

# How To Lead Two Schools...Seven Miles Apart

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## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

I was principal at TCP (K-2) the past two years and this year I am taking on a second building, TCI (3-6) with an assistant principal. The buildings are seven miles apart which required a lot of planning and organization to manage my time. I decided to spend full days at each building to be as consistent as possible and allow the ability to complete tasks for each day. I am at TCP every Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday is a Flex Day, and TCI every Thursday and Friday.

I couldn't add to my plate, and I felt I was limited as to what I can do being at two separate buildings with two completely different cultures. TCP is open to change and I have taken them forward very quickly. They work in PLC's for math and English instruction, STEM, and are using data in their decision making. TCP is one of 40 Family Friendly Schools recognized by the DOE and we are working towards becoming a STEM School. I spent two months and countless hours gathering data into binders, surveying, and evaluating our programs to achieve this recognition. TCI teachers have little collaboration, do not look at data, many are unwilling to change, are focused on their evaluations as opposed to instructional improvement, and don't trust administration. With a good portion of my time being spent in the areas noted, I am finding little to no time left for school improvement. I understand it is going to take time to establish my positive culture at TCI that I have created at TCP, but I don't know how to find the time to. My assistant spends her time at the opposite school I am at. We communicate through Google Doc throughout the day, meet face to face at least twice a week, and meet at least monthly to plan and organize. Her duties include discipline, attending grade level meetings, scheduling, and assisting with most other duties other than evaluations. She is doing an excellent job and is also very busy.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research project was evaluating time management to track the average minutes per day over a month to gather data on how my time is generally spent per day. By collecting data on the time spent in various job duties, I would be able to plan and organize my time to more efficiently manage and lead my two buildings to best benefit students.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered how do I build the leadership capacity and create a time management system to lead two elementary schools in an effective manner.

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into my wondering, I collected baseline data over the month of September including the average time spent per day in the tasks observations, visibility, walk-throughs, communication, team meetings, student discipline, individual meetings, planning, written evaluations, and other duties (504 coordinator and school safety specialist for the corporation). I created a list of these tasks and defined each. I found communication and discipline are both uncontrolled, can't be planned, and potentially can pull me away from other areas. For example, one particular day I spent three hours on a bus discipline incident. The other areas are controllable to some degree. The average per day came to 10 hours and 45 minutes. I did not

include school board meetings, PTO, athletic events, or other school related activities in this data. I did include time spent writing evaluations at home either at night or on the weekends.

After collecting this baseline data, I reported my findings to my IPLI cohort monthly to gather feedback and make changes for continued improvement. Each quarter, I collected data on time spent on each task to compare, evaluate, and make changes for improvement. Data was collected on a google drive where I logged tasks throughout the day. This data allowed consistent and efficient communication between myself and my assistant principal. I also met with my assistant principal face to face once a week to plan and organize tasks for the coming week.

Throughout the year, I changed my building schedule four times. I started with full days at the Primary Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday as a flex day, and Thursday, and Friday at the Intermediate. I found this to cause a disconnect between buildings because I wasn't visible for up to three days at a particular building. Next quarter, I changed to half days but I felt I lost time in travel and had difficulty planning, organizing and completing tasks. The third quarter, I tried full weeks at each building, but the disconnect was even greater between the two buildings. Finally, I alternated full days and I found this to be my best fit because I could start and end the day in the same building, and there wasn't as much disconnect.

### **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things I learned include the importance of leadership in education, finding balance is important in a time management system, and communication is vital to effective leadership.

Building leadership is extremely important for continual growth in a school. I found two buildings can be managed, but they are difficult to lead. We were making huge gains in the buildings with STEM education and project-based learning, but without consistent leadership, these programs were showing little growth. It was difficult strengthening the teams in each building with a lot of my time being spent on paperwork, evaluations, and discipline (See attached data). If the two buildings were combined to one, I would have been able to combine tasks and focus more efforts on school improvement initiatives.

Finding balance is important in a time management system. At first, the focus was on my schedule at each building, but I realized this didn't matter. I shifted my focus to creating more time to meet with students and staff and work on instructional growth. The most important thing is finding a balance that is comfortable for me. As the data shows, the time spent on tasks increased throughout the year and this is due to an increase in duties as the year progressed such as evaluations and community events. Finding my balance as the year progressed, allowed me to reduce anxiety and focus on the students.

Communication is vital in a successful time management system. I communicated throughout each day with my assistant principal through Google Docs so we could pick right up at whichever building we were at. I also created a private Facebook page for all staff in each building to bring everyone together, and communicated weekly through a Friday memo on any important information at both schools. Meeting face to face with my assistant principal was crucial to keeping us both consistent and having tasks planned out for the coming weeks. Both schools came together bi-weekly for shared professional development. We used this time to communicate with teachers and get both schools working together towards shared vision and goals.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

First of all, I truly appreciate this opportunity over the past year to grow as a school leader. I would not be the principal of two buildings that are separated by 7 miles again, but I am glad to have had this opportunity to learn about my leadership capacity and grow as a leader. I feel my abilities as a school leader were limited in this situation, and the students and community deserve more.

Our schools need leadership for optimal growth. We are far from the times where principals manage schools. In my 6 years of administration, I have been the principal at the high school, primary school, and now both the primary and intermediate schools. I have seen what I can do in one building, and the limitations of being in two separated buildings kept me from pushing either school to meet my goals of school improvements. I am stronger for this opportunity, and excited to go back to one building next year and lead them even further than I once expected.

Being in all three buildings, I have an understanding that each used to function as individual units. This opportunity provided us opportunities to get all three buildings together in professional development and corporation-wide improvement. I plan to continue this improvement by providing more opportunities for vertical alignment across the corporation and shifting the focus from building to corporation-wide by creating and developing PLC's and collaboration efforts towards shared goals and outcomes. It is important for administration within a corporation to meet regularly to plan, organize, and develop programs with the whole in mind to be most effective.

### **References:**

N/A

Average Minutes/Day

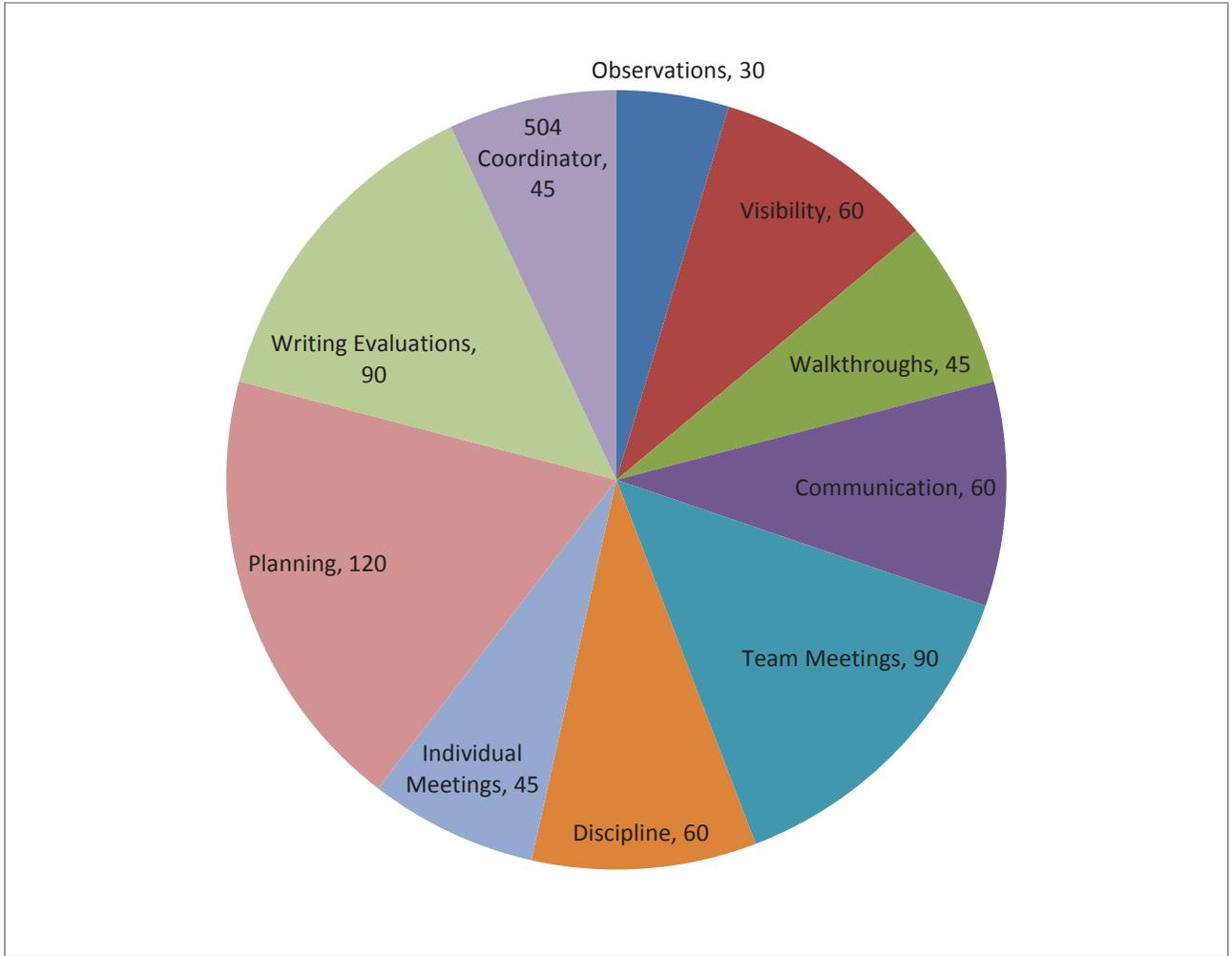


Figure 1. September

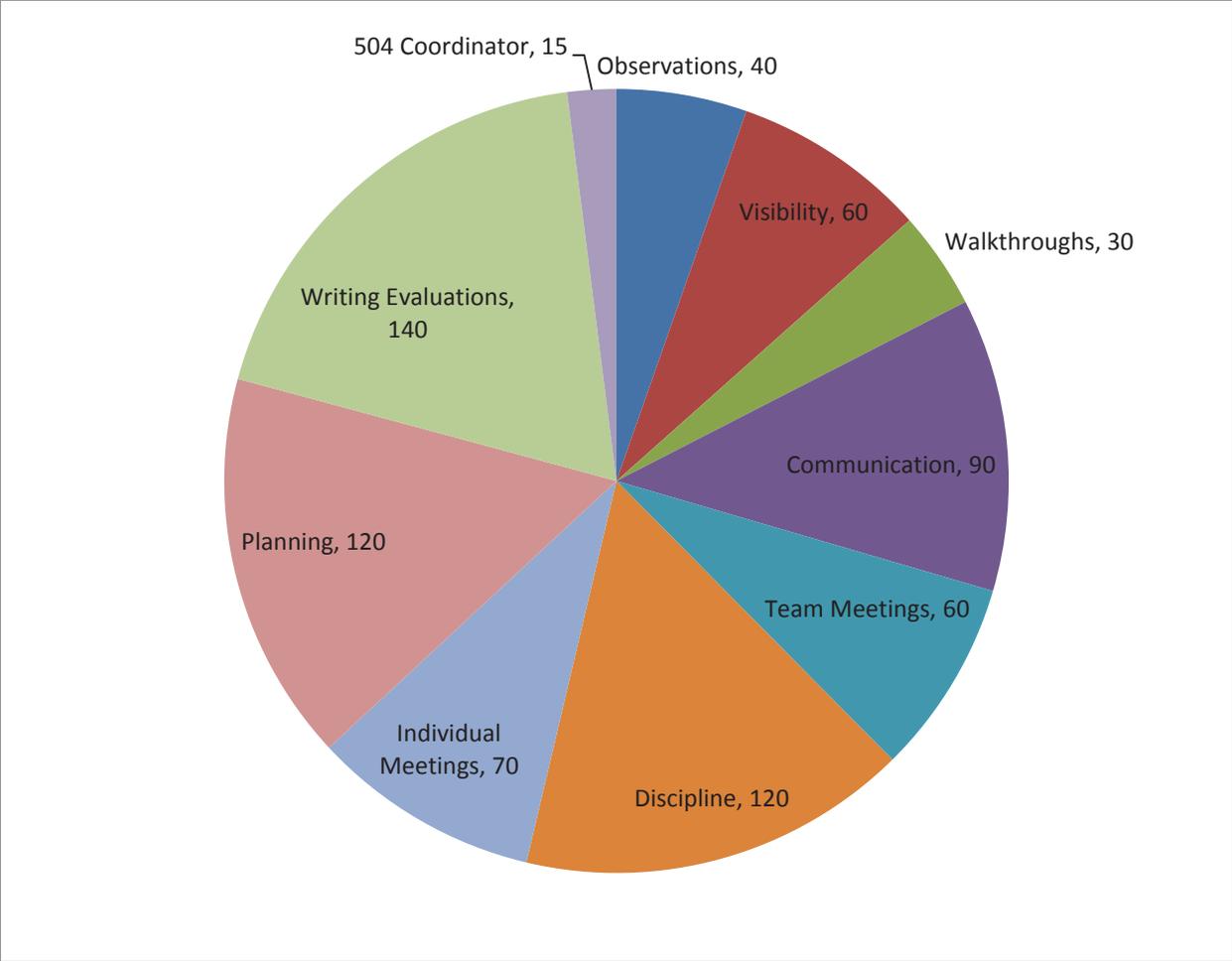


Figure 2. November

Total Average Time/Day 10 hours 45 minutes

Observations – Scheduled observations for evaluation process

Visibility – Greeting teachers, staff, parent from 7:20-8:20

Walkthroughs – Spending time in classrooms

Communication – Answer email, phone calls to parents, staff, teachers, Assistant Principal

Team Meetings – Weekly grade level, PLC’s, special education, RTI

Student Discipline – Bus, school, investigations, behavior modification, individual behavior plans

Individual Meetings – Post observation, SLO, TLO

Planning – Paperwork, state assurances, textbook reimbursement, SIP, Friday memo, professional development, mentor program, scheduling, etc.

Writing Evaluations – Writing up observations

504 Coordinator – Plan, schedule, meet, organize, and write 504's