

This series of resources presents effective practices implemented by some of the 27 schools involved in the original High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (HSFEPP) as they explored ways to use flexibility to increase student engagement and achievement and to support quality teaching in their schools.

This series represents a sampling of the effective practices being implemented in redesign schools across the province.

TEACHER ADVISORY SYSTEM

How does the Teacher Advisory System work?

As in other pilot projects for high school flexibility enhancement, Mother Margaret Mary High School's Flex Program is paired with a school-wide Teacher Advisory System. At the present time, each teacher advisor (TA) is responsible for 20 multi-grade (Grades 9-11) students for the four years of their time at the school. The TA and students meet every Thursday for 50 minutes. During this time they cover learning strategies, *My Blueprints*, post-secondary planning, celebrations and core curriculum.

A teacher in the school says, "The teacher advisor is our go-to teacher when a student is in need of some help. The teacher advisor keeps track of student progress and makes sure we are on the right track to success."

Four times per year, the TA has a private, one-on-one interview during the flex block with each student. Students prepare for these interviews in a number of ways, including making sure their portfolios are up to date. The TA looks at each student's marks and what the student has chosen to do during the flex block. These interviews are more conversational, with a focus on building the relationship.

One student describes the system this way: "The teacher advisors are there to help you throughout the journey you make in high school. They are there to help the students make better decisions when it comes to their education, keep them informed on what is happening in the school, and also help them navigate and start up on their first few days of high school."

One parent describes the program this way: "The teacher advisor: a) acts as my daughter's champion, b) understands my daughter's strengths and weaknesses, and c) guides my daughter to solve issues in ways that I as a parent may not have thought about."



“I especially like the concept of the teacher advisor in the high school environment when the students are making an important development transition from middle school. The role of teacher advisor as coach and mentor becomes an important element of this transition. Currently the way it is implemented really highlights the importance and effectiveness of this relationship.”

Parent, Mother Mary Margaret High School

What does the data indicate?

For Mother Mary Margaret High School, it is early days. The *TELL Them FROM Me* survey last year helped inform the school and will be used again this year, so they will have two data points. They do know anecdotally that students are more engaged. A teacher noted, “It’s helpful for students to have someone by their side who is part of the school staff. This way they are kept connected to the school.”

How success is measured

One student says succinctly, “The success of the Teacher Advisor program is measured by the relationship teacher advisors have with their students and how helpful teacher advisors are, especially in high school.”

A teacher measures the program’s success by “how on track students are with their high school plan, goals [and] core subjects.”

A parent notes, “As a parent I would measure it based on the ease my child feels using the program and how much it lets her exercise independent and responsible choice-making.” The level of trust the child has for her teacher advisor is key.

Another parent measures the success of the program through the positive outcomes and the “following points:

- a) my daughter’s public speaking abilities have been honed and improved,
- b) my daughter’s confidence in herself and her own judgement has improved, and
- c) my daughter’s ability to plan for effective short-term and long-term goals has improved”

She also goes on to say that, “When the teacher advisor strives to understand the child/student just as well as the parent does, you as the parent develop a trust with the teacher advisor and believe that they will act as the child’s champion. I have seen this commitment from the teacher advisor towards my daughter and as a result I have seen [my daughter] take on more responsibility and interest in the community.”

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What we learned

Kim Brophy says he is working with “exceptional staff who love working together, and who are compassionate and purposeful”. The Teacher Advisory System, combined with flex time, allows them to display these qualities and engage in a deeper level with students.

“Because we want to be open to feedback and we operate with horizontal leadership,” says Brophy, “the kind of leadership that legitimizes dissent is important for the program.” If the program requires change, it will be made. The high school aims to improve relationships between parents, teachers and students, all of whom will decide things collectively.

For more on the Teacher Advisory System, contact:

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