The Advisory Program: A Space for Nurturing Student-Teacher Relationships to Strengthen Student Advocacy in a Progressive Secondary School

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Abstract

Student motivation and engagement are linked to the quality of relationships they have with adults at school. An advisory program is one site for developing warm, caring relationships between students and teachers. Effective advisory programs have two-fold benefits: they enhance students' feelings of belonging and build teachers' ability to understand their professional role beyond that of curriculum instruction. Teachers with explicit professional expectations to develop relationships with students and provide social and emotional support are more effective across multiple domains. The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study was to understand how the structure of an established advisory program in a small, secondary school serves as a space to support teachers, as advisors, in building relationships with their advisees to provide them with academic, social, and emotional guidance. Interviews with advisors and administrators point to the advisory program as a central structure for cultivating trust-based relationships. Within this structure advisors and administrators collaborate to enhance student success in achieving goals through advocacy. Findings indicate that advisors feel supported within this structure to navigate their expanded role, build strong relationships with their students, and advocate for their advisees' needs. They point to key functions of the advisory program structure, including the meeting system and administrative support, as factors that enable them to grow strong relationships with their students to nurture self-advocacy.

Keywords: Teacher–Student Relationships, Teacher Roles, Teacher Support, Trust, Advocacy, Advisory Program, Engagement, School Belonging, Secondary Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Students show increased motivation, engagement, and social competence when they develop warm, caring relationships with adults at school (Wang et al., 2020). In an advisory program, teachers, who serve as advisors, foster relationships by providing academic, social, and emotional support to their small group of advisees. In doing so, they take on a professional role that extends beyond a traditional role as the instructor (Phillippo, 2010; Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Advisors can better support to students when they receive professional development and coaching to strengthen relationship-building characteristics and provide social and emotional guidance (Allen et al., 2013; Booker, 2021; Phillippo, 2010; Yee Mikami et al., 2011). However, scant research exists to understand how advisory programs can be structured within a school to fully support students and teachers, particularly in the upper grades.

Research has linked effective advisors and advisory programs to specific characteristics (Phillippo, 2010). Advisors' interpersonal characteristics, such as developing and sustaining warm, caring, boundaried relationships, can be built up through professional development (Alarcón & Bettez, 2022; Phillippo & Blosser, 2017; Phillippo et al., 2018). External characteristics of the school-level systems of support, like an advisory curriculum and administrative coaching, aid advisors in balancing the role of advising with their existing teaching load (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). A secondary external characteristic of effective advisories is an adherence to a Progressive philosophy. Progressive schools have long incorporated advisory programs into their daily fabric to enhance students' feelings of belonging (B. Johnson, 2009). Time spent in advisories encourages teachers to focus on understanding students as individuals who are developing a sense of belonging within a community of individuals (Read, 2013; Shulkind & Foote, 2009).

This article seeks to understand the school-level factors of an existing advisory program. It is an exploration of the structure of a long-standing advisory program in a Progressive middle and high school. Structure, in this study, is defined as the policies and procedures embedded in intentional spaces within a school. The structure is shaped by and includes the school leaders who organize the advisory program and support teachers, as advisors, as they support students to engage positively, both academically and socially. One key facet of this structure is the school's expressed commitment to cultivating and nurturing trust and relationships to achieve student success in social, academic, and behavioral goals through advocacy.

Studying systems that foster relationships and student advocacy will aid in identifying school-level characteristics that increase our understanding of the mechanisms through which they operate (Diehl, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of this ethnographic case study is to understand how the structure of an advisory program serves to support teachers, as advisors, in building relationships with advisees. The advisory program provides a mechanism through which advisors and administrators collaborate and problem-solve in a way that supports advisors to navigate their expanded role of building strong relationships with their students and advocating for their advisees' academic, social, and emotional needs.

Related Literature

The work of building effective relationships between teachers and students, and its impact on academic success has been studied at multiple levels. Research outlines internal and external characteristics teachers mobilize to form warm, caring relationships (Booker, 2001; Carlisle, 2011; L. Johnson, 2009). Other studies explore how to facilitate stronger relationships among students (Balkus, 2006; Keyes, 2019; Yee Mikami, 2011). The third line of inquiry connects strong relationships to student advocacy (Hafen, et al., 2015). However, each of these component pieces does not provide a holistic understanding of the processes, procedures, and people involved in building a school climate to nurture these relationships.

This study adds to the literature by proposing an understanding of effective relationships among adults and students within a school as a function of the structural supports built into the school fabric to support these relationships. This work is situated within three main bodies of literature, outlined in the following review. First is an overview of student engagement. This is followed by research on how teachers are trained to foster warmth and supportiveness. The section ends with a review of scholarship highlighting the importance of advisory programs and their role in strengthening classroom climate.

Student Engagement

The overarching reason behind schooling and education is to teach students. Therefore, attempts to improve elements of the school structure or the roles of the adults at the school must be understood through student motivation and engagement. Student engagement is defined as "the outward manifestation of motivation... Motivation refers to the underlying sources of energy, purpose, and durability, whereas engagement refers to their visible manifestation" (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 22). The visible manifestations of engaged students include behaviors such as: attendance, following directions, completing assignments, and an overall positive attitude toward learning (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

Academic engagement defines how students experience school both socially and psychologically. Therefore, it is critical to view students as actors who shape and are shaped by the school and classroom environment. The classroom setting impacts their engagement with the teacher, the content, and their classmates (Balkus, 2006; Booker, 2021; Carlisle, 2011; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). When students' social and academic needs are met in a positively, they are more likely to experience constructive outcomes such as higher grades, more time on task, and more positive interactions with teachers and other engaged classmates (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The inverse is true when students' needs are not met or are met in negative ways. Context, therefore, mediates how students show up in the classroom. As such, students can improve their educational and social achievement by shifting the environment (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Lamborn et al., 1992; Torres, 2021).

One key component that shapes student engagement is their relationships with their teachers. The next section shows how teachers learn to build and nurture these relationships.

Nurturing Strong Relationships in a School Context

One of the most predictive factors in student engagement is having a warm, caring relationship with adults at school (Allen et al., 2013; Carlisle, 2011; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). The research defines teacher warmth as a "collection of attributes including liking and being interested in their students, believing in their capabilities, and listening to their points of view. Supportive teachers show respect for each student as an individual, hold clear and consistent expectations for student behavior, and provide academic assistance for students who need it" (Finn & Zimmer, 2012, p.106). This collection of attributes is a combination of natural personality traits and learned behaviors: a set of skills that can be grown and developed.

However, solely focusing on teachers' skills overlooks the fact that all teachers are operating in a school system with multiple, competing demands for their time and attention. So often, with the demands of high-stakes testing, teachers are encouraged to view their role narrowly– as a deliverer of the content. This negatively impacts relationship building (Phillipo & Stone, 2013). Therefore, developing individual relationship-building skills is only effective to the degree to which teachers are given the time and space to grow relationships. Phillipo and Stone (2013) conducted research with teachers whose administrators expressed explicit expectations to develop relationships and provide social and emotional support to students through an advisory role. Their findings indicate that if teachers frame their job understanding to include student support and strong student-teacher relationships, students notice that teachers care about them as whole people and respond positively, with measurable gains in social, academic, and personal domains. Furthermore, Phillipo and Stone

(2013) found that teachers with a broader sense of their role felt confident providing student support; thereby creating a positive expectation-fulfillment loop for both teachers and students. These findings indicate that, while individual skills are important, it is necessary to study them within the context of expectations that are placed on teachers and the larger system in which they work. Viewing relationships within the whole school system is critical to understand the extent to which the system provides teachers with the structures and support to nurture positive relationships with their students (Diehl, 2019). The next section outlines research on advisory programs as one such support structure.

Advisory Programs

Despite evidence that teachers, as advisors, can build stronger relationships with students, scant research exists to understand effective advisors and advisory structures. Most research on advisories is with a focus on academic coaching (Balkus, 2006; B. Johnson, 2009), while others have studied advisories as a site for building relationships among students (Carlisle, 2011; Shulkind & Foote, 2009). In one study conducted with administrators in progressive schools that have long-standing advisories, five factors were found to impact the success of the advisory program: time, staff development, leadership and organization, implementation, and sustainability (B. Johnson, 2009). Administrators in B. Johnson's (2009) study noted that teacher-advisors saw advisories as, "crucial to the overall mission of the school… [and] inextricably connected to being a good teacher… [they] care strongly and value time with students and particularly value being an advisor to the students they teach in class" (p.3). These findings point to the dual nature of teachers' roles as instructors and advisors. Maintaining a system to build authentic, personal connections is difficult. It requires intentional work on the part of the administrators and teachers. B. Johnson's (2009) analysis is that the effectiveness of an advisory program lies in the quality of advising that teachers provide, "if schools can create systems of professional development that genuinely prepare teachers to be effective advisors, the school culture will flourish. If not, advisories will be problematic" (p. 3), which further emphasizes the importance of understanding advisories from a systemic perspective.

Furthermore, Carlisle (2011) found positive associations between teachers' relationship-building skills and intentional school policies and practices, such as advisory programs. Both Balkus (2006) and Grolnick & Pomerantz (2022) outline the importance building clarity between parents, students, and staff regarding the objectives of advisory programs. This consensus-building requires significant and ongoing staff development and family outreach in terms of both shared purpose and advisory content development.

A key marker of a quality advisor is their ability to advocate for students (Cunitz et al., 2011; Balkus, 2006). Having strong relationships allows space for students to trust their advisor to ask for help, and that the advisor takes this a step further by advocating for the student to get the services they need to succeed. Having a trusted advocate helps students to mobilize support they otherwise would not be able to get. This system of building trust and advocacy is explored further in the next section on classroom climate.

Classroom Climate

One way to study school ecosystems is to assess the climate. Hafen and colleagues (2015) show that in secondary schools, classroom climate is one observable, measurable dimension within the Teaching Through Interactions framework. This framework links teacher and student interactions to student academic achievement by measuring relationships across three domains: relational support, autonomy/ competence support, and relevance (Hamre et al., 2013). Within this framework, relational or emotional supports include positive or negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for students' perspectives. Autonomy and competence supports are measured through behavior management, productivity, and instructional formats. Relevance includes content understanding, analysis and inquiry, and quality feedback.

Classroom climate, then, is built upon the emotional connection and relationships between teachers and students. It can be observed in the level of warmth, respect, and enjoyment teachers and students derive from being in class (Hafen et al., 2015; Hamre et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2020). When students report a strong relationship with their teacher, they are more likely to seek help because they trust that their teacher will provide it in a supportive manner (Booker, 2021). In classrooms with a positive climate, students also develop healthier relationships with their peers (Carlisle, 2011) and are more engaged in their learning (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

While research on classroom climate, warm, caring relationships, student engagement, and advisory programs all point to the importance of how students and teachers interact, there is little research that provides insight into ways in which schools can structure their day-to-day policies and procedures to best maximize positive relationships. The next section outlines how this study aims to better understand a school system that does just that.

METHODS

Study

This article is derived from a larger dissertation on sustaining Progressive education reform at the Castanea School (a pseudonym)– a progressive, gender-inclusive day school serving grades seven through twelve. The school is located in a large, metropolitan area on the East Coast of the United States. It is an independent school with tuition that, for some students, is offset by needs-based scholarships or funding from the students' home districts. The complete dissertation research examined the roles of teachers and teacher learning in navigating the school's organizational structures to sustain Progressive education reform (Author, 2017). I collected the data for this ethnographic study throughout the 2015-2016 school year.

In its entirety, the dissertation explored multiple structural features at the school. In this article, I focus on how the advisory program functions as a systemic, structural foundation to assist teachers, as advisors (*teacher-advisors*), to support students by providing them with academic, social, and emotional guidance. I do so by answering the following research questions:

1. How does the structure of an advisory program work to support teacher-advisors to provide their advisees with academic, social, and emotional guidance?

2. How does the structure of an advisory program work to support teacher-advisors to build relationships with their advisees?

Participant observation was the primary source of data collection in this ethnography. My approach included "direct observation of human behavior and the physical features of settings, informal interviewing, and document analysis" (McKechnie, 2008, p. 599). In the tradition of Wolcott (2008), my participant observation hinged on what I experienced through my senses and then translated into observation notes and analysis to interpret the Castanea advisory program.

The continuum of participant observation ranges from complete (or naturalistic) observer, where the researcher observes the setting, but does not interact with the participants, to complete participation, where the observer actively engages and works alongside the participants (Gold, 1958). In this study, I took the approach of "participant as observer [where] … an observer develops relationships with informants through time, and where he (sic) is apt to spend more time and energy participating than observing" (Gold, 1958, p. 220). Trust building is a key element in this type of observation. I spent the first months of my fieldwork observing classes and school events. Once I had built rapport with the teachers, I attended meetings. While I observed all the various meetings that regularly occur in the course of the school year, the ones most salient to the current analysis are the advisory program meeting loop. This loop includes feedback and support team meetings. They are explained at length in the findings section.

Interview data was critical to understanding how advisors and administrators experienced the advisory program. I used purposive sampling to invite anyone who considered themselves part of the school's progressive community to participate in either a focus group or individual interview (Creswell, 2012). Ten of the school's 15 total advisors and six of the eight administrators accepted the invitation. Table 1 includes interview participants' job title, role in advisory program, number of years at the school, and the type of interview they participated in. The pseudonym markers are used throughout the findings to attribute quotations.

Table 1 Interview Participants

Job title	Role in advisory program	Pseudonym marker	Years at Castanea	Type of interview
Middle school history teacher	Middle school advisor	H1	2	Focus group
Upper school English teacher	Upper school advisor	E3	15	Focus group
Upper school learning specialist	Upper school advisor	L2	8	Focus group
Performance art teacher	Upper school advisor	SP	11	Focus group
Upper school science teacher	Upper school advisor	S2	4	Focus group
Upper school history teacher	Upper school advisor	H2	5	Focus group
Visual art teacher	Upper school advisor	SV	26	Focus group
Upper school English teacher	Upper school advisor	E2	11	Individual
Math teacher	Upper school advisor	M1	3	Individual
Administrator: Head of School	Advisory support	HoS	17	Individual
Administrator: Director of learning support	Advisory support	LS	13	Individual
Administrator: Director of emotional services	Advisory support	ES	30	Individual
Administrator: Director of admissions and college counseling	N/A	ADM	21	Individual
Administrator: Director of technology	Upper school advisor	DT	5	Individual
Administrator: Assistant to the Head and advancement associate	N/A	AtH	1	Individual

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis occurred in several phases. I organized observation notes according to meeting types and read through each note type. In subsequent readings, I used colored text to identify preliminary codes. I used these codes in a sequential manner to design thematic focus group and individual interview protocols around two key ideas: trust and belonging within a community; and academic differentiation. I transcribed each interview and listened to the recording multiple times to verify transcriptions and construct initial interview codes.

After analyzing the interviews for preliminary codes, I cross-checked the interview codes with those from the participant observation. I composed analytic memos to capture my emerging ideas (Maxwell, 2013). At that point, my analytic memos led me to reorganize the preliminary codes by themes. I distilled each theme into 5–15-word statements, ensuring to keep the original language as much as possible. I then imported the preliminary codes into The Brain, a mapping software, to visualize how potential codes might relate to one another categorically. In The Brain software, I was also able to attach illustrative quotes and recollections for each of these potential codes to the corresponding node on the map, which allowed me to stay grounded in the data.

As I developed findings, I actively sought respondent validation, which is crucial to ensuring that researchers are not misinterpreting participants' words and for identifying researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). I maintained contact with key participants throughout the study and asked for additional clarifying information as needed.

The following sections explore detailed findings on the structure of the advisory program as a means of support to advisors. Findings also outline the role of trust in nurturing relationships, and the importance of advocacy as a means for understanding and meeting students' educational goals and needs.

Finding 1: Structuring an Advisory Program to Support Advisors

Castanea's Advisory Program

Because existing research makes clear the need to view student-teacher relationships as a function of the school ecosystem (Phillippo & Blosser, 2017; Phillippo, et al., 2018; Phillippo & Stone, 2013) the first finding outlines the structure of Castanea's advisory program as a support for teacher-advisors to nurture positive relationships with and provide guidance for students. Castanea's Progressive advisory program operates on the principles of communication, advocacy, and trust. All full-time teachers are advisors. Each advisor is responsible for 6-10 students. Advisories meet twice daily for a total of 25 minutes. Advisors organize community building exercises and talk, individually, and as a whole group, with advisees about goal setting for academic, behavioral, and social needs. It is within this space that each student is heard and respected, not only by their peers, but also by an adult in the school (Cunitz et al., 2011).

A major tenet underlying Castanea's Progressive philosophy is that students are self-aware of their own strengths, barriers, and needs. To foster this, advisors coach students to advocate for a learning environment that aligns with their learning profile. Through this process, advisors come to understand how their advisees make sense of their own reality and how their perception shapes their personality, their interactions with others, and their learning needs. The advisor and the student determine what conditions the student needs to learn, grow, and thrive.

Advisory Meeting Structure

In addition to meeting with their advisees twice a day, advisors also meet with their support teams once every four weeks. Support teams consist of the Director of Learning Support (LS), the Assistant Head of School, both of whom sit on the school's administrative team, and at least one member of the Emotional Support (ES) team. The ES team includes one director, who sits on the administrative team, one full-time social worker, and five interns from local universities who are studying social work, counseling, or therapy. The ES team members are available throughout the school day on an as-needed basis for any student who is having a hard time. Additionally, they have regular appointments with students who require therapeutic support beyond what advisors or teachers can provide. The ES team also maintains contact with any outside therapists or counselors that the students see.

During support team meetings, the Director of LS reports back on data she has compiled on each student from the previous week. She collects this data during an additional system of feedback meetings. Feedback meetings occur weekly with each of the teams of teachers at the school. The agenda for feedback meetings is for teachers to provide input on each student's academic, behavioral, and emotional state while in their class, or in other settings where they interact, such as activities or service learning. The ES agenda item during support teams is to report on students' social and emotional progress both within the school and with outside therapists in a way that ensures confidentiality and complies with HIPPA guidance. The Assistant Head of School provides data on behavior, discipline, and attendance.

In support team meetings, the advisor works to bring the student's voice to the table. The Director of LS represents the teachers' voices. The clinical staff share a therapeutic perspective. The Assistant Head of School provides a global view of how individual student behaviors and interactions impact the social and behavioral ecosystem of the school at large. Through this process, they work to understand the social and academic progress of each advisee, both as an individual and as a member of the school community. Ideally, this leads to the provision of equitable support to foster each child's social, emotional, and learning needs while maintaining the classroom climate of decency and trust (Cunitz et al., 2011).

When an action item comes up in these meetings, it is the advisor's responsibility to inform other teachers, the student, and the student's family, then work out a way to put the plan into action. If the action item extends beyond reasonable work or relationship boundaries for the advisor, one of the administrators present in the support team will assume responsibility for it.

The main role of an advisor is that of an advocate for their advisees. Effective advisors pay attention to each of their advisees to understand who they are as multi-faceted people, how they see and understand the world, and in turn, how others (particularly other teachers) see and understand their advisees (Cunitz et al., 2011). They then 'translate' the student's perspective into a language that can best be understood and acted on by the other adults in the meeting, at the school, and in the child's life. Some Castanea students have struggled in other school settings because they lacked the self-advocacy skills required to communicate their needs or have not had adult advocates to ensure that teachers understand their needs. At Castanea, the advisor, as advocate, is considered one of the most valuable assets in ensuring student success.

Finding 2: Building a Trust-Based System

All school community members attest that trust is a bedrock value of the Castanea community. The Head of School uses the phrase, "trust-based system" regularly when addressing the whole school. He uses it to introduce and reinforce rules such as physical boundaries and behavioral expectations. He uses it when he announces that belongings have gone missing – even when he has a strong suspicion that something has been stolen, he sets up a plan of anonymity for anyone who has information to report it in a confidential, non-punitive way. He uses the phrase to talk about lunch time when students have a high degree of freedom to use their time in a way that suits them, and without constant adult supervision. He also uses the phrase to encourage students to practice academic honesty. But it is within the day-to-day work in the advisory where trust gets taught and modeled explicitly. This section lays out this process using data from individual and focus group interviews. Quotes are attributed to individuals using the pseudonym markers from Table One. Because teacher-advisors move fluidly from one facet of their expanded role to another, the terms *teacher* and *advisor* are used intentionally throughout the findings to indicate the facet or perspective of their role the individuals are speaking from.

Many advisors feel that this system of trust presents a steep learning curve for students. Castanea is unique in the level of trust that adults place in students, so depending on what their previous educational backgrounds may be, it is safe to assume that many students have not been in a trust-based system before. In fact, the students who come to Castanea from the adjacent urban public school district with metal detectors and school safety officers in each building are used to a system where they are actively mistrusted. So being trusted "is a new experience. Some students flourish in it and take on leadership roles" (H2). Many students learn to take ownership of their learning and behavior when they are trusted to make their own educational agenda. However, for others, they, "don't know how to react to the kind of independence that goes along with the trust-based system" (H2).

To clarify how trust gets operationalized at Castanea, one teacher explained her stance on academic honesty. As an upper school English teacher with 15 years of experience at the school, she is realistic about the idea that students will cheat. There are circumstances in students' daily lives that lead to them copying one another's work. She acknowledges that reality and begins her interactions with them more from a place of respect than of trust:

> The bottom line for me is about treating them with respect … When I hear trust-based system, to me that's a reminder that I am assuming the very best intentions on their part. If they do things that are wrong, there are good reasons that I can understand and feel compassion for. And that's what I'm going to lead with, is that compassion, while also holding them responsible so that they can learn. (E3)

Another advisor went on to explore the deeper philosophy of positive intent that underpins trust:

> Part of being a trust-based system is that we assume positive intent, or that we assume that people are doing the best they can, even if the best they can is a little bit sucky. … If somebody makes a mistake or does something bad, they are not bad…. There's some circumstance that leads to them making their bad decision. (SP)

This advisor went on to explain that generally, young people are not trusted to make their own decisions, to guide their own learning, or even to make their own mistakes. Families and society so often treat young adulthood as a place to catch kids misbehaving. Therefore, entering a system of inherent trust can be confusing for some students because it is:

> … in contrast to a lot of the world outside of Castanea. Some students may have an internal sense that this is a correct or good way to treat human beings, but for others … who don't get trusted very often, … it can be confusing to trust that this is a safe perspective to have about people. But even in moments [of punitive disciplinary consequences] there is a lot of human interaction between the adults and the young people who have done the trust breaking things. We relate to them as people. They make bad decisions but aren't bad people. (SP)

This process of learning to trust and be trusted, "takes time… time is such a big factor. We don't give up on kids" (L2).

Another factor that impacts trust is that the school, "is a very safe place for students to be and so they relax and let their guard down" (H1). However, some advisors countered that while the school may feel like a safe place for most students, there are other students who may not feel safe because of a certain identity, background, or circumstance they bring with them. One advisor described safety in this way, "I cringe when we talk about being a safe community because on any given day there are a number of students don't feel safe here, but I know that it's so much better than most places (for them)" (E3). While advisors agreed that even though some students may not feel safe at the school, they are trusted, and trust is foundational for building relationships and establishing a safe space. One advisor summed up the reciprocal nature of trust like this: "[Students] inspire trust in us. But we don't just hand them (trust). They come to us wounded and start to grow and heal. That affects us… It's a back-and-forth" (E3).

The advisors at Castanea revealed that by approaching relationships with trust as a key building block, they get to know the students as whole people, not just as pupils. This ability for teachers to see beyond the classroom to the rich lives of students is critical for teachers to respond more positively to instances of student disengagement. When teachers can trust that misunderstandings or failures are opportunities to learn, they are better able to problem solve to deal with challenges instead of punishing student shortcomings. They are more likely to respond with support and empathy (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

Finding 3: Supporting Advocacy through the Advisory Program

Along with trust, advocacy underpins all relationship building at Castanea. The advisor as an informed advocate is an integral component to the school's commitment to a strength-based approach to education (Author, 2017). As advisors build trust and relationships with their advisees, they come to understand what their educational needs are. Advisors bring the depth of those relationships to the advisory meeting loop where they gather more data about their advisees across social, emotional, and academic realms. These meetings focus both on what students do well, and what strategies they need to grow. Advisors have access to their advisees' academic history and testing as well as relevant notes from their sessions with the Emotional Support team and, when applicable, their outside therapist. The goal of sharing this much information is so that the advisor can be an effective advocate. Having a

designated person in the school monitoring each child's education eliminates any barriers that parents or caregivers may have in being their child's advocate, such as time, capacity, or lack of social capital.

One advisor explained, "Our advisory system creates … passionate advocates for students…. It's not just parents who are advocating,… but you have intelligent, passionate people 'on the in'… advocating…That creates a constructive dynamic. Our students experience way more advocacy here" (E3). Because all full-time teachers are advisors, they pivot back and forth between the two perspectives. One teacher reported that this system of advocacy helps her to focus more on her curriculum.

I am grateful, as a teacher, to have advisors that I know will help me figure out if a kid has a need that's not being met. So many kids need so many different things, and [teachers] can't hold all of that information. But the advisor knows … their kids really well and… if something is going on with a kid that is really hard the advisor will tell me. It makes it easier to [teach] without being stressed because you know there's somebody with eyes on each kid all the time. (S2)

Another teacher agreed but noted that the high level of advocacy sometimes creates tension, or perceived unfairness.

[As a teacher] if I have an advisor who's a really strong advocate emailing me about a student, I tend to pay more attention and check on their grade more. So, is it fair that person gets the extra attention because there's a powerful advocate? I'm not sure, but what I am sure of is that those kids …who are receiving that kind of advocacy are at higher risk for having really difficult lives [so] I think it's a good thing even if it isn't perfect. (E3)

Pivoting back and forth between the advisor and teacher perspectives is complicated, but it allows advisors to have a multi-dimensional relationship with their advisees and gives them better insight into their advisees lives as students. This relationship helps advisors to understand students' hardships, their strengths, their home lives, and their academic history in a way that a classroom teacher cannot. One participant explained the tension like this:

I put my teacher hat on, and I feel one way, and then I put on my advisor hat, and I feel completely the opposite. As a teacher you might feel frustrated [about] a student, but when we're advisors we know so much more about that person, about their home life, about their emotional struggle, about… whatever is happening. So [teachers] just see on the surface…whatever the academic issues are. But as the advisor you understand why that's happening. And so … [as an advisor] you advocate hard for those kids. You want to give them whatever advantage you can to be successful… I [tell my colleagues] what my kids need based on what I know as their advisor, and that's something they often don't know as the teacher. (H2)

Having such a deeply rooted system of advocacy strengthens Castanea's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion because each student is recognized as an individual, and their individual needs are brought to light. At the same time, the school has a very diverse student body, so sometimes students' individual needs conflict with those of other students or with the overall needs of the classroom community. This conflict leads to rich, solution-oriented, complicated discussions around equity and the allocation of resources. At the core of all these discussions is the idea that teachers trust that all students can and will learn. They work tirelessly to optimize their classroom environments in a way that everyone can access.

DISCUSSION

This paper adds to a limited body of analytic research on advisory systems in secondary schools. It has made initial steps toward an understanding of how the structure of an advisory program

supports teachers, as advisors, to build trusting relationships with their advisees while also providing them with academic, social, and emotional guidance. Data from 10 of the school's 15 total advisors and six of the eight administrators reveal that a school-wide commitment to cultivating and nurturing trust and relationships is a key, structural feature that underpins how advisors and administrators collaborate to grow student success in achieving goals through advocacy. These findings suggest that the work of building warm, caring relationships, strengthens students' sense of safety and belonging. Ultimately increasing student engagement is only possible within a school ecosystem that recognizes and nurtures an expanded notion of teachers' roles beyond that of just content delivery. This has direct implications for how schools and school leaders can support both students and advisors through an intentional organization of the school structure to accommodate a comprehensive advisory program.

Research has shown that effective advisory programs make students feel as though they belong in the school community (B. Johnson, 2009; Shulkind & Foote, 2009). Students who feel a sense of belonging engage more in their schooling (L. Johnson, 2009; Wang & Eccles, 2013). This study shows that a school-wide commitment to cultivating trusting relationships with an eye toward achieving student success across social, academic, and behavioral domains can be reached through advisor-administrator collaboration. This collaboration occurs within the advisory system meeting loop - an intentional, organized structure embedded in the operation of the school. This structure is shaped by and includes the school leaders who organize the advisory program and support teachers, as advisors, as they support students to engage positively academically and socially.

Another finding that aligns with past research on student engagement is that specific teacher characteristics that impact students' sense of classroom belonging and behavioral engagement. Keyes (2019) found that one of these teacher characteristics is their ability to foster relationships with and between students. Booker (2021) uncovered that another key teacher characteristic is knowing students in a way that activates additional advocacy for them. While L. Johnson (2009) notes that students feel a greater sense of belonging at schools that place an emphasis on the developmental needs of adolescents. The findings of this study indicate that the advisors at Castanea recognize that these same characteristics in their own work. By using the intentional structure of the advisory as a space to nurture these personal characteristics Castanea teachers are able to improve their ability to connect with students in a way that helps the students to develop their own sense of agency and self-advocacy.

Previous studies exploring teacher role breadth have concluded that, while teachers are generally trained to divide the work of teaching from the work of providing social-emotional support, there are benefits to placing them in a social-emotional support role alongside their already-demanding instructional role. These benefits include utilizing a more diverse skill set when dealing with student issues, and an increased knowledge of and responsiveness to students (Phillippo, 2010). However, this same research, "strongly suggest that expanded roles can in certain circumstances contribute to teacher burnout, job dissatisfaction, or decreased commitment" (Phillippo, 2010, p. 2288). The findings from Castanea outline how an intentional system to facilitate a team-based, problem-solving approach to addressing student issues can mitigate such drawbacks. Castanea advisors acknowledge that the added role of caring for students does cause additional stress, but they are quick to acknowledge that they are well-supported by administrators to address any issues that arise. Furthermore, when thinking from the teacher perspective, they feel more freedom to focus on the work of teaching because they know that each student has a support system in place, and there is a team of professionals who will make plans and communicate those plans to teachers when problems occur.

Other research on teacher role breadth explores factors that determine teachers' sense of efficacy at providing student support (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). This research showed that, "the most salient factor to predict teachers' role breadth was teachers' confidence about providing student support" (Phillippo & Stone, 2013, p. 369). Student data from Phillippo and Stone's (2013) study suggests that when teachers frame their understanding of their job to include the work of supporting students academically, socially, and emotionally, students notice that teachers care about them as whole people and respond positively, with measurable gains in social, academic, and personal domains. At The Castanea School, students feel the commitment to trust, respect, and advocacy

(Author, 2017). Participant observation data demonstrate that a high proportion of student issues that arise are resolved through the advisory program meeting process (Author, 2019). This is accomplished through collaborative problem-solving between advisors and administrators during support team meetings. When advisors receive administrative support, they are better able to extend that same support to students. This strengthens the support team's ability to design solutions that are in line with the student's needs and goals, and thereby more likely to be effective. This finding supports research into effective teaching (Allen et al., 2013; Hafen et al., 2015; Hamre et al., 2013) by digging deep into the domain of emotional support to better understand teacher sensitivity and regard for adolescent perspectives.

In alignment with past findings, this study shows that effective advisory programs are built on an institutional system of professional development and support. Carlisle (2011) found that school policies and practices, curriculum and instruction, and school organization impact the way in which teachers build relationships with students. While Balkus (2009) noted that a successful advisory program hinges on parents, students, and staff all understanding the objectives of the advisory program and its necessity. Furthermore, Balkus (2009) and B. Johnson (2009) both point to the necessity of staff development, not only at the inception of an advisory program, but also in an ongoing manner. This study concludes that the day-to-day collaboration between advisors and administrators in support team meetings is a form of ongoing professional coaching to differentiate care for students. That coaching, combined with an institutional commitment to trust, respect, and advocacy undergirds an effective advisory program.

An unexpected finding was how advisors pointed to the institutional pillar of trust as a key component to this work. Advisors at Castanea believe that the element of trust allows them to get the know the students as whole people, not just as a pupil in class, which they cite as a foundational building block to nurturing relationships. This finding is supported by research that shows that when an intentional element of trust-building is embedded in a learning community, faculty and students alike feel a greater sense of freedom to share their more personal side, which is particularly salient for the engagement of students from marginalized backgrounds (L. Johnson, 2009). Additionally, Skinner & Pitzer (2012) explain that when teachers trust students and invite them to share the details of their lives outside of the classroom, teachers respond more positively to instances of student disengagement.

Limitations and Further Research

Limitations to this study must be acknowledged. Clearly, this study drew data from a limited sample of teachers in one small, independent school. Other state, local, or school contexts might frame salient issues in student support differently. Second, this study considered advisories from a systemic perspective. Advisory programs include other activities, that, while not investigated in this study, are essential to nurturing warm, caring relationships, such as community-building, navigating difficult conversations, and goal exploration.

Further research into systemic structures that support an expanded teacher role breadth through an advisory program is needed to test these findings across contexts. Future studies should seek out other progressive secondary schools with advisory programs that, like Castanea, honor a school-wide commitment to cultivating and nurturing trust and relationships with an eye toward achieving student success in social, academic, and behavioral goals. Schools with a similar commitment and an established advisory program could provide valuable comparison data. Additionally, future studies that explore supportive relationships cultivated through systems that encourage teachers to broaden professional role will aid in identifying school-level characteristics that foster relationships and increase our understanding of how they operate.

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic research found that that a clearly structured advisory program includes both time and space in the cadence of the school's weekly schedule for relationship and trust building

between advisors and their advisees, as well as established meetings among adults who know the advisees well and can speak to their progress across multiple dimensions. In these meetings, advisors and administrators come together to discuss data points on each student across academic, social, and emotional domains. As issues arise, they collaborate on problem solving and solution building to provide meaningful, individualized support for all students.

These plans take into consideration all aspects of each student's growth and development. They enhance student engagement by respecting students as individuals, supporting students to develop their capabilities, holding clear, reasonable behavioral expectations, and providing academic assistance or enrichment. The advisor takes on the role of student advocate, with the goal of coaching the advisee to advocate for their own needs in future situations.

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