

**Supporting Students' Success
Through Distributed Counseling**

Supporting Students' Success Through Distributed Counseling

A Core Principle for Small Schools

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**Institute for
Student Achievement**

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Introduction

The final bell has just rung at Fairhaven High School, a midsize high school serving a diverse student population. As students and teachers converge in the hallways, Ms. Aronson, a ninth-grade math teacher, and Mr. Williams, a ninth-grade English teacher, set out for the faculty room. They take their usual seats around a creaky wooden table and wait for the rest of their colleagues, other members of their team, to join them. Within minutes, Ms. Thomas, the special education teacher; Ms. Holloway, the social studies teacher; and Mr. Sanchez, the guidance counselor, join them. The group members greet one another warmly, like old friends, after a long, demanding day of teaching.

“Where is Ms. Lillian?” they ask one another.

“We certainly can’t start our team meeting without Ms. Lillian,” Ms. Aronson states decisively.

“She had that lab today and is probably cleaning up,” remembers Mr. Sanchez. “Let’s start, because we have a full agenda—Ms. Holloway, can you be responsible for taking minutes? Then we will e-mail our minutes to Ms. Lillian.”

The group agrees to begin the meeting, although it is clear that they are reluctant to begin without Ms. Lillian being present.

The team facilitator, Ms. Aronson, commands the attention of the group. She begins by identifying the items on the day’s agenda; “OK, today we are going to have a case conference on two students; then we are going to finalize our plans for our interdisciplinary field trip to the science laboratory.”

Ms. Aronson continues. “OK, let’s begin with Jose. He’s failing three out of the four subjects. Last marking period he was doing much better. What’s going on with him?”

“Well, I think he lives with his grandmother and is quite close to her,” responds Ms. Thomas.

"That's strange," says Ms. Aronson, "He's been late to my first-period class a lot this week and he keeps on telling me it's because he had to go visit his grandmother. Is he making that up?"

Ms. Holloway replies, "No, he told me that his grandmother was sick and might have to go to the hospital . . . Maybe that's what's going on."

"OK, good. Now we have a better sense of what's potentially going on. Who's going to take the lead on this?" Ms. Aronson asks Mr. Williams. "John, you have a good relationship with Jose. Will you talk to him?"

"If Jose's grandmother is in the hospital," Mr. Williams replies, "he's probably living alone. Who knows what type of supervision he has? I'll talk to him and see how he's doing. I'll report back by Monday; we'll have to come up with a game plan for how to support him and get his schoolwork back on track if he's going through all this emotional turmoil."

"I could give you some techniques for how to talk to kids about illness and grief," offers Mr. Sanchez, the guidance counselor. "And certainly once you've talked to him, you can send him to me for counseling if you think he would benefit." The other educators nod, agreeing to the plan of action. The conversation turns to the following student.

Across the country, schools and districts are undertaking dramatic restructuring efforts to meet the needs of high school students. One of the most promising strategies lies in the creation of autonomous small high schools and small learning communities (SLCs) that are located within larger schools and in which a dedicated team of teachers, administrators, and one or more counselors work together to plan and provide instruction and support to a common group of students, typically no more than four hundred students in grades nine through twelve.

Fairhaven High School, the school in the preceding vignette, is partnered with the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), a nonprofit intermediary organization, with the aim of transforming the entire school into smaller learning communities for grades nine through twelve. Like Fairhaven, schools that collaborate with ISA work to implement the seven principles of the ISA model (see Appendix 1). These principles include working as a team to provide a college-preparatory curriculum for all students, extended-day learning opportunities, and a practice called *distributed counseling*.

Distributed Counseling

In traditional high schools, teachers are responsible for the academic progress of students taking those teachers' classes, and the guidance counselor is responsible for addressing any social or emotional problems that may emerge. Teachers rarely meet to discuss students they have in common—and even more rarely meet with the counselor to consider how to support students both academically *and* emotionally.

In contrast, in the system of distributed counseling, developed by ISA, teachers and a counselor regularly work together as a team to support students' academic and social-emotional development. Thus, both teachers and counselors have an expanded role in supporting students' success. Teachers find that when they form strong relationships with their students, they are better able to support them and to demand more from them academically (Lee et al. 1999; Bryk and Schneider 2002; Aneess 2003).

At Fairhaven, the team members capitalize on their knowledge of individual students by using a *case conference* approach. The ninth-grade team at Fairhaven serves eighty students and integrates all teaching and guidance staff. Time is allocated at each afternoon meeting to targeted discussions about particular students' progress. During the case conferences, all six team members share information about and observations of a particular student's performance, attitude, and behavior. They subsequently develop an action plan, specifying how individual team members will support the student's progress.

Case conferencing, as described here, is just one strategy for enacting distributed counseling. Each school or SLC implements distributed counseling by developing or adapting strategies aligned with its school/SLC goals and students' needs. Supporting students' success, rather than implementing any particular standardized model or set of activities, remains the goal.



In the system of distributed counseling, teachers and a counselor regularly work together as a team to support students' academic and social-emotional development.

Organization of the Report

This report is intended to serve as a resource for educators, schools, and districts interested in—or already engaged in—developing programs that provide students with the support they need for

success in school. We cover a number of areas in the report. In Part 1, we examine what the research says about the needs of young adults and the role of the school in meeting those needs. We then, in Part 2, provide an overview of the ISA principles and discuss the beliefs that undergird them, focusing particularly on distributed counseling. In Part 3, we describe in detail the major components of ISA's model of distributed counseling. Among these components are (1) team collaboration and integration of counseling strategies, (2) the participation of a dedicated counselor, (3) the role of teacher as advisor, (4) student-support mechanisms, (5) parent communication, and (6) college preparation. For each component, we provide concrete examples from schools that partner with ISA. In Part 4, we delineate the key decisions that schools face in creating a distributed counseling model. Finally, in Part 5, we describe the role that ISA plays in helping schools to develop a distributed counseling program.

The report is based on documentation from nineteen ISA schools/SLCs from September 2003 and May 2004. ISA works with autonomous small high schools and SLCs within larger schools in New York City, on Long Island, and in Westchester County and in Fairfax County, Virginia. All ISA schools/SLCs serve students at risk of school failure.

The Research Basis for Distributed Counseling

Recent high school reform efforts have focused on the creation of small schools (Toch 2003; Aneess 2003). Advocates for small schools point to the academic benefits that students gain from SLCs; among such benefits are academic performance, higher graduation rates, and lower drop-out rates (Center for Collaborative Education 2004). However, the advantages of a small high school environment are not merely academic; there is significant evidence that small learning environments foster closer student-teacher relationships, leading to social, emotional, and psychological enhancements for young people (Cotton 1996).

Benefits of Small Schools

Students at smaller high schools show more positive attitudes about being in school as well as fewer signs of alienation than do students in larger schools (Cotton 1996). Small schools also report proportionally fewer disciplinary problems and incidences of violence (Wasley et al. 2000). Students in small schools are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and to hold important positions in school groups than are similar students at large high schools (Cotton 1996). In general,

students in small schools report a greater sense of belonging, leading to more positive social behaviors (Center for Collaborative Education 2004).

Reducing school size, however, is not on its own sufficient to achieve positive academic and social outcomes for students. Structurally, small schools provide the opportunity for close student-teacher relationships and thus for teachers to know students well. Evidence in child-development and school-counseling research supports the belief that adolescents learn best in close-knit, nurturing environments where no child can fall through the cracks and where students develop “relational trust” with adults and other students in the building (Bryk and Schneider 2002).

Emotional Support

Historically, educators have often viewed the aim of providing social and emotional support as separate from addressing academic goals; however, research suggests that both components are needed to achieve high-level academic achievement, especially among low-income students. In a study of sixth- and eighth-grade public school students in Chicago, Lee and others (1999) assert that academic success is based on the twin components of “academic press” and “social support.” *Academic press* denotes an emphasis on academic achievement as a normative experience for students. *Social support* refers to the sources of assistance (teachers, parents, peers, community) that bolster students’ efforts to excel academically. Students in the study understood social support from teachers as being the frequency with which teachers “relate the subject to their personal interest, really listen to what they say, know them very well, and believe they can do well in school” (12). Lee and colleagues found that students showed increased achievement when they experienced both academic press and social support.

This evidence argues for strategies that systemically and thoroughly address students’ social and emotional needs and connect such supports to stronger academic achievement. ISA’s distributed counseling—a comprehensive system for ensuring that all students receive the academic and social support they need for their intellectual development, success in school, and capacity to move on to postsecondary education or a career path—is one such strategy. Under this system, a dedicated team of academic teachers and a counselor take responsibility for the academic, social, and emotional development of a relatively small number of students—a number they can reasonably be expected to know well. Responsibility for guiding students academically and socially is integrated and distributed across the team of teachers, administrators, and counselors working with students rather than being compartmentalized in any one individual, as is typical in traditional high schools.

Whatever structural arrangements a school makes, the foundation of distributed counseling is the presence of supportive, caring relationships between students and teachers and other staff members. Small schools provide conditions that support such relationships. Teachers and counselors are able to take advantage of their relationships with students to leverage higher levels of performance from the students (Ancess 2003). Only when providing ongoing support can teachers press students to do the kinds of work necessary to develop intellectually and to succeed in school.

2

The ISA Principles and Beliefs About Distributed Counseling

The ISA Principles

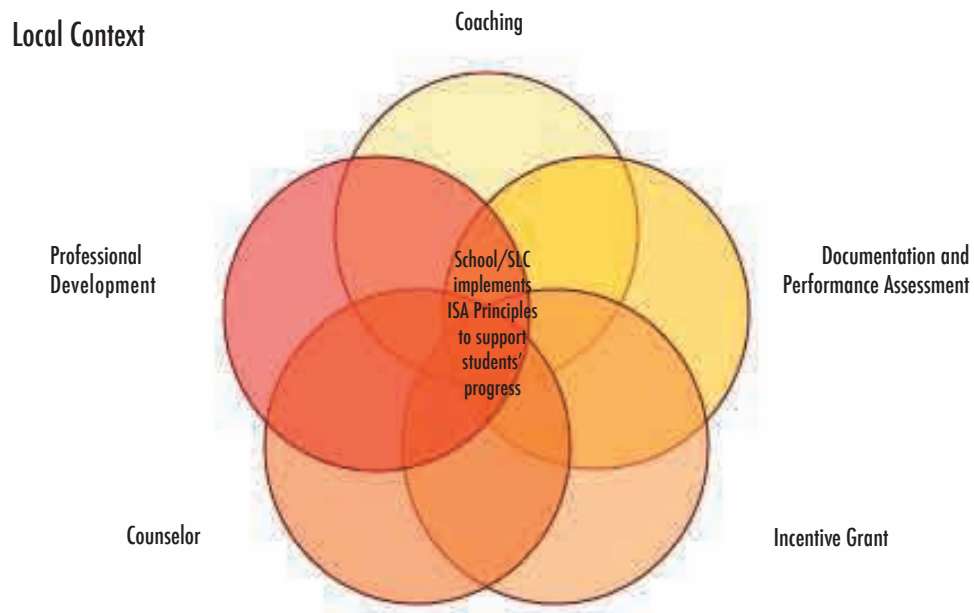
The mission of ISA is to ensure a high-quality education for students to enable them to advance in our society (ISA 2004). To accomplish this objective, ISA works with high schools to develop, or convert schools into, small learning communities (SLCs). In addition, ISA works with districts to create new small schools with the intention of providing underserved and underperforming students with multiple, sustained opportunities for high achievement and academic and social success. Toward this end, all ISA schools and SLCs make a commitment to follow a set of seven key principles that “ensure all students receive the attention and challenge essential for academic success” (ISA 2004, 6):

1. College preparatory curriculum for all students
2. Distributed counseling responsibilities across the faculty
3. A dedicated team whose members work together to support their students
4. Continuous organizational improvement

The ISA Principles and Beliefs About Distributed Counseling

5. Continuous professional development
6. Extended-day and -year learning opportunities
7. Parent involvement

(For more information about the ISA and its seven principles, see Appendix 1 and ISA's Web site: <http://www.studentachievement.org>.)



Resources Provided by ISA to Participating Schools/SLCs

ISA provides each school/SLC site with an integrated set of resources to support the staff in implementing the seven principles (see diagram). Their implementation, over a four-year period, is accomplished by means of specific strategies:

- A guidance counselor is dedicated to each site and integrated into the team to implement and support distributed counseling.
- A coach is matched to each school/SLC to guide staff through the process of implementing the ISA principles. Coaches are typically highly experienced former principals or leaders of effective small schools.

- An incentive grant is given to each school/SLC to support its individual teacher and team goals.
- Professional development opportunities are offered through the ISA coach, content area specialists, and intensive professional development summer and winter institutes.
- Data about student and program progress are compiled and provided. The data comprise documentation of changes in students' skills in writing and mathematics, surveys about students' sense of self-efficacy and their aspirations for college, and narrative feedback reports based on documentation of the implementation of ISA principles. ISA provides staff development and resources to support the teams' use of data for classroom and program improvement.

In Part 5 we describe in more detail how ISA supports the development of distributed counseling programs in schools and SLCs.

Beliefs About Distributed Counseling

Each staff member's role in contributing to students' success in school is a central feature of ISA's beliefs about distributed counseling. "To improve the quality of education so that all students can achieve, every staff member, individually and as a team, has an important role to play in attending to students' social and emotional needs so that every child will have the support needed to succeed academically" (Freeman and Mogulescu 2003). The following beliefs undergird the ISA principle of distributed counseling (Freeman and Mogulescu 2003; House 2002; ISA 2004, n.d.):

- Sustained and trusting teacher-student relationships can be used to influence student performance, motivation, and achievement.
- Every adolescent should have available to him or her an adult who is responsible for monitoring and advocating for that adolescent's academic and social progress.
- Students, like adults, are respected as autonomous human beings. Thus they are recognized not only as students, but also as individuals with their own thoughts and feelings.
- All team members encourage all students to achieve. As schools/SLCs strive toward improvement, student failure becomes less and less of an option.

- The parent is a significant partner with whom to communicate about his or her child's academic and emotional growth or any issue that may be standing in the way of progress in high school.

In Part 3, we describe the core components of distributed counseling that translate these principles and beliefs into practice.

3

The Major Components of Distributed Counseling

A staff member in an ISA school described how distributed counseling has changed the relationships of students and teachers in the school:

In a traditional high school, most counseling unfolds as a crisis intervention; however, as relationships with students deepen, I have experienced that crises do not occur as frequently. This is because [when] we work to develop and practice strategies to help students solve social problems and because students feel more connected to the adults in the building, we can prevent crises in the first place.

ISA does not advocate for any one prescribed model for its schools to follow in implementing distributed counseling. Instead, ISA supports each team as it develops its own program, one that is appropriate to that team's goals, contexts, and students. However, as delineated in what follows, there are several core components that are fundamental to distributed counseling in all its permutations:

- *Team collaboration and integration of counseling strategies.* The team members collaboratively develop goals and strategies for supporting students, meet to discuss the progress of individual students, and integrate counseling and academic subjects.
- *A dedicated counselor integrated into the team.* The ISA counselor provides direct counseling to individual students and groups of students. As a full participant in the team, the

counselor helps team members to develop the skills and knowledge to help them to collaborate in advising students.

- *Teachers as advisors.* The teacher's role is expanded to include serving as advisor, monitoring and supporting his or her students' development socially and emotionally as well as academically.
- *Student-support mechanisms.* Teams put in place a variety of structures and strategies to support students' academic, social, and emotional development. Two common strategies that are used to help teams support students' progress are team case conferencing and advisory programs.
- *Consistent communication with parents.* Teachers have sustained and purposeful interaction with parents, regularly communicating with them about their child's performance.
- *College preparation.* A four-year college-preparatory sequence of activities is developed by the team. Through these activities, students and families are informed of and actively engaged in the process of preparing for college.

Below, we elaborate on how these core components are practiced in ISA schools/SLCs. While we treat the components separately, they often overlap with other mechanisms or strategies employed by a team or school.

Team Collaboration and Integration of Counseling Strategies

In ISA schools and SLCs, the team comprises teachers, administrators, and one or more counselors, all working with an ISA coach. The team is the engine for program development, playing a formative role in planning school curriculum and instruction, professional development, and the distributed counseling program. Regular team meetings provide a forum for discussing students, planning staff development, and producing strategies and mechanisms for implementing the ISA principles.

In terms of distributed counseling activities, ISA teams use regular common meeting time for a number of purposes:

- Discussing specific students for the purpose of identifying a plan of action to support their progress
- Learning and sharing effective counseling strategies
- Integrating college-preparation activities into the curriculum

- Integrating counseling issues into advisory and core-course curricula, such as peer mediation, taking responsibility for one's actions, and health and sexuality
- Meeting with students who are not performing up to expectation—for example, not completing assignments on time—(often with a family member included in the meeting)
- Meeting with students who have emotional problems (often with a family member included in the meeting)
- Examining student data, such as that on course passage rates and ISA student writing and math assessments
- Designing college-preparatory events such as a college fair or visit

Regular team meetings are an important vehicle for sharing knowledge and perspectives with the aim of supporting students' academic and social development. The counselor often plays a leading role in working with the team on addressing many of the themes outlined in the preceding list, especially those that relate to student behavior and social development.

ISA team members described some of the ways in which their teams work together and their plans for future collaboration:

We bring a lot of different skill sets and perspectives to the table that a single teacher wouldn't have.

We're going to try to work more as a team on delegating responsibilities, with the counselor being the central point of contact.

We look at data every quarter—we look at the number of children failing and then look at the reasons why they fail. The counselors develop the list by team. We have a quarterly morning meeting by team. And when they take the Regents, we'll look at that.

A Dedicated Counselor Integrated into the Team

In ISA's distributed counseling program, the counselor is a critical member of the team in planning how to support a cohort of students. While the counselor works with students individually—much

as a traditional guidance counselor does—he or she devotes much of his or her time to working directly with and supporting the team’s teachers in their role as advisors to students.

There are many ways in which counselors support team members:

- Participating in team meetings, especially those that address individual student needs and issues (for instance, through case conferencing)
- Facilitating team interventions about individual students, often directly involving parents, students, or both, in the problem-solving process
- Preparing curriculum, including materials and activities, for advisory groups
- Training teachers in counseling techniques that can be integrated into their instructional practice
- Coordinating communication between team members about counseling and advising issues
- Coordinating the college-preparation program for the school, including working with teachers and students to ensure that students will meet the necessary requirements and deadlines for applying to college

ISA counselors remarked on their contribution to teams at their schools:

I’m trying to do more workshops and will be going to advisories more to assist teachers and to conduct workshops, and I’ll be bringing in people. . . . I’m helping them distinguish between when it’s something they can do and when it’s something that should be referred. I work with advisories to do workshops with advisors. I’ll bring in different community-based organizations to do presentations for them on teen-related issues—pregnancy, peer pressure, and sexuality.

As for a formalized distributed counseling program, the advisor is the key person with whom the students build a relationship along with their peers. If the students need further help, then the guidance counselor comes in. I have to be supportive of advisors who aren’t used to advisory—model and give lessons, come in once a month to give activities and support teachers in advisory, but advisory is teacher driven.

Teachers in ISA schools discussed the important role of the counselor within their ISA team:

I think the counselor is a very important aspect of the program. To have a counselor there who can really be hands on and involved in their lives is a really good thing. And then, as the kids like to say, she can “get in their business” and really gets to know them. Part of that grows out of the meetings that we have and talking about the kids; she has a knowledge of the kids that no other counselor is going to be afforded just because of the intimacy that she has and that’s a tremendous advantage.

[The counselor] is part of our team and she works closely with us. We’re constantly discussing student backgrounds—what we can do to help them. We have a lot of parent meetings. We’re there to support each other.

She asks for a list of [student] names for the conferences we would like. She contacts parents and sets up a meeting and then informs us when the meeting is going to take place. She gives us background and then we sit down at the meeting and she leads the meetings. She’s wonderful.

Teachers as Advisors

In the typical high school, the teacher is primarily responsible for the academic progress of students whom he or she teaches. In the ISA model, in addition to providing instruction, the teacher serves as an advisor to his or her students, monitoring and supporting their academic, social, and emotional development throughout their high school career. The small size of ISA schools and the team structure produce conditions in which teachers can know their students well. Teachers develop relationships with students that allow the former to “leverage” high-quality academic work and successful school behaviors (for example, perseverance, revising work to improve its quality) from their students.

There are many means by which teachers act as advisors in ISA’s distributed counseling system:

- Leading advisory groups
- Offering extended-day opportunities for academic support and extracurricular projects or activities
- Addressing individual student needs through case conferencing and interventions
- Conducting transcript reviews with individual students or groups to assess whether students are on track to graduate
- Working closely with the counselor to provide individual students and groups of students with the resources they need to succeed (tutoring, counseling, conflict resolution, and so on)
- Integrating counseling techniques and college-preparation activities into their curriculum and instruction.

The Major Components of Distributed Counseling

In many schools/SLCs, teachers are assigned an *advisory group*, composed of a small number of students for whom they serve as the official advisor (see the section “Advisory Groups,” below); at other sites, teachers select particular students whose progress they monitor or with whom they work intensively. Students bring personal concerns to their advisor, and advisors work to remove obstacles to students’ progress in school and to academically challenge their students. Positive relationships with students allow advisors to foster their advisees’ progress.

The teacher serves as an advisor to his or her students, monitoring and supporting their academic, social, and emotional development throughout their high school career.



The structures and mechanisms listed in this report provide critical tools for advising students; however, effective distributed counseling requires a fundamental shift in mindset regarding the teacher’s role—from that of primarily offering instruction to that of providing a range of supports that encompasses social and emotional, as well as academic, needs. It also requires teachers to think about their responsibility for students’ success. It demands a change from a largely passive stance, as in, for example, “I teach and the rest is up to the student,” to a proactive one, as in “I find the ways to connect to my student and give them every chance to succeed.” To achieve these critical shifts, teachers need ongoing support from their administrators, the counselor, and one another. In ISA schools/SLCs, teachers are also supported in this role by the ISA coach.

Teachers from ISA schools described how acting as advisors, and forming relationships with students, allows them to support their students:

Teachers feel it’s their responsibility to address whatever issues kids come to them with; they feel responsible to be the front line to address the problems.

In developing relationships with their students, teachers are gaining for themselves emotional capacity. They have a “bank.” It helps them to be able to be more honest with students and for students to be honest with them. . . . It’s hard to receive criticism or any words that are disciplinary if a relationship hasn’t been built. Teachers work on that. Being able to have a relationship with their students in a way that their students can go to them and say, “Look, Miss So-and-So, I’m having difficulty with this.”

There’s a falsity some teachers have when they believe they’re there to just teach a subject. And the very fact we’ve come into the profession where we’re with kids at such a malleable age. You see things going on and address issues. We can use our own experiences to give advice to kids.

Students in ISA schools also recognized the benefit of relationships with teachers:

Every teacher knows your name. So they know what’s wrong with you. If you don’t understand something in class they find the time to explain it to you by yourself.

My teachers are the motivation to do my best work. They push you and help if you need it. You can have a personal relationship with your teachers; they talk to you and give you extra help, too.

Student-Support Mechanisms

ISA schools/SLCs create or adapt specific structures or mechanisms that help the team to monitor and support student success—academic and social. Two of the most commonly used, case conferencing and advisory groups, are described below.

Team Case Conferencing

Case conferencing is a method for focusing the team’s attention on the progress and needs of individual students (see Appendix 4). In a typical case conference, a teacher (or counselor or administrator) “presents” a student about whom he or she has concerns, often based on the student’s academic performance, behavior, or both. Teachers share observations and evidence, such as academic performance in class, grades, or samples of student work from their classrooms, to gain an understanding of the issues facing the student and reasons motivating specific behaviors. The counselor often shares his or her perspective on the nature and source of the student’s difficulties.

Together, the team members develop strategies that teachers can use in their individual classrooms to address the problem. If the student has an advisor on the team, he or she may agree to communicate the plan with the student and the student's parents and monitor the student's progress (and report back to the team). In some cases, the student and his or her family meet with the team in person to address problems or issues and develop a plan to address them. This is sometimes referred to as an *intervention*. The counselor may also meet with the student one on one.

Many ISA teams devote some of their team meeting time to case conferencing—or, as one team called it, “kid talk.” Teachers may take turns selecting a student to present, or the team may develop a system for making sure that students who need attention are discussed. In some schools, teams break down into smaller groups to discuss different students whom they have in common so that more students can benefit from case conferencing.

A team member from an ISA school delineated some of the ways in which case conferencing has been used at her school:

We find a common thread in the student's behavior. We find out as a team, why isn't she walking around in your class and she's walking around in my class? We look at class structure. What is happening in that class that the child is not walking around? Another child is afraid to use English. This child, when pushed, speaks English. She is afraid—but she can do it. As a team, we decided that we're going to put her in a group with midlevel English speakers and also students who were willing to help her. She was supported by students but she was also where students spoke English.

ISA team members noted some ways in which case conferences can involve students and parents in interventions:

We fill out the child protocol form and then discuss the issue as a team, and try to bring the student in as well.

We are all around this round table, his five teachers and his mom. We ask him questions in front of his parents and other teachers. . . . “You're saying you don't have homework and he wasn't studying for the midterm.” We made up a contract. “If you do X, Y, and Z, we will take you off the at-risk contract.” He sat over there answering questions. He was really alert. Maybe he needed a wake-up call.

Advisory Groups

Many ISA schools/SLCs incorporate an advisory group into students' and teachers' weekly schedules. Typically, advisory groups consist of a small number of students working regularly with a teacher

or other staff member. The goals for advisory groups vary but typically include monitoring and supporting students' progress socially and academically and enriching the curriculum with topics, materials, and activities that will foster students' academic success and healthy social development, among them college preparation, health and sexuality issues, and conflict resolution.

There are many possible configurations for advisory groups. Most are made up of a consistent group, numbering between twelve and eighteen students, and meet regularly, at least once a week, for one class period (forty to one hundred minutes). In some ISA schools and SLCs, groups meet several times a week. Groups may consist of students from the same grade level or across grade levels. In one ISA school, one advisor works with a girls-only group to focus on female students' unique needs.



Advisory consists of a small number of students working regularly with a teacher or other staff member.

The curriculum for advisory groups is developed differently at each site—sometimes by the team working closely with the counselor, other times adapted from a growing number of resources for advisory systems, such as *The Advisory Guide*, published by Educators for Social Responsibility (Poliner and Lieber 2001), and the Advisory issue of *Horace*, published by the Coalition of Essential Schools (2004). Advisors typically have wide flexibility in how they implement advisory curriculum and structure their groups. Advisors often draw heavily on their own interests and experiences to

shape their advisory curriculum; for example, one teacher employed Project Adventure activities that he had learned in a previous school to focus on student leadership. (See Appendix 2 for a list of resources.)

In addition to planning and leading advisory groups, advisors often have specific responsibilities for their advisees:

- Monitoring academic progress, such as through reviewing transcripts
- Communicating regularly with the family about an advisee's progress
- Coordinating action plans, as developed in case conferences, for advisees
- Meeting with the counselor about an advisee
- Providing advisees and parents with information and resources for college preparation

Advisory groups can also provide a forum for college-preparation activities—such as researching colleges and college requirements—and lessons. In some schools, counselors rotate between advisory groups, working with students on college preparation and other kinds of activities, such as those concerned with health and sexuality issues.

Advisory groups, through the relationships they foster and the activities they undertake, can help build a school culture of caring, respect, and success. Some schools use advisory groups to collaboratively plan schoolwide events, such as a holiday celebration, or to develop schoolwide policies. Others use advisory as a forum for college preparation.

ISA team members shared their perspectives about advisory and their role as advisor to students:

Advisory provides a place for a student to know an adult.

This is a place where it's very small, intimate, where it's much easier for a student to talk about an issue that is important to them without having fears of having people come down on them. . . . We talk about what is important to them. We talk about team building, collaboration, behavior, relationships between male and female, student and student, student and staff. . . . In the future, hopefully . . . it will benefit them in a positive way in the future where they won't get into trouble, they'll know how to resolve the situation without name-calling or violence.

We act as intermediaries and advocates for the kids. We are supposed to keep an eye on failing students and why they have gotten low grades. We call the homes and so on. We also check their planners and binders to see if they're writing down their homework. The idea of [advisory] is that if fifteen kids are given to a teacher, you

can monitor the kids through the years to graduation. This is not purely academic but we can combine both.

Academically we have discussions about how they're doing in their classes and what are some strategies they use to overcome some of the challenges they have in their classes.

I did a lot of writing with the kids during the first semester and it was great; we got to know each other more. I tell them to write about anything they want for ten minutes and then I lock up the journals.

ISA provides opportunities to plan and strengthen advisory throughout the year through professional development and networks. Many ISA teams have used team planning time at the ISA Summer Institute, the annual professional development retreat sponsored by ISA, to develop their advisory curriculum or program. ISA also sponsors a leadership and guidance counselor network to support the unique professional needs of those fulfilling each role. For example, facilitators of the ISA Guidance Counselor Group (described below) disseminate curriculum resources for teams to use in their advisory program as well as provide an opportunity for counselors to learn about and share best practices across ISA schools.

Consistent Communication with Parents

In the ISA model, students have fewer teachers than do their counterparts at a typical high school, and teachers communicate more regularly about students with one another and with the counselor. These conditions are conducive to better communication with parents. As with the other strategies described above, effective communication with parents and family requires both making a commitment to the goal and developing structures and mechanisms to achieve it. ISA schools employ a number of mechanisms:

- Regular phone calls by advisors to their advisees' parents
- Teacher conferences with parents
- Parent and student orientations to introduce and discuss the mission of the school and aspects of its academic and counseling programs
- Team intervention meetings with students and parents
- Home visits with students' families

An ISA teacher discussed how her role as advisor brought her into contact with parents:

It's nice that I get to know my fourteen students closely. I'm in contact with their families; I'm their point person at the school.

The parent of a child at an ISA school commented on the level of communication she has with the team:

The communication is very good between parents and teachers. . . . When it is necessary I can go in and talk to them. I have gone many times. . . . I have talked to teachers, a counselor, and even the director. The teachers have given me a good response. They have all been great and very helpful. The rapport is very good between parents and teachers.

And a student recognized how teachers' communication with parents supported his success:

If you know you have that pressure, you're going to get a phone call, it will persuade you to do more [*sic*] better.

College Preparation

College preparation is a central goal of all ISA schools. In the distributed counseling model, the team members share responsibility for all their students' college readiness—from entry to the school through graduation. The team, with support from its guidance counselor or counselors, develops a context-specific college-preparatory sequence of activities to ensure that students and families will be informed about what they need to do to be prepared for college. ISA teams have undertaken, as part of such a sequence, the following activities:

- Mapping out a sequence of college-preparatory activities by grade level (beginning in ninth grade)
- Offering events to orient parents about the college-preparation process
- Using advisory or other vehicles to disseminate college curricula and information
- Arranging visits to colleges
- Providing support for the college-application process, such as in essay writing and interviewing
- Assisting in SAT and Regents preparation
- Making connections between classroom activities and college expectations

- Meeting with students individually about college admission requirements
- Providing students with opportunities to take college courses while in high school

Team members in ISA schools discussed their goals for college preparation:

We want [the students] to be exposed to college, to know what is expected of them from early on so that they have a plan of action, and [we] assist them in getting what they need so they can go beyond high school—to college and a good foundation. We're trying to build their foundation, their knowledge base.

I don't want a doubt to enter a student's head. . . . I want them to say, "I'm going."



College-preparation activities are part of a concerted effort to develop a school culture in which attending college is an expectation for all students.

One ISA team member outlined some of the components in her school's college-preparation program:

Students will receive weekly college orientation from the guidance counselor. Students will get prepared for the PSAT/SAT. Students will visit colleges and universities. Visitors from colleges will speak in school. Students will attend college fairs. The guidance counselor will arrange these activities.

Students reported some of the means by which their ISA schools emphasized college preparation:

We're taking courses at [a local community college]. We see the environment, subjects, and how you have to work in college. They take us to trips to college. They took us to Mercy College, where we saw an anatomy class. We know how to get scholarships. We went to a fair at Columbia University.

We get help with writing college applications, such as what they're looking for, and we have the opportunity to go to actual colleges and see actual professors.

A parent noted how her son's ISA school had influenced his thinking about his future:

The ISA team has allowed kids to really focus on their goals and to think about their post-high school plans. My son has always wanted to be an NBA superstar. We were concerned that he wasn't realistic about the future. But this year things have changed. He is much more excited to talk about job possibilities, how to get from point A to point B in terms of career. The ISA program has forced him to think about his realistic college and career goals.

College-preparation activities do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a concerted effort to develop a school culture in which attending college is an expectation for all students.

4

Implementing Distributed Counseling

As was demonstrated in the case conference excerpt that began this report, distributed counseling requires changes in individual roles and program structures. Implementing an effective distributed counseling program compels schools to make a number of key decisions about how the program will be structured and supported. In this part of the report, we summarize some of these decisions.

How Will Team Members Be Supported in Their New Roles?

As we have explained, teachers and counselors in a school practicing distributed counseling take on new and often unfamiliar roles, in that teachers are asked to serve as advisors, and counselors provide professional development to teachers on the team. Administrators and external partners must consider how to provide staff development that supports team members in these new roles. Teachers, especially, need professional development to aid them, in their engagement in the following tasks:

- Developing trusting relationships with students
- Facilitating discussions with students on social or affective issues, such as sexuality and health
- Developing conflict-resolution and mediation skills
- Counseling students about personal and health issues, such as nutrition or sex education
- Monitoring student progress by, for example, reviewing transcripts, student work samples, and student data
- Leading group discussions on, for instance, affective issues, in the classroom and advisories
- Communicating with parents and other family members about student progress and problems
- Integrating affective issues into the curriculum

In many cases, counselors are able to provide teachers with professional development and support in these areas. However, counselors used to working primarily one on one with students have need of their own professional development and of ongoing support from administrators in such areas as facilitating student group discussions; leading team discussions, including case conferences; providing staff development; and coordinating a college-preparation program that involves teachers, students, and parents.

Team members expressed feeling challenged by their changed responsibilities in a distributed counseling program:

I value it, but it's not an easy position. Personally, I've always liked that aspect of teaching. At the same time I don't think I or most teachers are sufficiently trained. So far as I do a good job, it's by instinct, and that's not a way to do a good job. We need much more development in that advisory. I think that's huge. There are people who've never taught advisory before. We need a curriculum for advisory, too.

Teachers need to feel confident on how to have these conversations with students—what questions to ask.

I'm not exactly comfortable as an advisor, yet. I don't have a lot of experience so far. I've tried to help the incoming freshman by hooking them up with sophomores. I

try to ease the anxiety. I try to make them feel like they have an adult in the building they can go to. . . . In the team meetings, we break into pairs and talk about issues. Getting the feedback helps make you a more well-rounded advisor.

What Are the Purposes and Scope of Distributed Counseling?

In order to develop a coherent and effective distributed counseling program, schools must first define what purposes the program will serve. Among the common purposes of distributed counseling are the following:

- Monitoring and supporting students' academic progress by the whole team
- Collectively supporting students' progress and college preparation, involving the team, the student, and parents
- Preparing all students for college
- Developing student work habits and behaviors, such as studying, follow-through, organization, revision, and attendance
- Building a common school culture focused on student achievement
- Developing relationships with students to promote their progress

ISA teams devote considerable meeting time to identifying the purposes and goals of their distributed counseling program. Having a strong sense of purpose allows teams and individuals to develop structures, such as case conferences; plan curricula and activities, for example, for an advisory group or extended-day program; and engage in appropriate professional development to implement these structures and activities.

It is important to communicate the purposes for distributed counseling, as well as structures and roles, to students and their families. Advisory groups serve as one venue for discussing the goals of the program with students. To offer orientation information, some ISA schools have also scheduled meetings or events with new students and their families.

Who Will Be Responsible for the Program?

It is important to determine who will coordinate aspects of the distributed counseling program—developing curriculum for advisories, for example, or scheduling case conferences. In one ISA

school, a committee of teachers, administrators, and a counselor meets regularly to plan curriculum for advisory; another committee considers how to address issues related to student life. At other sites, a counselor or teacher plays a coordinating role.

How Will the School Schedule Support Distributed Counseling?

Administrators play a crucial role in supporting distributed counseling, through the ways in which they allocate time, involve team members in planning, provide professional development, and participate themselves. For instance, several ISA administrators serve as advisors (or coadvisors) for advisory groups.

Distributed counseling depends on team interaction. Teams need significant chunks of time in which to gather as a group, plan programs and curriculum, discuss students, meet with students and parents, and engage in professional development. Some schools devote separate team meetings to distributed counseling activities, such as case conferencing.

Advisors also need time in which to work with their advisees. Regular advisory group meetings, typically held one or more times a week, are a common means of providing that critical time. In some ISA schools, extended-day activities—before school, during lunch, or after school—offer opportunities for teachers to meet with students outside the regular class schedule. In order to prepare for advisory, teachers need time in which to plan advisory curriculum, adapt existing curriculum, share resources, and work with the counselor.

Administrators play a crucial role in supporting distributed counseling, through the ways in which they allocate time, involve team members in planning, provide professional development, and participate themselves.



In many ISA schools/SLCs, team meetings furnish time for professional development, such as working on counseling techniques. Since team-meeting time is at a premium, it is often necessary

to dedicate other time to professional development—during a staff retreat, for example—as well as take advantage of out-of-school opportunities, among them conferences or workshops.

As the program develops, school leaders and team members need to consider how they will assess the effectiveness of the distributed counseling program to determine how to adjust and improve it.

5

How ISA Supports Distributed Counseling

As described in Part 2, ISA provides targeted resources to support partner schools in implementing the ISA principles. The distributed counseling principle plays an essential role in the process by which schools/SLCs realize ISA's college-preparatory mission. It is critical to understand how ISA supports distributed counseling so that others may provide necessary student supports. Below, we describe three ways in which ISA extends sustained opportunities to support distributed counseling through such practices as staff development, program planning, and participation in professional networks.

The ISA Guidance Counselor Group Network

To support guidance counselors in their expanded role, ISA sponsors an ISA Guidance Counselor Group to connect counselors from all ISA schools/SLCs. Counselors meet several times during the school year for full-day meetings and, in addition, have their own intensive group meetings during the weeklong annual summer institute. These ongoing meetings provide a forum in which to share best practices of participating schools/SLCs. This group is led by two ISA coaches with extensive

experience in counseling and knowledge of how distributed counseling can be used to promote students' success in school.

Together, these two ISA coaches and the counselors problem-solve common issues, share successful strategies, and develop a culture of college preparation across their schools. Agendas from past meetings have listed a variety of activities:

- Creating distributed counseling action plans establishing goals, next steps, and strategies
- Sharing distributed counseling practices and strategies
- Developing and refining a college-preparatory sequence of activities (time line) demonstrating how college preparation begins in the ninth grade
- Strengthening counseling skills through role-playing conferencing with parents and facilitating team meetings
- Discussing how counselors strengthen teachers' practices so that these include an understanding of adolescent emotional and social development, the implementation of strategies in the classroom to support students, and ways to talk about and with students and families
- Forming committees that focus on career orientation, college orientation, distributed counseling, and technology



Counselors problem-solve common issues, share successful strategies, and develop a culture of college preparation across their schools.

In this manner, the Guidance Counselor Group has served as a significant resource in creating and distributing information and resources for distributed counseling; further, it functions as a collegial support system. Counselors reported their experiences:

It was great to get together with people doing the same thing . . . at different schools. Conversation was engaging, and the four-year plan we created on attacking the college process is a terrific tool! I look forward to bringing these ideas/topics back to my school and team.

This was a very useful meeting. We were able to expand on our summer work and plan for future events. It helped to get some uniformity to our college/career prep. Gave us valuable time to brainstorm, share, and support.

It is always fantastic to have time to sit and talk with others in the same field. It was particularly helpful to have the time to discuss the successes and challenges of how the ISA programs are taking shape in the various school settings. Getting ideas from other colleagues is always awesome; so much is gained through these conversations and networking opportunities.

Staff Development

ISA teams participate in rigorous and intensive staff development to support staff in producing effective distributed counseling systems. As we have described, the counselor works with teammates to develop the necessary skills and knowledge for integrating students' academic and socioemotional goals.

To maximize the team's internal expertise, each school has a coach who works with the team and individual members on all aspects of the ISA model, including distributed counseling. For example, ISA coaches work with principals to address organizational issues related to distributed counseling, such as scheduling time for advisory groups and team meetings. Some coaches work with committees or groups involved in planning advisory curriculum.

To its annual summer institute, ISA brings expert social workers and school counselors to lead workshops on counseling techniques and program development, covering such topics as building an advisory program, conflict resolution, and creating a school culture that fosters student achievement.

Each school's ISA budget allows schools some discretionary funding with which to develop their own professional development workshops and on- and off-site learning opportunities.

Team Planning

Opportunities that allow for planning a distributed counseling program are essential. At the annual ISA Summer Institute, significant time is allocated for the team to plan and develop program structures, including the system of distributed counseling. The team may identify goals for distributed counseling; create program structures, such as an advisory system; and discuss school schedules, curriculum, student interventions, and so on. Again, the team benefits from the guidance of the ISA coach, who works with the team throughout the planning process as needed. During the year, faculty and administration continue to work together. ISA provides schools and SLCs with data, among them student surveys and feedback reports based on documentation visits, for the teams to use in planning and assessing their distributed counseling program.

Conclusion

ISA's model of distributed counseling is a principle for school change, not a standardized off-the-shelf program. In implementing the ISA distributed counseling model, each school identifies its own purposes and emphases and develops its own structures and mechanisms to achieve those goals.

Developing such a program presents challenges—discussed in this report—to schools, teachers, counselors, and administrators. High school practitioners must reconceptualize and expand the definition of their role and responsibilities and then develop the skill sets with which to effectively enact them. Developing distributed counseling is an evolutionary process that involves defining purposes, planning, trying out new structures and mechanisms, assessing their effectiveness, and making adjustments.

High school leaders play a critical role in the success of distributed counseling programs. They must collaborate with staff to reconceptualize the role of students and their families as knowledgeable and active partners in the education enterprise. They must provide the time and allocate the resources needed for effective implementation. And they must facilitate a process of ongoing assessment and improvement of the distributed counseling system.

Ultimately, distributed counseling is as much about a commitment to change the way we relate to adolescents in our high schools as it is about any single curriculum or school structure—it means moving away from treating each young person as simply a student to be taught and moving toward treating him or her as an autonomous, developing individual with the capacity to learn, to engage with others, and to succeed. Every interaction between a teacher, counselor, or administrator and a high school student can be an occasion for distributed counseling. The structures and mechanisms that a school creates are the tools with which to act on that commitment.

Appendix 1

ISA Seven Principles for Success

Focusing on improving academic achievement, the Institute for Student Achievement is a leading school-redesign partner that facilitates the transformation of high schools into small learning communities and small schools to prepare students for college. Building upon its Seven Principles for Success, ISA offers comprehensive school-redesign solutions that are customized to meet the unique needs of schools and districts.

1. College preparatory instructional program

Priming students for the college experience

Students view themselves as future college students and are prepared for all that entails.

Intellectual and emotional development through an inquiry approach to curriculum and instruction focusing on rigorous intellectual development.

Critical thinking and time management skills are emphasized.

Literacy and numeracy embedded across the curriculum continually reinforce reading and math skills.

Intensive ninth- to twelfth-grade postsecondary education preparation includes

College and financial aid orientation for both parents and students;

Courses at local colleges, internships, and community service;

Regular assessment of student performance.

2. Distributed Counseling

Extending support services beyond guidance counselors

Teachers function in a dual role as teacher and advisor, establishing them as the first line of defense to identify and address issues affecting their students.

Counselors work closely with teachers, enabling them to participate in counseling directly.

Students have a caring adult who knows them well and counselors have a smaller, more intimate caseload.

3. Dedicated team of teachers and counselors

Providing a consistent, four-year support network

Students are assigned to a team of teachers and a counselor who work collaboratively with them throughout their entire high school tenure.

Students develop strong, long-term connections with teachers and counselors.

Individual attention ensures that students perform at their personal best.

4. Professional development

Establishing a community of academic learners

Teachers are empowered to affect change in their classrooms and their schools by affording regularly scheduled common time to collaborate with each other, as well as opportunities to learn and grow.

Teachers have the time they need to plan, problem-solve, and review student progress.

Professional development opportunities such as ISA's Summer and Winter Institutes enhance teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills, while coaching assists them in overcoming classroom challenges.

5. Extended school day and school year

Creating opportunities for personalized learning

Staff is able to provide students with additional structured time, individual attention, and other support necessary for their success with the program's challenging, college-preparatory curriculum.

Dedicated time for extra help with homework, test preparation, career-related activities, internships, and community service projects.

Additional opportunities for effective skill and talent development and enrichment.

6. Parent involvement

Encouraging parents to participate in their children's education

ISA embraces and encourages parental involvement because of its positive impact on student achievement and satisfaction.

Parents are encouraged to take an active role in school activities and to give staff feedback on their children's progress.

Teachers and counselors keep parents informed of student performance and work together as a team to provide strong support.

7. Continuous organizational improvement

Monitoring progress and refining program components

Teams meet regularly to test their practices and progress against ISA principles and student achievement.

Benchmarking exercises establish accountability for measurable results, ensuring continuous organizational improvement.

External stakeholders visit schools to objectively assess the quality of teaching and learning.

Additional assessments include scored samples of student work in writing and math and surveys of students' attitudes and expectations about school and their future.

Appendix 2

Internet Resources for Distributed Counseling

American School Counselor Association

<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/>

Provides access to periodicals, online bookstore, professional development tools, peer networking, and information on best practices in school counseling.

Career Cruising

<http://www.careercruising.com>

Interactive career resource. Facilitates career exploration and planning by providing students with access to information and tools to track their progress.

College Board

<http://apps.collegeboard.com>

Helps students prepare for college by providing curriculum, services, and tools for parents, students, and educators.

College Board Financial Aid

<http://www.collegeboard.com/highered/fa/index.html>

Provides information, software, and other tools to manage the financial aid process.

College Board Scholarship Search

http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp

Matches scholarships, internships, grants, and loans to education level, talents, and background.

Appendix 2

FastWeb

<http://www.fastweb.com>

Matches scholarships with personal profile.

National Association of School Psychologists

<http://www.nasponline.org>

Provides access to periodicals, online bookstore, certification/training resources, career center, crisis resources, and information on culturally competent practices.

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Education)

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>

Federal program. Allocates funds to states in support of efforts that encourage low-income students to stay in school and attend college. For New York, see <http://www.hesc.com/bulletin.nsf/0/F33C9B2FBC3B937D85257083005724DE?OpenDocument>. For New Jersey, see <http://state.nj.us/highereducation/gearup.html>. For further information about programs in individual states, see your state department of education Web site.

New York State Department of Education

<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/scholarships/html.htm>

Provides award and scholarship information for legal New York State residents.

Project Adventure

<http://www.pa.org>

Experiential youth program. Builds school community and student leadership skills to effect positive growth.

School Redesign Network at Stanford University

<http://www.schoolredesign.net>

Provides access to articles and other resources on a variety of topics, such as personalization, to support effective small-school design.

School Mental Health Project, University of California, Los Angeles

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

Provides overview of mental health in schools and access to a resource center, newsletter, and database for mental health.

Appendix 3

College Preparation and Orientation Time Line

The following college-preparation strategies and activities have been developed by ISA guidance counselors for use in all ISA schools. ISA promotes a systematic, continuing college-going culture beginning in the ninth grade; to reflect this, these guidelines are arranged to show a progression grade by grade.

Ninth Grade

College visits, with previsit preparations and postvisit reflections

Initial ninth-grade orientation, stressing the expectation that all students will attend college

Advisories that reinforce college going

Résumé writing

Preparation of college folder, to be maintained for four years

Regular meetings between advisor and parents to discuss academic progress

Career-interest inventories

Beginning of writing college admission essays

Continuation of practice application

Initiation of counselors' building relationships with colleges

Presentations by career speakers

Mini-college fair

Career fair

Availability of community service opportunities

Tenth Grade

Research, including online, into specific colleges

Continuation of building college résumé

Preparation for SAT

Taking of PSAT

Transcript and grade reviews

Additional college visits, one each semester

Visits from college students to schools to talk with students

Summer opportunities

More career inventories

Push for honors courses and AP courses

Eleventh Grade

PSAT and SAT prep courses and actual administration

Financial aid discussions—special support for undocumented students

Junior Parent Night—discussion of financial issues

Reference writing by staff

Training for staff

Collection by students of reference letters

Continued practice with completing college application

Beginning of development of scholarship database

Summer opportunities

Enrollment in college courses on college campuses by eligible students

More career inventories

Twelfth Grade

Assistance to students in making best matches for college selection

Completion of final applications

Scheduling of college admission and financial aid officers to meet with students and parents

Student group sessions to discuss transition to college

Finalizing of college essay, references, résumé

Completion of financial aid forms

Preparation of students for interviews, where applicable

Collection and distribution of information about scholarships and assistance to students in identifying appropriate scholarships and preparing scholarship applications

Submission of packages by deadline

Follow-up with college admissions counselors where appropriate

Appendix 4

The Case Conference

Don Freeman and Bill Sigelakis,
ISA Coaches

A case conference is a planning session at which team members articulate an issue about a student and develop strategies based on evidence to help that student. Among the characteristics of a case conference are the following:

There is a designated chairperson who is responsible for making sure that appropriate staff and materials will be present at the conference and that there is a clear agenda.

A staff member is designated to begin the meeting by presenting the issues that will be discussed.

All individuals who can supply pertinent information are involved.

Available written data on a student is ready for review at the conference.

The focus is on the whole child.

It *must* be evidence based.

It *must* result in a clear plan of action.

It *must* lead to follow-through and reexamination at the next team meeting. (There must also be long-term follow-up to examine if the plan is working. Midcourse corrections [formative assessment] to improve the plan's effectiveness must be made when appropriate.)

If exacerbating situations—a student's poor nutrition, living in a shelter, having drug problems—exist, these should be brought to the table in a helping atmosphere.

Discussion time *must not* devolve into a complaining session.

Follow-up meetings encompass a number of components:

- Feedback on how things are progressing

- Plans for changes in strategies when appropriate to improve effectiveness

- A person who is designated to make sure that any such plan is effectively implemented and that necessary follow-up occurs (this staff member would report back on implementation and effectiveness at the second team meeting and would be responsible for long-term implementation and follow-up)

- Discussion of whether a meeting with a parent is to occur (if so, there needs to be a pre-mini conference to prepare for that meeting)

Specific materials need to be available:

- Permanent record

- Cumulative record

- Core academic data

- Attendance record

- Special needs information

- Information on family situation

- Health information

- Any material indicating learning issues or behavioral problems

- Reports—academic and behavioral—from teachers

- Samples of student performance

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