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**MIDDLE SCHOOL ADVISORIES: AN EVALUATION OF
EFFECTIVENESS IN CREATING GREATER AFFILIATION
AND SELF-CONCEPT**

Kimberly A. Quigley

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 1, 2001

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved/ 4/30/01

ABSTRACT

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Middle School Advisories: An Evaluation of Effectiveness in Creating Greater
Affiliation and Self-Concept

May 2001

Advisors: Dr. John Klanderman

Dr. Roberta Dihoff

School Psychology Program

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a first year middle school advisory program in the areas of school affiliation and early adolescent self-concept. A total of 300 sixth grade students participated in the study, with 100 students from each of three different middle schools in a New Jersey suburban district. The sample consisted of 140 females and 160 males. A combination of different scales was used to create the test packet that was distributed to the participants in order to examine the hypotheses regarding school affiliation and self-concept. Three scales were utilized to measure school affiliation; the *Liking School Scale*, the *Classroom Environment Scale*, and a *Family and Friends Interview*. One scale was applied to the second hypothesis regarding self-concept, which was the *Multi-Dimensional Self-Concept Scale*. Affect was the one subscale extracted from this test. A comparison of means was the major method of analysis applied to the examination of the two hypotheses. Although no statistical significance was reported, the results indicated some positive trends concerning middle school advisory programs.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research was to examine the efficiency of a first year middle school advisory program. The focus of the study was contained to school affiliation and self-concept, and was measured by comparing mean test scores with two other middle schools that had not implemented an advisory program. Although no statistical significance was found, positive developments were apparent.

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Chapter One: **The Problem**

Need

Throughout the past ten years there has been a significant increase in the research regarding advisory programs, particularly at the middle school level (Galassi & Gullede, 1997). The middle school years are a critical developmental period for students ((Proctor & Choi, 1994). Due to the onset of puberty, early adolescence is commonly associated with ardent biological, cognitive, and psychosocial transformation (Proctor & Choi, 1994). At the same time students are transitioning from the elementary school level, a sheltering, child-centered surrounding, to the middle school level, an environment much larger, more highly competitive, and more impersonal than what they had been accustomed (Manning, 2000). Research has indicated that this transition, along with the onset of puberty, has negative effects on students' self-concept (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Research has also focused on self-concept as an integral part of personality (Huitt, 1998). Therefore, it is crucial that possible programs to stabilize or increase self-concept be explored and utilized at this stressful level of student development.

Purpose

It is nearly impossible for the guidance department to meet the needs and concerns of every student in their school (Galassi, Gullede, & Cox, 1997). The expectation of advisory programs is to typically distribute the responsibility of guidance throughout the school in order to assist students with any emotional difficulties they may confront. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a first year advisory program at the middle school level, looking for a positive impact on school affiliation and self-concept in early adolescents.

Hypothesis

Within advisory programs, faculty members are designated advisors to smaller groups of students, therefore increasing the opportunity for faculty and students to build stronger communication patterns. Additionally, it is predicted that the smaller advisory groups will allow for the building of more peer relationships. It is anticipated that students will more frequently turn to each other and other adults, in addition to their guidance department, when addressing needs and concerns. Therefore, it is hypothesized that advisory programs will contribute to overall greater school affiliation. Additionally, it is further hypothesized that this positive school environment will create greater self-concept among these early adolescents.

Definitions

Self-concept can be defined as the “the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence” (Huitt, 1998). In simpler terms, it can be described as the impression one holds of oneself (Eccles, Midgley, & Wigfield, 1993).

Advisory programs, also known as teacher-based programs (TAP) or home-based programs were created based on the notion that all students should have a caring relationship with at least one adult in the school (Galassi et al., 1997). Advisory groups should be kept small, and should assist students’ social and intellectual development during a significant level in their lives (Wilson, 1998).

School Affiliation refers to a sense of belonging to one’s school, or the relationship one has with their school.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the sample used in this research is both normal and random. It is also assumed that the questionnaires, which were distributed among the sample, were

done so using the highest ethical standards, while maintaining strict confidentiality so that no student can be identified by his or her responses. It is also assumed that any alarming responses that are identified in the research will be addressed through guidance and counseling within the school.

Limitations

It is understood that this study is limited because of the fact that the students receiving advisory for the first time have also entered that school for the first time. It then becomes difficult to distinguish between scores that may be the result of the advisory program, or perhaps the result of the new school environment. Another limitation is the fact that the school implementing advisory is also a brand new school in the district. This makes it difficult to discriminate between scores that could be the result of a brand new school atmosphere. The restricted diversity among the population sample is another limitation of the study. The research was conducted in a higher middle class area, not allowing for many differences in culture and socioeconomic status.

Theory

Adolescence

Adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, beginning just before the teenage years and ending just after them. It is considered to be a crucial period in people's development because they are no longer considered to be children, but not quite adults. It is a stage when people face a variety of rapid physical and social changes that impacts the rest of their lives (Harter, 1990).

Puberty, the time at which maturation of the sexual organs occurs, begins at approximately age 11 or 12 for girls and 13 or 14 for boys. In western cultures, the average age at which adolescents reach sexual maturation has been steadily decreasing over the last century, most likely due to better nutrition and health care (Harter, 1990).

Puberty has a direct effect on the way adolescents feel about themselves, as well as how others treat them. Early maturing boys have a distinct advantage over later-maturing boys; they do better in athletics and they are generally more popular and have more positive self-concepts. On the other hand, they are more likely to have difficulties at school and become involved in minor delinquency. The reason seems to be that early-maturing boys are more likely to become friends with older, and therefore more influential boys, who may lead them to age-inappropriate activities (Gustavo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999). Puberty seems to affect girls in a different way. Although early-maturing girls are more sought after as dates and have higher self-concepts than later maturing-girls, some of the consequences of early physical maturation may be less positive. Early maturing females are sometimes the source of ridicule because of some obvious developmental features, such as breasts (Simmons & Blyth, 1987).

Early adolescence is often perceived as a time of “storm and stress” according to theorists such as Erikson (1968). There has also been research to support this belief. In a cross-sectional study of about 1,000 students aged 8-17, it was found that the early adolescence period (ages 11-14) was the time in which children’s self-perceptions were the most negative (Eccles et al., 1993). The 11 to 14 year-old population was more self-conscious and had lower overall self-esteem, less confidence in their academic abilities, and less stable self-perceptions (Eccles et al., 1993).

Advisory Programs

Advisory programs were created to focus on the emotional and social attitude of education in an effort to strengthen the cognitive development of our early adolescent students (Ingwalson, 1998). These programs are intended to function as an important supplement to school counseling, and they have received strong endorsements from the National Middle School Association (Galassi & Gullede, 1997). These programs are

particularly unique to the middle school in that they are part of the foundation of the middle school movement and one of the features that distinguishes middle schools from high schools or elementary schools. As a bridge between elementary and high school, middle school is trained to carry students from the school of their childhood to the school of their teenage years. Middle schools, cognizant of their important role in this transition, have assumed the responsibility in developmental guidance under the rubric of advisories, helping prepare students to make thoughtful decisions and be self-managers as their need for independence increases ("Middle Level," 1997). There is no question that this time in an adolescent's life requires the support of a caring adult. A tender adult at school may furnish meaningful emotional education and guidance for students between ages 10 and 14 who are going through challenging physical, emotional, and social changes. Since the guidance counselor couldn't possibly provide each student with daily or even weekly support, advisory programs make it possible for every student in a middle school to have an encouraging relationship with one adult (Galassi & Gullede, 1997). Advisory programs can offer support to each child navigating his or her way through emotional turbulence of this critical developmental stage (Wilson, 1998).

Self-concept

With the beginning of adolescence there comes an increase of elements that affect the shaping of goals and goal-oriented behaviors (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). Adolescents begin to spend less amounts of time with their family and more time with their peers. The satisfaction with these peer relationships is important to the development of good self-concept. Adolescents are more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem and academic achievement if their peers accept them. Those who are not accepted tend to be at greater risk for problems in later social and psychological functioning (Levitt et

al., 1993). Academic achievement and educational ambitions have also been shown to have an affect on self-concept (Mizelle, 1999).

Problems in adolescence can result in adolescent depression, however it is known that the majority of teens are able to get through this stage of development with a positive sense of personal identity (Nopp, 1998). Negative reactions to the onset of puberty can have a serious effect on the perceived body image and self-esteem of a young adolescent. Recent literature has emphasized the need for parents, teachers, and counselors to pay close attention to these symptoms, so that help can be offered in the early stages, and lessens the chances of more serious future dilemmas.

Overview

In Chapter 2 of this study, an in-depth review of all relevant advisory program information will be conducted. The review will examine all positive and negative research regarding the implementation of advisory programs, along with the impacts they have had at the middle school level. Subsequently, in Chapter 3 the design of the study will be incorporated into the paper, in intricate detail. In Chapter 4, all data will be analyzed and the results will be interpreted. The hypotheses will be restated and all findings will be identified and discussed. Finally, in Chapter 5, conclusions will be drawn based on this research study and implications for future research will be addressed.

Chapter 2: **Review of the Literature**

Advisory Programs

Ever since the tragic incident occurred at Columbine High School, education has shifted its focus towards our adolescents. Providing students with secure and comfortable adult relationships within school has gained attention from a multitude of education research. The middle school level, in particular, is considered to be a critical developmental period for students, thus requiring significant adult guidance. For this reason, advisory programs, also known as advisor/advisee (A/A), home base, home-group, homeroom, the fourth R, teacher-advisor programs, teacher-based guidance, and teacher-counselor programs, have been created (Galassi et al., 1997; Galassi & Gullledge, 1997). These programs have been well received by both the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Middle School Association (NMSA, 1992). They are also recurrently discussed in the Middle School Journal as well as the NASSP Bulletin (Galassi & Gullledge, 1997).

Surprisingly, these programs have rarely been reviewed within the current counseling research. Among the major national counseling journals, only four articles were discovered regarding Teacher-advisor programs in the past twenty years (Galassi & Gullledge, 1997).

Adolescent Need

There are psychological reasons why the middle school years are estimated to be a complicated time for adolescents. Cognitive capacities to compare oneself with others emanate in middle childhood and increase in adolescence as the adolescent experiences more intricate and diverse groups of individuals with whom to parallel the self (Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Rueman, & Yee, 1989). For some adolescents, these alterations in

thinking may contribute to occasional emotional problems such as depression and anxiety. Harter (1990) described four transitions in self-concept during adolescence and the emotional risks that accompany such changes. During adolescence, a student's self-concept becomes more abstract. Piaget described this shift as formal operational thought.

Secondly, the self-concept becomes more differentiated as the person enters the teenage years. Early adolescents begin to define themselves in various roles. The roles may include student, athlete, close friend, as well as roles involving their general social relationships, romantic relationships, and citizenship. Additionally, adolescents begin to perceive themselves differently in each role. For example, who they are with their parents could entirely contradict their role as a best friend or girlfriend. This presents conflict for many adolescents who are trying to discover their "true self." (Eccles et al., 1989). Harter (1990) suggests that those amidst adolescence, ages 14-15, are most confused by these various views of the self. Cognitively, they possess the capacity to identify their differences in behavior with different people. However, they are unaware of the reason why, and this can be very frustrating. As they move into late adolescence, more advanced cognitive skills develop, and help understand the normality of their behavior, along with skills to integrate the diverse views of self into a more theoretical visualization. Thirdly, an ideal or imagined self-concept develops during adolescence. The ideal self is the self that one would like to be. The development of the ideal self is made possible by hypothetical thinking, which is another "characteristic" of formal operations. Difficulty can originate for adolescents if there is a large inconsistency between the actual self and the ideal self. The more one sees their self as being different from the way they are, the more likely they are to become unhappy, disappointed, and even depressed (Eccles et al., 1989). Finally, during adolescence, one becomes more introspective, or inward looking. Again, Piaget's formal operations stage must be present

for introspection (thinking about what is going on in one's own mind). It is not unusual for adolescents to become very concerned with how they appear to others. It might be hard for them to distinguish between their own thoughts and the thoughts of others. They may fall victim to the "imaginary audience", meaning that everyone is looking at them. Adolescents also may view themselves as completely opposite from everyone else. They become convinced that no one else can comprehend their problems, including their parents (the personal fable) (Bijstra & Jackson, 1998).

It is clear that at this time, middle school students are in need of some adult guidance. It would be impossible for the guidance counselor to meet the psychological needs of all of the school's students. Instead, advisory programs have been created to assist with the responsibility of guidance (Galassi & Gullede, 1997). Advisory programs can provide adolescents with care and support that can aid them through the hardships they may face during changes in their cognitive development. Young adolescents need positive interaction with adults and help instead of criticism as they work through self-definition (Fenzel, 2000).

Implementation

There are various ways to implement an advisory program within the middle school (Miller, 1999). Research has indicated that students learn best in a supportive environment where it is impossible for a student to go unnoticed (Wilson, 1998). What is the most effective way to run an advisory program? Shoreham-Wading River Middle School in New York has proved to be an excellent example of a well-structured advisory program (Wilson, 1998). This school has utilized advisory since their opening in 1971. The program meets every morning and again during part of lunch. Each advisory program consists of only ten students along with an advisor. The daily curriculum changes from specific student discussions to fun activities, and then to community

service. The purpose of these meetings is to help build a relationship between the advisor and his or her students or advisees (Wilson, 1998). This relationship should serve as a safe organization for that student to lean on when experiencing new responsibilities as arising adults.

Adult support has not sufficiently been provided by society's home and family situation anymore. Therefore, the responsibility has shifted from the home and into schools. The fact of the matter is that in today's day and age both parents are assuming the role of the provider and require joint income in order to keep up with the financial system. They are also working longer hours and are just not as available to their children as they need to be. Families are also much more mobile, often separating from their extended families. When this occurs, children often lose the adult support they may have received from aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc. (Seidman, LaRue, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). This indicates that few adults are participating in the well being of our young adolescents. Young people, in turn, are becoming increasingly isolated from the advice and direction of our adults.

Teacher Support

Many teachers tend to be uneasy about being part of an advisory program. They feel they must take on the role of a counselor, and they are not prepared to handle the extra responsibility. However, the purpose of the advisor is not to be a counselor. The advisor should function in part as a friend, and as a contact person for the home, as well as the guidance department, when services are necessary (Wilson, 1998).

In 1994 in Indiana, advisory programs became a mandatory part of the curriculum, however, most states do not necessitate mandated advisories. However, as a result of augmented research and concentration regarding these programs, many middle schools have begun to provide advisory on their own. The lack of proper preparation and

planning from these schools has unfortunately led to merely satisfactory programs. Success depends upon clear goals, and a well thought out vision about the purpose of the program. This process requires time, teacher support, and a knowledgeable background on the theory behind advisory (Wilson, 1998). Then, extensive teacher training should be provided concerning adolescent development, and the correct program construction (Manning, 2000).

Assessment is another key component in advisory. If advisory programs are part of the school curriculum, then teachers should be evaluated on their performance to ensure proper implementation (Manning, 2000).

Parents are another necessary part of a successful advisory program. There is concern from some parents that different values may be taught during advisory that conflict with the values instilled at home. However, if parents are notified about the program's content and purpose ahead of time, negative response is more unlikely (Wilson, 1998).

In 1997, a survey of middle school teachers, parents, and students in five large northeastern and midwestern states, advisory programs endured a serious critique (Brockett, 1999). Seventy-five percent of teachers and 68% of parents agreed that advisory programs possessed the potential for assisting students in their academic, social, and emotional development. At the same time, only 32% of teachers and 40% of parents thought the program was fulfilling these goals.

What goes wrong with advisory?

Many advisory programs were created through the guidance departments and developed into a group counseling type program. Immediately, this method was perceived disapprovingly by teachers who are not comfortable with having to assume the

function of a counselor in their classroom. Then, without full teacher cooperation and enthusiasm, advisories cannot live up to their fullest potential.

Advisories, which were not allocated any sort of structure or format also tended to produce ineffective results. Teachers were poorly trained and let the students use their advisory time as “free time,” and simply supervised the unused period. Naturally, little communication occurs between the advisor and the student, and the entire purpose of the time is lost. Some teachers have tried to coordinate “fun” activities for which the students could engage, but without a clear goal or vision, the activity will most likely serve as a time waster with no purpose related to the concept behind advisory.

Some advisory programs chose to discuss serious current issues occurring in the world. This activity does closely correlate to the purpose of advisory, however, the conversations tend to become highly controversial and problematic. They received a great deal of negativity from the surrounding public eye, thus forcing them to alter the advisory discussions (Midgley & Edelin, 1998).

A survey of teachers verified that the most familiar advisory activities, listed in order of their rate of recurrence were, informal conversation among students, silent reading or study time, teacher discussion with group, group activities and games, and finally, teacher conversations with individual students. Unfortunately, the survey indicates that the activity that most connects with the goal of advisory, is the last one on the list (Gallavan & Davis, 1999).

Types of Advisory Programs

Developmental or Social Needs Based Advisory is a model that is formed based on the requests of the group it is helping. For middle schools, that group includes early adolescents and the issues associated with that stage of development (Brockett, 1999). Under this model, advisees are supported to participate in discussions related to their

own situations, and they are led and guided through the discussions by their advisor (Manning, 2000).

School Adjustment Advisory is a model, which focuses on school related conflicts that typically arise for early adolescents. Transitioning among schools, school performance and achievement, using school resources, highschool planning, and peer mediation skills are just some of the issues addressed in this type of advisory program. Community (Ingwalson, 1998). These advisories are often sponsored by other groups, such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, and junior Rotary (Ingwalson, 1998).

Workplace based advisories concentrate on the teaching of technical and vocational skills for the future planning of our young students. Part of this type of advisories are the “teacher aides”, which include students who assist teachers with preparing class materials, conducting research, and completing other school errands. These advisories intend to create a sense of direction for early adolescents.

Interest Centered Advisories encourage both advisors and advisees to organize groups based on similar interests and goals. These groups most often function informally, but a great deal of interaction usually takes place because of the mutual interest (Ingwalson, 1998).

Building Strong Advisory Programs

It is vital to a strong advisory program that the groups are kept small, only about 10 to 15 students per advisor. Administrators, counselors, and other employees can all participate as functioning advisors, not only teachers. Managerial assignments, announcements, and other disturbances should occur as little as possible. Different age group advisories should be considered that may act as leaders and teachers to the younger students in the school. The programs need to efficiently train advisors that will be teachers of specific skills such as speed typing or note taking during the advisory.

Flexibility is a key characteristic of a strong advisory program, especially when planning the approach for their specific group. “The less prepackaged the advisory program, the more successful it is likely to be” (Miller, 1999).

Current Research

There is still little published regarding the sufficiency of advisory programs (Galassi et al., 1997). The research that is available contains indirect and often weak evidence.

One study reviewed 160 middle schools that were surveyed about the effects of middle school programs in their district. The survey evaluated student achievement, school discipline, student personal development, school learning climate, faculty morale, staff development, parental involvement support, community involvement and support/media coverage, and high school staff perception. Ninety-three percent of these middle schools engaged in advisory programs, and 90% of the schools consisted of additional support systems like interdisciplinary teams and flexible school schedules. Results of this study included a significant reduction in office referrals and suspensions as well as fewer student expulsions (Galassi, Gullede, & Cox, 1997). The results of the study also suggested that advisory programs had increased the strong, positive relationships among students and teachers, thus leading to the decline in discipline situations.

An equivalent study known as the Rochester experiment examined the effects of a home-based guidance teacher program. Seventy-three percent of middle school parents described having contact with the home base guidance teacher, as compared to only 45% contact with a teacher the previous year. Of those parents, 83% indicated that the teacher-parent contact was indeed a helpful resource (Galassi, Gullede, & Cox, 1997).

In 1993, Felner and colleagues conducted research on the effectiveness of a STEP intervention (School Transitional Environmental Project). The STEP program contained the essential distinctiveness of a strong advisory program and yielded very optimistic results. It was revealed that the students involved in the STEP programs indicated more positive understandings of the school climate, meaning less harsh, less negative student communication, and more teacher interest, in comparison to non-participating STEP students (Galassi, Gullede, & Cox, 1997).

In 1986, Connors organized a case study to examine the effects of an advisory program implemented at Venice Area Middle School in Sarasota County, Florida. Through surveys and interviews with teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, students, and parents, much information regarding the program was disclosed. The study has shown that advisories assisted students with their sociability, contributed to a positive school environment, helped students become knowledgeable about their school, helped form relationships among peers, helped students learn to get along with each other, increased teacher-student relationships, created opportunities for advisors to form close relationships with advisees, help students develop a strong self-concept, and assisted students in developing the necessary skills for productive citizenship (Galassi et al., 1997; "Middle School," 1999).

In 1993 George and Alexander were able to yield very interesting results regarding the implementation of advisory programs in Lincoln Middle School in Florida (Galassi et al., 1997). The results of the study suggested that African-American students were more likely than Whites to believe that advisors genuinely cared for them as well as other students. African-American students were also more likely than Whites to believe that their advisors guided them in understanding other people and aided them with problem-solving. Females were more convinced than males that the advisory group

benefited them with problem solving, and females also reported stronger affiliation with their school. No activity in particular was reported as being specifically helpful, and there was a small amount of students who reported no benefit from the advisory program (Galassi et al., 1997).

Another advisory type program called C.L.U.E. (Caring, Learning, Understanding, Exploring) was researched to evaluate its effectiveness based on the understandings of mostly White students, grades 6 and 7, in an Arkansas middle school (Galassi et al., 1997). The study was somewhat challenging because of the small data sample, only 15 sixth graders, and 13 seventh graders. The purpose of the sixth grade C.L.U.E. program was mainly to help students develop strong study habits, organizational techniques, and decision-making skills. The seventh grade program intended to help students form relationship-building skills and increase their awareness of career opportunities. Both the sixth and seventh grade program was concerned with the development of positive self-esteem and self-concept. The students reviewed the program by responding to 23 questions that addressed eight general categories: value, impressions, interest level, purpose, focus, student recognition, and improvement of the program (Galassi et al., 1997). The evidence has shown that many of the sixth graders believed that C.L.U.E. aided them with setting goals, and becoming more reliable, while the seventh graders revealed that the program assisted them with their social problems. More importantly, the students involved with the C.L.U.E. program felt comfortable and confident in confiding in their program teacher. Students also indicated a desire to engage in more current conversations, relating more to their own conflicts as adolescents. Generally, the sixth graders displayed more interest in the program, and among both grades, results revealed that they were unsure if their parents were fully aware of the program's purpose.

A study was also directed in Fern Public School, grades 6-8 in Toronto, one year and three years after the execution of an advisory program (Galassi et al., 1997). The program was designed to help students develop more positive attitudes toward other peers as well as faculty. The program also intended to create better human relation skills, to examine principles, and to consider problems regarding isolation with age, culture, race and gender. Questions regarding the program's effectiveness were distributed to teacher, students, and parents. Results concluded that teachers enjoyed their role as advisors, felt good about their accomplishments with their students, believed that students appeared more affiliated with their school, felt student behavior in class had improved, believed the program established value, created opportunity for planning participation, and believed all relevant training had been provided (Galassi et al., 1997). The students disclosed that they liked the integration of grades during cross-grade advisory groups, and felt it was a great occasion to communicate with others. They also appreciated the chance to discuss topics not normally mentioned in regular classes, and they indicated positive feelings toward their advisors. On the other hand, a great majority of the students announced that they were still not comfortable discussing a personal situation with their advisor. The majority of parents who participated in the survey felt that advisory was a good idea, and revealed that they were more knowledgeable about their child's progress, report card, and teachers, than they had been in former years. It is also important to note that teachers reported significantly lower occurrences of student lateness and absence after the three years of advisory. Students also showed an increase in their school affiliation after three years as compared to just one year of advisory participation (Galassi et al., 1997).

In 1989 a national survey was given to find out the perceptions of seventh graders regarding advisory programs. A 43-item survey was administered to about 50 students in two middle schools from all 50 states, and that created an approximate 3,400 student

sample. It was concluded from this research that advisory programs improved teacher-student relationships, gave students confidence in decision-making, promoted an atmosphere of equality, provided opportunities for group synthesis, improved the interactions between students, helped increase the altruism among early adolescents, reduced drug, alcohol, and nicotine consumption, and increased teacher awareness toward students. The findings also discovered that advisories more positively influenced girls rather than boys (Galassi et al., 1997).

Summary

The limited research available about advisory programs suggests that they do contribute a positive impact on students in various developmental areas. It is also apparent from the research that depending on the goals of the advisory, different outcomes will develop. Much of the research has indicated that advisory programs are fulfilling their primary goal of enhancing student-adult relationships within middle schools. This study will examine if these relationships will in turn create stronger affiliation towards school, and consequently stronger self-concept among students.

Chapter 3: **Design of the Study**

Participants

The sample in this study consisted of a total of three hundred students from three separate middle schools in an upper-middle class suburban school district. One hundred students were studied from each of the three middle schools. The sample consisted of 140 females and 160 males. Forty-two percent of the population was European American, 3% was African-American, almost 2% was Hispanic, 7% was Asian, approximately .3% was Native-American, and 11.3% fell into an “other” category. Thirty-four percent of the students left this question blank. The age of the students ranged from 11 to 13 years old, and all of the students were in the sixth grade at the time the study was administered. Approximately 45% of the students reported that they received mostly A’s, 43% mostly received B’s, about 10% received C’s, and the final 2.7% of students ranked themselves into an “other” category. Approximately 12% of all the students participated in five or more activities. Thirty-six percent of the students participated in 2-4 activities, and 42% reported participating in one or fewer activities.

Measures

A variety of different psychological instruments were utilized in order to test the various hypotheses in the study. These tests were presented to the three hundred students in a small booklet form. Twenty-five questions in the booklet were taken from the *Multi-Dimensional Self-Concept Scale* in the affect subscale section. The internal consistency of the affect subscale of the MDSC indicates an alpha

coefficient over the .90 criterion for grades 5-12 who took the test. This suggests that the test takers responses should stay consistent within a particular subscale. The reliability of this subtest was revealed through test-retest reliability, using 37 students, and a four-week interval between the pre and post-test design. Five questions were extracted from the *My Friends and Family Interview*, adapted by the Center for Social Development and Education, which intended to uncover information relating to the first hypothesis, school affiliation. Thirty questions were drawn from three subscales of the *Classroom Environment Scale* in the areas of involvement, affiliation, and teacher support. Twenty-two participants contributed in the reliability testing of the Classroom Environment Scale. Involvement, affiliation, and teacher support received scores of .85, .74, and .84 respectively for internal consistency. After a six-week test-retest design, involvement, affiliation, and teacher support subscales received alpha coefficients of .87, .73, and .89 respectively. The *Liking School Questionnaire* was administered to all schools and slightly altered for the one middle school, which had already begun to use advisory, in order to include questions concerning the advisory program. These questions asked about the peers within their advisory group as well as their advisor. An *Advisory Scale* was administered only to the school that had implemented the program with intentions of revealing information regarding the likability of the program as perceived by the students.

Design

Confidentiality was the major influence in the design procedure that was created for the purposes of this study. Before the tests could be administered to the three middle schools, a necessary coding system was instituted. Each school was assigned a specific letter, which was found on every test, followed by a test number. Instructions were provided on the first page of the test, directing the participants to transfer that number to

the upper right hand corner of each page of the test. That number became the students' ID number, which was how organization was maintained, while also keeping the study completely confidential. The testing packets were given to the counselors of the three middle schools with directions to distribute the exams to all sixth grade homerooms. Instructions were also provided for the homeroom teachers to follow when administering the exams and during the collection process, in order to ensure orderliness.

Testable Hypotheses

Null hypothesis 1: No differences will be found regarding school affiliation as measured by test scores between students receiving advisory, and those who have not been exposed to an advisory program.

Alternate Hypothesis 1: Differences will be found regarding school affiliation as measured by test scores between students receiving advisory, and those who have not been exposed to an advisory program.

Null hypothesis 2: No differences will be found in the self-concept of students as shown by the test scores of those students receiving an advisory program, and those not receiving advisory.

Alternate Hypothesis 2: Differences will be found in the self-concept of students as shown by the test scores of those students receiving an advisory program and those not receiving advisory.

Analysis

The Random Table of Numbers was used to guarantee a normal, random sample of students from the three schools. Selection using this table was performed twice, limiting the number of participants from each school from 300 to 100 students.

This was an experimental study intended to derive results through the comparing of means for a variety of different psychological instruments, which was administered to

students who have received an advisory program and those who have not received an advisory program. Additionally, information was provided regarding only the school which had implemented the advisory program. Mean scores revealed information about how they perceived the program, their advisory, as well as their advisory peers. Finally, individual questions from the *Family and Friends Interview* were studied with hopes of revealing information regarding affiliation between advisors, students, and advisory peers.

Summary

The data obtained through the comparison of means of 100 students each from three different middle schools was used to address questions related to affiliation among faculty and students, students and their peers, as well as the overall school environment. Finally, this data assisted in suggesting whether or not greater affiliation within a school contributes to a greater self-concept among early adolescents. The aim of this design was to evaluate the effectiveness of a first year advisory program at the middle school level.

Chapter 4: **Analysis of Results**

Restatement of Hypotheses

Based on the available research, two hypotheses were devised, and tested within three suburban middle schools from the same district in southern New Jersey. It was hypothesized that advisory programs would create greater affiliation among students, faculty and the overall school environment. It was then hypothesized that through this positive school environment, self-concept in early adolescents would increase. Therefore, the second hypothesis is contingent upon the first.

Two tests were used to evaluate the first hypothesis. The means of all three middle school liking school scores were compared. Then, the means of all three Classroom Environment Scale scores were also measured for affiliation objectives.

One test was used to examine the self-concepts of all students from the three middle schools. The means of all three schools' scores were compared in order to determine if advisory had any affect on self-concept.

Three different scales were also analyzed specifically for the one middle school having already implemented an advisory program. The first scale used was created to measure students' perceptions of the first year advisory program. The second two scores related to students' likability towards advisories, extracted and revised from the Liking School Survey. Finally, questions from the Family and Friends Interview were analyzed

in order to evaluate affiliation regarding faculty and peers within an advisory environment.

School Affiliation Results

Through a comparison of means it became apparent that no significant differences were found between the three schools relating to affiliation. This was determined through an evaluation of the Liking School scores, and The Classroom Environment Scale scores in three specific areas; Affiliation, Involvement, and Teacher Support.

The Classroom Environment Scale revealed some interesting information regarding affiliation in the classroom. In Figure 4.1 the Affiliation Subscale has shown that School C reported having the greatest sense of affiliation within the classroom. Since, School C happened to be the oldest middle school in the community, this score was not surprising. However, it is very interesting that a brand new school, with an implemented advisory program was ranked second for this subscale. This same trend continued for the second CES subscale, Involvement, as shown in Figure 4.2. School C reported the highest involvement in the classroom, however, School A, the brand new school with advisory scored second highest among the three schools. Very different findings were reported for the last subscale used in the CES, which was Teacher Support, as shown in Figure 4.3. In this subscale, School A revealed the highest score, followed by School B, and School C described scores much lower than had been expected based on their previous scores.

It was not unexpected that School C, the oldest and most affiliated middle school within the community indicated the highest score for the Liking School Scale. However,

what was unpredicted, was that a brand new middle school, with newly implemented advisory programs ranked second highest for their Liking School total mean score.

Table 4.1
School Affiliation

MEANS	Classroom Environment Scale - Affiliation	Liking School	Classroom Environment Scale – Teacher Support	
School A	47.53	47.67	46.83	14.55
School B	47.93	46.51	46.31	14.38
School C	49.09	49.57	41.86	14.85

Figure 4.1

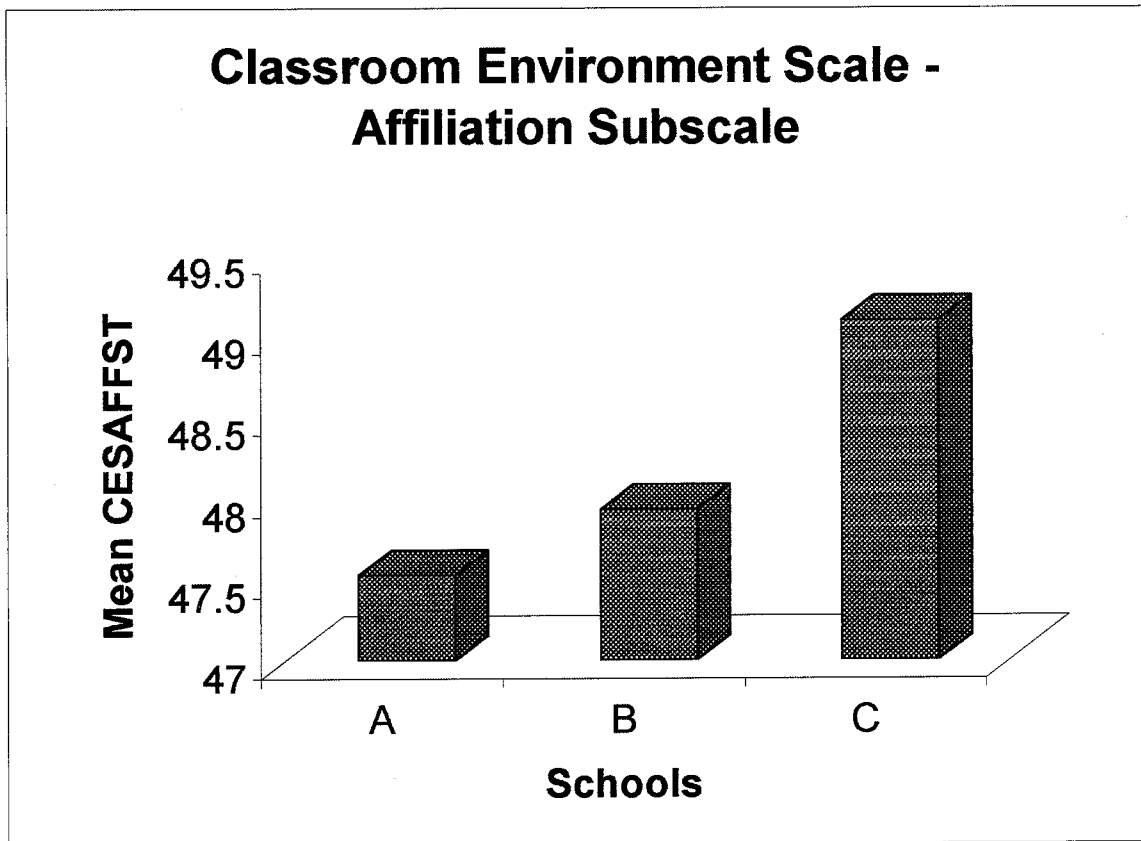


Figure 4.2

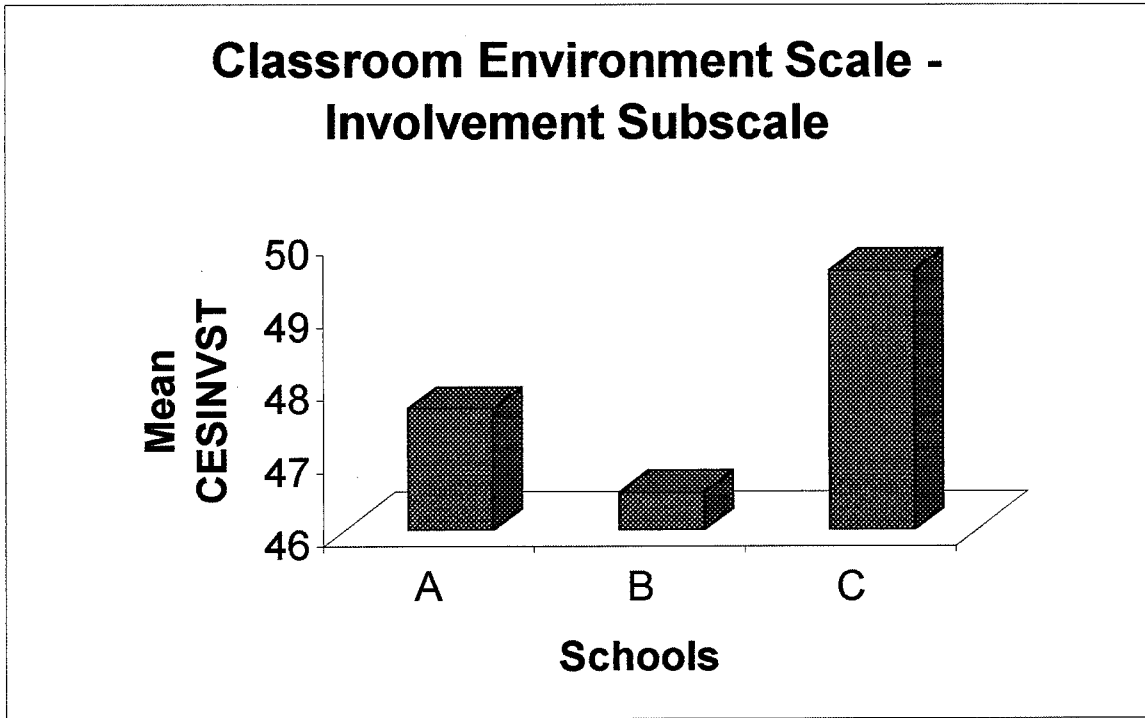


Figure 4.3

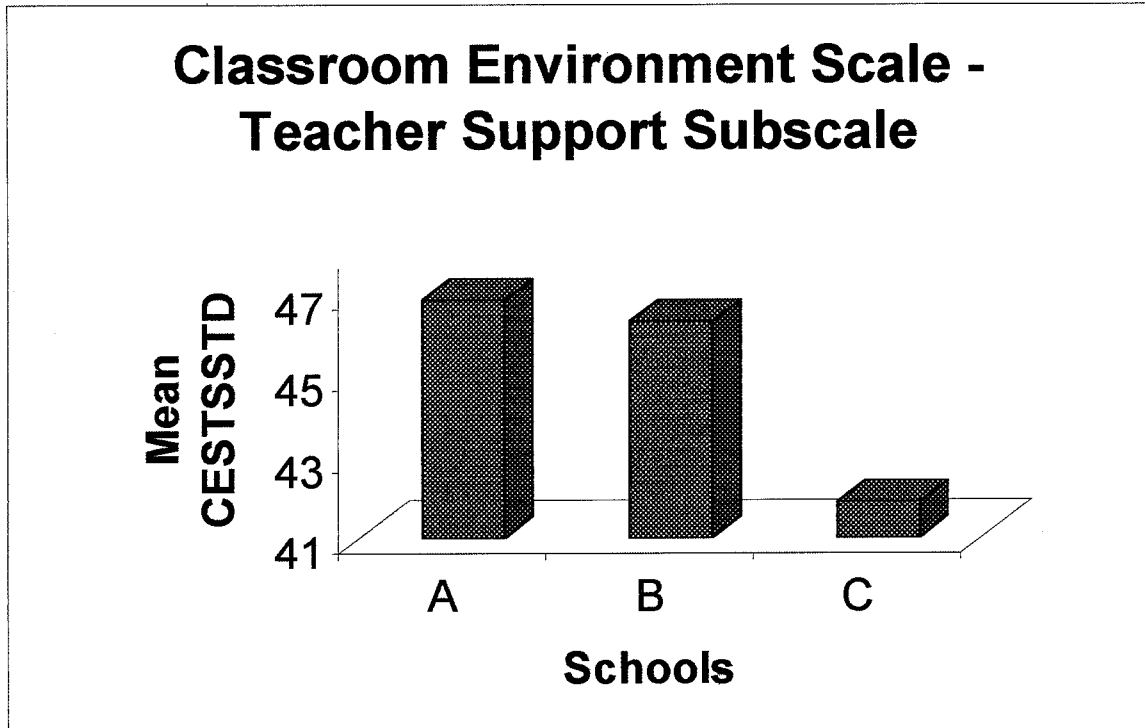
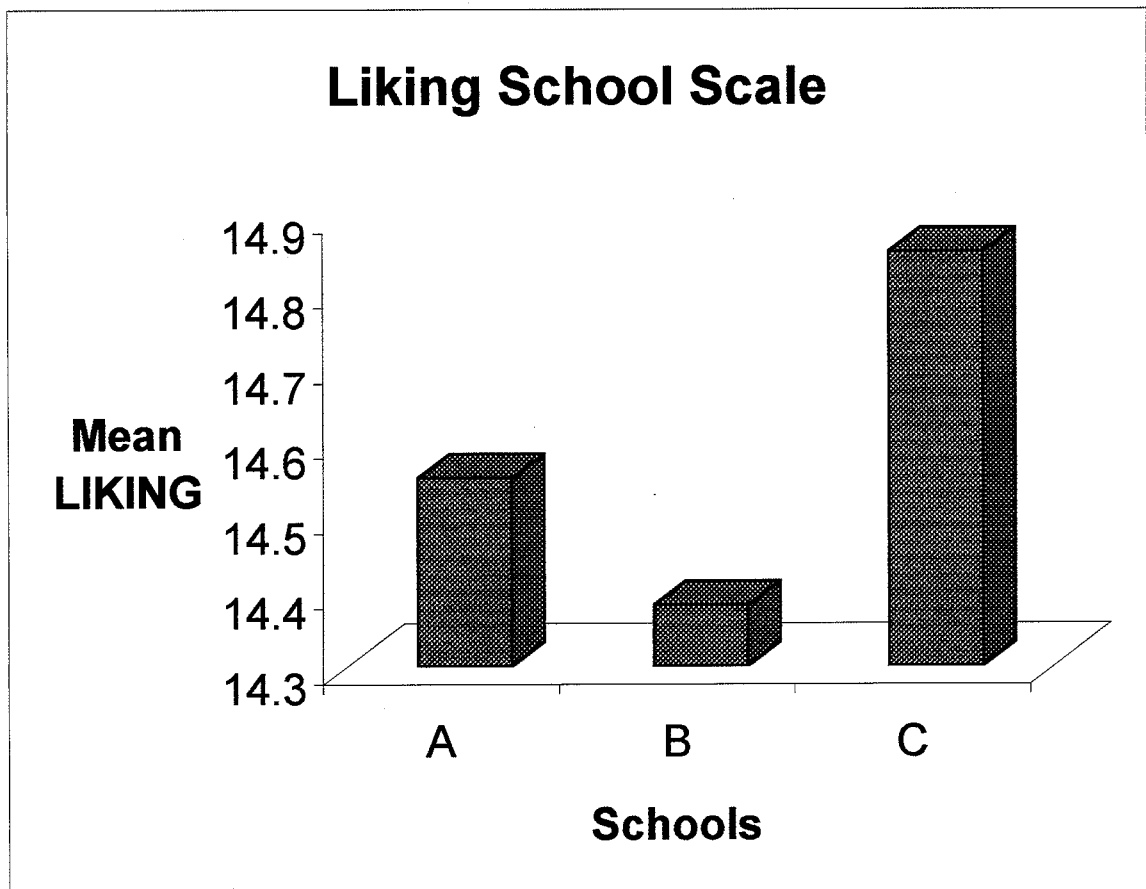


Figure 4.4



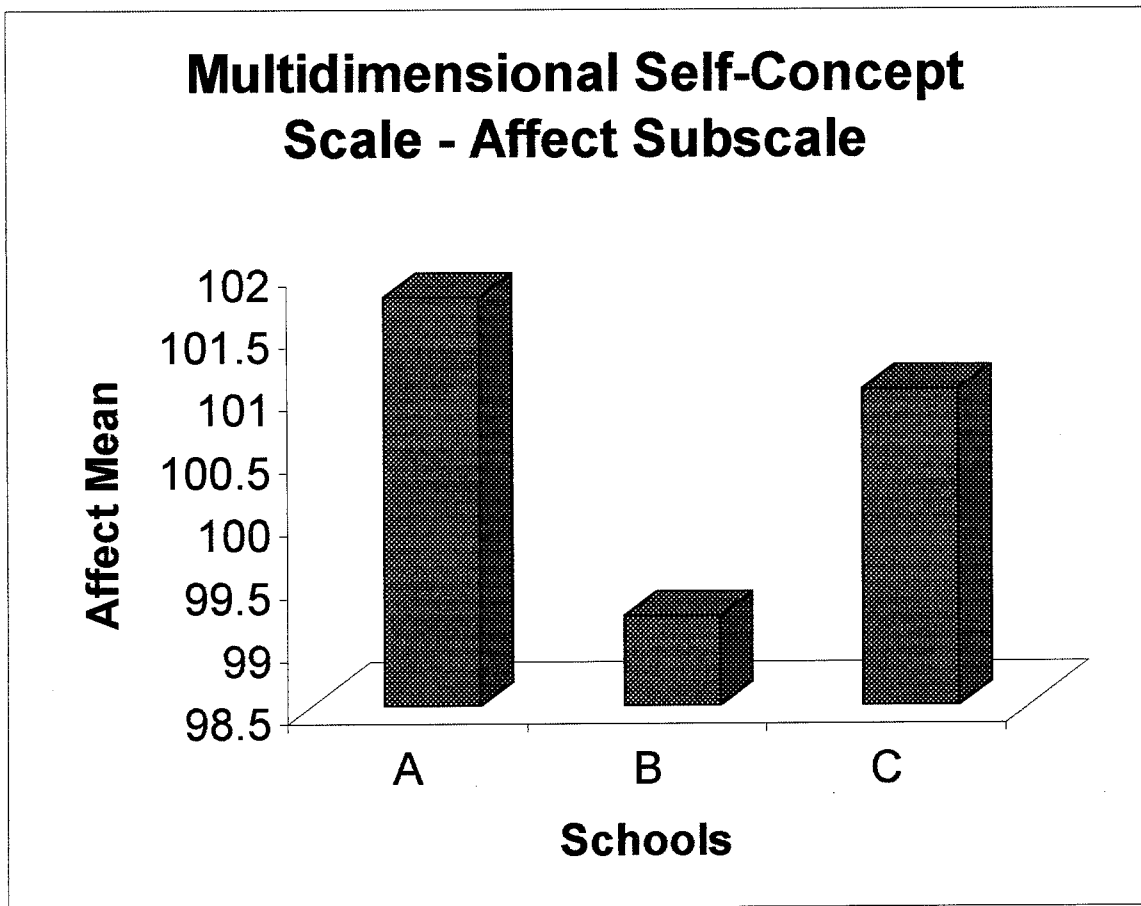
Self-Concept Results

Self-concept was evaluated through the analysis of means for all three schools in the Affect subscale of the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale. Although no significant differences were found, the school with the implemented advisory program maintained the highest mean score for self-concept.

Table 4.2
Self-Concept

MEANS	Self – Concept (Affect Subscale)
School A	101.76
School B	99.21
School C	101.02

Figure 4.5



School A Results

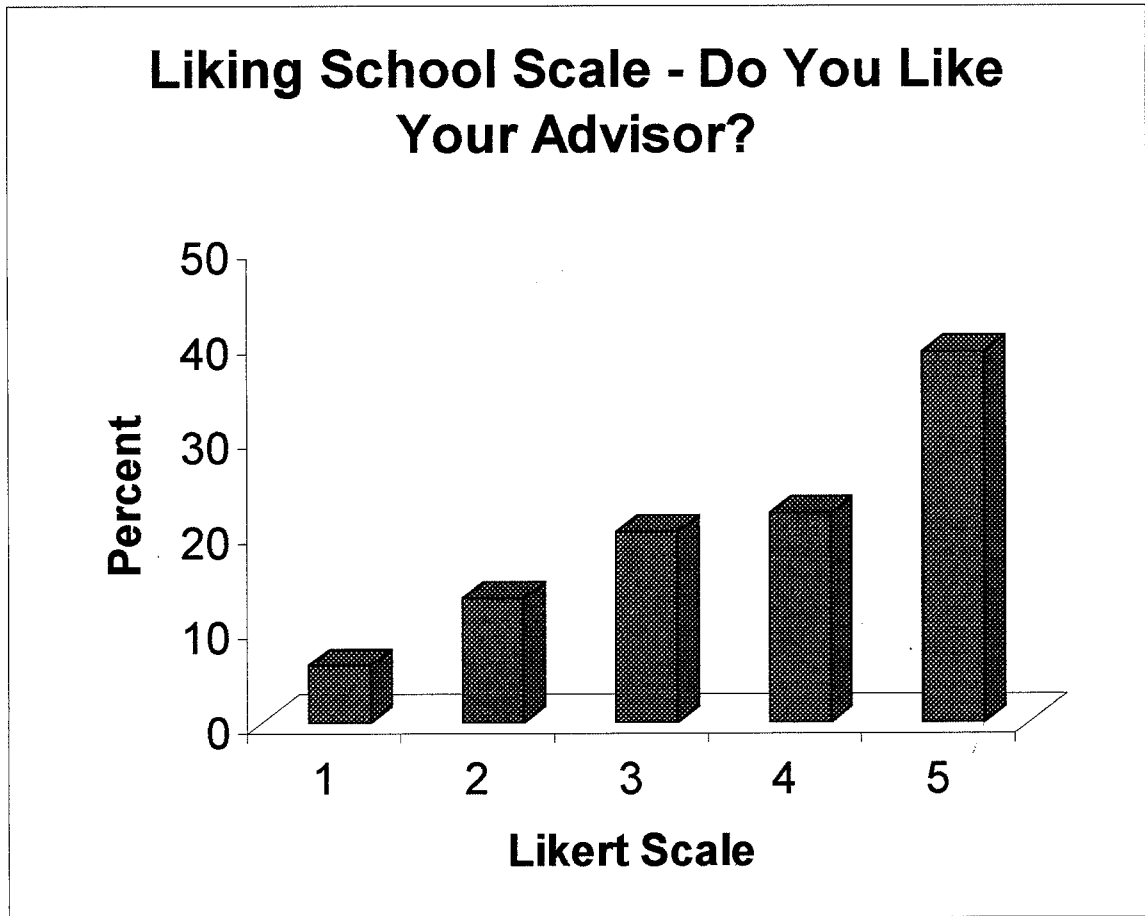
Certain tests were run only for School A, for the purpose of extracting more information about the first year advisory program, particularly how well sixth grade students responded to it. An advisory scale was presented to these 100 sixth graders, and the results were neither too positive nor too negative. Scores ranges from 7 being the lowest to 35, which was the highest possible score for the scale. The scores seem to be distributed in a typical bell curve with the mean score being 17.26.

The Liking School Scale was revised for School A, and two additional questions were provided for sixth graders to answer about their advisory group. One question asked students whether or not they liked their advisors. A likert scale was supplied with a score of 1 meaning none of the time, and a 5 representing all of the time. Scores revealed that most students picked a score of 5 to answer this question.

Table 4.3 Do you like your advisor?

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range
Liking Score	100	1	3.75	4.00	5	1.27	1.60	4

Figure 4.6

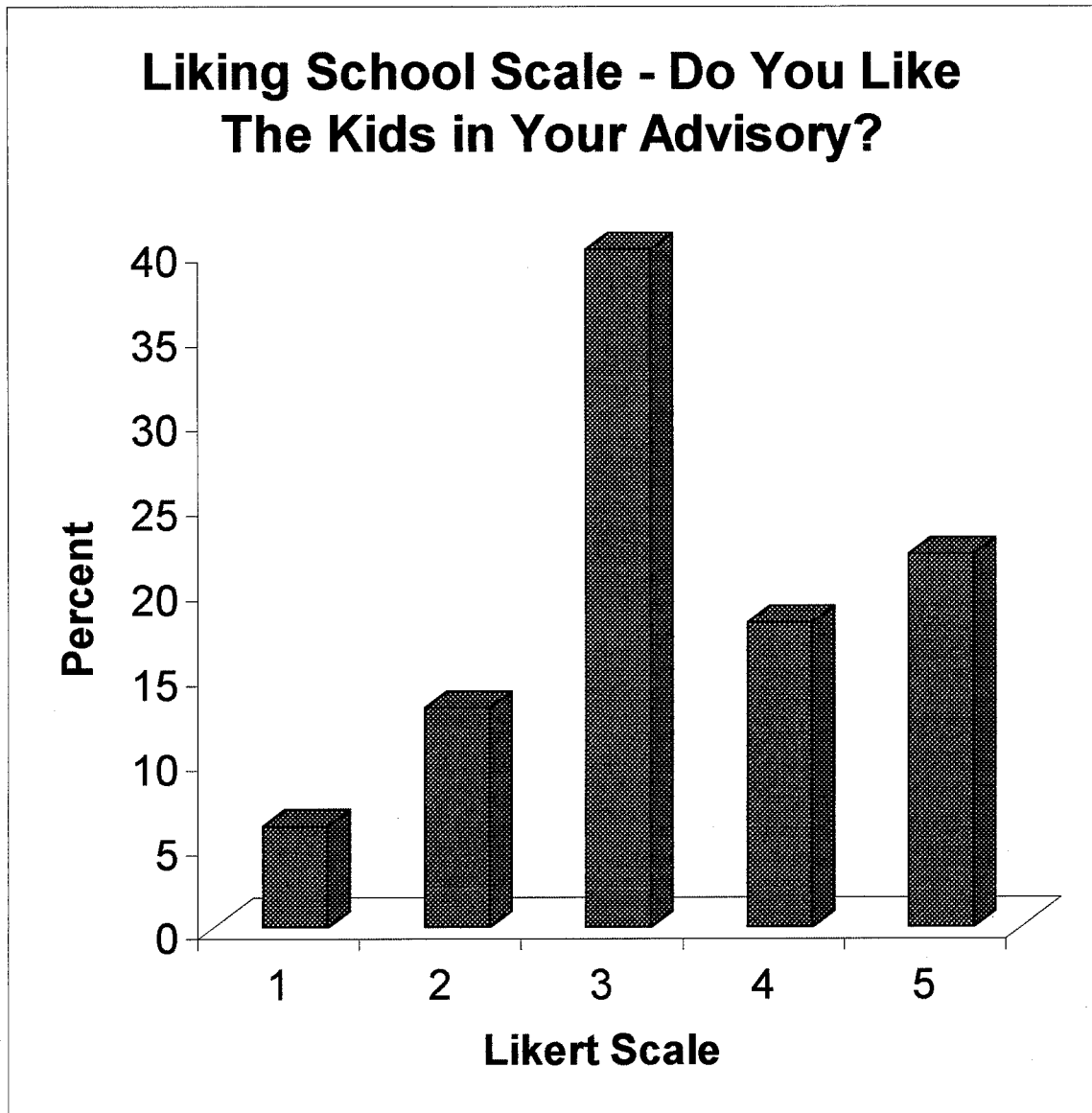


The second additional question provided regarding advisory asked students whether or not they liked the peers in their advisory. This time the scores revealed a mode of 3, meaning that most students felt that they liked their advisory peers some of the time.

Table 4.4 Do you like the kids in your advisory?

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range
Liking	100	1	3.75	4.00	3	.95	.90	4

Figure 4.7



Questions were also taken and revised from the Family and Friends Interview to find out which adults and which peers students who have had advisory were most likely to talk to in a variety of situations. Additionally, these questions hoped to reveal some trends regarding greater affiliation within the school with advisory programs.

Table 4.5 If you wanted to talk about your feelings, which adult would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Parent	77	76.2	77.0	77.0
Teacher	7	6.9	7.0	84.0
Advisor	14	13.9	14.0	98.0
Administrator	2	2.0	2.0	100.0

Table 4.6 If you didn't understand something, which adult would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Parent	52	51.5	52.0	52.0
Teacher	39	38.6	39.0	91.0
Advisor	8	7.9	8.0	99.0
Administrator	1	1.0	1.0	100.0

Table 4.7 If you needed help with something, which adult would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Parent	52	51.5	52.0	52.0
Teacher	32	31.7	32.0	84.0
Advisor	15	14.9	15.0	99.0
Administrator	1	1.0	1.0	100.0

Table 4.8 If you did something that you felt really bad about, which adult would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Parent	73	72.3	73.0	73.0
Teacher	10	9.9	10.0	83.0
Advisor	13	12.9	13.0	96.0
Administrator	4	4.0	4.0	100.0

Table 4.9 If there was something that you didn't know too much about and you needed information, which adult would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Parent	39	38.6	39.0	39.0
Teacher	44	43.6	44.0	83.0
Advisor	15	14.9	15.0	98.0
Administrator	2	2.0	2.0	100.0

Table 4.10 If you wanted to talk about your feelings, which peer would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School Peer	12	11.9	12.0	12.0
Advisory Peer	7	6.9	7.0	19.0
Home Peer	14	13.9	14.0	33.0
Friend Peer	67	66.3	67.0	100.0

Table 4.11 If you didn't understand something, which peer would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School Peer	15	14.9	15.0	15.0
Advisory Peer	10	9.9	10.0	25.0
Home Peer	21	20.8	21.0	46.0
Friend Peer	54	53.5	54.0	100.0

Table 4.12 If you needed help with something, which peer would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School Peer	21	20.8	21.0	21.0
Advisory Peer	13	12.9	13.0	34.0
Home Peer	12	11.9	12.0	46.0
Friend Peer	54	53.5	54.0	100.0

Table 4.13 If you did something that you felt really bad about, which peer would you go to..

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School Peer	6	5.9	6.0	6.0
Advisory Peer	3	3.0	3.0	9.0
Home Peer	19	18.8	19.0	28.0
Friend Peer	72	71.3	72.0	100.0

Table 4.14 If there was something that you didn't know too much about and you needed more information, which peer would you go to...

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School Peer	33	32.7	33.0	33.0
Advisory Peer	10	9.9	10.0	43.0
Home Peer	17	16.8	17.0	60.0
Friend Peer	40	39.6	40.0	100.0

Although no actual significant data was reported from these questions, important information was definitely revealed. Students did report having liked their advisors, and their peers, some of the time. More noteworthy, however, was the information discovered from the Family and Friends Interview, specifically relating to adults. The fact that students did report that they would choose to talk to their advisors in certain

situations has shown the positive impact of advisories. If schools can provide even one more adult support for students to turn to, a difference is more likely to be made in a young adolescent's well being.

<p>HYPOTHESIS #1: No differences will be found regarding school affiliation as measured by test scores between students receiving advisory, and those who have not been exposed to an advisory program</p>	<p>FAIL TO REJECT</p>
<p>HYPOTHESIS #2: No differences will be found in the self-concept of students as shown by the test scores of those students receiving an advisory program, and those not receiving advisory.</p>	<p>FAIL TO REJECT</p>

Summary

This study failed to reject the two hypotheses proposed, however, affirmative trends are clearly apparent. The school having the advisory program reported the highest score for self-concept on the affect subscale. On the Classroom Environment Scale, teacher support subscale, School A again ranked highest among the three schools. School A had the second highest scores of the three schools for the Liking School Scale as well as on the Involvement Subscale for the Classroom Environment Scale. This is outstanding just for the fact that this is a brand-new school up against one of the oldest schools, School C, that exist in the town. There is strong support to predict that in a few years, if School A continues with their advisory program, their scores would rank highest if retested.

Chapter 5: **Summary and Conclusions**

Summary

The literature has uncovered information regarding early adolescents and emotional risk factors associated with this age group (Hampel, 1998). Cognitive abilities are strengthening at this age, and the changes in thinking patterns can be a very difficult transition for many young people (Eccles et al., 1989). Thinking has become more abstract, and early adolescents are now faced with many more decisions to make about themselves and their lives. Research has indicated that depression and anxiety has often resulted in young people because of these added pressures (Harter, 1990).

Furthermore, this is also a time for transitions within the adolescent self-concept, as it is forming and becoming more abstract at this time (Harter, 1990). This is a crucial stage in life regarding the beginning of identity development, and can cause a great deal of confusion for young adolescents (Harter, 1990).

In addition to the pressures of cognitive transformations and self-concept realizations, young adolescents are leaving their very comfortable elementary schools and entering into middle schools, institutions much larger and much less personal than what they had previously become accustomed to.

Advisories have been created to relieve some of these pressures, and serve as another support system for young people to turn to during this difficult period of development.

Advisory programs consist of an advisor who may be a teacher, administrator, counselor, or other adult member of a school system, and a small group of students, usually no more than 15. The small ratio of students to advisor is crucial for creating meaningful relationships between advisors and advisees.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of a first year middle school advisory program by comparing different variables with the two other middle schools within the same district. This research was very interested in school affiliation, the sense of belonging that students feel for their school, including the faculty and students within it. The first hypothesis questioned whether or not advisory programs would create greater affiliation among students and faculty, thus generating greater overall affiliation for the school. Self-concept was another major factor that would be examined within the middle schools to look for differences in the school, which had implemented an advisory program. The second hypothesis stated greater affiliation within the school would then lead to more positive self-concepts for the students who had participated in the first year advisory program.

Conclusions

It was difficult to interpret the results from this research due to the fact that there were a variety of variables that simply could not be controlled for when creating the study. It was challenging to differentiate whether or not results were necessarily because of advisory or the fact that School A was a brand new school environment. The fact that students were admitted to School A through a lottery selection may have also influenced

their thoughts concerning affiliation and self-concept. Finally, the lack of a very multicultural population may have definitely skewed test results.

Discussion

Although no significant results were reported from the data, positive trends are unmistakably apparent regarding the implementation of advisory programs. The fact that School A reported the highest scores on the self-concept scale is a very encouraging indication that these programs have an influence on the lives of early adolescent students. Results also revealed that School A was not far behind in scores from the oldest, and most community oriented middle school in the district in terms of affiliation. Once School A has been well established, it would not be surprising if it reported the highest scores on this test, based on the results that this study has rendered.

School A was evaluated on the effectiveness of their advisory program after only their first year of implementation. Advisors were not completely comfortable with the new concept, and a total organized structure for the program was still in the process of being established. Additionally, students may still not have been one hundred percent positive of the purpose of these advisory programs. This is not unlikely being that they were also involved in another assignment, called *Personal Project*, which took place two days a week, during the time when advisory normally took place.

Implications for Future Research

School A was evaluated within this study after only its first year of advisory implementation. Continued research regarding school A's advisory program is necessary in order to track the progress it hopes to make through practice, time, and

experience. It would be interesting to assemble some fifth grade students who have not yet entered the school, and measure their perceptions of self-concept and school affiliation. It would then be worthwhile to test their perceptions again after their exposure to advisory.

Furthermore, it is still important to keep measuring the progress of the advisory program, while trying to eliminate some of the limitations that were present in this study.

Advisory programs can function as an additional support system for early adolescents. As previously stated, the middle school years are the most critical developmental period for young people, and guidance cannot possibly counsel every student in their school. If advisories can assist in the well being of even a small amount of young people, then they have succeeded in strengthening our next generation.

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