Title: Research on ninth grade advisory programs and curricula

Date: July 2013

Question: >>   Are there research and resources on ninth grade advisory programs and curricula?

Response:

According to the definition used by the California Department of Education, *advisories* differ from homerooms in that "advisory programs deliberately establish a connection between teacher and students. This connection can be in the form of academic advisement and coaching, student-led conferences and portfolio development, character and study skills development, discussion of current events, and packaged advisory program curricula." (See http://pubs.cde.ca.gov/TCSII/ch5/advisoryprograms.aspx). Note that *advisory programs* are also distinct from ninth grade academies and other structures that separate ninth graders from the rest of the school community or group them together into small learning communities that remain together for most of the day, or throughout their high school years.

This memo is organized into the following sections:

Reports and articles: Research reports and descriptive and policy-oriented articles about advisory programs (sometimes as part of more comprehensive programs, such as First Things First or Check & Connect). The studies included are primarily descriptive, as REL West was unable to find any rigorous, experimental studies of advisories.

Citations either include a link to a free online version when available.

Citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary that is text written by the author or publisher of the article. For three citations that are missing such text, we wrote brief summaries for your information and labeled them as "REL West summary".

Example advisory programs and curricula: Finally, while there is no solid evidence of their effectiveness at achieving their intended goals, this memo includes some examples of advisory periods/programs in place in schools in the Dropout Prevention Alliance for Utah Students with Disabilities (Utah Alliance) and elsewhere, including content areas, successes, and materials.

Organizations that focus on high school improvement, ninth grade transitions, and/or dropout prevention and that may provide helpful information.

Additional resources for a fee.

Methods: An explanation of our search process and terms used.

On occasion, in any of these sections we excerpted additional text to provide relevant info; these are labeled "REL West note" and are always quotes from the text. We have not done an evaluation of any of the resources or organizations in this memo, but rather provide them to you for your information only.

1. REPORTS & ARTICLES

Relevant resources as judged by abstracts are included here. While the literature on high school advisories is thinner than that on middle school advisories, we focus on the high school level here.

Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2008–4025). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/PracticeGuide.aspx?sid=9

Abstract: Geared toward educators, administrators, and policymakers, this guide provides recommendations that focus on reducing high school dropout rates. Strategies presented include identifying and advocating for at-risk students, implementing programs to improve behavior and social skills, and keeping students engaged in the school environment.

Felner, R. D., Favazza, A., Shim, M., Brand, S., Gu, K., & Noonan, N. (2001). Whole school improvement and restructuring as prevention and promotion: Lessons from STEP and the project on high performance learning communities. *Journal of School Psychology*, *39*(2), 177–202.

REL West summary: This study examined the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP), which is program focused on the transition from middle or junior high school into high school. The aim was to enhance school adjustment and decrease risk of problem behaviors such as school violence and dropout. The STEP program included two main components. First was to reorganize the school social system to reduce the chaos a student confronts as they enter the school. This was accomplished by creating smaller learning environments or teams within the larger school environment. The second component was to restructure the homeroom teachers' roles to become part of a teacher based advisory program. Each teacher serves as advisor for 20–25 students and as an administrative and counseling link between the students, their parents and the rest of the school. One of the teachers' goals in this capacity was to increase the students' sense of belonging and accountability, as well as reduce anonymity.

The researchers followed cohorts throughout their middle or high school careers. Results indicated that STEP students were more likely than comparison students to avoid academic difficulties and showed significantly lower levels of social, emotional, behavioral, and

academic dysfunction following the middle school or high school transition. The authors also noted that it is unclear how much of the demonstrated effect can be attributed to the advisory programs in contrast to the intervention as a whole.

Hagborg, W. J. (1995). High school student perceptions and satisfaction with group advisory. *Psychology in the Schools, 32*(1), 46–51.

Abstract: 140 White 9th and 10th graders (63 boys and 77 girls) participating in a school group advisory program completed measures of background information, academic data, school attitudes and motivation, self-esteem, satisfaction with the advisory program, and cohesiveness of their advisory group. More girls were in the high satisfaction group, and more boys were in the low satisfaction group. Girls were also more likely to rate their groups as more cohesive and to view their advisor as more caring. The nature of the advisory experience (e.g., attraction to fellow participants) had a substantial effect on Ss' satisfaction. Ss viewed group advisory with mixed reactions and felt that it only somewhat met their needs.

Lampert, J. (2005). Easing the transition to high school. *Educational Leadership*, *62*(7), 61–63.

Abstract: First-year students in high school face numerous pressures and usually have to face high school finals on their own. It does not have to be this way as a school outside Chicago, Maine East, demonstrates with its Freshman Advisory program that has senior students mentoring first year students.

REL West note: The curriculum presented in advisory sessions is driven by three concepts related to helping first-year students become socially and academically secure: attachment, achievement, and awareness. Since the implementation of this freshman advisory program, "the freshmen failure rate has decreased from 37 percent in the first semester of the 2002/2003 school year to 23 percent in the first semester of 2004/2005." (p. 63)

Lee, V. E., & Burkam, D. T. (2003). Dropping out of high school: The role of school organization and structure. *American Educational Research Journal*, *40*(2), 353–393.

Abstract: In this study, we explore how high schools, through their structures and organization, may influence students' decisions to stay in school or drop out. Traditional explanations for dropout behavior have focused on students' social background and academic behaviors. What high schools might do to push out or hold students has received less empirical scrutiny. Using a sample of 3,840 students in 190 urban and suburban high schools from the High School Effectiveness Supplement of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, we apply multilevel methods to explore schools' influence on dropping out, taking into account students' academic and social background. Our findings center on schools' curriculum, size, and social relations. In schools that offer mainly academic courses and few nonacademic courses, students are less likely to drop out. Similarly, students in schools enrolling fewer than 1,500 students more often stay in school. Most important, students are less likely to drop out of high schools where relationships between teachers and

students are positive. The impact of positive relations, however, is contingent on the organizational and structural characteristics of high schools.

Levine, E. (2002). One kid at a time. *Educational Leadership*, *59*(7), 29–32.

Excerpt: Through funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Met School implemented an advisory program that meets twice a day—for an hour in the morning and for thirty minutes in the afternoon. In addition to supporting students during advisory and on special field trips and team building trips, the advisor frequently communicates with the parents of the fourteen students in his/her advisory. The co-founders of this small, urban, public high school have found "powerful relationships and high students and expectations provide the context for learning that occurs through pursuit of student interests and real work."

McClure, L., Yonezawa, S., & Jones, M. (2010). Can school structures improve teacher student relationships? The relationship between advisory programs, personalization and students' academic achievement. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 18*(17). Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ895621.pdf

Abstract: This study focused on the relationships between student-perceived levels of personalization, students' opinions about advisory period, and academic outcomes. Surveys were administered to 10,044 students over three consecutive years at 14 redesigned small schools and survey responses were linked to students' weighted single-year grade point averages and English Language Arts standardized test scores. Results of a series of multi-level models indicated that more positive perceptions of personalization were predictive of better academic outcomes. Student perceptions of the advisory period were related to academic achievement as well, but in the opposite direction: more positive feelings about advisory period were associated with worse academic outcomes. These results are consistent with qualitative work suggesting that higher levels of personalization are associated with higher levels of academic achievement, improved school culture, and more student engagement. However, these results also suggest that the relationships among advisory period, personalization and academic outcomes are not as straightforward as was previously thought.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2004). *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High Schools Reform.* Reston: National Association of Secondary School Principals. Retrieved from: http://www.nassp.org/portals/0/content/47560.pdf

Summary: First published in 1996, Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution presented a vision of a dramatically different high school of the 21st century. Its more than 80 recommendations provided direction for high school principals across the country in making schools more student-centered by personalized programs, support services, and intellectual rigor for all students.

Breaking Ranks II outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every high school student. Its first set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will successfully support every student in their high school experience. The second set of recommendations and tools focuses on the need to provide every student with meaningful adult relationships that can best support every student. And the third set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of personalized learning, where students see their learning as meaningful and relevant, as well as rigorous and challenging, ensuring their success both within and beyond high school. Together, these recommendations and activities ultimately lead to the success of every student, not only those typically served well by the traditional comprehensive high school.

Breaking Ranks II is intended to assist principals by:

- Providing strategies for implementing the recommendations
- Illustrating possible entry points or areas in which to begin reform
- Profiling the successes, challenges, and results of schools implementing the recommendations.

Tocci, C., Hochman, D., & Allen, D. (2005). Advisory programs in high school restructuring. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, April 11–15, 2005. Retrieved from http://www.tc.edu/ncrest/Aera/aera2005_Advisory.pdf

Excerpt from Conclusion: In this paper, we have suggested that, in creating advisory programs schools consider at least five dimension along which the program will be built: the scheduling, scope & content, advisor roles, advisory grouping, and support systems. We have provided examples of each of these five dimensions as well as questions for consideration. In planning new advisories and refining existing systems, we hope school leaders and staff will consider these questions and use them to start important discussions about advisory.

The two case studies present two distinct structures for advisory programs. The School For Excellence study is an evolution story; while the school's goals for advisory have remained constant, the system's structure has been reworked to better meet those goals. As issues with curriculum and advisor support arose, SFE designed curricula and continues to organize ongoing supports for advisors. Their advisory system will undoubtedly continue to evolve as challenges arise and new strategies are employed to better counsel students for college, career, and affective issues.

The other case, Bronx Lab School, is a start-up story. From the initial planning stages, BLS has incorporated advisory as a central component of the school. Staff created the curricula and schedule to meet multiple goals: develop literacy skills, college counseling, and provide social supports. As BLS expands, and with it the advisory system, new staff will be integrated and new curricula will be developed to meet student needs.

REL West staff have also included here a few resources that address this more general topic:

American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF). (May 20, 2009). *Improving the transition from middle grades to high school: Promising district initiatives in coaching and planning* (Forum brief). http://www.aypf.org/resources/improving-the-transition-from-middle-grades-to-high-school-promising-district-initiatives-in-coaching-and-planning/?programareas=113%2C137&documenttype=11%2C18%2C19%2C168&search=advanced

Summary: The successful transition for students from the middle grades to high school is a critical component of their likelihood to graduate. However, this is precisely the time when many students fall through the cracks. This forum, the final one in the series on "Improving the Transition from Middle Grades to High Schools," detailed the work of Lowndes County Schools in Georgia and how they are implementing the state's Middle and High School Graduation Coach Initiative to help students transition successfully from the middle grades to high school. The forum also highlighted the use of a new course for incoming freshman, called "Keystone—The Freshman Experience," in Duval County, Florida, that helps high school students to become career-focused while learning how to make effective decisions about their futures.

Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (Eds.) (2007). *Easing the transition to high school: Research and best practices designed to support high school learning.* Washington, DC: National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from: http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_TransitionsReport.pdf

REL West summary: This report is a rolled up version of four NHSC products that had been previously released as individual pieces related to one of the NHSC focus themes: transitions into high school. These resources address the ninth grade "bulge,"--the disproportionate rate at which ninth graders are not promoted to tenth grade on time, which is a risk factor for dropping out. Research-based best practices for ninth grade transitions are discussed, along with examples of how some states and districts are easing the transition. A snapshot of one school's efforts to support positive transitions into high school is also included.

National High School Center. (2012). *Quick Stats Fact Sheet: The first year of high school.*
   Retrieved from:
   http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/documents/NHSC_FirstYearofHighSchool_Oct12.pdf

   REL West summary: This fact sheet provides statistics related to the transition into high
   school, highlighting U.S. high school enrollment rates, predictors of high school dropout, and
   ninth grade transition strategies.

Neild, R. C. (2009). Falling off track during the transition to high school: What we know and
   what can be done. *The Future of Children, 19*(1), 53–76. Retrieved from:
   http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/foc/summary/v019/19.1.neild.html

   Except from summary: Ninth grade…marks a critical juncture in American schooling.
   Students who manage the academic demands of the transition to high school have a high
   probability of graduating four years later. But those who do not—who fail to earn as many
   credits as they should during ninth grade—face a substantially elevated risk of dropping out
   of high school.…

2. EXAMPLE ADVISORIES & MATERIALS

Utah

Utah Alliance schools that said that they have an advisory program of some sort during alliance
meetings are listed here. You may want to communicate with their team members about their
experiences and lessons learned. REL West can provide names and contact information.

   City Academy charter high school in Salt Lake City: Small size and personalized advisory
   program. Students there meet with their advisors every day.

   Grantsville High School, Tooele: They have a teacher (and administrator) advisory, with an
   intervention enrichment period every week. 23 students are assigned to each advisor. At their
   site, they have learned that to be successful, advisor buy-in is critical; without it, fidelity of
   implementation suffers.

   Northridge High School, Davis: They have advisory teachers and plan to provide
   attendance reports to them so they can talk with each student who has a large number of
   absences (as part of their plan to improve attendance as part of their dropout prevention
   efforts).

Bountiful High School, Davis County Schools, Bountiful, UT
http://www.schools.utah.gov/CURR/accred/Reports/DOCS/Bountiful-HS-VT-report-2009.aspx
REL West note: According to the 2009 Report of the Visiting Accreditation Team, Bountiful
High introduced an advisory program: "Research-based practices were reviewed by all
stakeholders and adjustments were made to the schedule to include advisory classes." In
answering the question, "To what extent has the school established a formal system through
which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student

in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?" it was documented that, "The school has made concerted efforts to implement a system through which each student is fully supported in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning. Of particular note is the adoption of the advisory program, which provides an adult advocate for each student.…"

National

Bonney Lake High School, Bonney Lake, Washington
http://publications.sreb.org/2012/12V07w_BestPractices_Guidance_Advisement.pdf
REL West note: Their improved advisement program is described on page 10–11 of this 2012 SREB publication, Providing Guidance, Advisement and Extra Help to Connect Students to Schools, Education and Career Goals, and Programs of Study to Reach the Goals.

Hillsdale High School, San Mateo, CA (http://www.hhs.schoolloop.com/)
http://www.srnleads.org/events/institutes/hillsdale/hillsdale_files/postevent/2011-10/Handout%20B%20Jan%202012.pdf
REL West note: This document, retrieved from the School Redesign Network at Stanford University website, includes a handout explaining to students what "advisory" is, a grading rubric, content standards, staff responsibilities, and other resources.

Mehlville High School, St. Louis, Missouri
http://publications.sreb.org/2012/12V07w_BestPractices_Guidance_Advisement.pdf
REL West note: Their Teacher Advisory Program (TAP) is described and contact information is included on page 9 of this 2012 SREB publication, *Providing Guidance, Advisement and Extra Help to Connect Students to Schools, Education and Career Goals, and Programs of Study to Reach the Goals.*

West High School, Knox County Schools, Knoxville, TN
http://advisory-period.wesths.knoxschools.org/modules/locker/files/group_files.phtml?parent=5649445&gid=1197014
REL West note: Approximately 30 Advisory Period Lesson plan files are available on this web page.

3. ADDITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/WEBSITES TO CONSULT

Center for Social Organization of Schools (CSOS) at Johns Hopkins University
http://www.jhucsos.com
From the website: CSOS was established in 1966 as an educational research and development center at Johns Hopkins University. The Center maintains a staff of full-time sociologists, psychologists, social psychologists, and educators who conduct programmatic research to improve the education system, as well as full-time support staff engaged in developing curricula and providing technical assistance to help schools use the center's research. The center currently includes the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships and the Everyone Graduates Center.

Coalition of Essential Schools
http://www.essentialschools.org

From the website: The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) is at the forefront of creating and sustaining personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools. Essential schools are places of powerful learning where all students have the chance to reach their fullest potential.

REL West note: On the CES website is the following article of note:

Makkonen, R. (2004). *Advisory program research and evaluation*. Retrieved from
http://www.essentialschools.org/resources/282
Abstract: 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.

College & Career Readiness & Success Center
http://www.ccrscenter.org

From the website: The CCRS Center was launched October 1, 2012, under a five-year grant from the United States Department of Education to the American Institutes for Research (AIR) along with our five lead partners—the American Youth Policy Forum, the College Board, Quill Research Associates, the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, and the Forum for Youth Investment. The Center's mission is to help states and other CCRS stakeholders better inform, align, and support efforts to ensure that all students are ready for success in college and careers.

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
http://www.nassp.org

From the website: **Our Mission:** *NASSP promotes excellence in middle level and high school leadership through research-based professional development, resources, and advocacy so that every student can be prepared for postsecondary learning opportunities and be workforce ready.*

Advisories: Advice from the field
http://www.nassp.org/Content.aspx?topic=58245
REL West note: This is an e-newsletter from the NASSP.

National High School Center at AIR
www.betterhighschools.org

From the website: The National High School Center has served as a central source of information on high school improvement for the Regional Comprehensive Center network from 2005 until 2013. This technical assistance network supported state education agencies and the districts and schools they served as they worked to implement the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This website contains all of the Center's work on College and Career Readiness, Early Warning Systems (EWS), students with disabilities, English Language Learners, high school dropout, and other high school improvement topics.

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)

http://www.sreb.org

From the website: The Southern Regional Education Board works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D.

REL West note: Their High Schools That Work (HSTW) initiative may be of particular interest. While some resources cost a nominal fee, there are relevant newsletters and other information posted at no cost.

4. RESOURCES FOR A FEE

Although REL West attempts to provide free online resources, the following resources were deemed to be potentially of interest.

DiMartino, J., & Clarke, J. H. (2008a). The heart of school. *Principal Leadership, 9*(3), 16–19. [ERIC # EJ829634]

> *REL West note:* **If someone at your school site is a member of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, s/he can download this for free at** http://www.nassp.org/tabid/2043/default.aspx

> **Abstract:** Successful advisory programs have a number of things in common across a wide variety of schools. They all divide the student body into small groups, usually of 20 or fewer students, that meet regularly with an adult in the school community. In addition to this basic element, successful advisory programs have five other elements in common: (1) They have a commonly stated purpose that addresses essential needs in the school and guides all aspects of the program; (2) They are organized to meet that purpose; (3) Written content guidance is available for the routines and activities that take place in advisory period; (4) A plan for assessment includes gathering appropriate data for continuous improvement of the program; and (5) School leaders embrace the program so that appropriate resources are allocated to program implementation, including ongoing professional development. Far too often, there are programs that have identified a compelling need and purpose for their advisory program only to see the program fail when the other elements do not align with that need. Within each of the five key elements there are pitfalls that derail many advisory programs. This article describes Granger High School's advisory program, which provides great examples of how those elements are aligned and the powerful improvements for the entire school that came about as a result.

Poliner, R. A., & Lieber, C. M. (2004). *The Advisory Guide: Designing and implementing effective advisory programs in secondary schools.* Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR).

> *REL West note:* This guide can be purchased online for $38.00 from ESR at http://www.esrnational.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=8&products_id=2

ESR description: The Advisory Guide helps secondary educators design and implement an advisory program tailored to their school's needs and goals whether in large or small, independent, or charter schools. In this comprehensive guide, the design chapters present snapshots of various advisory models, and help planning teams think through nine major issues that should be addressed in order for the program and faculty advisors to get off to a good start. The implementation chapters offer facilitation tips, suggestions for using 15 different formats, and over 130 sample activities organized around ten advisory themes, including student orientation, community building, tools for school and learning, goal-setting and assessment, life skills, and career exploration.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in Searches

"9th grade advisory (programs)," high school advisory(ies)," and "advisory curriculum,"

Databases That Were Searched

- **Institute of Education Sciences Sources**: Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL), What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), Doing What Works (DWW)

  We searched a repository of Reference Desk memos produced by the 10 labs in the national Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) network over the last six years. Two other REL memos addressing advisories were located and their relevant resources were incorporated. (If you are interested in their search terms and websites searched, REL West can provide that information).

- **Additional Data Resources:** ERIC, EBSCO, JSTOR, ProQuest, PsycINFO, PsycArticles, Google, and Google Scholar.

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.

- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.

- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation

(Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).

- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.