

Instructional Leadership **SAM and the 'Fab Five'**

by Carol Lensing, SAM project state coordinator, retired superintendent and building administrator

Every building principal is time challenged. Research recently released by The Wallace Foundation in the context of a study about School Administration Managers suggests that if principals learn to delegate five basic responsibilities, they can immediately find more time to be instructional leaders. Those five are

- student supervision in non-instructional areas of the school,
- student discipline/behavior management,
- supervision of non-teaching school staff,
- school facilities and management, and
- interaction with parents on non-instructional matters.

The conclusion of Policy Study Associates was that principals who are able to delegate on a “first responder” basis the above five high-delegation areas to a SAM were able to spend significantly more time focusing on instruction and student learning. These high-delegation areas have been given the nickname “fab five” among the SAM project schools across the country. You can find this study at www.wallacefoundation.org under the “educational leadership” tab.

Iowa’s SAM project has grown significantly over the past three years from a pilot involving only three schools to one that now has 45 teams participating across the state, and has garnered the interest of many schools and districts. The value and need for leaders to be instructionally focused is well documented. In fact, educational research indicates that building leaders are the second most important factor in student learning, right after the classroom teacher.

The SAM project, which focuses on administrators’ use of time, supports the research in this area by arranging for someone to be the SAM. The SAM uses calendar-driven software called TimeTrack, as well as a reflective process of questioning, coaching and support, to document how the principal uses his or her time, and the impact that focus is having on instruction and learning in each classroom.

Among the SAM project sites across the country and in Iowa, protecting the principal’s time and assisting the principal in becoming a stronger instructional leader is the centerpiece of the work. That focus is not dependent on whether the SAM is a full-time position or a secretary/administrative assistant who assumes the role of the SAM while still doing other duties. Rather, it is dependent on the belief that together with the principal and the SAM, a “team” of people work together to distribute duties in the “fab five” areas and help the principal become a stronger instructional leader.

Is the ideal situation the addition of a new position called a SAM? Absolutely! Can the administrator create a culture of distributing management and focusing on instruction without adding a full-time SAM? Absolutely! It becomes a matter of vision, high expectations for learning for all, and a leader who lets go of some of the management areas in order to focus on the instruction, data and learning in each classroom.

School districts are financially strapped, and it doesn’t look much more promising in the near future. Even under those constraints there are things that can be done within buildings to change the existing culture. Sometimes it is easiest for those of us in education to understand the need to change; however, we’re not always willing to make the changes that shift the culture within our schools to one in which each person is an important member of the learning team. It takes the

principal, teachers and support staff, as well as parents and community to ensure that each and every child reaches his or her potential.

The SAM project and its focus on the five high-delegation areas of supervision, discipline, non-teaching staff, working with parents on non-instructional areas and building management, is moving in the right direction. With or without the SAM project, my hope is that all building leaders will work to distribute some of the high-delegation management areas and stretch themselves to focus even more completely on instruction and learning. Our children and grandchildren are counting on us to make it happen.

Read more about the School Administration Manager Project at www.sai-iowa.org/sams