

Booker T. Washington Middle School 54

103 West 107th Street

New York, NY 10025

Phone: 212.678.2861

SLT Minutes

January 14, 2022

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	Dimitra Koutsantoni
		Cat Travers
		Yael Swica

*Late

**Absent

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

The meeting was held remotely over Zoom.

Minutes: Minutes from the December meeting were approved, and will be sent to the PTA Corresponding Secretary for posting.

Agenda:

COVID-19 Update

- The teachers discussed the challenges presented by the significant number of student absences, including keeping track of assignments submitted through different

platforms (Google Classroom, e-mail, etc.) and figuring out when students are absent for medical vs. non-medical reasons.

- Students who are remote are responding very differently to the absence of live instruction: (i) some students can learn effectively by reading the slides the teachers post and getting class notes from classmates, and can get the work done; (ii) other students can get some of the homework done, but they lack understanding without live instruction; (iii) others cannot do the work at all on their own, and (iv) some students are simply not checking their assignments and are not engaged at all while remote.
- On top of that, absent students are returning on a staggered basis, so teachers can't catch everyone up at the same time.
- Parents echoed that students and parents are overwhelmed, struggling with how to get students back on track after absences. One parent noted that, as taxing and exhausting as the situation is, it is temporary, as the Omicron wave is expected to recede within weeks, not months. Parents also expressed gratitude for the extra efforts the teachers are making and for maintaining a sense of normalcy. One parent also suggested that the current situation may present an opportunity to think more about a longer term model, including relying more on tools like Google Classroom.
- Dr Elster also reviewed the dramatic increase in cases in the school – since the holiday break, around 120 cases out of 750 kids, and approximately 12 staff members. She observed that some kids who are sick feel pressured to come to school. She also said that, whenever a positive case is reported, any student who was exposed is being sent home with a rapid test.

Middle School Admissions

- Why did fewer families last year rank M.S.54 first in the admissions process?
- The group reviewed the 2020-21 admissions data, which showed year-over-year declines in the number of students, by elementary school, that had applied to M.S.54 and that had ranked M.S.54 first.
- Members suggested several possible factors and explanations for the decline, including:
 - After a challenging year, families last spring may have been looking for a less intense transition to 6th grade and thus at less rigorous schools
 - Students were more involved in the process than in the past and may have had different preferences than their parents
 - Given the changes and uncertainty in the high school admissions process, families may have been focusing more on 6-12 schools like WESS and Columbia Secondary. There was also an increase in families applying to private schools and moving out of the district.
 - The absence of school tours, where families could see M.S.54 teachers and students in action and feel the energy in the building.

- Ms. Williams said the school is filming a new recruitment video and that there are other videos available on the Admissions page. She also reported that the school had received a high number of RSVP's for the Open Houses.
- Dr. Elster noted that District 3 had told her the percentage of students in the district who got their 1st or 2nd choice was very very high.
- There was also a brief discussion of the DOE's new policy regarding siblings in admissions.
- Later in the meeting, there was further discussion regarding potential opportunities for M.S.54 parents and students to speak with fifth grade families looking at the school. Dr. Elster said that WESS is having forums with parent and student breakout rooms – something M.S.54 could consider doing as well. She added that the elementary schools cannot host panels with representatives from the middle schools, because they would need to have people from every school present. She also said that M.S.54 students do participate in the Open Houses, but noted concerns about students providing inaccurate or inappropriate responses to questions or feeling uncomfortable responding to certain questions.

High School Admissions: Private School Recommendation Requests

- Teachers reported a big increase in the number of requests teachers received this year from 8th graders for private school recommendations. Given the changes and uncertainty in the high school admissions process, *more* students are applying to *more* private schools. Teachers typically only have a fairly short window – which often falls over the holiday break – to write what can be several dozen recommendations.
- One teacher asked whether the school could ask parents to limit the number of schools students apply to, but the sense was parents would not respect that.
- While teachers have in the past tried using a single standard form for recommendations, some private schools have insisted that teachers complete the school's form.
- There was also discussion about reiterating that requests should be communicated on a timely basis and that students/families should let teachers know in advance that they will receive recommendation requests from schools.
- One parent opined that the increased interest in private schools is unlikely to change significantly and encouraged a further discussion with Rebecca Mansell regarding how to address these issues.

Academic Recovery Funds

- Dr. Elster reported that after-school support groups started in December, with a social worker, speech therapist and teachers meeting with groups of students who were identified as having fallen behind. The school plans to open the program to additional

students if and as space becomes available. The constraint on growing the program is not funding, but rather sufficient staffing.

New Business

- In response to a news report about schools having insufficient PPE, Dr. Elster indicated the school had plenty in stock.