Research and Development on Responsive Advisory Meeting Purpose Topics

February 2, 2018

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R&D Executive Summary

To inform the development of *The Responsive Advisory Meeting Book*, Center for Responsive Schools (CRS) used the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) improvement research cycles (Langley et al., 2009) to identify topics middle school students identified as important. The research activities were conducted from September 5, 2016 through October 28, 2016.

Although the IntegReview IRB exempted the project for IRB approval, CRS still asked teachers to complete a consent form prior to participating in the study to ensure they fully understood what the project involved for themselves and their students. Teachers also provided students with a passive consent form to take home to their parents.

During Cycle 1 (September 12 – October 4, 2016), 12 teachers from four schools and six different districts briefly defined four of the seven purposes of Responsive Advisory Meeting (RAM), gave an example of each RAM purpose, and asked students to brainstorm topics that would be of interest to them. The seven RAM purposes were: 1) Build Student-to-Student Affiliation, 2) Energize and Re-engage, 3) Theme-Based, 4) Reflect and Recalibrate, 5) Communication and Social Skills Development, 6) Advisor-Advisee Relationships, and 7) Academic Readiness.*

A total of 300 students (25 students per teacher) shared their ideas with the whole class, and teachers recorded students' responses and submitted them electronically at the beginning of the week (Monday or Tuesday). The brainstorming sessions were conducted once a week for four weeks and took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. During Cycle 1, CRS developed RAM plans on a rolling basis, based on the students' ideas, for teachers to implement in Cycle 2.

During Cycle 2 (October 3 – October 28, 2016), teachers implemented a three-day RAM plan during the week (typically on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) and responded to a survey at the end of each week. The plans that teachers implemented came from ideas generated by middle school students from a different school. The goal was to test whether the RAM plan ideas from students in one school could be implemented, by teachers, with students in another school.

The teacher-led student focus groups in Cycle 1 produced a rich repository of RAM topics (and themes), for each of the seven RAM purposes, that informed the development of RAM plan topics used by teachers and students during RAM in Cycle 2. In Cycle 2, students, for the most part, agreed on topics that were important and offered additional topics. During the project status update meeting held with teachers after the Cycle concluded, teachers reported that their students developed new skills, felt empowered, and did not want to see the project end, and that teachers themselves learned a lot about their students.

*Note that some purpose names were further refined during the development of *The Responsive Advisory Meeting Book*.

R&D Project Goals

The goal of this research and development project was to use the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) improvement research model (Langley et al., 2009) to generate and test middle school student ideas, using teacher-led student focus groups, on Responsive Advisory Meeting (RAM) topics to include in *The Responsive Advisory Meeting Book*. The objective of RAM is to support students in building positive, meaningful relationships with one or more caring adults at school, and with a small group of peers. RAM has the potential to empower students to create relevant connections and strengthen their learning community, as well as develop an academic mindset and improve communication about the life of the school.

IRB Exemption Approval

CRS obtained IRB exemption for this project according to 45 CFR 46.101(b) (01, 02). The exemption was granted because the research was implemented in an established or commonly accepted educational setting (i.e., the classroom), involving normal educational practices such as middle school Advisory sessions. The research was neither FDA-regulated nor did it involve prisoners as subjects. The teacher-led student brainstorming groups and the information collected during these sessions could not be linked to individual students and place them at risk of identity disclosure. Finally, the research topic was low risk and posed minimal psychological or physical risks to teachers and students.

Teacher Incentives. Each teacher received $100 per week of participation in the study. The stipend reflected (1) weekly work that teachers put in to prepare for and lead student brainstorming sessions on suggested Responsive Advisory Meeting sessions in Cycle 1, and (2) weekly implementation of the selected Responsive Advisory Meeting topics from these sessions in Cycle 2. Teachers participated in the cycles for four weeks. CRS also offered two status update meetings on October 6 and 27. Teachers received an additional $100 stipend for attending both meetings.

Teacher Consent. Each teacher signed a consent form that informed the teacher of the purpose of the study; how the study information would be collected, stored, analyzed, and reported; the minimal risks; and freedom to drop out of the study at any time for any reason.

Parent Consent. Although IRB exempted the study from review, CRS still used passive consent through parents as general ethics. Each student received a letter from their teacher to take home to their parents notifying them of their child's possible participation in the study. Parents could refuse their child's participation in the study by signing the letter and having the student return it to their teacher.

R&D Project Questions

CRS collected data from teacher-led middle school student focus groups on RAM purpose topics to address the following three questions:

Cycle 1: Q1. What RAM purpose topic ideas did middle school students generate in Cycle 1?

Cycle 2: Q1. To what extent did middle school students agree that the RAM topics identified in Cycle 1 were important when used during Responsive Advisory Meetings in Cycle 2?

Cycle 2: Q2. If a majority of middle school students were ambivalent or disagreed that the RAM topics were important, what additional topics did they suggest?

R&D Project Sample

Middle School Teachers. CRS recruited four middle school teachers for each grade (6, 7, and 8) for a total of 12 teachers. The teachers were from six different public schools located in the following six states: Tennessee, South Carolina, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Illinois. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the schools of these teachers. As Table 1 shows, all teachers were from public schools that were diverse in terms of locale, had a free or reduced lunch rate (in 2015), and had a percentage of minority students (in 2015).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Schools of Twelve Participating Teachers

School Name	School Type	School Locale Category	Free/Reduced Lunch Rate (2015)	% Minority Students (2015)
CICS Irving Park	Public Charter	City: Large	88.30%	96.30%
Oak Bluffs School	Public	Town: Fringe	27.1%	27.9%
Pond Rd Middle School	Public	Suburb: Large	3.6%	30.0%
Lincoln Middle School	Public	City: Small	85.2%	90.4%
A.N. Pritzker School	Public	City: Large	55.9%	72.1%
Brewer Middle School	Public	Rural: Fringe	68.3%	60.2%
Charles C. Erwin Middle School	Public	Rural: Fringe	50.8%	15.7%

Middle School Students. Approximately 300 students (25 students[1] per teacher) participated in the teacher-led focus groups in Cycle 1 and Responsive Advisory Meetings in Cycle 2. Based on teachers' reports, these students were from various racial, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds.[2]

[1] These counts were obtained from the Cycle 2 online survey.
[2] This information was obtained through a follow-up email with the 12 teachers.

R&D Methods: Teacher Training and Student PDSA Cycles

TEACHER TRAINING: SEPTEMBER 1, 2016

Prior to the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, teachers participated in a one-hour virtual orientation webinar to (1) learn why Responsive Advisory Meeting is an important middle school activity, (2) understand the goals and process for RAM purpose topic idea generation during Cycle 1 and RAM purpose topic testing in Cycle 2, (3) consider the informed consent procedures, and (4) learn about the requirements and process for receiving stipends for participating in the project.

PDSA CYCLE 1, IDEA GATHERING: SEPTEMBER 12 – OCTOBER 4

As Table 2 shows, the purpose of Cycle 1 was to use teacher-led middle school student focus groups to collect ideas on topics of interest and importance to students and organize these according to the following RAM purposes for Responsive Advisory Meeting: Build Student-to-Student Affiliation (BSSA), Energize and Re-engage (ER), Theme-Based (TH), Reflect and Recalibrate (RR), Advisor-Advisee Relationships (ADV), Communication and Social Skills Development (CSSD), and Academic Readiness (AR).

Table 2. Teacher-Led RAM Purpose Student Groups

	Teachers Cycle 1	Grade	RAM Purposes Cycle 1: Topic Ideas
Group 1	Teacher 6A1	6	Week 1 = BSSA, Week 2 = TH, Week 3 = ADV, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 6B1	6	Week 1 = BSSA, Week 2 = TH, Week 3 = ADV, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 7A1	7	Week 1 = BSSA, Week 2 = TH, Week 3 = ADV, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 7B1	7	Week 1 = BSSA, Week 2 = TH, Week 3 = ADV, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 8A1	8	Week 1 = BSSA, Week 2 = TH, Week 3 = ADV, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 8B1	8	Week 1 = BSSA, Week 2 = TH, Week 3 = ADV, Week 4 = AR
Group 2	Teacher 6A2	6	Week 1 = ER, Week 2 = RR, Week 3 = CSSD, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 6B2	6	Week 1 = ER, Week 2 = RR, Week 3 = CSSD, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 7A2	7	Week 1 = ER, Week 2 = RR, Week 3 = CSSD, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 7B2	7	Week 1 = ER, Week 2 = RR, Week 3 = CSSD, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 8A2	8	Week 1 = ER, Week 2 = RR, Week 3 = CSSD, Week 4 = AR
	Teacher 8B2	8	Week 1 = ER, Week 2 = RR, Week 3 = CSSD, Week 4 = AR

Once a week, on Monday or Tuesday, teachers gathered ideas using student focus groups for 20–30 minutes on a selected RAM purpose. Using detailed instructions provided by CRS (Appendix A), teachers led students through a brainstorming session to gather their ideas using the following steps:

1. Students were placed into small groups (3 or 4 students per group).
2. Each student was assigned a role in the group, such as facilitator of brainstorming or recorder of ideas.
3. Teachers provided the background information relevant to the RAM purpose to the student groups that were brainstorming on that topic.
4. Teachers collected student ideas using brainstorming sheets provided by CRS (Appendix B).
5. Teachers entered the ideas on the sheets into the online survey system by 6 pm on Wednesday of each week, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Online Survey Form to Record Cycle 1 Ideas

RAM plan ideas data collected through the online survey was analyzed by the CRS Data Analyst under the guidance of the CRS Principal Scientist. Results were shared with the Program Development Team. Program Developers created new RAM plans with activities for testing in Cycle 2.

PDSA CYCLE 2, IDEA TESTING: OCTOBER 3 – OCTOBER 28

As shown in Table 3, the purpose of Cycle 2 was to test (1) whether ideas for RAM purpose topics suggested by students in Teacher Group 1 (six teachers and 150 students) were important to students in Teacher Group 2 (six teachers and 150 students), and (2) whether ideas for RAM purpose topics suggested by students in Teacher Group 2 were important to students

in Teacher Group 1. In other words, Table 3 shows that each Teacher Group tested RAM purpose topics (through activities developed by CRS) with students who did not suggest the topics. Each week, CRS sent teachers in each group a set of RAM plans associated with a RAM purpose (on Friday prior to the week the plans were to be tested) as shown in the Cycle 2 column of Table 3. The testing of RAM plans, associated with a RAM purpose, can be summarized as follows:

- Teachers used the new Responsive Advisory Meeting plans with their students Monday through Wednesday of each week.

- CRS instructed teachers to inform their students that their RAM plan ideas were being tested in other classrooms of the same grade level, but at different schools.

- Teachers recorded the data and reflections from the students, as well as their own ideas and thoughts, using the online survey by Friday evening of each week in Cycle 2.

Table 3. Cycle 2 Teachers and Testing of Student RAM Ideas

Teachers Cycle 2		Grade	RAM Purposes	
			Cycle 1: Topic Ideas	Cycle 2 Testing
Group 1	Teacher 6A1	6	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR	ER, RR, CSSD, AR
	Teacher 6B1	6	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR	ER, RR, CSSD, AR
	Teacher 7A1	7	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR	ER, RR, CSSD, AR
	Teacher 7B1	7	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR	ER, RR, CSSD, AR
	Teacher 8A1	8	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR	ER, RR, CSSD, AR
	Teacher 8B1	8	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR	ER, RR, CSSD, AR
Group 2	Teacher 6A2	6	ER, RR, CSSD, AR	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR
	Teacher 6B2	6	ER, RR, CSSD, AR	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR
	Teacher 7A2	7	ER, RR, CSSD, AR	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR
	Teacher 7B2	7	ER, RR, CSSD, AR	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR
	Teacher 8A2	8	ER, RR, CSSD, AR	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR
	Teacher 8B2	8	ER, RR, CSSD, AR	BSSA, TH, ADV, AR

Note: Build Student-to-Student Affiliation (BSSA), Energize and Re-Engage (ER), Theme-Based (TH), Reflect and Recalibrate (RR), Advisor-Advisee Relationships (ADV), Communication and Social Skills Development (CSSD), Academic Readiness (AR)

As in Cycle 1, data were gathered through the online survey (see Figure 2). However, the focus in Cycle 2 was on understanding how important the RAM purpose activities—presented in the RAM plans used by teachers during Responsive Advisory Meetings—were to students. To gain this understanding, at the end of each week teachers asked their students to what extent they agreed with the following statement:

"I think that the topics covered this week are important to students in my grade."

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Maybe
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

As Figure 2 shows, teachers reported the number of students in each response category, and the number of students who were absent and could not provide a response. Finally, teachers offered students opportunities to suggest up to three additional ideas in order of importance, and recorded these in the online survey as well.

Figure 2. Online Survey Teachers Completed for Cycle 2.

Please indicate how many students chose each response to the statement about this week's Responsive Advisory Meetings (please enter "0" if no students chose a response):

\# who chose "Strongly agree" (5):

\# who chose "Agree" (4):

\# who chose "Maybe" (3):

\# who chose "Disagree" (2):

\# who chose "Strongly disagree" (1):

\# of students who were absent from the classroom

Are there any additional idea that the students suggested? If so, please provide up to 3:

First idea
Second idea
Third idea

PDSA CYCLE 1 RESULTS: STUDENT IDEAS FOR RAM PURPOSE TOPICS

As described in the R&D methods section, students in grades 6, 7, and 8 were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to Build Student-to-Student Affiliation that were important to them and that they believed would be important to other students in their grade. The data were analyzed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and complexity with which students at each grade perceived how

their strengths and needs could be met in Advisory. This analysis was conducted for each of the seven RAM purposes for each of the three grades to answer the first primary R&D question, which was:

Q1. What RAM purpose topic ideas did middle school students generate in Cycle 1?

What follows are the themes that emerged from the data that were also used by the CRS Program Development Team to develop RAM plans and activities for each respective RAM purpose.

6th Grade: Build Student-to-Student Affiliation

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 can 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.

7th Grade: Build Student-to-Student Affiliation

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.

8th Grade: Build Student-to-Student Affiliation

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.

6th Grade: Energize and Re-engage

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 specifi-

cally, 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.

7th Grade: Energize and Re-engage

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 to bring about 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.

8th Grade: Energize and Re-engage

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.

6th Grade: Theme-Based

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Engaging in competitive and team sports and activities.* Students listed a wide range of games and activities that developed sportsmanship and friendships. Playing these games can help develop reasoning for problem-solving, skills for predicting outcomes, or strategic thinking for making 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.

2. *Art, music and pop culture, news and current events.* At this age and stage, students are beginning to question previously accepted adult judgments about the world around them. They want the opportunity to establish their own individual thoughts and ideas relevant to pop culture and current events.

7th Grade: Theme-Based

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Extracurricular activities that provide a distraction from daily concerns and respond to their individual interests.* Students' ideas centered on engaging in extracurricular activities that provide constructive distractions from daily life and school concerns. While the activities included active and competitive activities, students also mentioned activities that support calm and relaxation. Some study results from other researchers (see page 25) have concluded that participating in extracurricular activities prevents dropping out of school, deters misbehavior and antisocial activity, and leads to improved communication and relationship skills as well as achievement in school and aspirations for higher education.

2. *Being part of the solution.* Consistent with their age and stage characteristic of desiring increased responsibility, seventh graders' ideas indicated they have an awareness of some of the ways in which their schools can improve and be more responsive to their specific needs. Examples of their ideas included: ways in which to give consequences instead of punishment, improving conditions in the lunch room, keeping recess and free time safe, having relevant school clubs, participating in and being leaders in student council, and addressing school safety issues.

8th Grade: Theme-Based

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Immersion in the arts.* Ideas centered on how to meet students' interest for self-expression through the arts. They expressed interest in self-expression through a wide range of artistic mediums as well as through opportunities to explore and excel in core content knowledge.

2. *Extracurricular activities that provide a distraction from daily concerns and respond to their individual interests.* Like seventh graders, eighth grade students' ideas centered on engaging in extracurricular activities that provide constructive distractions from daily life and school concerns. However, eighth graders' ideas tended to be more specifically tuned to competitive, gender-alike, and mentally challenging activities. Some study results from other researchers (see page 25) have concluded that participating in extracurricular activities prevents dropping out of school, deters misbehavior and antisocial activity, and leads to improved communication and relationship skills as well as achievement in school and aspirations for higher education.

3. *Developing interpersonal relationship skills.* Consistent with the age and stage development of forming close friends, ideas for thematic topics included how to get along with the opposite gender, developing new friendships and communicating with peers, balancing spend-

ing time with family and time with friends, and exploring and sharing their personal interests outside of school with others.

6th Grade: Reflect and Recalibrate

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Activities that instruct in altruistic behavior.* Students' ideas centered on the concepts of altruism or selflessness—a key sign of departure from childhood selfishness. Their ideas on how they can positively and unselfishly help others extended from near and local concerns, such as writing advice letters to fifth graders and making the school better for all students by doing things like contributing to student council, to global issues like addressing the effects of pollution and protecting endangered species.

2. *Anxiety management and self-soothing strategies.* Students expressed a need to find ways to distract and calm themselves from traumatic events that could happen or were happening at home, school, or in the local or global community.

3. *Discussing ways to improve academic behaviors and make responsible and right choices.* Topics students identified as important to them and other sixth graders included behaviors related to being a "good student," such as the importance of arriving at school on time and regular attendance; avoiding and learning to navigate "mean behavior," such as engaging in rumors, gossip, and cyberbullying; and dealing with social pressures to make poor choices, such as gang involvement, smoking, drugs, and vandalism.

7th Grade: Reflect and Recalibrate

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Time management and student leadership opportunities.* In line with this characteristic child/not-child age and stage of development, seventh grade students expressed a desire to have increased "free" time and the ability to make more decisions. Their ideas expressed a desire to be in control of their own student groups and to figure out how to manage their time.

2. *Altruism and civility.* These concepts were a pervasive refrain as important topics to address related to reflect and recalibrate. Students listed ideas such as helping others, volunteering, kindness, and honesty. Being civil to one another, no bullying, getting along, respecting others, and treating people equally, respectfully, and courteously—all were important topics and ideas for seventh graders.

3. *Seeing how their behaviors can improve school climate in ways that reduce stress.* Students' ideas demonstrated empathy toward each other and responsibility for improving school climate and reducing stress. They expressed interest in topics that would empower them to contribute to improving quiet and calm in halls and on buses, and to feel an increased sense of community. Their ideas also expressed a desire to have individual needs met in ways that

support them in doing their best academic work, such as listening to music to improve concentration and teachers taking the time to reflect on reasonable expectations for homework workloads.

8th Grade: Reflect and Recalibrate

Five themes emerged from the data:

1. *Reflecting with adults on their ideas for a safe and respectful school environment.* Students presented ideas that were related to school safety, such as working on ways to make schools safe, bully-free, and respectful of the educational process, and that required collaboration with and being heard by the adults in charge of the school in order to be actionable and meaningful.

2. *Unpacking altruistic behaviors and interpersonal relationships.* Students expressed an interest in altruistic behaviors such as learning how to be helpful to others, unpacking the meaning of honesty and integrity, being willing to help others, being aware of how your behaviors might negatively impact others (such as texting and driving), and understanding why respectfulness is important.

3. *Engaging in activities that foster creativity and show value for students as learners.* The ideas students shared in this category reflected an awareness of how they needed the school to respond to support them in reflecting and recalibrating. Students named things such as make class fun, value the opinions of all students, teach in the ways that meet their learning needs, and focus on developing the knowledge and skills to take big tests.

4. *Developing coping skills for managing local and global traumatic events.* The list of events that students named as important to develop coping mechanisms for included any 9-1-1 emergency, evacuations, local and global terrorism, emergency drills, a death in the community, weather-related emergencies and tragedies, and diseases that affect someone in the school.

5. *Personal well-being and success beyond middle school.* Eighth graders expressed interest in using this Advisory purpose to focus on identifying strategies and behaviors that would contribute to being successful in high school and ready for college, identifying concrete reasons for being responsible, and making good choices related to their physical health, and addressing other body identity issues.

6th Grade: Communication and Social Skills Development

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Learning to demonstrate core communication skills is important.* Sixth grade students identified making eye contact, "being a good listener," and speaking clearly and with confidence as important concepts to focus on during Advisories related to social skills and communication. They built on these concepts by expressing interest in topics such as the role of politeness and manners in communication, "using appropriate language," and being able to build respect and express oneself without being argumentative.

2. *Team-building, cooperation, and trust.* Sixth graders offered many ideas for games, skits, and even science experiments and debating as activities that enhance social skills through teamwork, cooperation, and trust.

7th Grade: Communication and Social Skills Development

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Being a respectful and responsible team member.* Seventh graders focused their ideas on "good team behaviors," such as taking turns talking, not interrupting, and giving everyone a chance to talk. In addition, their ideas focused on dispositions, such as being open-minded, less sensitive, and more resilient when facing opposing opinions. They were concerned with responsible team behaviors such as thinking before talking, supporting each other's ideas, following directions, and choosing the "right people" to work with. Finally, they expressed notions of inclusiveness—specifically, including or inviting friends to your group, building on the ideas of others, being able to find connections in the conversations, and being willing to compare your opinion with another person's.

2. *Activities that build social skills.* The ideas about building social skills were all focused on working together as a team on a common goal and building team camaraderie. They also saw as relevant having the opportunity to give feedback to help another student improve or to have lively exchanges of ideas.

3. *Opportunities to talk about and feel heard on issues that are important to them.* Students identified being "given the chance" to talk to and feel heard by adults through established channels, such as the student council or other structured exchanges, as opportunities that would improve their communication and social skills.

8th Grade: Communication and Social Skills Development

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Empathy, inclusion, and respect for the individual.* The ideas students shared expressed an interest in showing respect for each person as an individual. Being respectful of individual needs to open up and share without placing pressure on them, as well as feeling free to discuss interests, were concepts that would meet their need for communication. They expressed the need to have opportunities to discuss and practice how to speak up for others and bring others into a discussion; and making sure everyone has a chance to be heard and demonstrating "civil socialization abilities" as important social skills.

2. *Fluency in core speaking and listening skills.* Students listed a number of areas for growth related to communication and social skills, including being able to respectfully disagree, learning to respect others' ideas, compromising, working on relationships with others, working together to achieve a goal, staying on topic and on task, participating actively, and paying attention.

3. *Having choice in activities for social interactions.* Students saw as important the following ideas related to this topic: Having unstructured time to be free to interact, such as recess, being able to choose structured activities, working to solve problems as a team, and playing activities that support teamwork or encourage personal growth.

6th Grade: Advisor-Advisee Relationships

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Need to feel respected and known.* Students' ideas included expectations for teacher dispositions such as being kind and respectful, being interested in helping, and being willing to get to know them through games and other activities. Their ideas also connected engaging class instruction to meaningful relationships with their teachers.

2. *Interest in and support for achieving hopes, dreams, and goals.* Students expressed a desire to know their teachers were "loyal," and that teachers would take an interest in students' goals, hopes, and dreams and make time for students to regularly share and discuss them.

7th Grade: Advisor-Advisee Relationships

Two themes emerged from the data:

1. *Building a trusting relationship; being trustworthy.* Students' ideas focused on using the Advisory period to ask for advice, to have regular conversations with their teachers, and to gain teachers' respect. They communicated a desire to be "taught how to succeed in life" and to be able to "teach the teacher." They also noted the importance of being kind to their teachers.

2. *Being known and valued as an individual.* The search for identity is a thread that runs throughout adolescence. As students are engaged in this search, they desire to be known for who they are, and that their identity not be based on their older siblings, their parents, or other factors. They want to be able to assert themselves, to be free to ask questions and have them answered, and to be able to take ownership in their own success.

8th Grade: Advisor-Advisee Relationships

Four themes emerged from the data:

1. *Focus on advice and activities that support academic success beyond middle school.* At this age and stage of development, students have a focus on what's ahead of them, and their ideas for topics of importance to them support that. They expressed a desire for meaningful conversations that build courage and skills, not fear, about how they can get good grades and succeed in their educational endeavors in high school and college.

2. *Activities and conversations that build trusting, friendly, nonjudgmental advisor-advisee relationships.* Students' ideas showed interest in being able to freely discuss trends in popular culture, having advisors who are interested in "how my day went," "how I spent my weekend"

or "how I will spend my weekend," and "what's happening in my home life," and for the nature of those conversations to be trusting, honest, caring, kind, friendly, and nonjudgmental ways to learn about them. They also shared ideas that would allow them to learn how they were similar to their advisors.

3. *Advice and activities for understanding romantic friendship.* As adolescence proceeds, and students start to spend time in more mixed-gender groups and have a growing interest in issues related to body, identity, and looks, they also begin to have a desire to understand romantic friendships. Having a trusted advisor to discuss important issues related to these new interests was an important topic for eighth graders.

4. *Feedback that shows improvement.* Students expressed a desire to use this time with their advisors to unpack and reinforce what they are doing right in the way of progressing toward a goal. In identifying points of progress, advisors should remember that intrinsic motivation to achieve a goal can be developed by helping students to see how their own effort has contributed or can contribute to their continued progress and improvement.

6th Grade: Academic Readiness

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. *Sixth grade students desire explicit academic skill building.* Students identified the need to learn and build their skills for studying: learning strategies for improving their performance in core content classes and demonstrating mastery on tests and quizzes, checking their own work for errors, and identifying and working with a study partner. While performance improvement in core content classes was specifically named, the skills that sixth graders noted they needed to improve provide insight into how they think the purpose of academic readiness can be achieved for them, namely by focusing on learning activities that increase their ability to be empowered, independent learners and achievers through explicitly teaching and providing opportunities to apply learning strategies.

2. *Preparedness and organization are essential skills for academic readiness.* Being prepared and well-organized were qualities that sixth graders saw as important characteristics of being academically prepared. Being prepared was described as having school materials, getting to school and class on time, keeping track of their own progress, and managing their time so that they could stay focused. Students were even able to look to the future and make connections between preparedness and organization and success in high school and college.

3. *Academic readiness requires or includes personal growth.* Students identified learning to face challenges, learning from other cultures, learning to use technology, and being thoughtful about seeking help as important ideas to explore related to academic readiness.

7th Grade: Academic Readiness

Five themes emerged from the data:

1. *Academic readiness requires being prepared and attentive, and developing and using study and help-seeking skills.* Seventh grade students' ideas gave a high priority to taking individual responsibility for being academically ready. This sense of responsibility is often not yet matched by the skills to achieve it, so seventh graders can benefit from taking part in learning activities that help them learn to manage sensory and emotional distractors (as well as by being in classes that are structured to manage these distractors). Being able to recognize and articulate when they are mentally distracted, sharing that recognition with the teacher so that the teacher can address it, and using Advisory to talk about mental and emotional distractors can all be useful in helping students to stay attentive and to develop help-seeking skills.

2. *Balancing the cognitive load.* Students made specific references to the importance of balance in cognitive engagement and the need to purposefully manage stress by activity, breaks, "free time" exercise, and music. The implications for this can feel counterintuitive, in that it is at the times when students are engaged in highly rigorous core content learning or "high-stakes" activities, such as test-taking, that academic readiness in Advisory can be enhanced by integrating movement, extending recess, teaching mindfulness and coping skills, and using music as a tool to relax and come to balance.

3. *Setting and remembering personal goals.* Seventh grade students associated setting and reflecting on goals with a positive sense of self and the ability to stay focused and work hard. Developmentally, middle schoolers are filled with hope, which is the cognitive process needed to achieve a goal, and the idea of turning hope into specific goals and having opportunities to reflect on those goals and their positive outcomes is important to the mindset needed for academic readiness.

4. *Choice and interest were highlighted as important motivators.* Students expressed an interest in being able to have choice regarding building their own study and work teams as well as planning the activities they could do to get academically prepared. There was a clear indication that poetry and music were important.

5. *Positive adult support and relationships at home and at school.* Seventh grade students equated academic readiness with having adult support and encouragement. Teachers who show respect and interest in them as people and who are willing to help them achieve were viewed as important to academic readiness. Parental support and encouragement, even having "nice" parents, were also named as important to academic readiness. Students also noted that having basic needs met—such as "a full stomach"—was important to academic readiness.

8th Grade: Academic Readiness

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 academic readiness—eighth grade students were asked to brainstorm, discuss, and create a ranked list of Advisory meeting topic ideas related to academic readiness that are important to them and that they believe would be important to other eighth graders.

Four themes emerged from the data:

1. *Positive two-way communication between teacher and student.* Eighth grade students made specific references to the importance of being able to communicate with their teachers—both listening to teachers and being heard by teachers—as important to academic readiness. They expressed a need to ask questions, discuss their grades and performance, and receive clear directions to follow. Students desire to talk with their teachers about their academic struggles and be given positive reinforcement. In defining communication, they included ideas of encouraging a growth mindset, "progress takes time," and being able to chart that progress (increase perseverance) through holding discussions about goals and helping them to remember and focus on why those goals are relevant to both the present and the future.

2. *Having ample opportunity to practice and study.* Students pointed to the opportunity to study and practice as being important to academic readiness. There was a clear indication that the eighth graders distinguished study and practice from actual graded assignments by describing using games, visual aids, and technology as the methods for study and practice. Having dedicated study times and spaces and active reviewing for tests were also named as the ideas that eighth graders saw as important to academic readiness.

3. *Practicing self-control and responsible decision-making.* Self-control and responsible decision-making were central threads in ideas eighth graders identified as important topics for academic readiness. The data showed that eighth graders recognize that learning and practicing impulse control, being able to manage stress, setting and working toward personal and academic goals, and making choices about personal behaviors are important factors in academic readiness.

4. *Real-world challenges beyond the textbook are motivators.* Eighth grade students expressed high aspirations for engagement in projects and academic challenges that get them "out of their comfort zone" as a method to foster motivation and creativity.

PDSA CYCLE 2 RESULTS: IMPORTANCE OF RAM TOPICS DURING ADVISORY

As described in the methods section for Cycle 2, the purpose was to understand how important the RAM purpose activities—presented in the RAM plans used by teachers during Responsive Advisory Meeting—were to students. The survey data collected from the teachers on their students were used to answer the following questions:

Q1. To what extent did middle school students agree that the RAM topics identified in Cycle 1 were important when used during Responsive Advisory Meetings in Cycle 2?

Q2. If a majority[3] of middle school students were ambivalent or disagreed that the RAM topics were important, what additional topics did they suggest?

The answer to these questions, based on the students' responses recorded by the teachers, is organized by week and RAM purpose implemented during that week. Any additional topics suggested by students were submitted to the CRS Publications department to inform revision of *The Responsive Advisory Meeting Book.*

Week 1 – Build Student-to-Student Affiliation (BSSA) and Energize and Re-engage (ER)

Main Finding: Only 2 out of 12 teachers reported a majority of their students saying *maybe* or *disagree* that RAM topics were important. The students of these 2 teachers did not provide additional RAM topics to replace those used in Week 1, but students of 6 (out of the 10) other teachers did.

- For one teacher (n=1), more than two-thirds of students (68%), from a large suburban school, reported *maybe* or *disagree* that the Build Student-to-Student Affiliation activity topics were important. Students did not report additional ideas for topics.

- For one teacher (n=1), half of the students (50%), from a small city school, reported *maybe* or *disagree* that the Energize and Re-engage activity topics were important. Students did not report additional ideas for topics.

- For the remaining 10 teachers (n=10), a majority of students (more than 50% on average), from different types of schools, agreed that the Build Student-to-Student Affiliation and Energize and Re-engage activity topics were important. Six of these teachers (n=6) had students who reported additional ideas for topics, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Week 1 RAM Topics Recommended by Middle School Students

Idea Rank	Week 1 RAM Purpose	
	ER	BSSA
First	More games; Four Corners; More outside activities	Passing a ball; asking a get-to-know-you question; how to be better listeners; cliques
Second	Improvisation/acting; Would You Rather; more group activities	Life story using a photo; exclusion/inclusion
Third	Being silly with each other; choice of activities	None

[3] Defined as at least 50% of students that responded.

Week 2 – Reflect and Recalibrate (RR) and Theme-Based (TH)

Main Finding: Only 3 (2 using Theme-Based and 1 using Reflect and Recalibrate) out of 12 teachers had a majority of students who reported *maybe* or *disagree* that RAM topics were important.

- Students of these 3 teachers provided additional topics, as shown in Table 5.
- Of the remaining teachers, 6 out of 9 had students who reported additional topics as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Week 2 RAM Topics Recommended by Middle School Students

Idea Rank	Week 2 RAM Purpose	
	ER	BSSA
First	Doing our best learning; actvities with teamwork or acting out the same topics; more outside activities	Positive social interactions; other themes besides sports; how to be better listeners; cliques
Second	Goals; videos about safety that they can react to or have discussions about	Participation and inclusion for all; hobbies
Third	Being silly with each other	Self-esteem; books

Week 3 – Communication and Social Skills Development (CSSD) and Advisor-Advisee Relationships (ADV)

Main Finding: Only 2 (1 using CSSD and 1 using ADV) out of 12 teachers had a majority of students who reported *maybe* or *disagree* that RAM topics were important. None of the students of the 2 teachers reported additional topics, as shown in Table 6.

- However, 3 (1 using CSSD and 2 using ADV) out of 12 teachers had a substantial percentage (but not a majority) of students who reported *maybe* or *disagree* that RAM topics were important. None of the students of the 3 teachers reported additional topics.
- Two of the remaining 7 teachers had students who reported additional topics even though these students agreed that the RAM topics were important.

Table 6. Week 3 RAM Topics Recommended by Middle School Students

Idea Rank	Week 3 RAM Purpose	
	CSSD	ADV
First	Each student has a card and other classmates put compliments and nice things about that person; discuss more on the specific topic	None
Second	Continue to talk to each other more	None

Week 4 – Academic Readiness (AR)

Main Findings: There was some doubt about the importance of the RAM topic among the students of one-third of the teachers who conducted Responsive Advisory Meetings on AR during Week 4.

- A majority of students of 4 out of 12 teachers reported *maybe* that RAM topics for AR were important.

- Students for one of these 4 teachers reported additional topics, as shown in Table 7.

- Among the remaining 8 teachers who had a majority of students *agree* that the topics were important, 4 had students who reported additional topics as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Week 4 RAM Topics Recommended by Middle School Students

Idea Rank	Week 4 RAM Purpose
	AR
First	No walk and talk—not a group favorite; games that help students share their ideas with each other; more solutions; listen to what you are supposed to do and do it; specific information about high school enrollment
Second	The importance of maturity

Summary of What Was Learned from R&D Cycles

The goal of this R&D project was to use two cycles of the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) to generate student topic ideas (Cycle 1) using teacher-led student focus groups, test those topic ideas (Cycle 2) using teacher-led Responsive Advisory Meetings, and evaluate their importance based on student feedback. What follows is a summary of what was learned from R&D cycles from students and teachers.

Summary of What Was Learned From Students

As reported in the findings for Cycle 1, the teacher-led student focus groups produced a rich repository of qualitative data that was analyzed to produce multiple themes across RAM purpose and grade for development of topics to be used in RAM between teachers and students in Cycle 2. How important were these topics to students? The answer can be summarized as follows:

- **Build Student-to-Student Affiliation and Energize and Re-engage:** Students, for the most part, agreed topics were important and offered additional topics.

- **Reflect and Recalibrate and Theme-Based:** Students, for the most part, agreed topics were important and offered many additional topics.

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- **Communication and Social Skills Development and Advisor-Advisee Relationships:** Although students, for the most part, agreed topics were important, there were some teachers with a substantial percentage of students who had doubts or disagreed (even though these students were not in the majority in the classroom). These topics should be reviewed. Students reported few additional topics.

- **Academic Readiness:** There were enough teachers with students who reported doubts about the importance of topics to require a review of these topics. Students reported a number of additional topics.

Summary of What Was Learned From Teachers

CRS also offered two status update meetings after data collection was completed for each Cycle. The first was on October 6 at the end of Cycle 1 and the second on October 27 at the end of Cycle 2. The Cycle 2 meeting was used as an opportunity for teachers to: "Tell CRS how this experience was for you and for your classroom."

The following statements were representative of the teachers' responses:

- "Students thought it was awesome. They picked up some skills. My students use it as an outside experience and take it to other classrooms."

- "My kids had a great experience, particularly with Cycle 1. They felt it was good to build their self-esteem when they learned that it was being used nationally. The activities were excellent and they gained a lot out of it and they were sad that it came to an end."

- "My kids really enjoyed the experience. After the 1st cycle they were really interested in doing the activities for Cycle 2. My seventh graders really opened up during academic readiness activities in Cycle 2. Everyone got to know each other better."

- "My students developed new skills."

- "My students felt empowered and did not want to see the project end."

- "As teachers, we got a lot out of the cycles and learned a lot about our students."

Limitation of R&D Cycles

All research projects, no matter how well designed and implemented, have limitations (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015). This R&D project was no exception. The goal was to recruit a diverse sample of 12 teachers and 300 students. However, the size of this sample is small relative to the total number of teachers and students in the public schools in the United States or relative to the 15,000 teachers CRS trains annually.

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Appendix A:

Instructions to Teacher for Conducting Cycle 1 Brainstorming Session

Responsive Classroom®

Below are the directions for gathering ideas from students on topics of interest and importance to them related to the Advisory Meeting with the purpose of Build Student-to-Student Affiliation.

1. **Conduct a brainstorming session by organizing your students in small groups of 3 or 4 and assign the following roles and responsibilities:**

   • **Recorder 1:** Responsible for recording ideas that are the same. Give this student the My Ideas and Same Ideas brainstorm sheets.

   • **Recorder 2:** Responsible for recording ideas that are different. Give this student the My Ideas and Ideas That Are Different brainstorm sheets.

   • **Recorder 3:** Responsible for recording ideas in rank order 1 to 5. Give this student the My Ideas brainstorm sheet and Our Top 5 Ideas ranking sheet.

   • **Presenter:** Responsible for reporting out the group's ideas. Give this student the My Ideas brainstorm sheet. This student will use the same, different, and ranking sheets to share the group's ideas with the whole class.

2. **Give students the background information:**

   One day a week, for the next four weeks, we will use our Advisory meeting time for you to share your ideas about topics that are important to you and that you think are important to other ___ graders. In order to do this, I will give you a big category and tell you what the category means. Then you will think of ideas related to that topic that are important to you and other ___ graders. These topics will be things that we can do or discuss in school.

   I will send your ideas to an organization called Responsive Classroom and they will include some of those ideas in a book for teachers so that teachers can conduct Advisory meetings using topics that are important to other ___ graders like you.

   Teachers across the United States and in other parts of the world use Responsive Classroom books, so it is important that you give real thought to the ideas you share.

   Our first category is Build Student-to-Student Affiliation. This category is important because as a middle schooler and a young adolescent you are at a stage in your life where you are taking responsibility and ownership for forming new friendships, making connections, and finding associations through your interests, meeting new people, or being part of a team or other extracurricular group. This may be different in that prior to middle school your friendships, connections, and associations may have been formed more because of who was in your class or who lived near you or were friends with your family than choices you are making now on your own.

   Group A | Week 1   **Directions for Gathering Student Ideas
                                                                on Build Student-to-Student Affiliation**

3. Give instructions for student tasks:

Think of the category of Build Student-to-Student Affiliation as being related to all the things that are important to you when it comes to forming and keeping friendships, making new and positive connections with others, and being associated with groups or teams.

1. Your first task is to use the My Ideas brainstorm sheet to write a list of topics that are important to you as a ___ grader and that you think would be important to other ___ graders like you, related to the category of Build Student-to-Student Affiliation. You will have 3 minutes to do this task.

2. After you finish your own list, your second task is to take turns sharing your ideas. After you've shared them, Recorder One will write the ideas that you have that are the same on the Same Ideas brainstorm sheet. Recorder Two will write the ideas that are different on the Ideas That Are Different brainstorm sheet. You will have 6 minutes for this task.

3. After you have completed your Same/Different sheets, your third task is to come to agreement on what would be the top 5 ideas for your group. Recorder Three will write your top 5 ideas. You will have 4 minutes to do this task.

4. Your final task will be for the Presenter to share your top 5 ideas with the whole class.

5. I will give you a 1-minute reminder and then remind you of your next task when it is time to stop doing one task and start another. Do you have any questions? (Take and answer questions or provide clarity on the directions.)

6. You may begin brainstorming topics that are important to you and that you think are important to other ___ graders like you.

4. Collect the Same Ideas, Ideas That Are Different, and Top 5 Ideas sheets from the students and enter each group's ideas into the survey.

If you have questions, email them to programs@responsiveclassroom.org

Group A | Week 1

**Directions for Gathering Student Ideas
on Build Student-to-Student Affiliation**

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Appendix B:
Student Brainstorming Sheets

MY IDEA

👍 **Same ideas** 👍

IDEAS THAT ARE DIFFERENT

OUR TOP **5** IDEAS

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____