

Booker T. Washington Middle School 54

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SLT Minutes

November 12, 2021

7:20 AM

SLT Members

Core SLT Positions	Teacher Representatives	Parent Representatives
Elana Elster, Principal	Elizabeth McNulty (co-chair)	Andy Weinstein (co-chair)
Jose Beauvais, UFT rep**	Erica Williams	Alexis Freeman
Lee Uehara, PTA Co-Pres	Kirby Mason	Erica Teasley Linnick
	Sara Lichtman	Karen Saltser
	Stefanie Cohen (co-secretary)	Dimitra Koutsantoni
		Cat Travers
		Yael Swica

*Late

**Absent

Observers: Anne Pejovich, Marni Aarlev, Nildania Perez, Ann Kristin Lapidos, Alison Gardy

The meeting was held remotely over Zoom.

Minutes: Minutes from the October meeting were approved, subject to correction of certain names, and will be sent to the PTA Corresponding Secretary for posting.

Agenda:

Use of Recovery Funds

- Dr. Elster reviewed the permitted uses for the Recovery Funds available to the school.
 - *Academic Recovery:* These funds are intended to be used to compensate teachers for small group instruction outside of school hours, with a focus on students who need services based on academic progress in prior years. DOE has prioritized 148 students who are below level and/or have special learning needs. The school has identified teachers who will be involved and is in the process of forming groups of students.

- The school and teachers have flexibility in programming. The social worker intends to use the time for social skills. It may be possible to also support peer tutoring.
 - *Arts*: The school has hired new arts teachers and is thinking about how to use the funds, which can be used for projects or school community work.
 - *Summer School*
 - *Social worker*: The school has hired a social worker.
 - *Remote Planning for teachers*
 - *COVID Planning*: The school was unable to use this money because it did not receive the required approvals before the 9/1/21 deadline
 - *Vaccine Policy*
- The group then discussed the challenges of getting the targeted students to participate in the programming outside of school hours.
- Dr. Elster noted that some of the funds can be used for school-wide programming or for consultants/vendors, and invited suggestions for programming and other uses of the funds. She said she would like to focus programming on social dynamics, interactions, and stress.

School Safety Staffing

- Dr. Elster said she has not received a response from DOE Safety as to when the school's other safety agent will be returning. She added that, even when DOE Safety is notified of an agent's planned absence well in advance, they still have not been able to provide a replacement. She added that the vaccination rate among safety agents has risen from 40% to 90%, which may allow DOE to start moving agents back to their original schools.
- A discussion ensued about how parents could be helpful.
 - Dr. Elster said that parents could send a letter to DOE regarding the lack of safety agents and offered to draft a sample letter.
 - The group discussed whether parents could volunteer in some capacity in the morning/afternoon and whether PTA funds could be used for private school security for the time being. Dr. Elster noted that, usually when a safety officer is needed, it's due to a conflict between students. She said she would need to confer with others about the idea, as there may be legal constraints on parent involvement. A teacher noted that, while it may be helpful to have extra hallway monitors or at lunch, parents should not be involved in de-escalation. A parent commented that, due to liability issues, parents wouldn't be able to just volunteer and show up and that training and supervision would be required, so parents' role might need to be limited to providing administrative support.

SLT Mandate

- Dr. Elster referred to materials she had circulated in advance of the meeting and described the role and obligations of SLT:

- Helping to develop educational programming and ensuring the budget is aligned the school's goals
- Providing ongoing evaluation of the school's educational programs and their impact on student achievement
- Advising on school-based decision-making
- Collaborating with the administration and faculty on programming and school culture
- DOE does offer SLT trainings throughout the year; the group will be notified of any upcoming training opportunities.

MAP Test Results

- Dr. Elster referred to summary reports per grade for ELA and Math that she had circulated in advance of the meeting.
 - Overall, the 7th and 8th graders performed much better than the 6th graders. It was encouraging to see that students at MS54 had been advancing during the pandemic.
- The MAP reports include both overall results as well as results for specific skills, so teachers can see the areas of weaknesses for individual students and for the entire class and can address those areas with the class or during Early Academy.
- Dr. Elster is looking into whether and how parents can access their child's results. In the meantime, teachers are able to share results with parents during parent-teacher conferences.
- In addition to the test, the MAP program includes resources to address weaknesses in specific skills.
- Several teachers then addressed the pros and cons of the MAP testing. While it was time-consuming for the teachers, and some students resisted taking it, teachers generally thought it was worthwhile for some students. For instance, for students with IEP's, the MAP results were largely consistent with baseline assessments that the school had conducted.

DESSA Surveys

- Dr. Elster discussed the DESSA surveys regarding social-emotional skills that teachers will be doing. In addition to the assessments, the system offers programming ideas and resources for teachers
- Teachers have to complete their surveys by December 4. Each student is being assessed by one of their teachers, but not necessarily their homeroom teacher.
- Parents will be able to access the results of the survey.
- Teachers said the survey can take up to 5-10 minutes if the teacher knows the student well, and less time if the teacher is unable to assess the student on various topics. Multiple teachers can work on the same student survey.

DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Professional Development

- A parent noted that there had been some concerns around how diversity was addressed in a recent high school admissions forum and that there had been a discussion at Equity Committee meetings regarding the curriculum. She asked whether there was professional development or continuing education for teachers regarding DEI issues.
- Dr. Elster indicated that all faculty are required to take, and have taken, DEI training. She added that she had asked the DOE director about outside resources, but didn't receive any suggestions back. She said she would do additional research to see what resources we can avail ourselves of.
- A parent noted that effort would be made to have a more diverse group of students presenting at the next high panel. She also noted that the PTA and PTA Executive Board this year are more diverse than ever. Another parent noted that the issue on the admissions panel had been how the topic of diversity had been addressed.

New business

- A parent asked how the tone in the classroom has been and whether students' attitudes and social tension had improved since the last meeting.
 - Teachers and administrators responded that students seem to be getting into a routine. Independent study skills still need to be reinforced. The weaknesses are most noticeable in the 8th grade because, typically, those skills would have developed better by this point. Parents played an active role in managing students' work and schedules during the pandemic, so students have lost a measure of independence. They need time to work on those skills and reminders and reinforcement about accountability and being self-directed. The range in students' skills on these issues is huge.
 - A teacher noted that she has made a practice of praising students for coming to Early Academy, as a way to encourage other students to take initiative as well.
- A parent expressed concern regarding the behavioral issues across the school.
 - An administrator said that the increase in behavioral issues was largely due to the pandemic/remote learning. Students seem to have a low tolerance for frustration and lack skills to cope. Small conflicts may escalate quickly and are hard to de-escalate. These issues are not unique to MS54. While school staff spends a lot of time dealing with these issues (some of which are about school, some not), and while students would benefit from more outlets, unfortunately there is often not enough time in the day to address everything. Large class sizes also make addressing these issues more challenging.
- The Wellness Committee submitted an update, which is attached to these minutes.

Wellness Updates for the SLT (from Alison Gardy)

1) The Mindful Moment Challenge (we modified the name from The Mindfulness Minute Challenge) will enter its third week on Monday, Nov 15. Dr. Elster recently rolled it out with the faculty. The project is the brainchild of parent alum and psychotherapist Dr. Vijayeta Sinh, who articulated the idea when she and I were talking about how to meet an urgent need for strategies to help teachers and students achieve centering, grounding, and a stronger sense of community amid the challenges of returning to in-person school, especially given the deficit of Safety & Security Staff.

2) Video link to the Nov 10 Wellness Workshop video with Dr. Sinh for parents/guardians on "How Can We Take Care of Ourselves so that We Can Continue to Care for Our Families" will be forthcoming. Given MS54 faculty rapport with Dr. Sinh, they may want to watch the video on their own time.