



# Keystone Mission

Keystone Academy is a new model of education in China. It blends distinctive traditions in eastern, western, and international education, creating a new world school with a liberal arts program that is academically outstanding. All our endeavors are framed by five shared Confucian values: compassion, justice, respect, wisdom and honesty.

At Keystone, we embrace a world that is dynamic and ever-changing. We learn from and we learn for this enterprising, global, and diverse community.

Our keystones are:

- bilingual immersion in Chinese and English;
- building character and community throughout our residential setting;
- promoting Chinese culture and identity in a world context.

Our ambition is to share successes generously and to learn from failures bravely, to open our doors to many, and to engage fully with the world of education, and the world at large, beyond our gates.

Our students are hungry for opportunity, bold in their thinking, and creative in their instincts. They are encouraged to become expansive in their dreaming, determined in their actions, collaborative in their teamwork, and humble in their achievement. They learn to be stewards of the environment and to be at ease with otherness.

Our teachers are passionate about learning, rigorous in their standards, and inspirational in their methods. They are respectful listeners, attentive caregivers, interrogative thinkers, compassionate mentors, and world-minded citizens.

Our graduates will possess the intellectual, cultural, and ecological fluency to navigate gracefully the colleges, careers, and communities of their choice. They will know how to apply their emotional intelligence, character, and zest for learning to help develop and improve the communities in which they live.

# THE ADVISOR AT KEYSTONE ACADEMY 2021-2022

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When your advisee realizes that you consistently, honestly and genuinely have their best interests at heart, in moments of celebration or despair, you will have succeeded as a Keystone Academy advisor. You will have given a level of mentoring and care that is the foundation of who we are as Keystone Academy Advisors.

## Why advising is a priority at Keystone Academy

- Advisors know they are trusted and can make a difference in students' lives.
- Advising can lead to great conversations and great fun with students.
- Advisors witness and contribute to students' lives and their Keystone experience.
- Advisors can learn a great deal about different areas of school life by discussing after-school-activities, classes and projects with their advisees.
- Advisors experience the joy of celebrating students' accomplishments with them.
- Advisors can develop rewarding, lasting relationships with individual students.
- Students appreciate all of this.

(Ackerman & Smith, 2007, p. 14).

In sum, Keystone advisors are a distinctive and outstanding feature of the school when it comes to each student's individual growth and development. Advisors are crucial in making the Keystone experience special and excellent. Advisors are the gardeners who enable students to grow into mature persons, the mentors who make school life, especially boarding life, meaningful.

# Overview of Advising at Keystone Academy

The primary purpose of the Academy Advising Program is to assist students in the development of a deep educational experience at Keystone. The formal education of students is purposeful and holistic, and includes meaningful experiences in academics, co-curricular activities, social and residential settings, leadership development, citizenship and service to others.

Advisors play a significant role and are expected to mentor, coach, advocate for and guide a small group of students by working with individual advisees and grade-level advisory groups. Advisors ensure that each student is personally known, looked after, and cared for in our community. Teachers have advising responsibility for between four and eight students and are the “point persons” for those students and their families.

The advisor is primarily responsible for ensuring that all advisees and families experience these quintessential elements of the Keystone Academy community life:

- Students feel valued and have a sense of belonging.
- Students grow academically, socially and morally.
- Students establish meaningful and frequent connections with adults and peers.
- Parents have a source for direct communication with the Keystone Academy teachers and administrators.

Advisors foster students’ personal, ethical and intellectual growth and help students with course selection, adjustment to school life, organizing and time management, motivation and, when necessary, disciplinary situations. Advisors can be motivators, adults who challenge and push students to try new things, a guiding hand, a cheerleader, and an ally. Advisors provide a communication link between home and school and are a resource for parents when it comes to academic life, school culture, and their child’s emotional needs. Additionally, advisors provide parents with a sense of security while their children are away from home.

As an advisor, one is not expected to have all the answers or solve every problem. The advisor’s charge is to be available and approachable, to know each advisee, to listen, to care and to seek resolution to issues when they present themselves. Advisors are not school counselors or therapists. Advisors are encouraged to be themselves and to take a special interest in their advisees. In the course of advising, one will listen fully to an advisee and empathize, act as a thoughtful advocate or parent intermediary, and perform the more pragmatic aspects of the advising role such as report writing and facilitating the advisory group curriculum. Advisors will also extend themselves, quite naturally, in other meaningful and valuable ways.

In years to come, when students look back at their lives at Keystone, they will recall their stimulating classroom experiences, their friends and the connections they made with their teachers and advisor. Please be sure that no student leaves Keystone without making at least one significant adult connection. Keystone life is, among other things, about the connections we make with others and the value we place on our personal relationships.

# The Role of the Advisor

Advisors take time to learn about their advisees' educational histories and backgrounds. By understanding this information advisors become aware of each student's unique learning profile and academic needs. In the role as academic counselor a learning continuum is mapped out over a student's career at Keystone. Working cooperatively with Program Coordinators, current teachers and parents, advisors coordinate and manage course selection for each student. The Division Head provides training to the advisors on the Academy's academic requirements and College Counselors are consulted on university preparedness expectations. Advisors are asked to connect with parents to learn more about their educational and personal goals and concerns for their child.

Student learning and desirable outcomes include, but are not limited to:

- Intellectual growth and achievement of personal educational goals.
- Effective communication.
- Realistic self-appraisal.
- Sense of self in the context of the world.
- Clarified values, leadership and taking responsibility for self and others.
- Healthy behaviors.
- Social responsibility.
- Appreciation of diversity and awareness of others.
- Tolerance and appreciation of risk.

Advisors help students explore campus activities and opportunities. By identifying areas of interest or of challenge, an advisor can encourage greater involvement in a particular area of school life. Once advisees are involved in activities, advisors show interest and support by attending games, performances, and exhibitions or inquiring about activities where advisees are participating.

Keystone Advisors have a unique opportunity to support students and to act in loco parentis (i.e., in the place of a parent or of a parent's authority). As such, advising is one of the most important roles that teachers and administrators can assume at Keystone. In our residential community, all teachers and administrators are expected to play a role in the life of each student at the school. The depth and quality of the relationships between students and adults is what makes boarding school a unique and rewarding experience.

Advising takes time, patience and dedication. At times the role may feel frustrating, confusing and fatiguing, but it can also be incredibly rewarding to make a difference in a student's life. To be an effective advisor takes commitment. While one of the goals of advising is to make a solid connection with a student, it is at the same time important to maintain an appropriate level of detachment or distance in relationships with students. Advisors are not peers, or friends, although they do behave in friendly ways. Maintaining boundaries and putting limits on accessibility, where and when appropriate, is one way to manage the role and maintain adult time and privacy.

Above all, being an effective and caring listener may be the single most important task of an advisor.

# Additional Responsibilities

## CAS and Advisory

### Academic Revision and Extension

Built into our schedule is an opportunity for students to work with their teachers and receive additional support or extension of a lesson. Twice per week for 40 minutes, students gather in their advisory groups under their advisor's supervision, without a specific advisory curriculum goal.

These periods are intended for students to work on their homework independently or with classmates, or to seek extra support or guidance from their teachers. They may leave their assigned room to visit a teacher in another area. It is the role of the advisor to oversee his or her students during this period, and to use this as another opportunity to support his or her advisees.

Advisors of grade 11 and 12 students also act as Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) Advisors. The CAS programme at Keystone Academy forms the core of the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP). CAS Advisors work individually with their advisees to ensure that they complete the CAS programme successfully. In addition, the CAS Advisor works closely with the CAS Coordinator to ensure that CAS requirements are met, and continues to be a direct contact to the student throughout the student's diploma experience.

According to the *IBO Creativity, Activity, Service Guide* (p.34, 2015), these are the roles and responsibilities of the CAS Advisor:

- Educate students on all aspects of the CAS programme.
- Educate students on the meaning and purpose of the CAS learning outcomes.
- Assist students with clarifying and developing the attributes of the IB learner profile.
- Support students in understanding ethical concerns and international-mindedness.
- Develop purposeful reflection skills through individual interviews, group discussions and teaching strategies.
- Provide feedback on student reflections.
- Assist students in identifying personal and group goals.
- Meet with their assigned students regularly to discuss goals and achievements.
- Provide ongoing guidance and support to students.
- Monitor the range and balance of experiences undertaken by individuals.
- Advise and monitor progress towards meeting the CAS learning outcomes.
- Periodically review their assigned students' CAS portfolios.
- Meet with their assigned students in three formal documented interviews.

# Basic Expectations of Advisors

Many of the basic expectations of Keystone Advisors have to do with effective communication throughout the school year:

1. Establish a relationship with your advisees. Meet with your advisory group every week during the scheduled meeting time and cover topics in the advisory curriculum using the resources provided. Should you have an emergency and be unable to attend the advisory meeting, please ask your group to meet with another advisory group and inform the Dean of Students of this change. Your advisees must be accounted for and supervised for the entire advisory period.
2. Have on-going and regular one-on-one conversations with each advisee on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to discuss academic development, workload, course selection, upcoming opportunities and maintaining balance. Meet with advisees individually to discuss grades and progress reports in a timely manner.
3. Monitor advisee progress in the areas of academic achievement, residential life, co-curricular involvement, social activities and leadership development. Maintain a record in individual student or advisee portfolios. Since there is confidential information such as students' report cards and personal reflections, student portfolios must be kept securely.
4. Acknowledge student accomplishments and support advisees by attending events when they are participating.
5. Make contact with parents in the first two weeks of school and establish an on-going relationship with them. Be sure to inform parents when an advisee has a significant academic or personal issue that should be made known to them and facilitate the sharing of information between parents, the student and the school when appropriate.
6. Maintain an advisee folder for each student in your advisory group. Keep detailed notes of important conversations and interactions with advisees, parents and teachers at Keystone.
7. Write informed and thorough advisor reports that address the advisee's life at Keystone Academy. Do not simply retell the details of academic comments; tell the story of a student's progress and development at our school. Include details about the student's involvement in community and/or residential life, co-curricular activities, service learning, and cognitive and affective learning skills, along with other comments you may feel are helpful and valuable to record for an individual student.
8. Refer issues of concern to the appropriate individual: academic, counseling, health center, student life/discipline or residential.
9. Maintain your advisory budget and submit fapio reports to the Dean of Students.

# Working with Advisory Groups

Academy Advising is a vibrant program that ensures every student has at least one adult at the school who knows them well, who cares about their happiness and success at school. As an advisor it is your goal to get to know your advisees and to put in the time and effort needed to cultivate this relationship. The Academy has scheduled time each week for formal advisor meetings. Of course you are encouraged to gather informally and more often, but the formal weekly meetings are required.

Students will come to see that all advisors are not the same. While advising is not a competition between adults, your advisees need to know that you care and that you are available in order for them to invest the time into creating a relationship with you. Put in the time early on and you could reap the benefits of connecting with a young person in a very meaningful way.

Advising time can be for the sheer sake of having fun. Advising does not (and probably should not) always be a place for deep thought and introspection. Our students are busy and they enjoy a break once in a while. Let your own sense of play and fun guide the relationship you build with your advisees.

*Tip: Parents love to see pictures of their children. Sending photos is an easy and much appreciated way to let parents know that you are connecting with their child.*

There will be occasions when two or more advisory groups will be asked to join together for activities or directed conversations as part of the Advisory Curriculum. When this is scheduled, please communicate with the other Advisor(s) to coordinate tasks and meeting places.

## **Academic Advising**

Advisors assist with academic concerns, course selection, and referrals to the appropriate person for issues of concern.

### **Students with Academic Difficulties**

It is not the job of the advisor to “fix” the problems that your advisees may be having or to make the difficulties disappear, but you can help your advisees come up with productive strategies so that they can begin to learn how to address issues on their own. Rather than hover over each individual advisee to ensure that they are attending classes and completing their homework, the advisor’s responsibility is to facilitate the process of maturation. New students and students away from home for the first time may need additional organizational assistance and to work with support people. Some may simply need a “wake-up call” from you, and additional time to adjust and mature.

It is sometimes helpful to remember that our advisees are “works in progress.” They’re not “done” and may simply need more time to adjust and mature. In your communication with parents it may help to remind them of this and to be patient as their child develops intellectually and emotionally. Ask parents and teachers to provide positive reinforcement whenever possible. Help your advisees to be realistic about their strengths and weaknesses and help them to recognize evidence of their own progress.

### **Gathering Feedback from Teachers of Advisees**

There may be times between grading cycles and progress reports when parents ask for updated information from teachers regarding their child. Depending on the teacher and the course, you may want to advise parents that these mid-point assessments may not provide a complete picture, depending on how upcoming assignments are weighted. However, teachers may use email and logbooks to notify advisors regarding concerns. When a student is struggling academically, direct communication between teacher and advisor is crucial. Be mindful that busy teachers will appreciate specific, directed questions, which they can easily answer.

### **Advisor Reports**

Each advisor is tasked with writing comprehensive and thorough Advisor Reports for each advisee. These reports are a detailed record of the academic, co-curricular and social progress and development that a student has made at Keystone. The report should be written in a manner that demonstrates sound and sincere knowledge of the advisee, his or her interests and areas of involvement at the school.

## **Communication with Others**

Conversations regarding the members of your advisory group are expected to take place on a regular basis with classroom teachers, co-curricular instructors, dorm parents, deans and division heads. Open communication and follow-up ensure that no student slips through the cracks and provides students with the widest net of support that we can give. When in the course of these conversations, keep in mind that there should be a level of privacy and decorum when discussing students and discussions regarding student issues should not be had in the company of other students.

## **Concerns and Access to Support Resources**

Advising and the responsibilities associated with the job are not exclusive of outside support and it is expected that advisors will seek guidance and solutions when an advisee is in need of assistance. The advisor and the coordinator of the advisory program are, most likely, the members of the community who have the broadest knowledge of a student, and so they must help each other to understand the student's academic and personal life and involve others in action when needed.

Resources on campus include:

- The Health Center – all medical issues or concerns.
- IT Office – computer and technological issues, and Help Desk.
- Library – educational, research and learning support.
- CSD – Center for Student Development.

In an instance of a possible major rule violation, the advisor does not have the option to deal with this issue by him/herself. The advisor must inform the Head of the Division as soon as possible. When an issue is a minor event, one that can be handled immediately or poses no danger to self or others (being a few minutes late to curfew or failing room inspection) advisors and dorm parents should handle those issues through internal processes as described in the Community Handbook.

# Basic Expectations of Advisees

All advisees are expected to:

1. Promptly attend any and all advisory meetings, whether group or individual. Please report absences from advisory to the Student Life Office.
2. Respond to communications from the advisor.
3. See the advisor regarding school-related or personal concerns.
4. Expect the advisor to be involved and to act as a caring and concerned adult.
5. Accept responsibility for academic choices and decision-making.
6. Support and collaborate with fellow advisees.

## Toolkit for Advisory Meetings

### I. Tips for an Effective Advising Meeting

- Begin each meeting with a smile and enthusiasm.
- Meet in a space that encourages conversation.
- Always have a purpose and focus for the meeting. Advisory meeting should never be in a study hall.
- Get to know students as individuals and help the group to know each other.
- Show genuine interest and the students will respond.
- Develop a feeling of togetherness and group cohesiveness.
- Know where to go for answers.
- Focus on why we are all at Keystone.
- Be firm but understanding.
- Remember, it takes time to form individual and group cohesiveness.

### II. Facilitation Tips for Building and Maintaining Group Cohesion

No matter what the focus of your advisory program – career development, academic coaching, interpersonal skills, or any other focus – the students in the group will need to feel comfortable with each other. Some basic tips for encouraging and sustaining a sense of community are listed. It is crucial that this kind of group development happens before dealing with tough or sensitive topics.

Some of the significant learning available through advisory will be about group membership and group dynamics. Advisory can be a lab for understanding how people initiate and develop a sense of community, how they join and leave groups, and how they lead or dominate, participate or distract.

Spend time in the first few sessions making absolutely sure that students know each other's names.

Build from exercises that are easy and safe (name games, group bingo games, sharing summer stories) to exercises that encourage more bonding (peer interviews, sharing stories of family culture and heritage, compiling hopes and goals for the year). Everyone wants to be known and feel welcome, so the initial “too-cool-to-play” attitude usually subsides quickly.

**Have the group identify a few guidelines or agreements for how they want to interact.**

“What guidelines will promote the most comfortable atmosphere in our advisory group?” Another approach is “Describe a group or team in which you participated that met everyone’s needs and functioned really well. How did the members treat each other? What were their norms? What should our norms be?” Also, talk about who is responsible for maintaining the agreements. Do not let the group name you, the advisor, as the sole enforcer. Advisory is the students’ community and these are their agreements.

**Establish positive habits for small and large group work. Make habits routine, not just for a particularly challenging activity or the least productive group.**

Implement inclusion expectations, reflection, feedback, and debriefing practices frequently in the first several weeks and intermittently thereafter establish expectations and prevent many problems. When difficulties do arise, students will have more practice at how to understand and communicate about group interactions.

**Establish some rituals so students encourage and celebrate each other’s accomplishments.**

The rituals can include giving energizing fruit and munchies to the group or applauding for the actors and musicians in a recent play or concert. Noting birthdays and celebrating small successes is another way to enhance group connection.

**If new students join your advisory group during the year, take the time to invite them into advisory rituals and projects explicitly.**

Use a new exercise to welcome new members. This allows everyone to feel a bit shaky and unprepared again. We use this to “level the playing field” and create connection.

**If a student leaves your advisory group, or becomes ill for an extended time, note the loss or absence with a send-off, gift, card, visit, or other supportive gesture.**

As a group bonds, the loss or absence of a group member decreases the sense of cohesion. If it goes unnoted, it can feel like a secret that cannot be discussed.

**Reflect the dynamics of the group back to the group for consideration in order to model and encourage conscious participation.**

Ask the advisory group questions about its own behavior and style. These questions help them articulate their own group dynamics, and give them responsibility for describing the dynamic they want.

**Watch for advisees who dominate, distract, rebel, or withdraw.**

Reach out to these advisees privately to find out how they perceive the group and their own role in it. What do they need from the group? What is working or not working for them? Offer genuine feedback.

**Encourage full and reasonably equal participation.**

This includes watching for discussion patterns that get in a rut, advisees who are excluded, those who frequently accommodate others, and those who always seem to be the leaders or the attention-seekers.

**Initiate a conversation with the group about challenging dynamics if members are dominating, withdrawing, have unequal participation, or other challenging behavior persists.**

Although private interventions will hopefully succeed, the challenging behavior did not just happen to one individual, it happened to the whole group. If one student has been especially difficult, help him/her figure out what to say to the group to get a head start on diffusing some of the tension. For example, “I don’t think our group has felt as comfortable or been as effective as we could have been lately. I’ve spoken with Alex about it. I think he and all of you probably have some important views on what’s been happening.”

(The Advisory Guide, South Dakota Dept. of Ed)

# Parent Connections & Communication

Advisors are asked to maintain healthy and regular communications with parents. Communication can be via phone or email. Some parents will be eager to talk more often than others. Advisors must strive to be open and polite with all parents.

In the first two weeks of school it is the responsibility of the advisor to make a phone call to or email parents. This initial contact serves many purposes:

1. To introduce the advisor to the parents. For most families, this will be the first point of contact.
2. To let parents know that the advisor is becoming actively acquainted with the student and to let them know your initial impressions about how things are going during the first weeks of school.
3. To allow parents to express any concerns or to ask questions.
4. To share contact information for further conversations and to encourage a continued relationship.

*Tip: You may want to keep track of written correspondence and calls with parents in the advisee folder. This can be helpful when there are issues that require your follow up or as a way to document conversations and outcomes.*

Advisors should not promise quick solutions to things that might not be appropriate to change early on in the start of a new school year (course changes, or roommate changes). Advisors should clarify for parents whom to contact about these types of matter and encourage those conversations to take place. Advisors should be mindful of keeping students in the loop when it comes to parental requests and encourage parents to allow their children to act on their own behalf, with guidance, as related to school matters.

## **Making Parent Phone Calls or Emails:**

- Make initial advisory meetings count by asking questions that will help you get to know your advisees. Go beyond the data sheet.
- Start early and make connections with parents once a month. Calling may take multiple efforts.
- Ask parents to discuss their child's strengths, weaknesses and areas of concern. Let them know you are in partnership with them and that you are committed to making the student's Keystone experience a meaningful one.
- Consider sending an advisory photo to your advisees' parents.
- Ask for assistance with translation if needed.





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