

## MESSAGE DOCUMENT: NATIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION MANAGER PROJECT

### PRINCIPALS ARE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVING SCHOOLS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

- **The role of the principal has changed.** It was once enough for principals to be good building managers, but today they are also held responsible for improving student achievement. In an era of accountability, so much is expected of them that success in all areas of responsibility is out of reach for an increasing number of principals.
- **Principals are more important than ever.** Research makes it clear that leadership is critical to improving student achievement. Stronger leadership must be part of any strategy to raise student performance, deliver quality teaching and improve schools.
- **Principals can transform schools and improve student learning when they focus on essential tasks.** Principals are in a unique position to help transform schools, and a strong principal can help change any school into a professional learning community that focuses on improving teaching and learning. Research has shown that these broad sets of leadership practices are linked to improved student learning:
  - *Setting directions*, including a vision, goals and high expectations;
  - *Becoming a leader of leaders* by working with other key staff members to distribute various leadership roles;
  - *Developing teachers and other staff members* by providing instructional leadership and quality professional development and building strong learning communities; and
  - *Redesigning and transforming the school* by building a culture focused on teaching and learning to achieve goals.

### TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE, PRINCIPALS MUST HAVE MORE TIME FOR INSTRUCTION

- **Management duties prevent principals from devoting more time to instruction.** Even as we demand higher student achievement from our schools, principals are increasingly under pressure to perform duties that pull them away from instructional leadership. Though school leaders would like to be more involved in instructional leadership, studies show that principals – even those in the highest performing schools – spend up to 75 percent of their time on management. However, with guidance on how to delegate non-instructional tasks, principals spend dramatically more time on practices that lead to improved teaching and learning.
- **Transforming school leadership requires a systemic response.** Principals cannot become instructional leaders on their own. District leaders need to allow principals time for instruction. Teachers and staff need to recognize and appreciate the role of the principal as instructional leader. As a foundation, principals need clear goals, professional development, new tools, regular coaching, daily reviews of data and self-reflection.

- **States and districts can introduce new leadership strategies to promote systemwide change.** States and districts increasingly understand the link between high-quality school leadership and student success. As part of the greater focus on accountability, district and state leaders need to identify and promote strategies that enable principals to spend more time on instructional leadership and increase their potential to raise student performance.

**THE NATIONAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION MANAGER (SAM) PROJECT HELPS GIVE PRINCIPALS THE TIME AND SKILLS TO FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION**

- **The SAM Project has been in development for several years and is being piloted in school districts across the country.**
  - *The SAM Project began in Louisville, KY, in 2002 the Alternative School Administration Study.<sup>1</sup>* The study looked at conditions that prevented principals from making instructional leadership their priority and developed strategies to change those conditions.
  - *The Wallace network of educators in nine states is developing and implementing the SAM Project.* The network includes educators in California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, New York, and Texas. Participating school districts agree to fund project-related positions over several years, and the foundation covers training and data collection costs as part of the pilot. Educators from all participating sites work together through the SAM Project.
- **The SAM Project has created a process that allows principals to focus time on improving instruction and learning.** As a part of the SAM Project, principals do not stop managing their buildings – they simply learn to delegate some of their management responsibilities, creating more time to spend on teaching practice, student learning and school improvement. They continue to oversee the school’s management, but hand over many tedious and time-consuming activities involved with being a building manager.
- **The SAM Project consists of five core elements:**
  - 1) A readiness and willingness by principals and districts to commit to increasing time for instructional leadership;
  - 2) An initial Time/Task Analysis Data Collection™ of how the principals spend their time;
  - 3) Principals’ engaging with a School Administration Manager (SAM) in daily meetings;
  - 4) External coaching; and
  - 5) Follow-up Time/Task Analysis Data Collection after one year to assess improvement.
- **The SAM Project is primarily a change process and a statewide and districtwide change strategy.** The project goes beyond simply adding new staff to help individual principals improve instruction in their schools. It aims to ensure that the entire community is aware that changing principal time use is critical to transforming schools. This is a complex change strategy that SAMs can help facilitate.

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<sup>1</sup> The Wallace-funded SAM Project began as the Alternative School Administration Study (ASAS), developed by Mark Shellinger, in Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY. Mr. Shellinger coordinates SAM Project replication efforts nationally.

- **The SAM Project is built around data and self-reflection.** The first piece of the project is the use of Time/Task Analysis Data Collection, which tracks how principals spend their time. Coupled with increased self-reflection and the support of a SAM, the project helps school leaders spend more time on instruction.
- **The SAM Project is showing promising preliminary results.**
  - *The SAM Project helps principals spend more time on instructional leadership.* Three years after participating in the project, principals in three Louisville, KY, schools spent over 70 percent of their time on instructional issues and student achievement had increased.
  - *An upcoming evaluation will provide continued assessment of the progress of the SAM Project.* The Wallace Foundation has funded Policy Studies Associates to study the implementation of the project in pilot states. The results, expected in mid-2009, will help inform next steps for the work.

### HOW DOES THE SAM PROJECT WORK?

- **The SAM Project helps principals assess how they are using their time so they can make continual improvements.** Principals first receive baseline data from Time/Task Analysis Data Collection. Data collectors shadow principals for five days and record in five-minute increments how much time they spend on management, instructional or personal tasks. Principals use this data to create goals for the time they spend on instructional leadership. One year later, Time/Task Analysis Data Collection is completed again to assess improvement.
- **Principals meet daily with a School Administration Manager (SAM).** The SAM may be a new staff position or an existing staff member who takes on new duties. The SAM works with the principal to analyze how time is being use, shift managerial duties to others and establish the next day's calendar. During meetings, they use a software calendar program, TimeTrack™, which was developed for this purpose. The primary goal is to increase the principal's time on leading instructional improvement.
- **Principals and SAMs meet monthly with a Time Change Coach.** Coaches are retired school administrators who are selected and trained. In these meetings, the Time Change Coach helps the principal/SAM team reflect on progress and challenges, identify professional development needs and connect with other SAMs and principals in the SAM network.
- **The SAM Project helps principals use a range of data to further reflect on their practice and develop a plan to increase time spent as instructional leaders.** In addition to providing principals with data on how their time is spent, the project also helps them analyze results from school and community surveys.
- **The SAM Project encourages principals to build strong professional development communities.** As part of the project, principals not only agree to engage in their own professional development using data to guide reflection for improved leadership, but also to work with their staff to distribute leadership responsibilities and share decisionmaking roles.

- **The SAM Project helps principals strengthen relationships with teachers, parents and students to improve teaching and learning.** It asks that principals voluntarily seek assistance and advice on how to be better school leaders from the teachers, staff, parents and students at their schools. According to preliminary evaluation surveys, school communities notice and appreciate principals' change of focus to instructional leadership.
- **The SAM Project can be tailored to meet local needs.** While there are different ways to implement the SAM Project in a school, each model requires assistance from an individual in either a new position or existing position for the daily reflective practice meeting.
- **The SAM Project does not necessarily include a new staff position.** Some schools chose to hire a new person to fulfill the school administrative manager's responsibilities, while others give those responsibilities to an existing staff member or staff members. There are many cost-effective ways to implement the SAM process.

#### COMMUNICATING TO POLICYMAKERS, DISTRICT LEADERS AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- **The SAM Project is providing a new way to assess school leaders.** Current assessments of school leaders tend to be inconsistent and not very useful to principals. Assessment of time use gives principals objective, low-stakes and constructive input that helps them improve instructional leadership and align activities with school, district and state priorities.
- **The SAM Project is being carefully piloted and reviewed.** The Wallace Foundation has adopted a very deliberate strategy to pilot test the project and limit expansion to the pilot states in order to thoroughly develop the model. In addition, the project leaders will learn from the review now under way to make further improvements.
- **Strengthening education leadership is a cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning.** Creating and promoting effective school leadership is the best way to help students and schools meet higher expectations when resources are limited. The SAM Project can be implemented in different models to be most cost-effective given local needs.
- **The SAM Project can be implemented in different models to be most cost-effective and responsive to local needs.** Schools and districts do not necessarily need to create a new staff position.
- **This is a process that can be implemented at the local level with minimal state guidance.** The pilot states have seen steady growth driven both by local interest in the SAM Project as well as growth that begins with state involvement and outreach. In either scenario, the state provides guidance and technical assistance to help facilitate expansion.
  - For example, Kentucky's SAM Project is locally driven and now has 52 schools while the state provides technical and logistical support.
  - In Iowa, a state-led effort has resulted in 27 schools joining that state's SAM Project.

- **Improving principals’ capacity to lead could help with retention and performance.** The SAM Project is too new to say whether principals who go through the process will stay on the job longer than those who do not. However, the expectations placed on principals to produce more without new tools and resources are driving many to leave the profession. It is also creating doubts among educators who might otherwise aspire to become principals. The SAM Project offers much-needed relief to existing and future principals.
- **Education leaders at different levels can benefit from the SAM Project.** Some school systems in the pilot project are finding that the benefits principals see from the SAM Project can also be realized by district-level administrators in instructional and non-instructional positions when they participate in the program.
- **The SAM Project is a systemic support for leaders in performance management.** The project goes beyond simply hiring new staff members to help individual principals improve instruction in their schools. It aims to ensure that the entire community is aware that changing principal time use is critical to transforming schools. This is a complex change strategy that SAMs help to facilitate.
- **The SAM Project makes the principal’s job more doable by enabling them to delegate managerial tasks.** Many principals are pulled away from their “core business” of instruction by the need to handle tedious and time-consuming management duties. The SAM Project helps principals reflect on their time use, hand off non-instruction tasks and dedicate more time to teaching and learning.

For more information and research on the SAM Project, visit:

[www.SAMsConnect.com](http://www.SAMsConnect.com) and [www.wallacefoundation.org/SAM](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/SAM)

For information and research about other education leadership issues, visit The Wallace Foundation’s Knowledge Center, [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

The National SAM Project is led by Mark Shellinger, who has created two tools for which he claims trademark status: Time/Task Analysis and TimeTrack. For more information, contact Mark Shellinger at 502-777-7760; [Fairbanks@insightbb.com](mailto:Fairbanks@insightbb.com) [www.SAMsConnect.com](http://www.SAMsConnect.com).

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