

Booker T. Washington Middle School 54

103 West 107th Street
New York, NY 10025
Phone: 212.678.2861

SLT Minutes

January 15, 2021
7:20 AM

SLT Members

Core SLT Positions	Teacher Representatives	Parent Representatives
Elana Elster, Principal	Elizabeth McNulty (co-chair)	Andy Weinstein
Jose Beauvais, UFT rep*	Rachel Weisz	Alexis Freeman
Laura Adams, PTA Co-Pres	Kirby Mason (co-secretary)*	Brad Roberts
Peter Armstrong, DC37 rep	Erica Williams	Hudson Roditi (co-secretary)
	Sara Lichtman	Karen Saltser
		George Schneiderman
		Jacqueline Shannon

*Late

**Absent

Observers:

Minutes from previous Month: minutes were approved and will be sent to the PTA Corresponding Secretary for posting.

Agenda:

- Approval of October Minutes
- Principal’s Update
- Assessing Student Needs Assessing Students
- Meeting Student Needs
 - Heterogeneous vs. Homogeneous ELL
 - Staffing Needs
 - Teacher Training
 - Afterschool Support
 - Equity issues
- Budget/Additional Funding
- HS Admissions

- Administration of SHSAT
- Grading Policy
 - Are NX grades being updated/adjusted after a student has completed the missing work?
- Enrollment/Budget
 - Filling capacity gaps in current 6th grade
- Wellness Update
- Equity Update
- New Business

Dr. Elster:

Presented at Elementary School Forum. Was one of the later presentations at the event. Dr. Elster tried to push the rigor element of Booker T. Those who deal with budget don't coordinate with admissions. So not sure how this will be handled next year. In terms of recruitment next year, I've had some discussions about what the future student body may look like. Key question is how to structure the school's academics and meet everyone's needs.

Important to provide a background for where the school has been historically in terms of structuring the school program. From 1993 when Dr. Elster started at Booker T, to 2000 when she became principal, the school was divided into 4 programs with little interaction (see the history table). Hirings were for 1 specific program. Dr. Elster was hired for Olympiad. As demographics changed, there were fewer international and bilingual students, and programs were merged. No students for bilingual special ed class, so that was eliminated. Then there was separation into honors and non-honors classes. School felt polarized. Honors was referred to as "Delta". After that era, students were merged. We should have a discussion of what we see as the best way to serve students academically. There is less polarization in the school under the current configuration. It's important to raise your voice as members of this SLT body. Please bring suggestions.

Suggestion was made to review how Booker T is configured academically.

6th grade: 3 ICT classes. Heterogeneously grouped except we pull students out for reading instead of foreign language. SLT suggested students needing to be together with friends under remote/blended learning. Majority of Booker T students are performing highly.

Self-contained 12:1:1 class in every grade level, with 2 classes in 6th grade.

7th grade: All students grouped together except the self-contained students.

8th grade: Some students are not taking Regents math or science.

Teachers would be able to speak to the challenges in terms of range of students.

Over the last 2 years, increasing number of gen ed students without IEPs at level 1 or 2 in gen. Ed classes.

Lower level gen ed classes mixed together in all subjects except for math (pooling). For 6th grade specifically. This is similar to the model for 8th grade in terms of trying to get similar math levels together. Having to schedule all math classes at same time creates real challenges for scheduling.

Socio-emotionally, it's very good for lower level students to be together with higher level students. But incredibly challenging to meet everyone's needs. Benefit of having them all together outweighs the downside. Yes additional supports are needed, but they need to feel they're part of the group, so that's an advantage of mixing levels.

The mission statement of the school relates to supporting students on both ends of the spectrum meeting their academic goals.

One teacher agreed with everything that was said regarding social emotional benefits of heterogeneous classes. It's invaluable for the community. I taught for both programs, when programs were different. It was difficult for me. Heterogeneous grouping will get hard, and we'll do our job as teachers.

Another teacher addressed benefits of the social emotional benefits. Tone and culture in the building when students are together heterogeneously makes it a much better place to be for teachers and students.

Another teacher described being hired when programs were separate, and wouldn't want to go back to that. However, I sit in 3 grade level meetings a week, and we discuss repeatedly how things aren't working academically for students who are falling further behind. Teachers feel stuck about thinking about the best way to approach these issues. In academic classes we get stuck and students fall further and further behind. We don't have parent representation on the SLT of parents who are struggling in this way. And some struggling kids didn't want to come to BookerT, and the parents didn't choose it, and don't share the educational vision. The perspective of that population is missing.

Teacher related their experience prior to Booker T. It was a lower performance school. What happens at Booker T is amazing in the ICT classes. Even in self contained class, the spectrum is high. It's great the way kids are grouped. Higher level kids step up to help the lower level kids. Also, they were creating friendships. They push each other in ways that are beautiful to watch, empathy developing.

Another teacher: One thing that could help differentiate across different levels, might be having teachers plan together more. If we tried more to teach the same thing as one another each day, then we could collaborate by focusing on groups of students in a shared way. Many lower level students are black and brown. After model UN, there are a handful of students that develop an air of superiority. I'm concerned about this aspect if we move toward homogeneous grouping.

Another teacher: The racial tension that was in the school lessened when heterogeneous/program integration occurred. We evolved and came to a better place after that.

As a BookerT parent about 10 years ago, it was 2 communities, and they looked different. Bringing the community together as one, from a student and parent perspective, there was positive change. From a learning perspective, we had the benefit over the years of having screens. How are issues of having a more diverse population being dealt with by other schools (outside NYC, across the country)?

Dr Elster: Based on locality, there are built in homogeneities.

Parent: Fordham U. put out a study several years ago saying 2 million students attend schools with no poor students.

How have academics been impacted by heterogeneous grouping? What did academic achievement used to be?

Teacher: Priority can be supporting lower performing students instead of challenging higher performing students.

Teacher: Some things are harder to do over zoom. In a classroom setting I know I would have been able to get those students to answer the questions. In Early Academy, 3 sessions per week, I can get the lower achieving kids to get it. I remember when we had different programs in the school teachers were uncomfortable to walk across different floors. When Elana became principal, one of the best things she did, was to change that and it made things so much better. There are things I can get back to doing when we are in person again.

Another teacher: In Booker T the curriculum is geared towards higher level students. The ones we aren't targeting are the lower level kids and they need more extensive planning.

Another teacher: In science I always have a mix in my classroom. I typically post 4 different assignments for the different learners. I'm able to do that because we (the science department) plan extensively together.

Elster: There are groups who work together cohesively. In some subjects the curriculum is more specified whereas in others the curriculum is more general.

Teacher: That's true! In math when we common plan it's about hitting certain beats, there is little wiggle room. We teachers will grasp on to different parts of the subject and focus on teaching that.

Parent: What can SLT funding do to help with the different learners? Can we get supports/floaters to come in and assist? There are large class sizes. Would more adults be helpful?

Elster: Could it be a situation where the teachers pull students to work on specific skills?

Teacher: That could lead to a place where students are segregated once again.

Parent: Not what I'm suggesting, what can we do to pull together the resources and assist?

Teacher: Instead of homerooms being grouped together, can students have individual programming per student? My fear is if we do that we'll end up with homogeneous groupings--low level, high level, students of color, etc.

Parent: I think both things need to happen. Maybe it needs to be more like scheduling for high schools and more individualized programming in certain subjects and they come together for others.

Another parent: We are still dealing with clusters. Maybe next year there will be a difference in the students who come in because of the academic diversity that will come in. But there could be a mix of levels that could then be grouped heterogeneously. We have no idea what the distribution is and where the families will choose to attend.

Teacher: There is a strange place when we think about ability groups. Test scores tell us something but not everything. Parents who have children on the edge will push for students to take Regents in 8th grade and then we have to schedule for them.

Parent: It seems intuitive to me that if teachers were to plan across the curriculum and meet the needs of the different classrooms. Share and use the materials.

Elster: In terms of planning, sharing resources can be a big push to get certain groups of people together and plan. Approaches may be very different and the choices they make are different. There are times I have to go into the meetings to get them to plan together.

Teacher: Sometimes the teachers end up compromising when they didn't really want to.

Elster: The other piece is that there are kids who really do need the push and need the acceleration in work. When my own kids started at Booker T it was like, "finally!" because they didn't need a book to get them through the day. There are lower level kids who need the push.

Parent: I'm wondering if there is a way to learn more, how do we get more parents involved in the SLT. Maybe getting the Equity Team involved.

Elster: Maybe focus groups, inviting parents to share their experiences would be a good place to start.

Parent: Is the Equity team a good place to get those focus groups started?

Elster: We can approach them to solicit more feedback.

Kyle Clayton (Equity): Actively looking for what to cover. Looking at racism, looking at interest groups. Everything is on the table.

- High School Admissions:
 - SHSAT: students will be taking the test in-house on the 27th.
 - Workload as test approaches will be discussed with teachers.
 - Rebecca Mansell will be meeting with the 8th graders to go over the HS admissions process in two assemblies.
 - She will also hold evening assemblies with parents.
 - Is there an effort to target families who may need more help in the process?
 - Ms. Mansell sent out a Google invite for children to join to know more about the process. The expected students/families will be encouraged separately.
- NX Grading:
 - Will grades be changed after the kids make up the work?
 - Elster: grades will be assessed at the end of the school year and figured out then based on a whole year assessment per each student.
 - Parent: My daughter received an NX, and after she completed the work nothing was changed. It leaves her unwilling to do the same if not recognized now.
 - Elster: I will take a look at the directions re grades again for clarity.
 - Parent: Is there any thought about trying to fill out capacity in the 6th grade? It seems like some kids, from other schools, would be interested in switching.

- Elster: We were around our projection of students for 6th grade. Right now the school budget is pretty good. Because of the teacher shortage I haven't been able to hire another teacher. There is a whole science teacher position open.
- Wellness Update:
 - We would love to collaborate more closely with Equity. Would it be possible to think of groupings free from the boundaries that stand in our way?
 - Next Meeting: Jan 22nd at 7:30am.
 - Game Night
 - Wellness Day: Speakers
 - Yoga-In - a massive yoga meetup in the school yard in the spring
 - Big Q: What kind of community do we want to achieve? Can we have other students assisting others? Can we rid ourselves of the structures in grouping, etc.