
Introduction to *Community Matters: A Facing History and Ourselves Approach to Advisory*

Advisory works to help schools establish safe and inclusive communities where students learn to listen to diverse viewpoints and make their voices heard. Advisories serve as student-centered spaces, facilitated by a trusted adult, where honest questioning, discussion, and social and academic growth can occur; where students build understanding and empathy, break down stereotypes, and find and build their voices; and where they develop the skills necessary for academic and community success. A school-wide advisory program with these characteristics can help lay the foundation for a community centered on equity and justice.

Advisory supports adolescents' social and developmental needs by helping them better understand themselves as learners, peers, and members of the broader communities in which they live. Furthermore, advisory creates space outside of academic classes where students can develop a trusting relationship with an adult in school and can wrestle with the social and academic questions they face—questions that, when left unanswered, can impede their ability to learn and thrive.

Built on a foundation of social-emotional learning, *Community Matters: A Facing History and Ourselves Approach to Advisory* provides one year's worth of activities and materials for grades 8–10. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of young people's success in school, which depends not only on academic achievement but also on students' ability to engage respectfully and responsibly with others. At its core, SEL helps students and adults to develop the fundamental competencies for life effectiveness, including handling oneself, one's relationships, and one's work effectively and ethically. Principles of SEL can also be used as a framework for improving schools with a focus on creating caring learning communities with respectful, supportive relationships among students and adults.

Adolescence is a time when two tasks take on special importance: determining our own individual identity and figuring out where and how we belong. *Community Matters* supports and challenges young people who are beginning to see themselves as unique individuals with a desire to belong. The activities are grouped into six sections that align with Facing History and Ourselves' scope and sequence (visit facinghistory.org to learn more about our scope and sequence). Advisees begin with the foundational tasks of learning each other's names and establishing group norms. Then they embark on an exploration of their identities by examining how the relationship between the individual and society plays out in their lives. They pay close attention to the similarities and differences between their "real" and their online identities. Next, advisees reflect on why we all have a tendency to arrange ourselves into "in" groups and "out" groups. They apply this

theme of membership and belonging to a real-life case study, which challenges them to consider the factors that can lead to ostracism and bullying, as well as the roles that people play when they witness or become aware of ostracism, bullying, and cyberbullying. In the final section, advisees explore different ways of participating in the world around them in order to help them realize that even though they are young, they still have the power to shape their communities through their choices and actions.

In addition to the themes of identity, membership, belonging, and participation addressed in this guide, some schools may wish to include other important topics in their advisory programs, such as personal and academic goal-setting, time management, stress management, and college and career prep. For information, activities, and resources to help incorporate these important topics into your school's advisory program alongside *Community Matters*, we recommend the following resources:

- *The Advisory Guide: Designing and Implementing Successful Advisory Programs in Secondary Schools* by Rachel Poliner and Carol Miller Lieber
- *Teaching the Whole Teen: Everyday Practices that Promote Success and Resilience in School and Life* by Rachel Poliner and Jeffrey Benson