

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
January 8, 2013

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on January 8, 2013 in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center at the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President
Mr. Scott E. Congdon, Vice President
Ms. Irene Boyle
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Kim Koutsouradis
Mr. Mike Morris
Mr. William Oettinger
Mr. Mr. Mark Shubin
Mr. Anthony Sposato

ADMINISTRATORS:

Mr. Robert L. Copeland
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mr. Anthony Devlin
Mrs. Theresa Hinterberger

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS: Approximately 70 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, IV, Esquire
Chuck Sweet, Esquire

Mr. Webb announced that an Excessive Session was held and personnel issues were discussed.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Webb 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:

- Carl Sandburg Middle School Students send holiday greetings to our troops.
- Neshaminy students win Christmas choir contest.
- Neshaminy High School student council throws "Senior Citizen Prom."
- Neshaminy High School music department winter concert is Wednesday, January 16th at 7:00 p.m.
- Neshaminy High School Hall of Fame Dinner will be held on Friday, January 11, 2013.
- Revising the safety plans for all schools.

5. Public Comment

Howard Lindner, Langhorne, retired teacher, stated that the issue of school consolidation requires a referendum. He said this is the only solution that has worked in the past and it should be exercised in this case also.

Charles Alfonso, Langhorne, semi-retired business executive, said that he does not want to see any more ill-conceived Board decisions passed through at the expense of the district's children. He is calling for a

referendum to decide the school consolidation issue. Mr. Alfonso said the Board lacks the moral authority to make this multi-million dollar decision without taxpayer approval.

Carla Quinlist, Middletown Township, Penn State Associate Professor, declared that she is embarrassed by the lack of progress in the Neshaminy School District. She said that closing schools for political purposes is wrong and a referendum is needed to resolve this matter.

Angie Manning, Langhorne, New Jersey school teacher, advised that she served on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the school closure and consolidation matter. She proposed another option, which would build a new school at Tawanka and then create a dual school at Maple Point similar to Schweitzer/Sandburg and Ferderbar/Poquessing. She said this would accommodate students in the north western part of the district. She challenged the Board to sell this idea to the community and then have a referendum and let the people vote.

Rita Ann Thompson, Langhorne, Librarian, expressed her extreme disappointment over the proposed closing of Oliver Heckman Elementary School. She said that she does not want her child to spend additional time on a school bus each day and she would like the Board to keep an elementary school open in the northern part of the district. She called for a referendum on the issue.

Ed Kern, Levittown, retired, said he served on the Citizens Advisory Committee and he voted no for the proposed plan. Mr. Kern said he had 39 years of experience in public education as a former teacher and administrator. He stated that he is not in favor of super-sized elementary schools because smaller learning environments provide the students with a neighborhood atmosphere essential for the emotional, educational and social development of the children. He asked the Board not to approve the plan and find other options that will provide a better educationally sound solution to the problem.

Stephen Pirritano, Feasterville, self-employed, stated that while everyone ideally wants a neighborhood elementary school, it is now the time to make necessary changes for the good of the entire school district. He said this School Board has the courage to make the changes and move the district forward. He said the consolidation will improve every level of education from K through 12.

Presentation on School Consolidation

Mr. Pete Sparrow, a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee gave a Presentation on the committee's recommendation on school consolidation. He stated that the committee reviewed all available enrollment projections, building utilization and repair requirements, construction costs, and consolidation options. He also reviewed the consolidation option that the committee believes best meets the needs of the district from both an operational and educational need.

6. Items for Approval Tonight

a) Proposed Preliminary 2013 - 2014 Budget

Mrs. Markowitz reviewed the Proposed Preliminary Budget for 2013 - 2014.

Motion: Approval of the Proposed Preliminary Budget 2013 - 2014

Mr. Webb read the following motion:

WHEREAS, in accordance with Act I of 2006, the Board of School Directors had received a Proposed Preliminary Budget for the 2013 - 2014 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, the School District did on December 28, 2012 publish a Notice of intent to Adopt Proposed Preliminary Budget of School District as required by Act I 2006 of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

WHEREAS, in order to further comply with the Pennsylvania Department of Education interpretation of Act I of 2006, the Board of School Directors must adopt a Proposed Preliminary Budget.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2013 – 2014 Proposed Preliminary Budget is adopted in accordance with Act I of 2006 and it shall be made available for public inspection beginning January 30, 2013, as required by law.

Mrs. Cummings seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion by a vote of nine ayes, and zero nays.

b) Overnight Trips

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the following trips:

1. Neshaminy High School to York, PA for NHSCA Festival and Final Four Wrestling Tournament – January 11th and 12th, 2013.
2. Neshaminy High School to Rutland, VT for Annual Ski Club – February 1 - 3, 2013.

There was Board consensus for said trips.

7. Items for approval at the January 22nd Public Board Meeting

a) School Director Recognition Month

Mr. Copeland stated that at the January 22, 2013 Public Board Meeting there will be a proclamation made to honor the School Directors of Neshaminy.

b) Terms of Bucks County Technical School Authority Representatives

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the January 22, 2013 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion presented for the approval for the Election of a Board member to the Intermediate Unit Board.

c) Tax Collector Compensation Program

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the January 22, 2013 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion made to approve the Tax Collector Compensation Program.

d) Bids/budgets transfers

Mrs. Markowitz stated there are no bids and there is one budget transfer (Working Copy – 13 -2).

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for January 30th at 6:00 p.m. Topics will include acceptable use policy, weapon policy and public comment.

b) Educational Development

Mr. Shubin informed the Board that the next meeting has been scheduled for January 14th.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised the Board that a meeting is scheduled for January 15th; topics will include tax collector salaries. Also following that meeting will be a hearing on School Lane Charter.

d) IU Board

Mrs. Cummings informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for January 15th, which will be a dinner prepared by the students at the BCUI.

e) Education Foundation

Mr. Copeland informed the Board that the committee met last week and the Board approved an outreach program and a math program. He also stated that Mr. Larry Pastor has agreed to work with the committee and solicit funds from some of the local businesses.

f) **Technical School**

Mr. Morris advised the Board that at the last meeting election of officers were held and, John Doyle from Bristol Borough was elected President, Gary Sanderson from Pennsbury is Vice-President, and Stacy Garlatch from Bristol Township is Second Vice-President.

g) **Technology**

Mr. Shubin advised the Board that the date of the next technology meeting has not yet been set.

h) **Ad Hoc Facility Use Update**

Mr. Oettinger announced to the Board that the next meeting has not yet been scheduled.

9. **Public Comment**

Larry Pastor, Middletown Township, business executive, said that he hopes the Board will push forward the plan for a second needed charter school for the district. Mr. Pastor suggested that if a referendum is exercised, there should only be two choices – to close this set of schools, or that set of schools. He said we no longer have the option of spending money on buildings or on frivolous perks and salaries for staff. Mr. Pastor advised the Board to pull the offer that is on the table because it does not appear that the NFT is really interested.

Carla Quinlist, Langhorne, Associate Professor, disagreed with the information from the Citizens Advisory Committee on Consolidation stating that it is not purely a business decision. She said the decision must be made within the proper context of education and she urged the Board to look at the need of the students and said when there is a loss of community there is a loss of commitment to each other.

Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mills, retired, mentioned that Middletown Township still owes the district approximately \$250,000 for building permits from years ago. He asked why this has not yet been resolved. Mr. Rodos also said that he served on the Citizens Advisory Committee and the issue is not a new one, but one that should have been decided years ago.

Deb Harker, Middletown Township, bank employee, stated that the residents of Neshaminy are in favor of an additional charter school. She said that the charter school has a lot to offer the students such as robotics starting in the third grade. Ms. Harker said she hopes to hear an answer about the charter school soon.

Howard Lindner, Langhorne, retired teacher, stated that he does not understand the logic in tearing down a building from which the district is renting out and receiving an income. Mr. Lindner also questioned why the district would subject students to a super-sized school of 1200 students when this would cause a loss of identity and overwhelm the children. He declared that a referendum is needed so the people can be heard.

Kathleen Horwath, Langhorne, Council Woman, stated that the Langhorne Borough Council will be considering a position to encourage the Board not to close their community school of Oliver Heckman and the presentation will be forthcoming.

Stephen Pirritano, Feasterville, self-employed, said that he feels a grave mistake was made years ago by going to referendum to decide on renovating the high school instead of building a new one. He said the Board is elected to make decisions for the people and this is what representative government is all about. Mr. Pirritano said that if the contract is not voted upon by the NFT by the next public meeting, then it should be pulled from the table.

Charles Alfonso, Langhorne, semi-retired business executive, said he disagrees with supporting a totalitarian Board. He urged the Board not to vote on the issue without sending it to the taxpayers first. Mr. Alfonso presented an example of a Neshaminy parent who was not notified by any of the teachers

regarding a serious decline in her child's grades. He said he urged the parent to contact Dr. Rattigan for assistance and implored Dr. Rattigan to honor the parent's request.

Angie Manning, Langhorne, New Jersey teacher, said she recently polled the parents in her school district to determine the effects on students in the larger school setting. She said many of the students are overwhelmed by the larger setting. Ms. Manning asked the Board to take a closer look at the effects this decision will have on the students.

John Allen, Levittown, business owner, thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve on the Citizens Advisory Committee and give his input. He said it is time that something must be done.

Ben Schuhardt, Middletown Township, sales and marketing manager, stated that common sense must be applied in this situation. He said that while every parent wants a neighborhood school, it is simply not reasonable considering the facts. Mr. Schuhardt said that the same resources cannot be used when there will be 40% fewer students within the next few years. He called for taxpayers to come up with constructive alternatives that the district can live with.

10. Future Topics

None

11. Agenda Development for the January 22, 2013 Public Board Meeting

None

12. Board Comment

Mr. Sposato said that change is not easy but it is a necessary thing. He said the Board is charged to provide the best education in a fiscally responsible way.

Mr. Copeland remarked that he is familiar with the changing needs of a school district. He said that when he was presented with the numbers he agreed that change was needed due to the declining enrollment. He assured the public that everything will be done to ensure a sound educational environment. Mr. Copeland thanked the members of the Citizens Advisory Committee who performed their duty very seriously and did an outstanding job.

Mr. Shubin thanked the Citizens Advisory Committee for their time and hard work. He stated that we do need to hear alternative solutions and he would welcome hearing suggestions on how to handle the budget deficit and what programs would need to be cut if the consolidation is not the answer. Mr. Shubin recognized the accomplishments of the high school opera team, the football program, the ladies soccer team, among many other student programs who represent the district so well. Mr. Shubin said he is offended by the NFT's misrepresentation of the facts regarding the Board's proposals and negotiations towards a new contract. He said the Board has offered a fair contract and he urged the members of the NFT to apply the necessary voice to your leadership while there is still time.

Mr. Congdon thanked the members of the Citizens Advisory Committee for their time and efforts. He said that their suggestions will be taken seriously. Mr. Congdon reiterated Mr. Shubin's thoughts regarding the leadership of the NFT and the false accusations that have been made against the Board. Mr. Congdon reminded the public that most of the Board members have children, grandchildren or other family members that attend Neshaminy schools and have a vested interest in the Neshaminy education system. He asked how many NFT members actually live in the Neshaminy School District.

Mr. Koutsouradis thanked the public for their comments and thanked the Citizens Advisory Committee for their service. He stated that emotions must be set aside and a decision regarding the consolidation is well over due. He assured the public that the Board will do what is best for the district.

Mr. Webb clarified that with a referendum the question about which school to close would not be included. It would be strictly a financial question. Mr. Webb said he has not forgotten about the money that is owed to the district by Middletown Township and this will be addressed. He clarified that it was not Mr. Paradise that said \$3.1 million would be saved by the voluntary retirement plan, but rather the union president was the one that made that statement. Mr. Webb said that a final proposal was made to the NFT; however, the Board is willing to consider clarification if there should be any questions. He said meeting to clarify a question does not negate the fact that this is a final proposal and it stands firm.

13. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Shubin seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary