A Guide for Creating a School-Wide Student Advocacy Program

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A GUIDE FOR CREATING A
SCHOOL-WIDE ADVOCACY PROGRAM

A Project Report
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Theresa Dawn Chickering
November, 1991
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A GUIDE FOR CREATING A SCHOOL-WIDE STUDENT ADVOCACY PROGRAM

By

Theresa Dawn Chickering

November, 1991

This project introduces a philosophy and rationale for creating and developing a positive adult influence on elementary school students.

Research clearly illustrates the desirable impact a caring adult relationship can have on a child. The study addresses the importance of development of, and reasons why a school should implement a structured student/adult focused plan. The roles of the advocate and child centered activities are explored.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express gratitude to Dr. Wald, Dr. Chan, Dr. McPherson, and Dr. Potter for their willingness to serve on this committee.

In addition, the author would like to give special thanks to the staff at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School for their enthusiasm and help in developing this model. Their passion and commitment toward helping children be successful are surpassed by no one.

Finally, the author would like to express her sincere gratitude to her parents for teaching her the value of public education and that one can make the difference in creating a better world.
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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction to the Study

Background

During the 1989-1990 school year, Tumwater School District was involved in the process of formulating action plans to coordinate a new five-year district-wide strategic plan. Utilizing ideas from one of the considered options, the "At Risk Action Plan", Peter C. Schmidt Elementary School developed an interest in pursuing an advocacy program during its 1989-1990 self-study.

Sentiment is growing for preventing problems before children become teenagers and adults. The current climate and the societal trends have created a need for a new form of advocacy, one that will affect the community, promote institutional change, and revitalize childhood. (38:25)

In 1958 the passage of the National Defense Education Act was instrumental in providing guidance services at the elementary level. (48:1) Middle schools and high schools have been experimenting with advisor and guidance counselor programs. Federal and state agencies are developing advocacy programs for children defined as "high-risk youth." (3)

The development of these programs shows that we can no longer tolerate 20-25 percent of our future citizens existing on the marginal edge as they do now. Such
youngsters become potential drains on society, and are not likely to be productive or fully participating members. Tackling this problem is not an act of charity, but an act of necessity. We do not have a choice. We cannot let that many young people fall by the wayside. (31:2)

A large portion of this youthful population does not have a significant adult in their lives. (5) Researchers have found 5-10 percent of elementary school children are unable to acquire and maintain friendships of any kind. (5:1) It should be recognized that unless these students have a friend or a positive relationship with a significant adult, they will not function. They have absorbed a great deal of punishment from a series of authority figures in and out of school, and this destructive cycle is best eliminated by friendship with a successful adult. (15:130)

Researchers have now established a correlation between friendship problems and many different social problems such as alcoholism, violence, and suicide. It is found that unpopularity in childhood foreshadows many difficulties in later life, such as delinquency and career misadventures. More than this, it appears that people with poor relationships are prone to many other misfortunes - some of which are directly caused by worry or stress within their circle of acquaintances. These may include cancer, rise of heart disease, tonsillitis, injury in traffic accidents, and being attacked by muggers. (11:7) Children who are poor at forming relationships are obvious inhabitants of our social
casualty departments, such as divorce courts, prison mental hospitals, battered women’s hostels, and community homes. (11:30) The socially withdrawn, socially incompetent, and aggressive child becomes the socially inept adult casualty. (19:115)

A primary prerequisite for the development of a significant relationship is for a youth to perceive the teacher as being important and somehow special. The teacher then becomes a potential source of influence for the student. (14:54°) This relationship can affect a child’s understanding of complex problems and influence the development and comprehension of relationships between objects, between concepts, and between people, as well as having a predictable effect on the child’s happiness. (19:114)

There are three main areas one needs to address when forming a positive relationship:

1. The relationship must be personal
2. The communication should be deep and extensive
3. The evidence of personal satisfaction should be obvious. (14:55°)

The presence of significant adults within the school setting may have a critical impact on the value of the school experience. The relationships with these adults may be crucial for fostering healthy development. (14:54°) Students have a strong desire for a feeling of belonging.
(11:16) Good schools are places where students are seen as people worthy of respect and where there is a general attitude of good will towards all students. (22:14) An advocacy program in a school setting is reflective of public education's ever-growing responsibility sphere. (30:27)

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to help the staff at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School create a model for establishing one significant adult, an advocate, within the school setting. This will aid in the development of a school anchored in attitudes of respect, care, and civility that promote positive relationships and encourage human potential.

An advocacy program will provide opportunities for students to have new and different kinds of experiences with human beings that will convince them of their worthiness and capabilities. It will be successful if the students are provided an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. This respect must be honest and it must be based upon truth. One must look for the strengths so that the respect can be sincere. (23:7)

Education is meant to invite people to realize their potential, to meet the needs of society, and to participate in the progress of civilization. (35:77) As an advocate for students, one must provide support and information to reduce concerns and help each child reach his potential. (39:23)
(22:4) In a quality school, no student will be able to say, "No one cares." (15:132)

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited to the Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School in Tumwater, Washington. The population to be served by the program and participating advocates will be determined as the staff creates the model to be used.

**Questions to be Answered by the Study**

The predominant question to be answered will be if a significant adult, serving as an advocate, will create a positive influence for our students. Assessment will be in the form of the Survey 44 and Survey 66 tests, which measure a child's perceptions of school, relationships, and oneself. Peter G. Schmidt has been using these tests since the 1988-1989 school year and will provide comparative results of the students. The general attitudes and behaviors stemming from the students' and staff's perceptions will also be used for evaluating the program.

Many questions will need to be answered in the development of the model:

1. What percentage of the students will be involved? How will those students involved be assessed if we do not include 100% of our student population?
2. What percentage of the staff will be involved?
3. Will volunteers from the community be used? Will they be screened? How will they be trained?
4. How much, or will, an advocate deal with the child's parents?
5. Will meetings with the student be formal or informal?
6. Will there be contact time outside of school hours?
7. How frequently does the advocate meet with the students?
8. Will training be necessary for the staff?
9. Will the advocates have someone available to cover their room if they are needed by an assigned student?
10. What will the advocate do when face-to-face with the students?
11. How much counseling will actually be involved?
12. Who can the advocates go to for help and advice concerning a child?
13. How deeply involved will the advocate become with a child?

Definition of Terms

Advocacy
The act of developing an influential relationship which nurtures and convinces one of his worthiness and capabilities.

Advocate
One who gives the time and attention to create a positive relationship and to encourage human potential.
Counseling

A process designed to accelerate the growth of the client. (6:27)

Friendship

An interpersonal relationship that is mutually productive, established and maintained through perceived mutual free choice, and characterized by mutual positive regard. (10:124) Friendship is a term not commonly used in reference to a teacher-student relationship, but many of the skills in forming a friendship and the characteristics of friendship apply.

Friendship of Receptivity:

Characteristic of a teacher-student relationship. One person is the primary giver and the other is the primary receiver. This imbalance, however, is a positive one because each person gains something from the relationship. The person who receives affection and the person who gives affection both have their individual needs satisfied. (37:245)

Self-Concept

Refers to one's image of oneself. It is the degree to which we consciously or unconsciously accept and like ourselves. These are difficult terms to define because they involve the private, intimate "inner" life of a person to which only they have access and which only they can directly know. (48:7)
Significant Adult

An adult whom a child is assured is caring, listens, and responsive to his needs. This is the adult whom the child trusts, respects, and therefore, is influenced by him.

Trust

Faith in the behavior of another person: confidence in another person that leads one to feel that whatever is risked will not be lost. (33:178)
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Self-Concept Relative to the School Setting

J. S. Coleman's research finds that one's feelings of his inner self are strongly related to school success. (7:82) Within the school setting are children who lack self-image and self-acceptance and are hostile and reject other people. (34:118) Children who feel lonely say no one cares about them; they lack purposefulness, are uninteresting, and of low self-esteem. They see themselves as valueless, worthless, and insignificant often because that is how they feel everyone else sees them. (11:25)

Perceptions are learned and these feelings can change over time. Any change in our present perceptions alters our view of both the past and future. (35:24) In Pygmalion, Eliza Doolittle explains to Colonel Pickering why she will never feel like a lady to Professor Higgins. "...the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins because he treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will." (46)
In order to change the way an individual sees himself and his world, one must provide an atmosphere that convinces him through the things that we do that his fears and feelings are important, and that he is a worthy individual. Telling him will not suffice because we behave in terms of our feelings and not of our knowing. He must experience the feeling of acceptance, of safety, and of freedom. This does not mean we accept his inadequacies in social skills, his lack of knowledge, or his academic deficiencies as final. It must be understood that we expect improvement, that we have faith in his ability to improve, and that together we will work toward that end. The teacher who can communicate this positive expectation can change the student's perception of himself. (23:7)

Self-concept is never an end in itself. It is a necessary prerequisite for accomplishment. One develops a positive self-image because it helps create the confidence needed to master difficult tasks. (22:7)

The Importance of Relationships

The term friendship will appear frequently throughout the study. One must remember that although we will not use the term friendship in the advocacy program, many of the skills in forming a friendship and the characteristics of friendship apply to the relationship we will want to develop.

It is often found that low status children exhibit less positive and less effective styles of social interaction
than their higher status peers in a sociometric status. (8:11) This lack of interaction retards the formation of friendships.

In childhood, some children experience such difficulties with relationships, or are so unpopular, that the consequent resentment makes them generally hostile and resistant to intimacy, or else hopelessly dependent and over-sensitive. This relates to higher rates of emotional and mental health services, risk of schizophrenia, neurosis, and psychosis. (34:112) It is also found that friendship problems are closely intertwined with social problems such as alcoholism, violence, and suicide. Unpopularity in childhood foreshadows many difficulties in later life such as delinquency and inappropriate career decisions. (11:7) Those children who are poor at forming relationships are obvious inhabitants of our social casualty departments. (11:30)

Friendships are necessary for healthy functioning. (4:178) One can find his sense of well-being promoted by an interpersonal relationship. As a result of a friendship some people have been influenced not only to think differently on superficial matters but to transform their attitudes about life profoundly. Physical health can even be improved. (4:179) Our ailments can be cured just through affiliation with another human being. (4:206)

Schools need to be an inviting place for children. An important quality to inviting is a deep sense of belonging.
This belonging can be accomplished through an advocacy program. The advocate will keep the student emotionally stable and help him to see he is doing OK, a very important attribute to friendship. (11:19) The advocate can enhance, develop, and nurture an individual through the attributes of friendship. (10:125)

Many of the great people in our past have recognized the importance of positive relationships:

"In poverty and other misfortunes of life, true friends are a sure refuge. The young they keep out of mischief; to the old they are a comfort and aid in their weakness, and those in the prime of life they incite to noble deeds." - Aristotle (4:208)

"The most I can do for my friend is simply to be his friend." - Henry David Thoreau (4:208)

"The better part of one’s life consists of his friendship." - Abraham Lincoln (4:208)

Attributes of a Positive Relationship

The attributes of friendship and other positive relationships should be incorporated in the characteristics of being an advocate for a child. Friendships are characterized by the keen interest in the subjective and personal side of another individual. (4:177) Friendship, seen as such, is essential in forming an influential relationship with a student.
A friend provides psychological support. He shows appreciation for the other and lets one know his opinions are valued. (11:22) This communication provides an audience for self-expression and the opportunity to reveal details about oneself. This communication is essential in order to have another show an interest in oneself and one's problems. (11:21)

Friendship is more than crisis sharing. It provides someone to share dreams and fears. (4:203) Friends compliment, tell about other people's good opinions of us, attend to what we do, listen, and ask advice. (11:25)

A positive mentor relationship, similar to that of being an advocate, parallels a description of a friendship relation. A mentor gives positive reinforcement and encouragement, helps to motivate, talks about needs, offers services to help, is always available, simplifies things, offers companionship, assurance and informal conversation. (47)

Research shows that adolescents want to be treated more like peers than children. They want teachers to show interest in them and they want more interaction that is friendly. They seek out teachers to discuss personal problems, to ask advice, and to share similar school-related interests. (14:552) The ten most frequently mentioned qualities of a friend are all qualities a teacher could share with a student.
Ten most frequently mentioned qualities of a friend.

<table>
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<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. keeps confidence</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. loyalty</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. warmth; affection</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. supportiveness</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. frankness</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. sense of humor</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. willingness to make time for me</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. independence</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. good conversationalist</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. intelligence</td>
<td>57 (32:52)</td>
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</tbody>
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A friend and an advocate will interact with tact, good will, and humor. Each will laugh, become excited and confused with another, will have occasional moments of strains and many more of genuine enjoyment. (25:57) Attachment, such as advocacy, can be an element of any relationship. (1:94)

How to Develop Positive Relationships as an Advocate

One of the characteristics students mentioned most often as typical of the best teacher in a survey was the quality of caring. (42) It is this caring and nurturing one must address as an advocate.

It is unlikely students, particularly lower students, will be productive until they believe that they can be friends with their teachers and with students who do well in class. (15:130) The best way to create positive
relationships with the students is to spend time with them. Advocates should seize every opportunity for informal conversations with students. The best way for a teacher to learn about a child is through shared conversations. The tone should be informal. A teacher can find out more about a child while sitting with him at the lunch table, swinging side by side on the school playground swing-set, or standing together at the classroom guinea pig cage than he could ever expect to learn while seated at the teacher’s desk. (22:14)

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the time reserved for one-on-one contacts with individual students. (35:51)

When the advocate first meets a student, the main need is for information about each other. Show interest in the student’s personal life and reveal some facts about your life and some experiences that may intrigue him. To avoid subjects that are too personal, follow this rule: Never ask anything about his life that you are not prepared to reveal about your own. Sharing small parts of your life, especially little problems and some evidence of foolish acts, will lead students to become closer and more supportive of you. The more they know you and understand some of your struggles, the more they will tend to be on your side. Not knowing another person, especially one in a position of authority as a teacher, makes anyone more likely to cast that person in the role of an adversary or, at least, not as a friend. (15:126)
As the relationship develops, so will the communication. Good communication is based on mutual respect. Mutual respect means allowing each other to express one's beliefs and feelings honestly, without the fear of rejection. Adults may not agree, but they can show they accept the child's feelings. (17:61) As an advocate tries to solve problems, he will want to do it in a way that makes it apparent to the student that if he works hard, he will feel good, which means that he will satisfy his needs. (15:123) Giving the student two to three choices allows the student to feel power in his decision-making which is essential to a positive relationship. (8) To become personally involved in helping the student, an advocate should use the following techniques:

1. Use a calm voice
2. Lean forward if there is a belonging need, lean back if there is a freedom need
3. Use eye contact
4. Sit at the same level as the student
5. Sit with an open posture
6. Say over and over some version of, "We need to work it out."
7. Listen and affirm
8. Understand the child's point of view. (17:10)

When developing trust with the child, the advocate must share inviting comments within the first two crucial minutes of interaction. The advocate should be predictable and
should show commitment, share risks, and give credit. (25:44) He must also portray authenticity and acceptance. (4:179-180)

Each student needs a pat of assurance, a nod, or an encouraging smile at least some time during the day. Teachers who are aware of children's need to feel pride in their accomplishments take every opportunity to acknowledge an activity that is well done. (27:203) Ten ways to show encouragement are as follows:

1. Emphasize strengths
2. Minimize failure
3. Show you care
4. Spend time together
5. Develop patterns of learning to build success
6. Value silence as a way to reduce discouragement
7. Support effort, not just success
8. Try to understand the child's point of view
9. Be positive for both of you
10. Both adult and child have the right to a bad day (let the other person know). (18:65)
As the advocate develops the relationship with the child through problem-solving, trust building, and giving encouragement, values of friendship may start to appear. These are the five values that both the effective advocate and responsive child will share:

1. Utility value - help in solving problems
2. Affirmative value - see our positive self-attributes
3. Ego-support value - view ourselves as worthy and competent individuals
4. Stimulation value - introduce us to new ideas and new ways of seeing the world
5. Security value - does not call attention to our weaknesses. (52:198)

Creating a positive relationship is a skill and process. (11:9) The steps an advocate takes toward reaching a child must be intentional, nurturing, insightful, and supportive. (29:6) Charlotte, in Charlotte’s Web, is an example of one posing as an advocate. One must draw the child’s attention to his competences, growths of learning, increasing capacities, and his skills in a way that makes him aware of his ability to cope in a variety of situations. (34:118) Just by looking in, hearing, seeing, and feeling with children, the teacher can make school a happy place where each member is taken into consideration.
Why a Significant Adult is Needed

In order for an effective advocacy program to take place, one must develop a strong component that allows close contact between the student and adult. Youngsters need someone who can prod, encourage, cheer, discipline, and reward. Most important, regardless of the technique used, the student must realize that the adult really cares about him. When that feeling emerges between the student and the adult, you're on the way to helping that child make it in life. (31:3)

Those who have practiced the art of teaching know there is a delicate balance between helping one grow, see, and discover as opposed to directing, ordering, and demanding. All these techniques must be used periodically, but it is the blend that makes for success. It is the blend that makes the student see that the adult in his life genuinely cares. (31:3)

Adolescents on probation seek out any adult who genuinely cares. This may be seen as juvenile offenders near the end of their probationary sentences. They might violate the terms of probation in order to keep contact with their probation officer. Their probation officer has become their significant adult. (32)

Due in part to shifting family and community structures, many students do not receive the support they need for success. (12) Nicolas Zill, a psychologist with Child Trends Inc., conducted a survey on families and
children which found that developmental, learning and behavioral disorders are among the most common chronic conditions in childhood and adolescence that affect one in five children of those parents where there is some conflict. (13:D1)

In addition, recent research indicates academic problems extend to those whose families include a stepparent, or are from a single-parent family. This is fifty percent of our population. Several studies have also shown the absence of a father has an exaggerated effect on both math scores and discipline. (51:A1). A solution is involvement with an adult. Young people need adults in their lives! (31:2)

The most famous mass murderers of almost every country such as Christie, the Black Panther, the Michigan Murderer, the Boston Strangler, and others, have invariably been found to have had abnormal social experiences in childhood, or to have been left without adult help or guidance when they ran into difficulties with their peers. (34:115)

British and American studies on alcoholics repeatedly reveal cases of adults who turned to excessive drinking because their relationships were not satisfactory and as children they did not have the assistance from an adult to learn to put them right. (30:116)

Britt Nederhood, principal at Garfield Elementary in Olympia, Washington, stated schools can help families in a
number of ways. One of these ways included more opportunities for children to bond with adults. (45:A1)

Educators agree that poverty and a lack of parental attention are negative influences on a child’s development. (45:A2). Children need adults. Even though they may not realize it, significant adults influence young people through nearly everything they say and do. (18:60) It should be recognized that unless these students have a friend, they will not function. Many students have absorbed a great deal of punishment from a series of bosses in and out of school, and this destructive cycle is best eliminated by friendship with a successful adult. (15:130)

Why Schools Should be Involved

Next to the family, the school is generally considered the most important influence on a child’s life. Here he spends one-third of his young life, trying to learn, expecting to be cared for, and learning to trust. A teacher is entrusted with a real treasure - a child’s spirit - it can grow and flourish or be crushed. The school may be the only avenue of escape, a place where he can feel safe and find people to depend upon. (23:8)

In addition, the school reaches the greatest population of children. This gives the school the advantage of discovering those children who are reaching out for help. Their troubles often surface as behavior problems in the classroom. Problems children face today which alter behaviors include: unemployment, divorce, single-parent
households, poverty, working mothers, drug and alcohol abuse, prejudice and racism, and sexual experimentation. (36:342) A significant adult can help by listening to a child with these problems. If more help is needed, a counselor at the school may be available.

Since low self-esteem saps learning potential, a school is responsible for raising its students' self-esteem. (22:7) Those that come to school with low self-esteem tend to withdraw and make fewer and fewer attempts to initiate other friendships, or become noisy, rebellious, boastful, and a nuisance to teachers and classmates. (34:119) This prohibits the development of relationships. Unpopular children perform poorly at school, experience learning difficulties and drop out of school in much greater numbers than their popular peers. (34:112)

One can legitimately say, "There are so many of them; there is no way I can take on this gargantuan problem." Saving the world is not and should not be each teacher's commitment, but trying to help at least one child should be. A school should not set goals it cannot accomplish. It should not set goals where failure is almost destined to occur; but as educators taking on one child is not an unrealistic goal. There may be failures, but there will also be successes. A few failures should not keep one from trying again. (31:3)

A school needs to build an environment that addresses the myriad of needs and capacities of students. A variety
of ways to keep students from falling through the cracks needs to be tried. (12) The school has to be the most inviting place in town and the school needs to address all students. A teacher who dismisses this responsibility is saying, "When we get better prisoners, we'll have better prisons." The teacher is the professional; he should be the primary source of inviting messages for all students. (35:6)

Many effective businesses now have mentor programs, similar to that of an advocacy program in a school. They have found that individuals that have the advantage of a mentor made more money, more often followed career plans, were better educated, and were happier in their careers. (39:15) If we were to parallel that to the school setting, we would find that children with advocates earned better grades, set goals for themselves, achieved more, and were happier in school.

Next to home, schools exert the single greatest influence on how students see themselves and their abilities. (35:28) The goal of teachers is to make each child as wonderful as possible. (22:3) The school does make a difference in a child's life.

Review of Schools with Similar Programs:

Advocacy programs are relatively new within the elementary schools. Middle schools have worked toward each student having an advisor, a teacher who is the school expert on that child and a small group of others. They meet
together regularly. In addition to the class time they spend together. This teacher is not a "mommy" but a special friend to whom they may come. (20)

"One to One" is a private mentoring program which formed in Washington D.C.. This initiative aims to mobilize enough volunteers so that by 1991 every young person in the country who might benefit from a mentor has the opportunity to be matched with one. David T. Kearns, chairman of the board of the Xerox Corporation, told One to One's national mentoring conference, "I believe that mentoring may, in fact, be the fastest and quickest solution to the fact that we're educating only about half the people in our country." One to One promises to be instrumental in generating large-scale interest in reaching out to young people in need of a supportive hand. (24:4)
CHAPTER THREE
Creating a Model for an Advocacy Program
for Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School

In April, 1989, a planning team of 25 people was formed to draft a strategic plan for consideration by the school board. The planning team was composed of teachers, support staff, administrators, board members, parents and community citizens.

The planning team met for three days to develop the initial parts of the strategic plan. During that time the team analyzed the district and the community, examined environmental impacts, assessed the district's strengths and weaknesses and identified critical issues which needed to be addressed in the future.

Five groups were formed, one for each strategy, to develop specific action plans which would cause the district to achieve its objectives. More than 100 school staff and community members served on the action teams. The action plans were meshed with the five components to form the Tumwater School District's strategic plan. The school board approved the plan in January.

Thirty action plans were developed to implement the strategies. One of these plans was to develop an advocacy program which would ensure that "at risk" students succeed.
As part of that program, an advocate is to be identified for each student in the district to help that student achieve learner outcomes.

Throughout the 1989-1990 school year, Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School was involved in the process of a self-study. From that study, the staff became interested in an advocacy program but did not begin any research into this due to other greater areas of concern.

During the 1990-1991 school year, the staff prioritized areas to focus upon in order to reach the objectives of the strategic plan. Creating a safe environment and a student management system were worked on throughout that school year.

As the staff met to devise a plan for the 1991-1992 school year, an interest in advocacy again arose. It was decided that information from the author would be dispersed throughout the year. In addition, several staff members showed a great interest in creating and possibly implementing a model for this school year.

Research completed by the author was circulated to several staff members in order to receive background information. These staff members highlighted information which they felt was of the greatest interest to the entire staff.

A group of thirteen staff members met to discuss the research found on the importance of the need for a significant adult for a child. At that meeting it was
unanimously decided that something must be done for the students at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School.

The thirteen staff members also discussed the advocacy program taking place at East Olympia, another elementary school in the Tumwater District. After speaking to a few teachers from the school, they found that their program was not meeting the needs of all involved. East Olympia has set up a program in which each teacher is assigned a group of students from various grade levels and meets with these students once a month as an entire group. The staff at East Olympia found that there is little interactive correlation with the students and it ends up being just another class to prepare for.

The thirteen staff members who attended the meeting came to the consensus that they would develop a simplistic model to experiment with. It was decided that the first grade would be targeted. Due to the few number of staff members present, only sixteen first grade students were chosen to be assigned an advocate. These were students the first grade teachers felt had the greatest immediate need. The advocate would meet with the assigned student at least three times a week on an informal basis.

The results of these meetings were more astounding than previously thought. After meeting with the assigned student twice, the student looked forward to the meetings with his advocate and would wave, smile, or run to give the advocate a hug whenever the two saw each other. The
students literally clung to their advocates just because these positive adults knew their names and asked them how things were going.

Word spread quickly throughout the school and a greater population of the staff was interested. During a staff meeting it was decided that 100% of the first grade population was to be assigned an advocate. The position of advocate was voluntary, but many chose to be included due to the success and ease of the program. A great number of the staff also realized that they all had an invested interest in these students as they would be working with them in the future.

Because many of the school's educational assistants do not attend staff meetings, a special meeting was coordinated by the author with the educational assistants to include a greater population of them. One hundred percent of this population volunteered.

The most difficult task was the assigning of all 84 first grade students to their advocates. Some staff members specifically requested a student and others were simply chosen at random. Each staff member was assigned one to three students.

Formal and informal discussions took place throughout the following weeks. Research from the author was shared throughout these discussions to help guide and focus. These discussions led to the model for an advocacy program for Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School.
CHAPTER FOUR

A Description of the Advocacy Program

The staff at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School came to a consensus of what the school wanted from an advocacy program and how the school would acquire this.

At this time, the program is optional for staff. Sixty percent of the staff have chosen to participate due to the committed interest in working with these students and the ease, enjoyment, and simplicity of the program. The first grade teachers are not posing as advocates since they already work with the first grade students. The staff which volunteered includes the principal, classroom teachers, educational assistants, and the custodian. Staff members who did not choose to participate felt they would not have the time to make it a valuable experience for the students.

Due to the lack of time to train and screen community volunteers, it was decided that staff only would work with the students as part of the advocacy program.

Since the staff does not see the value of a pull-out program, it was decided that the needs of all enrolled students must be eventually considered. Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School has a population of over 600 students, too many to be involved in the program, so only first grade students were assigned an advocate. This gives each
advocate two to three students. Each following school year
the staff will be assigned two to three new first grade
students.

It was also noted that even though these students would
not be formally assigned an advocate in their later school
years, the advocates would still know and talk with these
students which still allows for the informal contact the
students need and look forward to. The difference would be
that the advocate would not need to intentionally seek out
the student to make contact once he is no longer in first
grade.

When assigning students to their advocates, the
advocates first looked at the first grade roster and chose
students they already knew. If the advocates did not know
any of the children, they were then selected at random. If
two advocates chose the same student, one was simply asked
if he would take another child.

Since there is no all-school advocate/student meeting
time, the advocate seeks out the student during his free
time. Initially, the first grade teachers often must point
out the assigned student to the advocate. During the first
meeting of advocate and student, the advocate is to
introduce himself and inform the student that he is going to
be his special friend. He should also tell the student that
he will be visiting him often. It has been found that after
the second meeting, the student recognizes the advocate and
looks forward to the meetings with great anticipation.
The advocates are to make contact with their assigned students a minimum of three times a week. During these meetings, informal conversation generally takes place. The students are to know that there is an adult who is interested in them. The advocate asks the student what he has done today, what new words he has learned, how his new baby brother is doing, and other points of personal interest. Conversations can take two minutes or a half an hour. The goal is to show interest and let the child know there is a significant adult in the school who cares about him.

It is this interest that will make the student feel special. It is important the student know that there is someone at the school he can talk to if he is in trouble. For the students who are struggling with success, this is a time when an adult at the school meets with them on a positive level. An adult can look beyond a child's tattered clothes, odor, and anti-social behaviors much more so than his peers. The advocate needs to help teach the child to relate in a way acceptable to peers. The adult should provide the necessary relationship to help the child make changes necessary to being successful.

At various times the first grade teachers may express a concern about a child to his advocate. At this time the advocate may consider meeting with the child on a formal basis in order to work through the concern. In order to reduce the occurrence of negative behaviors, problem-solving
should be worked on together. The advocate may wish to continue these meetings throughout the child's school years.

Since meetings are based on an informal basis, there will be no contact made to the parent from the advocate. The advocate will also not do any counseling with the student, although the advocate can refer the student to the counselor for help. The staff is not comfortable with counseling, but it is ready to befriend children.

Peter C. Schmidt Elementary School participates in the Survey 44 test annually. This test measures a student's attitude toward himself, adults, and school. Questions such as, "Do you think grown-ups in your school care about you?" will be looked at closely in determining a change from the advocacy program. First grade teachers will also play a large role in evaluating the program as they work with these students on a continual basis. Basic observations and subjective assessments will be used by the first grade teachers to see if the advocates have made any changes in working with these students.

**Items One May Need to Address**

**As an Advocate**

"When we take a man as he is, we make him worse, but when we take him for all that he could be, we advance him to what he can be." - Goethe (23:7)
Negative behaviors, problem-solving, and relationships are just some concerns an advocate may need to address. Of course there will also be shared weekend adventures. In dealing with any one of these issues, it is essential the advocate establishes a focus. The advocate should choose something to work toward with the student that is important, meaningful, and changeable. (25:35)

Negative behaviors are noticeable and will, therefore, be something the advocate wishes to address with the student. One must remember that it is the behavior, not the student, that is bad. Behaviors can significantly predict the social status one acquires, so it becomes important that these behaviors change. (5:19) Behaviors may also be used to identify those children with needs beyond an advocate’s help, and referral to counseling can be made. (36:343)

Problem-solving may be worked on together in order to reduce the occurrence of negative behaviors. During problem-solving with the advocate, the student should arrive at the conclusions by self-analysis and reflection. (39:26-27) The advocate should recognize the positive aspect and seek to guide the child in such a way that the ability to adapt becomes an asset. (23:6) The advocate should also recognize that blame is a way to shift responsibility and to avoid self-examination. (4:189) The advocate does not accept the student’s inadequacies in social skills, his lack of knowledge, or his academic deficiencies as final. It must be understood that the advocate expects improvement,
that he has faith in the student’s ability to improve, and that together they can work toward that end. (29:6)

William Glasser’s Reality Therapy directs one to point out the negative behavior and go on from there. Since no excuses are accepted, there is no need to ask why it was done. Responsibility is accepted through restitution. This way the student corrects his mistake to take ownership for his behavior. He needs to learn a better way. The focus of Reality Therapy is an action, a plan to try a new behavior for a short time and then for the person to evaluate whether or not he has taken a better route of action for himself. (17:9)

Since this study has portrayed the importance of relationships, this may be something with which the advocate may want to work on with the student. Looking at friendship as a process and a skill is advantageous as it leads to a direct and useful form of practical advice for people who are lonely or frustrated. It focuses on what people can do to improve their relationships. Children often have two problems in establishing friendships:

1. Learning to relate in a way acceptable to peers
2. Learning skills of friendship that will be a good grounding for relationships in later life. (11:114)

As an advocate one may need to teach how to avoid or bypass roadblocks to learning. Students, especially highly anxious students, do not know what to do when they do not
know the correct answer. (25:83) Miscommunication may need to be explained to the student to continue a desire for learning. For example, in a familiar scenario where a student knows an answer, jumps up and down in his seat due to his excitement, and gets reprimanded for being a disturbance in the class there is miscommunication. (50:223)

As a student exits or enters the school, an advocate can provide the support needed at a new and strange time for the child. The advocate should find and discuss his fears and hopes in a new environment. (3)

Professionals such as counselors, teachers, and school administrators who work with children are not immune to the unprofessional judgment of physically unattractive children. Research indicates that physically attractive children are perceived to be more intelligent, successful, and socially competent. Adults provide more help and social rewards such as smiles to physically attractive children. As an advocate, one needs to first acknowledge this behavior and then inform the children who suffer from this, that few people are born beautiful and show them ways they can improve themselves. (26:146-147)

The advocate and the student may want to share the following together:
How to stay well

or get better if you're not so well to begin with.
1. Do things that bring you a sense of fulfillment, joy, and purpose that validate your worth.
2. Pay close and loving attention to yourself.
5. Love yourself and everyone else.
6. Create fun, loving, honest relationships.
7. Make a positive contribution to your community.
8. Make a commitment to your health and well-being.
10. Keep a sense of humor. (17:42)

Life is irreversible: every experience a person has is forever. One cannot unexperience what has happened! Every experience of significant interaction has its impact upon those who were involved in it. Meaningful experiences provided by a helper may not be sufficient or produce the change hoped for, but they are always important. (9:31)

The staff at Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School know and fully understands that saving the world is not and should not be each teacher's commitment, but trying to help at least one child should be.
CHAPTER FIVE
Summary and Recommendations

Summary:
Studies clearly indicate that students need positive relationships with encouraging adults. Many elementary school children are unable to acquire or maintain friendships of any kind. Research has shown how vital friendships are to children.

Children need adults. Caring adults influence children through nearly everything they say and do. A personal relationship with extensive communication is a prerequisite for the development of a positive relationship between a teacher and student.

One of the best ways to create positive relationships with students is to spend time with them. The best way for a teacher to learn about a child is through informal conversation. As an advocate, one should seize every opportunity for informal conversations with students.

Research has shown that one of the characteristics students mentioned most often as typical of the best teacher in a survey was the quality of caring. To care is to become personally involved with the student and to show encouragement.
The author's task has been to investigate the realm of an advocacy program for Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School. The purpose of this project was to create a model for establishing one significant adult within the school setting. Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School is working at continuing its commitment as a quality school, and within a quality school, there is no student who feels nobody cares about him.

Recommendations

The population of Peter G. Schmidt Elementary School is one which consists of a large turn-over. For example, during the 1990-1991 school year, 451 students started school in September, and 452 students were enrolled in May; however, there were 150 new students throughout the school year.

In order to help meet the needs of these new students, the author developed a new student program. Unfortunately though, this does not meet the need of developing a relationship with a significant adult as the other students had done as a first grade student at Peter G. Schmidt. One possibility to alleviate this problem may be to expand the advocacy program to first grade students and new students. This, of course, is something the staff may wish to look forward to in the future as the staff is still experimenting with this new program.

The staff will need encouragement and support in its efforts to implement the new program. Formal and informal
discussions must be continually provided to help teachers feel more skilled in taking on the role of advocate. Teachers new to the school must also receive inservice training about the advocacy program.

The model is being piloted during the 1991-1992 school year at Peter C. Schmidt Elementary School. During a spring meeting the staff will need to address any unanticipated shortcomings of the model. The time and resources invested in the effort are proof of a strong staff initiative and periodic "fine tuning" will always be part of the process.
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