



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: NATIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION MANAGER PROJECT

This document is intended to help education leaders participating in the National SAM Project answer questions and guide conversations.

What is the National SAM Project?

The SAM Project is a pilot funded by The Wallace Foundation to help develop a better understanding of how principals use their time and to develop strategies to help principals manage their days to have more time to for instructional leadership. The goal of the project is to shift the role of the principal to focus less on management duties and more on teaching practice, student learning and school improvement.

How and when did the SAM Project begin?

The SAM Project began in Louisville, KY, in 2002 as a study – the Alternative School Administration Study – that examined the use of principal time. The study looked at conditions that prevented principals from making instructional leadership their priority and developed strategies to change those conditions.

How does the SAM Project help principals?

The SAM Project helps principals use data to reflect on their practice and develop a plan to reframe their roles, become more effective leaders and improve student achievement. As part of the process, principals establish baseline data, analyze results from school and community surveys and set goals to increase time spent on improving teaching and learning. To facilitate this effort, schools can create a position for a School Administration Manager (SAM), who will meet with the principal daily to review how time is spent and management duties are distributed. The process encourages principals to build strong professional development communities and to strengthen relationships with teachers, parents and students as part of their school improvement efforts.

What are the reactions of participating principals and other school administrators?

Feedback from principals and superintendents in the SAM Project has been positive. As one principal in Iowa said of the project, “I can’t imagine life without this.” Principals report that participation in the project gives them time to spend in classrooms and to focus more on leading instruction and increasing student achievement. District administrators also welcome the SAM Project. “[It’s] cutting-edge leadership,” one Kentucky superintendent said. Another said, “For us to go out on a limb like this, we’re definitely sold on the value. I know I’ve got three happy principals. I think everybody feels good when they think they can be effective.” A major review of the SAM Project is being carried out by a team of researchers, to be completed in spring 2009.

What does “instructional leadership” mean in terms of daily activities of principals?

Instructional leaders make high-quality teaching and learning the top priority of the school and set processes in place to make this vision a reality. Among other responsibilities, instructional leaders establish and promote high expectations for students and staff, engage in classroom observations and collaborate with teachers and staff on implementing instructional best practices. They are able to keep their focus on these priorities, while also ensuring that the demands of managing the school are met.

Who is using the SAM Project now?

Nine Wallace partner states are participating in the SAM pilot. These states are California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, New York and Texas.

How does the SAM Project improve student achievement and help struggling schools? Is there research to back up these findings?

Initial data from three Louisville, KY, schools in the SAM pilot are promising. They show that these schools have posted increases on state assessments that have outpaced the average increases for their districts and the state. In addition, three years after joining the project, principals in these schools report they are spending over 70 percent of their time on instructional issues. More research is under way in schools in the nine states that make up the national SAM Project. A more complete picture of the impact that the process has on students and schools will be made available when this review is complete in spring 2009.

What is Time/Task Analysis Data Collection™? When is data collected and how is it used?

Time/Task Analysis Data Collection is a week-long record, in five-minute increments, of how a principal's time is spent. Baseline data is collected at the beginning of participation in the SAM Project. This baseline data is used to set goals for the principal to spend more time on instructional leadership. Data collection is repeated annually to evaluate to what extent the principal has changed how he/she spends the day.

What is TimeTrack™?

TimeTrack is a software calendar program that was developed to review precisely how a principal's time is spent. The principal and SAM use this tool together during their daily meetings to help analyze the principal's daily activities and better distribute managerial tasks.

What is a Time Change Coach?

A Time Change Coach is a retired school administrator who is selected and trained to discuss progress and challenges and identify training needs with the principal/SAM team. The principal, SAM and Time Change Coach discuss progress and challenges and identify training development needs. The Time Change Coach also helps build support networks of SAMs and principals.

How can my school/district become part of the SAM Project?

The SAM Project is a pilot effort underway in nine Wallace partner states and several districts and schools within those states. Funding has provided training to ensure guided implementation. The pilot project is under review and once that review is finished in spring 2009, The Wallace Foundation will determine the next steps for the project and future expansion.

How much does it cost to implement the SAM Project?

As part of the pilot project, The Wallace Foundation has funded annual data collection and coaching services for principals: approximately \$2,400 per school site, per year. Districts fund salaries for the SAMs, either by creating a new position or by giving SAM responsibilities to an existing staff member. Most districts that create a SAM position fund this individual at about the same level as a beginning teacher.

Can my school/district implement the SAM Project without adding a new position?

Depending on their available resources, schools and districts can implement several models of the SAM Project. In the first, a new, full-time SAM position is created. A second model redesigns a current position, so that a current staff member takes on the full-time role of a SAM. In the third model, additional SAM duties are assigned to an existing position. Finally, if resources are limited, schools and districts can choose to use only Time/Task Analysis Data Collection to provide baseline data to the principal and enable him/her to set goals and measure change.

How much time does the principal spend working with a SAM to track his or her time/duties?

Principals spend 30 minutes a day with a SAM in a daily meeting to track time, organize their schedules and identify barriers to spending time on instructional leadership. In every school participating in the SAM Project, principals have increased the time spent on instructional leadership by focusing the use of their time.

Many principals never seem to work directly with students or teachers on instruction, yet are still successful. Why do principals need to change?

The role of the principal has changed. Principals were once expected to be building managers, but they are now held responsible for improving student achievement. Political leaders have shifted responsibility to principals because the research is clear: principals engaged in instructional leadership make a tremendous difference in student performance.

Is this model right for all principals? What about principals who are strong managers?

The SAM Project is a voluntary professional development process that the principal and school community mutually agree to engage. Most principals are strong managers, but it takes different skills to be a successful instructional leader. Management duties are important, but principals need to use their authority, expertise and skills to move instruction forward.

Where can I find more information about the SAM Project? Can I talk to someone who is already part of the SAM Project?

For more information on the SAM Project, visit www.SamsConnect.com and www.wallacefoundation.org/sam.

The National SAM Project is led by Mark Shellinger, who can be reached at 502-777-7760 or fairbanks@insightbb.com.

For more information and research on education leadership, visit The Wallace Foundation's Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.