



## The National School Administration Manager Project

*By Sara Vitaska Shelton*

*Good principals make a big difference in student achievement.*

In today's complex school environment—where resources are limited and pressure to turn around low-performing schools is high—strengthening effective school leaders is key to improving student achievement and meeting high standards. A 2004 Wallace Foundation study found leadership to be second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to improved student learning, especially in high-needs schools.

*Principals must be more than building managers.*

In an era of principal shortages, retention problems, and expanding job roles and responsibilities, expectations for principals are becoming increasingly unrealistic. It once was enough for principals to be good building managers. Today, however, they are held accountable for improving student achievement. Although principals want to be more involved in leading instructional improvement, data show they can spend up to 75 percent of their time on management. When they are able to delegate managerial tasks—thereby distributing leadership and helping to develop future leaders—principals can spend dramatically more time on practices to improve student learning. Such activities include setting direction, becoming a leader of leaders, developing teachers and staff, and redesigning and transforming the school.

**School Administration Managers.** The National School Administration Manager (SAM) Project brings together tools, training and strategies to help principals focus on instructional leadership. The project's goal is to free a greater percentage of principals' time to teaching practice, student learning and school improvement. The SAM Project, which can be adapted to respond to local needs, could be an efficient and cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning.

*The SAM Project helps principals focus on instruction.*

The SAM Project began in Louisville, Ky., in 2002 as the Alternative School Administration Study in three Jefferson County elementary schools. It examined conditions that prevented principals from making instructional leadership their priority and developed ways to change those conditions. Financed by The Wallace Foundation, the project has expanded to more than 300 schools in nine Wallace partner states. The project has created a process that allows principals to focus on improving instruction and learning. Principals continue to oversee school management, but hand over many of the tedious and time-consuming activities to other school staff.

**SAM Project Components.** The SAM Project consists of five core elements:

- **Readiness and willingness to commit** to increasing time for instructional leadership.
- **Baseline Time/Task Analysis Data Collection.**<sup>TM</sup> Data collectors shadow principals for five days and record time spent on management, instruction or personal tasks.
- **Engagement with a school administration manager.** The manager can be a new staff position or an existing staff member who assumes new duties. The manager meets daily with the principal

to analyze time use and shift managerial duties to others, using TimeTrack™ software developed for this purpose.

- **External coaching.** The principal and manager meet monthly with a coach who is selected and trained to discuss

SAM Project Models	
<b>Model 1: New Position</b> California and Missouri	A new full-time position is created to help principals increase time spent on instructional leadership and assume management responsibilities.
<b>Model 2: Converted Position</b> Mix of states and districts	A full-time existing position is redesigned to help principals increase time on instructional leadership and assume management responsibilities.
<b>Model 3: Additional Duties Assigned to Existing Position</b> Mix of states and districts	A portion of an existing position is redesigned to help principals increase time spent on instructional leadership.

*Several project models are in use.*

progress and challenges and identify training needs with the principal/SAM team.

- **Follow-up Time/Task Analysis Data Collection™** is used one year later to assess improvement.

**State Action** Since 2002, the project has expanded to 304 elementary, middle and high school administration manager/principal teams in nine Wallace partner states—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, New York and Texas. In 2007, Georgia passed legislation to authorize local boards of education to hire school administration managers, in lieu of or in addition to assistant principals, and to determine their qualifications. In Illinois, the General Assembly passed legislation in 1997 that paved the way for districts to adopt the SAM Project. Principals are to focus on instructional leadership, and their primary responsibility is to improve instruction.

*Schools in nine states have adopted the SAM Project.*

**Preliminary Results.** Although research will be available in mid-2009 to help understand the promise and challenges of expanding the SAM Project, early data show that teachers, parents and students notice and appreciate how managers help principals change their focus. Preliminary results in the three Louisville, Ky., pilot schools are promising. Three years after participating in the SAM Project, principals spent more than 70 percent of their time on instructional issues, and student achievement increased. The SAM Project is an innovative approach that school districts and states are using to help principals focus on instructional leadership, thus improving teaching and learning for all students.

### Resources

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