for the advisor.

Teachers should inform Advisors when they need to contact a parent about a student. If there is a disagreement concerning the resolution of a problem, the counselor, psychologist, or social worker will assist in making a decision.

The advisor is the student's advocate, and, at times, must explain the student's behavior to staff members to help minimize potentially troublesome situations. The advisor should also communicate special kinds of information that may affect a student's performance in school to appropriate staff members.

In order to have a comprehensive picture of each advisee, advisors need written and oral feedback from staff. At the beginning of the year, meetings may be held so that the previous year's advisor can communicate relevant information about the advisee to the current year's advisor.

VI. Role of the guidance counselor, social worker, psychologist, administration, and Child Study Team in the advisory program

Advisors may use the resources of the counselor, social worker, and psychologist in several ways. The first is as a sounding board in dealing with the advisee. If an advisee exhibits a pattern of failing to meet school responsibilities, the counselor, social worker, or psychologist can be of help to the advisor by providing several different types

of suggestions to assist with changing the pattern. Periodically, problems arise in which the advisor feels that personal contact between the advisee and the counselor, social worker, or psychologist is necessary. In such cases, the advisor will notify the appropriate pupil personnel staff member, who will then initiate contact with the advisee. Parent consent will be obtained if any continued involvement seems necessary.

Occasionally, an advisee may share with his/her advisor information about him/herself, the advisee's family, staff members, or other students that is of a sensitive and/or confidential nature. At other times, an advisor may become privy to such information from sources other than the advisee. If the nature of the information indicates that the safety and health of someone is involved, that the school or community property has been or may be damaged, that a civil law has been broken, or that major school policies have been violated, the advisor has the responsibility to discuss such information with the counselor, social worker, psychologist, assistant principal, and/or principal. Unless extreme circumstances indicate otherwise, the advisor should inform the advisee of the necessity of this consultation.

Although most advisor/teacher-parent conferences take place without the counselor, social worker, or psychologist, the situation is sometimes such that his/her presence and input are recommended. The counselor or psychologist may also present and interpret standardized test scores to parents.

The counselor, social worker, and/or psychologist may provide workshops for staff, in order to improve the quality of interaction among advisees, between advisors and students, and between advisors and parents.

The school's Child Study Team (CST) is an additional source of support to advisors in working with their advisees. The CST, whose membership consists of the counselor and psychologist, an administrator, special education teachers, and the nurse, meets regularly to discuss students with unique educational and/or behavioral needs. An advisor may refer a student to the CST through the school psychologist. Advisors are encouraged to attend those CST meetings at which their advisee is being discussed.

The school's special education teachers and psychologist work closely with those advisors who have students with special educational needs.

The principal and assistant principal are also involved in the advisory program. They are available for help on general concerns as well as for problems that warrant special attention. Administration ensures that advisors are consistent and conscientious in carrying out their advisory duties.

VII. Summary

Since the advisory program is fundamental to the success of the Middle School program, it is important that each advisor meet his/her responsibilities as summarized below.

An advisor is responsible for the following:

- Having two formal parent conferences (fall and spring)
- Performing advisory duties (attendance, salute to the flag, collection of milk money, communication of school-related information)
- Supervising and interacting with his/her advisees during the advisory lunch period
- Keeping an organized and up-to-date folder on each advisee
- Contacting parents concerning each advisee's progress and behavior
- Meeting regularly with other advisors to share relevant information about students
- Assisting with discipline problems of advisees (as referred by teachers) including involving the counselor, social worker, psychologist, assistant principal, and/or principal when necessary
- Informing appropriate staff of special information about advisees (i.e. family situations, etc.)
- Assisting counselors with 9th grade course orientation
- Having and keeping records of individual conferences during the year with each advisee (a minimum of five in all – one before the fall parent conference, two more before the spring conference, and two more before the end of the school year).

Advisors need to know as much as they can about their advisees. There are several sources of information available:

- Advisee conferences
- Advisory group activities/interactions
- The advisee's permanent record folder
- The counselor, social worker, psychologist, special education teachers, other teachers, the administration and the Child Study Team
- Last year's advisor and teachers
- Regular advisory team meetings
- Progress reports from teachers
- Parent contacts
- Discipline referrals
- Informal staff contacts