

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 ADVISOR PROGRAM

At James Fowler High School in Calgary, “We believe that students who have relationships with an adult in the building will improve student achievement and personal growth throughout their time at high school,” says Principal Keith Johnson.

What is the Teacher Advisor Program?

Teacher advisors meet with students regularly to develop bonds that are not focused on curriculum, but are focused on being part of a larger school community that is connected both locally and globally. For example, through the Teacher Advisor Program, students at James Fowler have participated in fundraising for breast cancer research (local cause) and a school in Sierra Leone (global cause). As well, teacher advisors help students set goals for both school and career.

One teacher explains that a teacher advisor provides “a link between students and staff in a non formative, assessment-driven environment. A teacher advisor tries to connect and build relationships with students in regards to their academic program, attendance, general well-being, and transition to and after high school.” She goes on to note that the teacher advisor “should be an adult advocate and a touchstone for the students in their class.”

Why the school introduced the Teacher Advisory Program

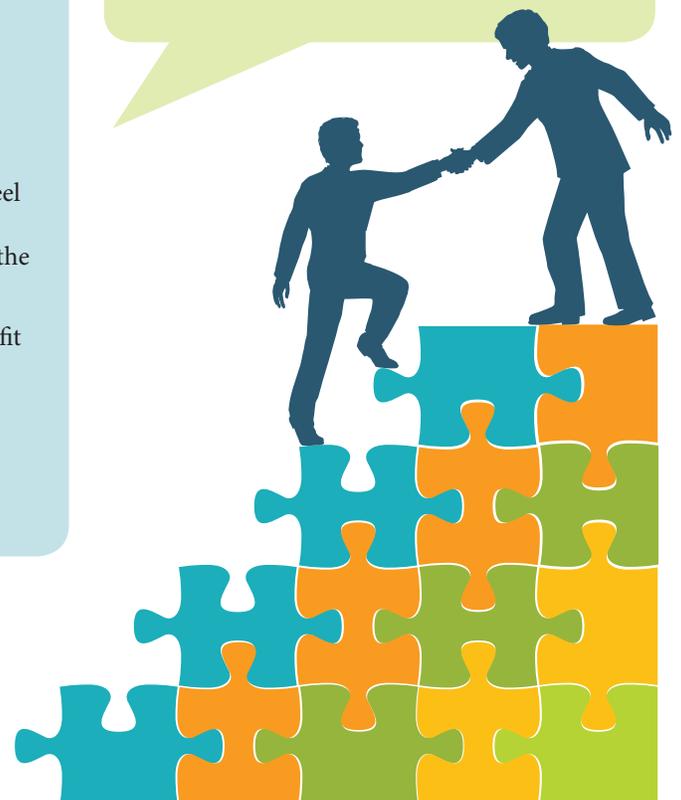
“Our data was telling us that students were disconnected from our school in some ways,” says Johnson. “Students were not connecting with adults in the building aside from their teachers. Many of our students live far away from our school and are bused for over 45 minutes. As a result of this transportation factor, our students were lacking opportunities to connect with other adults in the building. They were missing opportunities to develop meaningful relationships.”

A teacher adds, “I know that, from my discussion with my students, they felt disconnected – there was a divide between staff and students. The average student, who didn’t belong to teams or clubs, seemed to feel nameless, like they were just a face in the crowd. The teacher advisor helps to create one more link between staff and students, thus closing the gap a bit more.”

Teachers also believed that relationships with other adults would benefit students in Grade 10, as they prepare for life after high school. “We wanted to help our students create goals and work toward them,” says Johnson. “High school curriculum alone will not lead to high school graduation. We must help students make connections between the courses they take and their own aspirations and goals.”

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Teacher, James Fowler High School

How success is measured

The program's success is measured through student attendance in the Teacher Advisor Program, rates of high school graduation, responses to the *TELL Them FROM Me* surveys, and participation in school activities.

Adds one teacher, “I think the success of the practice is measured in the increase in student engagement. My students come to our teacher advisor sessions and know that they belong somewhere in the school. They participate in teacher advisor challenges, discussions and activities. They ask for advice about school and after high school from me and from each other. They are present and involved. They have begun to identify themselves as a group within the school. Also I find an increase in my positive interactions with students in the hallways. I get to see students in a different light, and they me.”

What we learned

A teacher notes, “I would like more recognition and rebranding of the teacher advisor in our school. This has already been started with Teacher Advisor bulletin boards and trophies, but I think a name change may help to focus the time more. I would also like to see an incorporation of some kind of tutorial time, even on a once-a-month basis, to support academic growth. I feel that the practice is for the most part effective, but it always benefits from reflection and adjustments.”

“We would like to introduce more student choice of topics, as part of the Teacher Advisor Program,” says Johnson. “We would also like to introduce more discussions around careers, connections to industry, and links to outside agencies, as well as host more guest speakers to talk on topics such as stress, anxiety, drugs and alcohol abuse, and other meaningful and relevant topics.”

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Keith Johnson, Principal, James Fowler High School

For more on the Teacher Advisor Program, contact:

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