

Designing Advisory Systems

Innovative Approaches From High Schools



ABOUT US

[Springpoint](#) is a national nonprofit that partners with districts, charters, and networks to design and launch innovative high schools that meet the needs of all students, preparing them for college and career success. We provide school design and planning workshops, implementation supports, tools and resources, customized coaching, and learning experiences that help educators do school differently.

This set of case studies is part of our effort to drive important conversations about student-centered school model design. We have learned a lot in our work with partners over the last six years. Sharing our own learnings and the best practices that we have seen and sourced from the field, is core to our mission to enable all students, regardless of environment or background, to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. We hope this resource is useful to practitioners, school leaders, families, and communities working to reimagine the experience of school through the lens of advisory.

What is advisory?

Advisory. CORE.

Crew. Advising Group.

It may go by different names but what is commonly known as advisory can be a critical element of a school model.

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.

These case studies feature five forward-thinking high schools that recognize the importance of advisory as a vehicle for relationship building and academic success. Each school has a unique approach to advisory that is appropriate to its context and student population. At the same time, they all share some common goals and core elements, including a commitment to protect the time set aside for advisory, an intentional approach to iteration, and a clear focus on creating connections between:

- ⊗ **students and their school** to emphasize inclusion and belonging
- ⊗ **students and their learning** to empower student ownership of learning and create space for academic supports
- ⊗ **students and their future** to help them build a viable postsecondary plan
- ⊗ **students and adults** to ensure every student has someone they can count on in order to access the support they need
- ⊗ **students and their community** to embed learning in a wider context
- ⊗ **students and their peers** to engender a positive school culture and learning environment

At Springpoint, we have seen the power of advisory when it is held as a sacred and important space that makes students feel safe, seen, and valued. We support our partners in school design, which has included helping them develop advisory structures that allow them to advance toward the ambitious goals of their innovative school models. We also regularly visit high schools across the country, often bringing our partners so they can learn from innovative practices nationally. (You can read more about

innovative school models we recommend visiting in our latest [schools to visit guide](#).) Through dozens of conversations with school leaders, teachers, students, and community members, we have experienced a range of innovative and robust advisory models that provide strong supports for students and facilitate the implementation of student-centered school models.

A key stakeholder from each school—a teacher, leader, support staff, or student—wrote about their school’s approach to advisory in an effort to support others in the field who are crafting or reexamining advisory programs. We recognize and celebrate these five schools, where intentionally designed structures are married to thoughtful planning and training—of both adults and students—to ensure quality execution and create meaningful impact.

We hope these advisory profiles—and the artifacts and resources each school shares in their respective articles—can drive a conversation about the importance of positive youth development and student-centered school design, two of the necessary elements that underpin the important work that goes into devising and crafting a strong advisory program.

- ⊗ For more about how positive youth development acts as the foundation of all strong school design work, please see our publication: [How Students Thrive: Positive Youth Development in Practice](#). Also refer to our [landmark design guide](#) if you are interested in how advisory might fit into a larger school design process.

Photo Credit: Alexis Acosta



Advisory at Urban Assembly Maker Academy

By Amanda Delaney

*founding student and recent graduate
of Urban Assembly Maker Academy*



If you enter a classroom at the Urban Assembly Maker Academy (UA Maker) around 2pm some days, you will see each student doing something different. Students might be speaking to their advisor about recent experiences in a class, or collaborating on group projects, or tackling design challenges with teachers and friends. This is advisory, a dynamic space that serves and supports every student in different ways.

Each advisory is comprised of about 10-15 students in the same grade who have one advisor for 9th and 10th grade and another advisor for 11th and 12th grade. In my final year at the school, my senior advisory met three times a week for one hour. Each of us also gets to meet one-on-one with our advisor to review grades, talk about future plans, and discuss things we are concerned about. Our advisor helps us create plans of action, which might include emailing a teacher to ask for a meeting, asking for extra credit to boost a grade, researching college opportunities, or reaching out to an employer to apply for a job that provides real world experience.

UA Maker was founded by Luke Bauer in 2014 as part of the first cohort of the [Opportunity by Design](#) initiative supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York. Luke worked with Springpoint to develop the school model, which is mastery-based and focuses on design thinking and innovation. One important aspect of the model is a robust advisory program, designed to help build student-teacher relationships. Back when Luke was a student, he had close relationships with adults and fellow students at his school, which he believes enabled his success as a student and a graduate.

Designing a brand new high school was an exciting challenge and he knew that he wanted his students to have a similar opportunity to form strong relationships with teachers. And that is exactly what students are experiencing. “The relationships we’ve developed make coming to school and doing work a lot easier for me,” said Cheyenne, a fellow senior. “It also just makes me really proud of our school.”

One of the many ways we have built these relationships in advisory is through design challenges, which are team-based activities that gives groups of students an objective with heavy constraints. For example, I have worked with others to build the largest tower from straws and tape, using our non-dominant hands. Design challenges force me to communicate with my peers and teachers and helps create a well-balanced system of learning, feedback, and collaboration.

I spoke with Nina Dibner, the founder and executive director of [PowerTools](#), an organization that supports schools in creating systems, environments, and experiences for students. She helped bring UA Maker’s advisory structure to life and introduced Luke to design challenges.

We discussed how relationships in school can help students. “When young people establish a sense of belonging and when they develop a long-term and caring relationship with an adult as well as a caring peer group, they do better academically,” explains Nina. “A sense of belonging is very important for all human beings and its good for our brain to have a sense of comfort and relaxed alertness when we feel we have a home, especially in a school setting.”

Design challenges and similar activities have helped me create bonds with my school community, which in turn contribute to my development as an active student. In previous schools, I felt like I did not have relationships with teachers and, because of this, school became an intimidating place where I was unable to be the best version of myself. I kept my head down and I was afraid to take certain steps toward success. But I now speak up and I am aware of the proper ways to reach out and take charge. I have leadership roles, like student body president for three years and, when I am not achieving my full potential, the adults in my school show concern and push me to be more accountable, re-evaluate, and make plans to get back on my feet. Advisory has made me a better, more involved, and organized student.

According to the Australian-based [Society for Evidence Based Teaching](#), when students establish tight bonds with their teachers, they are more likely to take risks, feel positively about school, and ask for help when they need it. This can result in students performing better academically and socially. [Research also suggests](#) that strong relationships with adults while in high school “increases the likelihood of graduation



Photo Credit: Alexis Acosta

“When I am not achieving my full potential, the adults in my school show concern and push me to be more accountable, re-evaluate, and make plans to get back on my feet.”

and postsecondary success” for students. Some of the reasons this could be effective ties back to comfort. If students feel more comfortable in their environment they are less likely to feel judged and more willing to push themselves.

But at UA Maker, advisory is not only about relationships. It is a time when students establish goals regarding their learning, their future, and their progress toward graduation. Advisory lets students take a step back, reflect on their current work in the classroom, and pinpoint exactly what steps will improve their current

grades and allow them to achieve more outside of school. Since we are a mastery-based school, students have opportunities to pull their grades up at any point during a unit. In addition to advisory, we have support systems such as study hall and AP class support, which allow students to improve by working with teachers on specific content.

Advisory at UA Maker is different than other support classes because it lets students develop habits that make them more successful, like establishing goals and working on problem-solving skills to better understand their grades and check in with teachers when needed. I have benefitted from the routine of reviewing my grades, especially before parent-teacher conferences or before the end of a marking period. I can focus on specific grades I want to change by sitting down with my advisor to organize a plan that addresses how to reach out to my teachers for support. This helps me understand what I should be working on and gives me assignments to bring to study hall and AP class support so I am using my time wisely. My advisor constantly checks in with me to make sure I am following the plan we created together. The simple act of creating a plan or a goal pushes me to complete my work. I create goals now in my everyday life because of how successful it has made me feel.

Advisory does not just work to establish short term goals, it helps students plan their future. It is where I started thinking about my future college and career goals and where I began exploring my options. A lot of students can say they want to be a performer or a teacher but might never get the opportunity to experience those fields until their second year of college. In my freshman year of advisory, we planned workplace visits, learned about joining city clubs,

and made connections that lead to great experiences. For me, I performed at the Intrepid Air and Space Museum with a choir group, traveled to Costa Rica to study the environment through a Girl Scout Leadership group, and established connections that led to an internship at Springpoint, where I get to feature the great work happening at my school! These experiences have exposed me to things I want to do in life.

In advisory, and with the support of my former advisor and current college counselor, Ivy Anderson, I have continued collecting experiences and researching college options. As a college preparation space, advisory has allowed me to understand the FAFSA, research my best college-fit, set up trips to visit colleges, and create a resume and draft essays for applications. Ivy explained the rationale, saying, “Without advisory, and without the space of advisory to do college and career work, I would have had a lot harder of a time managing all 100 kids’ college process.” Advisory, put me on the path to Hunter College, where I will be a freshman in fall 2018. I am grateful for the consistent support in this process, which can often be confusing for both students and parents.

I am fortunate to have had such supportive adults and peers throughout high school. As Nina from PowerTools said, “Advisory is a great vehicle to help young people feel that they belong and that they’re seen and respected by adults, and that they have an advocate, someone who can help them navigate adolescence.” My experiences in advisory have molded me into a better student and person. I have opened up and I know how to meet new people, improve my grades, and reach out to my teachers. Most importantly, I have a plan for the next four years of my life. And I am so grateful for all of it.



URBAN ASSEMBLY MAKER ACADEMY, within [The Urban Assembly Network](#), believes the world needs problem solvers who can find and solve challenges to create positive change. UA Maker aims to empower students not only to be successful, adaptive citizens of the future, but also to create that future through design thinking and innovation. Grades at UA Maker provide precise, actionable feedback about students' ability to master the design thinking process, content knowledge and the skills they need to be truly college and career ready. The school's robust partnership network connects students to unique, real-world opportunities that help them develop 21st century workplace skills. The UA Maker community prioritizes the core values of curiosity, empathy, risk taking, self-awareness, and resilience. The school launched as part of the Opportunity by Design initiative, funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York and supported in their model design work by Springpoint. To learn more about Urban Assembly Maker Academy, visit [their website](#).

AMANDA DELANEY is a recent graduate of Urban Assembly Maker Academy, where she earned an advanced Regents diploma and Career-Technical Education distinctions. As a founding student, Amanda acted as a key voice in the school's design and iteration process. Amanda also served as student council president and a student representative, traveling across the city and the country to talk about her experience in a student-centered, innovative school. She is also a Girl Scout leader and a tutor. She attends Hunter College as of fall 2018.



Crew at Casco Bay High School



By Derek Pierce

*Founding Principal at
Casco Bay High School*

In the journey of life, we are all crew. This motto guides our approach to advisory, called Crew, here at Casco Bay High School (CBHS) outside of Portland, Maine. Crew focuses on relationship building as a way to help students succeed academically and plan their futures upon graduation.

Crew is a foundational aspect of our high school model. Each Crew consists of about 14-15 students who loop with the same advisor for grades 9 and 10. Students get a different advisor for grades 11 and 12. This approach lets advisors really get to know students and allows them to personalize their supports. Crew is a required, credit-bearing class that typically meets for 30 minutes every day. In order to earn credit, a student must meet all Crew standards, which are listed in our [Student and Family Handbook](#).

We do our best to ensure that, through Crew, students have an opportunity to connect with new people they might not otherwise interact with as a way to promote empathy and caring. We attempt to have an even mix of genders and previous academic achievement, for example. According to recent CBHS graduate, Nori Hilton, “Crew prepares students for college because it forces one to make connections with unlikely peers. I think one of the most important and most useful skills I learned...is how to engage with and tolerate people who are different from oneself. In Crew we could disagree, argue, bicker but in the end, we had a mutual respect for the opinions of our ‘crewbies’. We learned to disagree and then still coexist.”

A major part of Crew is Quests, which students in all grade levels experience. These are trips outside of school that serve as authentic bonding time, which accelerates our relationship building efforts and fosters trust. Quests also set the stage for each student to begin exploring their grade’s essential question, which they will do all year through Crew curriculum and activities. In 9th grade, students explore the key question of “Who am I?”; in 10th grade, they focus on “How am I doing?”; and in 11th and 12th grade, students begin to design their future by asking “What are my plans for the future?”

In 9th grade, Crew focuses on relationship building—students get to know their peers, their teachers, and themselves. Learning how to set goals and creating a personal learning profile sets students up for academic and personal success. Advisors provide attentive supports with both informal check-ins and planned meetings. The year is punctuated by a “Freshmen Finale,” where students report on what they learned about themselves and how they can be successful in high school.

In 10th grade students kick off the year by reconnecting with crewmates. They start their college and career exploration with PSAT preparation, college visits, and internship research. Advisors work closely with students throughout the year to ensure they are on pace toward graduation. Students reflect on their progress during an overnight trip called “Sophomore Solo” and through their Sophomore Passage, a 10- to 15-minute public presentation that addresses the overarching questions of Crew and gives students the opportunity to demonstrate a talent or passion.

In 11th grade, students focus on the future planning work that will guide the rest of their Crew career. Experiences like internships and college exploration culminate in concrete postsecondary plans. During their 12th grade year, students receive support and guidance, checking in with advisors to make sure they will graduate and are well positioned to execute their postsecondary plans.

Though the scope and sequence of Crew follows a grade-level structure, we recognize the importance of fostering community across grades. “Buddy crews” collaborate on Quests and projects to foster mixed-age connections that let younger students learn from older students, and give advisors a thought partner.

Crew has evolved over the years. Previously, we had four days of Crew but added a fifth day to ensure that relationships do not get taken for granted. We have adjusted elements like time of day, length, location, and human capital structure. One person used to oversee all things Crew, but we restructured to create more coordination across grades and teams. The balance between

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prescription and freedom for Crew leaders is an ongoing conversation and we are constantly tweaking Crew to make it more sustainable and enriching.

Our approach to Crew is deeply intentional with regard to both timing and content. On Monday, Crew falls after first block so we catch students early in the week but not so early that potential tardiness disrupts our time together. We conduct activities to help get our heads around the week, discuss upcoming items, and take the socio-emotional temperature of students. On other days, we have dedicated work time, which includes college planning, academic coaching, internship exploration, and more. Other days focus on bonding activities, like Wednesday’s “Crew lunch,” a good time for informal one-on-one meetings. Recently, my Crew went for a walk and I checked in individually with nearly every student.

Advisors are responsible for all elements of their crew members’ success. One part of this is academic advising. Advisors help feel out a good balance for each student, which might mean nudging a student who doesn’t feel ready for a new challenge or helping a student navigate obstacles in a certain class. If a student is struggling, a team—led by that student’s advisor—will develop a plan.

The advisor is responsible for following up and providing support. Advisors also play the role of “graduation Sherpa,” supporting students in college discovery, applications, decision making, and all the details in between. Our talented guidance counselors provide further expertise and support, but the buck stops with a student’s advisor.

The advisor role is taken seriously at our school—advisor competencies are a major part of hiring decisions and professional development work. A support group helps new teachers understand Crew at a high level and exposes them to strategies, implementation ideas, and tools. Grade-level Crew teams set learning targets and constantly tweak and refine the curriculum and design of the program. In hour-long monthly meetings—and periodically over the summer—they plan, collaborate, and rely on each other for advice and input. Teams are led by a Crew grade-team leader. I meet with these four leaders each month to plan and resolve issues.

We make sure every student has a voice in Crew. Circles are held periodically, giving each student 10-15 minutes to answer questions on aspects of their identity, their experiences, and their personal challenges. Crew is also the kernel of democracy at our school. Each Crew has a student representative who brings suggestions to a student cabinet. Every month students propose topics for “Courageous Conversations.” Topics range from free speech, to mental health, to the role of privilege in our lives. I work with staff and the student cabinet to pick an issue and train facilitators from each Crew. Facilitators adapt the topic to their particular Crew, develop action steps, and run the meetings.



“Advisors also play the role of ‘graduation Sherpa,’ supporting students in college discovery, applications, [and] decision making.”

Relationship building is the heart of Crew. It is not just a group of students and one adult that were assigned to touch base once in a while—it is a microcosm of our school, a place of safety and consistency. The culture of Crew is carefully cultivated and transparency is essential. No one asks what we are doing on any given day—they know, and they see the value.

Further, these relationships help students feel seen and valued. A recent graduate of my Crew, Brooks Miller, said that Crew “helped me as someone who struggled with depression actually get to school. If I didn’t show up to school, someone from Crew would notice and text me to make sure I was okay. It makes you feel wanted and a part of something, and that helped me get to school and want to be there.”



CASCO BAY HIGH SCHOOL (CBHS) is an expeditionary learning, mastery-based public high school in Portland, Maine. CBHS challenges and supports students to become college-ready through its 3Rs: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. The school's aim is for each student to "Get Smart to Do Good." Its instruction is driven by Learning Expeditions that result in quality work about genuine problems for a real audience. Learning Expeditions are long-term, in-depth studies of a single topic that explore compelling social justice questions, incorporate vital standards, require fieldwork, and culminate in an authentic project, product, or performance. CBHS partners with nonprofits in the community to facilitate these projects. Topics are driven by student interests with a strong emphasis on getting students out of the classroom and into the community. As part of their mastery framework, CBHS measures both performance on content knowledge, as well as each student's 'habits of work' skills,

which are the same across subjects and grade levels. To learn more about Casco Bay High School, visit [their website](#) and read about their mastery-based model in our publication, [Inside Mastery-based High Schools: Profiles and Conversations](#).

DEREK PIERCE is a visionary education leader. After earning a master's in education from Harvard, he taught for several years in Los Angeles and Maine, becoming principal of a school in Poland, Maine. He founded Casco Bay High School in Portland in 2005 and serves as the current leader of the school. As principal of Casco Bay High School, Derek has been named Maine's Principal of the Year, received a Silverberg Leadership Award, won a \$100,000 leadership award from the Nellie Mae Foundation, facilitated the success of hundreds of Casco Bay students, and inspired educators across the country with his leadership, commitment, and innovative approaches.



Advisory at The Young Women's Leadership School



By Christy Kingham
Instructional Coach

The first days of school can elicit groans from teachers and students alike. Not for lack of excitement or a love of learning, rather it's the often-bumpy transition into a fixed schedule and a new community that can seem daunting. At the end of the 2017 school year, a group of teachers and administrators from The Young Women's Leadership School (TYWLS) in Astoria, Queens met to plan a new advisory structure to assist with this transition and build our school community throughout the school year.

We wanted to kick off our structure with a whole-school community build. A teacher had the idea to dedicate the first few days of school to familiarizing students with our new structure. Our innovative staff jumped on this idea. We engaged in a lively discussion of what's possible, the room lighting up with excitement about spending the first days of school genuinely getting to know our students and welcoming them to the new school year.

This planning eventually led to [Advisory Camp](#) for which we developed an [advisor handbook](#) and an [onboarding approach](#) to support teachers and familiarize them with our advisory structure. It was a celebratory two days: advisors welcomed students to Advisory Camp and led them through team bonding activities and informational sessions to explain the new structures. The two days culminated in a parade around the school, with each advisory chanting their new name and a connection to what they had learned. For example, one team named themselves the "Big Little Dippers" and their chant included lines about supporting each other during the year,

guiding each other like the stars in the sky. The energy was anything but groan-inducing and—for the first time in our 11 years as a school—students were connected right away.

Our commitment to Advisory Camp was inspired by our commitment to advisory as a whole. TYWLS, where I serve as an Instructional Coach, works tirelessly to craft and maintain teacher-created systems. Our school is a Title I, public, all-girls school serving 6th through 12th grade. On average, 98% of our graduates are accepted to and attend college, and we have been a project and mastery-based school for the past seven years. Advisory has been an integral part of our structure and our success since our school opened, and it is a key part of our mission. We are supported by The Young Women's Leadership Network, with sister schools around New York City and the country.

As we've evolved over the years, we have iterated on advisory, experimenting with small group, large group, multi-grade, and single-grade groupings. As we added more programs and

opportunities for our students the past few years—like electives and clubs—we began to realize that we had increasingly large advisory groups due to less teacher availability and space. This structure deviated from our belief that every student should be in a small group advisory and that every teacher should serve as an advisor. We were feeling and seeing the disconnect with students and knew something had to change.

In order to revise our advisory model, we tapped some of the best problem-solvers we could find: our teachers. We started with our advisory mission (yes, even our advisory has a mission statement!):

The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria strengthens the mind, body and soul of our students by providing daily opportunities to build self-confidence. We encourage cooperative behavior through team-building exercises, and acquire life skills by developing meaningful peer and advisory relationships. An integral component of our advisory program is service to our in-school, local and global community. The end goal is to gain understanding, appreciation and to celebrate the diversity within our shared community. Our primary focus is to equip our students with the tools and experiences they will need to become educated and productive citizens, as future leaders of tomorrow.

After many whole-staff and small group discussions, TYWLS teachers settled on a decision. In order to serve all students through advisory, we would give up common-planning periods, meet with our advisories every other day, and cap advisory at 15 students. We also decided that each grade-level would have an overarching theme or essential question for the year. To develop the theme, grade-level advisory teams



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considered the largest social-emotional challenge that their students face and crafted that into a larger theme to unify the year. This was a robust planning phase that took place in the summer and resulted in themes such as “making healthy connections” in 7th grade, and “awareness of self and others” in 11th grade. With grade-level themes as our center, we created rotations whereby each day would have a different focus. Here is a sampling from the 11th grade:

**11th Grade Advisory Structure
2017 – 2018**

Theme: Awareness of Self and Others
→ [Calendar](#) Linked Here, Rotation Overview Below with links to each

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	Awareness of My Community	Awareness of the World	Awareness of Others	Awareness of Self	Awareness of Self
10 mins	Opening Ritual: Emotions Wheel Check-in	Opening Ritual: Emotions Wheel Check-in	Opening Ritual: Emotions Wheel Check-in	Opening Ritual: Emotions Wheel Check-in	Opening Ritual: Emotions Wheel Check-in
15 mins	Community Service Project Planning (Coaching Sessions)	Current Event Reading and Journal Response (Coaching Sessions)	Collaborative Problem Solving Circle (extended emotions wheel)	Meditation/ Mindfulness Exercise	College Readiness: Khan Academy SAT Prep Teacher checks progress during class (Coaching Sessions)
15 mins		Group Discussion	Team-Building Exercise and/or Social-Emotional Ted Talk/Podcast	Jump-rope Check-In/Goal Setting Portfolio Uploading	
5 mins	Announcements, Upcoming events, Business_check jumpro.pe for uniform and cell phone info	Announcements, Upcoming events, business_Announcements, Upcoming events, Business_check jumpro.pe for uniform and cell phone info	Announcements, Upcoming events, business_Announcements, Upcoming events, Business_check jumpro.pe for uniform and cell phone info	Announcements, Upcoming events, business_Announcements, Upcoming events, Business_check jumpro.pe for uniform and cell phone info	Announcements, Upcoming events, business_Announcements, Upcoming events, Business_check jumpro.pe for uniform and cell phone info

The center of our model is relationship building—every student has one adult supporting her, communicating with her parents, coaching her in academics, and intervening if an issue arises. Advisors closely coach students on their academics using our online grading system and students’ digital and physical work portfolios as “evidence” to ground discussions. When an advisor sits down with a student for academic coaching, the student logs in to her academic profile and the advisor guides the student to discuss specific areas of success and areas of growth.

As a mastery (competency) based school, all students in all subjects are assessed on the following 21st century skills at TYWLS: planning, collaboration, discerning, being precise, arguing, innovating, investigating, concluding, communicating, and creating. Advisors are trained before and during the school year to coach students on these competencies. A student might identify a specific outcome to work on—say the argue outcome, which involves, “formulating and defending an argument using multiple pieces of evidence.” The advisor then guides the student to set a manageable goal and follows up with her in the next coaching session to ensure she is on pace both toward that goal and, more broadly, toward bigger goals like graduation and postsecondary planning.

At the close of our first year of our advisory re-boot, it was clear that our new advisory structure successfully rebuilt our relationships with students and created a stronger school community. Students, too, have felt more of a connection to advisory this year. One 12th grader, Prabjot, shared that “Each day we began with a circle ritual and had a chance to share what we are thinking and feeling. We really felt like we had that one place we could go to no matter what we needed.” In an end of year survey, students overwhelmingly shared a positive response to both Advisory Camp and their advisory experience as a whole.

For teachers, we found success in our structure for oversight, settling on an advisory team comprised of one lead-advisor per grade and our administrative staff. This group meets once each month to discuss needs, events, and future planning. Additionally, each grade-level



“The center of our model is relationship-building—every student has one adult supporting her.”

advisory team meets once each week during professional development time to discuss student needs and plan for future advisory lessons.

But as a school committed to iteration, we know that school design is never totally done. We have already noticed issues with this new structure. For example, advisory sometimes can become a catch-all for other activities, creating less time for coaching and social-emotional support. As we work to revise our structure and curriculum for the next school year, this is at the top of our list. We are asking ourselves how to efficiently inform students about updates and make time for special events while maintaining the integrity of advisory.

Additionally, there was a big sister-little sister aspect of Advisory Camp that we did not continue throughout the school year. Many students gave feedback saying they wanted this aspect of advisory to return. In response, we have already planned for big sister-little sister “reunions” and activities starting in September. Longer term, we would like to find a way to reinstate common teacher planning periods, which will require bigger picture staffing and scheduling shifts.

As we dive into a summer of planning, our school community is enthusiastic to continue building upon our success with advisory. Everyone is dedicated to maintaining our small-group advisories as a way to ensure that each student is “seen” and that student learning and growth is embedded at the center of our work.



YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL OF ASTORIA (TYWLS of Astoria) is a single-sex New York City public school that was established to prepare low-income and minority women from diverse backgrounds for college and other postsecondary experiences. TYWLS of Astoria nurtures the intellectual curiosity and creativity of young women by supporting the "whole girl" in order to maximize academic achievement, social emotional well-being, and postsecondary success. It is a college bound initiative (CBI) school that serves middle and high school students. To learn more about The Young Women's Leadership School, visit [their website](#).

CHRISTY KINGHAM has been a middle and high school English teacher since 2004. She is currently at The Young Women's Leadership School in Astoria, Queens, as an Instructional Coach and Curriculum Developer in addition to teaching 11th Grade English and AP English. Christy spent her first seven years teaching in Bedford NY, at Fox Lane Middle School before moving her career to New York City. She graduated from Georgetown with a bachelor's degree in English Literature and Teachers' College with a master's degree in the Teaching of English. Since the summer of 2011, she has been a teacher leader with the New York City Writing Project. Christy spends her summers facilitating workshops for teachers of all disciplines and grade levels and also teaches graduate school courses for Drexel University's online master's program. Her online classroom can be found at www.christykingham.com and her school's site at www.tywls-astoria.org



Advising Group at Jefferson County Open School



By Jennifer Wisniewski
Walkabout Advisor & Teacher
with Mickey Walsh and Nils Aberg

The Jefferson County Open School (JCOS) is a pre-K through 12th grade public option school in Lakewood, CO. For nearly 50 years, JCOS has provided a viable, vibrant, and life-changing alternative to conventional schooling. Advising is at the center of the JCOS program and features multi-age groupings for all students. Advisors at the Open School share a guiding principle when it comes to building advising relationships with our students: no young person in our building will remain anonymous, and each and every person will have a minimum of one adult as their advocate.

At JCOS, students are supported by their advisor to take the personal, social, and intellectual risks necessary to discover the joy of lifelong learning. All students work closely with an advisor to develop a highly-personalized curriculum, which drives their individualized graduation plan. These two tailored anchors are the critical components of the school's Walkabout Program in grades 10 through 12.

Our high school model is designed so that students spend time in 9th grade preparing for our Walkabout Program, which requires more self-directed and student-driven engagement. Students new to the Walkabout Program spend the first two weeks of the program in what we call the "disorientation period." We help students unlearn the ideas they may have about conventional schooling so that they can become accustomed to the non-hierarchical way of relating to adults and their peers, an approach that underpins the JCOS model. We don't believe in the "authoritarian" teacher or ranking grade levels that students might have learned prior to JCOS.



Disorientation is student planned and led. Students are introduced to their Advising Group through an intense three-day wilderness preparation period consisting of group building and trust exercises to prepare for the pinnacle experience—the Wilderness Trip—which is led by two members of their new Advising Group and their new advisor. This trip orients new students to the Walkabout Program, creates connections with advisors and peers, and establishes trust within the group. The trip practices risk-taking

as a way to build students' confidence as they begin the Walkabout Program and helps them form relationships that are based on trust from the start, which carries through their time at JCOS.

Each Advising Group ranges in size from approximately 15 to 18 students and consists of students in the conventional 10th through 12th grades (although we steer away from labeling by grade level). Advising Groups meet three times a week or more for an hour and emphasize group building, planning, problem-solving, and supporting of individuals and schoolwide community endeavors. The makeup of Advising Groups is chosen at random, which creates a broader sense of community and facilitates connections outside of a student's normal social group. Advising Group teaches skills like engaging in conflict resolution, building healthy relationships, being a community member, and contributing to a group. Mickey Walsh, a 2018 graduate, discussed his relationship with advising, saying "by being an active member of your Advising [Group] and the greater community, you demonstrate that you can be trusted to access parts of the program that are increasingly student-centered."

An advisor's responsibilities are many. Beyond facilitating their Advising Group and providing one-to-one student support, advisors are responsible for teaching a minimum of five self-designed courses to be chosen by students, offering an average of two travel opportunities per year that are tied to curriculum, and participating in the democratic process of the school that emphasizes shared leadership. Since this multi-faceted advisor role is the most

important responsibility for all staff, we look for advisor competencies in all new hires and work to develop those skills in all staff. New staff are oriented through a year-long progressive education course taught by veteran advisors and school leaders from JCOS. It is designed to provide the necessary tools, strategies, and ideas for implementing a self-directed, progressive education model centered on advising.

Creating a sense of community is paramount within the Advising Group. Advisors help build a strong group such that students are able to learn important skills like how to resolve conflicts, how to garner resources and support, and how to contribute meaningfully to a group. We acknowledge that teacher training programs do not inherently train aspiring teachers to do this, so it is important for us to cultivate that in new advisors.

Advisors are student advocates and learning facilitators who assist students in setting and achieving key goals. The advising relationship is paramount in guiding students toward successful completion of all aspects of the

"By being an active member of your Advising [Group] and the greater community, you demonstrate that you can be trusted to access parts of the program that are increasingly student-centered."



“Trusting relationships allow advisors to provide deep and meaningful feedback and lets them push students just beyond comfort zones to take risks.”

program, including personalized learning projects that we call “Passages,” core curricular classes, and other mutually agreed upon personal, social, and intellectual pursuits. Advisors provide continuous feedback and supports as students progress through graduation expectations. Advisors meet individually with each student on a weekly basis (sometimes more often) to build the relationships necessary to guide students through their individualized program.

Trusting relationships allow advisors to provide deep and meaningful feedback and lets them push students just beyond comfort zones to take risks as they design their own personalized,

rigorous program. Nils Aberg, who came to JCOS from a comprehensive high school, spoke about his advisor: “Individual advising, and the relationship that a student crafts with their advisor, is incredibly valuable.” He continues, saying, “Quickly after arriving at the school, Jen, my advisor, was able to see and understand my goals and what I wanted to get out of my Open School career. Mostly through individual advising, we looked at what classes would best allow me to rediscover passions and connect with my peers. During my transition between schools, since Jen was the first staff member I met, I always had somebody to talk to.”

Because of advising, from the first day at JCOS, students find a home. Mickey Walsh describes it this way: “In my personal experience, advising constantly provided that safe space for me in my years at Open School. See, what makes advising special is that the people who are part of the group, and the advisor, actually care. It can be as simple as asking how someone’s weekend was or as elaborate as a two-day trip to view the total solar eclipse. Advising is one of the greatest support systems a student can have because every student is held accountable by their advisor and their Advising Group. So from an academic standpoint, you have 18 people making sure you’re going to class, willing to support you when you’re struggling, and encouraging you to do your best.”

Relationship building is valued across the school. When a student is struggling, an advisor will develop a plan alongside other members of that student’s support group. We have a weekly meeting called “kid talk” where students are brought up amongst staff to help problem solve

issues that have arisen in that student's life—whether academic or personal. It is a time where we can all get together to advise one another about how to proceed, inform the community about struggles a student is facing, and celebrate accomplishments of students. This is a valued time for staff that allows us to better know each student outside of our Advising Group on a deeper level.

Advising is also a time to ensure that students are planning their path upon graduation.

"Advising, and my advisor specifically, were not just central to my high school years but also to my postsecondary plans," said Mickey.

"Having an advisor means having someone who truly knows you and...can help you make a plan to achieve exactly what you want to achieve."

Advisors have several touchpoints throughout the year to support students in their college and career planning—from college research and visits, to job shadowing, and, most importantly, finding the passions that will propel them toward a fulfilling life trajectory.

At JCOS, we believe that mixed-age groupings help to build the community and drive student ownership. That's why mixed-age groupings can be found throughout every aspect of the program—from advising, to classes, and even on trips. But perhaps the most effective use of this philosophy is in an advising "Triad." Triads are a multi-age peer support group that serves as an internal mentoring group. It is comprised of three or more students, and creates a home base for students, where they can support and celebrate each other. Having a mix of ages and experiences allows younger students to learn from their older peers. There is also pay off for older students who model the Passage process and serve as mentors

and role models for younger students. Advisors place a lot of responsibility on the elder members of the Triad to educate their peers, provide leadership and mentorship, and plan their weekly meetings. Some advisors even have their graduating students create Triad groupings when new students arrive. Most Triads will stay together for their entire time, allowing for a continuity of relationship building and mentorship. Triads meet each week for an hour, usually independently or sometimes with their advisor.

A student's participation in an Advising Group and a Triad provides opportunities for leadership, mentorship, and community building. The supportive environment within these intentional structures gives each member a sense of purpose and belonging. All students have an advocate and feel seen and heard by their community. Nils Aberg describes it this way: "The most important aspect of advising in my opinion is the inability to be anonymous. Advising is a key part of tying the Open School community together because of this. By having individual advising and a Triad who meets frequently, it's impossible to go unnoticed. This helped me become my extroverted self much easier, ask for help if I didn't understand aspects of the program, and now help people who I can see need it. In advising, students are given the sense that everyone around them is willing to help and support them."

Advising is what allows us to do all other aspects of our program successfully. The relationships that develop as a result of this practice set students up to succeed interpersonally and academically. Advising is a central and deeply cherished practice throughout the program and school community.

JEFFERSON COUNTY OPEN SCHOOL

(JCOS) is a pre-K through 12th-grade school that uses multi-age groupings and provides a vibrant, viable alternative to conventional schooling. Students work closely with their advisor in the development of their personal curriculum and write narrative self-evaluations instead of receiving a grade from a teacher. These narrative evaluations form the basis of a student-written transcript that is created over a student's time at the school. With a constant focus on fostering strong, caring relationships between students and adults and among students, the school is centered on five primary values—curiosity, responsibility, courage, personal best, and respect. All students complete a “Walkabout” that includes six “Passages,” projects developed by each student that demonstrate how students can apply their skills to the real world. To learn more about Jefferson County Open School, [visit their website](#).

JENNIFER WISNIEWSKI is entering her 14th year at Jefferson County Open School. She is a Walkabout Advisor & teacher of the social sciences and language arts, with a social justice focus. She is passionate about the JCOS model, having student taught before joining the staff. She relishes student trips such as last year's wilderness trip, hurricane Harvey relief trip, borders trip to Tucson, AZ to study immigration, and canoe trip to the boundary waters. She is a self-proclaimed education nerd and avid traveler looking forward to upcoming student trips next year, including a hurricane relief trip to Puerto Rico, a canoe trip to trace the footsteps of Lewis & Clark, and a women's backpacking trip. She

earned her teaching degree at the University of Colorado Denver, and a master's in curriculum & instruction from University of Colorado Denver.

NILS ABERG is entering his graduation year at JCOS. This upcoming year for his Global Awareness Passage, he will be teaching a class about Guatemalan culture and how micro-credit loans can empower women in the region, while preparing and planning a two-week long trip to Guatemala for his class. Currently you can find him attempting to unicycle 14 Colorado fourteeners to raise money for local non-profits.

MICKEY WALSH graduated this past year and will be attending Carleton College in fall 2018. For Mickey's Global Awareness Passage, he studied the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, acting as a youth coach for Ultimate Peace, a non-profit that brings Muslim, Jewish, and Christian youth together through ultimate Frisbee to build mutual respect and friendship. After this life-changing experience in the Middle East, he hopes to continue working with youth in this capacity.



CORE at South Bronx Community Charter High School



By Cathleen Collazo

Youth Development Specialist

South Bronx Community Charter High School (SBC) is part of the EPIC High Schools network in New York City. The school was founded in 2016 to prepare students for success in college, career, community, and life. I serve as a learning coach and youth development specialist in restorative justice practices at SBC where our instructional model focuses on four key areas, including “CORE,” which is designed to build students’ social-emotional skills. CORE stands for Creativity, Opportunity, Risk, and Experience—and we work hard to weave all of these components into our students’ high school journey through a series of programs that span all four years.

While elements of CORE are similar to a traditional high school advisory, it is designed to be much more. CORE groups are comprised of two adults and up to 20 students who stay together throughout the year. Groups meet every morning for a full 50-minute class period and for a double block on Fridays. CORE is the basis of every student’s support system and a primary relationship-building mechanism. Curriculum is project-based and includes a strong focus on building student accountability as well as college and career exploration and preparation. CORE groups develop shared rituals, engage in service learning, and provide a safe environment where students can speak their minds and share their values. CORE creates community, enabling difficult discussions—about race, gender, and identity—that are key elements of the school’s culturally responsive approach.

SBC’s staffing model is key to our CORE structure. Throughout the school, we have two adults in

every classroom: a teacher and a learning coach. Learning coaches are tasked with supporting students toward social-emotional skill development, conducting one-on-one conferencing, and leading small group tutoring. They have expertise in youth development and work closely with teachers to provide support in academic classes as necessary. Learning coaches are the main facilitators of CORE, with teachers plugging into advisory in similar ways to how learning coaches plug into academic classes. These two groups of educators collaborate very closely on all aspects of their work since students bring similar strengths—and challenges—to all their classes, be it math, science, or CORE.

The two adults in each CORE group split the advising load of their group, meaning that each learning coach and each teacher is an advisor to 8-10 students from their CORE group. Advisors meet with each of their students every two weeks to check in on goals, progress, and CORE

SEL competencies. Advisors are in charge of monitoring the grades of their advisees. They are the first to refer students to after-school support, which is held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, with different subjects on certain days. After-school sessions allow students to receive direct support from their content teacher. Advisors document all meetings in a spreadsheet, noting progress or any issues. If an advisor ever feels that there is a situation they cannot or should not handle alone, there are mechanisms in place for support. Advisors may pull me in for support and guidance since I am the school's licensed mental health counselor. If we decide the situation is severe, we will contact outside resources or devise a deeper counseling plan with measurable steps and goals. Our leadership team also provides support as part of our school's commitment to restorative justice practices.

At SBC, we believe that student-led conferences allow students to take ownership of the learning process and can familiarize them with the level of accountability that will be expected in college and career. Advisors help students prepare for three student-led conferences each year, which take place in November, March, and June. Students use the time to explain grades and present skills and habits (called "attainments" at SBC). They talk about the attainments they have excelled in as well as those they are seeking to improve upon, and discuss an action plan to further their growth. The final student-led conference in June is called a "Gateway presentation," wherein students present to staff, fellow students, and their family, explaining why they should be promoted to the next grade. Advisors join each student-led conference, and help speak to their advisee's work and progress.

This also gives them a baseline upon which to personalize their supports or push students toward more challenging work, as appropriate.

CORE follows a four-year scope and sequence, which creates a contiguous learning experience for students. We see 9th grade as the year of exploration, where students learn about their postsecondary options, look at colleges, and begin to think about how their passions can manifest into opportunities. In 10th grade, we design exposure opportunities that take many forms—students research careers, connect with and shadow career mentors, participate in college tours, and engage in passion projects. Our college tour this year was a major success. We convened panels of college students, which really changed our students' perceptions of college—some of whom previously thought that college was not for them are now interested in the opportunities it can provide. Preparation will get more intensive in 11th and 12th grade, with internships, application and financial aid support, and decision-mapping.

"At SBC, we believe that student-led conferences allow students to take ownership of the learning process and can familiarize them with the level of accountability that will be expected in college and career."

Many of the key components of CORE revolve around social-emotional learning (SEL) skill-building, which we see as a critical aspect of college and career success. We organize this skill acquisition within our competency framework, which includes skills such as time management, collaboration, empathy, tolerance for diverse perspectives, and more. We also believe that SEL skills should be woven into cross-curricular learning experiences, but CORE is a dedicated time to focus on these skills so that they are not taken for granted. Learning coaches are in charge of helping students set SEL goals, with a focus on leveraging their strengths and building on areas of growth. According to 10th grader Katie Rodriguez, “My advisor and CORE have helped me build SEL competencies that I’ll need in college and career by getting us to set a goal for ourselves, and checking in to see whether or not we have [made] any progress [toward] that goal.” She went on, “your advisor is there to check on you, which in my case is very helpful. This creates a habit of making a goal for yourself and...being able to push yourself and reach it.”

CORE also provides space for students to engage in community-based projects that explore key themes around identity and current affairs. At the beginning of the year, for instance, students participate in a cross-disciplinary project in CORE. Last year, we assigned 9th graders a school-wide text—*Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates—that all students read and discussed. It was used as a foundational text in every academic class. Students also went into the community and interviewed community members about their experiences with the “American dream”—a key theme from the book—and blogged about their

conversations with others. In 10th grade, CORE projects include a mentor challenge and a mentee challenge. For the mentor challenge, students find a mentor in the career field they are interested in, and document the process of interviewing and shadowing that person. Tenth grade students also serve as mentors to 9th grade students, creating agendas for meetings, preparing icebreakers, and setting goals. They also document the progress of the mentoring relationship and reflect on its successes and points of improvement.

Outside of the foundational 50-minute meetings and one-on-one coaching, CORE includes the weekly Rites of Passage program, comprised of single-gender groups that are co-led by students and adults. In 9th grade, the primary focus is trust and relationship building. That trust fosters a sense of belonging and sets the stage for students and adults to have conversations on everything from academics to personal barriers in students’ lives to challenging conversations about identity and world issues. This sense of support and safety facilitates learning and allows students to take academic risks. Rites of Passage groups (called Chapters) stay together throughout their time at SBC to create consistency and to solidify the strong bonds that grow from the extensive, personal work that groups do.

Ensuring that our school’s innovative model works seamlessly requires coordination and collaboration from all staff. We centralize planning for CORE projects, which is led by one of our school leaders who focuses on youth development. Learning coaches, as a team, use a planning block to shape CORE curriculum and build out student experiences. Often, we will pick a learning objective, such as career

exploration, and then brainstorm the ways in which students can demonstrate particular skills. We also think about what we hope to see students produce as a demonstration of their learning. From there, we backwards-plan student experiences and lessons. For example, 9th grade career exploration work culminates in a career day project in which students participate in a mock group interview with professionals who work in a field of interest to them. They submit their “future” resume to the professional and get feedback. In the interview, they answer questions and work on a collaborative task with fellow students, receiving feedback on each of those elements. Students spend about six to eight weeks preparing for these rigorous career days.

This summer, our school engaged in a round of summer planning and iteration. I helped iterate our CORE model, as we continue to learn a lot about what works well and what our students still need. For example, we want to ensure all students understand the purpose of and internalize the SEL skills that CORE focuses on so that they are not just checking a box or working toward a certain grade. We also see students continue to struggle with time management. In response to these considerations and others, we are going to reduce the number of major CORE projects next year to four: college readiness, career readiness, health skill-building (i.e., mental and physical health), and social-emotional skill-building. Students will also need to be able to explain their learning and attainments. These four projects are meant to be intense and meaningful. We will devote more time to them and connect them more deeply to real world applications through experiential touchpoints.

Students at our school, on the whole, develop strong relationships with their advisors, seeking them out for both academic and social-emotional support. “My advisor is someone who I can just go up to and talk to them about my problems,” said 10th grader Brandon Sterling. “So academically they help keep me on track. If I need help with an assignment and—let’s say I didn’t get good help from the teacher, getting it explained—I can go to my advisor and they can help me and explain to me in a different way. And socially if I’m coming to school and I’m having a bad day, I can talk to my advisor about it because that is someone who I can trust.”



“Trust fosters a sense of belonging and sets the stage for students and adults to have conversations on everything from academics to personal barriers in students’ lives to challenging conversations about identity and world issues.”



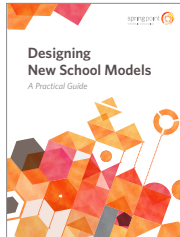
SOUTH BRONX COMMUNITY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL was launched in 2016 as part of the [EPIC High Schools network](#). Similar to EPIC North High School, the instructional model centers on four categories of classes: studios, “selectives,” targeted support, and CORE (detailed in this feature). The school is competency-based, allowing students to fulfill performance tasks—rigorous, engaging, and complex projects—in order to progress. Learning pathways are accessible online and students move at their own pace, receiving support as needed. To learn more about South Bronx Community Charter High School, [visit their website](#).

CATHLEEN COLLAZO is a licensed mental health counselor currently working as a Youth Development Specialist in restorative practices at South Bronx Community Charter High School. Previously, she worked as a mental health counselor for children and adolescents at Upper Manhattan Mental Health Center. As a founding staff member at South Bronx Community Charter High School, Cathleen relishes the opportunity to work with teenagers daily to positively direct their growth and development. Cathleen obtained her bachelor’s degree in psychology and her master’s in mental health counseling, both from Baruch College.

Springpoint is a national nonprofit that partners with districts, charters, and networks to design and launch innovative high schools that work to meet the needs of all students, preparing them for college and career success. We work with partners to shift the traditional power dynamic between communities and school designers, and to empower diverse stakeholders in the school design and planning process. Partnerships with Springpoint are differentiated by an intentional approach to school design that is both student-centered and grounded in youth development theory, which is essential for activating and engaging students as learners.

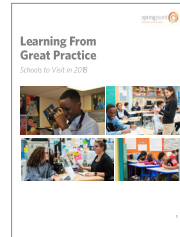
We provide school design and planning workshops, capacity building and model implementation supports, tools and resources, customized coaching, and learning experiences that help educators do school differently. These supports are flexible, grounded in research-based practices and responsive to each partner's unique context. Since 2013, we have supported partners across the country to design and implement new high school models, which serve thousands of students.

Springpoint seeks to advance a broader understanding of how intentional school design and implementation can result in transformative success for students and their communities. This guide is part of that ongoing effort, along with a growing set of resources and publications, including:



④ **Designing New School Models: A Practical Guide**

Our landmark design guide that outlines the three key phases of our school design process and provides a starting point for practitioners to engage in school model design.



④ **Learning From Great Practice: Schools to Visit in 2018**

A schools to visit guide that organizes models by region, provides a brief overview of key elements and look fors, and provides contact information.



④ **How Students Thrive: Positive Youth Development in Practice**

A publication featuring the five tenets of positive youth development theory and their application in school model design.



④ **Inside Mastery Based High Schools: Profiles and Conversations**

A series of case studies that looks at five innovative mastery-based models and includes links to several robust resources and tools from each school profiled.

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