




THE PRINCIPAL STORY



CONVERSATION GUIDE
SAM I AM: Making the
Time for Effective
Instructional Leadership





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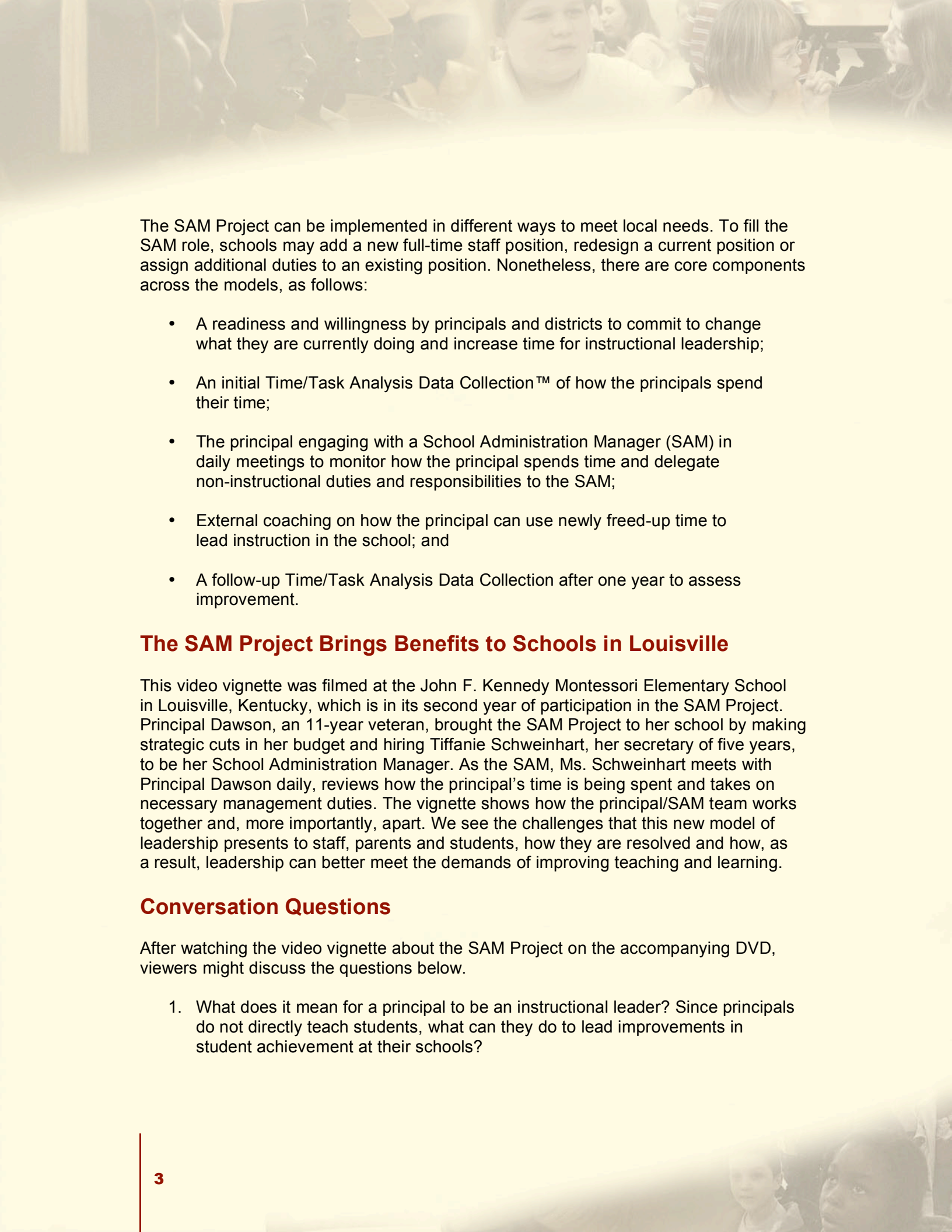
What Is the Issue?

Principals have a tough job, and it's only going to get tougher. It is a serious challenge to balance leadership and management duties. There is not enough time in the day for a single person to provide the leadership in the school as well as handle operations responsibilities. How can principals focus on what's really important: that is, shaping and realizing the schoolwide vision for improving teaching and learning? Often principals must respond to central office, school staff, students and parents before they can even think about instructional leadership. What if that were different? What if principals could focus more than half of their time on leading effective instruction, rather than just a third? What if we could transform schools simply by changing how principals spend their time?

This video vignette, available on the accompanying DVD, features the national School Administration Manager (SAM) Project, which helps principals understand how they use their time, gives them a staff person (the "SAM") to whom operations responsibilities are delegated and provides them with strategies for what to do with their newly found time to lead efforts to improve instruction in the school. This video demonstrates how one school in Louisville, Kentucky, reshaped school leadership. Follow Principal Opal Dawson as she receives increasing support to get out of her office and into classrooms, strengthens relationships with teachers and gets to know students better than ever before. Witness a principal who meets with her SAM on a daily basis, gets professional support from a coach and uses new tools and strategies to spend more time on improving teaching and learning.

Background of the Program

The SAM Project changes the way we have long viewed school leadership. Funded by The Wallace Foundation, project goals go beyond helping principals improve instruction in their schools. They aim to ensure that the entire community understands that principals' most important responsibilities are to lead the efforts around teaching and learning in their schools.



The SAM Project can be implemented in different ways to meet local needs. To fill the SAM role, schools may add a new full-time staff position, redesign a current position or assign additional duties to an existing position. Nonetheless, there are core components across the models, as follows:

- A readiness and willingness by principals and districts to commit to change what they are currently doing and increase time for instructional leadership;
- An initial Time/Task Analysis Data Collection™ of how the principals spend their time;
- The principal engaging with a School Administration Manager (SAM) in daily meetings to monitor how the principal spends time and delegate non-instructional duties and responsibilities to the SAM;
- External coaching on how the principal can use newly freed-up time to lead instruction in the school; and
- A follow-up Time/Task Analysis Data Collection after one year to assess improvement.

The SAM Project Brings Benefits to Schools in Louisville

This video vignette was filmed at the John F. Kennedy Montessori Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, which is in its second year of participation in the SAM Project. Principal Dawson, an 11-year veteran, brought the SAM Project to her school by making strategic cuts in her budget and hiring Tiffanie Schweinhart, her secretary of five years, to be her School Administration Manager. As the SAM, Ms. Schweinhart meets with Principal Dawson daily, reviews how the principal's time is being spent and takes on necessary management duties. The vignette shows how the principal/SAM team works together and, more importantly, apart. We see the challenges that this new model of leadership presents to staff, parents and students, how they are resolved and how, as a result, leadership can better meet the demands of improving teaching and learning.

Conversation Questions

After watching the video vignette about the SAM Project on the accompanying DVD, viewers might discuss the questions below.

1. What does it mean for a principal to be an instructional leader? Since principals do not directly teach students, what can they do to lead improvements in student achievement at their schools?

2. Operations functions are critical to a school's effective functioning. Why wouldn't a principal spend most of his/her time ensuring that everything runs smoothly? What tasks does the principal have to do personally?
3. In this video, we see Principal Dawson take steps to evaluate how her time is spent, find new ways to manage non-instructional duties and dedicate more time to instructional improvement. Most principals in the SAM Project are surprised to find that, when they first measure their time use, they are spending only about a third of their time on instructional matters. To what extent do principals have realistic expectations about their jobs and what they can accomplish? What do your school and district expect from principals? What do parents expect from a principal?
4. Why might it be useful for principals to reorganize their days so that they have more time to devote to instruction? What prevents principals from doing so?
5. What factors made the relationship between Principal Dawson and her SAM, Ms. Schweinhart, work for both of them? What obstacles stood in the way of making this relationship effective? How did they overcome these barriers?
6. Principal Dawson encountered some hurdles when she tried to change how her school community perceived her role. What are the barriers in implementing this new concept of leadership in your community, district and school? How does your school community perceive the principal's role?
7. At the Kennedy Montessori School, what was the initial reaction of teachers to Principal Dawson becoming more involved in their instruction? What are new levels of support that she gives her staff? What was the reaction of students and parents?
8. Reflecting on how the SAM Project has affected the Kennedy Montessori School, Principal Dawson says, "The big picture is our test scores have improved, but more importantly ... we have truly become a community of learners." How did the climate of the school change as a result of the SAM Project?
9. As a principal, how willing would you be to give up much of your managerial role and focus the majority of your time on instructional leadership? Why? How receptive might your school and district be to such a change in the leadership role?
10. What are the potential benefits of implementing the SAM Project or another time management strategy in your district? How might the SAM Project help schools and districts address the professional development needs of principals and teachers? What are your reservations about the project?

Additional Resources

- For more information and research on the SAM Project, visit www.wallacefoundation.org/SAM or www.SAMsConnect.com.
- To learn more about the SAM Project in Kentucky schools, visit [www.kde.state.ky.us/KDE/Administrative+Resources/School+Improvement/Leadership+and+Evaluation/Kentucky+Cohesive+Leadership+System+\(KyCLS\)/School+Administration+Manager+Project.htm](http://www.kde.state.ky.us/KDE/Administrative+Resources/School+Improvement/Leadership+and+Evaluation/Kentucky+Cohesive+Leadership+System+(KyCLS)/School+Administration+Manager+Project.htm) or contact:

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- To read a journalistic account of how Louisville and other districts are testing this new way to help principals spend more time each day on instruction, visit <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/improving-leadership-for-learning-stories-from-the-field.aspx>.

This project is part of THE PRINCIPAL STORY outreach campaign, which is made possible by a generous grant from The Wallace Foundation, a source of ideas for improving school leadership. Visit www.wallacefoundation.org/principalstory.



For more information and research about education leadership, visit the Wallace Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.



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