

## Responsive Advisory Purposes

Advisory is a strong, flexible structure that can support a variety of purposes, as you'll see below. The teacher's responsibilities change depending on the purpose.

- **Build Student-to-Student Affiliation**—Middle school students are in a period of significant developmental changes. They're seeking new connections and learning to navigate new school experiences, and they have increased autonomy.

**Teacher's Role:** To foster students' sense of significance, belonging, and fun.

- **Energize and Re-engage**—After sustained periods of academic focus, middle school students can benefit from activities that give them a brief mental break and recharge them for the learning ahead.

**Teacher's Role:** To effectively manage activities that are fun, physically active, and energizing while helping students develop positive social skills.

- **Reflect and Recalibrate**—The middle school is the students' community, so there may be times when the primary purpose for Advisory is to analyze the events happening in school or to address critical issues, such as safe transitions, taking care of school property, preparing for high school, or taking actions against bullying.

**Teacher's Role:** To provide leadership, clarity, and support as students discuss important issues; to invest students in doing their part to create a vibrant, healthy school community where they can flourish.

- **Extend Learning Through Themes**—During the middle school years, students hone their talents and often develop life-long hobbies, interests, and skills. A theme-based Advisory may cross grade levels and be organized into groups of students with similar interests. It often extends to service learning projects and may include partnerships with external stakeholders. A theme-based Advisory also provides an opportunity for older students to mentor younger students.

**Teacher's Role:** To serve as a guide, providing engaging and meaningful opportunities for students to learn through exploration, develop their talents, and make strong connections with others who share similar interests; to help students become increasingly independent and competent in their areas of interest.

- **Support Academic Readiness**—Every middle school has a set of academic goals for its students. An Advisory that has the purpose of helping students achieve these academic goals does so through a “whole child” lens. While the focus is on helping students meet the achievement standards, consideration is also given to helping them develop the academic and social-emotional skills essential for positive academic performance.

**Teacher’s Role:** To ensure that students get varied, targeted, and engaging learning activities that are curriculum-based; to help students develop a set of skills that enable them to engage in rigorous instruction.

- **Strengthen Advisor-Advisee Relationships**—For middle school students to be successful, it’s critical that they have a positive mentoring relationship with at least one adult at school who knows and cares about them.

**Teacher’s Role:** To develop trusting relationships with a group of students and interact with them in ways that build that trust; to get to know each student personally and serve as a mentor and advocate.

- **Develop Communication and Social Skills**—Sometimes, there’s an expectation that middle school students should already have well-developed communication and social skills. However, these skills must be explicitly taught to all students. The Advisory meeting focuses on helping students develop competencies, such as listening attentively, speaking effectively, and displaying cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.

**Teacher’s Role:** To teach these skills directly, provide time for practice, and have students set and monitor goals for developing these skills.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Build Student-to-Student Affiliation

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which sixth grade students perceive how their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory—specifically related to the category of Affiliation—sixth grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Affiliation that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other sixth graders.

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Sixth graders are interested in exploring the nature of friendship.*

Sixth graders are curious about what friendship requires from them. At this age, students are beginning to view friendship as mutually beneficial; this is a developmental shift *from* viewing friendship as a primarily one-way benefit for themselves *to* a growing understanding of relating friendship to loyalty. At this age, students are able to be “self-reflective perspective takers and cooperative or compromising negotiators” (Blume & Zembar, 2007); however, they haven’t yet developed the skills that will allow their friendships to survive difficult arguments or negative events (Selman, 1980). Exploring the nature of friendship is an important step in helping sixth graders develop a cognitive understanding of and an opportunity to practice the behaviors that support belonging, inclusion, and community.

2. *Play, whether structured by the teacher or by the students, is a critical aspect of building affiliation.*

Students expressed value for being able to talk about things that are personally interesting to them, whether those interests are school-related or not. They listed opportunities to connect with each other as the basis or context for that connection, which would extend beyond the classroom. In particular, being able to have some choice or autonomy in how to use their time to build friendships and to play games or sports was viewed as a critical path to building affiliation.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student-to-Student Affiliation

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which seventh grade students perceive how their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory—specifically related to the category of Affiliation—seventh grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Affiliation that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other seventh graders.

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Opportunities to explicitly name, define, and discuss behaviors that support friendship.*  
Seventh grade students expressed a desire to spend time talking about the behaviors that underlie strong and lasting friendship, perhaps as a way of preventing the kinds of negative events that end friendships. They also expressed interest in spending time in structured group talk to learn and discuss how to be a mutually good friend. Ideas for specific topics fell into six categories of ideas: (1) kindness; (2) altruism; (3) respect and respectful communication; (4) socializing with others appropriately; (5) knowing how to work together cooperatively; and (6) being able to resolve issues.
2. *Awareness of the impact of diversity, identity, inclusion, and exclusion.*  
A variety of issues relating to diversity, identity, inclusion, and exclusion—such as cliques; stereotypes or intolerance of differences; socioeconomic, religious, or racial differences; and even academics—were named as topics of importance when it comes to friendship. Students' descriptions of the best methods for them to talk about and grow from these discussions were steeped in the concepts of and procedures for active and interactive learning. As such, structuring the discussion of these ideas by providing students the opportunity first to individually engage with the topic in order to build a solid foundation for discussion, and then to interact with their peers on that same topic in a safe and structured way with well-defined expectations for roles, responsibilities, and expectations, will be an effective way to meet the students' developmental strengths and needs.
3. *Focus on team play.*  
While seventh grade students expressed a value for unstructured free time that gives them opportunities to be with their peers, there was also a significant interest in team games. This is especially significant in that teaming allows students to work together toward a common goal, build trusting relationships, and improve their communication and conflict resolution skills. Being on a team is also a way to reduce risk, stress, and anxiety, as the students belong to a safe group with whose members they have things in common.

## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student-to-Student Affiliation

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which eighth grade students perceive how their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory—specifically related to the category of Affiliation—eighth grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Affiliation that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other eighth graders.

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Positive influence on academics.*

Students presented ideas that suggested it is important to them to learn about and to get ideas for dealing with how affiliation influences academics. In general, students at this age and grade are aware of their own capabilities and are showing greater autonomy in honoring their responsibilities. Additionally, they have an increased ability for abstract thinking, so they can imagine hypothetical situations, enabling them to consider how a friendship might have multiple benefits or complications as it relates to immediate and future academic outcomes. Students also expressed a need to discuss responsibilities and values related to friendship such as authenticity, respect, and civility.

2. *Managing non-school-related interests.*

It is important at this age to be liked and to be part of a group, so activities and hobbies outside of school are important ways to be known and to make connections. Eighth graders are also developing an interest in dating and relationships, and their responses indicate a desire for opportunities to discuss how to manage a safe, healthy, and appropriate interest in another person. Students also view social media and life in general as important affiliation-related topics.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Energize and Re-engage

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which sixth grade students perceive how their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory—specifically related to the category of Energize and Re-engage—sixth grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Energize and Re-engage that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other sixth graders.

One theme emerged from the data:

1. *Play is an important motivator for engagement.*

Sixth grade students' responses showed a high interest in simply playing games as a way to remain focused or engaged. More specifically, the responses indicated a desire to play games that they are already familiar with or can become familiar with and can therefore play regularly and become more skilled at because they understand the rules. The responses also expressed a desire to interact in fun ways with both their peers and their teachers. This sort of play supports social and emotional development because it provides practice in seeing things from another's point of view and valuing the feelings of others as well as learning to work through conflicts and to follow rules.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Energize and Re-engage

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which seventh grade students perceive how their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory—specifically related to the category of Energize and Re-engage—seventh grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Energize and Re-engage that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other seventh graders.

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Movement for stress management and calming techniques.*

Students' ideas for being energized or re-engaged after periods of intense or extended work or testing centered around stress-reducing movement, such as stretching or yoga-like movements. Students also listed sensory experiences such as listening to music. These experiences can be extended to deep breathing exercises, relaxation practice, or even walking so as to bring a level of quiet and focus.

2. *Designated unstructured wiggle time.*

In general, the demands of hormonal and physical changes can be a bit of a drain on seventh graders' otherwise high energy. They tend to experience extremes of emotions and, as their response reflects, they need unstructured time to socially interact and to play familiar games.

## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Energize & Re-engage

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which eighth grade students perceive how their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory—specifically related to the category of Energize and Re-engage—eighth grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Energize and Re-engage that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other eighth graders.

One theme emerged from the data:

1. *Team-focused games.*

Playing competitive games that require teams or partners is a high priority for eighth graders. In addition to being a mental diversion, these games can help develop reasoning skills for solving problems, predicting outcomes, or contemplating alternative moves. Playing games also helps with learning from experience, identifying patterns, impulse control, persevering at a challenging problem, and following rules, all of which transfer to performing academic tasks.