

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
BOARD STRATEGIC ACTION COMMITTEE
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
October 20, 2008

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on October 20, 2008 at the Oliver Heckman Elementary School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Richard M. Eccles, President
Mr. Frank Koziol, Vice-President
Mr. Joseph R. Blasch
Ms. Irene M. Boyle
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Kim Koutsouradis
Mr. William O'Connor
Dr. William H. Spitz
Mr. Ritchie Webb

ADMINISTRATORS:

Mr. Paul Kadri
Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Dr. Sandra Costanzo
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Dr. Geeta A. Heble

SECRETARY: Mrs. Anita E. Walls

SOLICITOR: Not present

OTHERS: Approximately persons from the public, staff and press

BOARD STRATEGIC ACTION COMMITTEE MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Eccles called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Eccles requested everyone in attendance to join in the pledge of allegiance.

3. WELCOME AND MEETING OVERVIEW

Mr. Kadri advised that this is an ad hoc meeting to discuss urgent issues that exist within the district. A list of about five areas in which discussions would be timely and important going into the next school year. In addition to Board members, members of the cabinet are also present. Mr. Kadri advised that this atmosphere will be slightly different than a regular board meeting.

Mr. Kadri advised that the main areas of discussion include facilities use, staffing, fiscal, contracts (not able to be discussed at this meeting), and student success (Improvement Plans). Within each of those areas there is a logical sequence of issues which need to be addressed. Many of the above mentioned are inter-related. For example, full day kindergarten has a direct relation to facilities and capacity and a direct relationship to fiscal situation. The district should be spending money on the highest priority items. Is full day kindergarten the highest priority item as it relates to fiscal?

4. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Mr. Kadri provided Board members with an outline chart for review.

Mr. Koziol stated that he made a chart which includes Student's Needs and Available Funds to meet those needs. Some of the items under urgent issues have already been allocated people and resources to take care of same. For example, for contracts, a negotiating team has been appointed, Facilities and Finance Committee discusses elementary school closures, Eisenhower usage, Tawanka facility usage, purchasing, etc. Mr. Koziol feels that Finance and Facilities handles a large part of the first two columns. Full day kindergarten, however, reflects on everything from budget, student success, facilities usage, etc. Mr. Koziol pointed out that most of the items on the chart are covered by committees which are already in place.

Mr. Paradise noted that in his opinion it is not the decision of the Facilities and Finance Committee to decide whether or not an elementary school should be closed or where should the Tawanka program be moved. These are decisions that the Board as a whole must make and, therefore, this is one of the motivating factors behind why these items need to be discussed.

Mr. Paradise stated that there is a limited amount of time in which the Board must make substantial recommendations to the community and decisions on the part of the Board.

Mr. Blasch stated that the Board has authorized expenditures to have the McKissick report completed and it is one of the items on the list to consider. The Board has not done the report justice, because money was spent and nothing has been done with the report. Does Neshaminy School District really want to go with full day kindergarten? Mr. Blasch is convinced that the earlier the district gets to the child the better; however, can the district afford such a program?

Mr. O'Connor feels that the Board and cabinet should begin looking at the issues as a whole.

a) Full Day Kindergarten

Mr. Kadri stated that the Board must determine whether it should be kept as an option to implement full day kindergarten. The cabinet's recommendation is to keep the option open.

Dr. Rattigan stated that a committee was formed and it consisted of Administrators (Dr. Rattigan, 2 elementary school principals, teachers from kindergarten, pre-first and first grade, school psychologist, guidance counselor, and reading specialist). The group met over a period of several months in the Spring of 2008 and they basically discussed relevant research on the benefits of full day or extended day kindergarten. They also discussed the costs of each type of program. The benefits of having such a program are very positive. Student benefits are all positive. Even though the district is putting money forth initially for full day kindergarten the remediation rates are decreased and the district saves money in the future. The group also discussed the number of classrooms which will be needed, staff members, etc. Pre-first teachers would be reduced and possibly less children will be referred to special education since they attended a full day kindergarten program. Dr. Rattigan advised that 8-10 teachers would be needed and 10-12 classrooms. The group recommended that this be phased in over a two year period starting in the 2009 school year. The reduction in cost of not having to transport students mid day would be \$137,000. The first year would cost the district anywhere from \$383,000 for a low estimate to \$511,000 for a high estimate. Each year after would also have costs ranging from \$343,000 to \$463,000. Salaries and benefits would continue on, however, furniture and rooms, etc. would be in place.

Dr. Rattigan stated that salaries were estimated at \$60,000 per teacher, not including benefits.

Dr. Spitz asked who authorized this study to be done. Mr. Kadri stated that he would have authorized the study in order to prepare for this discussion. However, a much more thorough study would be necessary if the Board wished to proceed with full day kindergarten.

Mr. O'Connor could not find any study that full day kindergarten would provide the above benefits since most studies do not follow the students all the way to grade twelve. Dr. Rattigan advised that the group based their information on recent studies for student successes.

Ms. Boyle wanted to know if specific number were available for salaries. Dr. Rattigan advised that with the contract negotiations the group could only provide an estimate.

Dr. Muenker advised that as a group we need to look at what direction we would like the district to go and it is obvious that any additional programs would put additional costs on the school budget. All trends in the State of Pennsylvania seem to be increasing time in kindergarten. It is becoming an anticipated need and the facilities evaluation is critical since the full day kindergarten will require additional space and closure of a building could affect same.

Mr. Blasch asked Dr. Rattigan to explain the funding of full day kindergarten from the State of Pennsylvania. Dr. Muenker advised that kindergarten is not a required grade level by the state and, therefore, funding is not received from the state. Dr. Muenker further advised that the state is funding for early childhood development and there are some grants available for a program such as this.

Mrs. Cummings inquired why Pennsbury School District has discontinued their full day kindergarten. Mr. Kadri stated it was for financial reasons.

Ms. Boyle noted that grants are available, however, with the understanding that the district will continue same in years to come. Eventually, the grants end and at that time it becomes sometimes impossible to continue.

Dr. Costanzo advised that the state does provide grants for full day kindergarten programs.

Dr. Spitz asked that if the district wishes to have a full day kindergarten programs will that definitely affect the closure of an elementary school. Dr. Rattigan also noted that modular classrooms are no longer in the district. Consolidations have taken place. I.U. classes also allow students to be mainstreamed into the regular education classrooms. Staffing is very complicated and class size maximums are in place.

Dr. Spitz noted that the district could not have a full day kindergarten program and at the same time close an elementary school building. Mr. Paradise is in agreement with that statement.

Mr. Paradise noted that if the district does not want full day kindergarten then the closure alternative should be discussed and everything is related to the budget.

Mr. Koziol feels full day kindergarten is a benefit, however, the economy must be considered at this time.

Mr. Koutsouradis inquired which other neighboring districts offer full day kindergarten? Dr. Rattigan stated that Abington, Central Bucks, Cheltenham, Colonial, Hatboro-Horsham, Lower Moreland, Bensalem, West Chester, Norristown, Upper Dublin, Upper Perkiomin, Wissahickon offer full or extended day programs.

Dr. Rattigan stated that the study is based on the enrollment projections for next year. Dr. Rattigan stated that full day kindergarten increases your numbers.

Mr. Eccles asked what is the cost saving over the life of the student if said student attends full day kindergarten. Dr. Rattigan stated that she can not provide that information.

Dr. Spitz noted that in better performing districts full day kindergarten at times is looked at as a glorified baby sitting service. The district should look at same for the right reasons, such as improving student success down the road, and not a convenience to parents.

Dr. Rattigan stated that extended day kindergarten would not be offered to every student, but is based on qualification and criteria.

Mr. O'Connor stated that the research does not prove a life long benefit to the students and given the costs and other issues the district is faced with Mr. O'Connor feels it is a back burner item.

Mr. Eccles disagrees with Mr. O'Connor and he would like to see how many students can be saved from special education due to full day kindergarten. At a young age, many children can be saved. Our goal is to be superior.

Mr. Blasch inquired how much instruction time is received during half day kindergarten and would more benefits be received by attending full day kindergarten? Dr. Muenker stated that half day kindergarten is a 2 1/2 hour day. Full day kindergarten would provide far more instructional time.

Mr. Paradise advised that if the district is speaking about making an investment, then the Board and community needs to be willing to fund that initial cost of that investment. Presenting a budget is basically assembling the costs of the decisions that the Board has made. This is one of the decisions that will be made and the district will either struggle to pay for or be able to reduce costs by closing a facility. Clearly, this decision will have an enormous financial impact especially in the early years. Mr. Paradise at this time is not comfortable stating that the costs of said full day kindergarten program will be approximately \$500,000.

Dr. Rattigan stated that it also very important to remember that educating the whole child is very important, socially, emotionally and physically. The kindergarten teachers will attest that there are just not enough hours in the day to accomplish all these tasks in a half day program.

Dr. Spitz inquired whether parents would be given a choice to have either full day or half day kindergarten or if the district went to a full day program that would be all that was offered. Dr. Rattigan stated that if it was that important to us as a district that it

should be available as extended day or full day. The committee's first recommendation is full day kindergarten for all children based upon the research.

Dr. Muenker noted that if a choice were given the transportation costs would be eroded and savings would not be effective.

Dr. Rattigan stated that the district currently has six pre-first classes. If the full day kindergarten were instituted, initially one or two pre-firsts would remain and then over time they could also be eliminated.

Dr. Rattigan advised that if the district provided full day kindergarten the number of children attending would increase because there are already children attending full day programs at other locations. Parents would then be saved the tuition money.

b) Grade Configuration

Mr. Kadri stated that the district runs two facilities with two buildings connected that provide a K-8 service (Ferderbar/Poquessing) and (Schweitzer/Sandburg). The elementary schools are considered neighborhood schools (K-5). Would the Board consider going to a regional approach having four or five regional K-8 type schools? This does provide efficiencies with transportation, staffing, smaller school, etc.

Mr. Kadri asked whether the Board would consider closing, for instance, Heckman, since a regional type facility could not be created at this property.

Mr. Koziol would like to have input from the educators and administrators to here the pros and cons of same. Benefits could exist from both. Neighborhood schools provide security to our children. What are the effects on the students, etc?

Mr. Blasch stated that he does not feel which is best and would need to yield to the educators to see what research has been done.

Dr. Spitz stated that the option of regional schools based on the McKissick report would require a fair amount of investment up front. One of the K-8 facilities would be Neshaminy Middle and that would require the Board to reopen same and require extensive renovation. Where do we want the district to go and what do we want it to look like ten years from now. Budgetary issues are always the first concern. Decisions are all inter-related.

Mr. O'Connor stated that he would not look at Neshaminy Middle as a total impossible project, since the building is currently empty and renovations would be easier and quicker and less expensive. Educationally recommendations are necessary from the educators, but economically do we want to invest money now, to save money in the future.

Mr. Eccles is concerned about the present scores within the district and three of the schools could possibly face school choice if the grades are not improved. Out of the five Title One schools, three, if they don't improve, the neighborhood schools (children and parents) could conceivably choose whatever school they wish to attend. Mr. Eccles larger concern is to increase the PSSA scores so that the district is not facing federal liability.

Dr. Costanzo noted that discussions with PDE and looking at the school improvement plans indicated that a small percentage of families opt for school choice. In most cases parents want their children to attend the neighborhood schools. Even though Mr. Eccles is correct that the district may in the future be put into that situation, it is very unlikely that parents would choose for school choice and that it would have a great impact.

Mr. Blasch stated that the enrollment of Neshaminy will drop by 480 by the year 2014-2015. Knowing that in advance it behooves the district to plan to handle that reduction in enrollment maybe by planning to close one or more schools.

Dr. Spitz noted that the Board cannot be frozen on making decisions on facilities or grade configuration based on the scores of certain schools or schools which may be potentially two years away from school choice.

Mr. Kadri advised that last March the concept of closing a middle school was begun. The Administration needs direction on certain issues in order to make an educated decision regarding an elementary school and hence the determination of Neshaminy Middle option, McKissick report and bringing all schools up to good condition, and then finally a long term capital improvement plan which will depend on all of this. Even if a regional approach were chosen, Neshaminy Middle would have needed to be closed anyway for extensive renovations. Whichever path is chosen, Neshaminy Middle would have taken the path that it has.

Dr. Spitz advised that the K-8 approach essentially closes five buildings over time and will impact many, many families and students.

Public Comment

Mrs. Kathy McGackin, Oliver Heckman parent, stated that she is all for full day kindergarten. Pennsbury went through all of this and would it not be possible for Neshaminy to borrow their data. They have been down this road and why should be try to reinvent the wheel and waste time.

Mrs. Dawn Abbromondi, Oliver Heckman parent, stated that she is opposed to full day kindergarten. Neshaminy would benefit from having new families coming into the district if we were to offer full day kindergarten. Full day kindergarten will not be the answer to day care issues for working parents. Mrs. Abbromondi would not like to see sacrifices like Art, Music, etc. which are things parents cannot have the ability to do at home and the district could provide these resources with expertise.

Mr. Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, stated he is pro full day kindergarten. Students being in school an entire day enables so much more learning. Mr. Rodos feels that it would cost the district approximately \$1M and savings to bus transportation. Mr. Rodos noted that many new students would attend and he does not see this as a problem. Mr. Rodos is not in favor of closing the elementary schools and having a K-8 configuration. When neighborhood schools are closed property values decrease by 10%. Property values are already low and stabilization is not happening in the immediate future. Finally, Mr. Rodos stated that the Department of Education has informed him that, if necessary, the district could charge people for full day kindergarten.

Mr. Ken Miller is a parent of six children and all children attend Neshaminy School district. The first three children attended pre-first and the twins who are in first grade were also in pre-first. Mr. Miller wonders whether a full day kindergarten would have benefited the five children. Mr. Miller is encouraging the Board to pursue a full day kindergarten program.

Mrs. Lisa Reiser, parent of children at Heckman and Maple Point, stated that she is in favor of full day kindergarten. It helps level the playing field and the instructional time is extended. Mrs. Reiser is upset that the Board is putting things off and decisions are not being made. The McKissick report has been in place for over one year. The information needs to be obtained and it needs to be discussed. When considering regional vs. community there are many financial decisions regarding the buildings? Elementary schools need to be brought up to better standards if the decision is made to keep all elementary schools. Facilities are a major factor and is it worth sinking money into the elementary schools since the buildings are all very old and upgrading them would just cost the district additional monies in air conditioning and heating.

(Continuation of discussion)

Mr. Kadri questioned if the Board would consider closing neighborhood schools and looking into the regional approach and investing monies up front for renovations for the purpose of obtaining a long term efficiency for the district.

Mr. Paradise advised that the K-8 concept is a middle school building and elementary school building. Examples are within the district on how they operate. Board members who are interested in this concept need to be willing to close five elementary schools.

Mr. Koziol feels that it more then just and dollars and cents issue. Neighborhood schools are important to the district and Mr. Koziol is not willing to close them just to save dollars and cents.

Mr. O'Connor stated that he would not close five elementary schools and incur what could be many more points of failure when there is not perceived academic benefit. Mr. O'Connor is not in favor of looking at the K-8 model.

Mr. Koutsouradis is also in favor of keeping the neighborhood schools.

Mr. Kadri stated that at this time the Board does not wish to pursue the K-8 model at this time.

Mr. Kadri summarized that there was a genuine interest from the Board to pursue the full day kindergarten program to see if this could be a consideration for the district. Dr. Spitz would like to see a phase-in proposal for full kindergarten.

Mr. Paradise advised that since the Board has ruled out K-8 does that mean that Neshaminy Middle School should become a rental property.

The Board was in agreement for Mr. Paradise to contact a commercial realtor to begin to aggressively look at the rental of Neshaminy Middle School.

c) Staffing

Mr. Kadri advised that the ninth grade will be moving to the high school which involves an array of changes. The Administration is suggesting an analysis being performed and bringing back to the Board with fine tuned information.

Mr. O'Connor is concerned that students may not be able to select their specific classes and scheduling. Lunch period is also a concern due to more students in attendance. Mr. Paradise advised the cafeteria has undergone an expansion to handle more students.

Mrs. Cummings raised questions regarding 9th graders using sports fields from middle schools or high school fields.

Mrs. Cummings would be a contact person from the Board and Mr. Kadri would gather information and Mrs. Cummings would be a liaison between Administration and Board.

Mrs. Cummings also referred to the reorganization of the Central Office.

d) Budget

Mr. Kadri stated that last year the Act 1 limit was 4.1% increase to taxes.

Mr. Koziol would like to see a zero tax increase.

Mr. Paradise stated that the budget process is assembling the cost of Board's decisions. If a zero tax increase is wanted, than please make decisions in accordance with that desire.

Dr. Spitz stated that he would also see a zero tax increase.

Mr. O'Connor stated that minimum achievement should be 4.1% tax increase and a maximum achievement would a zero tax increase.

Mr. Paradise advised that the single most significant item that affects all of this is the employee contracts district wide.

e) Student Achievement

Mr. Kadri stated that this is the district's core mission. Improvement needs to occur for all students and the foundation of No Child Left Behind. Mr. Kadri advised that School Improvement Plans are in place and reading by third grade is critically important to long term success of students.

Mr. Kadri stated that the district has looked extensively into the social and emotional development of students.

Mr. Koziol felt the last report provided was very helpful. The plan presented looks impressive and the district has a good handle on same. Mr. Koziol is in favor of moving forward with same.

Mr. Blasch feels the Administration is saying that the district could do a better job, and identify students much earlier and provide help earlier.

Dr. Spitz noted that if the Administration should identify problems earlier and be successful overall the district needs more data research capability throughout the district. Dr. Spitz would support spending additional funds to hire one data research person and he encouraged the rest of the Board to support same.

Mr. Koziol does not agree. The data needs to be made available to the teacher and the teachers need to be trained on how to interpret the data provided. The teacher is responsible for the child and works with the child every day. It is the principal's job in each school to make sure the teachers are doing the job. Teachers need to be educated and provided more training. The district has some of the best teachers and Neshaminy currently has too many Administrators.

Dr. Spitz that some additional commitment is needed to get the data, analyze the data and get it to the student level. A small additional amount of money needs to be allocated towards this goal. Mr. Blasch is in agreement with Dr. Spitz.

Public Comment

Mr. Rodos stated that he would like to see technology teachers into the elementary schools. The elementary schools should have on staff a person to teach this type of curriculum.

Recap

- Further research on Full Day Kindergarten
- Maintain neighborhood elementary schools/ Consolidation of elementary schools could occur, however, the regional concept should not be explored
- Pursue the exploration of the rental of Neshaminy Middle School
- Enhance research capabilities for the district
- Budgetary framework of no more than 4.1% increase with no exceptions
- Administration begin work extensively on transition for the upcoming year

Mr. Kadri advised that the next Board Strategic Meeting will take place on Wednesday, November 5, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Eccles thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary