

Student Success Plans & Advisories: The Perfect Marriage

By Dave Maloney, CAS Assistant Director and Scott Brown, LEARN

Would you like to see student achievement dramatically improve and sustain itself over time? Would you like to see students take more responsibility for their own learning and behavior? Of course you would. Who wouldn't? Well, there is untapped power within every classroom, grade, school, and district that, until recently, has not been significantly tapped. Of all the reform initiatives simultaneously bombarding schools from national, state, and local fronts, who would have ever thought that the words "climate" and "connectedness" might be key answers to higher student performance.

But, it is true.

The Case For Connectedness

Breaking news . . . middle and high school student surveys report that when students feel a strong connection to their school, are treated fairly, and have multiple friendships, they are more likely to succeed.* That is precisely why we are so excited by Connecticut's investment to improve school climates and student achievement by implementing Student Advisories and Student Success Plans. **

We think it is a perfect marriage. Here's why.

Study after study has confirmed that when middle and high school students feel connected to each other and to a caring adult in the school setting they are less likely to engage in mean-spirited and negative behaviors. Furthermore, scores of research studies have also reported that young adolescents respond much better to efforts to improve academically when they feel connected to their school and perceive personal meaning in their academic program. Building positive school climates characterized by trustful relationships between students, teachers, administrators, and parents is clearly the precursor to improved school performance.

Student advisories and student success plans hold great promise as vehicles to provide school communities with the structure and practices to mentor students through the challenges of adolescence.

The Answers So Far

Here are ten strategies that teacher-advisors can implement to foster connection to school:

1. Give students more say in what they do at school and what they will learn.
2. Help get to know each other's strengths
3. Promote cooperation over competition
4. Involve students in planning, problem-solving, and identifying issues to improve
5. Build a strong, trusting relationship with each and every advisee
6. Convey excitement about learning; especially when your advisees do great things!
7. Involve all your advisees in the chores and responsibility of managing their advisory
8. Try to integrate concepts of respect, fairness, and caring throughout the advisory program
9. Show a genuine interest in academic, career, and physical development aspects of student success plans

10. Meet your advisee's parents and family members whenever possible

The Guide-On-The-Side for Student Success Plans

There are wonderful on-line programs that can assist student advisories in their development of Student Success Plans. While these plans should be student-driven, not teacher-driven, SSP activity works best embedded in a student advisory program because they share a common fundamental purpose: To help students take ownership of their own learning. Student advisory is an ideal vehicle for student success planning because it:

- Provides students a personalized small group setting with a certified teacher who can know each student well and be an effective “guide-on-the-side”
- Provides the necessary continuity of close mentoring and support over time
- Ensures that the process of student self-assessment, self-reflection and ownership of learning occurs within a community of their peers
- Provides the student interaction and group dynamics that build individual student ownership and accountability

Having a student simply manage his/her Student Success Plan by interacting only with an on-line program while somewhat purposeful, will remain a solitary and sterile experience. But, having students share SMART goals, plans, progress reports, self-reflections, interest inventories, career explorations and the like in a small interactive student community under close teacher support will take students down the road of making powerful and personal meaning of their school experience. That leads to the executive skill-building, self-assessment skill, critical thinking and personal responsibility that enable students to own their own learning and connect purposefully to their personal futures.

We believe that the marriage of Student Advisories and Student Success Plans in the long run will improve student achievement across the board and also enrich the teacher-student relationship in the process.

*Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health

**Additional resources may be located at www.casciac.org under Student Success Plan Resources