

**EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION  
MANAGER PROJECT**

**Executive Summary**

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The School Administration Manager (SAM) project, supported by The Wallace Foundation as part of its education initiative, focuses on changing the conditions in schools that prevent principals from devoting more time to instructional leadership. The project addresses the issue that the press of management responsibilities deprives the school of a valuable instructional-leadership resource: the principal's time. In schools participating in the National SAM Project, principals have made a commitment to increase the amount of time they spent on tasks related to instructional leadership, and each school has hired or designated a SAM to support and assist the principal in making this change. The National SAM Project has received grant funding from The Wallace Foundation to scale up and support the SAM innovation through communications, negotiations with prospective sites, and external assistance.

Policy Studies Associates (PSA) evaluated the implementation, early effects, and diffusion of the SAM innovation around the country during 2008 and early 2009. The evaluation documented and analyzed the essential properties of the SAM innovation; the dimensions of variation found across schools; the organizational and individual incentives for adoption, implementation, and adaptation in particular contexts; and the outcomes for individual principals, SAMs, and schools. We anticipated that the state and local policy makers could use the evaluation results to inform decisions about adopting the SAM innovation and that developers could use the results to identify modifications of the innovation and implementation strategies. We approached the evaluation as an opportunity to lend a new source of objective analysis to the ongoing adaptation of a field-based innovation.

From its beginnings in three schools in Louisville, Kentucky, the National SAM Project focused on helping principals delegate time-consuming management responsibilities and increase their interactions about instruction with teachers, students, and decision-making groups in the building. In the initial design, a SAM was always a new staff member, hired to play a dual role of handling management tasks and working closely with the principal to encourage him or her to delegate more managerial work and spend more time on instructional tasks. Later, in response to local concerns about the cost of a new position, the project devised the alternative of adding SAM responsibilities to an existing position in the school. In these schools, the SAM continued to perform some or all (usually all) of his or her existing job and also met with the principal to discuss time use, but was not necessarily expected to take on additional management tasks.

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This study would have been impossible without the generous cooperation of the SAMs, principals, teachers, and other school staff who hosted our visits, participated in interviews and surveys, and answered our questions about their experience with the SAM project. State and local coordinators helped with arrangements for data collection as well as sharing their own experiences and insights. Debbie Daniels, Troyce Fisher, Bert Hendee, and Carol Lensing were especially helpful in this process. Mark Shellinger, National SAM Project Director, and his colleague James Mercer were unfailingly cooperative and gracious in the face of our information needs and our critique of the project. Deanna Burney helped us conceptualize issues of principal leadership. At The Wallace Foundation, Jody Spiro, Senior Program Officer, provided invaluable information and help. We are grateful to Edward Pauly, Director of Research and Evaluation, for guidance and encouragement. Throughout, the wise counsel and support of Mary Mattis, Senior Research and Evaluation Officer, has been of immense benefit to our work.

The National SAM Project provided several mechanisms and procedures for focusing principals' attention on their time use. One was a system of measurement that divided instructional and management tasks into a total of 25 discrete categories called "descriptors," each describing an observable behavior. Another was a shadowing process, in which a trained data collector from outside the school observed the principal for a week, recording behavior at five-minute intervals and producing a picture of the time spent, by descriptor, over that week. Shadowing at the beginning and end of a full year in the SAM project provided a pre- and post-test measure of the principal's time use. Special calendar-based software enabled the SAM and principal to record what the principal was doing at all times during the day, by descriptor. The software produced graphical summaries of time use that enabled the principal to track progress toward his or her goal of spending some specific percent of time on instruction. Finally, the project designated an external coach to visit the SAM/principal team monthly.

Although some essential features of the SAM innovation remained constant across sites and over time, many variations emerged in the work, especially at the state and school levels. State coordinators not only took initiative in disseminating the innovation, they developed refinements in such procedures as training and coaching. Across schools, each SAM/principal team developed somewhat distinctive ways of working together. However, compared with states and schools, local school districts were generally less active in adapting the SAM innovation; the limited role of districts is an issue to which we return in our recommendations below.

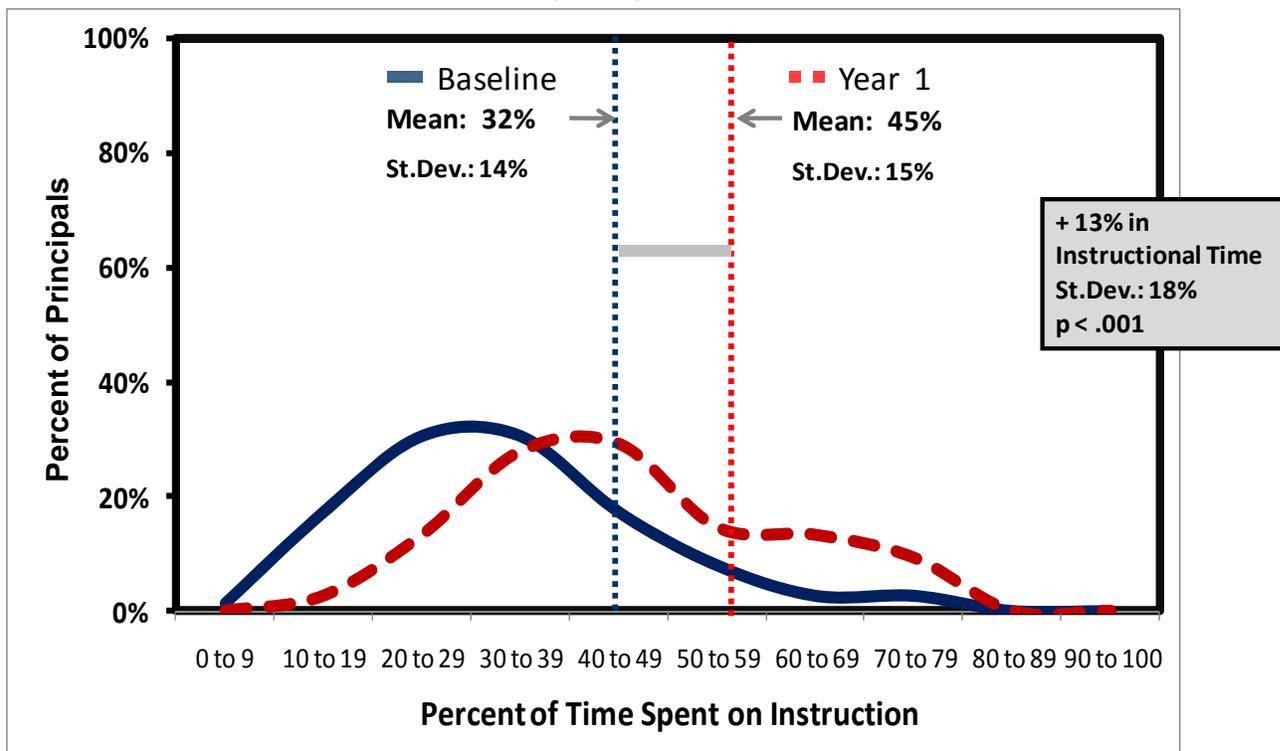
The evaluation team analyzed all the data on participating principals' time use collected by the National SAM Project; administered online surveys to the principals, SAMs, and coaches participating in the project as of late fall 2008; interviewed decision makers in eight states, 11 school districts, and The Wallace Foundation; observed numerous events of the National SAM Project; and interviewed 166 school-based staff (principals, SAMs, teachers, and others).

The following key points emerged from the data collection and analysis:

- As of March 2009, a total of 160 SAM/principal teams in 37 districts in nine states participated in the National SAM Project. Principals reported that they participated because they wanted to spend more time on instruction and to develop their skills in instructional leadership. State and district decision makers typically participated because they saw the SAM project as a means to higher student achievement, having learned that achievement had risen in the three schools that were the first to hire SAMs. Other incentives for policymakers to adopt the project included their belief that participating principals would supervise teaching and learning effectively and that student discipline would improve.
- Among the 75 principals who had participated in the project for at least a full year by April 2009, the time devoted to instruction-related tasks increased by an average of 58 minutes per day or almost five hours per week. They registered this increase in spite of the fact that the length of the average day they spent in school shortened from 8 hours 46 minutes to 8 hours 15 minutes. The percent of time principals devoted to instructional tasks (as defined in detail in the project's

system of measurement) rose from a mean of 32 percent to a mean of 45 percent. The change in time use among this group of principals was statistically significant; it is shown graphically in the following exhibit.

**Percent of Time Spent on Instruction,  
at Baseline and One-Year Follow-up, by Principals with Pre- and Post-Data  
(N=75)**



Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of all data from the National SAM Project for principals with both baseline (pre-) and one-year follow-up (post-) data.

Exhibit reads: The graph shows two distributions of the percent of principals whose percentage of time spent on instruction fell into each decile (0 to 9 percent, 10 to 19 percent, etc.), one distribution for the baseline data and one for one-year follow-up data. The mean time spent on instruction at baseline was 32 percent, with a standard deviation of 14 percent. The mean at follow-up was 45 percent, with a standard deviation of 15 percent.

- There were three instructional leadership activities on which principals increased their time by at least 10 minutes per day, on average. The descriptors for these activities were “observation and walkthrough,” “instruction-related office work prep,” and “work with students.” Principals decreased their time by at least 10 minutes per day on each of four management activities: “office work prep,” “building management,” “student supervision,” and “student discipline.”
- Principals who delegated five time-consuming management tasks to SAMs (student discipline, student supervision, managing non-teaching staff, managing school facilities, and interacting with parents) significantly increased their time

spent on instruction over one year. But in schools where fewer of these tasks were delegated to SAMs, principals' time use did not change significantly. This difference in delegation may account for the differences observed across staffing models: the change in time use was significant where a new position was added, but not significant where the person designated as the SAM continued to occupy another job.

- Although participating principals welcomed the chance to spend more time in classrooms, our interviews suggested that more could be done to support principals in deepening their repertoire of leadership skills. Feedback to individual teachers was seldom extensive; principals' participation in meetings of school-based teams was typically sporadic. Only in a few sites did we find that the principal had strategically selected a set of high-leverage leadership activities that would serve specific purposes in instructional improvement. Apart from coaching to help SAM/principal teams develop their partnerships and use the project software, the National SAM Project was not designed to provide professional development for principals as instructional leaders.
- SAMs had carved out important roles in a number of schools that we visited. As they settled into their jobs over time, some SAMs took charge of revamping systems for managing facilities, for student transportation, or for discipline. Not only did the SAM's role in management tasks make a difference in the principal's time use, it was also credited with helping the school run more smoothly.
- In their interactions with principals on the subject of time use, SAMs did less probing, reflective coaching than the project originally envisioned. Typically, the required "daily meeting" of a SAM and a principal revolved around coordination on immediate, practical matters and fulfillment of the project's requirements for data entry. Seldom did the SAM's interaction with the principal about time use go beyond routine reminders about following through on planned instructional tasks.
- At the early start-up stage of participation, the project's tools and infrastructure were reportedly useful. Principals recognized the credibility of data collected by a trained shadower; they embraced the challenge of changing their time use; and they saw value in using calendar software to monitor the overall breakout of their time between instructional and management tasks. Initial training provided some needed how-to's. Monthly coaching helped some principals and SAMs smooth bumps in the road to a new working relationship.
- Principals and SAMs who were veterans in the project had different situations and needs than did novices, and they reported deriving less value from the project's tools and infrastructure over time. Although the data on time use were useful to some veterans, few found the detailed breakouts by descriptor to be understandable or helpful, and many found the software cumbersome to use. Veterans were less likely than novices to value the coaching visits, especially

when those visits focused on project mechanics, and some principals wanted more substantive help in developing skills in instructional leadership.

- Alignment of the SAM project with district priorities and procedures was highly variable. District offices only inconsistently recognized the SAM role. They had received little encouragement to strategize about ways of supporting principals' use of time for instructional leadership. In a few cases, district offices purposefully selected principals for participation and supported them with ongoing, thoughtful conversation about instructional leadership. More often, though, the lack of alignment between the SAM project and district priorities for school improvement represented a missed opportunity.

Based on these findings, we offer several recommendations for future development of the SAM innovation. The National SAM Project Director and the state coordinators who have received funding from The Wallace Foundation for their work with the SAM project are continuing to work with the project and are in a position to act on these recommendations; indeed, after early briefings and discussions regarding our evaluation findings, they had already taken steps toward doing so as of fall 2009. We believe that following these recommendations would build on the innovation's existing strengths as a lever for changing principal behavior, alleviate operational issues, and open the door to more substantive and strategic capacity building for participating principals:

- Commit to delegation of management tasks, whether to the SAM or to others in the building, as a way of increasing the likelihood that the principal will change his or her use of time
- Rethink the project's 25 descriptors of time use, which are confusing to many participants and are not well suited to informing the pursuit of strategic goals in school leadership
- Identify stages of project implementation, and provide support to participants tailored to their stage
- Improve the project's data collection and reporting tools for efficiency at scale, simplifying and improving user-friendliness where possible
- Improve coaching, not only tailoring it to stages of implementation but, in particular, providing more in-depth support for principals' development of skills in instructional leadership
- Actively engage school districts as full partners in the project, negotiating expectations more clearly and allowing districts to use the SAM project's tools as part of their efforts in school improvement and principal professional development

More broadly, the record of the National SAM Project points to opportunities, challenges, and tensions inherent in a national intervention aimed at supporting school leadership. In its early years, the project allowed many types of adaptations to arise at the state and school levels while some procedures and priorities were specified nationally. For example, state coordinators determined the amount and content of professional development for principals and SAMs; coaches decided individually whether to use the techniques in which they had been trained; principals identified their own goals for change in time use; SAMs developed their sphere of responsibility as they interacted with the principal and others in the school. Surprisingly few decisions were left to the districts, other than the major decision of whether and how to support SAM positions financially, and for sustainability and effectiveness of the innovation we have advised an expansion of district authority in the project.

As the SAM project evolves, its national and state leaders can capitalize on the variation that has emerged by systematically identifying and cultivating productive variations within the project while weeding out counterproductive ones. However, this will bring hard choices. Stakeholders at the national, state, and school levels embrace their own ways of implementing the SAM innovation, yet as more data emerge, not every feature or adaptation will prove to be workable and effective. Our findings already suggest that one way of implementing the project—designating a SAM but delegating few new tasks to him or her—has not resulted in changing principals' time use in the desired ways. Other school-level consequences that should be assessed in later years will include whether SAMs stay on the job over time, and how changes in principals' behavior affect teaching and learning in their schools. Still other consequences will be seen at the policy and system level, including whether districts support the project financially. Each of these types of consequences deserves systematic monitoring and should inform further revision and specification of the SAM innovation's essential elements. In this way, the project can continue to build on its notable accomplishments in helping principals change their use of time.