

TAMALPAIS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
Larkspur, California

Course of Study

ADVISORIES

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Advisories is to help students succeed by teaching them skills that enhance performance in school and life, by increasing their commitment to their school and community, and by helping them develop greater awareness of connections between school and the future. Advisories increase rapport between staff and students, increase the flow of information between the school and students, and give students a meaningful opportunity to interact on campus with an adult who knows the student well and can advise him/her on school and personal matters. Advisors, for example, receive copies of grade and progress notices, attend Student Study Team meetings, and provide leadership to students on matters of course selection and class performance.

Advisories are integral to helping the school achieve the ten system outcomes designated by the District. Teaching students to become lifelong learners requires schools to develop learning communities and mentor relationships between students and teachers. Advisories contribute greatly to this process by teaching communication, self-management, and goal-setting skills, as well as providing a forum for discussion of contemporary issues and values.

All of the 14 system outcomes, though not officially addressed by the District at this time, are impacted positively by Advisories. Advisories draw students closer to the process of learning by engaging them in school and connecting them to teachers and the instructional process. Advisories thus articulate with all courses and departments by teaching generic skills that enhance academic performance in every discipline and subject.

General Advisory goals have been identified as follows:

- Create relationships between students and staff
- Create peer relationships
- Improve student conduct and attendance
- Offer advice and assistance to students
- Provide direction on goals and goal-setting skills
- Increase awareness of current issues
- Increase awareness of school policies
- Improve the school climate
- Improve student academic performance
- Provide a forum for student feedback and input

Specific Advisory goals relating to achieving District outcomes are:

- Demonstrate and practice effective verbal communication
- Demonstrate knowledge of and practice the democratic process
- Demonstrate knowledge of the global environment
- Analyze current issues
- Demonstrate school-to-work skills and knowledge
- Participate in community or social service
- Demonstrate knowledge and practice of good health

II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completing a semester of Advisories, students will:

- Have an increased knowledge of school-to-work and postsecondary opportunities
- Possess improved verbal communication skills
- Have an increased awareness of significant contemporary issues
- Have an increased ability to achieve academic success
- Understand in more depth how their school system and student government function
- Have an increased understanding and knowledge of opportunities at the school

III. METHODS/MATERIALS

Advisories will use a variety of instructional methods including small group discussion, speakers, panels, service projects, large/small group cooperative learning, writing, maintenance of individual progress records (goals, time management plans, etc.), cooperative problem solving, and role playing.

The teacher's role is as facilitator and student advocate. The Advisory period should be organized to highly interactive and responsive to student needs/concerns. Flexibility to take advantage of "teachable moments" is essential.

There may be a variety of organizing structures for Advisories. One approach is a one hour thematically oriented Advisory, with in-depth activities. These themes include planning and visioning the year ahead, as well as exercises at the close of the year that aid students in assessing their growth and performance and focusing on goals for the coming year. Another theme might be linking school learning to the real world, with discussions of how skills/knowledge acquired in specific courses transfer to work and postsecondary opportunities.

A. Student Assessment

Advisory students will be assessed using a pass/fail grading system. Specific criteria for earning a "passing" grade will be established by the school and clearly communicated to all students at the beginning of the semester. Criteria may include attendance at advisory meetings and completion of individual and group advisory tasks.

B. Course Assessment

Advisories are one component of a broader initiative to improve school climate and increase student performance. There is research to support the belief that getting students engaged in the school community is a powerful strategy for achieving these goals.

Since it is difficult to draw cause/effect conclusions about the effectiveness of any one instructional component, assessment of the Advisories program will be part of the broader school assessment of student success. Such indicators as GPA, DFI lists, graduation rates, test scores, and numbers of students continuing to postsecondary education will be used. In addition, participation in student government; rates of school vandalism, violence and disciplinary actions; and other indicators of students' satisfaction with the school will be studied. Such data must be systematically collected over a number of years, as a longitudinal study, to assess the effectiveness of Advisories.

Formative evaluation of Advisories will be done through surveys of students and staff on a regular basis (at least once per year) in order to refine the program and maintain its relevance for the changing student population.

IV. GENERAL INFORMATION

Advisories are offered on a partial credit basis, with one unit of credit for each 18 hours of instruction, not to exceed four units total during the four years of high school. Schools have flexibility in designing Advisories on any type of schedule which fits appropriately into the total school schedule.

Schools have flexibility to determine if, and for whom, Advisories are required. Schools may opt to offer Advisories as an elective.

Each school will communicate clearly, in writing, the expectations, credit, and grading criteria to all students, staff, and parents.

A. Requirements Met

Credit earned in Advisories may be used as partial fulfillment of the district's 220 unit graduation requirement. Credit is elective and does not fulfill any specific subject requirement. Advisories credit has not been approved for acceptance by any college or university.

B. Prerequisites

None.

BOT Approval: 9/26/95