

SAM project helps principals focus on instruction

MoLean County Unit District 5 needs to add 20 new instruction-oriented building administrators over the next five years, administrators say, in order to fill jobs at schools to be built, and to replace retirees. The district would like to “grow” those school administrators from the ranks of current teachers, so it is turning to a program called SAM.

SAM, short for “School Administration Manager,” is part of a system that trains current teachers over two years to be administrators. The trainees also help with building management duties, giving administrators more time to work in the classrooms to improve achievement, according to Superintendent Gary Niehaus.

With a trained School Administration Manager (SAM) assigned to handle the organizational overflow, the principal also can achieve another program goal. That goal is getting into every classroom at least once a week to observe teachers and interact with students, a necessity in today’s NCLB environment.

Getting principals out of the office and into classrooms is not a new approach, of course. Many school reform efforts in the past two decades have emphasized the importance of redefining the principal’s default role as supervisor of “transportation, budgets, and attendance” to the school’s chief of instruction. What the SAM initiative does is systematize the process by showing principals exactly how they spend their time and how they can use it better. It encourages changes in professional practices driven by coaching and data.

Based on a study conducted in a district in Kentucky, the SAM project includes three key components. The first is hiring a business manager or reallocating the duties of an existing building administrator to focus on school operations. The second is routinely and accurately tracking the principal’s time to ensure that she or he does, in turn, emphasize instruc-

tion and learning. The third is coaching the principal to become a more effective and reflective leader.

The last aspect may be the most important, because if a principal doesn’t use the reallocated time well, then the effort will be wasted. An outside coach visits each principal monthly to provide support.

“This is not something you can just do. It’s something you practice,” said Mark Shellinger, a former principal and superintendent who serves as the national expansion coordinator for the project. Shellinger, a former principal and the national SAMs expansion coordinator, said the initiative began in 2002 with a study of more than 20 principals in Jefferson County, which includes the city of Louisville, Kentucky.

With support from The Wallace Foundation, principals and SAMs in nine states now receive extensive professional development and mentoring to help with the transitions. Participating districts agree to pay for the SAM positions over several years, and the foundation pays for training and data collection.

The SAM program is relatively new in Illinois. Normal’s Unit 5 is one of only three school districts the state — the others are the public school systems in Chicago and Springfield — to try out the program. The Wallace Foundation, which does research to develop educational leaders and resources, pays \$2,000 per principal for a time-use study as part of the process.

The statistical review is multidimensional. Principals, SAMs, and their mentors analyze both daily and longitudinal patterns to see how the administrators are spending their time and what adjustments they may need to make. As part of the process, trained outside observers spend a full week each year shadowing the principals and coding their work in five-minute increments to develop an accurate portrait of their management and instructional roles. The research shows

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that most principals initially spend only about 30 percent of their time on activities that are directly related to learning. The majority of their work involves school operations, everything from cafeteria supervision to playground patrol.

The ratios usually reverse after just a year in the SAM program. A pilot study in Kentucky also found that the rate of student achievement gains doubled during the same period.

The concept isn’t new, according to Paul D. Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). He said the challenge is in getting school boards to accept any extra expense, and in encouraging principals to let go of managerial tasks that are familiar.

Insiders say the SAM program focuses on a handful of components. Principals must have an in-depth analysis conducted on the way they’re spending their time. They must agree to meet daily with their SAM, and keep daily records of their tasks and the time they spend on them. Principals and SAMs also meet monthly with an outside coach, who works with both on ways to increase the time principals spend on instruction. Research has long indicated that this is the best role for principals.

Critics of the program sometimes express the concern that freeing up the principal’s time to engage in activities one would expect from an instructional leader will not automatically make the principal an instructional leader. But national program leaders are taking steps to address that con-

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IASB's School Board LeaderShop Academy set for June symposium

In June, members of the IASB School Board LeaderShop Academy will have the opportunity to attend a special bi-annual Academy Symposium designed especially for them. The event, held in even-numbered years, is scheduled to be held on June 21 at The Westin, Lombard.

The School Board LeaderShop Academy is designed to promote and recognize board members' efforts toward continuous learning and professional development. According to IASB Associate Executive Director Angela Peifer, who directs the association's School Board Development department, programs in both continuous learning and professional development are offered at regular intervals in four-year cycles. Those cycles coincide with the typical four-year term of office of school board members.

As board members work their way through the School Board LeaderShop curriculum, they earn and maintain membership in the Academy. Admission to Academy membership requires completion of three School Board LeaderShop programs.

At least two of these programs must be from the core curriculum and one of those must be the school district governance overview, the third program may be either a core or an elective offering.

Academy membership is maintained by completing at least one additional program (either core or elective) over a two-year period.

To learn more about IASB board training, including upcoming events and available resources and materials, visit the Association's Web site at: <http://www.iasb.com/training/>.

2008 economic interest statements due by May 1

State law requires school board members, certificated administrators and some non-administrative school district employees to file annual economic interest statements by May 1 with the clerk of the county where they reside. Such statements must be filed by May 1 unless the individuals required to file have already done so this calendar year.

Local school district superintendents are generally required to file, as well as school business officials and certificated administrators. Others required to file include: department heads responsible for large contracts (\$1,000 or more), those who have authority to issue or promulgate school district rules, and employees who have supervisory authority for 20 or more employees.

Individuals who have not received economic interest forms by mail should contact their county clerk to obtain the forms or additional information.

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cern about SAM.

Shelling explains that principals must work with their coaches to determine how to improve their instructional leadership skills. "We know a principal is making progress when he or she begins asking teachers to help. We've found when a principal opens up and risks asking teachers how he or she can be a better instructional leader, good things begin to happen.

"Most principals in the project share their time data with staff and ask the question: 'How can I be better at this?' The coach urges this kind of discussion with individual teachers and leadership teams," Shelling says.

The coach also identifies resources to help the principal further develop his or her skills. This is really pretty powerful as the principal is modeling the kind of professional learning community behavior we'd all like to see in schools.

And Shelling adds: "We do a lot

of readiness work with principals and schools prior to collecting data. We need to be sure the principal really wants to be an instructional leader and has the requisite skills to work collaboratively with staff, students and parents. We never allow a district to force a principal to have a SAM. It has to be the principal's desire followed by permission from the school community."

Shelling is investigating whether school administration managers can be effective at the middle and high school levels. The schools are also adopting different models of managers, from hiring new personnel to adding tasks to a position that previously existed, which is what Normal is doing by adding manager tasks for teachers.

For more information on the SAM program, visit the Wallace Foundation Web site at: Wallace Foundation Web site's SAM program area:

<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/>.

School library support offered via sets of books

The endowment fund of the Illinois School Library Media Association/Library Book Selection Service (ISLMA/LBSS) will issue its first set of annual grants in 2008. Public and private school libraries, as well as public libraries registered in any of the children's choice reading awards programs, are eligible to apply.

Grant recipients will be awarded one set of books for the 2009 reading campaign for the children's book award the library indicated on their application, including the Monarch, Abraham Lincoln or Rebecca Caudill awards.

Information about the grant is available at the ISLMA/LBSS Endowment Fund website at <http://www.lbssfund.org>. The application form is available on the website.

All applications must be post-marked by May 15, 2008. Questions may be sent to info@lbssfund.org or by phone to 309/649-0916.