

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
May 8, 2012

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on May 8, 2012 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. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice President
Ms. Irene Boyle
Mr. Scott E. Congdon
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Mike Morris
Mr. William Oettinger
Mr. Mr. Mark Shubin
Mr. Anthony Sposato

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mr. Anthony Devlin
Mrs. Theresa Hinterberger

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS: Approximately 300 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire
Charles N. Sweet, Esquire

Mr. Webb announced that prior to the meeting an Executive Session was held where personnel issues were discussed.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:42 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

Dr. Muenker continued his presentation of the Possible Cost Savings Measures for the 2012 - 2013 Budget. Dr. Muenker proposed that at this time the budget gap stands at \$7,473,150.00.

Mr. Shubin asked what is the final date for the approval of the budget and when will the final numbers be given by the state?

Dr. Muenker responded that the final date for approval of the budget is June 30th. He also stated that hopefully everything will be in place by June 19th, which is the last scheduled Board meeting.

5. Public Comment

Donna Kramer, Neshaminy High School teacher, Langhorne, said that in her 25 years of teaching at Neshaminy she has seen many School Superintendants come and go. Ms. Kramer pointed the finger at Dr. Muenker claiming he has allowed the community to voice their dispute with the NFT and to disrespect them. She said that she holds Dr. Muenker, Mr. Webb and the Board responsible for creating a war zone by failing to stop the community from criticizing the NFT.

Bonnie Anderson, teacher, Buckingham voiced her disappointment at the prospect of changing the middle school model of team approach and the Instructional Opportunity Period. Ms. Anderson stated this proposal will be detrimental to the students by replacing an instructional period for students with a study hall. She urged the Board not to eliminate the IOP.

Jim Wyatt, teacher, Centreville, commented that the team approach during the Instructional Opportunity Period (IOP) in middle school is invaluable in raising student confidence and lowering anxiety. The strengths and weaknesses of each individual are considered during IOP as well as familiarizing students with what to expect during testing, what the day will look like or reassuring them that they are ready and prepared for the test. He pointed out that these advantages would be lost with the elimination of the IOP.

Stacy Kirsh, teacher, Langhorne, stated that she has recently avoided the public meetings because she is tired of the negative atmosphere that has developed. Ms. Kirsh thanked the certified staff at Pearl Buck Elementary School for their time and help that they have given her. She also thanked all the Neshaminy teachers for the work they do every day for the students in the district.

Jennifer Emrich, special education teacher, Holland, said it has been a wonderful experience seeing the success of the middle school model. She said the middle school model works well because of the teams and the IOP. Ms. Emrich said the IOP offers the students the opportunity for social and emotional learning. She implored the Board to reconsider the proposed changes.

Audra Elfvin, insurance representative, Levittown, remarked that the Maple Point Middle School students are very upset over the lack of school field trips. She asked if something can be done in the way of fund raising to correct this situation. Ms. Elfvin thanked the Board for their efforts in negotiating and she thanked the teachers for educating the students. She added that striking is not a solution because it will only frustrate and anger the parents and students.

Almando Carrasquillo, retired State Trooper, Langhorne, commented that students and parents who advocate saving school programs such as TLC and IOP should be addressing their pleas to the NFT for refusing to accept what the district can afford. Mr. Carrasquillo said there will undoubtedly be more program cuts if the NFT does not cease making unaffordable demands. Mr. Carrasquillo thanked the Board and Dr. Muenker for their service and stated that it is not their legacy that is in question, but the teachers who are leaving a bad legacy because they are abandoning the students. He remarked that Neshaminy is a school district that is hemorrhaging and a band aid will not fix the problem.

Andrea Berneck, store manager, Langhorne Manor, read a letter from her daughter, Kira, regarding TLC. Kira described how TLC has helped her cope with her social, emotional and educational issues by providing a safe, secure and friendly school study environment. She implored the Board to reconsider closing TLC.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired business executive, Middletown, quoted the ranking of Neshaminy School district as categorized by the Pittsburgh Business Times. Out of 500 districts in Pennsylvania, Neshaminy ranks 211 dropping 27 points from the ranking of 184 in 2011. Mr. Alfonso challenged parents to conduct a home evaluation of their children's reading and writing skills.

Debbie Vossah, educator, Bensalem, stated the definition of special needs students and the importance of providing these students with the best possible educational environment, such as TLC.

William O'Connor, employee of a New Jersey non-profit association, Middletown Township, commented that he certainly does not want to see any programs cut, including TLC. Mr. O'Connor said the arbitrator's ruling is a contradiction to the very rules set up by Harrisburg, which puts the Neshaminy School Board in a very difficult position. He said that he hopes that the Board will vote no to the arbitrator's proposal to send a clear message to the NFT and to Harrisburg that the Board is standing up for the sake of the children in the

Neshaminy district. Mr. O'Connor concluded by proclaiming that Dr. Muenker leaves behind a legacy of exemplary service to Neshaminy and the community.

Steve Rodos, retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, asked the Board if they must follow Pennsylvania law regarding closing TLC. He urged the Board to change the senior citizen tax program by doubling the exemption and including all families up to \$40 thousand of income. Mr. Rodos thanked the Board for finding a savings of 10% for the cost of busing. He asked why the budget has gone up \$4.3 million for salaries if there have been no raises in the last two years.

Louise Boyd, teacher and President of the NFT, Furlong, asked why the budget process cannot be more open and transparent. Ms. Boyd suggested that the Board is only transparent when it comes to doom and gloom and the budget process has been built around a "sky is falling" scenario. Ms. Boyd said the budget numbers are not solid or trustworthy. She claimed the fund balance has risen from \$3.5 million to \$18.7 million in the past 5 years. Ms. Boyd blamed the Board for trying to make the district look broke due to the contract negotiations.

Mary Cwiklinski, teacher, Vice President of the NFT, Feasterville, expressed her disapproval of an editorial written by a Board member regarding how the budget will impact the students. Ms. Cwiklinski stated that the editorial blamed the necessity for program cuts on teachers refusing to acknowledge that concessions are needed, which she finds is a ridiculous accusation. Ms. Cwiklinski said the cuts were due to deep reductions at the state level. Ms. Cwiklinski said the Board regularly advises the public that more program cuts may come to pass before the facts of the budget are completed and she compared this to pulling the fire alarm before knowing if there is really a fire.

Sharon Bremser, homemaker, Feasterville, asked the Board to save the TLC program for the sake of the children. Ms. Bremser inquired if the possibility of charging a fee for extracurricular sports programs has been researched in an effort to save money. She said that education comes first and extracurricular programs are secondary in importance.

Mr. Webb advised the public of the findings of the State Mediator, which Mr. Webb found to be predisposed in favor of the NFT. Mr. Webb estimates the cost to the district should this proposal be accepted to be \$3.7 million per year for the next three years. Additionally, with full step increases, level credits and a 1.5% salary increase, which would increase the payroll 4.2% over the current year and all these increases added to the \$14 million budget deficit would increase the deficit to \$20 million. Mr. Webb also stated that the Auditor's full report can be found on the Neshaminy Website.

6. Items for Approval tonight

a) Motion: Rejection of Act 88 Arbitration Award

Mr. Webb made the following motion:

I move that pursuant to Section 1125-A of Act 88 of 1992, the arbitration determination issued as an award dated May 2, 2012, in AAA Case No. 14 370 L 009812, be rejected by the Board.

Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

Mr. Webb requested a roll call. The roll call tally indicated that the motion passed by a vote of nine ayes, (Ms. Boyle, Mr. Congdon, Mrs. Cummings, Mr. Koutsouradis, Mr. Morris, Mr. Oettinger, Mr. Shubin, Mr. Sposato, and Mr. Webb), and zero nays.

b) Motion: Approval of the 2012 – 2013 Proposed Final Budget

Mr. Webb made the following motion:

WHEREAS, the Board of School Directors did, on January 24, 2012, adopt the 2012-13 Preliminary Budget of the School District in accordance with Act 1 of 2006, and made same available for public inspection as required by law; and

WHEREAS, Section 687 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code requires that the Board of School Directors prepare a Proposed Final Budget at least thirty (30) days prior to the adoption of the Final Budget, and to make the Proposed Final Budget available for public inspection at least twenty (20) days prior to the date set for the adoption of the Final Budget; and

WHEREAS, Section 687 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code requires that the President of the Board of School Directors certify to the Pennsylvania Department of Education that the Proposed Final Budget was prepared, presented and made available for public inspection using the uniform form furnished by the Department of Education; and

WHEREAS, the Board of School Directors has the 2012-13 Proposed Final Budget of the School District in the required form, and desire that same be made available for public inspection as required by law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2012-13 Proposed Final Budget presented at this May 8, 2012 Public Meeting of the Board of School Directors be made available for public inspection, and be made available for duplication to any person on request, beginning on May 29, 2012, and that the President of the Board of School Directors is authorized to issue the certification to the Pennsylvania Department of Education required by Section 687 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of School Directors will approve the 2012-13 Final Budget of the School District at a Public Meeting to be held on June 19, 2012 at Maple Point Middle School District Offices, Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center, 2250 Langhorne-Yardley Road, Langhorne, PA.

c) **Overnight Trips**

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the following trips:

- Neshaminy High School Model UN Club to conference at UN Headquarters and Grand Hyatt Hotel – New York City – May 17 – 19, 2012
- Neshaminy High School Foreign Language Trip to Montreal and Quebec City, Quebec, Canada – April 24- 28, 2013

Mr. Webb made a motion to approve said trip and Mr. Morris seconded the motion.

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

7. **Items for Approval at the May 22, 2012 Public Board Meeting**

a) **Appointment of Treasurer**

Mr. Webb stated that the appointment of Treasurer will be an agenda item at the May 22, 2012 Public Board Meeting.

b) **Real Estate Tax Universal Installment Payment Plan Resolution**

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the May 22, 2012 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion to approve this item.

c) **Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 Special Education Contracted Services for 2012 - 2013**

Mr. Webb stated that the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 Special Education Contracted Services for 2012-2013 will be an agenda item at the May 22, 2012 Public Board Meeting.

d) 2012 – 2013 Bucks County Technical High School Budget

Mr. Webb stated that at the 2012 – 2013 Bucks County Technical High School Budget will be an agenda item at the May 22, 2012 Public Board Meeting.

e) Bids/budgets transfers

Mrs. Markowitz presented the following bid for approval:

Bid No. 13-14

Bid Amount: \$97,067.00

Bid Description: Repaving of student parking area which includes 11,366 SY on High School Campus. This project was budgeted at \$120,000.

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for May 9th, at 5:15 p.m. Topics will include background checks for employees, and computer usage policies.

b) Educational Development

Mr. Shubin informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for May 14th, at 6:30 p.m. They will be discussing the Ombudsmen Program and the Keystone PSSA Exams.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised the Board that at their last meeting they discussed refinancing. The next meeting has not been set as to date.

d) IU Board

Mrs. Cummings informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for May 15th. The IU Board has invited several State Representatives to come and speak with the IU Board members.

e) Education Foundation

Dr. Muenker informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for May 14th. The committee will be screening applicants for scholarships associated with the high school.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis advised the Board that the Technical School graduation date is set for June 12th, at the Sun National Bank in Trenton. The school calendar was approved for the upcoming year. The technical school budget was passed and will be brought before the Neshaminy Board at the end of the month.

g) Technology

Mr. Congdon had no updates at this time.

h) Ad Hoc Facility Use Update

Mr. Oettinger announced to the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for May 15th, at 6:00 p.m.

9. Public Comment

Steve Young, writer, Langhorne, read a letter from his son, Casey, who is a foreign exchange student studying in Brazil. Casey related his positive experience as a student at TLC. Casey said that his path completely changed by attending The Learning Center giving credit to the entire staff for helping to change

his attitude about life. Casey said he will continue to be an advocate for TLC and he urged the Board to reconsider any decision to close the program.

Debbie Vossah, educator, Bensalem, continued her plea to keep TLC open. She said many of the students are in pain and they need someone to care about their pain. Ms. Vossah said that Joann Holland has a budget plan that would cost less than \$10 thousand per student. She suggested that each Board member get a copy of this budget for review before making any decision to close TLC.

Jennifer Bouton, financial services employee, Langhorne, said that the Board is leaving a legacy of putting the students first and fighting for a better educational system. She said that she speaks for herself, her family and her friends and they are behind the Board all the way. Ms. Bouton stated that the teachers need to step back and look at what is really important. She said if they want transparency, they should agree to televised negotiations; if they want to talk about dedication to their work, they should eliminate WTC and a strike option.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, thanked the Board for voting no to the arbitrator's proposal and for continuing to stand up for the children, the community and for the advancement in education. Mr. Pirritano said he was shocked at the arbitrator's report citing the section where she denied the Board's request for mandatory participation in Home Access.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired business executive, Middletown, continued his suggestion that parents conduct an evaluation of their children's educational skills particularly in the areas of English, grammar, punctuation and basic mathematics. Mr. Alfonso voiced his respect and admiration for Dr. Muenker declaring that Dr. Muenker will be leaving with his head held high. He requested that the Board issue a directive to all Neshaminy School Principals prohibiting the use of taxpayer money or fund raising money for the use of teacher recognition function without the written consent of the School Superintendent.

Sharon Bremser, homemaker, Feasterville, continued with her plea to keep TLC open. Ms. Bremser said that there are many things that can be done to lower costs, such as changing time schedules to coordinate with the mainstream school, parents contributing to school supplies, forming a PTO for fund raising to name a few. Ms. Bremser asked for information regarding the cost difference between TLC and the Ombudsman program.

Steve Rodos, retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, asked the Board for an update on the search for the new School Superintendent who will replace Dr. Muenker.

Deana Ziggmund, student at TLC, Langhorne, asked the Board not to close TLC. Ms. Ziggmund said TLC gave her the opportunity to set goals for her life and to improve her grades. She said she understands the financial problems that the Board is facing, but she hopes there can be some way to save TLC.

Christopher Dicardi, full-time student, Langhorne asked the Board to make a conscientious decision regarding TLC. He said the program provides a personalized and supportive environment for these students, which is what they need to thrive. He said he is aware of the financial situation that the Board faces, nevertheless, a child's mind is not expendable. Mr. Dicardi said the budget money should be reallocated in different ways, if at all possible, to ensure stability to the students at TLC.

Bonné, student, Penndel, commented that TLC has changed her life by helping her to improve her grades, her concentration, and her emotional and social issues. She said the acceptance and compassion that she has received has made a big difference in her life. Bonné asked the Board if this is only about money or if they really care about the students.

10. Future Topics

None

11. Agenda Development for the May 22, 2012 Public Board Meeting

None

12. Other Board Business

. None

13. Board Comment

Mr. Sposato remarked that the Board is not the villain and that while TLC is undoubtedly a good program the \$3 million is simply not there. He added that the members of the Board are willing to review the savings plan that Ms. Holland and TLC has created, but they have yet to receive a copy. Mr. Sposato voiced his disapproval of the first public commenter who made a personal attack against Dr. Muenker. He said the district's expenses are going up every year just to meet the needs of the teachers and the retirees who are leaving with \$27 thousand plus on the backs of the taxpayers and students and this is the legacy that they are leaving. Mr. Sposato concluded by complimenting the choir who performed before the ceremony.

Mr. Shubin rebuked the comment from the NFT president that the Board has not been truly transparent about the budget. Mr. Shubin said it is disingenuous for the union leadership to continue to use spin to change the subject, because the subject is the NFT's unaffordable demands are preventing the district from moving forward. Mr. Shubin said Neshaminy does not have the reserve fund necessary to be safe and to move forward and the Board is willing to show the books to anyone at any time. Mr. Shubin said that he agrees that teaming is a necessary approach in middle school and this will be looked at more closely. In honor of Teacher Appreciation Week, Mr. Shubin voiced his thanks to his daughter's teacher and to a teacher in his life, Dr. Flynn, who helped to shape his life and steer him on the correct path.

Mr. Congdon thanked Dr. Muenker for his service as Superintendent and said that Dr. Muenker has his respect. Mr. Congdon added that the teacher who came to the podium and attacked Dr. Muenker showed a total lack of respect and was totally wrong.

Ms. Boyle thanked the choir for a marvelous performance. Ms. Boyle remarked that regardless of the current differences between the Board and the NFT, teachers who serve 25 years teaching deserve the proper respect. She said she was disappointed that she has not received the report from the principal of TLC and would appreciate getting a copy. Ms. Boyle said the contract that was rejected at tonight's meeting was obviously unaffordable.

Mr. Morris said that Dr. Muenker is always very fair to the students and the staff and the insensitive remarks from the teacher were undeserved. He said that the attitude of the NFT is reflected in Louise Boyd's comment during a negotiation meeting that it is not her problem where the money will come from to pay for the NFT's demands. Mr. Morris admonished those teachers for walking out of the meeting as soon as the vote was taken to reject the arbitrator's proposal. Mr. Morris concluded by advising parents and students who do not want to see programs cut to voice their concerns to the NFT.

Mr. Koutsouradis said that the Board wants to find a fair contract that will be fair for the taxpayers and the students and not just the teachers.

Dr. Muenker responded to Mr. Rodos' question regarding TLC stating that it is defined as a program and not a separate school, so there would be no Act 35 hearing needed.

Mrs. Markowitz responded to Mr. Rodos' question about the salary column of the budget saying that dollars are added in the proposed budget to cover the Board's offer at the time the budget was prepared. She said part of the budget process is to project all budget costs and some wish list positions included in the figures. The figures will be reviewed and the numbers usually change before the budget is finalized.

Mr. Webb, in rebuttal to Ms. Boyd's claim that the district has an \$18.7 million fund balance, explained that the statement is incorrect. Mr. Webb said \$2.7 million was carry over from the previous year, which was used to pay bills, so the fund balance was approximately \$16 million. To balance the current budget, \$3.9 million was used, leaving \$12 million. Then \$4 million was put into the PSERS fund, because PSERS is constantly increasing. The \$8 million remaining is a reserve. The policy is to maintain a reserve of 4% - 8 %; therefore, the \$8 million reserve is \$4 million short of the maximum (\$12 million) or about \$1.8 million over the minimum (\$4 million). The \$1.8 million is what can be used for district needs. Mr. Webb said this shows that there is no huge amount of money that is unaccounted for. Mr. Webb reiterated that the district is audited by an independent auditor as well as by the state. In closing, Mr. Webb apologized to Dr. Muenker that he did not censor Ms. Kramer in her comments. He said it was a cheap shot and a personal attack, which is expressly prohibited in the public comment. Mr. Webb joined the other Board members in their praise and admiration for Dr. Muenker's professionalism and integrity.

14. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mrs. Boyle seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:54 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary