The Journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools

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Innovation in Education



### **Advisories in Essential Schools**

We All Win Together: Met Graduates Reflect on Advisories Advisors, graduates, and a parent from the Met in Providence, Rhode Island discuss teaching and learning in a school environment designed with advisories at the center.

Creating Advisories: A Few Notes from the Field Carol Miller Lieber and Rachel Poliner, authors of Educators for Social Responsibility's *The Advisory Guide*, analyze potential pitfalls that could undermine newly launched advisory programs.

#### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Connections that Matter and Endure CES National's Mara Benitez reflects on her experience as an advisor at an Essential school, recalling students as curriculum, rituals, and the golden strand.

# Advisory Program Research and Evaluation

A review of research that demonstrates advisory programs' connection to increased academic success and improved school culture, plus suggestions for action research and data collection efforts to document the impact of advisories at your school.

#### Go to the Source

A guide to the schools and support organizations featured in these pages.

#### **Book Reviews**

- → Keeping School by Deborah Meier, Ted Sizer, and Nancy Sizer
- → The Big Picture by Dennis Littky with Samantha Grabelle
- → An Ethic of Excellence by Ron Berger
- → The Red Pencil by Ted Sizer
- → Many Children Left Behind edited by Deborah Meier and George Wood
- → Teaching as Inquiry by Katherine Simon and coauthors

### Student Bios

Takesha Lopes, from a Cape Verdian family, recently graduated from Dean College with her Associates degree in Criminal Justice. While at Dean, she was a Resident Assistant and the president of her class. In the fall of 2004, Takesha enrolled at Providence College as a junior.

Alex Rivera immigrated to the U.S. from Puerto Rico just before entering junior-high school. He is the oldest male of nine children. After gradating from the Met, he completed an Outdoor Leadership Program at Green Mountain Community College and has worked at the Met ever since. He enrolled last year at Vermont College and plans to complete his BA by 2007 as a first-generation college-bound student.

Ramon Frias transferred to the Met during his junior year from Providence's Central High School. He grew up in the Dominican Republic and immigrated to the United States at the age of eight. After graduating from the Met, he has taken on various part-time and full-time positions. Among the first in his family to pursue higher education, Ramon recently enrolled in Vermont College full-time and is working as a teacher's assistant at the Met.

Joe Claprood, deciding to put his education before his socialization, attended the Met after growing up in North Providence amidst a tight knit group of friends and family.

After graduating, he enrolled at Rhode Island College where he has been on the Dean's List numerous times. As a firstgeneration college-bound student, Joe will be graduating in the fall of 2004 with a BA in political science.

Jesse Suchmann is entering his junior year as a design student at Syracuse University, where he has not only maintained a top ranking in his highly competitive class but has also been a teacher's assistant during his sophomore year. Jesse is hoping to use his talent and education as a graphic artist to work towards positive social change.

Elissa Toro has continued to follow her passion for riding horses. Certain that she wants a future in animal care or research, she is currently managing a local stable while attending community college and deciding on a college or career program to achieve her life goals.

Also in conversation though not represented here was Cynthia Tapia, who came from Peru with her family just before entering junior high. During junior high, she was segregated into a Spanish-only classroom and had very little connection with the English-speaking community. After graduating from the Met, she got married and gave birth to a baby boy while continuing to work towards her Associates degree.



Met advisor Kristin Waugh-Hempel with some members of her advisory during their junior year. Back row: Leah Costa, Waugh-Hempel, Dan McGuigan, Javier Sanatana, Ricardo Vargas, Josh Robinson: Front row: Nate Brelsford, Elissa Toro, Sopheary Huy, Takesha Lopes



about it, because a lot of times, family is right involved in that baggage. But if you have a place that you can go to and feel comfortable enough to talk about it, then that makes you want to go there. And if you set up that environment where the kid is comfortable coming in there and talking about it, then that is the reason the kid is coming to school. Because most of the time when a kid isn't coming to school, it's because they have an issue, they have emotional baggage but they have nowhere to go, so they say, "Let me stay home by myself."

CHRIS: So what would you say if a teacher said, "You know what, I'm not trained to do that. That is not what I am most effective at. I was trained to be a historian; I was trained to be a math teacher. I am not a social worker: I am not a guidance counselor."

JESSE: I think the reason it works so well is because they're not trained for it, somehow. It's a lot more realistic and it made me a lot more trusting. Like whenever I talked to a guidance counselor, I just could see what he was trained to respond with. And I think that what makes you a good teacher is dealing with you as a person and not as something they've read about and are dealing with on a case study basis. Instead, they're just interacting with you. Even if it doesn't go as well as it would have otherwise, I felt like it was a real bond instead of "work."

JOE: When someone sits down with you and says, "You know, these are the things that troubled me when I was at this stage, these are the issues I ran into. This is how I dealt with this then, and maybe it wasn't the best way to deal with it, or maybe it was." Being reflective and being able to express that to the students is very helpful. When an advisor is open about the experiences that they had, it allows the student to be reflective and to think, "Other people have gone through similar things. And they were able to get through it. And look at them today—they were able to get past that." That's very important to a teenager.

ELISSA: You know, being in a regular high school, for every little wrong thing that you do, the school automatically either punishes you or calls the cops or calls your parents. What's good about you guys is that you try to figure out the problem behind the behavior; you'd sit down and talk about it and figure out the problem. So you personally try to figure out with



Chris Hempel's advisory at their 2000 Senior Prom. Back row: Pat Kienle, Chris, Jocelin Fried-Krupp, Amanda Esons, Lisa Gallant, Kathy Garcia, Joe Claprood, Juan Huertas, Brian Pualino. Front row: Greg Paquette, Alex Rivera, Ramon Frias

the kid what the problem is instead of just calling someone else to punish the kid and that's the end of that. Instead, you actually fix the problem by going behind the problem.

ALEX: You also value student voice. And that's the most important thing—I mean if you don't value the voice, you're not going to get far. You have to stop and listen. I mean you can disagree, but you can say, "Okay, let's figure this out." We had to learn to work with each other as people, not because one of us had authority or power.

KRISTIN: What role did your advisor play in your learning?

TAKESHA: I'd say that you served as guidance. I always think of it as guidance because you never really did the work, but you helped me to do the work. So I'd say you knew what I was interested in, you knew my passions, so it was easier for you to help guide me. You'd see something about a book or a conference or a program that brought my interests together in new ways or would build on an interest and expose me to something new and you would encourage me to check it out. And you also saw things that I didn't know I was really interested in. So you weren't just connecting the obvious stuff. And you'd use those things to get me to work on things that I hated, like math. Just sitting back and watching what I'm doing on my own, not telling me what I have to do, but reminding me of my goals and showing me the choices I have about how to get there and showing me when I'm making a choice that isn't helping me toward those goals.

CHRIS: Did you ever feel like there was competition among people in the advisory?

JOE: Well, not in a bad way. It was the kind of competition that made you want to do well. Once somebody had a success, everybody was happy and proud. It was healthy. Seeing somebody try hard made you try hard, which made the next person try even harder, so everybody was becoming successful at the same time. So it wasn't like competition against each other. It was like a marathon race where I pass the baton to you and you come in fast and then the next person comes in faster and then next person comes in faster, but at the end if we win, then we all win together. That's what it was like.

KRISTIN: Is there anything else you think is important, something that you would want people to know about advisories and that you think people should know before becoming an advisor?

TAKESHA: If you're going to be an advisor, don't necessarily come in and think that you're going to run it, that you're going to be the one teaching. Because little do you know: you might actually learn more from the people you're teaching than what you actually intended to teach them. When we were in your class, you probably didn't know a lot about horses, and I know you didn't know a lot about medicine, but through me having a passion for medicine and Elissa having a passion for horses, you learned more. You automatically assume, "I'm going to teach them English, I'm going to teach them math, I'm going to teach them science." And you came out knowing about Cape Verde and being Cape Verdian, about the history of Cambodia and what it's like to be Asian, about being half black-half white. Those are just things that you normally wouldn't know. And then you don't know that when you get in there, you are actually going to have family, how much everyone is going to mean to you, how attached you are going to get. It's not a nine-to-five day because at five o'clock if there is someone who really needs you, would you rather walk away from someone who is becoming like your family or would you rather stay till six or seven because that's just what you have to do? So, know that it is not going to always be like you intend. Structure is good; you can plan to talk about panda bears from nine to five, but know that we might not even talk about panda bears because something else came up, and that's okay. A schedule helps you, but it's not always going to be what you want and it's not how you should make your decisions. If you're willing to run an advisory, you have to be willing to deal with whatever comes with it.

CHRIS: I'm curious about what it has been like for you at college, how what you learned at the Met affected your college experience.

TAKESHA: When I got to college, I made a point to get to know my professors and so they got to know me. I did go to a small college because I knew that I liked small schools. Coming from the Met and being an independent learner made it easier. I already knew about scheduling my time; I knew how to multitask and set priorities; I knew what my learning style was and what I needed in order to learn best; I knew how to learn from those around me. And I figured that out through learning at the Met, through learning on my own and learning with somebody guiding me. So it was easier for me to talk to an adult and tell them what I didn't understand and what I needed and how I learn. I had already learned how to learn, period.

#### A final reflection from Kristin and Chris

How can you truly hold students to high standards without knowing the extent to which they are capable of reaching or exceeding them? As an advisor, you have to know your students, know what motivates them, know their warning signs, know their limits. But to reach that point of familiarity, you have to be willing to know yourself and be open to your struggles. Being a good advisor takes tremendous humility and a willingness to let go of your locus of control as a teacher, as a purveyor of knowledge. If you present a façade of perfection, your students will never bridge that chasm of distrust and of silence and become engaged learners who are honest about what they know, what they don't know, and what they want to know. And as educators, isn't that what we want? Students who are excited about learning and who understand themselves as knowers and doers who take every interaction, every success, and every disappointment as an opportunity for mental and emotional growth.

Kristin Waugh-Hempel graduated from Swarthmore College in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education and Sociology/Anthropology. Her Bachelor's thesis was on parental involvement in education. She was an advisor at The Met from 1998-2002 and her students are now in colleges and jobs throughout the East Coast. After her students graduated, Kristin became an LTI (Learning Through Internship) Coordinator, working with two of the six small Met schools in Providence to identify student interests, recruit mentors, and build educationally rich internship experiences. Now in her seventh year at The Met, Kristin is the Director of the LTI Program and oversees the LTI process for all six Providence Met schools. She will receive her Master's of Educational Psychology this November. Her Master's thesis was on learning through internships.

Chris Hempel graduated with a BA in Psychology from the University of Connecticut in 1992. Soon afterwards he became a youth counselor for adjudicated youth in Litchfield, Connecticut. He received a Master of Arts in Teaching from Brown University in 1995. In 1996, he joined the Met as one of the original advisors. He brought to the Met not his training as a social studies teacher along with experience as an Outward Bound instructor. Since his students graduated in June 2000, he has continued to work with The Met and the Big Picture Company, first as the Curriculum Coordinator and Quantitative Reasoning Specialist and then as an Aspiring Principal. In 2002, he became principal of one of the six small Met schools in Providence.

# Advisory Program Research and Evaluation by Reino Makkonen

This article reviews the research literature to bolster the case for advisory and demonstrate that putting it at the core of a school is worth the investment. Lessons from CES schools also reveal the importance of a cycle of collaborative inquiry when planning and implementing advisory.

At its heart, advisory forges connections among students and the school community, creating conditions that facilitate academic success and personal growth. Intuitively, the program makes perfect sense. But that isn't enough. Maintaining an effective school-wide advisory program requires a substantial investment of resources. So what does the research say?

It's a tricky question. After all, how do you quantify a relationship? There are no statistics on personalization, and generalizing across the diverse spectrum of advisory programs is virtually impossible. Plus, as advisory facilitator Jeanne Fauci at Los Angeles' Wildwood School points out, with only so many hours in a day, there's the issue of capacity. "Although I would like to do a lot more data gathering and evaluation, it's always hard to balance that with actually doing advisory," she notes.

Even so, many schools regularly evaluate their advisory programs, and numerous studies examine issues commonly targeted in advisory, such as school culture and students' participation in school activities. This article explores that research—both the large-scale studies and the school-based evaluations—to answer two basic questions. First, what published evidence suggests that advisories succeed, and second, how can educators evaluate their program?

#### The Research Literature

Few quantitative, systemic studies have been conducted on advisory, and there is little comprehensive data on its outcomes. With different objectives and components, conducted at different grades, advisory programs obviously net different results. Advisory is also rarely a school's sole strategy for supporting students and fostering personalization. When a school adopts advisory in conjunction with smaller, longer classes, a focus on project-based learning and performance assessments, and a more democratic leadership model, it becomes tough to measure the results of each individual effort. Did student achievement improve because of advisory, or because kids were encouraged to conduct their own in-depth investigations in class?

Despite these methodological challenges, many narrative accounts attest to advisory's positive impact. Generally, studies have shown that students who don't feel an attachment to school staff are likely to have poorer attendance and to drop out more than students who feel that they are part of a supportive school environment. In addition, healthy relationships between teachers and students appear to facilitate academic achievement. Advisory can contribute to this type of positive school climate in several ways, including:

- → Improved relationships between students and teachers (Espe, 1993; Totten & Nielson, 1994)
- → An increased sense of trust and belonging (Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994)
- → Better communication among all members of the school community (Simmons & Kiarich, 1989)
- → A strong atmosphere of equality (Putbrese, 1989)
- → Reduced student smoking and alcohol use (Putbrese, 1989)

Other studies provide more explicit findings about advisory. In a nationwide survey, Mac Iver and Epstein (1991) investigated the opinions and perceptions of more than 2,000 principals. They found that after controlling for such variables as family and student background, region, and grade organization, principals with effective advisory programs in the middle grades reported stronger overall guidance programs and lower expected dropout rates in high school (though no data about actual dropout rates were provided in the study).

Regarding attendance rates, a study by Simpson and Boriack (1994) looked at a Texas middle school program specifically geared to reduce absenteeism among a group of 70 chronically delinquent students. The researchers found that by reaching out to parents and working closely with students in a daily advisory period, the school was able to generate "immediate and very gratifying" results. Average daily attendance among the students skyrocketed from 76 percent in the first 12 weeks to 95 percent for the next 24.

Overall, the published research on advisory that exists is generally optimistic and indicates that the program leads to the kind of positive outcomes—such as increased attendance—that correlate with improved academic outcomes. Advisory is thus indeed a worthwhile investment—one supported by published research and countless testimonials. As Wildwood's Jeanne Fauci emphasizes, "In the realm of human experience and relationships, advisory is a really important thing."

#### **Evaluating Advisory**

With comprehensive studies of advisory often proving problematic, localized evaluations become much more important. Schools need to find ways to assess their programs effectively and report tangible results, particularly when working to marshal resources behind advisory. As veteran middle school teaching consultant and University of Vermont doctoral candidate Jim Burns makes clear, "Proactive leaders publicize data... prior to discussions of the merits of using instructional time for advisory when speaking to the school board, parents, community, or representatives of the media." According to Burns, the documentation and utilization of concrete results is a necessary component of any successful advisory program.

In today's era of diminishing budgets and reduced funding, with schools pressured to implement programs with a proven track record of success, schools need to be prepared to use data to demonstrate advisory's results. So what are some productive and proactive approaches to evaluating advisory in order to fine-tune the program and demonstrate effectiveness?

Research suggests that there is no one correct way to measure an advisory's results. The process should be tailored to the specific program, with formative evaluations carried out during the planning and implementation stages and summative assessments completed after each program cycle. Since programs with different purposes and activities produce different outcomes, an advisory evaluator should always clearly specify the objectives under examination by asking essential questions about the program. For example, if a major goal is to promote a college-going culture at the school, it is important to not only measure the number of additional students applying to college, but to also survey those students about their motivations and the effect of advisory.

"As you create your (advisory) program, you also create the assessment instruments and connect them as closely to the avowed purpose of the program as possible," advisory coordinator Alan Gordon recommends. At Gordon's school, Souhegan High in Amherst, New Hampshire, students, parents, and teachers have been surveyed about advisory several times a year since the advisory program started in 1992. This collaborative inquiry around advisory has in turn facilitated valuable reflection and analysis at the school.

"The focus of our program has always been personalization, so we focused the surveying very specifically on that early on," Gordon explains. "Did the kids feel known well? Did parents feel like advisors knew their kids well? Did advisors feel like they knew their kids well? We surveyed everyone early and often, on a scale, say from 1 to 4, from 'Not known well' to 'Known extremely well.' There were some open-ended areas for comments, and the results directed us in ways that were extremely helpful."

According to Gordon, advisory has gone from one of Souhe-gan's most controversial programs to a core element of the school's culture, in large part because of the focused, transparent, and actionable inquiry carried out at the school. "(Early) surveys indicated that students felt known well," he notes. "But as we began to implement a few changes over time, they felt known better. And advisors tended to feel better about the program, as did parents."

Schools developing an advisory program from scratch can particularly benefit from collaborative inquiry. When a state administrator shut down the middle school in Emeryville, California, last year, students moved to a new Grade 7-12 institution, Emery Secondary School. Mark Salinas, a school coach with the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), helped develop many aspects of the secondary school's design, creating new structures to foster collaboration among adults, personalize learning for the students, and raise achievement. Features included small learning communities, interdisciplinary teaching teams, and an advisory



Wildwood School advisor Tengiz Bibilashvili works with senior Puja Bhakta during Consultancy, a time in advisory for students to get support with their academic work

program. In this nascent environment, formative action research proved vital. Emery's students were surveyed about the advisory curriculum in September and January of year one, and staff advisors regularly worked through a cycle of inquiry, prioritizing program goals and reflecting on their leadership roles.

"We looked at all the data and we developed our advisory plan for this upcoming year [2004-2005], in regard to the goals we set," Salinas notes. "Grade-level team members got together in the summer, and as we looked at the survey data about the students' interests, they mapped that into the advisory curriculum."

And Salinas hopes to further develop program evaluation and action research at Emery. "I'm pushing for us to talk to students and collect more data this year, for when we do specific initiatives—focusing on attendance or what have you—we can find out more about the effects," he says. "Was it advisory? Was it your advisor? Was it the small learning community team? What is it that's contributing?"

Researchers agree with this approach, noting that asking advisors and advisees about their perceptions and suggestions is important. However, they also emphasize that subjective reactions and impressions alone are not necessarily adequate outcome measures. Hard, objective data should also be considered whenever possible.

Galassi, Gulledge, and Cox (1997) explain: "For example, if we are interested in knowing whether [advisory] programs are associated with lower dropout rates, fewer disciplinary events, and higher grades, then the most adequate measures would appear to be objective indexes of these variables and not someone's impressions or opinions about whether dropout rates have fallen and grades and discipline have improved."

Methodologically speaking, research suggests that the best advisory evaluations consider participants' subjective impressions in conjunction with objective indexes. As lone measures, data and opinion may be limited, but when considered together, they provide a more accurate assessment of a program's effectiveness.

#### The Importance of Data

Data matters. Producing documented results for students has perhaps never been more important in education than it is today. And although advisory may indeed be all about personal relationships, collaborative inquiry and evaluation are not impossible tasks. When a local politician or policymaker asks "Why advisory?" or "What does it accomplish?" the evidence can save the program. As Mark Salinas observes, "There's a feeling, seeing the initial data that we have, that what we are doing is making a difference in young folks' lives."

Reino Makkonen is an educational researcher and journalist based in San Francisco. He previously served as assistant editor of the *Harvard Education Letter* and worked for several years as a substitute teacher and textbook editor.

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#### Personalization Surmounts Academic and Health Barriers

Essential schools, long accustomed to sharing strong practices around knowing students well, have found themselves sharing the concept, habits, and specific practices of personalization with schools nationwide, thanks to the growing national small schools movement.

Recent findings announced by the Wingspread Group, a forum of over twenty education and health leaders, are likely to increase the call for insight into increasing personal connection among students to school. Published in the September 2004 *Journal of School Health*, the Wingspread findings contribute substantially to the array of research that demonstrates that students who feel connected to school are less inclined to participate in risky behaviors and more apt to do well academically. Among the Wingspread Group's specific recommendations is the call to "ensure that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school."

As the "Wingspread Declaration on School Connections" describes, "School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals." Research shows that up to sixty percent of all students, from all backgrounds, feel disengaged and disconnected, making the work that Essential schools have done to understand and nurture personal connections within school communities crucial knowledge for schools nationwide. Validating the CES commitment to personalization in its many forms, these findings particularly underscore the primacy of advisories, the structure most likely to ensure that adult-student connection.

The Wingspread Group's findings are gathered at www.jhsph.edu/wingspread

The September 2004 issue of *The Journal of School Health* can be read at www.jhsph.edu/wingspread/Septemberissue.pdf

# Creating Advisories: A Few Notes from the Field by Carol M. Lieber & Rachel A. Poliner

Research solidly confirms that advisories provide the kind of personalized support that increases student achievement, and the current surge of secondary school start-up and restructuring initiatives is promoting a new wave of advisory programs in thousands of schools nationwide. Although many exemplary advisory programs exist, we know of many other schools struggling to establish meaningful advisories.

As we've worked with high schools nationwide, we've observed a pattern of problems in efforts to develop successful advisories. We'd like to offer some cautionary notes by presenting six pitfalls accompanied by illuminating quotations and, most importantly, strategies for climbing out of the pit and developing and sustaining successful advisories.

# Pitfall 1: Advisory planning begins with scheduling, instead of goals.

"We found a way to fit advisory in the schedule; we're ready to go."

"One thirty-minute advisory per week will work, right?"

Strategies: There are lots of possible reasons to create an advisory program. Maybe climate data shows that students feel anonymous, or you're noticing cliques and factions that make the atmosphere tense. Maybe your students need more support regarding career or college plans. Or, perhaps the ninth graders need a more deliberate transition to high school. It is crucial to identify your goals, and then make sure the goals and schedule are a good fit.

Daily fifteen-minute advisory sessions have worked in schools where the main purpose is academic advising, the group has seven to nine students, and the advisor's responsibility is meeting privately with each advisee several times per week. However, if an advisory program is expected to improve peer culture, support the development of life skills, or focus on career and college preparation, longer blocks of time are essential. Thus, sort out your goals, then the session length, frequency, and whether or not they will be held simultaneously (allowing for town meetings).

### Pitfall 2: Grouping arrangements do not match the goals or content.

"We have 50 rooms, so we can have 50 groups, each with 20 advisees."

"We wanted to improve peer culture, so we created mixed-

grade groupings, but we always feel like we're not meeting the myriad needs of the seniors, and lots of our activities fall flat."

Strategies: Your goals should drive your groupings as well as your schedule. When developmental needs are driving the program (helping ninth graders learn to use their assignment books or shepherding seniors into colleges and careers) single grade level groups are a better fit. Mixed grade groups can help ninth graders shift quickly into high school culture and offer older students leadership opportunities. In some schools, single gender groups may provide a more supportive environment. No grouping arrangement can meet every possible goal; choose your goals carefully and the groupings that fit them. Be sure to consider the composition, size, and continuity of your groups carefully.

# Pitfall 3: The faculty is reluctant and resistant, and perhaps votes against implementing advisory altogether.

"Our design team is really excited, so our school is ready to implement advisory groups."

After a no-vote from the faculty, "Why did they vote it down after we worked so hard?"

Strategies: People need a lot to convince them to change—inspiration, convincing arguments, incentives, research, promises of support, and pressure. In some cases pressure comes from leaders or peers, in other cases from parents asking for a more supportive environment or from survey data indicating student anonymity and detachment.

In many schools, we observe that a few people have done research, visited other schools, and spent time together reading, discussing, and designing. They have learned about the links between healthy development and learning. They feel creative and inspired. When asked, "How much of this experi-

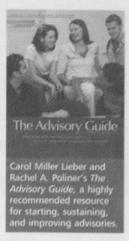
ence has transferred to the whole faculty?" they usually answer, "Sure, we involved the faculty. We gave a half-hour presentation at the April faculty meeting." And while clearly not enough, that half-hour is generally more attention than either students or parents received.

All of these constituencies need to be more involved and informed in order to address concerns and dispel misperceptions. Rumors are usually worse than reality. People often need multiple exposures to become open to something. Specific issues may need to be discussed with the whole faculty. It's critical, for example, to clarify that advisory is not like a prep for an academic class. Design teams may have to persuade teachers of advi-

#### ESR FALL FORUM PRESENTATIONS

Author Carol Miller Lieber is facilitating a day-long preconference session, "Personalization Is Not Just About Structural Reform: Classroom Practices that Personalize Learning," on Thursday, November 11 at the Fall Forum in San Francisco. As well, Lieber and coauthor Rachel Poliner are facilitating a Fall Forum conference session, "Personalizing Learning through Advisories." Fall Forum information is available at:

www.essentialschools.org Register now!



sory's importance, supply a safety net of activities, reshape the design, or district leaders may need to negotiate an agreement with the union about trade-offs and incentives.

Despite inspiring speakers and convincing research, many people say no when they're asked to do something new. Eating asparagus. Exercising regularly. Leading an advisory. Therefore, do all the things you can think of—share readings, interview students, demonstrate sample activities—then do three more—and even then, don't be devastated with

a no vote from teachers. Try to handle the conversation so remaining questions lead to more discussion. A no vote with resistance and civility is better than a no vote with rancor and gloating. Use consensus decision-making rather than a quick majority vote, encouraging public accountability for stances. Try private interviews with faculty, inspiring remarks, or a pilot advisory program. An after school version or a couple of community-building afternoons might offer other ways to try on the advisor role.

Pitfall 4: The teachers hired for our new small high school agree that advisory is a good idea but lack crucial skills and understandings.

"I had no idea that our instructionally focused faculty would have such a hard time getting comfortable with the more relational role of advisor."

"We were so focused on instruction and other start-up tasks that advisory just never got on our agenda in a serious way."

Strategies: Leaders of start-up schools can be swamped with ordering furniture, creating a whole curriculum, hiring staff, learning to use their budget software, even getting the phones to work. It's easy to shortchange thoughtful advisory planning, especially in small schools expecting to hold advisory multiple times per week. When these leaders plan induction and orientation for new faculty, they need to design a specific professional learning strand on adolescent development and academic, social, and behavioral student support. The structure of advisory, the practices of personalization, and the power of supportive relationships among and between students and faculty are the necessary complement to academic press and a focus on relevant student learning,, aligned to high standards. In the early years, new schools need someone (a teacher, consultant, or a team) for whom advisory is a prime responsibility, someone who will be on top of activities, materials, events, shaping rituals, ensuring that advisory is not an afterthought.

Pitfall 5: Advisor expectations are vague and there is no clear plan for professional development, coordination, supervision, and assessment.

"We're going to start holding advisory groups in September. No, we don't have any professional development scheduled. We just need a few activity ideas. Maybe we'll insert an hour or two of training along the way in faculty meetings." "We've had advisory groups for a year now. Some groups are terrific; a real home base for kids. In other groups, the advisor checks email and the students treat it like study hall or nap time."

Strategies: Too many leaders underestimate what it takes to develop and support effective advisors. Developing comfort, confidence, competency, and consistency requires professional development and much more. Create expectations, which promote advisor accountability. Provide workshops, study groups, mentors, incentives, and pressures to live up to the expectations. Designate a teacher or counselor whose job description will include time and responsibility for coordinating and coaching. Department heads or team leaders who place advisory on meeting agendas or who do observations of advisory give it weight. Of course, the principal sets the overall tone for taking advisory seriously.

Pitfall 6: Advisory doesn't feel authentic or worth the effort to faculty, students, parents, or administrators.

From a student: "This is really lame."

From an advisor: "I just don't see how this is benefiting our students. It's a waste of time."

Strategies: Students and teachers easily recognize when something feels artificial or empty. Academic advising should be a key focus of advisory, especially in high schools. Monitoring and tracking students' academic progress, conferencing with students about their goals and grades, supporting students' completion of grade level benchmarks, graduation requirements, and personal learning and post-secondary plans provide immediate legitimacy for advisory and link advisory directly to a school's core academic mission and educational program. When advisors coach students to monitor and assess themselves, they are truly teaching learning to learn skills.

Though we see these six pitfalls repeatedly as we work with schools to establish and strengthen advisories, we witness lots of successes too! Advisories that remain strong over time put relationships first. These advisory groups develop culture-building rituals, encourage student voice, and respond to the needs and interests of advisees. We'd like to hear your stories. Send us your advisory challenges and accomplishments to educators@esrnational.org.

Carol Miller Lieber (Chicago) and Rachel A. Poliner (Boston) work with large school redesign and restructuring initiatives and new small schools throughout the United States. They are co-authors of Educators for Social Responsibility's *The Advisory Guide*, available at www.esrnational.org.

# Connections that Matter and Endure by Mara Benitez

Students from the Arturo Schomburg Satellite Academy gather during a field trip



Recently, my former student Jaelis Toro called to see if I had Elmer Myer's new telephone number. Elmer had been her advisor a few years ago at Arturo Schomburg Satellite Academy, a small alternative school in the South Bronx, when I was the director of the school. Jaelis-now a junior at Bethune Cookman, a small, Southern, historically Black college-called because she missed her advisor. "I just want to let him know what I'm up to and I want to congratulate him and find out if he likes his new job," she said. I wasn't surprised that Jaelis was still so connected to Elmer, who was now running a teacher training program elsewhere. Elmer was the kind of advisor who celebrated every birthday with a special ritual. At the end of every year he held a barbeque at his home for all the graduates in his advisory. He really understood the meaning of advisory. He took it on and he grew from it. He became a better teacher through the experience and most importantly, he made students feel special and celebrated, so much so that Jaelis wanted to check in not just to tell Elmer what was going on in her life, but to give back to him by celebrating him for his new job.

Jaelis's call wasn't uncommon. During my years at the school and even after I moved on, former students called or emailed trying to track down their advisors. And on one occasion when I was interested in locating a former colleague, I emailed a student who I was sure knew how to find him—he had been his advisor and they were still close. In fact, students regularly came home from college and rushed to see their advisors, excited about sharing every detail about their new school. Former students also returned to the school to mentor a new advisee, coming to orientation to talk about the dos and don'ts of advisory to all the incoming students.

The bonding experience that took place in advisory created ties between students and adults that were not easily severed. For some students, it was the first time they trusted an adult outside of their family long enough to build a relationship. The role of advisor offered teachers and their students a new way to interact and relate to one another, providing them with the liberty to get to know each other without the constraints of the academic curriculum. In advisory, the students were the content to be studied and explored. Students sat in a circle and talked about life and school. They shared themselves and revealed their flaws, analyzing what it meant to be this or that kind of student. It was there that they first established their commitment to themselves as learners and to the school as a place where they chose to learn.

Through the years, students continue to reach out to the caring adults with whom they spent five to ten hours a week throughout high school. Spotting Norman, a former student, in the 3rd Avenue shopping district in the Bronx, I asked him if he'd gone back and seen Beverly, his advisor. "No," he confessed, "But I call her and she stays in my heart." And the feeling is mutual. Last year, at an outdoor concert in Sonoma County, California, I ran into a former colleague from New York City. It was the most serendipitous event: out of nowhere, there was Kelson Maynard with a huge smile. "Girl, California can't be as big as they say," he said in his West Indian twang. We immediately embraced and after some quick catching up on work and family, he began speaking of his former advisees and sharing "the stories of their lives." I listened attentively to his animated, sad and hope-filled tales of his advisees: who was in college, who got pregnant, who came back to the school to speak to his new advisory, and who hadn't returned.

Kelson, Elmer, and Beverly will never be the same again because Jaelis, Norman, and all of the other advisees came into their lives and touched their hearts so deeply that they have been changed forever. "Teaching is different from being an advisor" shared Laura Thompson, my colleague and long-time friend. "You think you know what to do as a teacher in most situations, but as an advisor you are truly learning yourself all over again, and the children are your witness as you are theirs. And if you do it right, both of you are transformed for the better."

The role of the advisor and the mission of advisory is practical and honorable at the same time, made up of mundane and magical moments that are carefully crafted to guide young people through one of the hardest transitions of their lives. Advisors teach life skills while they nurture young people through the growing pains of becoming young adults. The advisory becomes the family, and sometimes the advisor becomes the surrogate parent. At its best, advisory is the place where young people learn to feel interconnected, interdependent, and accountable to and for each other. At these times, advisory almost runs itself. The leader learns to be a member of the group while she fosters the leadership of each of the students.

When done right, advisory is the heartbeat of the school, the energy center of resilience, equity, and love, nurturing and sustaining a healthy school culture that validates and affirms each and every member, young and old. Advisory is the place

where you can be yourself even as you explore your new and emerging selves. Finding your voice means learning from the other advisees how to speak up for yourself when a teacher isn't exactly being fair. It means practicing how to tell your mom that you couldn't miss school anymore to take care of your little sister. Advisory is the place where you share your fears and explore your passions in the company of people who know and care about you. They cheer you on and challenge you to do better and not give up. Magical things do happen when a young person feels that they are heard, respected, and belong.

I wasn't always a good advisor, but one thing I figured out very quickly was how important it was to let absent students know that they were missed. Our advisory's ritual: I would create a chair circle for the number of advisees that should be in attendance and then I'd slowly eliminate the chairs of those who were not present, only after asking about their whereabouts. It meant so much to the students to be known by their name and to be missed that it made them want to come to school. I never had perfect attendance, but students were fully present, engaged and working hard to change old habits.

At Schomburg, we carved out a space for advisory that allowed for all of us, teachers and students, to give, receive, and create. Advisory was the glue that held us all together. It gave us a platform to speak our truths on our own terms and a resting place to cry and seek out new answers to what ailed us as individuals and as a community.

When I was an advisor, my advisees asked, "How come so many students keep coming back to the school after they graduated? Don't they have a life?" The answer came from one of my first advisees. She told us the story about how at some point we each plant a tiny golden strand into each other's hearts that no one can see, and that is what keeps us together. Even after we are no longer in that classroom, all together striving to figure things out in happiness and in sadness, we are still connected. And when we don't see each other, we feel a reminding tug. This young wise person had figured out that we had become entangled in each other lives and dreams, and that there was little we could do but accept and enjoy it.

Mara Benitez co-directs CES National's Small Schools Project. Prior to joining CES, she served as the Executive Director of Alternative Education for the Oakland Unified School District. Ms. Benitez taught humanities at several CES schools in New York City and she directed a small CES alternative high school in the South Bronx.

#### CES NETWORK SOURCES FOR ADVISORY DEVELOPMENT

The CES network, long infused by Essential schools' early adoption of and commitment to advisories, is rich with resources to help plan and refine advisories. Connect with regional CES centers to find professional development opportunities in your area. As well, some Essential schools have collected their learnings about advisories and offer workshops and resource materials. Some examples from CES Mentor Schools:

#### The Wildwood Outreach Center

Based at the Wildwood School in Los Angeles, the Wildwood Outreach Center provides workshops for educators and small school advocates, including a one-day workshop on advisory programs in which participants learn about the benefits that a structured advisory program can have in their school or get new ideas on how to improve an existing advisory program. The workshop includes information on advisory purpose and design, curriculum, protocols, implementation training and reference materials. Wildwood also offers The Advisory Toolkit. a step-by-step guide for educators who want to create or enhance an advisory program at their school. The Advisory Toolkit includes a 45-minute DVD on the advisory programs at four schools accompanied by a detailed workbook. Topics include advisory purpose, design, implementation, faculty training and advisory curriculum. The Toolkit will be available in mid-October and costs \$79.95.

For more information: www.wildwood.org/outreach/workshops.asp

# The Regional Teachers Center at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

The Regional Teachers Center, in Devens, Massachusetts, offers a range of professional development opportunities including a two-day institute devoted to advisories. "The Promise of Advisories: Making Personal Connections Between Adults and Students" focuses on advisory program design, giving participants an opportunity to create a vision for an advisory program and develop a plan for successful implementation. Participants will leave the institute with an understanding of the importance of developing consensus around a clearly defined purpose; materials and structures to help think about questions of program organization; examples of advisory content, including several commonly used protocols and routines; tools designed to assess program effectiveness; and samples of professional development plans to ensure the successful implementation and ongoing support for an advisory program.

For more information: www.parker.org/rtc

As well, CES National's Small Schools Project is collecting examples of exemplary practice, including material on advisories, to be featured in CES ChangeLab, launching in late 2004. Keep an eye on www.ceschangelab.org for more!

# horace

Volume 20 no. 4 Fall 2004 Community Connections

Horace, the quarterly journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), is published by CES National, Horace combines educational research with "hands-on" resources and examples of innovative practices from CES schools around the country.

Visit the CES National website at www.essentialschools.org to read Horace issues from 1988 through the present. The staff of CES National invites your comments and contributions to Horace via the CES Interactive area of our website or at the contact information below.

#### **Coalition of Essential Schools**

The Coalition of Essential Schools, founded in 1984 by Theodore Sizer, is dedicated to creating and sustaining equitable, intellectually vibrant, personalized schools and to making such schools the norm of American public education. The CES National office is in Oakland, California, with nineteen CES regional centers across the country.

CES schools share a common set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling, known as the CES Common Principles. Based on decades of research and practice, the principles call for all schools to offer:

- → Personalized instruction to address individual needs and interests
- → Small schools and classrooms, where teachers and students know each other well and work in an atmosphere of trust and high expectations
- → Multiple assessments based on performance of authentic tasks
- → Equitable outcomes for students
- → Democratic governance practices
- → Close partnerships with the school's community

We aim to create a system that refuses to rank and sort students, and that, instead, treats each child as a precious being with great gifts to be nurtured and supported.

Our work supports the creation and sustenance of large numbers of individual schools that fully enact CES principles—schools that emphasize equity, personalization, and intellectual vibrancy. These schools can serve as models to other schools and demonstrate to the public that it is possible to re-imagine education.

In addition to individual schools, we also need to create the conditions under which whole systems of schools will become equitable, personalized, and intellectually vibrant. To affect these whole systems, CES National supports regional centers as they develop the capacity to aid schools and to influence school districts and states. We seek to influence wider public opinion and policy-makers to develop policy conditions conducive to the creation and sustenance of schools that enact CES principles.

Please visit our web site at www.essentialschools.org for more information on CES National, our affiliated regional centers, and affiliated schools. Interested schools, organizations, and individuals are invited to the website for more information about affiliating with CES National.

# The Common **Principles**

Learning to use one's mind well

Less is more, depth over coverage

Goals apply to all students

Personalization

Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach

Demonstration of mastery

A tone of decency and trust

Commitment to the entire school

Resources dedicated to teaching and learning

**Democracy and** equity

**CES**National 1814 Franklin Street, Suite 700 Oakland, California 94612 telephone: 510,433,1451 fax: 510.433.1455

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The Red Pencil: Convictions from Experience in Education by Theodore Sizer (Yale University Press, 160 pages, \$23.00) Reviewed by Jill Davidson

A t The Red Pencil's start, Ted Sizer—founder and chairman emeritus of the Coalition of Essential Schools—takes us into his tenth-grade Latin class, a starkly terrifying scene imbued with anything but "unanxious expectation." Mr. Barrell's classroom was a place of right or

wrong—no discussion, no second attempts, just constant, impersonal judgment etched into a gradebook with a red pencil. Sadly, as Sizer notes, his long-ago experience seems familiar, a still discernable image of what school often is.

As this self-described "argument wrapped in a memoir" unfolds, Sizer describes three silences—familiar, yet mainly disregarded—that prop up education's status quo, and suggests a range of approaches to shatter those silences. Sizer uses personal experience as evidence, linking to his arguments details of his fifty years of intellectual explorations, participation in policymaking, leading a national movement for school change, and daily work in schools. This tour through Sizer's intellectual life is gratifying and fascinating for the thousands of us who have been shaped by his views.

The first silence: education is the effect of all of the complicated, intermingled factors in student's lives. "High schools alone cannot do the job assigned to them," writes Sizer. That education is the product of the multiple and overlapping worlds surrounding children is commonsensical yet woefully unattended in our nation's schools. This silence is labeled "Building," referring to the severe limits of the notion that school buildings are where education happens.

The second silence concerns authority, particularly the heavy-handed role of the state and the resulting implications for democracy. A fetish for "the regularities of schooling"—the persistence of the factory model of education—is the basis for the third silence. Sizer knows that these ideas aren't revelations, but they persist and pervade because "we largely fail to muster the honesty and intensity that reform requires." The silences are the monolithic compromises of our society.

Sizer suggests approaches toward solutions that would shatter these silences. For example, the start of the "Authority" chapter sets forth a bare-bones framework for democratically managing the responsibility of public education. The state raises the money, ensures that schools exist, and holds them accountable to their claimed goals. The schools—in varied forms—create themselves according to their community's needs and dreams. Families then choose which school best serves their child's needs. Authority is shared.

Sizer argues steadily and persuasively throughout The Red Pencil for choice as a method to balance authority within and restore order to the enterprise of schooling all children with public funds, and he establishes his connection to the idea of school choice before it was appropriated by far-right concerns. Sizer recounts the events that led to his co-authoring the Poor Children's Bill of Rights, published in Psychology Today in 1968. The Poor Children's Bill of Rights proposed that economically disadvantaged children receive supplemental funds in addition to their district allocations. Those children could take the sum of their monies elsewhere, to other schools or to other districts. "This notion of the money following the child" reads now like an endorsement of vouchers, but Sizer argues that it's the best and most respectful way to treat families trying to find the good schools for their children. Indeed, public schools of choice in various formsdistricts with choice, charter schools, alternative schools—have become a main focus of CES National's work.

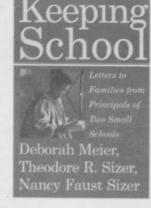
Sizer revisits the silences in the fourth chapter, "Horace Compromised," which reintroduces Horace Smith (of *Horace* trilogy fame) and tells the story of the founding and development of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Having detailed the silences of building, authority and order, Sizer asks why the American public is so unwilling to challenge the status quo when it's so evident that we must. He traces five possible reasons for this state of affairs: the wealthy opting out of public education, expense, complexity, fear, and the failure of imagination and leadership in higher education (this Sizer notes with some self-recrimination).

The epilogue collects the book's proposals and analyzes their feasibility, taking note of the current movement of schools—many recently born, many associated with the Coalition of Essential Schools—that reflect the values of "real world work," choice, progress by student performance, personalization, and community inclusion. Sizer notes that these few schools tend to attract antipathy on the part of "traditional school authorities," and are therefore on slippery political ground. But they—many of them Essential schools—represent tremendous hope and an evolving redefinition of "school."

The Red Pencil's depiction of how much needs to change is sobering. Yet, as Sizer affirms, "It is a road worth taking." The Essential schools that Sizer has inspired over the past two decades demonstrate the value of breaking the silences and allowing new modes of public education to prosper.

Keeping School: Letters to Families from Principals of Two Small Schools by Deborah Meier, Theodore R. Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer (Beacon Press, 192 pages, \$23.00) Reviewed by Jill Davidson

t's nearly impossible to overestimate how many fully loaded plates most principals (and teachers) spin on any given school day. Interruption-driven, overscheduled: this is their norm. Though it may seem counterintu-

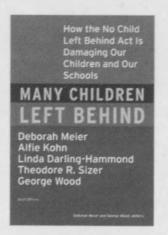


itive and nearly impossible to find time on a regular basis to put a page's worth of sentences together, many school leaders have discovered that predictable, proactive communication home to families can set the tone for the school community, steering attention away from dead-ends, squabbles, and rumors, and toward celebrations, important decisions, and other matters of real significance. Reliably setting expectations, managing the flashpoints of potential misunderstandings, tooting your school's horn—these are the basics of ally-building and cultivating partnerships.

Keeping School collects selected weekly letters from Deborah Meier, principal of Boston's Mission Hill School and Ted and Nancy Sizer, one-year co-principals at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts, sorting them into four themes (learning, community, authority, and standards) and providing commentaries. The Sizers and Meier are the real thing, principals of a secondary school and an elementary school, newly founded schools at that, with all of the attendant joy and craziness. They are also, to say it plainly, big shots, and the letters' accessible, informal language nicely complements their more formal writing to which we are more accustomed (this is particularly true of Ted Sizer's letters from Parker).

What does Ted Sizer say to Parker community when it confronted drug use? How does Deborah Meier present to parents the choice whether to permit their children to take state standardized tests? What words and images does Nancy Sizer choose to describe education as a collaboration between teachers and families? The letters make the process of keeping school transparent, and thus serve both as wonderful models for other school leaders and offer vivid "insider access" to Mission Hill and Parker.

As much as anything else I've read, these letters provide tangible and specific details of what it is like not only to keep school but to keep an Essential school. In particular, the letters in the section on standards aim to reset families' expectations about assessment, creating an alternate vision of what school can be. "Learning is different in our schools," writes Nancy Sizer, and these letters demonstrate that one of the elements of that difference is the collaboration among educators, families, and students that *Keeping School's* letters describe.



Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act Is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools

edited by Deborah Meier and George Wood (Beacon Press, 132 pages, \$13.00) Reviewed by Jill Davidson

know a principal of a small urban high school who has to defend his school's mission of meaningful learning as assessed by authentic, high-

standard measures against constant demands for "accountability." It galls me to see how No Child Left Behind's labels have shaped the expectations of some parents, board members, district officials and funders, how the tendency to look for easy answers has led to the notion that test scores tell all.

I never feel like I can do enough to protect and support this school, to give it the time and space teachers and students need to do the real work of learning and teaching. At least I was able to give my friend Many Children Left Behind. Produced by members of the Forum for Education and Democracy, its five arguments—seven, counting George Wood's introduction and Ted Sizer's preamble—press the case against NCLB emphatically and in great detail, even as they acknowledge, when possible, the light NCLB has shed on the imperative that schools should serve all children well.

Linda Darling-Hammond documents NCLB's "unmeetable requirements" that guarantee that most public schools inevitably will be labeled as failures. Concluding with suggestions to remake NCLB, Darling-Hammond's contribution documents other NCLB shortfalls, among them its lack of accountability for financial inequity among schools, its punishment of schools with a wide demographic variety, and its push-out of struggling students. Later on, Stan Karp builds on the notion of the impossibility of Adequate Yearly Progress; Karp also details the dire financial impact of NCLB.

George Wood reports on NCLB-caused trends, such as the Houston's "miracle," the sham that underlies much of NCLB. From Ohio, Wood describes how those schools that met NCLB standards were wealthy, white and stable, with well-paid teachers and few special-ed students. Describing how NCLB seems to be "narrowing the school experience," Wood's demonstration of the potential for joylessness that schools face is truly depressing.

Spotlighting the fundamental mistrust of schools and their local communities that underlies NCLB, Deborah Meier suggests steps for rebuilding confidence and respect. And Alfie Kohn concludes with a fiery essay on the possibility that a push for school privatization motivates NCLB.

Many Children Left Behind offers arguments packed with data that reveal the legislation's larger dire consequences. Through its pages, school people dedicated to high-standard, meaningful, personalized teaching and learning, people such as my principal friend, can connect to a wider world that is creating NCLB resistance.



The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business by Dennis Littky with Samantha Grabelle (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 230 pages, \$26.95)
Reviewed by Jill Davidson

lias, my four-year old son, is crazy about baseball. As any parent—anyone who spends time with a child she or

he knows well—can and most certainly will tell you, watching that kid's mind unleash itself is joyfully dizzying. Elias has organized his speech development, his imaginative play, his literacy acquisition, and his blossoming math skills around baseball. He has learned to read so he can identify players; he adds so he can write page after page of box scores; he tells intricate, inventive stories about the fates of teams and players. It's real work with real meaning for a real purpose. As I read *The Big Picture* I thought about Elias, about how he knows what he loves, about how that's been such an extraordinary motivating lever in his life already, and about how my responsibility is to enter with him into new (non-baseball!) experiences so his world keeps expanding even as he thrives, at home in his world of baseball. This has been his education, and I will make sure it remains so as the years unfold.

Demonstrating the esteem and respect for young people that they deserve and that the people who love them best so desperately want, Dennis Littky describes how he, and Elliot Washor with the help of many, founded Providence, Rhode Island's Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (known widely as "The Met") on what he believed most deeply after a lifetime creating and remaking schools. The Met respects high school students for their passions, encourages (and gently forces) their explorations, organizes their learning around what's meaningful, requires hard work and interdependence, and asks everyone—community members, families, students, teachers—to be accountable for education.

Littky opens *The Big Picture* with students' writing, emphasizing his belief that "the students must and always come first," and follows up in the first chapter with a hard charge through his beliefs about learning, teaching, and the "best possible environment" that supports the collaboration of students and teachers. The second chapter details that environment, contending that school—and society—must understand students' whole lives and respect complexity, insisting that the only way to do that is to remake schools so they are driven by pace, interests, challenges, and gifts of the young people that they serve.

Taking on school culture, the third chapter includes Littky's take on the culture-shaping role that Met advisories play, and it describes the conditions that make it possible for adults at the Met to focus on "one student at a time." Chapter four breaks down the work and rewards of running a school that way, and chapters five and six dive into how it's done, focusing respectively on learning through passions and learning through "real work in the real world" (that is, the Met's "Learning Through Internships" program). Chapter seven completes the cirlce, bringing the students, mentors, teachers, and families together. Littky uses the next two chapters to argue against inelegant and unsatisfying traditional grading and standardized tests and make the case for exhibitions and narrative evaluation, with lots of detail about how the Met does it.

The Big Picture concludes with the call to "Make It Happen," providing a practical to-do list for all of us—non-school people in particular—to make real change happen. Littky's voice is like a message from another land, where, with hard work and vision, the grass really is greener. Littky lists ways for us to push aside the status quo and make room for the schools our kids need now.

One of the Met's graduation requirements is a lengthy autobiography, and I imagine that many Met grads are quite pleased that Littky has finally created his own, infused with student work, past writing (often pulled from the Met's weekly "TGIF" memo), dozens of stories, provoking quotations, lists, memories and questions for further conversation. This collage, with the book's emphatic, often bold-printed prose, captures Littky's energetic personal presence aptly. The Big Picture is a portfolio, really, of a vibrant life well-lived in an exciting, accelerating movement to infuse the image and practice of schooling with meaning, real accountability, and personal power.

An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftmanship with Students by Ron Berger (Heinemann, 160 pages, \$17.50) Reviewed by Laura Flaxman

More than ten years ago, when I first saw Ron Berger present a portfolio of his students' work and explain the process behind these beautiful and impressive artifacts, I was struck by this master teacher's combination of skill, passion, energy and

humility. An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftmanship with Students allows others who haven't had the good fortune to work with Ron to be similarly inspired. That his book can stand on its own, without being able to see in person the high quality student work that is central to Ron's philosophy and teaching, is a testament to both the writing and to Ron's enthusiasm for his craft.

The book is divided into "toolboxes" for fostering a "school culture of excellence," creating "work of excellence" and inspiring "teaching of excellence." The anecdotes and ideas that make up each toolbox are designed to help us build school and classroom cultures of excellence, through the important idea of "craftsmanship." As Ron explains in his introduction, "In carpentry there is no higher compliment builders give to each other than this: That guy is a craftsman. This one word says it all. It connotes someone who has integrity and knowledge, who is dedicated to his work and who is proud of what he does and who he is. Someone who thinks carefully and does things well."

Ron argues that these are qualities that all students should have, with the same attention to producing work that is thoughtfully done and has relevance, meaning and implications beyond the confines of the school walls.

So how do you get students to produce the kind of high quality work that Ron describes and shows off in his massive portfolios of student work? This is the question that many educators want to know (and many quoted in the book ask). Ron answers by sharing his toolboxes filled with examples. both from his own classroom and others, of ways to build culture, improve teacher practice, and help students achieve their personal best. The tools include using models, outside "experts," protocols for critiquing work, field trips, multiple drafts, and creating high-level, well-scaffolded projects. Ron's sixth-grade students conducted a water study of their town. created a business making and selling jewelry handcrafted from stones they had excavated, and wrote biographies of local senior citizens. These projects and the many more described in the book illustrate the use of these tools and serve as models for other educators looking for inspiration.





Teaching as Inquiry: Asking Hard Questions to Improve Practice and Student Achievement by Alexandra Weinbaum, David Allen, Tina Blythe, Katherine Simon, Steve Seidel and Catherine Rubin (Teachers College Press, 192 pages, \$21.95) Reviewed by Jill Davidson

"In the field of education, we believe we can, in time and with effort, better understand the interaction among people

that is teaching and learning," writes *Teaching as Inquiry's* chorus of co-authors, who offer a solid foundation in the theory and practice of looking at evidence, particularly student work, through collaborative inquiry. Written as the result of a bona fide collaborative effort—a befitting approach, both as a practice-what-you-preach compliment and as a practical and meaningful way to include multiple perspectives—*Teaching as Inquiry* emerged from a National Study Group funded by the Wallace Foundation and formed by the Academy of Educational Development, Project Zero, and CES National, whose co-director Kathy Simon participated as an author.

The book opens with two chapters on the theory and practice of collaborative inquiry. The first reviews the research on school-based collaborative inquiry, breaking it down into six types. For professional learning communities seeking to weave inquiry into their work, this background is essential. Just as indispensable is the second chapter's discussion of defining and communicating the purpose of inquiry, matching subject to method, and determining who should participate. Close attention paid here will likely have a tremendous positive influence on collaborative inquiry efforts.

The four middle chapters represent collaborative inquiry in various forms and stages at four schools. These chapters vividly demonstrate the multi-year process of group examination of teacher and student work in pursuit of better learning and teaching, portraying what it's like for a group of professionals to think deeply about the work that happens in a school. Each of these chapters were written by school coaches or other such facilitators from the Academy of Educational Development, Project Zero, or the CES network, and a vivid subtext throughout *Teaching as Inquiry* is the crucial role of consistent "outsiders" who know the school well and can push, listen, support, challenge, guide, and analyze as the situation warrants.

The seventh chapter uses examples from the book's four case studies to illustrate fairly predictable milestones in a learning community's inquiry process. The eighth lists key questions that a group willing to devote hours to group inquiry should use as provocations to refine their efforts.

Most likely of greatest value to learning communities committed to a deep, multi-year cycle of inquiry, *Teaching as Inquiry* provides a synthesis of practical tools and theoretical frameworks to encourage thoughtful improvement of professional practice and student learning.

# RESOURCES Workshops and Publications to Help Schools Plan and Strengthen Advisories

# Changing Systems to Personalize Learning: The Power of Advisories

The Power of Advisories, created by Debbie Osofsky, Great Sinner, and Denise Wolk of the Education Alliance at Brown University, is a well-researched and hugely comprehensive 174-page guide designed to accompany an Education Alliance professional development workshop of the same name (see www.alliance.brown.edu/services/br/ for further information about the workshop). Divided into "key dimension" areas of purpose, organization, content, assessment, and leadership, The Power of Advisories is designed to propel a team through the advisory design and planning process, and while it's likely best used as a group workshop guide, The Power of Advisories is valuable on its own, both for the strategies it suggests and as a richly comprehensive overview of the research literature that supports advisories. Elementary and middle school educators, take note: though this resource is part of the high school-oriented Breaking Ranks process, it's valuable for all. The Power of Advisories contains facilitator's guidelines, discussion guides, graphic organizers, exercises, protocols, worksheets on analyzing students' needs, defining advisory's purpose, and aligning appropriate activities.

www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/changing\_systems/power\_of\_advisories/index.shtml

#### The Advisory Guide

Carol M. Lieber and Rachel A. Poliner, authors of "Creating Advisories: A Few Notes from the Field" (see page 14), realized years ago that no comprehensive resource existed on the topic of advisories. Their resulting book, *The Advisory Guide: Designing and Implementing Effective Advisory Programs in Secondary Schools*, published by Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR), is a comprehensive, intelligent, focused, and practical guide to the world of creating and sustaining high school advisories. Its contents cover design, facilitation, formats, and advisory group activities. Two *Advisory Guide* chapters are indispensable parts of any advisory program planning process. "The Advisory Design Puzzle," chapter three,

is devoted to aligning goals with advisory group structure and design. And the fourth chapter, "The Bridge Between Designing and Implementing: The PR Campaign," walks through the process of getting others in the school community enthusiastic about and committed to advisories, anticipating common roadblocks such lack of support, and suggesting communication strategies to manage expectations.

ESR consultants are available to conduct a two-day workshop, "Designing and Implementing an Effective Advisory Program." Please see www.esrnational.org/hs/reform/ hsadvisory.htm for more.

www.esrnational.org/resources.htm

#### **Student Advisory**

This fifteen-page document, produced by New Visions for Public Schools, is a succinct overview of high school advisory programs. Of particular note are descriptions of advisories at three New York City schools—Baruch College Campus High School, The Beacon School, and The New York City Museum School—that detail the programs' structure, curriculum, and advisor role.

www.newvisions.org/schoolsuccess/downloads/ StudentAdv.pdf

#### **Five Attributes of Satisfying Advisories**

Written by Jim Burns and published in the Fall 1996 New England League of Middle Schools Journal, this short article, much-cited in the literature on advisories, is worth studying for its candid and vivid descriptions of what works in middle school advisories. The five points—1. advisories should be integrated into the larger plan for learning, 2. satisfied teacher-advisors feel comfort and authenticity within the role of advisor, 3. advisory tasks should have common, recognizable aims, 4. school leaders should champion the advisory program, and 5. advisories should yield tangible results—are equally apt for high school settings.

www.vla.com/idesign/attributes2.html

#### **Advisories**

Produced by the University of Washington's Small Schools Project, this document collects a handful of advisory resources. The collection's introduction cogently addresses the linked issues of advisory purpose, advisory design, and school mission. The "Advisory Design Sequence," created by the Small Schools Project's Jeff Petty and Kim Feicke, is a thorough flow-chart, accompanied by questions to consider in advisory design, that guides planners through considering school and advisory program goals, planning advisory strategies and design, and dealing with implementation issues. Also included is a portrait of advisories at the Met, and lengthy interviews with Parker Charter Essential School's principal Terry Schrader, and Fenway High School's former acting director Luz Padua.

www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/Planning\_Resources/images/advisories.pdf

#### Resources: Middle School Advisory

This compilation of twelve resources for planning and improving advisories, gathered by MiddleWeb, is geared in particular to middle schools. Journal articles, web-based discussions, classroom stories and more demonstrate the sustained practice of advisories in the middle grades.

http://www.middleweb.com/advisory.html

#### **Advisory Resources**

Stanford University's School Redesign Network complied this list of advisory resources geared for secondary school settings. Among the resources offered are links to several online portfolios produced by What Kids Can Do of advisory and other personalization efforts at High Tech High, Minnesota New Country School, and the Met.

http://www.schoolredesign.net/srn/server.php?idx=861

And there's more! See page 17 for "CES Network Sources for Advisory Development," a description of the professional development opportunities offered by the Regional Teachers Center at Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School and the Wildwood School.

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# GO TO THE SOURCE: More about the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in this Issue

#### Schools

Arturo Schomburg Satellite Academy High School Public school serving grades 9-12 1010 Rev. James A. Polite Ave. Bronx, NY 10459 718/542 2700

Bushwick School for Social Justice
Public school serving grades 9 and 10
(9-12 by 2007)
400 Irving Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11237
718/381-7100 x5000 or 5001
http://bssj.net

Emery Secondary School
Public school serving grades 7-12
1100 47th Street
Emeryville, CA 94608
510/601-4000
www.emeryusd.k12.ca.us/emeryhigh/
default.htm

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School Public school serving grades 7-12 49 Antietam Street Devens, MA 01432 978-772-3293 www.parker.org

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) Public school serving grades 9-12 Public Street Campus 325 Public Street Providence, RI 02905 401/752-2650 www.metcenter.org

Souhegan High School
Public school serving grades 9-12
P.O. Box 1152
412 Boston Post Road
Amherst, NH 03031
603/673-9940
www.sprise.com/shs/default.htm

Wildwood School–Secondary Program Independent school serving grades 6-12 11811 West Olympic Boulevard Los Angeles, CA 90064 310/478-7189 www.wildwood.org

Young Women's Charter Leadership School Public school serving grades 7-12 2641 South Calumet Ave Chicago, IL 60616 312/949-9400 www.ywlcs.org

#### **Support Organizations**

The Education Alliance
222 Richmond Street Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903
800/521-9550 or 401/274-9548
info@alliance.brown.edu
www.alliance.brown.edu

Educators for Social Responsibility– National Center 23 Garden Street Cambridge, MA 02138 617/492-1764 educators@esrnational.org www.esrnational.org

Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools 1720 Broadway, Fourth Floor Oakland, CA 94612-2106 info@bayces.org www.bayces.org

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If CES stands for what you believe inpersonalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools-we invite you to affiliate with CES National as a school or as an individual. Stand up for schooling that is worthy of the name, join a network of passionate educators and innovative schools, and receive great benefits such as Horace subscriptions, Fall Forum facilitator fee waivers, subscriptions to In Common, the CES affiliates' newsletter, and more.

Learn more about CES National Affiliation at www.essentialschools.org.

ESNational

# Special Issue

Horace 21.1 celebrates CES National's 20th anniversary with essays from network teachers, parents, school leaders, and students. These voices tell stories from all over, demonstrating the strength and diversity of Essential schools. The 20th anniversary issue replaces the School Design issue.

# Classroom Practice

How do we bring Coalition ideas like less is more, teacher as coach, and demonstration of mastery to life in the classroom? Topics include: curriculum and instruction, assessment, and classroom culture.

# Leadership

What kinds of leadership are necessary to transform schools into more humane and intellectually rigorous environments? How can the change process be sustained? Topics include: governance, distributed leadership, and managing the change process.

# **Community Connections**

How can schools most powerfully engage the community as advocates and partners in the education of its students? Topics include: parental involvement, service learning and internships, and using community members as resources.



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Community Connections
Advisories in Essential Schools

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#### Advisories in Essential Schools

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- 21 An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship in Schools by Ron Berger, reviewed by Laura Flaxman
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#### Notes on this Issue

In these pages, Horace explores the state of advisories in Essential schools. What do graduates think of an advisory-centered high school education? Kristin Waugh-Hempel and Chris Hempel, former advisors at the Met in Providence, Rhode Island, talked with graduated advisees about their collaborative, advisory-based learning and teaching experiences. How do research and data support advisory programs? Reino Makkonen, an Education Pioneers Fellow at CES National during the summer of 2004, reports on research that validates advisories' beneficial effects and looks at how Essential school educators are conducting their own data-based inquiries to demonstrate the effectiveness of advisory programs. What challenges are schools encountering as they implement advisories? Carol Miller Lieber and Rachel M. Poliner, authors of The Advisory Guide, suggest strategies to avoid common advisory pitfalls. And how do advisories permanently change the landscape of our souls? Mara Benitez, former advisor at the Arturo Schomburg Satellite Academy High School and current CES National staffer, writes about the permanent connections that advisories produced among her colleagues and students.

CES schools have a long and deep track record of using advisories to strengthen the commitment to and practice of personalization. If this collection of stories, research, and experience helps your school, I am eager to hear from you. Send your advisory stories, comments, and questions to idavidson@essentialschools.org.

This issue was inspired by conversation with Leadership High School's principal Gregory Peters. Thanks for the push, Greg.

Regular Horace readers will note that we have expanded our book review section. In happy conjunction with CES National's 20th anniversary, the CES network has unleashed a volley of inspiring, provoking, and deeply worthwhile books. It has been an honor to read and in these pages comment on works by Dennis Littky, Deborah Meier, Kathy Simon, and Ted Sizer. I have learned so much from all of you. And CES National's Laura Flaxman reviewed An Ethic of Excellence by Ron Berger, a teacher who profoundly inspired her. As long as the CES network continues to read books that inspire and enhance practice—and as long as CES practitioners continue to write the same—we will share those titles, recommending must-reads worth your time and attention.

A final note: though formal announcements are being made elsewhere, I want to say goodbye to departing CES National codirectors Vanessa Coleman and Kathy Simon. All of us at CES National thank you for your boundless hard work, intelligence, synergy, and belief in CES. And welcome to incoming CES Executive Director Lewis Cohen, who comes to us with a deep well of experience, energy, direction, and respect for the hard work of schooling. Please visit the CES National website, www.essentialschools.org, for more information about Lewis and other breaking news at CES.

See you at the Fall Forum in San Francisco, November 11-13!

Jill Davidson Editor, Horace

# The Simple Complexity of Advisories by Jill Davidson

Years ago, I shadowed a student through an all-day school visit. Marius was confident and happy, engaged in his classes, bristling with energy and full of comments on the teachers and the connections he was discovering in the school's inter-disciplinary block-scheduled program. I was pleased, of course, to be having such a wonderful day with this bright young man at this thoughtful school. Eleven o'clock arrived: advisory time. I accompanied Marius to his advisor's class-room where, for the first time in my presence, he slumped in his chair, legs sprawled, face blank. Other students filed in. No greeting from the teacher. Some did schoolwork, some played cards, some gossiped. One seemed to nap. The teacher pulled aside a few, one by one, and conferred about matters mysterious to the rest of us. It was a deadly, jarring interruption in an otherwise vibrant day.

Later in the day, the principal confirmed what was obvious enough: the quality of advisories varied wildly at this school, and I happened upon a bad day in one of the weaker advisories. No, there wasn't any professional development for advisories yet. Yes, most of the teachers had been at the school prior to the implementation of the advisory program, and not a few were resistant. There was a goal—academic support—but no particular design to support it. Believing in advisories, the principal carved out the time in the day to make advisories happen, but he soon realized that they

RELATED RESOURCE

Horace 7.1, "Are Advisory Groups 'Essential'? What They Do, How They Work?" is a 1990 look at advisories in Essential schools. Among its contents is "Some Advisory Group Models," a useful collection of various forms of advisories in CES settings.

www.essentialschools.org/ cs/resources/view/ces\_res/8 weren't going to happen on their own. And yes, he believed that until the school could do more than just make time for advisories, it wasn't going to be able to reach its goal to become an equitable place for learning, not for students and not for professionals.

Denise Wolk, Program
Associate at the Education
Alliance and co-author of
"The Power of Advisories"
notes that my experience
with the dead zone advisory
wasn't unique. "Advisories
have become the reform
du jour," says Wolk. "A few
years ago advisories became

one of those things that a lot of schools and districts wrote into federal Small Learning Communities grant applications." Sold on the idea of advisories, many schools are realizing that they require the commitments of appropriate structures aligned to specific goals, connection to the school's mission and culture, and ongoing professional development.

#### Form Follows Function

Those commitments produce an evolving range of advisory forms. Some Essential schools hold advisories in fifteen-minute increments at the start and close of the day. Others meet every other day for an hour. And elsewhere, much of the onsite learning and teaching happens in advisories that serve as a home base for students' personalized learning, providing a setting that replaces traditional classes.

Some advisories gather students together as ninth graders, and together they stay until they graduate. Others intentionally combine age groups. Some create all-male and all-female advisories; still others are carefully considered combinations of students and adults, as diverse as possible. Some have space devoted solely to the advisory; others meet in classrooms, closets, lunchrooms, or courtyards.

While too frequently prompted by circumstances—a lack of time, a lack of space, a lack of a plan—this advisory diversity is often the result of varied goals. A school that wants to create mentoring among older and younger students will value a different advisory group composition than a school that regards advisory as the main place to focus on progress toward grade-level exhibitions. When their goals are well-defined and organized to support the students' overall school and life experience, schools report, advisories gain traction and become sacred. (For pointers to much more information on and help with goal-setting and choosing complimentary advisory structures, see page 22, "Resources: Workshops and Publications to Help Schools Plan and Strengthen Advisories.")

#### Connection to the Core

Mark Rush, English teacher and CES coordinator at Brooklyn's Bushwick School for Social Justice (BSSJ), knew how not to do advisories. "I came from a school at which advisories had been whittled away to once a week and were set up for failure." As its 2003 opening approached, BSSJ was committed to including advisories done right. "I didn't stop believing in what I thought advisories could be," said Rush. "What that meant was close personal relationships between students and staff. It would be a place for kids to interact with other kids in a safe way to talk about issues that don't get talked about. We wanted teachers to be go-to person for parents." As time for planning dwindled and the school's opening approached, however, new circumstances tightened its goals for advisories. "We were facing new mandates from the Board of Education that seemed to limit our ability to write creative curriculum," Rush reports, "We realized that we could use advisories to emphasize our social justice curriculum." BSSJ's advisories meet daily, mid-day, for fifty minutes, with fifteen students per teacher, serving as the locus of students' efforts to synthesize their evolving learning about equity. This connection to the core mission of the school got advisories at BSSJ off to a powerful start.



#### RELATED RESOURCE

Horace 19.1, "Making Great Teachers into Great Advisors: Advisory Training at Parker Charter Essential School," describes the Parker staff members' collaborative inquiry into improving their skills as advisors.

www.essentialschools.org/ cs/resources/view/ces\_res/ 276 In addition to providing a forum for focusing on essential, unifying curriculum, advisories create the fundamental conditions for personalization. Advisories are the time, location, and social organization that ensure that each student is known well by at least one adult in the school, that the child is for at least a part of the day, personally recognized. This focus can-and should—take academic form. Breaking Ranks II, the National Association of Secondary School Principals' strategic plan for high

school reform, recommends that all students have personalized learning plans. Advisory is the home for the assessment that such plans demand; it's the place where students, families, teachers, counselors, and community converge to create, demonstrate progress toward, and update each student's unique plan for learning and growth.

And advisories are the best place to create connections with the students' wider world. Mary Ann Pitcher, co-director of Chicago's Young Women's Leadership Charter School (YWLCS) says, "It's really about creating relationships with families." As it happens at many other Essential schools, family interaction with the school is largely mediated through advisories, which serve as the nerve center for informal communication, scheduled conferences, and parent leadership. At the same time, notes Pitcher, teachers need the most support in the area of family communication. "It's where a lot of teachers struggle. Teachers are often younger than parents, or from different cultural or economic backgrounds. This inhibits their ability to reach out and pick up the phone at the drop of a hat." Addressing this challenge via role-plays, colleague observations, readings, and discussion, YWLCS has located the work of building connections between teachers and families at the center of its professional development.

#### **Professional Development**

For many teachers, discomfort with advisories extends further. The teacher who sees herself as "a science teacher, not a guidance counselor" sounds a legitimate alarm: she needs support to help her use advisory as a place to focus on goals and deepen relationships with students. She needs to know she has the ability to call on counselors, social service providers, and other specialists, to assist her in the work of knowing young people's whole worlds. But she shouldn't feel that she must respond front-line to all crises. Mara Benitez, former advisor and school leader at the Arturo Schomburg Satellite Academy High School and current co-director of CES National's Small Schools Project observes, "Investment in advisory pays off schoolwide, creating the kind of teachers that really can do intense personalized work with students. Advisories are the micrcosom of what the bigger school should look like."

It's also crucial to include advisories in a school's cycle of inquiry and self-examination. Denise Wolk suggests, "Look at indicators that can affect student achievement such as attendance data, disciplinary referrals, and minor suspensions." Using action research to demonstrate the positive effects of advisories on these phenomena provides data that sells advisories to doubters throughout the school's community.

#### Sacred Time with the Kids

In A New Kind of Science, Stephen Wolfram observes, "Remarkably simple programs seem to capture the essential mechanisms responsible for all sorts of important phenomena that in the past have always seemed far too complex to allow any simple explanation." Advisories may well be described as one such simple program. Advisories allow schools—necessarily intricate and complex—a simple, reliable way to teach and emphasize the best qualities of their cultures, nurture their students' resilience, confidence, and personal power, center themselves around meaningful teaching and learning, involve parents and community, create professional and personal growth for teachers, and become personalized, equitable, safe, and joyous places for learning. Advisories provide an inviolable time and space to pause, collaborate, breathe, reconnect, mend, learn, work, and then relaunch into the world.

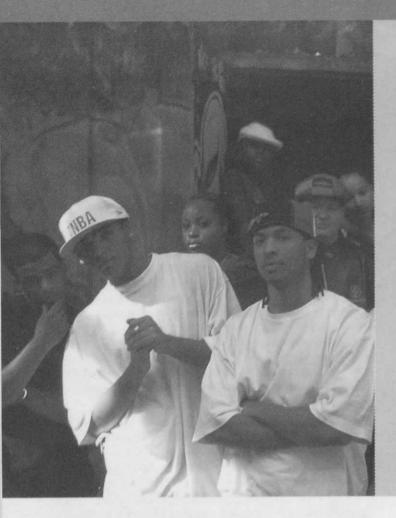
Ultimately, the power of advisories comes from relationships and connections: a simple concept that allows the complexity of a vibrant, intellectually challenging, equitable school to flourish. "It's sacred time with the kids," says Mary Ann Pitcher. "Ultimately, you have to give yourself up to them and talk about their lives, their jobs, their families. It might not seem like productive time but it sure is; it's how we establish relationships."

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Wolfram, Stephen (2002). A New Kind of Science. Champaign, IL: Wolfram Media.

A New Kind of Science is available online in its entirety at www.wolframscience.com/nksonline/toc.html



We All Win Together:
Met Graduates Reflect
on Advisories
by Kristin WaughHempel and Chris
Hempel, with Takesha
Lopes, Alex Rivera,
Ramon Frias, Joe
Claprood, Jesse
Suchmann and Elissa Toro

Met students on a New York City trip

Rich with ideas, opinions, and passions, advisories are a place to get feedback, to try out new ideas, to learn, and to teach. As teams focused on a common goal—learning and life success for everyone in the group—advisories at the Met redefine what it means to teach and learn. Advisories go beyond forced groups in which individuals relate to each other in predetermined roles of either student or teacher. Instead, advisories are communities of people who come together, appreciate, and learn from each other regardless of age, background, and interests.

During 2004's summer months, Kristin Waugh-Hempel and Chris Hempel, both advisors for four years at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) in Providence, Rhode Island, talked with seven of their now-graduated advisees about the centrality of advisories at the Met and the impact of their advisory's relationships and connections. In this article, Waugh-Hempel, now the Met's Learning Through Internships (LTI) director, and Hempel, now a Met principal, present excerpts from this reunion conversation along with their own reflections on their experience as the group's advisors.

KRISTIN: Before we begin talking about the role advisories play in learning, could you describe what an advisory is?

TAKESHA: An advisory is a group of people who come together to make decisions and to discuss things, like a family where people learn from each other's experiences and who come together for a purpose—to help each other—because we were all trying to graduate.

ALEX: You feel that your opinion is respected. So is your race, where you come from, things that are part of your culture. You feel like you can bring them into the advisory and feel comfortable and safe there. Advisories are about relationship building through discussion. Sometimes you can have conflicts in there, but the advisor is there to help everyone learn from the conflicts. Sometimes we had conflicts that were very, very heated, and we had to learn how to control our anger or our emotions. How do you start growing as a person? The advisor is there for that. And the advisory is very helpful in teaching you that.

TAKESHA: You were with people that you cared about and there were things they were passionate about, so you learned. We just basically learned from each other, passing on everything. Some of it started by passing on information about common interests, whether it was music or shopping or video games, but then it became about STDs and aerodynamics and graphic design. It just happened all the time. It was sort of like the joy that everybody got from seeing you at your best. You wanted to learn because everybody liked what you were teaching or you saw that everybody was proud of you.

ALEX: You go to your peers' exhibitions and they blow you away with what they've learned and accomplished or with their self-reflection and goal setting. And it feels like it's not just the advisor giving you feedback, so you realize that your peers are seeing what is going on with you. Their feedback helps you understand when a project really comes together and how to finish it and how you can use it to help the community or the school.

#### Reflections from Kristin and Chris

One year, we had a guest speaker come in to the school to discuss how the actual events of the first Thanksgiving differed dramatically from the myths perpetuated by American society. The speaker went to great lengths to differentiate the "His-Story" of Thanksgiving related by the white man from the truth of the actual event. He explained that the "truth" about Thanksgiving is merely a romanticized version of the event meant to gloss over the decimation of Native Americans. Yet rather than ending with the point that his-

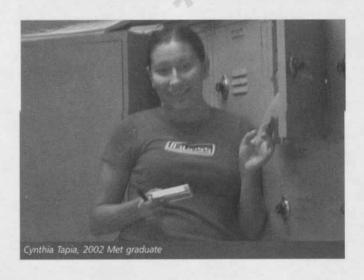
The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) began in September 1996 as a bold new school with high standards, and strong family engagement. By 2005 the Met will house 120 students at each of its six small schools throughout Providence. The Met is a community school that provides programs after school and in the evenings, and allows community access to its facilities including a state-of-the-art athletic center and track, a performance center, a culinary kitchen, a technology center, and a school-based health center.

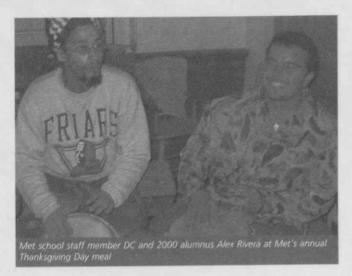
At the Met, each student works with an advisor, a parent or guardian, and a workplace mentor to design a personalized curriculum based on the student's interests. Students work at internships in community businesses and organizations two days each week, learning academic skills through real-world problem solving. The Met aims to empower students to take charge of their learning, gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve success beyond high school, and to become life-long learners.

For much more about the Met, visit www.metcenter.org.

tory is ultimately a collection of perspectives, he substituted one truth for another equally distorted "truth," thereby displaying his bias.

The advisory discussion that ensued was memorable due to the students' intense historical identification as aggressors or aggrieved. In the hour, we ventured far beyond the issue of historical accuracy to talk about the history of our countries of origin and the negative impact of colonization, about the role white men have historically played in documenting important world events and the impact that has had on others. This discussion launched us on a month-long learning journey through issues ranging from economic inequality to cultural identification.





CHRIS: What role, if any, do you think that an advisor has in creating a communal learning environment?

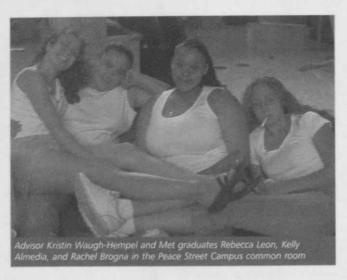
TAKESHA: They serve as a liaison, finding common passions. An advisor is like someone who is the head of the group, but doesn't necessarily act like the head of the group. It's someone who participates in the group and is there for structure and guidance. I see an advisor like a teacher in wisdom, but not really like the teachers in regular high schools who I see more as supervisors. Advisors are more like coaches and less like supervisors who tell you what to do and how to do it and if you don't do it their way, then you get in trouble.

#### Reflections from Kristin and Chris

Creating a thoughtful learning environment in advisory takes a lot of preparation. Advisors identify and adapt to the dynamics of the group as they empower students to take charge of their learning. We spent a great deal of time nurturing leadership in the advisory so students felt comfortable taking over and teaching each other. It is critical to have thoughtfully planned formal and informal activities in various configurations designed to "cross-pollinate" and build connections and trust between students. We would appoint student co-facilitators to organize and run advisory, to create guiding questions for books we read together, to plan camping trips and afternoon excursions.

KRISTIN: So, did you just walk into the Met and automatically have that relationship with your advisor?

TAKESHA: No, I think it was easier because we talked. In traditional high schools, you don't really talk to your teachers. Here, the teachers stay after, they come earlier, they call your house, they talk to your parents. You know them because they make themselves known. Before I even stepped in the classroom, you had called me. I know that the conversation we had was about the book that I was reading, about the Salem Witch Trials. I asked you about what you liked and about your nationality because I thought your name was "Wah." So we had a conversation.



Some thoughts from Met parent Ann Rule. Rule's son Matthew McCormick is in his senior year at the Met.

My son is a bright young man whose struggles with learning presented a challenge to an antiquated "one size fits all" educational system. Countless times in middle school, I would see him become overwhelmed, frustrated, and giving up. The teaching strategies used at the Met meet his needs. He sets learning goals with plenty of advice and guidance from people who are part of his learning team. He is then expected to be responsible and accountable for meeting those goals. Most of all, any struggles in meeting these goals are not seen as failures but rather learning experiences that are reassessed and new strategies are developed constantly building on what he has learned.

His advisory is a place where all students are respected for their skills and interests. My son not only learns academic skills in a meaningful context, but he is also learning life skills which enable him to develop mutually respectful relationships, give and take constructive criticism, handle both the positive and negative consequences of his decisions, and be a contributing member of a larger community.

The Met is a place where parents work closely with teachers. Raising a teenager is a difficult struggle. I now feel I have a community of people helping me. His advisor and even school administrators really know him. Family involvement is so deeply embedded in the culture of the school that my relationship with my son flourishes.

For my son, the world is his classroom and his advisor helps him structure his learning into manageable increments. He is acquiring the skills to be a "life long learner." He is being taught to learn and consequently learns what he is taught. CHRIS: Do you feel that the fact that you knew who your advisor was and she knew who you were encouraged you to learn somehow?

TAKESHA: Yeah, it made it easier because in life sometimes you have good times and sometimes you have bad times. If you have a relationship with someone who knows you and knows how you act and knows if you're acting out of character and knows how to talk to you, then they can help you. Just you knowing me as an individual helped me get through high school. I know that all the stuff that I went through during high school, that a normal teenager goes through during high school, can keep you from doing your best. And there are a lot of students who don't have somebody who helps them at home and probably don't have somebody who helps them at school, so that's probably why a lot of kids don't finish. If they get sidetracked, they don't have anybody who's going to stop what they're doing to help them.

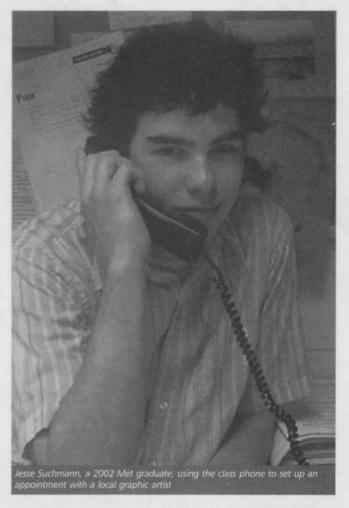
#### Reflections from Kristin and Chris

A very bright and academically gifted student arrived at the Met a year behind her age group due to severe bouts of depression that would often go unchecked for months. During the depressive periods, she was chronically tardy and often fell hopelessly behind her peers on internships, projects, and advisory assignments, rebuffing any attempts to make a connection between attendance and success. Yet she kept coming to school and, when there, was able to complete weeks of work in short order. We tried desperately to get her into counseling to mitigate her cyclical bouts of depression with little support from her family. When we felt that all hope was lost, she wrote a letter that ended:

I want to succeed, go to college through way of high school diploma. I know you're trying to help me, and I ask you, though I shouldn't, for just one thing more: to keep asking me what you can do to help. Whereas I would feel horrible for you to drive out to my house every morning and harass me into school...or even to call me every morning, it's a good idea. That doesn't mean I agree to it, I'm just saying thank you for offering; it means I know, at least, the limit you'll go to. I don't even really want to ask you for help but I suppose, if you keep offering, I just might get brave enough.

KRISTIN: Did the fact that your relationship with your advisor was more "human-to-human" than "teacher-to-student" ever get in the way with either your relationship with your advisor or with your relationships with the students around you?

ALEX: I think a lot has to do with how the advisor starts it off, comes in, sets the tone, sets the expectations of the advisory from the beginning, and sticks with them. "I am here to be your friend, but I am also your teacher and we have a job to do. My job is to help you academically, but also to help make sure that you meet your potential and that you reach all the goals you have for yourself." And advisors also help the students figure out who they are.



RAMON: I think also that having a relationship with a teacher makes a difference. I wouldn't skip school because I knew you would wonder why I wasn't there today. At other schools, if you don't go to school, nobody cares. And if you don't know what's going on in class, sometimes the teachers don't take the time to explain it.

JESSE: I think that's a good point about having such a close bond with your teacher. I did

more because I was close with my teacher. For example, at my old school it was all about, okay, what can I do and not do. If I could fake a signature, I could be out for two days. Here, Kristin would call me. "Where are you? What's going on?"

JOE: I think every teenager, no matter who you are, has some kind of emotional baggage. I can't imagine any kid that doesn't. Some have more than others, but a lot of times it's too difficult for kids to deal with it at home and to talk to their family

#### RELATED RESOURCE

"Sustained Relationships," a section of "Succeeding Together at the Met: An Online Portfolio," produced by What Kids Can Do, details the relationships and connections among advisors, students, mentors and parents. Find it online at

www.whatkidscando.org/ portfoliosmallschools/MET/ Sustained.html