

Graves County Schools utilize student SAMs

Photos, captions and copy by Paul Schaumburg, Community Relations Director, Graves County Schools, (270) 328-1556; additions by The National SAM Project, 10/2/09



A NEW ROLE – Graves County High School senior Tucker Starkey never dreamed when he was a student at Wingo Elementary School that he some day would assist a school secretary to help the principal. This year, he’s serving as a student School Administration Manager for part of each day. He’s shown here with administrative assistant Glenda Green as they check computer files. The district’s student SAM program allows two students interested in business management careers to assist with building management aspects of schools. That frees up the school principal to focus more on instructional leadership. The pilot program will be used to inform Kentucky’s other 173 school districts as it unfolds.

(Photo by Paul Schaumburg, Graves County Schools)

POSITION OF TRANSITION – Justin Roberts, a Graves County High School student, is in a pioneering position this school year. Like other seniors he is preparing for post-secondary education. His personal goal is to seek a business degree and career. However, his senior project is taking him in a different direction. He’s serving as a student School Administration Manager at Graves County Central Elementary School. While he learns about managing people and daily business affairs, he frees the school’s principal, Stephanie Sullivan, to spend more time in the classroom as an instructional leader to teachers and students. Administrative assistant Sherri Frick is shown here helping the student worker understand specific documents for the job. The Graves County School District hopes to expand the hours of student SAMs and the number of schools utilizing them.

(Photo by Paul Schaumburg, Graves County Schools)

The modern school principal’s role increasingly has focused on instructional leadership in recent years. That’s given rise to the role of School Administration Manager to ease the principal’s workload in business and building management. The factors creating such positions – standardized accountability testing, the global economy, and the need for more rigorous and relevant curriculum – remain. But in many cases the funding



has not. Two Graves County elementary schools have just begun a pilot project utilizing high school student SAM/secretary teams. They hope to offset the loss of their previous SAM positions, eliminated due to funding cuts. They also want to provide a successful model for Kentucky's other 173 school districts.

"The SAM program was very successful in our schools in recent years," said Graves County secondary instructional supervisor Carla Whitis. "We had them at our county-wide middle and high schools and at both Wingo and Central elementary schools. It was a wonderful arrangement with help from the Kentucky Department of Education and the Wallace Foundation. But when that grant arrangement ended, the tough economic times and state budget cuts prevented us from funding it on our own as a district."

In the early weeks of the 2009-10 school year, Debbie Daniels, the state education department's director of the Kentucky Cohesive Leadership System and State SAM Coordinator, proposed an idea she'd encountered at the 2nd Annual National SAM Conference. A school in Illinois was teaming responsible, hand-selected high school seniors with a school secretary to serve as SAMs.

"The administrators who talked to us about doing this project wanted the principals to have more time to focus on instruction," explained Justin Roberts, the student SAM at Central Elementary. "Tucker Starkey is doing the same thing at Wingo. He and I are both business management majors and they want us to take care of a lot of paperwork, computer work, and assist with minor student behavior management issues. It sounded pretty cool to come over here and be with the kids and to learn what managers do. So, it's going to be our senior project."

Both the student SAMs and principals will be the subjects of time studies to determine how their days are spent. The students will work at the school one 90-minute block each day throughout this school year.

"The whole focus of the SAM program is to allow the principal to focus more on instructional leadership and less on building management," said Wingo principal Sarah Saylor. "So, the more help I can have, I will gladly accept! That allows me to spend more time in the classroom. One of the great things about this SAM model is that we're using students who have an interest in business. So, they not only get valuable experience in the working

world, but they can provide really valuable assistance every day. Even if I have Tucker here for just an hour a day, that's an extra hour I have for instruction."

"I'm really glad to be in this position because it's going to help me with my career plans," added Starkey, who attended Wingo as a student in years past. "I want to manage a small business some day and this will help me see what managing people is like and whether I want to do it. I think this is going to be a lot of fun and I'm happy to be at Wingo!"

Even though the new phase of SAMs in Graves County is limited to the two elementary schools previously involved, administrators are optimistic. "It's working in our district because there is such great collaboration between the elementary schools and the high school with their senior project program," Saylor explained. "There's going to be a learning curve on both sides of this, but we will learn and grow."

"We're already looking ahead to how we can expand this," Whitis noted. "We'd like to set it up where the student spends the first or last half of each day at the school. And, it would be great to have student SAMs at our other six elementary schools and the middle and high schools, too! We hope to be a leader in the state," she concluded, "and to help Kentucky be a leader in student SAMs across the country."