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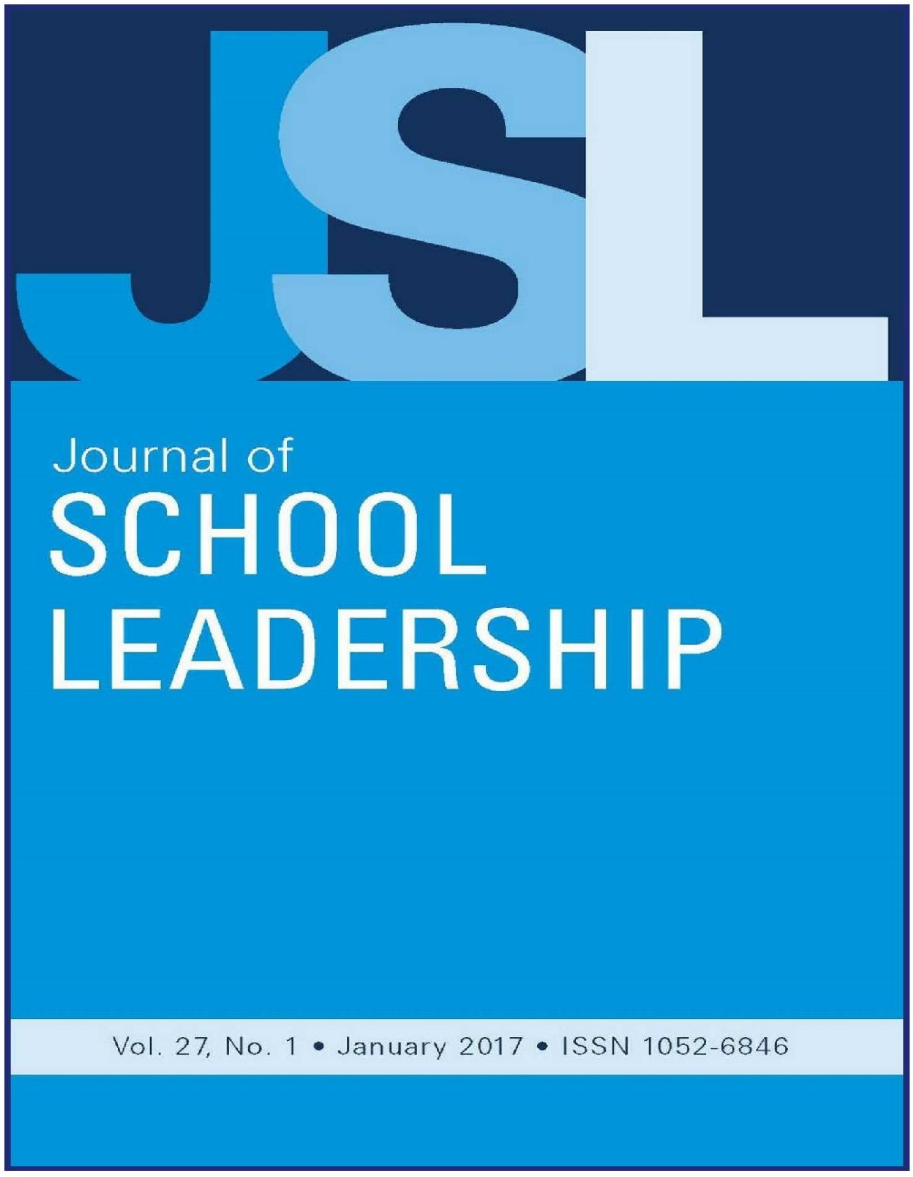

School Administration Manager

Redefining the Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

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School Administration Manager

Redefining the Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader

ABSTRACT: In response to an increasing emphasis on instructional leadership and school achievement, the School Administration Manager (SAM) model was introduced as a change strategy to release principals from managerial responsibilities so that more time can be devoted to instructional leadership. The study collected and analyzed survey and focus group interview data to evaluate the impact of SAMs on principals' management and instructional leadership. In addition, the study examined if school level (elementary or middle school) affects the impact of SAMs. Results illustrate SAMs have a positive impact on management and instructional leadership and the impact was stronger at the middle school level.

KEY WORDS: Instructional Leadership, School Administration, School Leadership, School Level, Mixed Methods

INTRODUCTION

With the pressures and demands placed on schools and school districts to ensure students achieve at the highest levels possible, it is no wonder schools are focusing on the principal serving as an instructional leader. However, with the daily demands placed on the building principal, finding time to focus on instructional leadership is a challenge. One idea to provide principals the time to be instructional leaders is through a School Administration Manager (SAM). A SAM is an individual put in place to take on managerial duties (e.g., lunchroom duty, bus supervision, or creating the master schedule) usually in the purview of the principal. The SAM position is designed to change the role of principal from a predominately managerial leader to an instructional leader (School Administrators of Iowa, n.d.).

In the SAM model, SAMs help principals: (1) increase the time they spend as instructional leaders, (2) use time and task data to reflect on their practice, (3) strengthen relationships with teachers, and (4) distribute management responsibilities and tasks to classified and support staff to keep routine management work from pulling the principal away from instructional leadership (School Administrators of Iowa, n.d.). The SAM Project began in Louisville (KY) in 2002 as an "Alternative School Administration Study" that examined the use of principals' time. The initial study examined differences in principal time use and found that the principals in schools that adopted the SAM model spent more than 70% of their time on instructional issues (Shellinger, 2005). This study evaluates the impact of SAMs on principals' management and instructional leadership.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Effective principal leadership is essential to school improvement. Among the school-level factors that influence student success, principal leadership is second only to classroom teachers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). A meta-analysis conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) examined effective leadership practices and their relationship to student learning. Their study revealed that increasing principal leadership effectiveness by one standard deviation would result in a 10-percentile point gain in student achievement. Research on effective schools emphasizes the importance of the principal as an instructional leader in creating and leading a positive learning environment (Spillane,

Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2002). Hallinger (2011) reviewed over three decades of leadership research and his review provided empirical support for the essential role of principal instructional leadership in improving schools and student learning. In a subsequent article written by Hallinger and Murphy (2013), the authors stated that there is "substantial consensus of the importance of instructional leadership in efforts to raise and sustain the quality of teaching and learning in schools" (p. 7), further emphasizing the role of the principal as an instructional leader.

Research on instructional leadership originated from the 1970s in studies of effective schools in poor urban schools (Edmonds, 1979). Since then, the field has moved from the early studies on principal characteristics in effective schools to studies on principal behaviors and actions that relate positively to school improvement (Neumerski, 2013). Although researchers may define instructional leadership differently, there is a general understanding of what an instructional leader does and the importance of instructional leadership in leading schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Hattie, 2009; Neumerski, 2013). Principals have both direct and indirect effects on school improvement and student learning. Principals can influence student learning directly by conducting regular classroom visits, providing constructive feedback to teachers, and maintaining ongoing communications with teachers about instructional issues (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 2010; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Principals also influence student learning indirectly by providing support for instruction and learning, implementing professional development, and fostering a school culture conducive to learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010; Witziers et al., 2003). Studies suggest that the effects of principal leadership are achieved primarily through the principal's influence on teachers, classroom and school conditions, and school culture (Halllinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Neumerski, 2013). A meta-analysis conducted by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) analyzed empirical studies published between 1978 and 2006 that examined instructional leadership and student achievement and found that the effects of principal instructional leadership on student outcomes were not only statistically significant but also moderate to large in effect size.

Despite strong empirical support of the importance of the principal as an instructional leader to positively influence school improvement and student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Hattie, 2009; Neumerski, 2013), focusing on instructional leadership continues to be a challenge for principals, given the amount of time they have to spend on day-to-day building management. Several studies have documented that principals spent only a small portion of their time on instructional leadership activities (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; May & Supovitz, 2011; May, Huff, & Goldring, 2012; Spillane et al., 2007). Using daily logs of principal activities or in-person observations of how principals spent a school day, these studies uncovered that principals spent on average less than 10% to about 20% of their time on instructional leadership activities. The time use data from Grissom et al. (2013) and Horng et al. (2010) showed that the time principals spent on instruction-related activities was less in middle schools and even less in high schools. However, most of the studies on principal time use did not establish a link between the overall time principals spent on instructional activities and school effectiveness, but they did find specific instructional leadership activities such as time spent on professional development, evaluation of teachers and curriculum, providing teachers with feedback and coaching, did positively influence school effectiveness.

School context plays an important role in studying and understanding the presence and influence of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2011; May & Supovitz, 2011; Neumerski, 2013). In this study, we chose to examine how school level (elementary schools vs. middle schools) relates to instructional leadership. While research in this area has been limited, existing studies have found more evidence of instructional leadership that has been observed at elementary schools than at middle or high schools

(Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Recent studies have documented that elementary school teachers more often report their principals were engaged in instructional practices while middle and high school teachers rarely report their principals taking the role of an instructional leader (Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou, 2010; Wahlstrom, 2012). The varying presence of instructional leadership may be due to differences in organizational structures (Louis et al., 2010). Middle and high schools operate more like a complex organization with departmentalization, a larger number of staff members, and a larger student body (Firestone & Harriott, 1982; Hallinger, 2012). The complexity in organizational structure could imply more and layered managerial responsibilities for middle and high school principals making it less likely for them to enact instructional leadership.

Moreover, national and international assessment data illustrate that the need for instructional leadership can be more pronounced at the middle and high school levels. Middle schools and high schools have lower levels of academic performance as evidenced by the nation's report card, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Data from the international assessments such as Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study show that American secondary schools do not compare favorably with schools in other countries. The U.S. fourth-graders significantly outscored other countries in reading and scored above the international average in math, but by high school, the reading advantage has diminished and the math performance falls below the international average (Hull, 2007). In addition, based on a Harvard report on achievement growth in U.S. schools, over the past two decades, minimal gains have been observed for students in secondary schools (Hanushek, Peterson, & Woessmann, 2012).

The focus of the SAM model is to develop instructional leadership and provide principals the opportunity to be instructional leaders. The existing literature on instructional leadership coupled with national and international assessment data suggest that there is research value and practical significance in studying the SAM model to determine if and how it influences principal leadership in varying organizational contexts.

THE SAM MODEL

The initial development of the SAM model was supported and funded by the Wallace Foundation as part of its initiative in educational leadership. The SAM model was piloted in three schools in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2002. The initial work on the SAM implementation found promising results in increasing principal's time on instructional issues (Shellinger, 2005). The SAM model is currently in place in more than 700 schools in 21 states in the United States (National SAM Innovation Project, n.d.).

For districts that are interested in adopting the SAM model, there are three typical implementation options (or models) according to the report "Implementation of the National SAM Innovation Project: A Comparison of Project Designs," written for the Wallace Foundation (Turnbull, Arcaira, & Sinclair, 2011). The first model involves adding a new position, a SAM position, to the building or redesigning an existing position into the SAM position (Model 1). The other two models assign SAM responsibilities to an existing position with (Model 2) or without additional compensation (Model 3). With a Model 1 SAM implementation, a new (or reassigned) staff member is expected to devote all of his or her working time to SAM responsibilities including meeting with the principal each day, keeping track of the principal's use of time using special time managing software, and handling school management tasks. In Model 2 and Model 3 implementation options, a staff member performs SAM responsibilities in addition to his or her existing duties. The models are depicted graphically in Figure 1. The chart illustrates that the SAM model was created with the premise that delegating managerial responsibilities to others allows the principal to

focus his or her time on instructional leadership and therefore enhances school improvement and student learning.

The district that participated in this study is among the early adopters of the SAM model in the state of Iowa. The district chose to adopt the Model 1 implementation option for the SAM positions. This SAM model was utilized in 66% of SAM implementations between 2004 and 2010 (Turnbull, Arcaira, & Sinclair, 2011). The school district includes 17 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 4 high schools. The district serves a diverse student population of over 15,000 students including 57% Caucasian, 19% African American, 14% Hispanic, 8% multiracial, and 2% Asian students. At the time of the study, SAMS were only implemented at the elementary and middle schools in the district. The district administration was very supportive of the SAM implementation as was evidenced in their decision to participate in the SAM process. The School Administrators of Iowa, through funding by the Wallace Foundation, provided the implementation of SAMs at the district. Support was provided for the principals and SAMs through initial training, regular follow-ups, and a review of the implementation.

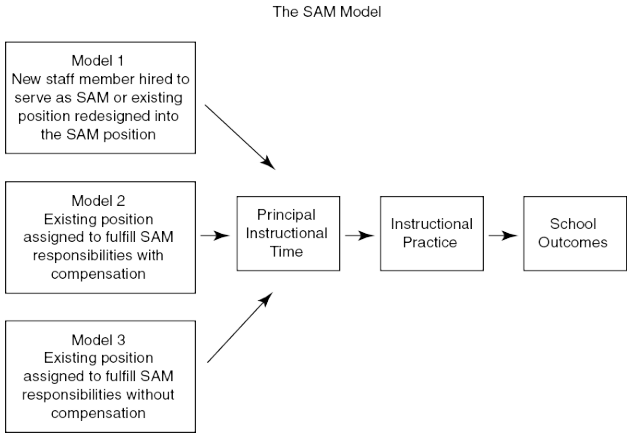

Figure 1. Graphic representation of the SAM model.

SAM candidates in the district schools must either hold or be completing Iowa principal certification. In addition, to be recommended for the position, they must have held some type of leadership responsibilities as a teacher. The majority of the candidates hired were employees within the district, but some came from other districts in Iowa and Illinois. SAMs were assigned to schools at the discretion of the superintendent who selected the receiving schools based on their No Child Left Behind (NCLB) status of not meeting student achievement expectations for the appropriate proficiency levels in math and/or reading. Most SAMs stay in their positions for 1 to 3 years. Also of note was the practice in the district of promoting SAMs who are successful in their positions to full-time assistant principal or principal positions within the district.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to collect quantitative and qualitative data to document the influence of SAMs on elementary and middle school principals' management and instructional leadership. An additional focus of the study is to explore if the impact of SAMs differs between school levels.

METHODS

The study utilized a mixed-method design (Creswell, 2014) relying upon both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the SAM implementation in a number of schools. Data collection involved a survey of teachers and focus group interviews of principals and SAMs at the SAM schools in an attempt to

triangulate data to better understand the SAM impact.

SAM SURVEY

The SAM survey (see Appendix A) was developed by the researchers to evaluate the impact of SAMs on principal management and instructional responsibilities. Principal management and instructional responsibilities included in the survey were informed by prior studies on instructional leadership (Hallinger, 1990, 2005) and by Turnbull, Arcaira, and Sinclair's (2011) report on the SAM project. The survey contains two sets of parallel items. The first set of items measures if respondents agree that there has been improvement in the performance of various school managerial and instructional responsibilities. Managerial responsibilities include building management, student supervision, managing discipline, supporting staff efficiency, and facilitation of the school improvement process. Instructional leadership responsibilities include feedback on teaching from informal and formal observations, administrative support for student academic needs, and job-embedded professional development for teachers. Response options for these survey questions range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The second set of items measures the extent of improvement in the surveyed management and instructional leadership responsibilities. Response options for these questions range from "to no extent" to "to a great extent." Initial survey questions were piloted with teachers in a school district with SAMs, but that was not participating in the study. Minor modifications to the survey were made based on feedback from the pilot. The final survey contains 34 items with each set consisting of 17 items. For each set, five items measure the SAM impact in managerial responsibilities and 12 items measure the impact in instructional leadership. The 12 items that measure instructional leadership were further divided into two parts: (1) five items measuring perceived improvement in the frequency of the principal engaging in instruction-related activities (frequency of instructional leadership) and (2) seven items measuring improvement in the principal's performance as an instructional leader (quality of instructional leadership).

Participants

The SAM survey was emailed to teachers in a school district in Iowa at schools where SAMs were being implemented. Since SAMs were not being implemented at the high school level in the district at the time of the research, no high school teachers were surveyed. Teachers in four middle schools and 11 elementary schools participated in the study and 333 surveys were returned. Of those surveys collected, 22 failed to complete over 75% items on the survey. These responses were subsequently deleted from further analysis. The final data set contained 311 usable surveys.

Of the sample, elementary teachers made up 69.5% of the participants with 30.5% of the respondents at the middle school level, which was consistent with the grade configuration of the district. About a quarter (23.9%) of the teachers in the sample were fairly new to the teaching profession (having five years or less teaching experience) and 28.7% of teachers were very experienced with over 20 years of experience. Over half of the sample (52.9%) has worked in the current position for less than 5 years (elementary school—54.4% and middle school—49.5%). About half of the sample (44.2%) has worked for no more than three principals.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were conducted with SAMs and with principals to explore if and how SAMs assisted principals in management and instructional leadership. Focus groups were chosen as the method to interview study participants based on the consideration that this interview format allows interactions among interviewees and therefore a wide range of ideas and perceptions can emerge from the groups that

would not be possible to gain from individual interviews (Creswell, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Principals and SAMs were interviewed in separate groups so that each group consisted of participants with similar positions to encourage sharing of perceptions of their experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015). A total of five focus groups were held with two focus group interviews conducted with SAMs and three focus groups with principals. Each focus group interview was conducted with one researcher serving as a facilitator and another researcher serving as a note-taker. The focus group size ranged from 8 to 12 for principals and six to eight for SAMs.

The interviews were arranged at a time and location convenient for majority of participants. Focus group interviews used a role-specific interview protocol (see Appendix B) and a similar process was followed in conducting the interviews. Participants were greeted and introduced to each other at the beginning of each interview. The interview facilitator explained the study benefits and what participation in the study entailed. The role of the note-taker was also explained. Consent forms were collected from interview participants after it was explained their participation in the interviews was voluntary and they were assured of confidentiality of the interview results.

ANALYSIS

The teacher survey and the focus group data were analyzed as appropriate. Analysis procedures are described below.

Survey

The internal consistency of survey items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The coefficient alpha for all survey areas ranged from 0.845 to 0.934 (see Table 1) indicating a high degree of internal consistency among items that measure management and instructional leadership. Initial analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to illustrate the overall teacher perception of SAMs' impact on principals' management and instructional leadership. Separate MANOVA analyses were conducted to explore if there was a significant school-level effect (elementary school vs. middle school) on teacher perception of the impact of SAMs on leadership responsibilities. The first MANOVA was carried out comparing teacher perceptions of improvement in the major leadership responsibility areas and the second MANOVA was conducted to evaluate teacher perceptions of the extent of improvement. If MANOVA analyses resulted in a significant school-level effect, univariate ANOVA analyses would be used to pinpoint in which major leadership responsibility area(s) a significant effect exists.

Table 1. Reliability Estimates for SAM Survey

Leadership Area	*# of Items*	*Cronbach's Alpha*
Agreement of improvement		
Management	5	0.845
Instructional leadership—Frequency	5	0.867
Instructional leadership—Quality	7	0.924
Extent of improvement		
Management	5	0.851
Instructional leadership—Frequency	5	0.899
Instructional leadership—Quality	7	0.934

Focus Groups

Principals and SAMs were invited to participate in focus group interviews. Each focus group interview session was tape recorded and lasted about an hour. The facilitator asked the interview questions and

facilitated each interview. Follow-up questions were asked for clarification. Note-takers took detailed notes during the interview. Immediately following each interview note-takers made an initial analysis of the notes. After all focus group interviews were completed, the interview data from each session was transcribed verbatim by a transcription service. The researchers individually reviewed all interview transcripts and identified initial codes and themes. The research team then compared the initial codes analyzing both convergent and divergent codes and themes. Differences were resolved through a review of the transcript and discussion. The transcripts were then recoded using the agreed upon codes and themes.

RESULTS

SURVEY

Comparing Major Leadership Areas

To investigate if the level of school (elementary vs. middle school) had a significant effect on teachers' perceived impact of the SAM implementation, two MANOVA analyses were conducted on the teacher survey responses. Results are presented in Table 2. The first MANOVA was carried out on teacher agreement on improvements in the major leadership areas: management along with the frequency and quality of instructional leadership. The test showed significant differences exists between elementary and middle school teachers' perceptions [Wilks's Lambda $\Lambda = 6.76$, $F(3, 293) = 2525.68$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$]. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs on each of the leadership responsibility areas revealed significant school-level effects on improvements in management [$F(1, 295) = 6.02$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$] and in perceived frequency and quality of instructional leadership responsibilities [$F(1, 295) = 5.02$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$; $F(1, 295) = 6.08$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$]. Means and standard deviations reported for each area of leadership responsibilities illustrated that middle school teachers had significantly higher ratings in each of these areas. The partial eta-squared values suggested that there was a moderate school-level effect on perceived improvement.

A second MANOVA was conducted on teacher perceptions of the extent of improvement in the management and instructional leadership areas. Results showed significant differences exist between elementary and middle school teachers' perceptions [Wilks's Lambda $\Lambda = 6.76$, $F(3, 289) = 1344.88$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$]. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs on each of the leadership responsibility areas revealed significant school-level effects on improvements in management [$F(1, 291) = 16.89$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$] and the perceived frequency and quality of instructional leadership responsibilities [$F(1, 291) = 12.52$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$; $F(1, 291) = 11.91$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$]. Means and standard deviations reported for each area of leadership responsibilities showed significantly higher ratings by middle school teachers in each of these leadership responsibility areas. The partial eta-squared values suggested a moderate school-level effect on perceived extent of improvement. This effect is slightly larger than that on perceived improvement, especially in the management responsibility area.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and MANOVA Results for Elementary and Middle Schools by Leadership Area

Leadership Area	Elementary School M	Elementary School SD	Middle School M	Middle School SD	Wilks's Lambda Λ	F	η2
Agreement of Improvement					6.76	2525.68	0.07
Management	2.79	0.58	3.07	0.57		6.02	0.06
Instruction—Frequency	2.76	0.60	3.02	0.55		5.02	0.05
Instruction—Quality	2.70	0.62	2.99	0.58		6.08	0.05
Extent of Improvement					6.76	1344.88	0.11
Management	2.46	0.68	2.94	0.69		16.89	0.11
Instruction—Frequency	2.39	0.81	2.81	0.76		12.52	0.07
Instruction—Quality	2.33	0.81	2.74	0.79		11.91	0.06

Figure 2 depicts the 95% confidence intervals around the mean response in each of the three major leadership areas for elementary and middle schools. The first set (the left three error bars for elementary and middle schools, respectively) shows 95% confidence intervals for mean responses in perceived improvement. The second set (the right three error bars for elementary and middle schools respectively) indicates 95% confidence intervals for mean responses in the extent of improvement. The graph illustrates clearly significant differences exist between elementary and middle school teachers' survey responses. In addition, the graph illustrates that teacher responses were generally higher with respect to perceived improvement than with respect to the extent of improvement. However, differences between perceived improvement and the extent of improvement were more pronounced in elementary schools than in middle schools. The data taken together indicated that middle school teachers had very favorable perceptions of the SAM implementation and of its impact on improving principals' performance of management and instructional responsibilities.

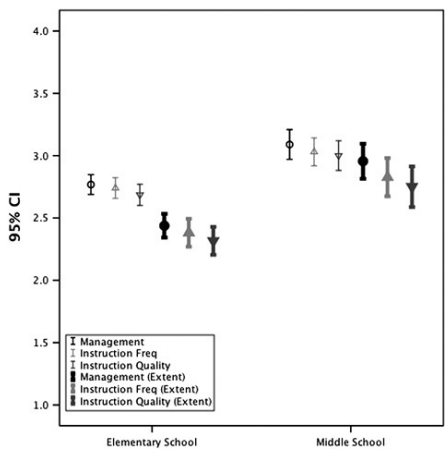

Figure 2. 95% confidence intervals for mean responses by school level and by leadership area.

Comparing Survey Items Within the Leadership Area

Following the MANOVA analysis of the survey data, teacher responses to each survey item within each leadership responsibility area were examined. Results for specific management or instructional responsibility are reported in Tables 3–5. In reviewing the results, we found that the majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with improvement in all management and instructional leadership areas surveyed. Middle school teachers gave overwhelmingly positive responses. In fact, 75–90% teachers from middle schools agreed or strongly agreed there had been improvement since the implementation of SAM support. Elementary school teachers were also positive about the improvement since SAMs, but the responses were not as strong as middle school teachers. At both elementary and middle school levels, more teachers agreed or strongly agreed with improvement in the management areas than in the

instructional leadership areas. Fifty-eight percent of elementary school teachers agreed or strongly agreed with SAMs' positive impact in implementing the Iowa professional development model. Even though this is the lowest percentage related to instructional leadership, it still indicates that over half of elementary school teachers were in agreement.

Table 3. Perception of Improvement and Extent of Improvement in Management Activities

		Elementary School		*Middle School*		*Total Sample*	
	Management	*A/SA*	*Mean*	*A/SA*	*Mean*	*A/SA*	*Mean*
Agreement of Improvement							
Q5	Support Service Delivery Speed	70.8%	2.82	86.2%	3.00	75.5%	2.87
Q7	Building Management	64.5%	2.65	78.5%	2.96	68.8%	2.74
Q9	Student Supervision	67.3%	2.80	82.1%	3.08	71.8%	2.88
Q11	Discipline Management	69.0%	2.82	85.3%	3.11	74.0%	2.91
Q13	School Improvement Facilitation	75.5%	2.82	89.6%	3.23	79.9%	2.95
		Moderate to Great	*Mean*	*Moderate to Great*	*Mean*	*Moderate to Great*	*Mean*
Extent of Improvement							
Q6	Support Service Delivery Speed	39.1%	2.37	65.6%	2.80	47.3%	2.51
Q8	Building Management	37.7%	2.26	62.6%	2.73	45.3%	2.41
Q10	Student Supervision	67.9%	2.76	78.4%	3.13	71.2%	2.88
Q12	Discipline Management	50.0%	2.62	75.0%	3.07	57.6%	2.76
Q14	School Improvement Facilitation	45.9%	2.48	80.0%	3.20	56.6%	2.71

Note. A/SA = Agree/Strongly Agree.

When examining the extent of improvement in management and instructional leadership (see Tables 3–5), we found that most middle school teachers (56–80%) perceived moderate to great improvement in management and instructional leadership. In management, 75 to 80% of middle school teachers perceived moderate to great improvement in student supervision, discipline management, and facilitation of school improvement processes. In instructional leadership, over 66% middle school teachers perceived moderate to great improvement in the frequency and quality of principal feedback to teachers and in the administrative support of student academic needs. Teacher responses from elementary schools in regard to the extent of improvement were less favorable compared to those from middle schools. The majority of elementary teachers perceived moderate to great improvement in student supervision. Half of the elementary teachers perceived moderate to great improvement in discipline management as well as in the frequency and quality of principal feedback. However, in improving support staff efficiency, in managing building operations, and in implementing the Iowa professional development model, more elementary teachers perceived only a little improvement rather than moderate to great improvement.

Table 4. Perception of Improvement and Extent of Improvement in Frequency of Instructional Leadership Activities

	Instructional Leadership—Frequency	Elementary School A/SA	Elementary School Mean	Middle School A/SA	Middle School Mean	Total Sample A/SA	Total Sample Mean
Agreement of Improvement							
Q15	Feedback from Informal Observations	72.4%	2.84	84.9%	2.96	76.4%	2.88
Q19	Administrative Support	66.0%	2.75	87.2%	3.05	72.8%	2.84
Q23	Feedback on Teaching	65.3%	2.71	83.5%	2.98	71.0%	2.79
Q27	Positive Reinforcement	69.0%	2.81	78.3%	2.94	72.0%	2.85
Q31	Job-embedded Professional Development	65.7%	2.73	85.6%	3.11	71.9%	2.84
		Moderate to Great	Mean	Moderate to Great	Mean	Moderate to Great	Mean
Extent of Improvement							
Q16	Feedback from Informal Observations	51.3%	2.50	72.0%	2.88	57.9%	2.62
Q20	Administrative Support	41.5%	2.33	69.9%	2.86	50.7%	2.49
Q24	Feedback on Teaching	44.3%	2.35	70.3%	2.77	52.6%	2.48
Q28	Positive Reinforcement	46.2%	2.39	64.1%	2.72	51.9%	2.49
Q32	Job-embedded Professional Development	42.3%	2.30	64.0%	2.73	49.1%	2.43

Note. A/SA = Agree/Strongly Agree.

Overall, teachers were very positive about the SAM's role in improving the various aspects of building management and in enhancing the principal's role as an instructional leader. In the district that we studied, middle schools gave significantly more positive feedback on SAMs' impact. The majority of middle school teachers perceived moderate to great improvement in all areas surveyed. Facilitation of school improvement process had the highest rating among middle school teachers. For both elementary and middle school teachers, moderate to great improvement was perceived in student supervision, discipline management, and in the frequency and quality of principal feedback to teachers.

Table 5. Perception of Improvement and Extent of Improvement in Quality of Instructional Leadership Activities

	Instructional Leadership—Quality	Elementary School A/SA	Elementary School Mean	Middle School A/SA	Middle School Mean	Total Sample A/SA	Total Sample Mean
Agreement of Improvement							
Q17	Feedback from Classroom Walkthroughs	69.2%	2.77	81.7%	2.99	73.1%	2.84
Q21	Administrative Support	62.2%	2.67	81.9%	3.03	68.5%	2.79
Q25	Feedback on Teaching	65.7%	2.70	82.4%	2.98	70.9%	2.79
Q29	Positive Reinforcement	69.8%	2.76	80.6%	2.98	73.3%	2.83
Q33	Job-embedded Professional Development	59.5%	2.64	83.5%	3.01	67.1%	2.76
Q35	Iowa Professional Development Model	57.9%	2.60	75.3%	2.87	63.6%	2.69
Q37	Teaching resulting from Coaching	64.5%	2.70	78.5%	2.94	69.0%	2.78
		Moderate to Great	Mean	Moderate to Great	Mean	Moderate to Great	Mean
Extent of Improvement							
Q18	Feedback from Classroom Walkthroughs	50.0%	2.46	72.5%	2.85	57.1%	2.58
Q22	Administrative Support	43.0%	2.29	67.7%	2.81	51.0%	2.45
Q26	Feedback on Teaching	42.8%	2.34	68.5%	2.69	51.0%	2.45
Q30	Positive Reinforcement	45.8%	2.34	66.3%	2.72	52.5%	2.45
Q34	Job-embedded Professional Development	40.1%	2.22	61.8%	2.67	47.0%	2.36
Q36	Iowa Professional Development Model	33.2%	2.12	55.7%	2.54	40.4%	2.25
Q38	Teaching resulting from Coaching	41.5%	2.24	62.0%	2.71	48.1%	2.39

Note. A/SA = Agree/Strongly Agree.

FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group interview data provided a context for understanding the survey results. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the focus group interviews with principals and SAMs: (1) communication and collaboration; (2) mentoring, training, and coaching; (3) distribution of management responsibilities; and (4) instructional leadership. A brief description of each theme follows.

Communication and Collaboration

One theme that recurred in both the principal and SAM focus groups was communication and collaboration. Both the principals and the SAMs reiterated the importance of daily conversations (albeit brief meetings of 10–15 minutes) between the principal and the SAM. Daily conversations between the principal and the SAM are crucial for setting objectives, problem-solving, and managing the principal's calendar. Regardless of the time of day or the frequency of the meetings, both principals and SAMs said it was critical to find the modes of communication that work best for the principal-SAM team. One SAM stated, "You have to find modes that work well for everyone." A big benefit of the SAM implementation seemed to be having a person to collaborate with, as another SAM stated, "You both have that other person to bounce off things . . . that's the most important part."

However, both the principals and SAMs discussed the fact that this type of communication and a collaborative relationship "take[s] time to develop." One principal said, "Having those conversations and building relationships is not easy to do." Developing a relationship of open communication and regular collaboration is critical in a productive principal–SAM relationship. Figuring out the best way for the team to communicate, participating in regular meetings, and navigating the principal's calendar are critical for successful implementation of SAMs.

Mentoring, Training, and Coaching

Principals and SAMs saw their relationship as one of mentoring and coaching. One principal mentioned that principals spend time "helping them [the SAMs] and supporting them and coaching them." Another principal said, "I do think we have that head coach/assistant coach relationship." The principals talked about giving the SAMs the opportunity to "do more educational leadership tasks rather than [just] manage" because "we are growing our own leaders." The principals spend time "helping them [the SAM] and supporting them and coaching them." Both principals and SAMs talked about the need for trust in the relationship. According to one principal, "You have to build trust. I don't think anybody can just walk in. We worked so hard" to build trust and our relationship.

Distribution of Management Responsibilities

The purpose of a SAM is for the principal to disperse management responsibilities to the SAM and other school staff members so that the principal can spend more time on instructional leadership. A SAM prevents the principal from getting "swallowed up with management" tasks. However, as one principal said, "If you do not manage your building, you will get fired." So the tension to make sure the building runs smoothly (i.e., management) and the need to be an instructional leader is a definite concern of the principals.

For one principal the biggest challenge was "just allowing them [the SAM] to take things." This was because of a concern about the ramifications for turning over management tasks and responsibilities. In many cases the principal had worked independently as a leader so this may well have been the first time the principal was working collaboratively on a day-to-day basis with another school leader. One principal stated it was a "challenge to get used to actually having someone who did all these things." Having a SAM to assist in running the building requires a change in how the principal operates.

Nevertheless, the issue goes beyond just the building's operation to a concern about having "somebody undo what you've built up. It's just as difficult to build it back up again."

Instructional Leadership

SAMs made it possible for principals to be in the classrooms and to have more time observing and monitoring instruction. Principals acknowledged that having a SAM is "a great opportunity . . . to be in the classroom more often and to improve instruction in the building." One principal said that "before he had a SAM that didn't happen." Having a SAM taking over managerial duties allowed the principal to "actually go back and check in [to the classroom] for implementation" of ideas and suggestions. The SAM position also gave principals the opportunity to model lessons and coach teachers especially beginning teachers. According to one principal, "It is just fun for me to kind of model as well as coach beginning teachers. Now I can spend more time in her classroom." One SAM echoed this concept when he said that "we are to set the principal up to model . . . that's how you're going to help your principal become a better instructional leader."

A side benefit of being in classrooms more, according to one principal, was that "teacher leadership rose a lot through the SAM project because you know where your leaders are." A benefit was also noted for teachers at the other end of the spectrum. It helped identify the "struggling teachers and classrooms where I need to get in a little quality time." However, having the principal in classrooms more is not without growing pains. Many teachers were not used to having the principal in the room other than a formal observation or to deal with a student problem. One principal said, "A lot of teachers seem to believe that every time we're in the room, we're supervising or evaluating. It's not the case."

DISCUSSION

Schools are held increasingly accountable for student performance. Over three decades of research has suggested that principals who are instructional leaders are effective building leaders and have positive influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2009; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). However, the school principal is frequently caught in an ever expanding web of responsibilities: "They must be educational visionaries and change agents, instructional leaders, curriculum and assessment experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators, and community builders" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 1). Growing job responsibilities and unrealistic expectations create frustrations for the school principal. The SAM model was designed to restructure the role of the principal so that instructional leadership becomes the priority. This study collected both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the impact of SAMs on principals' managerial and instructional leadership in elementary and middle schools.

The quantitative data showed that elementary and middle school teachers had positive perceptions of their principals' performance of managerial and instructional responsibilities. Of note is that in the area of instructional leadership, the perceived positive impact is found in both increased frequency and improved quality of instructional leadership. These findings suggest that increasing the amount of time principals spend on instructional leadership has the potential to improve the quality of instructional leadership. Additionally, the benefits of having SAMs in place were demonstrated in various leadership areas in management and instructional leadership. These findings support the importance of principals focusing on instructional leadership as pointed out in previous leadership studies (e.g. Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004).

Survey results revealed a higher percentage of middle school teachers perceive moderate to great

improvement in management and instructional leadership than teachers in elementary schools. This could be because elementary school principals had focused on instructional leadership prior to SAMs, as suggested by studies on instructional leadership across different school levels (Grigsby et al. 2010; Wahlstrom, 2012), resulting in the lower level of improvement reported by elementary school teachers than by the middle school teachers. Based upon international studies (PISA and TIMSS data) and NAEP data, secondary schools have seen minimal achievement gains under the current accountability policy (Hull, 2007; Hanushek, Peterson, & Woessmann, 2012). As such, instructional leadership is particularly important in secondary schools. The perceived overwhelming success of the SAM model in the sample of middle schools suggests a strong need for SAM support in middle schools to free up principals' time for instructional issues. Delegating managerial responsibilities to SAMs allowed the principals in these schools to have more interactions with teachers and students, resulting in the perceived improvement in the principal's role as an instructional leader.

The focus group interviews with principals and SAMs outlined the process of putting the SAM model in place and clarified how SAMs, working together with their principals, facilitated and enhanced principals' roles as building managers and instructional leaders. The interviews also revealed challenges and concerns in developing a trusting relationship between principals and SAMs. Ongoing communication and collaboration between SAMs and principals is the key to the success of the SAM model. When successfully implemented, the SAM position benefits principals by providing more time on instructional issues, creating opportunities for SAMs to gain leadership experiences, and helping districts develop school leaders. The study's findings provide evidence that the SAM model is a promising strategy to focus the principal's time on instructional tasks. With SAMs in place, principals had more opportunities to provide instructional support and to influence instructional practices.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the study have important implications for school practitioners and researchers in educational leadership. The survey results suggest that school context may influence instructional leadership activities and the perceived effects of these leadership activities. The data point out that the impact of instructional leadership practices varies by school organizational context. What works in some schools or certain types of schools may not work as well in others. School practitioners need to be cognizant that instructional leadership practices that are shown to be effective in one context may not be transferable to other contexts and it is therefore crucial to examine what instructional leadership practices are effective for what types of schools. To date, considerable leadership research has been conducted examining decontextualized instructional leadership behaviors (Neumerski, 2013). While these studies are valuable in developing our understanding of instructional leadership practices that impact student outcomes, there is an emerging need for studies to focus on school context and how that influences instructional leadership practices.

Evaluating the SAM model and its implementation process has practical significance to school leaders and their leadership practices. The SAM model offers flexibility in creating or designing the SAM position and it is a valuable resource to guide school administrators in the implementation of SAMs. If funding constrains the creation of a new SAM position or delegation of an existing position exclusively for SAM responsibilities (Model 1), schools might consider alternative SAM models by assigning SAM responsibilities to an existing position (e.g., secretary, dean, or assistant principal) with or without additional compensations (Models 2 and 3). The alternative SAM models make it possible for schools to employ the SAM approach without incurring additional expenditures or increasing personnel, enabling a wide range of schools to employ the approach in creating opportunities for principals to engage in

instructional leadership activities.

Focus group interview findings reveal multiple benefits of adopting the SAM approach in schools. In addition to releasing principals from managerial responsibilities so that more time can be spent on teaching and instruction, the SAM model engages others (e.g., SAMs) in leadership roles and in so doing it expands the leadership function beyond the principal and enables others to act and to lead learning. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) pointed out that a key strategy for principals to allocate more time for instructional domains is to share or distribute leadership and to foster collective instructional leadership. By having others to assume part of the leadership responsibilities, the SAM approach increases the time available for principals to focus on instruction and develops greater collective capacity for leadership. In the era of increased accountability placed on American schools, there is an increased urgency for school principals to find "the time and the capacity to lead learning" (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013, p. 13). The SAM approach represents a powerful and realistic strategy that school principals could utilize in their efforts to improve schools and student learning.

LIMITATIONS

Although the study found that elementary school and middle school teachers perceived positive impact in managerial and instructional leadership areas, the study results are limited by several factors that may be addressed in future studies. First, the teacher survey and focus group interviews were conducted in one large urban school district where the district administration was very supportive of the SAM implementation. In addition, the district had support from the School Administrators of Iowa through funding by the Wallace Foundation for SAM implementation. The level of support provided by the district administration along with the support from the School Administrators of Iowa may have created conditions for successful implementation of the SAM processes. The positive results from this study should be interpreted within this context. Second, teachers were surveyed about their perceptions of the improvement and extent of improvement in various managerial and instructional leadership areas after the SAM was in place in the school. Although surveys are efficient in capturing a wide range of areas in SAM implementation, the use of survey data may introduce biased estimates of effects. The researchers conducted focus group interviews in an attempt to complement and validate findings from the survey. Third, the study focuses on evaluation of the SAM impact on principal management and instructional leadership and results show that delegating principal managerial responsibilities has positive impact on principals performing various managerial and instructional functions. Ultimately, the SAM approach, with its emphasis on increasing the principal's time on instructional leadership, is to bring about better student performance. A logical next step to extend the current research is to investigate the link between adopting the SAM approach and increased student learning so that additional empirical evidence may be collected to add to the understanding of the SAM model.

CONCLUSION

The study utilized a teacher survey and focus group interviews to investigate the impact of SAMs on principals' managerial and instructional leadership in elementary and middle schools. The survey data illustrated that teachers had positive perceptions of SAMs in facilitating and enhancing the principal' role in building management and instructional leadership. Greater improvement was perceived in student supervision, discipline management, and in the frequency and quality of principal feedback to teachers. Additionally, survey results showed that the impact of SAMs was perceived stronger in middle schools than in elementary schools.

Follow-up focus group interviews with principals and SAMs identified ongoing communication and collaboration between SAMs and principals as the key to the success of the SAM model. The interviews revealed that the SAM position not only benefits principals by enabling them to allocate more time on instructional issues, but also benefits SAMs by creating opportunities for them to gain and develop leadership experiences. The SAM model was developed to release principals from managerial responsibilities so that instructional leadership becomes a priority. The model offers flexibility in adapting the SAM position to varying school contexts and holds promise as a practical strategy to promote the principal's role as an instructional leader.

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APPENDIX A

SAM SURVEY

Please rate if the following areas have improved during the period of time that the school has had SAM support and if they have improved, please indicate the extent of the improvement.

1. effectiveness and delivery speed of support services offered by support staff (e.g., secretary)
2. management of the building operations such as custodial services, technology infrastructure, and scheduling
3. supervision of students in the hallway, at lunch, at the bus drop, and at activities
4. management and handling of student discipline issues from the classroom
5. facilitation of data teams, building committees, and other school improvement processes
6. frequency of feedback from my principal's classroom walkthroughs (informal observations)

7. amount of feedback from classroom walkthroughs by my principal (informal observations)
8. frequency of administrative support for working with individual student academic needs
9. quality of administrative support for working with individual student academic needs
10. frequency of feedback offered by administrators on my teaching, lesson development, and/or technology integration in my classroom
11. quality of feedback offered by administrators on my teaching, lesson development, and/or technology integration in my classroom
12. frequency of positive reinforcement offered by administrators on my performance as a teacher and employee of this district
13. quality of positive reinforcement offered by administrators on my performance as a teacher and employee of this district
14. frequency of job-embedded professional development to enhance my understanding of curricular changes, program development, and/or classroom teaching
15. quality of job-embedded professional development to enhance my understanding of curricular changes, program development, and/or classroom teaching
16. effectiveness of implementing the Iowa Professional Development Model at the building level
17. quality of my teaching, as a result of additional coaching from the principal and content-area specialist (e.g., literacy coach)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions:

Principals

1. Tell me how you feel about selecting and supervising a SAM in your building.
2. Please share some of the most important management activities that you assigned to him/her or those that he/she volunteered for.
3. Discuss the mechanisms used with your SAM to control the calendar and prioritize activities for him/her.
4. Discuss your perceptions on how the SAM role has affected the operations of the school office.
5. Discuss your perceptions on how the SAM role has affected your access to and engagement in classroom activities with teachers.
6. Discuss your perceptions on how the flow, clarity, and impact of communication from the school office to school personnel have changed with the implementation of the SAM.
7. Discuss your perceptions on how the school has met the academic and behavioral needs of different student subgroups (e.g., gifted, Tier 2, Tier 3).
8. Please share some of the important benefits of having a SAM in your administrative team.

SAMs

1. Tell me how you were recruited or selected as a SAM and how you were assigned a building.
2. Please share some of the most important management activities that you were assigned to or volunteered for.

3. Discuss the mechanisms used with your principals to control the calendar and prioritize activities for him/her.
4. Discuss your perceptions on how the SAM role has affected the operations of the school office.
5. Discuss your perceptions on how the SAM role has affected the principals' access to and engagement in classroom activities with teachers.
6. Discuss your perceptions on how the flow, clarity, and impact of communication from the school office to school personnel have changed with the implementation of the SAM.
7. Discuss your perceptions on how the school has met the academic and behavioral needs of different student subgroups (e.g., gifted, Tier 2, Tier 3).
8. Please share some of the important administrative skills, knowledge, and processes that you have learned while serving as a SAM.

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