

An Adult Advocate for Every Student

This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents



Academic success and personal growth increase markedly when young adolescents' affective needs are met. Therefore, all adults in developmentally responsive middle level schools are advocates, advisors, and mentors. The concept of advocacy is fundamental to the school's culture, embedded in its every aspect. Advocacy is not a singular event or a regularly scheduled time; it is an attitude of caring that translates into action when adults are responsive to the needs of each and every young adolescent in their charge.

Each student must have one adult to support that student's academic and personal development. This adult is a model of good character who is knowledgeable about young adolescent development in general, who self-evidently enjoys working with young adolescents, and who comes to know students well as individuals. Advocates or advisors are not counselors, but they listen and guide youth through the ups and downs of school life. Young adolescents have many concerns about matters that lie outside the parameters of the academic curriculum, and they need opportunities to discuss these with one another and a trusted adult.

The advisor is the primary liaison between the school and family and often initiates contact with parents, providing pertinent information about the student's program and progress, as well as being ready to receive calls from any parent with a concern. Helping families stay engaged in their child's education is a critical task. Students seeking independence often prefer to keep home and school separate, but a high quality of three-way communication will ensure that students, their parents, and the advisor will be mutually supportive.

Advisors are in a position to recognize behavioral changes in students that should be brought to the attention of counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and others who could provide appropriate support. Advisors and all staff members facilitate healthy and caring peer relationships by modeling the interpersonal relationships that define the school vision. Protecting young adolescents from bullying, for instance, begins when teachers in their classrooms as well as the total culture of the school promote compassion, understanding, and mutual respect.

To assist teachers in fulfilling the pastoral role, middle level schools use a variety of organizational arrangements such as advisory programs, extended homerooms, and team-based mentorships. These efforts augment but do not conflict with comprehensive, essential guidance and support services. The successful school demonstrates a continuity of caring and support that extends throughout a student's middle level experience.

Original publication information:

NMSA Research Committee. (2003). *An adult advocate for every student*. In *This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents* (pp. 16-17). Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.