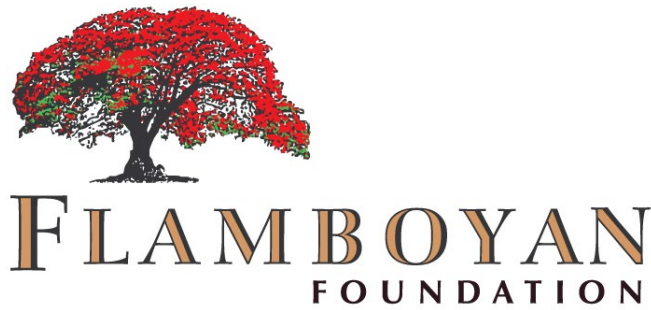


Advisory & Family Engagement Model Handbook

Fall 2025

Written and Developed by Brittani Saxton



The following handbook will explore how secondary schools can utilize an advisory model to improve and harness strong relationships with families while supporting all aspects of student development: social, emotional, academic, and mental well-being. The examples discussed in this handbook came from two secondary schools that used a daily advisory model with no more than 15 students per group.

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Purpose and Goals of Advisory

What is advisory?

Advisory is a scheduled class period with the goal that a small group of students meets with a dedicated staff member(s) with the purpose of social emotional learning and relationship building. The purpose of advisory is to provide students and families with a main point of contact for school communication while ensuring scholars have a safe and trusted adult in the building. Advisors are at the forefront of family engagement and relationship building.

At its most effective, advisory should meet daily for 20-30 minutes. Topics should vary to capture a variety of student interests and student needs at the secondary level. Advisory should be utilized as a school-wide resource for family engagement events, communication, and distribution of key information. At the secondary level, students are acclimating to managing assignments from multiple classes along with due dates; they are navigating new social situations and the anxiety that accompanies them; and they want to feel a sense of belonging. With a scheduled, daily advisory, we hope to provide explicit instruction around soft skills, social emotional skills and discussions, and a foundation of strong interpersonal relationships.

Why an advisory model?

At the secondary level, family outreach may not be the forefront of the comprehensive school plan. However, we know that student success is tied to supports at home, high expectations, and shared ownership of academic success.

Here's a scenario – both school A and school B have 500 students and approximately 45 staff that can serve as advisors.

School A adopts the advisory model and has 42 advisory groups with 12 students each. Teacher in school A has 12 families to begin partnered communication starting in August. They can identify the family's hopes and dreams for their student, their priorities, and understand the cadence and type of communication they prefer.

School B does not receive buy in from staff. Their ELA department is strong and they know that 10 of their ELA teachers reach out to families at least monthly and are well regarded by students and families. But 12 out of 45 staff are new to DCPS and they have 8 teachers who historically struggle with family communication. This means that 45% of staff either struggle with communication or may need a model to learn from; 33% of staff that may have strong communication skills, or they may not; and 22% of staff are strong. The responsibility of building relationships with students and families in School B falls on the shoulders of a quarter or less of their staff.

The advisory model builds trust with families, provides a strong social and emotional curriculum to students, models authentic relationships between students, teachers, and families, and defines what success looks like for the student through consistent and frequent communication.

Connection to Family Engagement

Advisory can serve as the foundation for regular and consistent family communication. We recommend advisors make monthly touchpoints with families in their advisory. A touchpoint is considered any two-way dialogue between advisor and family member. When you streamline communication to families through advisory you can maximize uniform messaging and provide families with a main point of contact at the secondary level. For example, when a school hosts Back to School Night, you might typically send out a family newsletter via email, share a post on social media, and hang a flyer in the front of your building. However, this will not reach all families and may not stress the value of attending the school event. With advisory outreach, each family could receive an individualized text message or phone call to invite them, to take their questions, and open a dialogue. As the advisor continues to share updates regarding their student, they are actively building two-way communication between schools and families.

It is important to recognize that this may fundamentally shift how teachers in your building have previously communicated with families. The goal of advisory family outreach is a holistic approach to communication. To recognize the whole child, advisory family outreach allows you to provide a grade update from Aspen while also sharing a positive student interaction in the hallway. When students enter middle school or high school, we know that more responsibility shifts to the student; however, that does not mean their parents or guardians have less to share. This provides parents with a single point of contact to share pertinent information.

At the secondary level, we find that monthly communication typically meets the needs of most families. We understand that some families may appreciate more frequent communication which can come in the form of school newsletter, principal outreach, or social media. We also encourage schools to set up Aspen access for families early in the year to build accountability and monitor grades in real time. Typically, grades are the focus of teacher outreach at the secondary level but the advisory model can support schools in expanding their practice to build a true relationship with families that supports the whole child.

Evidence of Success

DC Public Schools has a 5-Year Plan that includes the vision that **“Every student feels loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life.”** Under this vision there are three strategic priorities, one of which is Connected to Schools. One of the ways that DCPS measures success for this priority, is through the Panorama Survey and student sense of belonging. The diagram below shows the increase of student sense of belonging after two years of Advisory implementation.

Sense of Belonging

Based on 471 responses

How much students feel that they are valued members of the school community.

How have results changed over time?



Advisory Roles and Responsibilities

Key Roles of the Advisory Model

For the advisory model to be successful, there needs to be buy-in at all levels.

The school administration must believe and communicate that advisory should serve as the core of family outreach and engagement. Advisory implementation must be consistent across grade levels and advisory groups. Administrators should schedule bi-weekly or monthly walkthroughs during scheduled advisory time to ensure groups are implementing the curriculum and provide support and feedback to staff as needed.

An *advisory lead* is strongly recommended and encouraged for success at the secondary level. An advisory lead should be considered a department lead and should receive a stipend for their work. The advisory lead is responsible for creating weekly advisory content and distributing to grade level teams. Their second main responsibility for the advisory lead is managing a school-wide, family outreach tracker to celebrate advisory groups that consistently reach out to families monthly. You will find more information in the accountability and data tracking section below.

The most important role of the model are the staff who serve as *advisors*. They are the foundation and key to success. Advisors will make monthly touchpoints with families in their advisory, build relationships with students in their advisory, and implement the advisory curriculum. We do recommend spending time during pre-service to norm as a school community around expectations for advisors.

Who is an advisor?

Everyone! In a school environment, we want to include instructional coaches, behavior technicians, and administrators, in addition to teaching staff, as advisors. Advisory can be led by one or two advisors. Co-taught advisories can be beneficial for maintaining continuity when one staff member is out, for on-boarding a new teacher, or providing flexibility with staff who respond to a crisis. For example, the 7th grade dean & 7th grade teacher co-teach an advisory so in the event of behavior incident the dean could step away and their co-advisor continues with advisory.

When building an advisory model at your school, you will want to consider the following when assigning staff to host an advisory:

Morning Arrival Duty: consider staff needed for tardy arrival or for parent meetings first thing in the morning

Crisis & SWD Management: depending on your school population, social workers and school psychologists may be excluded from holding an advisory to provide adequate time for servicing students with disabilities and being available for a student crisis.

Exceptions: Manager of advisory - At one school, the staff member who coordinated and planned advisory material did not host an advisory. This allows that staff member to fill in as a substitute advisor and conduct walk-throughs to ensure school-wide implementation. Another exception could be the school librarian – this allows the library to remain open should a student need a book. At one school, the librarian coordinated silent reading

activities and ensured all students had a library book. They were excluded from hosting to provide a whole school service.

Responsibilities of an Advisor:

- Daily implementation of the provided advisory curriculum
- Establishing a community of trust within their advisory group
- Monthly two-way communication with the family of each student in their advisory group
 - Documenting monthly outreach
- Optional: hosting student-led conferences per semester

Building an Advisory Model

Scheduling Advisory

There are positive considerations to a morning advisory block. First, it allows tardy students to arrive prior to the start of content instruction. Morning advisory can also be scheduled in your SIS. If you operate on a block schedule with 4 classes per day, scheduling Advisory in your SIS will more accurately reflect full day versus a partial absence given the 60/40 attendance rule. Second, it can be used to build soft skills around organization for the day. Advisors can also review any upcoming schedule changes to help students feel prepared.

Scheduling advisory in your SIS ensures that teachers have access to student contact information, can log contacts in the SIS, and can review grades should families ask. Another bonus to including an advisory block in your SIS as the first class of the day, is that you can sort and print academic and attendance documents via advisory class. For example, students can reflect on mid-year academic testing during advisory and testing reports can be printed by advisory. It expedites printing grades for weekly grade checks.

Advisory Content

When building a model, it is best to have a set structure for the week. This results in more effective implementation and provides a routine for both students and staff. Below are some potential topics (organized by theme) for each day of advisory:

Socio-emotional Learning	Content Learning	Executive Functioning
• Social Emotional Skill Day 1 (Skill Launch + Discussion) • Social Emotional Skill Day 2 (Application + Practice) • Team Building	• Worldwide News • Student Journalism + Announcements • D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything & Read)*	• Grade Checks • Organization Day (setting up week for success, cleaning backpack, etc)

It is important that students get a range of skill building practice during advisory, rather than only focusing on executive functioning skills, or only focusing on SEL, etc. Below is a sample weekly layout that mixes topics throughout the week:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
News - CNN10	Drop Everything & Read	Grade Checks	Social Emotional Learning	Team Building/School-wide announcements

Similar to an academic class, it can be helpful to have a set structure for an advisory period. Journaling is strongly encouraged to be implemented daily. Journal prompts¹ are embedded as the Do Now/opener for every lesson. It is recommended that advisors respond or check journals weekly to encourage student responses. It allows for a predictable start and can help boost discussions in the advisory group. Below is a sample daily lay out for an advisory period that is about 25 minutes long.

Journal Prompt	3 – 5 mins
Share Out	2 – 3 mins
Key Announcements	1 – 2 mins
Activity	5 – 7 mins
Discussion	3 -5 mins
Clean-up/pack up	1 – 2 mins

Advisory Groupings & Considerations

For a successful rollout, it is best to provide a preference survey to staff, and if possible, students, to make groupings that best meet everyone’s needs. In previous models, advisory groupings were gendered by students, and staff could identify which population they’d prefer to work with. However, this requires students to identify a gender which may not align with their identity. It is suggested to provide both options – mixed gender & single-sex groups. You can expand your offerings as you build your model; ie: SAGE (sexuality & gender equality) group or newcomer ELL group to further differentiate for students.

It is recommended that staff host an advisory for the grade level they work with. For staff who work with multiple grade levels, you can slot them into the grade level with the highest enrollment to help keep advisory groupings even across school level.

When surveying students, there are a few options. If you plan to roll out advisory at the start of the school year, you can start year 1 with gendered groupings for a true mix of students. If you plan to roll out advisory mid-year, we recommend surveying students in one content class in a digital platform to assist with sorting and rostering. When you roll out year 2 of advisory, we recommend a paper survey given during advisory to capture feedback and student preferences. Sample surveys for staff and students are included in the appendix.

¹ **Morning Journal Prompts** – this book can be utilized over multiple years for daily journal prompts.

<https://www.secdlab.org/morning-classroom-conversations-extention>

Aligning to SEL Standards

Social Emotional Learning Considerations

One of the primary goals of advisory is to embed explicit, social emotional learning through short activities and discussions. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) voted to support the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards². The SEL standards consist of five core competencies that should be addressed weekly through advisory. The chart below includes individual topics that can become daily lessons. We recommend partnering with your school's mental health team to ensure you are addressing grade level and school wide concerns in real-time. In the event of an emergency (school-based or nationwide), we encourage schools to address it through an advisory lesson.

	Self-Awareness Positive Self-identity Suicide prevention Strengths Finder Career Interest Survey Identify emotions	Self-Management Goal setting Self-care Managing emotions Appropriate expression of emotions Coping skills Perseverance
Decision Making & Agency	Relationship Skills	Social & Cultural Awareness
Test Anxiety & Management Making good choices Executive Functioning Impact on community	Conflict Resolution Bullying Prevention Collaboration/teamwork Communicating with parents Recognizing toxic relationships	Sept – Hispanic Heritage Oct – Mental Health; Bullying Prevention Nov – Gratitude for self, community, world February – Black History March – Women's History April – Autism Day; Earth Day; Eid/Ramadan May – Asian American & Pacific Islander; Mental Health Month June – Pride/LGBTQ Month

² SEL Core Competencies Toolkit-

[https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Comprehensive%20SEL Toolkit.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Comprehensive%20SEL%20Toolkit.pdf)

Advisory and Family Engagement

Leveraging Advisory for Family Engagement

One of the biggest transitions for both students and families as they enter middle and high school is the number of staff they interact with on a daily basis, combined with the increased academic and extracurricular demands. One of the key strengths of an advisory model is that it provides students and families with a single point of contact who can support them in navigating the challenges of secondary school.

Advisory can also be a helpful structure for educators and other school staff to help engage families more efficiently. While an elementary school educator may have a class of 20 students they need to build relationships with and communicate with on a regular basis, a middle or high school educator may have over 100 students with rosters that change from semester to semester. Rather than needing to decide which staff will conduct relationship building visits with which families or how to structure parent teacher conferences where a family talks to 7 different teachers, advisory groups can create a structure for engaging with families. Advisors (with their partners if developing a co-lead model) can be responsible for conducting relationship building visits, maintaining monthly ongoing communications, and leading academic partnering activities (like student led conferences) with their advisory students.

Data Tracking & Accountability

With frequent outreach, a visual and transparent model serves as a reminder and celebration tool for staff. Using Microsoft Excel, some schools have created a multi-tab spreadsheet to capture family outreach in a way that all staff members can see. While Aspen provides journal capabilities to capture individual student outreach, it does not allow school administrators to easily extract and manipulate this information. Building a spreadsheet in a school SharePoint can help other staff members see students who haven't received a touchpoint for the month and can encourage staff to make outreach when they see other teachers have.

This is a visual of school-wide tracking per month. You can use to create a competition between grade levels or remind staff when you are approaching the end of the month. Below this you will see an example of an individual grade level tab, that includes student name, advisor(s), and columns for each month. Based on the number of data points entered in the Grade Level "September" column, you can calculate the percentage of September outreach on the main page using a "Countifs" formula in Excel.

	BOY Intro	September	BTSN	October	SLCs (#1)	November	December	January	February	March	SLCs (#2)	April	May
(6th)	75%	81%	21%	86%	59%	54%	72%	88%	93%	91%	57%	79%	93%
(7th)	76%	66%	19%	78%	50%	51%	51%	64%	68%	71%	48%	34%	38%
(8th)	56%	56%	5%	74%	58%	49%	34%	58%	51%	71%	59%	16%	26%
Specialized Programs (HoA)	56%	62%	5%	87%	67%	56%	62%	87%	54%	59%	46%	56%	49%
Schoolwide	68%	67%	14%	80%	56%	52%	52%	71%	69%	76%	54%	43%	51%

Location	Advisor(s)	Student	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
142	€			10-Oct					4-Mar
142	€		12-Sep	10-Oct			17-Jan	27-Feb	13-Mar
142	€		12-Sep	7-Oct	12-Nov		14-Jan	20-Feb	9-Mar
142	€			4-Oct	21-Nov	9-Dec	17-Jan	20-Feb	
142	€		11-Sep	7-Oct	12-Nov	12-Dec	13-Jan	20-Feb	5-Mar
142	€		11-Sep	10-Oct	21-Nov	12-Dec	21-Jan	21-Feb	6-Mar
142	€		11-Sep	7-Oct	12-Nov	12-Dec	13-Jan		10-Mar
343	€		25-Sep	8-Oct			17-Jan	27-Feb	13-Mar
343	€			10-Oct					
343	€		27-Sep	8-Oct				27-Feb	13-Mar
343	€		25-Sep	8-Oct		4-Dec	1-Jan	27-Feb	13-Mar
343	€		27-Sep	8-Oct				25-Feb	13-Mar
343	€		18-Sep	8-Oct	15-Nov	11-Dec	16-Jan		7-Mar
343	€			8-Oct	15-Nov	4-Dec			7-Mar
343	€		27-Sep	10-Oct					13-Mar
343	€		27-Sep	8-Oct	25-Nov	4-Dec	17-Jan	27-Feb	13-Mar
343	€							27-Feb	13-Mar
343	€		4-Sep	8-Oct			17-Jan	19-Feb	13-Mar
343	€		25-Sep	8-Oct				27-Feb	13-Mar
343	€		23-Sep	8-Oct	12-Nov	18-Dec	16-Jan	13-Feb	13-Mar

Using this example, we can quickly scan to see who received or did not receive a call each month. During a grade level team meeting, this tool could be utilized for advisors to ask other staff members for support if they are having difficulties reaching a family. This tool can be used to celebrate staff monthly who consistently reach a majority of their families. It can also serve teachers as a call log that can be used as evidence for their Commitment to School Community (CSC) rubrics.

Addressing Staff Concerns

As with any new initiative, staff will have questions and concerns. This chart is meant to help school administrators with a successful rollout.

Anticipated Challenge or Pushback	Explanation + Considerations
"This is an extra prep. I already have three preps in a day"	Advisory should be pre-planned and provided to teachers to eliminate any preparation on the advisor's part You should consider teacher's classroom placement at the start of the day to avoid a long transition from advisory to period 1 location.
"I have enough families to communicate with in my regular classes."	Advisory communication should be monthly, two-way communication. This means you can call, text, email, or discuss in person as long as the conversation provides families with an opportunity to engage in a back-and-forth dialogue. You should consider adjusting communication expectations from classroom teachers. For example, teachers must communicate with families when a student's grade drops below a 72% with missing assignments or feedback for improving their grade. School-wide or grade level events should be communicated through advisors.
"Why do I have to co-teach my advisory?"	Advisory is a school-wide initiative and we want as many staff members as possible to be involved. Two adults can be helpful if an adult is needed to step out for a student crisis or is absent and can maintain a cohesive grouping. We want to rely on senior teachers to build and develop relationship building skills for new teachers.
"I can't talk about that student's grades; I don't teach them."	With access to Aspen, all teachers can share student grades. It could also be helpful in bi-weekly grade level team meetings for advisors to discuss 2-3 students to gauge ways to support students or discuss parent contact. Advisory is also an opportunity to build student's own executive functioning, self-advocacy, and communication skills. While you may not be in class with them, advisory is an opportunity to engage students in self-reflection so that they can identify their own strengths and areas for growth.

"I don't like my advisory teacher. I want to move to X teacher's advisory"	We strongly discourage advisory moves during the school year, unless there is a safety concern. It is important to provide both adult and student support in mediating their relationship. Advisory is meant to teach real, relationship building skills versus a social hour. However, you may find an advisor needs support in making their group their own.
"Where do the journals for my students come from?"	We highly encourage schools to purchase one journal per student to provide to advisors at the start of the year. This ensures journal prompts are implemented with fidelity.
"Let's get students on iReady during advisory in preparation for CAPE."	We strongly encourage advisory to be student tech free. This does mean that student grades will need to be printed from Aspen and provided to teachers. Schools may need to create systems for distribution (ie: teacher mailboxes) but we find that holding advisory as a discussion-based group yields stronger relationships.

Appendix I – Sample student and staff surveys

Student Name

466

Grade: 7

SY 24-25 Advisory Selections & Survey

1. Please select your advisory group preferences below:

- ☐ I would like a single gender group (all boys or all girls)
- ☐ I would like a mixed group (both boys and girls)
- ☐ I have no preference on my advisory group.
- ☐ I would like the students in my advisory group to remain similar.
- ☐ I would like to participate in a SAGE advisory.

2. Please share the **topics** you would like to discuss in advisory next year:

Examples:

Current events, conflict resolution, and checking my grades

3. Please share some of your **interests** you would like to explore at school next year:

Examples:

I like cooking, playing video games, soccer, and yoga.

4. Any other **comments** or **questions** you would like to share about advisory for next year?

Staff Advisory Preferences for Next Year

Hi, [redacted] When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

* Required

1. I prefer * [redacted]

- ☐ Single gender (male) advisory
- ☐ Single gender (female) advisory
- ☐ Mixed gender advisory

2. I would be interested in having students in advisory who identify as members of SAGE. This would mean providing support to students who are exploring what their sexuality and gender means to them and creating an environment of allies. * [redacted]

- ☐ Yes, I am comfortable helping students navigate this.
- ☐ No, I think there are other staff better suited for this role.

3. I prefer * [redacted]

- ☐ A co-teacher for advisory
- ☐ Running solo for advisory
- ☐ either option

4. Is there anything we should be aware of or that you'd like to share about your advisory or location from this school year? [redacted]

Enter your answer

5. Any additional comments (optional) [redacted]