Advisory: Project North Star[1]

Growth Opportunity. A 2020 Bellwether Education Partners study of Making Waves Academy found that our Advisory program is "spotty." Improving the quality and consistency of our Advisory programming could be a key opportunity to improve student success in college and beyond.

Innovation Intent and Vision. "Project North Star" is a three-year initiative to optimize the Advisory structure for our school.

- The **innovation intent** of Project North Star is to optimize the Advisory structure at Making Waves Academy to build community, provide students with a safe environment, and to form the basis of a primary person model wherein all students have a trusted adult invested in their success. Additionally, the Advisory structure can potentially serve as an effective vehicle for furthering the depth of service provided by our College and Alumni Program (CAP), cited by Bellwether as being "perhaps the highest touch college success model in the country." Lastly, we will utilize the 2018 Springpoint report on Designing Advisory Systems[2] as inspiration for the day-to-day experience of Advisory at Making Waves Academy.
- The **vision** of Project North Star is to produce two deliverables: 1) a document that captures the practices and competencies that represent an exemplary Advisory experience for Wave-Makers, which, at the end of this three-year process, can serve as a program evaluation tool; and 2) a scope and sequence, grounded in the exemplary practices and competencies for Advisory, consisted of diverse curricula and other resources.

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[1] In a 2020 Bellwether Education Partners report, providing support in identifying a "north star" that recognizes a range of post-secondary pathways and aligned supports is an emerging best practice and innovation among K-12 systems and schools innovating in college access and success and third-party organizations focused on college access and success. In feedback received from an Advisor at Making Waves Academy, it was expressed that our program is needing to define our "north star." (See "initial feedback from students and an advisor, page 10).

[2] "Designing Advisory Systems: Innovative Approaches from High Schools." Springpoint, 2018. See pre-reading.

Table 1. Project North Star Timeline. Project North Star incrementally paces our optimization of the Advisory structure over a three-year period.

	AY 2019-20	Project North Star Timeline and Priorities		
		AY 2020-21	AY 2021-22	AY 2022-23
Priorities	Design project plan and collect feedback	Gather information on the current advisory (US) structure and identify themes	Based on information gathered, identify growth opportunities and build innovations	Introduce and embed innovations within existing practices in Advisory
		Nurture partnership with teacher leaders	Nurture partnership between teacher leaders and CAP	Gather information on innovations, gain insights, and adapt the strategy
			Deliverable 1: Practices and competencies for an exemplary Advisory experience	Deliverable 2: Scope and sequence

Continued.

Table 2. Best Practices for College Access and Success. As a starting point for compiling practices and competencies for an exemplary Advisory experience, we will use a college access and success framework from Savitz-Romer and Boufard. This framework will be used as the basis for our program evaluation tool for Advisory.

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Best Practices for College Access and Success[3]	
Envisioning | Forming an identity that includes college-going	
● Make the unconscious conscious -- help youth validate all dimensions of their identities.	
● Lead discussions about whether and why youth believe that "people like me" can and do go to college.	
● Identify exploratory opportunities that allow youth to truly experience the role of a college-goer.	
● Review program or school policies that might undermine identity exploration.	
● Include activities that allow youth to build strong ties to and feel proud of the group with which they identify.	
Believing | Seeing college as possible and probable	
● Create opportunities for youth to assess their assets.	
● Provide opportunities for youth to build skills and then reflect on those skills.	
● Assist youth in transferring self-efficacy from one domain to another.	
● Set the stage for balanced goal setting.	
● Utilize tools that promote self-appraisal.	
● Be mindful of approaches that undermine the development of self-efficacy.	
Aiming | Setting goals that set up success	
● When presenting the benefits of college, strike a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.	

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[3] From *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success* by Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne M. Boufard, Harvard Education Press, 2012

● Build on youths' interests and passions to tap into intrinsic motivation for college.	
● Help young people internalize the benefits of extrinsic rewards and performance goals.	
● Emphasize mastery and learning for academic activities rather than just the end goal.	
● Stress the value of effort and de-emphasize the role of innate ability in determining success.	
● Help youth find and develop interests and passions.	
Organizing | Realizing college dreams through self-regulation	
● Teach regulatory skills.	
● Provide strategies to help youth minimize distractions.	
● Help youth keep their eyes on the prize while also finding short-term benefits and interests in the college-going process.	
● Teach youth to become adept at developing alternative plans or multiple pathways.	
● Help youth identify potential barriers and obstacles and develop strategies for overcoming them.	
● Teach self-regulatory skills in academic courses and help students transfer them to college-going.	
● Encourage youth development programs and employers to emphasize self-regulatory skills.	
Connecting | Marshalling the support of peers	
● Ask youth about their friends' aspirations and plans.	
● Create structures for peer-oriented and peer-directed college planning.	
● Facilitate peer study groups and group projects.	
● Include activities that capitalize on specific cultural identities that support college-going.	

● Create opportunities to build networks among youth bound for the same colleges or types of programs.	
● Ensure that programs based on an intentional cohort model include explicit programming to leverage peer resources.	
Connecting | Marshalling the support of families	
● Don't be color blind or culture blind.	
● Commit to ongoing, accessible communication.	
● Invite families to be involved in college planning events.	
● Meet families where they are.	
● Create opportunities for families to connect with one another, either in groups or one-on-one.	
● Facilitate family-youth discussions about college.	
● Create opportunities for youth and families to work together.	

Potential design inspiration for optimizing Advisory

- Designing Advisory Systems: Innovative Approaches from High Schools, from Springpoint
An intentionally designed advisory structure builds community, provides students with a safe environment, and forms the basis of a primary person model wherein all students have a trusted adult invested in their success.

- Project Wayfinder
Step into life with purpose. We imagine a world where adolescent education is designed for all students to develop lives of meaning and purpose. Project Wayfinder partners with educators to design innovative learning experiences that foster meaningful relationships and guide students to navigate their lives with purpose. Since launching from Stanford University's d.school in 2015, Wayfinder's Purpose Learning toolkits and trainings have journeyed to over 15,000 students, 1000 teachers, 200 schools across 25 U.S. states and 18 countries.

- 6to16, University of Chicago Urban Education Institute
6to16 consists of a college-readiness curriculum, and a set of online learning experiences that give students the beliefs, knowledge, skills, and support to successfully complete high school and college. 6to16 begins in the sixth grade and provides students the support to continue through middle school, high school, and the four years of college (16th grade).

- Ask Big Questions
Can we change the world through better conversation? We believe we can. We hear it all the time: the idea that people are struggling to talk and listen to each other. But what if we could shift from debates to conversations that help us connect? College is the perfect place to start, to bring the energy of students to a new kind of conversation about life's Big Questions. No matter our background or views, we need opportunities to see and hear each other more deeply. When we share our stories and listen to others, we find connections and discover new perspectives about ourselves, each other and the world.

Initial feedback gathered from students and an advisor

In March 2020, students and advisors were asked to provide some insights regarding their experiences in Advisory. Specifically, they were asked to comment on the following prompts: 2-3 sentences to describe what's happening in your advisory; the strongest positive interactions that occur in advisory; the strongest negative interactions that occur in advisory; possible innovations to reduce the negative interactions. Below are the responses from four students and one advisor. We will be seeking to engage more people in year one of Project North Star.

Student 1

In my advisory, everything becomes really relaxed and everyone calms down for a break. The most positive experience I had for the class is the peer work I give with my classmates in advisory. At most, the strongest negative interactions in the class is bickering and joking across the room when someone gets heated up, which of course [my advisor] breaks it down. One solution I thought up with would be to put 10-15 minute reading period and the rest for break.

When asked to go into further detail about "the peer work," the student responded:

The meaning for "the peer work I give" with my classmates would be our computer studies in math and we would figure out a problem together. We would also quiz each other in upcoming tests.

Student 2

The strongest positive interaction, I think is when [my advisor] actually cares about us and tries to help us in anyway she can. The strongest negative action is that a lot of the time our advisory is doing other things and sometimes we don't pay attention to her. I don't know any solutions besides time because we are getting better at it.

Student 3

In my advisory we usually have time to do our work or just talk. It depends if the teachers want the classroom to be quiet or not. We really don't do anything in our advisory regarding activities. One of the positive interactions in our advisory is that everyone does their own thing and try not to distract. However, some kids like to distract others and make the class rowdy. Some things that we can improve is to create social activities that will build a bond in favor of the advisory.

Student 4

Currently nothing is happening in our advisory. We only have things to do when the CCC has things planned for us. We no longer do anything as a whole like the talking cards or even playing uno.

I think that the strongest [positive interactions we have in advisory] is when we all come together and enjoy games or fun activities which can be a kickball game or a field trip.

When asked to describe the strongest negative interactions that occur in advisory, the student responded:

Sadly, having [our advisor] leave [mid-year] and it feels as if there isn't really a main person there for us and it doesn't feel like we are united.

When asked to describe possible innovations to solve for the strongest negative interactions, the student responded:

We should do activities together once in a while even if it is watching a movie or maybe the talking circle or even a kickball competition between advisories.

<div align="center">Advisor 1</div>

This year (Junior year), I am trying to implement a couple programs during our Advisory time:

1. Most of my students have agreed that their SAT scores are not what they want them to be and are interested (sometimes they are even motivated!), so we have agreed that the first 15 min. of Advisory on Mon. and Tues. are dedicated Khan Academy SAT prep time. They can do more time if they like, but as long as we don't have any other programming, that is the "expectation". In reality, I would say about half of my students adhere to this regularly.
2. Summer programming search. After AFCs this Spring, we agreed that using some Advisory time to search for, apply to, and research summer programs would be another great use of our time. So after our SAT prep time, students are encouraged to look into summer programs.

I have found that having some routine that involves some "goals" that the students find valuable is extremely helpful in terms of climate and productivity in Advisory. Students who are not participating in SAT prep or summer searching are usually working on school work or pretending they are doing something productive while hiding the fact that they are on their phone (#radicalcandor). These programs are only around 50% successful, but that is an improvement, in my eyes, from when we had a more volatile schedule where they didn't know what to expect and almost always reacted negatively to whatever I had for them to do.

Strongest positive interactions:

As students spend time in my Advisory (talking years here), they begin to open up with more personal and honest aspects of their lives. I remember one of my toughest students from my first advisory finally sharing (after years of passing) in a circle that he wanted to set a good example for his younger brother to follow and that he felt like he had a lot of work to do on that front moving forward. These interactions tend to happen more in one on one settings than in the Advisory group. I think some

students find it tough to share in the group setting because of past conflicts with people or associations. It's hard for them not to hold on to the past and know where they (or others) are on issues that they've never openly addressed. This is high school, there are grudges, there are social issues, there isn't much talking about them or moving on from them… I think that when we do circles and ask kids to share openly without the tools to address social challenges with others, we put them in difficult positions that they just aren't ready for, and then, when they don't participate, we (I) get frustrated that our plan we worked so hard on isn't working because students aren't participating. If we want them to be vulnerable, we need to create a real safe environment, and Advisory just has not been that for every kid. Oh, sorry, this was the positive… Despite my tangent there, kids sometimes do share things that are affecting them personally, they have someone at school who gives them unconditional love, they know that if they mess up, I'll give them another shot (unlimited shots…), and I think that's important for them. What we do in Advisory isn't as important as just being there for them and accepting them when they screw up (for the millionth time…).

I think the strongest negative was covered in my last point.

We force students into an uncomfortable situation beyond their acceptable level early on. They often come from our middle school with a serious distrust of teachers and staff. They expect punishment for "bad" behavior, rather than compassion (which we give them in the US, but they often take a long time to unlearn the defensive reactions they have built up). This is a deep valley to climb out of for many of them, and then we jump right in and demand that they be vulnerable. We have to read the room better, show them that we are here for them even when they make poor choices, that they are valuable, and so on. Advisory is just another thing they have to do. It would be better if it was something that could be whatever they needed it to be. We can nudge them toward good choices, but there's no point in forcing them to do things (even if they might be good for them) that they aren't ready to take on. I think all the negative interactions I've had with my Advisees have stemmed from me telling them they have to do something when they feel that they have something more important to do. I think this was best summed up by Tauji Louisville when we had our senior sendoff with them. She told me that (mind you this was after she spent almost all of her junior year in the office during advisory because she couldn't stand to be around me) I "finally learned to just let her" do what she needed. Basically, she said that I finally learned how to get out of her way.

Innovations:

1. Decide what Advisory's goals are. Pick one "North Star" goal to guide us, then pick a goal or two per year. Keep it simple. Make them relevant to students (SAT scores, Summer programs, College apps, homework, etc.), and roll them out when they are relevant to students (e.g. SAT prep can be a tough sell to freshmen, but they get homework!).
2. Let Advisory (at least at first) be a space for the kids to do what they need (even if that is homework!). They may not have reliable help at home and look, they have a teacher right in the room with them (or other students who might be able to help!). Then we can support them one on one if/when they need it. We can check in, they can relax/socialize/support each other with school work or even emotionally. Let them see that we care about them and want the best for

them. Then we can move on to bigger things when we establish a relationship. Teachers can decide how this looks, quite time, social time, maybe a mix of both, games, activities, etc.

3. Work on turnover. The best part of Advisory is that you can be someone that gives your kids unconditional love/unlimited chances to be their best. This takes years to develop, we need to be better at keeping good people around.

4. Make Advisory smaller. 20+ is too many to be truly effective and build a deep relationship with them all, even over 4 years. We have so many adults here on campus, use them! To this point, I know that we need to have a credentialed "teacher of record" for each class so some adults "can't" be advisors. I disagree. How do we do lunch, assemblies, field trips? We can get creative. We have open learning spaces, we can combine Advisory with lunch time. I think that we can make this work if we think about it, especially with the spaces in our new buildings. This is where adult to student ratio really matters. Let us get to know our kids, and let them get to know us.

   a. On this topic, I think that it would be extremely healthy for our community to have those who make decisions around what we do in/what the goals of Advisory [are] be Advisors for 4 years. I think that then solutions/adjustments will become more clear. If I may be so bold, I challenge MWA leadership to all adopt Advisory as part of their job.

5. Avoid putting teachers in positions where we feel like we have to force our students to comply with activities they are not comfortable with/ready for. I spoke on this at length already, but basically, if we set our goals, we can sell the kids on the goals and make class relevant to them so that they opt in to the activities we really want them to participate in.

6. If we don't have an ASM, no (or less) Friday Advisory. Less is more with Advisory. It should be a time the students look forward to (even if that is because it is a break from the rigor/stress of their day). If we don't have an ASM on a Friday, add 10 min. back to every class! Or have Advisory be a short 15-20 min. check in, then add the rest of the time back to their classes! Forcing kids into community circles/adding another hour of planning is a recipe for conflict. If the students are stressed about work they have to do (or anything really), they will resent me for making them sit and listen to others, if the students aren't following the brilliant plan I spent extra time on so that we can all connect and grow together, I will resent them. Bottom line, Friday Advisory time: short check in, or none at all. Give the time back to their classes.