

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
(PUBLIC MEETING)
May 18, 2005

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on May 18, 2005, in the Board Room of the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Richard M. Eccles, President
Dr. William H. Spitz, Vice-President
Mrs. Sue C. Barrett
Mrs. June R. Bostwick
Mr. Jason Bowman
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mrs. Kimberly A. Jowett
Mr. Ritchie Webb

ADMINISTRATORS:

Mr. P. Howard Wilson
Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Dr. Sandra Costanzo
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Mrs. Jacqueline Rattigan
Mr. Bruce M. Wyatt

BOARD MEMBER NOT PRESENT:

Ms. Carol Drioli

SOLICITOR:

Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

SECRETARY: Mrs. Anita E. Walls

OTHERS: Approximately 22 persons from the public, staff and press

Call to Order

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

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Announcements

No announcements.

Public Comment

Mr. Bruce Wyatt stated that at the recent Facilities and Finance Committee meeting held on May 11, 2005 the topic of the alternative education program at Tawanka Learning Center was discussed. Individual board members stated that their issue was not the need for the benefits of the alternative program, because we all agree to that, but the issue is costs. The committee requested information and the Tawanka Learning staff and district resource staff are working together to prepare a report that is planned to be presented to the committee at the May 26th meeting. Mr. Wyatt stated that some of the key points will be discussed tonight as the board prepares to vote on a preliminary budget. Mr. Wyatt introduced Mr. Paul Mahoney, Principal at Tawanka Learning Center, Mr. Grant Passman, Guidance Counselor, Mr. Joseph Kelly, District Social Worker, Tara Kayros, graduate of Tawanka, and Rob Schnepf, 10th grader at Tawanka and recent recipient of the WBCB community service award which he earned as part of his Tawanka community service project.

Mr. Paul Mahoney, Principal at Tawanka Learning Center, addressed the student enrollment and relationship to building costs and also the consideration of opening enrollment to neighboring districts. Current school year enrollment is 69. Revenues received from leasing 11 of the 25 classrooms to Bucks County Intermediate Unit must be reflected in an accurate analysis of Tawanka's operating budget. Additionally, Tawanka houses and operates the district's alternative suspension program that provides an additional savings to the district. Mr. Mahoney stated that he strongly believes that bringing in outside students would be a tremendous mistake. Tawanka works well with Neshaminy students because we have an invested Neshaminy staff and administration; we know the students, issues and families. Students from other districts could be inviting disaster. The district would not know what issues and problems they would be getting. Other districts would not be sending Neshaminy their best and brightest. Mr. Mahoney is concerned to place a volatile student in an already fragile environment and you are inviting chaos.

Mr. Grant Passman, Guidance Counselor at Tawanka Learning Center made the following three points:

1. Graduation rates – 26 seniors, 22 will graduate on time and without this program only 2 of the students would probably graduate. Ten of the graduates have been accepted to college, 1 to a vocational trade school.
2. Service Learning Program – Integral part of Tawanka Learning Center which comes at no additional cost to the taxpayers because it is grant funded. The program includes making quilts for terminally ill children, visiting nursing homes, providing tutoring to Lower Southampton Elementary School and three year Partnership with Aid for Friends which provides meals for the elderly, frail, disabled senior citizens. Tawanka students through the grant monies that are received have cooked thousands of meals that have been distributed throughout the community.
3. Teen Suicide – Touched the Neshaminy community. Part of the answer at Tawanka is the relationship and connection that has been provided to the students. What tragedies have been averted due to the Tawanka Learning Center? Tawanka has provided some of the district's neediest students the opportunity to attend a program like Tawanka. The district and community can be proud of this.

Mr. Joe Kelly, Social Worker who has worked for the district for 33 years. Mr. Kelly recognizes the good things occurring at the Tawanka Learning Center. Mr. Kelly's primary duties are placing students and primary tools in helping to alter student's lives that are running into trouble in school. Mr. Kelly stated that Tawanka is one of the finest programs around. Mr. Kelly stated that it is in his best interest to have the best program available to students in order that students in his case load have a suitable place to learn. Mr. Kelly's case load is between 200-300 students per school year. Mr. Kelly noted that the dissolution of what was used to be known as a community mental health system is occurring right before our eyes. The onset of managed care has diluted away individual counseling services, placement services, etc. The school districts need to fill the void for students in trouble. Mr. Wilson was very instrumental in developing this program since he had seen a model in the past and recognized that there is a great population of students that fall by the wayside. Tawanka has altered the lives of many students. Mr. Kelly is very proud of the staff and their dedication and finds the program to be very cost effective. Mr. Kelly strongly supports its continuance.

Ms. Tara Kayros, recent graduate of Tawanka Learning Center in 2003 the first year that Tawanka was opened. As a sophomore at the high school education was difficult at times. Ms. Kayros noted that she did not have major problems, but learning in a huge setting was difficult and hard to complete her work. Ms. Kayros noted that she would not have been a graduate if it would not have been for Tawanka. The students at Tawanka receive one on one education with their teachers. The students know them on a more personal level and the students are not nervous asking questions. The student's ratio is much smaller than at the high school. Ms. Kayros noted that she greatly benefited from the Service Learning Program. The students have the opportunity to work with elderly and younger students with tutoring. The program makes a world of difference for the students that attend Tawanka.

Mr. Rob Schnepf, 10th grade student at Tawanka, stated that he has received many benefits from attending Tawanka Learning Center. Rob stated that he went from straight F's in his freshman year to getting good grades. Rob won the WBCB award for community service. Rob had problems when he first came to Tawanka, but the school has tremendously assisted him. The class size is smaller and Rob needed that extra attention. The teachers are willing to meet you half way and the help received gets the students by. Rob advised that a regular school environment was not for him. Tawanka is providing the type of education for him that is necessary for him to succeed.

Mr. Solis Basen, Langhorne, PA, stated that the only problem that he can see with Neshaminy School District is the infestation of geese. Mr. Basen is also concerned with the lack of the backbone of the lame duck members of the board. Mr. Basen feels that they are obligated to be part of it and not duck out at the last few minutes.

Mr. William O'Connor, Langhorne, PA, noted that the board has to make a decision tonight about Act 72 which is a very complicated piece of legislature. Mr. O'Connor noted that Governor Rendell has stated on many occasions that he does not believe in referendum. Mr. O'Connor feels the governor should give voters the approval process for state budgets. There is much more waste on the state level than the community level. The Governor has threatened the school districts to opt in. The negative impacts of Act 72 are very far reaching. Two-thirds of the school districts have opted out. The district through its website and TV encouraged everyone to file their application. Mr. O'Connor does not support Act 72, but he also filed the application. Mr. O'Connor stated that better legislation can be achieved. Mr. O'Connor stated that whatever happens this evening please do not use this issue as political collateral against one another. It is a difficult decision and there is no easy choice, but one needs to be made. Mr. O'Connor wished the board well.

Ms. Helene Ratner, Langhorne, PA, spoke about the children in the neighborhood and the incidents at the high school in the past couple of weeks. Ms. Ratner is concerned about the students of the district. Mr. Ratner is a graduate of the district and she stated that for any students listening, she does not care what you are going through, but your high school years are the best times of your life. Whatever types of pressures that students are experiencing, there is help and people to help you. Things are not that bad that you need to do something to end your life. Ms. Ratner stressed for the students to reach out to people in the community. Ms. Ratner urged students to seek people and do not resort to extreme measures. Ms. Ratner hoped that the district was speeding up the process to assist in these matters.

Mr. Phil Schieber, Langhorne, PA, stated that he agrees with most of what Mr. O'Connor said about Act 72 and its flaws. Nevertheless, the district needs to opt into Act 72 to assist with revenues. Mr. Schieber refers to the Act as the Wealth Distribution Act because property tax is being sifted, but a lot of money is being sifted into the class one cities of the state. That is the major objective of the Governor. Mr. Schieber stated that language coming out of Harrisburg is nasty and mean. If the district does not act on same positively this time, it will be forced down the district's throats or pull it off the table completely. Mr. Schieber noted that if you don't vote "Yes" forget about sharing in the pot.

Mrs. Cummings thanked both students who came from the Tawanka Learning Center for attending the meeting this evening and sharing the views about Tawanka.

Mr. Eccles commended the efforts of the Neshaminy employees, but public comment should not be turned into a forum for employment and education issues. Mr. Eccles commended Tara and Rob, but Mr. Eccles is very disappointed with the Director of Secondary Education that he needed to do this during public comment. Mr. Eccles noted that this a committee issue and it could be placed on the agenda.

Mr. Webb noted that the directive was to check into alternative means. Mr. Webb noted that board in not anti Tawanka. It was made very clear at committee that all the services provided are very important and necessary. Mr. Webb has information that the district is paying \$40,000 per student and this may be excessive. If the program is cost effective then so be it. If not then maybe changes can occur. Mr. Webb does resent the approach that was taken with the issue. Mr. Webb does not want to cut any programs or hurt any students. Mr. Webb feels that all the staff is doing a great job.

Mrs. Bostwick noted that the state is not looking out for school districts or seniors. The state is already putting together a Gambling Addicts program because the seniors will get caught up with the gambling. The working families that are paying taxes will be supporting that program. Act 72 is not a good thing and it should be sent back to Harrisburg and it should be done right and fair for everyone.

Dr. Spitz hopes that we can be professional and not make personal accusations to staff or members of the public. The district has had staff members and other employees come and speak before the board during public comment. Dr. Spitz noted it is not the traditional way to address the issues, but obviously it reflects the very strong feelings that are had for Tawanka Learning Center. Dr. Spitz thanked the members of the staff and students of Tawanka for the information that was provided.

Mrs. Barrett thanked Tara and Rob for speaking before the board. Mrs. Barrett noted that their speaking gives her the courage and heart to continue.

Mrs. Doris Reilly stated that she attended a meeting conducted by Matt Wright last week concerning Act 72. Mrs. Reilly stated that Mr. Wright stated that school boards have another option to Act 72, yes or no, and that is putting it to referendum to the voters. Mrs. Reilly feels the legislation is flawed, but it is an alternative and it is something that could give some relief. Mrs. Reilly hopes the board opts into Act 72.

Superintendent's Report

Mr. Wilson announced that the task force is moving as quickly as possible with the issues facing Neshaminy. Dr. Langman and two national consultants will also be participating. The district is searching for answers and children are our most precious commodities.

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Walls noted that there will be one correction to the April 26th meeting minutes under Other Board Business, Pike Holding Co., L.P, Tax Map Parcel #22-047-011-002 tax year 2005 figure of \$193,750 will be multiplied by 4 in order to make the figure \$775,000. Mr. Profy confirmed that is the correct the number for the 2005 tax year.

Upon motion of Mr. Bowman and seconded by Mrs. Jowett, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the April 26, 2005 Public Meeting.

Approval of Treasurer's Report, Bills for Payment, Investments, and Exonerations of Personal and Per Capita Tax – Mr. Paradise presented the following for approval:

- April 2005 Treasurer's Report, subject to audit
- Bills for payment Check Register – April 2005
- Escrow Fund, Capital Project Funds, Investment Funds, and New Investment
- Budget Transfer Report – Working Copy 05-4
- Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations – April 2005

Dr. Spitz moved the April 2005 Treasurer's Report be approved, subject to audit, and the April 2005 bills for payment, Budget, Escrow Funds, Capital Project Funds, Investments Funds, Budget Transfer Report – Working Copy 05-4 and Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations. Mr. Bowman seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the Treasurer's Reports, subject to audit, bills for payment (as per amendment), investments, escrow funds, and capital project funds, budget transfer report – working copy 05-4 personal and per capita tax exonerations.

Certified and Support Personnel Actions

Mr. Wilson presented the following for approval:

- Elections of Certified Personnel
- Resignations/Leaves of Certified Personnel
- Elections of Support Personnel
- Resignations/Leaves of Support Personnel
- Sabbatical Leaves of Certified Personnel

Mr. Wilson requested approval of the personnel report as presented.

Mr. Bowman moved the personnel report be accepted. Mrs. Cummings seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the personnel report.

Motion: Approval of Act 72

Mr. Eccles presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, the state legislature has approved a form of property tax relief based upon gaming revenues; and

WHEREAS, school boards may decide to vote on Act 72 prior to the end of May.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy School District Board of School Directors approve its participation in Act 72.

Mr. Webb seconded the motion.

Mrs. Barrett noted that this is very difficult decision and she does not believe this is good legislation, however, at this point and time it is what we have. There will be some tax relief and there will also be referendum which hopefully will not impede our educational efforts, but help us examine all of the costs and try to bring them down.

Dr. Spitz agrees with Mrs. Barrett. Dr. Spitz stated that it is unfair to have school districts make this decision at this point and time. Tax relief may not come for three to four years.

Mr. Eccles requested a roll call vote regarding Act 72. The roll call tally indicated the motion failed with four ayes (Mrs. Barrett, Mr. Bowman, Mr. Eccles and Mr. Webb), and three nays (Mrs. Bostwick, Mrs. Cummings and Mrs. Jowett), one abstention (Dr. Spitz), one absent (Ms. Drioli).

Mr. Profy advised that under the operative language for opting into Act 72 school districts shall by resolution, levy, assess and collect the one percent earned income and net profits tax authorized by Section 221(b) and

under Section 508 of the school code it is necessary that there be in order to levy an excessive tax a majority of the entire board. Five affirmatives votes are required to levy a tax.

Motion: 2005-2006 Preliminary Budget

Mrs. Jowett presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, the Board of School Directors has received and reviewed a working draft budget for the 2005-2006 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, as set forth in Section 687 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code, this document shall be made available for public inspection 30 days prior to final adoption.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the preliminary budget as of May 18, 2005, be made available to the public for review in preparation of the final budget, with additional changes, to be adopted during the month of June 2005.

Dr. Spitz seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the motion. Ms. Drioli was not present.

Motion: Appointment of Treasurer

Dr. Spitz presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, each year during the month of May the Board must elect a Treasurer to serve for the year beginning July 1, 2005.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Joseph V. Paradise, Business Administrator, be appointed Treasurer of the Neshaminy Board of School Directors for the above term, beginning July 1, 2005.

Mrs. Jowett seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the motion. Ms. Drioli was not present.

Motion: Appointment of Board Secretary and Assistant Board Secretary

Mr. Webb presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, Sections 404 and 434 of the School Code permit the Board of School Directors to elect a Secretary and an Assistant Secretary.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board School Directors appoint Anita E. Walls to serve as Secretary for a four-year term, from July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2009.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Debby Spadaccino be appointed Assistant Secretary to the Neshaminy Board of School Directors Effective July 1, 2005.

Mrs. Bostwick seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the motion. Ms. Drioli was not present.

Motion: Approval of PDE-3074 for Renovation of Poquessing Middle School

Mrs. Barrett presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, the Neshaminy Board of School Directors recognizes the need for facility improvements at the Poquessing Middle School; and

WHEREAS, the Board has appropriated \$5.5 Million from proceeds of the Capital Improvement Bond Issue Series of 2004; and

WHEREAS, the Board wishes to proceed with this important renovation project to improve the instructional areas of Poquessing Middle School.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of School Directors submit the appropriate documentation to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and that the Board Secretary certify the vote on the application to signify compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

Mr. Bowman seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the motion. Ms. Drioli was not present.

Motion: Revision of Policy 550

Mrs. Bostwick presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, in order to keep District Board Policies updated and current, new policies and revisions are recommended by the administration to the Board Policies Committee for review, and

WHEREAS, recommended policies meet the requirements of Federal Law; and

WHEREAS, after review by the Board Policies Committee the District is ready to recommend:

Revised Policy 550- Networked Information Resources Procedures for Students

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that said Policy be revised and approved by the Neshaminy Board of School Directors.

Mrs. Cummings seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the motion. Ms. Drioli was not present.

Federal Programs

Mr. Wilson advised that the Federal Programs are closing out for the year. The district is in the process of spending all the money received. There will be significant cuts in Federal Programs for next year.

Other Board Business

Mrs. Jowett advised that Neshaminy Middle School participated in a music competition at Hershey Park. The students placed in the top two in almost every category. Symphonic Band – second place, superior rating, Wind Ensemble – first place, superior rating, Choral – first place, superior rating, Symphonic Chorus – second place, superior rating, Orchestra – first place, superior rating. Jazz Band received grand champion award for

the entire festival and outstanding rhythm section award. Fifteen hundred students participated and our directors at the Middle School did a wonderful job with the students – Donna Magrann, Beth Sinagoga, Helen Kirsch and Daniel Weiner.

Mr. Eccles attended the Carl Sandburg Academic Awards Dinner which recognizes the top 10% of students in the middle school. Mr. Eccles thanked the staff and students for their hard work.

Mr. Wilson thanked McCafferty Auto Group for sponsoring the event.

Mrs. Barrett stated that the Tech School Dinner was wonderful and the students prepared a wonderful meal for all the attendees.

Mr. Webb inquired whether it would be possible to have a referendum on Act 72.

Mr. Profy stated that the board has until May 30, 2005 in order to opt in by either one of two methods.

1. Levy, assess and collect the earned income tax
2. Proceed with electoral approval process

The agenda is open through May 30, 2005.

Mr. Profy advised that the decision the board made this evening was not to opt in to Act 72. A meeting could be scheduled between now and May 30, 2005 to take another vote on the issue.

Public Comment

Earl New, Parkland, PA, stated that people in his neighborhood call him the mayor. Mr. New thanked the board for its service. Mr. New also attended Mr. Wright's presentation. Mr. New moved from Bristol Township to Neshaminy so he would not have the earned income tax. Mr. New believes that seniors do deserve a break. Seniors do more voting than younger people in this area. This legislation is not the best. Mr. New stated that he has heard that if districts would not opt in to Act 72 the Governor would feel crossed and made it very clear that he hoped all districts would sign on.

Mr. Steve Rodos, Langhorne, PA, stated that it is very foolish not to accept monies that are given. Dr. Spitz with no vote and those voting against Act 72 is a gutless vote. The only fair thing would be to vote in favor of this act. With all its faults it is still better than what we presently have. It is a step toward a resolution. Mr. Rodos feels the real estate taxes are not fair to the seniors. Mr. Rodos stated that Dr. Spitz, before the meeting is over, could vote in favor of Act 72 and have Neshaminy opt in.

Mr. Solis Basen, Langhorne, PA, stated that the magnitude of Act 72 needs to be worked on before May 30, 2005. A special meeting should be called between now and May 30, 2005 and try to resolve this issue. One Board member is not present this evening. It is the Board's responsibility to the community to have another meeting before May 30, 2005 to resolve the issue.

Board Comment

Mr. Eccles inquired whether there would be five votes for another meeting. There were not five votes to have a special meeting.

Dr. Spitz commented that he takes all comments from the public very seriously. The Act 72 vote is a very difficult decision. Dr. Spitz would hope that in the future comments were not directed toward individual board members. Dr. Spitz feels that this legislation has too many unknowns. In two years from now there would still not be any tax relief. Dr. Spitz is hopeful that over the summer the Governor and legislature come up with another solution. Dr. Spitz noted that Matt Wright is a supporter of Act 72, however, is a co-sponsor of at least

four other bills pending in the legislature that one way or another change Act 72, one of which, in fact, repeals Act 72 altogether.

Mr. Bowman requested that the meetings remain professional and stay away from personal attacks on board members.

Mrs. Barrett stated that she has lived in the community along time and there needs to be property tax relief. We cannot continue on this path.

Adjournment

Mrs. Jowett moved the meeting be adjourned and Mrs. Bostwick seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Eccles adjourned the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary