The exploration of the teacher’s advisor role continues by taking a very wide view of it, beyond the individual or school level. In this chapter, we provide a broader view of the advisor role by considering the messages that teachers receive from leaders and scholars in their field about how they ought to care for and support their students. In *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher* (2005), Wong and Wong advised readers that “the sincerest form of service requires no money, no training, no special clothes, and no college degrees. The sincerest form of service comes from listening, caring, and loving” (pp. 75–76). While this best-selling text showers teachers with pages of detailed advice on procedures and routines for the classroom, it offers no guidance about how teachers might effectively listen to, care for, or love their students. “To say that you are on the side of caring for students is very nice, but not very helpful,” Proefriedt (1975, p. 56) writes, 30 years prior, as if anticipating Wong and Wong’s statement. “What does such caring mean in terms of the specific behaviors in which you will engage?” (p. 56). Proefriedt’s question is particularly relevant to this book’s exploration of teachers’ work as advisors, in which they encounter expectations to provide social-emotional support to their students by knowing them well, learning about their lives, and intervening when problems arise. But the advisor role presents only one way in which teachers have been assigned these responsibilities. The history of American education contains abundant examples of demands—some subtle, some
more explicit—for (and against) teachers to provide social-emotional support. In this chapter, we look at this history by rephrasing Proefriedt’s question: What exactly do we expect of teachers when it comes to providing social-emotional support to their students?

We pursue an answer to this question by examining discourse about teachers’ social-emotional support responsibilities in greater detail, looking at documents about teaching and teacher education from a 120-year period (1892–2011). We specifically consider ideas in the field of education about teachers’ social-emotional support responsibilities. What are these ideas? From where have they come? Have they changed over time? Answers to these questions can help us understand how members of the broad field of education—policymakers, teacher educators, textbook authors, scholars, and would-be gurus—develop, or fail to develop, ideas about expanded teacher roles that contribute to the images we hold of how teachers ought to do their work.

In the documents we analyzed, we found multiple, competing representations of how, and even whether, teachers ought to provide social-emotional support to their students. Further, these documents generally provided limited detail on what teachers providing social-emotional support to their students would actually do. Readers did not learn what it would look like, for example, for teachers to “detect the social needs of the child,” as urban education pioneer Julia Richman (1910) suggested they should. Relevant to this study’s three focal schools, we also reviewed a subset of documents (dating from 1992 to 2010) describing the small schools movement. These documents clearly favored teachers providing social-emotional support to students via close student-teacher relationships, and also came up short-handed on details that would guide teachers’ practice. These findings suggest that teachers who serve as advisors, with a role that has expanded into the realm of providing social-emotional support, receive confusing, incomplete guidance from scholarship about teaching as they figure out how to do their jobs.

We approach the framing of teachers’ social-emotional support responsibilities from three angles. First, we review research on the conditions of teaching and teachers’ roles in the United States that conceptualizes teachers’ relationships with students as both essential to teaching and problematic. Second, we report upon the analysis of 80 documents from the years 1892 to 2011, noting chronological trends in our data, differing interpretations of the teacher’s role related to the social-emotional support of students, and the degree of specificity in documents that included social-emotional support as a teacher responsibility. Third, we discuss our evaluation (using the same criteria) of a sample of five documents from the small schools movement.