

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES  
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
October 14, 2014

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on October 14, 2014 in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr., Performing Arts Center at the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

Mr. Scott E. Congdon, President  
Ms. Irene Boyle, Vice President  
Mr. John Allen  
Mrs. Susan Cummings - left at 9:10 p.m.  
Mr. Mike Morris  
Mr. Stephen Pirritano  
Mr. Ron Rudy  
Mr. Anthony Sposato

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

Mr. Robert L. Copeland  
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz  
Mrs. Theresa Hinterberger  
Mr. Anthony Devlin  
Dr. Gloria Hancock  
Mr. Don Harm

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Mr. Mark Shubin

**OTHERS:** Approximately 200 persons from the public, staff and press

**SECRETARY:** Mrs. Jennifer Burns

**SOLICITOR:** Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire  
John Torrente, Esquire

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**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Congdon called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Mr. Congdon requested those in attendance join in the salute to the flag.

**3. Announcements**

None.

**4. Superintendent's Report**

Mr. Copeland advised the Board on the following:

- Addressed issues that were raised at the September 23 Public Board Meeting.
- Mr. Congdon informed the public that the 5 through 8 middle school plan and the consolidation plan are two separate items and will be voted on separately.
- Mr. Copeland thanked the committee for their hard work on the 5 through 8 middle school plan study work group.
- Dr. Hancock gave a PowerPoint presentation on the 5 through 8 middle school plan study work group's recommendations.

**5. Public Comment**

Zack Cannimore and Caroline Angerer, students from Maple Point Middle School, invited the public to the annual Veteran's Day Celebration at 11:00 a.m., on Friday, November 7th, in the auditorium at Maple Point Middle School.

Robert Sanna, resident of Levittown, firmly expressed his opposition to closing neighborhood schools and moving fifth grade to middle school. Mr. Sanna stated that the community has elected the Board members and the faith in the Board is diminishing. He implored the Board to vote no on the consolidation plan.

Mark Fiore, resident of Levittown, gave a presentation on his research into the cost savings predicted by the Board for the consolidation plan. Mr. Fiore said the announced savings is misleading because the same costs would then be transferred to the new "mega" school; therefore, there really would not be a substantial savings. He said it would actually amount to a half of one percent savings to the budget, which does not justify all the disagreement and conflict that is occurring within the district.

Jeanette McVeigh, resident of Levittown, implored the Board to put the welfare of the children first when considering closing neighborhood schools. She said that life is hard enough and why make it harder for the children by taking away their neighborhood schools.

Frank Dugan, retired Neshaminy teacher, resident of Levittown, said that, as an educator, everything that he has read supports the fact that neighborhood schools are a better environment for children than large "mega" schools. He also pointed out the health benefits of children walking to and from their neighborhood schools rather than hour long bus rides. He suggested to the public to change the school board at the next election if the consolidation plan is implemented.

Steve Rodos, retired, resident of Villages of Flowers Mill, announced that the Neshaminy Education Foundation was established in 1993 and it is a non-profit organization that acknowledges the community's pride and commitment to the Neshaminy School District and students. He said the foundation provides grants and scholarships to students. Financial support for the foundation is provided through donations and fund raising activities.

Doug Hanisch, resident of Langhorne, declared his opposition to the school consolidation plan. He said that new buildings do not improve the educational outcomes. Mr. Hanisch acknowledged the current issues of 600 empty seats in the elementary schools, budget constraints and needed building repairs; however, he said there must be a more equitable, more affordable and less divisive solution to these problems.

John Lolli, New Jersey public school teacher, resident of Langhorne, said school districts need to provide safe environments for children. He stated that taking students who are vulnerable and at risk and moving them to an environment, which is not as safe as an elementary school, is irresponsible. Mr. Lolli said there has to be a better solution.

Bill Appleton, resident of Levittown, stated he is against the school consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school because these students are not emotionally ready to be in middle school.

Reita Bakshi, resident of Langhorne, thanked Dr. McGee and all the school administrators for a positive experience during "Back to School Night" at Neshaminy High School. Ms. Bakshi said she is encouraged by the constructive changes that have been implemented, but she would also like to see the return of educational programs that had been cut in the past. Ms. Bakshi said what matters most is that the funds are put toward the educational programs.

Raina Shoemaker, resident of Langhorne, voiced her support for the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school. Ms. Shoemaker said she is concerned with better educational programs for Neshaminy. She emphasized that it does not matter what school they attend or how they get there as long as the students get a quality education.

Dara DeMari, resident of Levittown, stated that the consolidation plan is not a fair and balanced plan because the students in the lower end of the district will not benefit from the new "mega" school and they are the ones that will sacrifice by the disruption of their schools and safety. Ms. DeMari said she would like

to see an analysis of the current costs of transportation and school maintenance compared to the proposed savings costs associated with the consolidation plan.

Bob Kraye, resident of Langhorne, expressed his opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school. Mr. Kraye said most of the taxpayers feel misinformed and unhappy about these proposals and some are not even aware of the issues.

Howard Lindner, resident of Langhorne, said it is important for the Board members to listen to the taxpayers and represent their wishes. He said there is a way to provide the best education for the students of Neshaminy and still give the people of the community what they want.

Darlene Csolak, resident of Levittown, asked the Board to make sure that whatever decision is made should be for the right reason at the right time. Ms. Csolak said 10 year old children are not ready to be put in middle school. She said they are not ready to have their innocence and youth taken away from them because they are children, not adolescents.

Mike Nelson, resident of Middletown Township, said closing 3 schools is not worth the small savings that will be realized. He wants to see a referendum on the issue. Mr. Nelson said he is against the fifth grade being moved to middle school. He implored the Board not to rush the matter and reevaluate the situation.

Jason Bauer, resident of Levittown, voiced his concerns about the 5 through 8 middle school model. He said he does not think proper examples have been given on the performance of this concept. Mr. Bauer also stated that while a lot of recommendations have been made, he does not see a specific plan or timeline or basic contingency plans if goals are not met.

Meg Offenbach, resident of Levittown, asked that the proposal of the new "mega" school be put to a referendum. She pointed out that Samuel Everitt Elementary School is in the middle of a residential neighborhood and closing it would present traffic safety concerns as well as possible abandon building concerns.

Tim Sauritch, Samuel Everitt Elementary School teacher, implored the Board to reconsider the closing of neighborhood schools and moving fifth grade to middle school. Mr. Sauritch said the voices of the public are being lost and overlooked by the Board. He said the majority of taxpayers are against the plan and it is the Board's responsibility to listen to their constituents. Mr. Sauritch urged residents who are against the consolidation plan to come forward and voice their opposition.

Pat Wandling, resident of Middletown Township, read the following letter from Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick.

Dear President Congdon:

In 1954, the Samuel Everitt Elementary School, located in the Snowball Gate section of Levittown, opened its door to 380 students, grades kindergarten through fifth. William J. Levitt, credited as the creator of the modern American suburb, built and designed Levittown as a complete community, with schools being an integral part of a neighborhood. Notably, Levitt donated land in each neighborhood for a public elementary school.

Levitt also was creative in planning the street names, with some reminiscent of their purpose or their location. For example, Learning Lane connects two sections with the Walt Disney Elementary School. He had the vision to foresee how the different sections formed neighborhoods and ultimately a community.

In addressing our school district issue, I see Samuel Everitt, Oliver Heckman and Lower Southampton elementary schools as much more than buildings. They represent our community history, the future of our

neighborhood and certainly the children who learn there. In the case of Samuel Everitt, it is the distinct part of the larger concept of a community's plan.

Municipalities and developers now look to include schools and other critical users into development plans to create walkable communities with ancillary benefits -- we can rely less on our cars, reduce traffic, improve air quality and benefit our health.

I grew up in Snowball Gate and along with my wife, Kathy, have chosen to raise our family here. Samuel Everitt happens to be my neighborhood school. I attended kindergarten there and have many childhood memories playing with friends on the streets, our yards and the playground at Samuel Everitt. I feel fortunate my children have had a similar experience growing up.

As a former school district solicitor, I fully understand the pressure school districts face in complying with government mandates, fiscal constraints and curriculum requirements in a rapidly changing society, but it is important to know our children are not line items in a budget.

School merger and consolidation plans are often considered a favorable solution to declining enrollment, however, these measures may be shortsighted. After reaching a peak in the early 1970's public school enrollment across the nation declined during the remainder of the 1970's and early 1980's but began rising in the latter part of the 1980s. Enrollment continues to increase throughout the 1990's, 2000's, and early 2010.

Over the decades, we've seen the enrollment rollercoaster play out across the county. Although today, Central Bucks School District is the third largest district in the state, in the early 1980's the enrollment was trending downward. Assured decreasing enrollment would continue, they closed three elementary schools; however, enrollment did not remain in decline. In fact, enrollment was on the rise by the mid- 1980's. It was gradual at first but by decades' end, it was rapid. Then Superintendent Winters said, "To be frank, we weren't prepared for it. We've had to scramble."

By the mid 1990's headline grabbing cost-overruns were commonplace. In one year alone, cost overruns at several schools hit the \$1 million mark.

Such occurrences were not limited to the Central Bucks School District -- school districts throughout the county had similar experiences. Rather than scrambling sometime in the future, I respectfully request that the Neshaminy School District Board of Directors to give careful and thoughtful consideration to moving ahead with their plans. Please take more time to study census data, real estate trends, the real cost of renovation and construction, faculty positions, class size and logistics. This information should be presented in public forums with ample opportunity for resident input and feedback.

Our schools are a critical part of our community plan and our country's future. There are many elements of the decision to close and consolidate schools that must be carefully examined. Revisiting the history of decisions made by nearby school district highlights the importance a holistic approach to these critical decisions.

Again, consider the concept of the Levittown developer - neighborhoods and communities that bring people closer together and in contact with the educators of our most precious commodity - the children, our future. Interaction comes easier with familiarity, which is why I believe this is a most important link in the decision - making process.

In closing, I am most appreciative of the dedication demonstrated over the years by the members of the Neshaminy School Board to our community. I ask that you thoughtfully consider your decision regarding proposed school closures and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Warmest regards,

Mike Fitzpatrick.

**6. Items for Approval Tonight**

**a) Approval of request for Sunday Field/Parking Lot Usage at Lower Southampton Elementary School by the Bucks County Soap Box Derby for October 18, and 19, 2014**

Mr. Copeland informed the Board on the above Sunday Usage.

Mr. Pirritano made a motion to accept the approval of request for Sunday field/parking lot usage at Lower Southampton Elementary School by the Bucks County Soap Box Derby for October 18, and 19, 2014.

Mr. Allen seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion by a vote of 8 ayes, and 0 nays. (Mr. Shubin was not present.)

**b) Overnight Trips**

Mr. Harm submitted the following trips for approval:

1. Neshaminy High School Drama to PA State Thespian Conference - York, PA - December 4, 5, & 6, 2014.

Ms. Boyle made a motion to approve said trip.

Mr. Rudy seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion by a vote of 8 ayes, and 0 nays. (Mr. Shubin was not present.)

**7. Items for Approval at the October 28th Public Board Meeting**

**a) Revised Board Policies #226, #325, #326, #426**

Mr. Harm advised the Board on the following Board Policies:

- Revised Policy #226 - Leave for Long Term Illness or Injury
- Revised Policy #325 - Medical Examination Requirements
- Revised Policy #326 - Leave for Long Term Illness or Injury
- Revised Policy #426 - Leave for Long Term Illness or Injury

**b) Implementation of the 5th - 8th Middle School Grade Level Configuration**

Mr. Copeland stated that the above item will be an agenda item at the October 28th Public Board meeting.

**c) American Education Week - November 17 - 21, 2014**

Mr. Copeland stated that the above item will be an agenda item at the October 28th Public Board meeting.

**d) Support of High Quality Pre-K for Pennsylvania**

Mr. Copeland stated that the above item will be an agenda item at the October 28th Public Board meeting.

**e) Act 34 Hearing**

Mr. Copeland stated that the above item will be an agenda item at the October 28th Public Board meeting.

Mr. Morris asked if the Act 34 Hearing is in regard to the closing of Samuel Everitt.

Mr. Copeland stated that the Act 34 Hearing would determine the top dollar amount that any new construction would cost.

## **8. Committee Reports**

### **a) Board Polices**

Ms. Boyle stated to the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for October 22nd, at 6:30 p.m.

### **b) Educational Development**

Ms. Boyle stated to the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for October 21st, at 6:30 p.m.

### **c) Finance/Facilities**

Mr. Congdon advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for November.

### **d) IU Board**

Mrs. Cummings advised the Board that at the last meeting there were several presentations and highlighted a particular presentation called, The Executive Functioning Summer Academy Presentation. The next meeting is scheduled for October 21st.

### **e) Neshaminy Education Foundation**

Mr. Shubin was not present.

### **f) Technical School**

Mr. Morris stated to the Board that there was nothing new to report at this time.

### **g) Technology**

Mr. Shubin was not present.

### **h) Facilities Ad Hoc Committee**

Mr. Pirritano announced to the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for October 23rd, and discussions will include the Tawanka project and costing and preparation for the Act 34 recommendations to the Board.

### **i) Legislative**

Mrs. Cummings stated to the Board that the next meeting has been scheduled for October 22nd, and welcomed the public to the meetings, which are well attended by State Representatives from our area.

## **9. Public Comment**

Michelle Palmer, resident of Levittown, asked if the foreign language program will still be reinstated in middle school even if the fifth grade is not moved up. She also asked if fifth grade is not moved to middle school is the "mega" school really necessary. Ms. Palmer also suggested that the referendum be a two part choice including the bond money and whether it should be used towards a new school or renovating existing schools.

Richard Eisenacher, resident of Levittown, stated that the issue should be put to a referendum and let the residents be heard.

Mark Fiore, resident of Middletown Township, demonstrated that the proposed savings is so minimal that it does not warrant the dissention that it is causing. He noted that Neshaminy should strive to keep the community intact.

Gene Sahn, resident of Langhorne, said that the supporting documents for the proposed savings do not take into account the cost of the new school maintenance, staff, etc. He urged the Board to give a better depiction of the actual numbers so the public can better understand the savings.

Jennifer Willeter, speech therapist, resident of Levittown, commented that the neighborhood schools that are being selected for closing consists of many families that moved to these areas specifically because of the community schools. Ms. Willeter also stated that bullying is a real problem and fifth graders are not ready to be moved to middle school.

Stacey Kirsh, resident of Langhorne, asked what provisions will be made for recess if the fifth grade is moved to middle school. She also said there are no after school child care programs in middle school and 9 and 10 year olds cannot be sent home to be alone. Ms. Kirsh said the Board is the elected representatives of the public and it is their responsibility to listen to what the people want.

Angie Manning, New Jersey teacher, resident of Langhorne, said it is a mistake to put fifth grade in middle school. Ms. Manning said the buses can be a source of mayhem and very intimidating for younger children. Ms. Manning asked what was discussed at the executive session prior to the public meeting in October 2013 in which Mr. Pirritano was appointed to the Board.

Gina Kiley, resident of Levittown, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Natasha Gomez, resident of Levittown, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Scott Glass, resident of Levittown, voiced his opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Jim Jenca, resident of Levittown, asked the Board to give more accurate numbers to the public regarding the proposed savings. Mr. Jenca said the bond issue should be put to a referendum so the public can make the decision.

Helen Miller, resident of Levittown, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Jessica Millward, resident of Langhorne Borough, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Joanna McGee, resident of Langhorne Borough, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Megan Chandling, student at Carl Sandburg Middle School, said it is hard for sixth graders to transition to middle school and it would be even harder for fifth graders. She urged the Board to vote no to moving fifth grade to middle school.

Melissa Perrin, resident of Levittown, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Raina Shoemaker, resident of Langhorne, said she feels that the school administrators are successfully segregating the sixth graders from upper classman and she thinks it will work with fifth grade also. Ms. Shoemaker said she supports the Board and she is in favor of consolidation and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Robert Sanna, resident of Levittown, voiced his opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school. He stated that this decision is being rushed and he implored the Board to take their time and reconsider.

Diane Byer, resident of Middletown Township, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Debbie L, resident of Levittown, voiced her opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Steve Rodos, retired, resident of Villages of Flowers Mill, voiced his support for the consolidation plan. He stated that the elementary schools need new innovative educational programs and the consolidation plan will achieve that goal.

Howard Lindner, resident of Langhorne, said that he respects everyone's right to their opinion; however, the fifth grade should not be moved to middle school because it will compromise the innocence of these young children.

Richard Geiger, resident of Levittown, voiced his opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Tim Sauritch, Samuel Everitt Elementary School teacher, said as a fifth grade teacher, he knows firsthand that these students are not ready to transition to middle school. Mr. Sauritch said he would like more details on the decisions that were made within the 5-8 committee, particularly involving the revisions on departmentalizing.

Kevin Moens, resident of Levittown, voiced his opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Mary Ellen Bowman, Samuel Everitt Elementary School teacher, invited Board members to come to her fourth grade classroom to observe the children and see firsthand that they are not ready to be moved to middle school.

Jason Bauer, resident of Levittown, voiced his opposition to the consolidation plan and moving fifth grade to middle school.

Matt Walther, resident of Middletown Township, noted that Congressman Fitzpatrick took the time to write to the Board and ask them to reconsider this decision. Mr. Walther implored the Board to carefully measure the facts and take their time on this matter.

#### **10. Future Topics**

None.

#### **11. Board Comment**

Mr. Copeland stated that the vote on departmentalization was not universal, but every committee member's opinion was heard and taken into consideration. He referred the matter to Dr. Hancock for further explanation.

Dr. Hancock concurred with Mr. Copeland that the 5-8 committee members did not come to a majority consensus; however, the recommendations that resulted came from the very best thinking and thorough information that was gathered from the meetings.

Mr. Copeland also stated that it is one of his goals to bring the world language program back to the middle school curriculum. He stated than any member of the public that wants specific information on the numbers

related to cost savings of the consolidation plan this can be discussed at the October 23rd, Ad Hoc committee meeting.

Mr. Rudy thanked the public for their comments and stated he is in agreement with the majority of the public - he is against the consolidation project. He explained that he does not see the cost savings of the consolidation project as truly coming off the budget costs. He said the funds would actually be transferred to another expense of the new school, so the district would not really be saving the amount of money that is expected.

Mr. Congdon suggested that Mr. Rudy forward his numbers to him in writing for comparison purposes.

**12. Adjournment of Meeting**

Mr. Congdon made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Sposato seconded the motion. Mr. Congdon called for a roll call vote and the tally indicated the motion passed by a vote of 7 ayes and 1 nay, (Mr. Morris.) (Mr. Shubin and Mrs. Cummings were not present.) Mr. Congdon adjourned the meeting at 10:00 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns  
Board Secretary