

An Evaluation of the Advisory Program

at

Mabton Junior-Senior High School

A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

An Evaluation of the Advisory Program

at

Mabton Junior-Senior High School

Approved for the Faculty

_____, Faculty Advisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative/descriptive research study was to determine the extent to which students who participated in the Mabton Junior-Senior High School (MJSHS) advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed the program met its stated purpose. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, a student survey provided essential baseline data from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated. MJSHS students who participated in the advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed the program met its stated purpose and should continue.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

“If you are reading this, you are likely a teacher or an administrator who senses intuitively that something is missing in your middle school or high school program. You have heard about advisories. It may be that your school has implemented this program and you’re seeking techniques to increase its effectiveness, or you may be trying to decide if it is an approach that will serve your students and staff. In either event, you are willing to look at the adolescents in your care more closely than their academic performance alone allows.” (MacLaury 2002, p.ix).

The above statement by MacLaury has alluded to the absence of personal relationships in schools and the need to provide advisory programs that meet student needs emotionally and academically.

Poliner & Lieber (2004) have also concluded that advisory programs have promoted academic success. These authorities stated:

“Advisory programs promote healthy student development, support academic success, and provide multiple opportunities to bridge the divide between healthy development and academic success. For example, they help ensure that all young people have at least one adult who knows them well. Advisory groups help create stronger bonds among young people, usually cutting across the typical exclusionary social groups that form in schools. They are the “safe container” for discussing adolescent

concerns that kids care about. Advisory programs provide an ideal setting to teach and practice important life skills. In addition, advisories encourage student voice on school-wide issues. Finally, they establish a forum for academic, college and career coaching, and advising that cuts across the subject areas.”

The authorities cited above have addressed the important role that advisory programs can play in enhancing and supporting student academic growth and development and in doing so, have established the context of the present study.

Statement of the Problem

For the past several years, staff at Mabton Junior-Senior High School (MJSHS) had been considering the need to restructure the daily school schedule and to determine whether or not to continue the advisory program. All teachers were not using advisory time appropriately, causing a lack of purpose as well as interest in the program. There had been no updated training available, and the staff had a large turn over during the four years following the initial implementation of the advisory program. There was no consistent advisory curriculum or instructional materials available for staff. The only professional development the staff received after first implementing the project was to converse about the program during professional development time in peer groups.

Phrased as a question, the problem which represented the focus of the present study may be stated as follows: To what extent did students who participated in the MJSHS advisory program understand the purpose of advisory and believe the program met its stated purpose?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this quantitative/descriptive research study was to determine the extent to which students who participated in the MJSHS advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed the program met its stated purpose. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, a student survey provided essential baseline data from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Delimitations

The present study was conducted during the 2006-2007 school year at Mabton Junior Senior High School, located in a rural community in Eastern Washington. There were four hundred and twenty-nine students enrolled at MJSHS grades seven through twelve. The demographics of the attending students were 91.8% Hispanic, 7.0% White, 0.9% American Indian, and 0.2% Black. Eighty-five percent qualified for the free or reduced lunch program. Special education students made up 6.1% of the population, and 26.9% of students were transitional bilingual students. Thirty-seven percent of the population was considered to be in migrant status. Twenty-four certified teachers made up the staff with an average of 17.9 students per teacher. Half of the staff held at least a masters degree, with an average of 14.7 years teaching experience as reported on the Office of the Superintendent's School Report Card.

Assumptions

The assumption was made that continuing the advisory program at MJSHS would have a positive effect on all students enrolled. Specifically, students would understand the purpose of advisory and believe the program was meeting its stated purpose. It was further assumed that all staff was trained or generally familiar with the advisory process. Finally, the assumption was made that the end of the year survey would provide data needed to validate the hypothesis.

Hypothesis

MJSHS students who participated in the advisory program will understand the purpose of advisory and believe the program meets its stated purpose and should continue.

Significance of the Project

Undertaking the present study was essential for determining the continuance or termination of the advisory program at MJSHS. The use of student data has driven most decisions made in this school in recent years. This project would provide another useful tool in decision making about the advisory program. Further, the study would serve to address the problem of polarization between administration and faculty regarding the effects of the advisory program, wherein the administration was attempting to make the program mandatory, while and faculty questioned the effectiveness of the advisory program. The effect of top-down decision making was taking a toll on staff morale. The

completed project would provide useful information for administration as well as teachers.

Procedure

The researcher (Jennifer B. Schlegel) sought and obtained permission to undertake the present study from the MJSHS building principal during summer of 2006. Permission was also granted to conduct an end-of-year survey of the MJSHS senior class during June, 2007, to obtain their generalized perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the advisory program. At this time, a student survey was designed and approved by the senior class faculty advisor. At the close of the school year in June, 2007 all senior class members were invited to complete the survey. There was one hundred percent participation of the senior class members.

Definition of Terms

Significant terms used in the context of the present study have been defined as follows:

advisory. a time where one adult and a small group of students have the opportunity to meet, discuss and interact on a regular basis.

descriptive research. research that determines and describes the way things are; involves collecting numerical data to test hypotheses or answer questions about the current subject of study. Also called survey research.

quantitative research. the collection of numerical data to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena of interest.

summit. a meeting of minds around a specific topic.

survey. an attempt to collect data from members of a population to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables.

Acronyms

MJSHS. Mabton Junior Senior High School.

OSPI. Office of The Superintendent of Public Instruction

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The review of literature and research summarized in Chapter 2 was organized to address:

What is Advisory and Why are Advisories Important?

Student Needs and Advisory Benefits

Advisory Challenges

Summary

Data current primarily within the past ten years were identified through an online computerized literature search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the internet, and ProQuest. A hand-search of selected materials was also conducted.

What Is Advisory And Why Are Advisories Important?

According to Poliner & Lieber (2004) the authors of The Advisory Guide, an advisory program has provided an arrangement where one adult and a small group of students have an opportunity to meet, discuss, and interact on a regular basis. The time has typically been scheduled daily, weekly or monthly for a specific amount of time to provide a caring and safe environment for academic guidance and support. Advisory has also provided time for student recognition, activities, and administrative details such as school surveys. Advisory summits (ie: a meeting to discuss school-wide issues) and time to work on student needs, individually or as a group was provided as well. Advisory may

also be used as a time to discuss current events and school wide issues and to promote good citizenship through accountability to the group and the adult at the helm.

Cushman (1990), in the article Are Advisory Groups Essential, discussed that in order for advisory to be successful the following should be in place. First, placement in the school day wherein advisory became a part of a normal teaching day, rather than an additional responsibility, proved very important. Second, the authenticity of the advisor played a huge role in the functionality and effectiveness of each advisory. Third, the advisory program of the school showed common vision and purpose. Fourth, the leadership within the school supported the implementation of advisory. Finally, it was important to have results that could be seen, felt, heard, or recorded.

MacLaury (2002) asserted that the purpose of advisory was to ensure that every student was known by at least one adult at school, an adult that served as an advocate. Advisory played an important role for the student and his success. Guaranteed acceptance for each student in at least one peer group where they were safe helped students become successful academically and fostered a relationship between the school and the home. Advisory fostered connections among students as well. Advisory aided in fostering a greater sense of school community through the creation of an environment wherein a student's personal growth and academic achievement was monitored. Advisory also contributed to a positive school climate.

Advisory meetings were smaller than the old homeroom meetings. The advisor or adult advocate played a role in many aspects of a student's life. From discipline to scheduling, as well as coping with problems at school and issues at home, the advisory showed potential to coordinate and help. As an advocate, the teacher or adult aided in

meeting with a student's parent or guardian, or even with other faculty, to ensure productive relations between school personnel, the student, and their guardian.

Relationships were the key to a good advisory program (MacLaury).

MacLaury found that an effective advisory contained four key elements. First, it must be a safe environment for the student to be and express themselves. Students must have been able to ask questions and get answers. Second, an advisory must have been able to create a link between students, the school, and the home. Third, advisories must be in support of academic achievement. Students must be able to recognize themselves and their peers for a job well done or be able to get help from the teacher or their peers. Last, there must be a positive relationship between the advisor and the students.

A great example of why advisory was important in a school was in a school-wide crisis. Consider take the situation of a student killed by a drunk driver. Word came to the students via a classroom student's cell phone call. Soon the word spread, and the school was in crisis. The principal asked all students to report to advisory. In the advisory, students were able to discuss the incident and their feelings. The counselor was available to deal with the particularly traumatized. Because of advisory, the students received the support they needed. With the help of their advisor, they handled a traumatic event well. In the wake of so many school shootings, lockdowns, and emergency evacuations, a well-established advisory was helpful in dealing with many of these critical situations (Poliner & Lieber 2004).

Student Needs And Advisory Benefits

MacLaury (2002) explained that students who have not felt an attachment to school or staff were more likely to be the students with the poor attendance and a higher chance of dropping out of school. Students who felt like they were a part of a supportive learning environment were the ones more likely to succeed academically and be the ones involved in school and its supporting activities. The main point of a good advisory program was to help the student feel that it mattered what he or she was doing with his/her life and mind, and to facilitate the creation of an ability to recognize that the two were connected. Teenagers have been dealt with an array of hormonal changes, which affected their physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and moral development. Confusion was a common state of a teenage mind, and an advisory was the place where they could find answers.

Jones & Tittle (1999) concluded that students often arrived at school with a plethora of needs. Advisory served as a place where many of them could be met. By providing social interaction and peer support in a safe environment, a link was created between school and home. Academic support allowed students to learn coping strategies for personal and interpersonal factors that affected their work. Advisories also improved students self esteem through the promotion of a healthy relationship with an adult who cared about them.

Self-esteem issues were rampant among teenagers. Advisories had the ability to influence how students viewed themselves outside of the classroom and gave them a feeling of more control over their decisions. Through the promotion of a safe and equal environment, advisory improved a student's ability and willingness to share and discuss

his or her feelings. Advisory activities reduced the amount of teenage usage of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, weapons, and affiliation with gangs. While all of these things were happening to the students, the advisor was becoming more sensitive to the students, their situations, and their needs. Thus, the advisor developed more understanding of particular student behaviors (Jones & Tittle)

Researchers for the Small School Project in Seattle, Washington, discussed the many benefits of advisory. First, the relationship between students and teachers improved. Secondly, communication between all stakeholders in the school environment improved – student to student, student to teacher, teacher to administration, administration to student, as well as student to teacher to home.

MacLaury cited an example from a school, wherein the school conducted student-led conferences. For the first time in the history of the school, students talked to their parents about their grades and achievements, including academic goal setting and personal goal setting. Advisors and the advisory program played a crucial role in the preparation and implementation of student-led conferences.

Advisories provided a venue to discuss school-wide issues and take care of administrative details. In fact, advisory in schools served to generate many thought-provoking questions and ideas. Advisory groups moved intellectual conversation into a concrete realm wherein the student understood ideas at their level, making sense of their world. Advisories, in essence, were working on the student as a whole. Some advisories carried out community service projects. In this cushioned environment, even the shyest student served as a leader, building capacity in all of the students. Through discussions,

students assumed roles such as facilitator, timekeeper, note taker, and group reporter. These skills have proved essential in the workplace today (Cushman, 1990).

Advisory Challenges

Poliner & Lieber (2004) discussed the fact that schools devoted inadequate time to assessing their advisory programs, resulting in the inability to properly produce tangible results regarding their effectiveness. One school saw improved citizenship and manners, another saw improved academic achievement, and some schools saw students simply learning to be quiet and respectful to each other. Each of these was an improvement and achievement, but again, was very subjective and varied among districts, schools, and even classrooms. The advisory program was very dependent on the allocation of time and resources determined by the school and reflected the values held there.

One of the biggest challenges an advisory program faced was that of selecting an advisor. An advisor with no ownership in the program was detrimental to its success. An advisory group was more work for the teacher, and needed to be prepared for, just as much as for a regular lesson. This produced immediate agitation as teachers already felt that they were overworked and underpaid. A second challenge was the advisor's ability to connect with the students. Teachers eventually got to know their students and developed their own sense of what they wanted to do and what their limits were. Some teachers loved the challenge and liked the idea, and others backed away for various reasons - fear of not feeling qualified to handle certain situations, for example. Within the advisory, often times subjects or issues arose where the teacher or support staff did

not feel comfortable dealing with the issue. They built resentment, sometimes thinking, “I went into teaching, not counseling.” They were reluctant to get involved simply because they felt unqualified to deal with some of the problems that arose. Comfort level differed as some advisors gave out their home phone numbers and did home visits, and others did just the bare minimum (Poliner & Lieber).

Many times, in order to keep advisory size small for a sense of intimacy, teachers, as well as support staff, were asked to be advisors. Advisories often ended up with custodians, school resource officers, home visitors, and other program directors as the advisor. Having non-teachers as advisors often created instability within the advisory, as they were often called away from their advisor role whenever they were needed. Their “on call” status within the school was their primary purpose, so often advisory was put on the back burner. The students in those particular advisories began to feel disenfranchised and were less likely to open up and trust (Jones & Tittle).

Summary

The review of selected literature presented in Chapter 2 supported the following research themes:

1. The purpose of advisory has been to ensure that every student is known by at least one adult in the school, who serves as an advocate, making students feel like they are a part of a supportive learning environment, possibly improving academic success and involvement in school activities.

2. The primary benefit of a good advisory program has been to help the student feel that what he/she is doing with their life and mind matter, and to create the ability to recognize that the two are connected.
3. One of the biggest challenges an advisory program has faced has been that of selecting an advisor who has the ability and willingness to connect with students.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative/descriptive research study was to determine the extent to which students who participated in the MJSHS advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed the program met its stated purpose. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, a student survey provided essential baseline data from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Methodology

The methodology behind the senior class survey was quantitative. The purpose of the survey was to see if the students believed the advisory program was beneficial enough to retain it in the school schedule. A group of fifty six seniors were asked to participate in the study. The seniors were chosen as they had spent the most time in an advisory, and had been in the school before the advisory program was in existence.

Participants

Participants included in the study were all members of the senior class at MJSHS. The entire senior class participated and no distinction was made by grade point, language ability, or length of time attending the school.

Instrument

The instrument used to decide whether or not to continue the advisory program was the MJSHS senior class survey. The survey was comprised of three yes or no questions and students were asked to circle which answer they believed best represented their generalized perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their advisory. The survey was administered to all seniors to ensure the lack of bias by classroom teacher/advisor. It was believed that all teachers needed to be represented in the study (refer to APPENDIX).

Design

The survey was intentionally designed to get a clear yes or no answer to each of three questions. The questions were designed to explore and determine whether or not the student understood the purpose of the advisory program as well as to determine whether or not the advisory program should continue in the school.

Procedure

The present qualitative research study evolved in several stages as detailed below.

1. The researcher (Jennifer B. Schlegel) sought and obtained permission to undertake the present study from the MJSHS building principal during summer of 2006.
2. Permission was granted to conduct an end-of-year survey of the MJSHS senior class during June, 2007, to obtain their generalized perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the advisory program.
3. A student survey was designed and approved by the senior class faculty advisor.

4. At the close of the school year in June, 2007 all senior class members were invited to complete the survey.
5. The students were asked to report to a survey location during the advisory time to ensure the privacy of the answers and to negate any influence by the advisory teacher.
6. The students were given five minutes to complete the survey and were asked not to discuss the questions or the answers with other students taking the survey.
7. The students were given no preparation to take part in the survey, and the questions on the survey were not discussed at any time except in the case where translation was needed.
8. Results were tabulated and will be shared on the following pages.

Treatment of Data

The researcher used a questionnaire survey to assess the stability of the advisory program. The survey was comprised of three yes or no questions, and was administered at the end of the school year prior to graduation. Student responses to the survey questions determined whether or not the advisory program in the school should be retained or abolished. Data obtained were organized in tabular form from which to formulate related conclusions and recommendations.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a description of the research methodology employed in the study, participants, instruments used, research design, and procedure

utilized. Details concerning treatment of the data obtained and analyzed were also presented.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Students and staff were beginning to question the validity of the advisory program at Mabton Junior-Senior High School. The school schedule was being redone for the upcoming school year and information on whether or not to continue the advisory program was needed. A survey was administered to the fifty-six seniors at MJSHS. Students from all advisories were included so that the study could reflect the beliefs and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the advisory program at the school.

Description of the Environment

The present study was conducted during the 2006-2007 school year at MJSHS, located in a rural community in Eastern Washington. There were four hundred and twenty-nine students enrolled at MJSHS grades seven through twelve. The demographics of the attending students were 91.8% Hispanic, 7.0% White, 0.9% American Indian, and 0.2% Black. Eighty-five percent qualified for the free or reduced lunch program. Special education students made up 6.1% of the population, and 26.9% of students were transitional bilingual students. Thirty-seven percent of the population was considered to be in migrant status. Twenty-four certified teachers made up the staff with an average of 17.9 students per teacher. Half of the staff held at least a masters degree, with an average of 14.7 years teaching experience as reported on the Office of the Superintendent's School Report Card.

Hypothesis

MJSHS students who participated in the advisory program will understand the purpose of advisory and believe the program meets its stated purpose and should continue.

Results of the Study

Figures 1-3 provide a summary of the descriptive research. The figures have been organized around the three survey questions. Figure 1 details the results of the understanding of the advisory program purpose. Figure 2 details the results of whether or not advisory programs were meeting the stated purpose. Figure 3 details the results of whether or not the students felt that advisory should be continued.

Figure 1: Understanding of Purpose

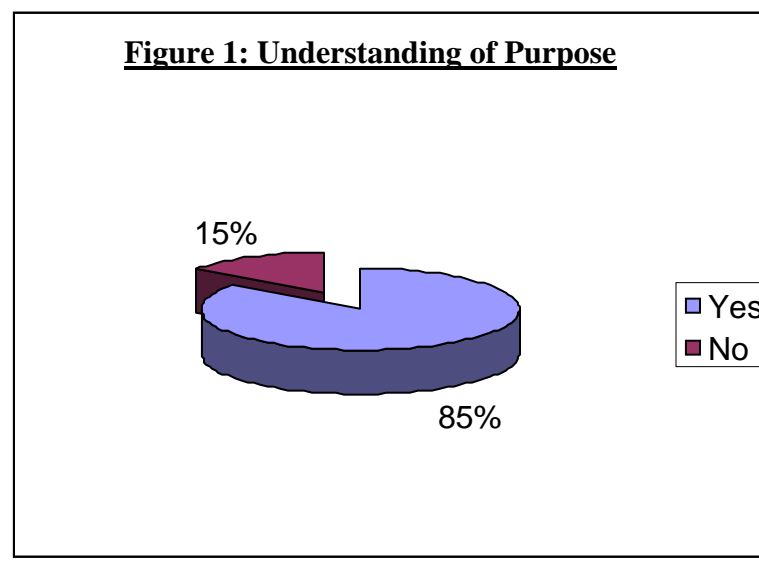


Figure 2: Meeting Stated Purpose

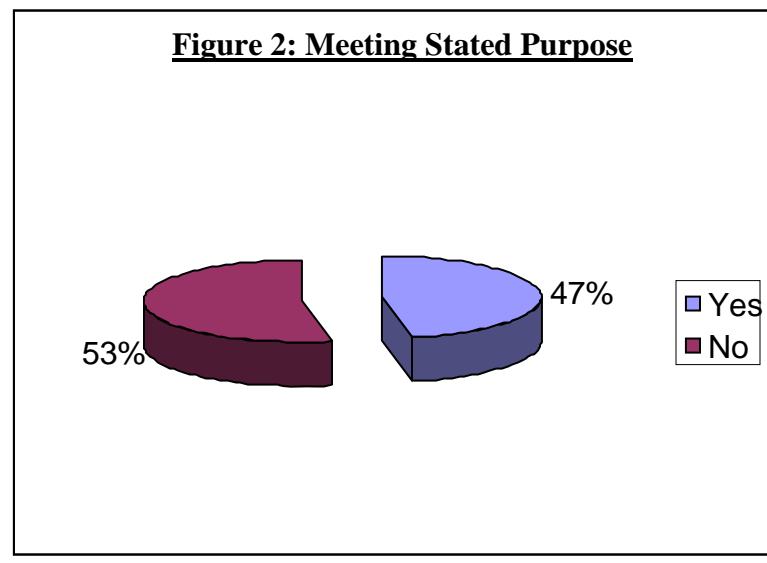
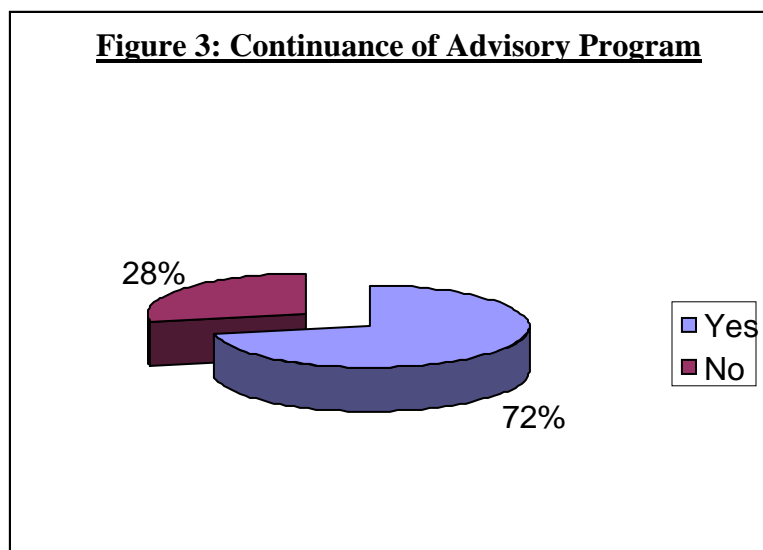


Figure 3: Continuance of Advisory Program



As shown in figures 1-3 responses to each question were as follows:

Question 1: Do you know what the purpose of advisory is?

Yes: 85%

No: 15%

Question 2: Do you feel that advisory meets its purpose?

Yes: 47%

No: 53%

Question 3: Do you feel that our school should continue to have an advisory program?

Yes: 72%

No: 28%

Findings

The study conducted showed an overall desire to continue the advisory program. The students did have a working knowledge of the advisory program's purpose, however, students did not believe the advisory program was meeting its stated purpose. Significantly, 72% of students surveyed believed the school should continue the advisory program. The survey scores represented the opinion of the survey group. With the data collected and reviewed, the hypothesis was accepted (ie: MJSHS students who participated in the advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed it met its stated purpose and should continue).

Summary

Student response to a three question survey provided a convincing argument in support of the desire to continue the advisory program at MJSHS. Seventy two percent of the senior class decided that the advisory was an important program to have in the school.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative/descriptive research study was to determine the extent to which students who participated in the MJSHS advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed the program met its stated purpose. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, a student survey provided essential baseline data from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Conclusions

From the review of selected literature presented in Chapter 2 and the analysis of data in Chapter 4, the following conclusions were reached:

4. The purpose of advisory has been to ensure that every student is known by at least one adult in the school, who serves as an advocate, making students feel like they are a part of a supportive learning environment, possibly improving academic success and involvement in school activities.
5. The primary benefit of a good advisory program has been to help the student feel that what he/she is doing with their life and mind matter, and to create the ability to recognize that the two are connected.

6. One of the biggest challenges an advisory program has faced has been that of selecting an advisor who has the ability and willingness to connect with students.
4. MJSHS students who participated in the advisory program understood the purpose of advisory and believed the program should continue.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions cited above, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. To ensure that every student is known by an adult in the school who serves as an advocate, making students part of a supportive learning environment, while improving their academic success, student advisory programs are strongly recommended.
2. To help students understand that what they are doing with their life and mind matter, educators should be aware of the benefits of a good advisory program; additionally, appropriate professional development in addressing the true purpose of an advisory program should be provided for all staff.
3. To overcome advisory program challenges particular care should be focused on selecting an advisor who has the ability and willingness to connect with students.

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APPENDIX

Senior Class Advisory Survey

DIRECTIONS: Please take a few moments to fill out this survey. Do not talk to anyone while you take the survey. Please return surveys to Mrs. Schlegel when you are finished. Thank you.

Circle yes or no.

Do you know what the purpose of advisory is?

YES

NO

Do you feel that advisory meets its purpose?

YES

NO

Do you feel that our school should continue to have an advisory program?

YES

NO