POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES, INC.

RESEARCH BRIEF:

COSTS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION MANAGER (SAM) PROCESS

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The National School Administration Manager (SAM) Innovation Project (NSIP), supported in its early development and expansion by The Wallace Foundation, aims to increase the amount of time that school principals devote to instructional leadership. Working together, a principal and a SAM track the principal's time use and identify opportunities for delegating a portion of the principal's non-instructional duties to other members of the school staff. A Policy Studies Associates evaluation of the national project, completed in 2009, found that participating principals did indeed increase the amount of time that they spent on instruction-related tasks.[1] The evaluation team found that these increases were associated with the delegation of five time-consuming management tasks to SAMs: student discipline, student supervision, managing non-teaching staff, managing school facilities, and interacting with parents. The analysis of implementation and results has been updated with data available through 2011.[2]

This research brief addresses a different topic in implementation of the SAM process, discussing what districts pay for (1) the SAM's services and (2) the support the SAM/principal team receives from the NSIP or its state affiliates. The costs vary, and we discuss the factors associated with the variation.

SAM Compensation

A key distinction relevant to SAM compensation is the "model." The model definitions have changed over time, but the gist is as follows:

- Model 1: The SAM is a *newly hired* member of the school staff

- Model 2: The SAM is an existing staff member in the school who takes on the SAM duties and receives *additional compensation* for these duties

- Model 3: The SAM is an existing staff member in the school who takes on the SAM duties with *no increase in compensation*

The SAMs literature refers to the cost of hiring a SAM in the Model 1 design as comparable to the cost of a beginning teacher, which averages about $35,000.[3] In urban districts that have hired several full-time SAMs in 2008 or later, the salaries range up to $51,000. With benefits, the total compensation is $60,000-68,000.

The use of Model 2 is said to be infrequent, compared with the other models, but its cost can be illustrated by a small city where SAMs are being compensated with a stipend of $5,500

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[1] See Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erikson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, "Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project." Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, 2009.

[2] Brenda J. Turnbull, Erikson R. Arcaira, and Beth Sinclair, "Implementation of the National SAM Innovation Project: A Comparison of Project Designs." Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, 2011.

[3] This figure is based on recent national estimates generated by the National Education Association.

per year.[4] They are expected to spend 300 hours per year on their SAM responsibilities and receive "exception pay" of $17.50 per hour for this work.

For the Model 3 design, there is no direct outlay for salary or benefits.

Thus the cost of salary and benefits for a full-time SAM in the Model 1 design is roughly 10 times the cost of a SAM in Model 2, and infinitely more than the cost of a SAM in Model 3. In all models, the SAM is expected to prepare a schedule for the principal's day and week, to record how the principal actually uses his or her time, and to meet with the principal daily. Our study of the models' implementation showed that essentially all SAMs maintain schedules and time records, and that about half of them (in either Model 1 or Model 3 designs) participate in regular daily meetings. It also showed that principals' time spent on instructional tasks rises in both Model 1 and Model 3 designs.[5]

The key difference between Model 1 and the other models is, of course, that the district is also buying a staff member for the school. Thus we examined job descriptions for SAMs where Model 1 designs are in use. The job descriptions define a wide range of responsibilities and grant SAMs a significant amount of authority in areas such as supervision of non-teaching staff. In most schools, this set of responsibilities and the authority of the position would make the SAM at least comparable to an assistant principal in status. Further, a SAM carrying out all or most of these responsibilities effectively would almost certainly make it easier for the principal to devote additional time to instructional matters, especially in schools that do not have assistant principals or similar positions. Indeed, our study of the models' implementation revealed that the SAMs in Model 1 schools are far more likely to assume time-consuming management responsibilities than are SAMs in Model 3 schools.

As an illustration, a typical job description from an urban district outlines the following responsibilities for a SAM:

- ■ Serves as a liaison between the school, parents and the community as needed or assigned by the school principal
- ■ Facilitates student registration and scheduling
- ■ Conducts interviews and makes recommendation for hiring of classified staff members
- ■ In collaboration with the principal, develops and manages the annual school budget
- ■ Conducts meetings with parents and teachers on student discipline issues
- ■ Supervises classified staff members including paraeducators, secretaries and custodians
- ■ Provides ongoing communication to school community including staff and parents

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[4] Although the city's schools are currently classified as Model 3 in the NSIP database, this compensation policy matches our understanding of the definition of Model 2, and we use it here as an example of a ballpark figure for a Model 2 stipend.
[5] See Turnbull et al., 2011.

- Monitors student attendance and assures that appropriate contacts are made to parents, community services or staff members to facilitate better attendance
- Manages all school scheduling, including community use of facilities, field trips, cafeteria activities, transportation, maintenance, playgrounds, cleaning and special events
- Manages school budget and maintains appropriate records for all local school fiscal affairs in accordance with state and system-wide accounting practices
- Supervises the maintenance and custodial services of the physical facilities
- Collaborates with District departments in planning and improvement of school facilities
- Promotes the school and District through positive relations with community, business, parents, and students
- Works in collaboration with various members of the central administrative staff on problems/projects related to the school operation
- Manages and monitors the safety and security program for the building including oversight for various safety drills
- Reports to work on a regular and reliable basis
- Performs other duties as assigned by the Principal

In Model 3, SAMs assume a much narrower range of responsibilities. Some also serve as the school secretary or administrative assistant to the principal, and as SAMs they are gatekeepers who deflect potential interruptions away from the principal. Their roles are probably best characterized as extensions of roles that they already play and do not represent a significant change in their sphere of responsibility.

Because Model 2 is rare, we are hesitant to generalize about possible Model 2 arrangements from the one district in which we found SAMs who receive stipends, but in that district the SAMs already held professional positions in the school (e.g., teacher, instructional coach) before adding the SAM role. Their SAM duties may include taking responsibility for the building when the principal is out.

Thus, a "Cadillac" arrangement for SAM responsibilities is to hire a full-time professional for a total price of more than $60,000. In addition to carrying out the standard SAM process responsibilities of record keeping and meetings with the principal, this individual is expected to be capable of serving as the public face of the principal's office with a variety of audiences inside and outside the school. A "Chevy" arrangement is to provide a stipend of about $5,000 to a professional who can spend time not only in routine SAM project responsibilities but also in other work that would otherwise fall to the principal. A "bicycle" arrangement is to designate an existing staff member as a SAM and help that person fit the SAM process responsibilities into existing work time. In addition, it possible that a newly assigned Model 3 SAM could look for ways of delegating some of his or her existing responsibilities to someone else to free up more time for SAM-related tasks.

Pricing for Support of a SAM/Principal Team[6]

Whether or not a SAM receives compensation, each SAM/principal team incurs costs on a fee-for-service basis for startup or ongoing support. Again, there is variation: annual fees range from $12,900 down to less than $2,000, depending on the package of services rendered and the agreement between the district and the support provider.

The package of support services includes the following (with variation in innumerable details under these umbrella descriptions):

- Baseline data collection in which a trained observer shadows the principal for five school days, recording his or her use of time at five-minute intervals. Data are analyzed centrally, and the principal receives a detailed report that summarizes the percentage of time spent on instructional and management tasks respectively, along with a breakout of those tasks into a total of 25 categories.[7]

- Follow-up data collection at 12-month intervals from the baseline. The number of days of observation in a follow-up visit depends on the principal's years of experience in the project and on the data-collection policy set by the state-level project coordinator, but the report is the same in all cases.

- Access to the TimeTrack software, which the team is expected to use in scheduling and recording the principal's time. Technical support accompanies the software. Over the years, TimeTrack has been modified to synchronize with Outlook and to accommodate web-based use. The software has also been modified to develop a variety of reports on the details of time use which have the potential to guide planning of focused instructional leadership activities.

- Initial orientation to the project, varying in elaborateness across states.

- Assistance from a Time Change Coach, trained and paid by the project. Coaches are expected to work with new teams, in person and remotely. After the initial startup, they are expected to visit a team monthly.

- The opportunity to attend an annual SAM/Principal Conference. Some support providers at the state level include the conference expenses in the standard price that they charge for teams, while others offer it as an available add-on.

Fees for this package of services vary within and across states, depending on exactly what is delivered and by whom. Each startup or continuing team is charged the standard price that applies in its state. For new teams in states that do not have an existing state-level structure, the service provider is the NSIP, which charges $12,900 for the services listed above, including

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[6] The information we report here comes from service agreements and other documents gathered from the NSIP and its partners at state and local levels.
[7] The report for the principal also provides additional details, but the ones listed here are generally considered to be the key information items.

relatively elaborate readiness activities with the district and school before and during startup, and including conference participation.

In states where an education organization works in partnership with the national project, the annual fee varies. It is almost always less than $10,000, and for some sites it is less than $2,000. Prices are sometimes higher for startup teams and lower for continuing teams, calculated either as a flat fee for all continuing teams or on a sliding scale that diminishes over five years of participation. Some state partners are able to offer lower prices where there are existing professional-service relationships between service providers and/or professional associations and districts. There can also be variation depending on other factors: the number of days of data collection that a state partner requires for continuing teams; the travel costs for coaches and data collectors; and whether national conference participation is included. The state partner takes these factors into account in setting its standard pricing schedule for schools in the state.

The process of setting fees is, obviously, decentralized. It reflects a process of transition from philanthropic support to a fee-for-service structure. As the NSIP grew from 2004 to 2009, the national project and its state partners included the cost of supporting new and continuing teams under the umbrella of larger grants from The Wallace Foundation for a range of activities in education leadership. Each grantee negotiated its activities and budgets annually with the foundation, and the support for new and continuing SAM/principal teams was subsumed within a much broader set of activities in each state. As this grant support wound down in 2010, sustainability came to the fore as a significant challenge for the grantees.

The Wallace Foundation required each of its grantees to develop plans for scale and sustainability and encouraged them to use outside technical assistance. With help from the Nonprofit Finance Fund, the NSIP and state partners began working on fee-for-service models to set the prices for continuing and new participants. The fundamental equation was that projected revenues would equal projected costs, including not only the direct costs of working with teams but also the indirect costs of program infrastructure. The direct costs can include daily consulting fees, travel, and materials; these costs are associated with readiness work with new teams, data collection, training, coaching, and meetings. The indirect costs include the costs of maintaining the SAMs infrastructure, such as continuing software development; supervision of data collectors and coaches; and a share of the operational costs of host organizations that provide utilities and other basics. State partners faced different costs and made different estimates of the number of teams they would be supporting, with the result that the per-team fee could and does vary.

Funding Sources

Districts may assemble funds from various sources to cover the costs of participation in the SAM project. For example, in several districts the fees charged by NSIP for team support are paid from federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds. In one of these districts, SIG funds are also used to cover the salaries of most SAMs, although two SAM salaries are paid out of local funds. In another urban district, SAMs' salaries are covered by a grant from a local

philanthropy, and fees are paid from district general funds. Yet another district is exploring the use of federal Title IIA funds for future support of the stipends that it pays to its SAMs, and the district is fairly confident that this will be approved. General funds are used to cover project costs in most sites.