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# An Advisor / Advisee Program in the Middle School: Its Effect on Student GPA and Daily Attendance

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An Advisor/Advisee Program In The Middle School:

Its Effect on Student GPA And Daily Attendance

Cindy Norton

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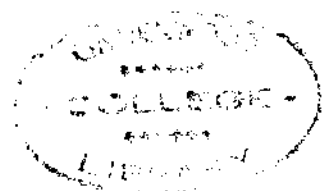
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ABSTRACT

Fifty-three seventh grade students from a rural public school had their grade cards used as method of determining if an advisor/advisee program increases grade point averages and daily attendance. Students grade point averages (GPA) and daily attendance were compared using the t-test during the time they received an advisement period (1995-96) and the time he/she did not receive an advisement (1994-95).

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Society is constantly challenged by ever-increasing changes.
Students graduating in the next century will come from a world sharply
different from the world that shaped the beliefs and assumptions of the
adults who work in the schools. These students will enter a world marked
by profound economic, demographic and social change (Williamson &
Johnston, 1991). Today's youth, as well as adults, are faced with many
complex social problems. Problems such as unemployment, divorce,
single-parent households, working mothers, substance abuse, sexual
experimentation, violence and prejudice have effects on the lives of
children. These problems not only have an impact on the lives of children
of low income and minority families but they also affect the lives of
children of well educated, middle-class majority families. Consequently,
children from all backgrounds can come to school with a high potential
for academic failure (Reed, McMillan, & McBee, 1995).

Middle grade schools are potentially society's most powerful force
to recapture millions of youth adrift and help every young person thrive
during early adolescence (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development,
1989). A pre-adolescent emerges from childhood in slow stages,
sometimes awkward and insecure, sometimes facile and adept, frequently
concerner with self-assessment, often amazed by newly-developed
powers, constantly in need of appropriate opportunities for exploration
and venture, sometimes capable of adult behavior and responses and

frequently in need of opportunities for trial and error in situations where error is acceptable (Alexaner, Williams, Compton, Hines & Prescott, 1968).

Since young adolescents have a need to belong to a group, advisory time helps students establish positive peer group support, so they will not have to go outside the school to negative arenas for a sense of belonging. Advisory activities provide young adolescents with opportunities to work together toward a common goal. Advisories offer students ample opportunities for vital social interaction. They integrate socializing into activities which help students develop coping skills. These activities help students build a vital sense of self-worth (Aryes, 1994).

Although few formal research studies provide hard data on a comprehensive, national level, numerous narrative accounts attest to the effectiveness of advisory programs in the affective domain and subsequent effect in other areas (NMSA Reseach Summary #9 Advisory Programs, 1996). Observing the advisor/advisee program in my own school has helped me appreciate the dynamics of such a program.

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the implentation of an advisory program in the middle school has any impact on student grade point average and daily attendance.

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in grade point average between students who participate in an advisement program and students who do not participate in an advisement program.

The alternative hypothesis is that there is a significant difference in grade point average between students who participate in an advisement program and students who do not.

A second null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in the daily attendance of students who participate in an advisement program and students who do not participate in an advisement program.

The alternate hypothesis is that there is a significant difference in the daily attendance of students who participate in an advisement program and students who do not.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Middle School Student Characteristics

The onset of adolescence is a critical period of biological and psychological change for the individual. Puberty is one of the most far reaching biological upheavals in the life span. For many young adolescents, puberty involves drastic changes in the social environment as well. Foremost among the social changes is the transition from elementary to secondary school. These years are highly formative for behavior patterns in education and health that have enduring significance (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

The years from age ten to age fourteen are among the most turbulent in the human life span. Within a relatively short period, young adolescents experience profound changes in physical, intellectual, social, and, emotional development (Ames & Miller, 1994). There is at this time perhaps a greater diversity in individual physical development than at any other time. Because of their unique physical development and behavior, preadolescent students have special needs that include a basic understanding by adults, especially by middle school teachers with a sense of humor who do not nag, condemn or talk down to the students. They also need opportunities for greater independence and for assuming greater responsibility without excessive pressure (Reinhartz & Beach, 1983).

Under current conditions far too many young people will not make the passage through early adolescence successfully. Their basic human

needs, which include caring relationships, guidance facing overwhelming biological and physiological changes, the security of belonging to constructive peer groups and the perception of future opportunity, often go unmet at this critical stage of life (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

Young adolescents are changing cognitively, socially, and emotionally. They know that they must soon put away the trappings of childhood, and yet a great many young adolescents are not quite ready to give up the safety and relative serenity of childhood. They are eager to loosen the bonds with parents, but they have not yet developed new, more mature patterns of relationships. In addition, they have neither the skills nor the confidence to become fully autonomous (Ames & Miller, 1994).

In a study of 1,850 seventh graders, Wigfield and Eccles (1994) found children's self-esteem decreased following the transition to a typical junior high school. They noted, "decline in social competence beliefs illustrates the impact of the transition to junior high. This decline probably occurs because the transition disrupts early adolescents' social networks, at a time when social activities are becoming increasingly important" (p. 123).

For most young adolescents, the shift from elementary to middle school means moving from a small neighborhood school and the stability of one primary classroom to a much larger, more impersonal institution typically at a greater distance from home. In this new setting, teachers and classmates will change as many as six or seven times a day. This

constant shifting creates formidable barriers to the formation of stable peer groups and close, supportive relationships with caring adults (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. 1989).

History of Middle Schools

The middle school in the last decade of the twentieth century was intended to help the early adolescents make a smooth transition from elementary to high school and from childhood to adolescence. Earlier in this century, the majority of school districts in the United States tried a different organization, the junior high school, but often found it lacking for their students and, subsequently, moved toward the middle school plan.

The longest-running debate in middle level educational research concerns the best grade span for schools containing early adolescents (Calhoun, 1983). Seventh or eighth graders in the United States are currently found in schools of about 30 different grade spans, mainly 6-8, 7-8, K-8, 5-8, 7-12, and K-12 schools. Over several decades, the number of junior high schools has decreased, and the number of middle schools has increased from fewer than 2,500 in 1970 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1984) to over 6,300 in 1988 (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990), and the number of public junior high schools has decreased from approximately 5,000 in 1970 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1984) to about 2,100 in 1988 (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Recent estimates indicate that 39% of the seventh graders in public schools attend a middle school, 25% attend a 7-8 school, 17% attend a junior high

school, 9% attend a K-8 school, and the remaining 10% of the students attend schools with 7-12, K-12, or other less typical grade configurations (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991).

In response to national commission reports and recommendations, many state and local school boards have mandated new, more rigorous academic standards which should be applied not only to high schools, but to middle level schools as well. As a result, many middle level school principals are pressured to modify existing programs in ways that will significantly reduce their responsiveness to early adolescent needs (Clark & Clark, 1987).

As Troisi (1983) points out, most of the research on school effectiveness has been conducted at the elementary school level, largely in urban settings. It has focused on basic skills instruction. Since there are significant organizational differences between elementary, middle and secondary school, generalizing from one level of research to another is at best problematical. Studies conducted by Research of Better Schools (RBS), the regional educational laboratory, highlight these differences. RBS cautions that basic educational structure at the secondary level may necessitate different approaches to improving effectiveness and even different definitions of effectiveness (Clark & Clark, 1987).

As a result of these and other studies, teachers and administrators began to recognize the need for an arrangement that would meet the special requirements of the preadolescent, the student ranging from nine or ten to thirteen years of age. This recognition led to the reorganization

of the junior high school and the emergence of the middle school, which was designed to provide curriculum and methods more suited to the developmental levels of the preadolescent (Rienhartz & Beach, 1983).

Until the 1980s, little research on middle level schools was being conducted, and the few available studies tended to be "ammunition-gathering" expeditions conducted by proponents of particular grade spans or educational philosophies (Johnston, 1984). However, during the past 10 years the pool of researchers studying middle level education has expanded greatly. Middle level schools and their students are receiving serious and sustained attention from researchers who are from diverse disciplines and who have no historical ties to the junior high or middle school movement (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1992).

John Goodlad's "A Place Called School: The NASSP National Study of Schools in the Middle," asked middle level teachers to grade their schools. Using an A-F system, Goodlad averaged the grades of each of the twelve middle level schools. Nine of the schools received a B and three received a C, indicating overall teacher satisfaction with their schools. Teachers were also asked to rate the importance of four common focuses of American schools:

1. Academic - encompassing all intellectual skills and domains of knowledge.

2. Vocational - developing readiness for productive work and economic responsibility.

3. Social and Civic - preparing for socialization into a complex society.

4. Personal - emphasizing the development of individual responsibility,

talent, and free expression.

Less than half of the teachers ranked the academic/intellectual category as most important (Goodlad, 1984)

Joan Lipsitz, in her study "Successful Schools for Young Adolescents", asked one hundred researchers and practitioners to each identify five characteristics of effective schools for early adolescents. She found that few respondents devoted more than one or two of their five answers to academics; instead, they focused on developmental responsiveness. Based on her survey, Lipsitz identified the following seven categories of needs that must be addressed by schools if they are to respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents: competence and achievement, self-exploration and definition, social interaction with peers and adults, physical activity, meaningful participation in the school and community, routine, and diversity (Lipsitz, 1980).

Analyses of the Hopkins Education in the Middle Grades Survey (Epstein, McPartland, & Mac Iver 1991) indicate that public middle schools are somewhat more likely than other public schools to adopt the supportive structures and responsive practices such as group advisory programs that provide students with regular, structured opportunities for discussion with a small group of peers and a caring adult.

There is an ever-growing consensus among researchers and practitioners that the hard work of developing excellent programs in the middle grades is not accomplished by changing grade spans but by

implementing practices that support the social, personal, and academic development of early adolescents (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley 1991).

Guidance in Middle School Education

The guidance program, therefore, becomes an important component of middle level education as it attempts to respond to some of these needs cited to in the reseach. Justification of the need for an extended guidance program for middle grade students has appeared in professional literature since the evolution of the junior high school in the early part of this century (Schockley, Schumacher & Smith, 1984).

All youth of this developmental period need guidance as they move through the crucial stages of early adolescence. The importance of the quality of experiences occurring during early adolescence is becoming more widely known as the long term effects of these experiences are realized. Thornburg (1980) and others have brought this realization to the attention of those responsible for the education and welfare of these youth. This evidence makes it apparent that schools must immediately work toward improving the quality and quantity of guidance services. Guidance remains a basic and vital responsibility of education (McEwin, 1981).

Many educators say that it is the school counselor's responsibility to address these issues. Most school counselors will respond that they simply do not have the time to provide each student with the individual attention and effective instruction necessary to meet their developmental needs. If middle level schools are to successfully address this issue, they must recognize effective education as an important component of the

educational program that is everybody's responsibility (Schockley, Schumacher & Smith, 1984).

There are educators who deny responsibility for guidance functions. They desire only to teach their specialty and leave all guidance responsibilities to others. Some guidance activities require high levels of professional preparation and special competence, but not all services traditionally provided by school counselors require formal training. For instance, teachers are well qualified to assist students with academic program planning and career and personal-social decisions (Keefe, 1986).

The role of the classroom teacher is certainly not to replace or even substitute for the trained guidance counselor. Instead, the classroom teachers can assist students in their daily decision-making and in their relationships (Brough, 1985).

Advisory Programs

An increasingly popular and successful program for improving guidance experiences for early adolescents is the advisor-advisee concept. While the guidance provided by the student's advisor will never replace that of the school counselor, the advisory program is an important supplement to it (Alexander & George, 1993).

An advisory program could be defined as an organizational structure in which one small group of students identifies with and belongs to one educator who nurtures and shapes the individuals in that group throughout their middle school years. Another way of describing an advisory program is a program which makes it possible for students to

belong, meets their need to affiliate with a group, and makes caring manageable for a teacher, enabling the teacher to express concerns in a personally satisfying way to a small number of individuals (Cole, 1992).

About 75% of middle grade schools use advisory group periods to increase the chances that each student has at least one constant, caring adult at school and peers with whom to relate and with whom to share the joys, questions, and problems of early adolescence. In most schools, however, the advisement period is devoted mainly to mechanical tasks, taking attendance and making announcements rather than to social or emotional support activities, meeting with individual students about problems, discussing academic problems or issues, personal or family problems, social relationships and peer groups. Only about 28% of the nation's middle level schools have strong group advisory programs that provide social and emotional support activities frequently to help early adolescents adjust, cope, and succeed in school (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1993).

No educational program can be successful without attending to the personal learning needs of individual students. A single approach to instruction, whether traditional or innovative, simply does not suffice. The role of teacher as adviser implies a knowledge of personalized education and personalized learning (Keefe, 1986). Many educators feel that helping youngsters with their personal problems is not within the school's domain or the capacity of today's hard-pressed school teacher. Yet, it is impossible to meet many young adolescents' academic needs

without addressing their social, emotional and physical needs as well (Ames & Miller, 1994).

Implementation of Advisory Programs

Many middle schools have had difficulty implementing student advisory programs, largely because most middle school teachers are uncomfortable outside their traditional roles as instructors (Ames & Miller, 1994). Van Hoose (1991) listed six reasons why a teacher advisory program is often not popular with teachers: parents do not understand the concept and many may oppose it; many administrators are not really concerned about it; most teachers have had little formal preparation for service as an advisor; teachers do not understand the goals of the endeavor; advisory takes time that many teachers believe could be invested more effectively in preparing to teach their subjects; some teachers do not want to engage in a program that requires personal sharing; programs are under-invested.

Ayres (1994) questioned the staffs at seventy-five Midwest schools about their advisory programs. She concluded that teacher advisory programs are the most difficult middle school component to implement successfully and maintain over a period of years. The fundamental obstacle in many schools is teacher "fear, inexperience, lack of appropriate skills and above all, ignorance of the underlying philosophy of advisory programs." She concludes that subject-matter specialists must understand the relationship between affective and cognitive learning to appreciate the benefits of advisories to their students' academic success

(Ayres, 1994).

A study entitled "Teachers Attitudes Before Beginning A Teacher Advisory Program" (Cole, 1994) was used to explore the beliefs about teacher advisory programs from more than two hundred middle school teachers in three different eastern states before their schools began teacher advisory programs. While these teachers knew their schools would begin teacher advisory programs within the next year, few had been involved in the planning. Teachers attended either a half-day or full day workshop on teacher advisory presented by an outside consultant. Participants in the workshops answered four questions: Do you believe your school needs a teacher advisory program? How do you feel about being an advisor? What is your biggest reservation about beginning a teacher advisory program? What help would you like to have before you become an advisor?

Overall, 77% of the teachers felt their school was in need of a teacher advisor program. Although the majority, 64%, felt positive about being advisors, 12% felt negative and 24% felt unsure. No single issue emerged as the greatest concern, but several areas worried large numbers of the teachers surveyed. The most cited concerns were time for advisory planning and time supplanting other curriculum. Lack of knowledge or skill concerned almost one-fourth of the teachers. They worried students would not talk or participate in the program; in addition, the teachers feared they would not be compatible with their advisees or would not be able to involve all students (Cole, 1994).

The study indicates the importance of the professional counselor in

adviser-advisee programs. In successful programs, professional counselors serve as consultants to teachers and administrators and provide inservice training on advisement techniques for grade-level department teams (Keefe, 1986).

Because of the high ratio of students per counselor, it is impossible for the counselor to know and interact with each student and serve as a first-line guidance source. By utilizing the advisor-advisee plan, the classroom teacher is not expected to take over responsibilities of the counselor concerning problems requiring specialized preparation (McEwin, 1981). The relationship between teacher advisor and professional counselor is a cooperative one: the functions are distinct but complementary. While teachers provide academic advisement and ordinary school adjustment counseling, counselors coordinate the guidance program and take referrals. The counselor's role is greatly enhanced in advisory programs. Counselors have more time to handle the kinds of referrals for which they are professionally trained. Their services are in greater demand by the professional staff because the counselors are experts on techniques needed by the entire staff (Keefe, 1986).

The teacher is a key to a successful teacher advisory program. If teachers in a school do not embrace the program, the program will fail. If an individual teacher does not carry out the program with his/her advisory group, the program fails for that group of students and the teacher (Cole, 1994). Staff members who are favorably disposed toward advisory or those who are undecided but open to information about the program might

have that disposition reinforced by being sent to a conference on the subject or on a school visit to a district already using an advisory program (Williamson & Johnston, 1991).

Once the decision has been made to institute advisories either on a pilot or school-wide basis, the question of programming arises. As might be expected, this has been accomplished in a variety of ways at different schools, depending upon how institutions have conceptualized the advisory group's function (MacLaury, 1995).

The implementation of an advisory program requires reorganizing the school to ensure adequate time for teachers to work with students and to plan with colleagues. It demands that teachers see themselves not as curators of knowledge but as facilitators of learning and that they pay as much attention to group process and group dynamics as to content. An advisory program is primarily about a change in the roles of teachers and students, and, secondarily, about a change in content (Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994).

Cole (1992) writes "Appropriate training for caring teachers is the keystone of a successful teacher advisory program". In particular, staff members require training in listening and responding skills. Failure to provide comprehensive training is a common pitfall which can limit an advisory program's effectiveness. James (1986) concurs, adding that most schools ultimately provide staff development for their advisors because the advisory role calls for certain skills such as facilitation skills not commonly possessed by subject matter teachers. Cole recommends that

schools wishing to implement advisory programs devote on average a year to their planning and staff development.

Based on the experience of New York City's Community School District #1 (CSD #1), developing a successful advisory program involves several steps. To define the intents and scope of a district's overall advisory program, its initiator must first develop a mission statement. The mission statement guides the writing of the district's goals. The building of support for an advisory program, assessing student needs, researching programs in place, developing or adapting existing curricula, training staff and developing a method of evaluation are all necessary for successful implementation (MacLaury, 1995).

If schools are to become more personalized and effective, the teacher as an adviser is one critical variable. Teachers in the advisor role get to know their advisees as friends. As the advisement relationship is strengthened over the years, advisers are able to help students make better decisions. As the relationship between teachers and students becomes a highly supportive and mutually satisfying one, the school climate improves and student performance is enhanced (Keefe, 1986). When properly facilitated by faculty and staff advisors, these groups are indeed safe places in which students may learn about themselves and understand their impact on others (MacLaury, 1995).

In some schools, all or almost all professional staff become advisors: teachers, counselors, librarians, administrators and other certified personnel assigned to the building. Fern Middle School in the

City of Toronto began their advisor-advisee program in September, 1990, with all staff committed and involved in this program (Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994). In other schools only classroom teachers are advisors, and, occasionally, only those on interdisciplinary or core teaching teams. The study titled "Teachers Attitudes Before Beginning A Teacher Advisory Program" suggested alternate assignments in lieu of a solo advisory responsibility: a co-advisory group may be used in order to build confidence for staff unsure of the program; high interest mini-courses may be organized and scheduled as a part of the advisor-advisee program; intramural activities may be developed for advisor-advisee group participation. Using teachers in a role other than advising will increase the size of advisory groups, but the quality of advising may be improved by using unwilling staff members in some capacity other than advisor (Cole, 1992).

As previously mentioned, in September of 1990 Fern Public School in the City of Toronto opened the doors of its upper grades as a middle school, with a teacher advisory program. Fern is a K-8 school in Toronto's multilingual, multicultural west end. The program was conceived by the principal as a way of overcoming what he perceived to be a somewhat apathetic and school-alienated attitude on the part of many of the grade seven and eight students.

The process of implementing the advisory program and its results at the end of the first and the third year of its operation are documented; these results make an interesting and useful case study for educators who

wonder how advisory programs can be created that will have positve

results in schools for young adolescents.

Table 1

Advisors' Opinions About The Process

			percent who agree	
			1993	1991
			n = 11	n = 13
There have been sufficient opportunity to participate in goal-setting, planning, stategizing.			100%	77%
The Principal and Vice-Principal have shared information about the nature of the project.			100	100
The project has valued and built upon the experience and experience of staff.			100	54
There has been enough time to plan together.			73	15
Appropriate training and staff development have been provided.			100	62
Staff members take responsibility as a team more than before.			100	39
The principal and Vice-Principal repeatedly help to focus direction and create excitement for the project.			100	69
I like being an advisor.			90	77
I am felling good about my work with my advisees.			90	69

Note. From " Establishing and Evaluating a Successful Advisory Program

in a Middle School," by S. Ziegler and L. Mulhall, 1994, Middle School

Journal, 25 p. 43. Copyright 1994 by the National Middle School

Association.

Table 2

Advisor's Opinions About The Outcomes

	1993	1991
	n = 11	n = 13
Students in grades 6-8 feel more a part of the whole school than they used to.	89%	62%
Students in grades 6-8 are more cooperative with same-age peers than before.	100	54
Students in grades 6-8 are more cooperative across gender than before.	70	54
The behavior of grades 6-8 students in class has improved. improved.	100	54
The behavior of grades 6-8 students outside outside class has improved.	67	54
Absences are down in my classes.	78	15
Tardies are down in my classes.	50	15
In my opinion, the grade 6-8 students are pleased with the advisory group idea and how it is working so far.	90	46

Note. From " Establishing and Evaluating a Successful Advisory Program in a Middle School," by S. Ziegler and L. Mulhall, 1994, Middle School Journal, 25 p. 43. Copyright 1994 by the National Middle School Association.

The advisory program at Fern has continued to evolve and is now a strongly integrated piece of the middle school program. The feedback from the teacher-advisors indicates a strong growth in support both for the process of developing and building the program (see Table 1), and for the

outcomes for students (see Table 2). By 1993, agreement that the process of staff development has been a successful one for building commitment to and expertise in advisement was close to unanimous. The responses in Table 2 indicate that advisors see real improvements for students and for the school as a result of the advisory program (Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994).

Reporting the results of a national survey of practices and trends in middle grades education, Mac Iver (1990) found that, according to principals' estimates, schools with strong advisory programs were "more successful at meeting students' needs for guidance, advice, and counseling and at lowering the proportion of students who will drop out before finishing high school". Mac Iver suggests that advisory groups give students extensive social support and frequent opportunities to discuss topics that are meaningful to them. The relationships formed in the advisory group include both adult/student bonds and student/student bonds, both of which are essential to young adolescents.

The advisory group setting gives the opportunity for personal growth and trust in a situation where, even though the curriculum may not be academic, the personnel and setting are in school. Consequently, the possibility exists for relationships of trust and confidence which develop in the advisory group to extend to other settings in the school, including the academic classroom. If students come to experience a teacher as someone who is personally interested in them and eager to help them address their real concerns and if teachers experience their young adolescent students as people with interests and apprehensions and a

desire for respectful but personal relationships to their teachers, the motivation both of students to learn and of teachers to guide, instruct and listen will quite possibly increase. not only in the advisement situation but in the regular classroom situation (Mac Iver, 1990).

The best advisors are those who extend themselves to students. There are times when middle level students need to be in close contact with a teacher for a specific reason. Topics or events sometimes occur which require explanation or exploration in a clear, personal manner: a death in the school, a tragedy within the community or a new policy with significant effect on students. If a strong association already exists between students and advisor, the exploration of feelings in areas such as those listed above can be more effective than in a classroom group (Cole, 1992).

Just as there is no right way to teach, there is no right way to operate an advisory group. So long as teachers have a stated goal and can demonstrate that they are making progress toward that goal with their advisees, they may make the most progress when permitted to pursue their goal in ways that are most comfortable for them. Many teachers are very comfortable and effective when using the greater part of their advisory time for small group discussion, but some are not. It is important to the success of the program that teachers see themselves as free to pursue their own activities in a mode that feels safe (Alexander & George, 1993).

Advisors do not need to know how to solve all their advisees' problems, but they must know how to refer them to others who can help.

The need for confidentiality must always be respected. Advisors must know how to listen and respond to students, how to recognize behavior which calls for referral to a helping professional and how to refer that student to an appropriate helper, usually the school counselor (Cole. 1992).

The length of time devoted to the advisory period is important. For programs where teachers meet daily with the same group of students. thirty minutes seems adequate. Three quarters of an hour is too long for most of the activities one would expect to be conducted during advisor-advisee programs, and less than twenty minutes seems too short and is likely to turn into a time where little else other than attendance taking and announcements are accomplished (Alexander & George, 1993). Other experts believe three or four meetings per week for at least twenty to twenty-five minutes is most beneficial. A designated time and location seem to be vital in order to establish the stability required by the middle level student (Gill & Read, 1990).

Advisement Curriculum

The advisor-advisee activity schedule should be well balanced and should proceed from a set of overall goals. Even though some middle schools provide teachers with a set of objectives for the advisor-advisee program on a schoolwide basis, the most effective advisors seem to give the program considerable additional thought and design their own activities on the basis of the goals which they have established, perhaps with their students, for their individual groups (Alexander & George,

1993). A study of one rural midwestern middle school with twenty-six of the thirty teachers responding showed a mixed reaction with regard to the type of structure preferred. Eighteen of twenty-six teachers surveyed preferred a less structured program, one which would give teachers options in choosing activities (Brown & Shetlar, 1994).

Some schools use the advisory time to conduct a variety of activities such as sustained silent reading, intramural events, community service projects, current events discussion, special interest mini-courses, relationship building programs and career information. The philosophy of the advisory program determines the activities that meet the needs of each district's students based on the developmental needs of students (Cole, 1992).

The success of the advisor-advisee program begins with the understanding and support of the school principal and other administrators. When administrators enthusiastically approve a program, the chances for success are good. When the administration is not supportive, teachers will soon get the message, and those who really are uncomfortable with the program will begin lobbying against it with the principal, neglecting their own advisor-advisee groups, and generally seeking to erode support for the program among other faculty members. Principals must be willing to treat teachers in the same way that they want teachers to respond to students. That is, they must explain the goals of the program, show the teachers how they may succeed, encourage them to try

and let them know that the program is an important part of their job and is not optional (Alexander & George, 1993).

Parent Support

Most elementary schools have a high level of parent involvement: parents belong to PTA's. they volunteer to help in the classroom and they turn out on parent nights. By the time youngsters reach the middle grades, however, parent involvement typically declines substantially. Many parents assume their children no longer want or need their active involvement once they reach early adolescence. Middle-level educators in turn often make little effort to involve parents in school affairs, while at the same time blaming them for their lack of interest. Strong parental and community support can help strengthen students attachment to their schools and teachers (Ames & Miller, 1994).

During Phase II of the NASSP/Dodge Foundation National Study of Schools in the Middle, interviewers sought parent opinions on a variety of issues and concerns. When asked about school climate, parents identified the following areas as being important: "firm, consistent, fair administration of rules, policies, and discipline, attractive facilities, activities for students, support by the community, openness and acceptance of people and ideas, and good communication" (Keefe, Clark, Nickerson, & Valentine 1983).

Table 3 indicates parents opinions surveryed in the Fern district. A majority felt they were better informed about school events and found it easier to stay in touch with teachers and know about their child's progress

than in previous years. Most parents knew their child was in an advisory

group, knew the identity of the advisor, had talked to him or her, and felt

the advisory group to be a good idea (Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994).

Table 3

Parents' Opinions

	Percent who agree	
	1993	1991
	n = 73	n = 62
Compared to previous years, this year I:		
find I understand report cards better.	81%	82%
feel I know more about child's progress.	74	71
find it easier to stay in touch with teachers.	67	52
Regarding the advisory groups:		
I have been aware that my child is in an	89	87
advisory group which meets daily.		
I know who her/his advisor is.	84	77
I have talked to her/his advisor.	77	63
I think the advisory group is a good idea.	86	87

Note. From Establishing and Evaluating a Successful Advisory Program

in a Middle School, by S. Ziegler and L. Mulhall, 1994, Middle School

Journal, 25, p. 44. Copyright 1994 by the National Middle School

Association.

With the current cry for more homework, longer school days,

longer school years, and greater emphasis on academic basics, parents

must be convinced that the time spent in an advisor-advisee program is an

asset and not a liability. Personal contact with parents is an important

responsibility of advisors. Each advisor should be encouraged to contact

parents by phone, notes, or conference. These contacts should be made at

appropriate times when good news about a student can be conveyed as
well as when the student is experiencing difficulty. Ways to include
parents and gain their support for program options include describing the
program during orientation sessions for new students and their families,
openly inviting parents to visit the school during advisor-advisee time for
a first hand look at the program in action, regular newsletters describing
program features and discussion of advisee development during parent
conferences (James, 1986).

Advisement and Service Projects

An advisory system fosters better communication within the school
and the community. There seems to be no substitute for community
service as a means of building selfworth and accomplishment (Brough,
1985). Service learning provides a method by which middle school
students learn and develop through active participation in an organized
experience (Kurth, 1995).

Students like to do community service when they believe their
contributions are necessary and important. Service projects give students
a sense of contribution and help develop an advisor-advisee group spirit
that fosters the feeling that "we are proud of us". Too many middle level
students have too few experiences in contributing to their community or
helping others. Most students respond to service projects with vigor and
enjoyment (George & Bushnell, 1993). Since student involvement in the
planning of service learning projects are an integral part of the success of
the program, advisors use many techniques to generate possible service

projects. Initially, advisors may help students identify and analyze issues.
Students clarify what interests them, such as working with people.
working with things and or working with ideas. The students then
brainstorm potential projects (Kurth, 1995).

Field Middle School of Northbrook. Illinois. adopted and
implemented a structured service program as a key component to their
middle school advisory program during the 1993-1994 school year. The
service program provided students with a method to learn through active
participation in a thoughtfully organized experience that would meet
community needs and be coordinated in collaboration with the school,
home, and community. In addition, the program would integrate part of
the students' academic curriculum while providing a structured time for
the students to think, talk, and write about what they did and saw during
the actual service activity. This program would, therefore, enhance what
is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom
and, at the same time, help foster the development of a sense of caring for
others (Kurth, 1995).

Benefits of Advisement

Although stronger, more direct evidence is needed, principals'
reports suggest that students benefit from supportive advisory groups
(Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). Students benefit greatly from well planned
and effectively delivered advisory programs. No one program can satisfy
the needs of all schools or even all grades within a school. Each school
must devise its own program around certain general requirements. Once

programs are implemented, they must be carefully monitored, regularly evaluated, systematically modified and protected from intrusions. Teachers must feel total commitment to advisories if advisories are to be successful. Teachers must receive support, encouragement and periodic inservice for at least the first three years of the program. This commitment is only achieved when teachers feel the ownership which comes from developing their own programs. With adequate staff development and careful planning for the needs of young adolescents, the advisory component of the middle school concept can be beneficial to students (Ayres, 1994).

Teacher advisory programs are not a frill or a luxury. They provide a way to use the resources of the school more efficiently and effectively. These programs increase the range and types of communication between parents, students, teachers and administrators. By sharing the counseling function, teacher advisors help to make problems more manageable and often provide better strategies and solutions for solving those problems. Advisory programs are important because they can make connections between teachers and students and between students and students; these connections are at the heart of a meaningful, non-alienating school experience. Evidence suggests that these programs have the potential to increase student motivation and to lower absentee and drop-out rates. Advisory group programs provide the opportunity to make positive connections between adults and young people at school and at home in ways which are genuinely educational and community-

enhancing (Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Report cards from the 1994-95 school year for fifty-three seventh

grade students, 30 (56.6%) males and 23 (43.3%) females, ages 12 to 14.

with a mean age of 12.8, were used in a pre-test sample. Of the fifty-three

students used in this study four (0.07%) of the male students and six

(1.13%) of the female students are African-American.

Procedure

The sample group included all seventh grade students who

completed their seventh and eighth grade education at Louisiana Middle

School. At the time of the pre-test, the students had no advisory program

in place. The post-test group included the same students who completed

their eighth grade year with an advisory program in place. The fifty-three

students participating in the advisory program were randomly divided into

four advisement groups. The advisement period was held for twenty

minutes following the lunch period.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the report cards of a rural school district,

Louisiana Middle School, in Louisiana, Missouri. The data was be

gathered from the 1994-95 grade card and the 1995-96 grade card.

Information used in the study included grade point average and number of

absences from school of each student during the time he/she received an

advisement period and the grade point average and number of absences

from school of each student during the time he/she did not receive an
advisement period.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The data was analyzed using the Data Analysis ToolPak, a part of the Microsoft Excel computer program. Descriptive statistics were run for the sample on the grade point averages (GPA) and number of absences for the two years of this study: 1995, before an advisement program was instituted, and 1996, the first year of a formal advisement period. The paired sample t-test was used to compare the mean grade point average and number of absences for each of the two years. In reporting, all data was rounded to four places to the right of the decimal point.

Table 4 presents the following information concerning grade point averages for the middle school students in the year without an advisement program (1995) and the year with an advisement program (1996).

TABLE 4

Descriptive Statistics For Student Grade Point Pre and Post Advisement

GPA 95		GPA 96	
Mean	2.473207547	Mean	2.597358491
Standard Error	0.111392679	Standard Error	0.117651225
Median	2.5	Median	2.68
Mode	1.97	Mode	3.22
Standard Deviation	0.810950946	Standard Deviation	0.856513844
Sample Variance	0.657641437	Sample Variance	0.733615965
Kurtosis	-1.175285124	Kurtosis	-0.575435631
Skewness	-0.064929923	Skewness	-0.384065324
Range	2.92	Range	3.5
Minimum	0.88	Minimum	0.48
Maximum	3.8	Maximum	3.98
Sum	131.08	Sum	137.66
Count	53	Count	53

The group without advisement (1995) showed a 2.92 range (.88 - 3.8), with the mean, or average, score for this group being 2.4732. The median, or middle, GPA score was 2.5, while the mode, or most frequently appearing score, was 1.97. Skewness for this sample was calculated at -0.0649, meaning there were fewer scores below the mean score than above (22 to 31). Kurtosis, or amount of data in the tails relative to what would be expected in a normal curve, was calculated at -1.1753, meaning that there was less data at the extreme ends of the continuum than one might expect. The variance, or amount of dispersion form the measures of central tendency was .6576. The standard deviation, or positive square root of the variance, was 0.8110.

In contrast, when these same students received an advisement period the following year (1996), there was 3.5 range of GPA scores (0.48 -3.98), with the mean score being 2.5974. The median GPA score for this group was 2.68, while the mode was 3.22. Skewness for this sample was calculated to be -0.3840, with 24 scores falling below the mean compared to 29 scores above. Kurtosis for this sample was calculated at -0.5754, meaning that there was less data scattered to the extreme ends of the continuum than one would expect in a normal curve. The variance for this sample was 0.7366 and the standard deviation was 0.8565.

Another academic area often thought to be affected by an advisement period is attendance. This information is presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Descriptive Statistics For Student Absences Pre and Post Advisement

Absence 95		Absence 96	
Mean	7.924528302	Mean	9.354150943
Standard Error	0.980894802	Standard Error	1.558974893
Median	6.5	Median	6.5
Mode	0	Mode	5.13
Standard Deviatior	7.14102195	Standard Deviatior	11.34950853
Sample Variance	50.99419448	Sample Variance	128.811344
Kurtosis	2.704227678	Kurtosis	18.1450096
Skewness	1.581196038	Skewness	3.745493537
Range	31	Range	72.17
Minimum	0	Minimum	0
Maximum	31	Maximum	72.17
Sum	420	Sum	495.77
Count	53	Count	53
Confidence Level (95.0%)	1.968308087	Confidence Level (95.0%)	3.128309868

In 1995, the year the students had no advisement period, the mean
number of absences was 7.9245 with a range of 31 (0-31). The median
number of absences was 6.5 with a mode score of 0 absences. The
standard deviation was calculated at 7.141. Kurtosis for this sample was
calculated at 2.7042, meaning there was more data at the extreme ends of
the continuum than one would expect to find in the normal curve.
Skewness was at 1.5812, meaning that a greater number of scores fell
below the mean number of absences than fell above it. This kurtosis and
skewness is easily noted in the frequency chart shown in Table 6, which
shows 42 of the 53 absences as being in the 0-10 range.

TABLE 6

Frequency Distribution of Student Absences Pre-Advisement
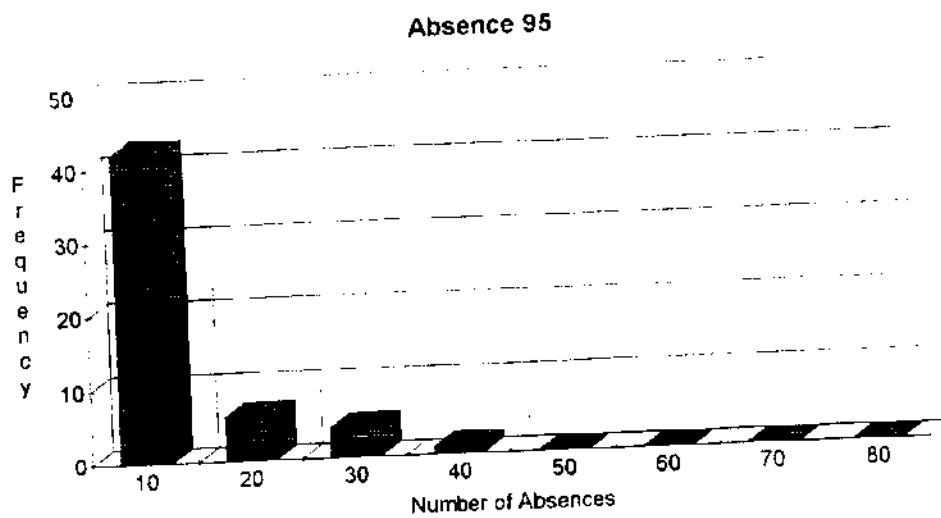
Absence 95

Absence 95	Frequency
10	42
20	6
30	4
40	1
50	0
60	0
70	0
80	0

In 1996, with the same number of students receiving an advisement period, the mean number of absences was 9.3541, with a range of 72.17 (0 -72.17). The median number of absences was 6.5, with the mode being 5.13. The standard deviation for this sample was 11.3495. Kurtosis was calculated to be 18.1450 and skewness as 3.7455. Again kurtosis and

skewness is evident when viewing the frequency chart in Table 7, which

shows 38 of the 53 pieces of data as falling in the 0 -10 range.

TABLE 7

Frequency Distribution of Student Absences Post Advisement
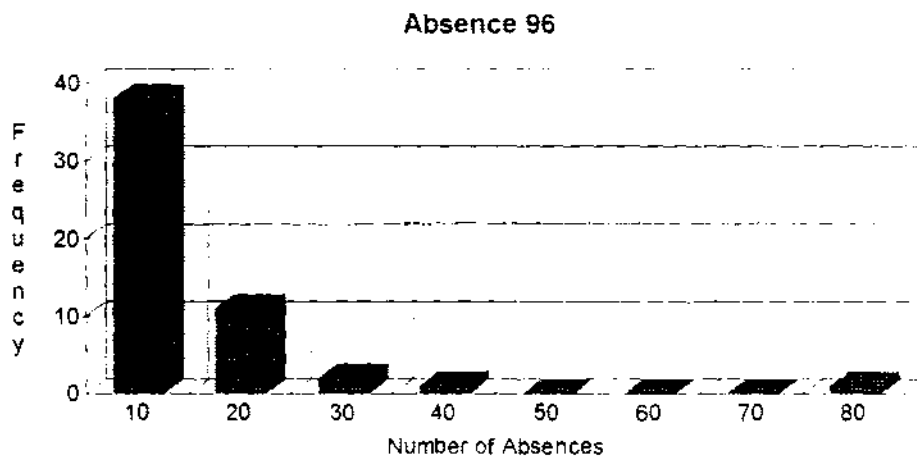
Absence 96

Absence 96	Frequency
10	38
20	11
30	2
40	1
50	0
60	0
70	0
80	1

A paired sample t-test was performed in both sets of data to test

the null hypothesis that no significant mean difference in GPA scores or

number of days absent exists between students receiving an advisement

period and those who did not receive such an advisement period. The data

appears below in Tables 8 and 9.

TABLE 8

T-Test of Student Grade Point Average Pre and Post Advisement

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	GPA 95	GPA 96
Mean	2.473207547	2.597358491
Variance	0.657641437	0.733615965
Observations	53	53
Pearson Correlation	0.82861883	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	52	
t Stat	-1.844342935	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.035416581	
t Critical one-tail	1.674688974	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.070833163	
t Critical two-tail	2.006645445	

TABLE 9

T-Test of Student Absences Pre and Post Advisement

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	Absence 95	Absence 96
Mean	7.924528302	9.354150943
Variance	50.99419448	128.811344
Observations	53	53
Pearson Correlation	0.679120055	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	52	
t Stat	-1.246429728	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.109096269	
t Critical one-tail	1.674688974	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.218192538	
t Critical two-tail	2.006645445	

Comparing the mean GPA scores for 1995 (no advisement) and 1996 (with advisement) one notes a .1243 point difference between the mean scores, with the slightly higher score calculated for 1996. The calculated t-score was -1.8443 at 52 degrees of freedom, which does not exceed the critical two-tail value of 2.0066 (alpha = .05).

Comparing the mean number of absences for the two years, one finds a 1.4296 difference between the mean number of absences, with the higher number of absences falling during the year the students received an advisement period (1996). The t-score was calculated to be -1.2464 at 52 degrees of freedom, which again does not exceed the critical two-tail value of 2.0066 (alpha = .05).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

As stated in the article by Ziegler and Mulhall, (1994) advisory programs are important because they can make connections between teachers and students and between students and students which are at the heart of a meaningful, non-alienating school experience. Evidence suggests that they have potential to increase student motivation and to lower absence and drop-out rates. Advisory group programs provide the opportunity to make positive connections between adults and young people at school and at home in ways which are genuinely educational and community-enhancing.

The result of the t-test call for the researcher to retain the null hypotheses that there is no significant difference in grade point average between students who participate in an advisement program and students who do not participate in an advisement program. Additionally, there is no significant difference in the daily attendance of students who participate in an advisement program and students who do not participate in an advisement program. Although the mean GPA was slightly higher with an advisement program, the difference is not statistically significant. The mean number of absences actually increased during this year, although again the difference is not statistically significant.

There are several reasons that the advisement program used in this study did not improve GPA's to the extent that some research indicates. These reasons might include the time of day the advisement period took

place. The advisement program used in the study took place in the middle of the day, which is not recommended by most of the experts. Researchers agree that the beginning of the school day is the best time for the advisement sessions. The first period in the morning establishes a smooth transition from home setting to the school (Gill & Read, 1990).

The study group staff did not have had much input in the implementation of the program nor was sufficient time spent on in-service training . It is much more difficult to criticize a program when you have been included in its planning. Training must include ample opportunity for teachers to discuss, modify, and design the advisement program (Gill & Read, 1990). A planning perod of at least six months preceding implementation is recommended by Ziegler and Mulhall (1994). The staff requires inservice traning, teachers are required to work in different capacities, using various strategies and techniques, a considerable amount of staff development is required.

In observing the number of absences for the two years, one notes that the median number of absences was the same for both years. In 1996 there was one extreme value (72.17), or outlier, which may have caused the rise in mean absences. In any case, the results of this sample do not show the improvement in number of absences recorded in the literature.

Even though the results of this research did not show increases in student grade point averages or daily student attendance, reports of research on affective education clearly support the concept that advisory programs are necessary for the middle level school (Putbrese, 1989).

Some middle schools operate more like traditional junior high schools, which have often been criticized for treating young adolescents as if they were indistinguishable from older adolescents, or like conservative, small K-8 schools which have often been criticized for treating young adolescents as if they were still children than like the "exemplary middle school" envisioned by Alexander and George (1981) and others in the middle school movement. Conversely, some schools of all grade spans have adopted many of the so-called developmentally responsive practices of the middle school movement such as the advisor-advisee program (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1993).

Limitations of the Study

As in most studies, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. Developing data from a student grade card does not expose a full range of knowledge about the dynamics of an advisor/advisee program. Contextual information is lacking about the possible effects of language, ethnicity, social class, motivation, and attitudes. All of theses factors play an important role in interpreting data. Additionally, the impact of the variance in teaching styles is impossible to analyze.

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