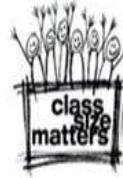




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What's the Story with School Leadership Team Meetings?

What are School Leadership Teams (SLTs)? New York law requires functioning teams at every NYC public school, made up of half parents and half school staff (which includes the principal or any administrators), to develop via consensus the school's goals and priorities in a Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). The SLT ensures the school-based budget supports and is aligned with the CEP goals and priorities. The SLT must be consulted prior to the appointment of a new principal or assistant principal, and the members collaborate on other issues and problems that occur at the school level. The SLT is supposed to meet at least once a month at a time convenient for all members.

The SLT is also supposed to participate in a joint public hearing regarding any proposal to close a school or make significant changes in school utilization. The team provides an annual assessment to the superintendent of the principal's record of effective shared decision-making with other SLT members. To ensure the alignment of the CEP and the school-based budget, any member of the SLT may request the Galaxy Table of Organization Report up to two times per semester and, in response, the principal must provide this report within five school days.

Who are the members? SLTs are composed of ten to seventeen members, and must include the Principal, the UFT chapter leader and the PTA president, with other members elected by their own constituent groups. In high schools, SLTs include at least two students. Representatives from CBOs that work with the school may also be included. The members of the SLT choose a chair through consensus.

What recently happened in Court regarding SLT meetings? The NY Appellate Court ruled unanimously on Oct. 25, 2016 that School Leadership Teams are subject to the Open Meetings Law, and their meetings must be open to the public. This follows a similar ruling by the State Supreme Court in 2015 in a lawsuit brought by retired teacher Michael P. Thomas. The lawsuit was joined by Public Advocate Letitia James and Class Size Matters, representing the rights of parents, advocates, and members of the public.

Who can now attend these meetings? As the Appellate Court concluded and DOE has now conceded, these meetings are open to any member of the public who wishes to attend. ***Parents of children at the school have ALWAYS had the right to attend SLT meetings*** – though DOE has given out contradictory and confusing information on this issue.

How can you find out when the meetings are held? The DOE has instructed principals that public notice of the time and place of SLT meetings must be provided at least one week prior to the meeting, and notice must also be given to the news media and posted in one or more public locations including on the school's website at least 72 hours before the meeting. The best practice would be for the PTA and/or the principal to send notice of SLT meetings on a regular basis through their email newsletters to parents.

If you are a member of the public and would like to find out when the next SLT meeting will be held, you can also call the school and ask the school secretary or Parent Coordinator.

What if the meeting room is not big enough? The room where SLT meetings are held must be large enough to accommodate all who wish to attend. If you plan to come and bring a large group, you should call or email the school at least 24 hours in advance and let them know how many people to expect.

Do you have the right to speak at an SLT meeting? This depends on each school's SLT by-laws, which are public documents. Ask to see the by-laws, and if you do not have the right to speak, you can also request that an SLT member to put an issue on the agenda for discussion and/or invite you to speak.

What about minutes? Minutes of items discussed and decisions made at these meetings should also be written up and made available to parents and members of the public within two weeks after the meeting is held.

What about the agenda? If there is an agenda, it should be made available upon request before the meeting, as well as any public documents scheduled to be discussed during the meeting.

What if confidential items are being discussed? If sensitive topics are on the agenda, such as School Safety Plans, investigations, or litigation, SLTs can go into executive session and non-members will be asked to leave the meeting during that discussion.

If you want more information or are prevented from attending an SLT meeting, email info@classsizematters.org or info@advocatesforjustice.net

You can also check out the Committee on Open Government website on Open Meeting Law at <http://www.dos.ny.gov/coog/openmeetinglawfaq.html>