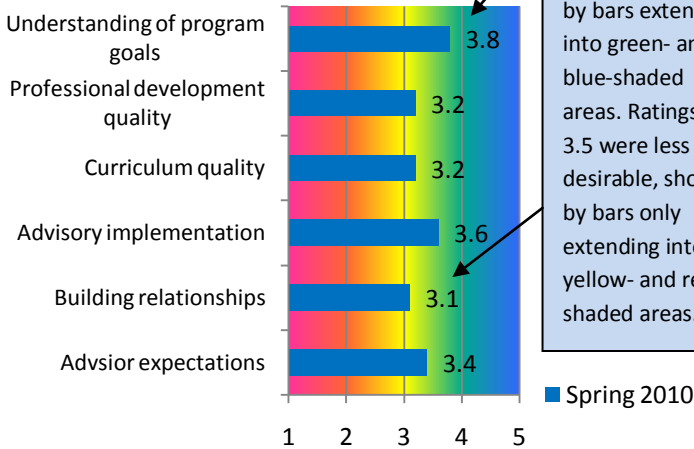




What is Student Advisory? In 2007–2008, all Austin Independent School District (AISD) high schools began implementing a student advisory program for all students. Although the curriculum and implementation structure of the advisory program is tailored to meet the unique needs of each campus, four goals are common to each campus’s program: (a) building relationships, (b) supporting academic achievement, (c) promoting postsecondary preparation, and (d) supporting healthy development toward adulthood. Each school requires a small student-to-advisor ratio (i.e., a 17:1 average ratio) and attempts to assign students to the same advisory instructor as they progress through high school. The advisory program was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and allocated \$621,201.00 in 2009–2010, approximately \$37 per student.

What do advisors think about advisory? Advisors indicated agreement with respect to their understanding of program goals. However, their responses were mixed in other areas. The lowest ratings were in the areas of curriculum quality and building relationships. With respect to curriculum quality, teachers did not agree that advisory plans and/or materials were relevant to students and that the curriculum addressed students’ socio-emotional development needs. In the area of building relationships, most advisors admitted that they did not contact the parents/guardians of the students in their advisory groups, nor did they notice when their advisory students were having a problem or in a slump.



Source. AISD Advisor Survey, Spring 2010

About the surveys. Student and advisor surveys addressed advisory implementation and relationships between the students and advisors. Both surveys were conducted in all district high schools in May 2010. For advisors, 1,108 surveys were emailed, and 65.7% responded. Additionally, all students enrolled in advisory ($N = 16,956$) were asked to complete the survey in their advisory classroom, and 61.7% responded. Response rates for both surveys were found to be statistically representative of that group.

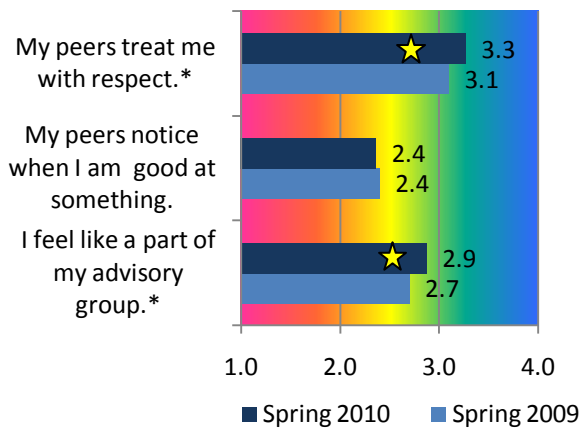
Understanding the data. The advisor survey items had two rating scales. Most of the advisor survey items were based on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. A rating of 3 was *not sure*. Advisor survey items pertaining to implementation were based on a 1 (*rarely/never*) to 4 (*almost always*) scale. Advisor survey items were grouped into subcategories to summarize results. The student survey items were based on a 1 (*rarely/never*) to 4 (*almost always*) scale. To compare advisor and student results, some items for advisors were converted to a 4-point scale. For each question displayed in this report, the mean response was placed on a continuum of desirability ranging from excellent (blue) to poor (red). Campus teams received the full set of survey results for program improvement purposes.

Past results. Changes made to the advisory surveys across years prevented some comparisons of results. Comprehensive program evaluation reports for the 2008–2009 and 2007–2008 school years may be accessed at <http://www.austinisd.org/inside/accountability/evaluation/reports.phtml>.



What do students report about advisory? Student survey results revealed positive outcomes related to the relationships between students in advisory groups.

In 2009–2010, students' ratings of whether they felt they were a part of the advisory group and were respected by their peers increased significantly ($p < .05$), compared with their responses in the previous school year.



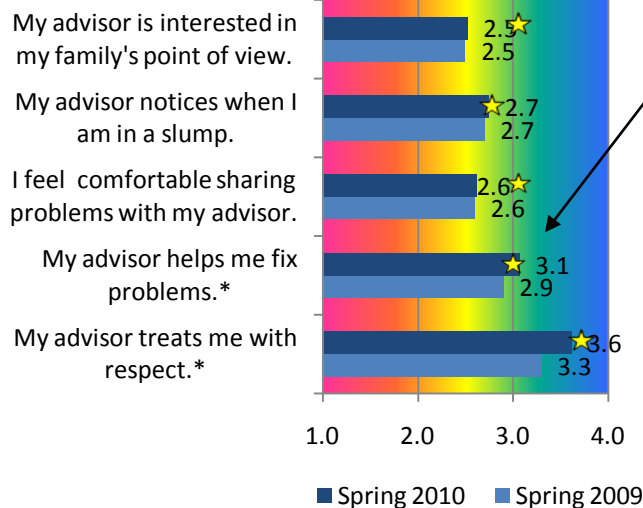
Source. AISD Student and Advisor Surveys
★ Indicates advisor response (refer to sidebar for details)
* Statistically significant increase ($p < .05$)

Building relationships: How do the perceptions of students and advisors compare?

Overall, students rated most survey items higher than did advisors. In regard to peer relationships, advisors indicated they were *not sure* about whether students in their advisory group treated one another with respect (2.7). They also were *not sure* that they helped students feel like a real part of their advisory group (2.5). Considering the relationship between the advisors and students, student ratings were higher than those of advisors in three areas: advisors noticing a slump (2.3), advisors helping with problems (2.3), and advisors treating students with respect (3.1). Both advisor and student ratings were lowest for their comfort level in sharing problems and advisor interest in family views.

Student ratings of their advisors, in terms of their respectfulness and helpfulness with problems, increased significantly in the 2009-2010 school year.

However, there was no other change in student ratings of advisors from year to year. Consideration and support should be given to the further development of student and advisor relationships.



Source. AISD Student and Advisor Surveys
★ Indicates advisor response (refer to sidebar for details)
* Statistically significant increase ($p < .05$)

Ratings > 2.7 were considered positive, illustrated by bars extending into green- and blue-shaded areas. Ratings < 2.7 were less desirable, illustrated by bars only extending into yellow- and red-shaded areas.

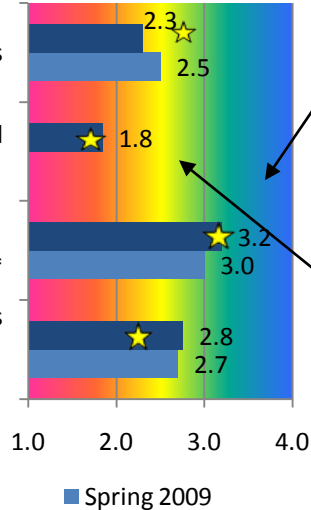


Students reported significant increases in the frequency of academic advising and college and career preparation in their advisory groups in the 2009–2010 school year.

However, students reported differing levels of implementation for the major advisory activities. Academic advising activities were reported to occur frequently, but students reported advisor contact with parents/guardians occurred infrequently. Although students reported college and career advising activities *sometimes* occurred, most aspired to enroll in college within a year of graduating from high school (see figure below). Consistent with their reports of college and career preparation frequency, students reported that advisory only *sometimes* influenced their plans for college, and their average rating significantly decreased from ratings the prior year.

The lowest rating on the survey pertained to family contact. The rating indicated that this practice did not happen often, even though one of the advisory program goals was to have advisors serve as a liaison to parents for academic progress and college/career support.

Advisory has changed or supported my plans for college.*
My advisor contacted my family.
My advisor reviews academic progress.*
My advisor teaches about college/careers.*



Ratings > 2.7 were considered positive, illustrated by bars extending into green- and blue-shaded areas. Ratings < 2.7 were less desirable, illustrated by bars only extending into yellow- and red-shaded areas.

Source: AISD Student and Advisor Surveys

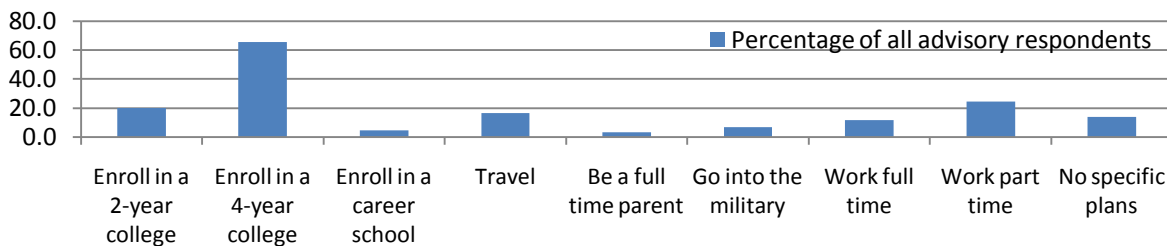
★ Indicates advisor response (refer to sidebar for details)

* Statistically significant increase ($p < .05$)

Major components of advisory implementation: How do the perceptions of students and advisors compare?

In regard to program implementation, student and advisor perceptions were mixed. Student and advisor ratings were similar for academic advising and family contact. Interestingly, perceptions related to the implementation of college and career advising differed between students and advisors. Students perceived college and career activities happened more frequently than advisors perceived they did; however, students reported the activities had less of an influence on their college and career plans than did the perceptions of their advisors.

Within a year of graduation, I plan to....





What does all of this mean? Across the district, survey results indicate the advisory classroom may provide an environment in which students feel respected and receive consistent help to monitor their academic progress. It appears that relationships may be developing between students and between students and their advisors. However, the mixed results indicated that improvement is needed in the areas of college and career preparation and communication with families.

Recommendation. The extent of program implementation has not been determined at the district or campus level. Thus, one cannot verify the relationship between program implementation and desired student outcomes. Further inquiry into the fidelity of implementation is recommended to discern program outcomes for students. This information also would assist program staff in identifying best practices and improving professional development support for advisors.

About the Department of Program Evaluation. The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) was established in 1972 to support program decision making and strategic planning in AISD. The department is housed in the Office of Accountability and is charged with evaluating federal, state, and locally funded programs in AISD. DPE staff pride themselves on integrating best and innovative evaluation practices with educational and institutional knowledge. DPE works with program staff throughout the district to design and conduct formative and summative program evaluations. DPE's methods for evaluating programs vary depending on the research question, program design, and reporting requirements. The evaluations report objectively about program implementation and outcomes, and serve to inform program staff, decision makers, and planners in the district. DPE also responds to information needs at all levels. DPE reports may be accessed online at <http://www.austinisd.org/inside/accountability/evaluation/reports.phtml>.

About the author. After earning degrees in elementary education, curriculum and instruction, and educational administration from Texas A&M University and obtaining certifications for school principalship and superintendency, Dr. Karen Looby began to specialize in program evaluation. She joined DPE in October 2000 and supervises multiple projects focused on supporting academic success and college and career preparation in middle and high schools.

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