

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
(WORK SESSION)
May 2, 2006

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on May 2, 2006, in the Board Room of the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Richard M. Eccles, President
Mrs. Sue C. Barrett, Vice-President
Mr. Joseph R. Blasch
Mr. Jason Bowman
Ms. Irene M. Boyle
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Frank J. Koziol
Dr. William H. Spitz
Mr. Ritchie Webb

ADMINISTRATORS:

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

SECRETARY:

Mrs. Anita E. Walls

SOLICITOR:

Thomas Profy, III, Esquire

OTHERS: Approximately 16 persons from the public, staff and press

Prior to the meeting the Annual Neshaminy Employee Recognition Program was held in the Maple Point Middle School Auditorium. Vocal Music by Neshaminy High School Chanticleers under the direction of Ms. Kristin Cloak was enjoyed by all at the recognition program. The following awards were presented to Long Term Service Employees of Neshaminy School District:

15 Years	Ceramic Box	51 Awardees
20 Years	Gold Lapel Pin	37 Awardees
25 Years	6 ½" Silver Bowl	15 Awardees
30 Years	Brass Hand Bells	9 Awardees
35 Years	9" Silver Bowl	14 Awardees
40 Years	Crystal Apple	1 Awardee

1. Call to Order

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

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

No announcements.

4. Public Comment

Mr. Steve Rodos, Langhorne, PA, urged Board members to select a Superintendent to be appointed from within the ranks of Neshaminy School District. Mr. Rodos feels that it would be beneficial to the staff and students of the district. Mr. Rodos thanked the Board in advance for approving the contract with SAGE. Mr. Rodos thought that this group would be very beneficial to the district. Further, SAGE is helping seniors work within the district.

5. Items for Discussion

a) Short Term Borrowing for Blue Cross Prepayment

Mr. Paradise advised the Board that this short term borrowing would allow the district to prepay the Blue Cross payment for employee health care benefits. The amount to be prepaid will be in excess of \$16M. In order for the district to prepay the amount the district must borrow the amount of money in the month of July, since prepayment is necessary by July 15. The district will borrow the money for approximately 60 days until the real estate tax revenues begin to come in. This would be a savings to the district in the amount of approximately \$800,000. The cost to borrow the money will be less than \$100,000.

The upcoming budget is based on this prepayment.

b) Replacement of Classroom Furniture at Poquessing Middle School

Mr. Paradise advised that this replacement of classroom furniture at Poquessing Middle School would be part of the renovation project at the facility. Presently, the plan is to move the existing furniture out of the building and store it in trailers that the district will rent in order that work can proceed at the facility. If new furniture is obtained the district could save the expense of the storage trailers and dispose of the furniture. Mr. Paradise advised that it would cost approximately \$68,000 to replace just the classroom furniture and approximately \$116,000 to replace other furniture as well.

Mr. Paradise advised the Board that there would be a savings of approximately \$40,000 for the storage trailers. This is a substantial amount and could be put towards the purchase price of new furniture.

Mr. Paradise advised that the disposal of the old furniture would also be an expense to the district. There needs to be a good faith effort to try to sell or dispose of the furniture since it was paid for with taxpayer's money. Mr. Paradise noted that there is a board policy that exists regarding this issue and the district must find the most expeditious way to eliminate the old furniture.

Mr. Blasch and Mrs. Barrett had an opportunity to tour the facility and most of the furniture is the original furniture which was bought for Maple Point and when the Maple Point facility was closed it was taken to Poquessing which makes that furniture about 35 years old and the remaining furniture is approximately 50 years. Most of the furniture is in deplorable condition. Mrs. Barrett noted that the furniture has already seen much repair and the school is in need of new furniture.

Mr. Sayre, Principal of Poquessing, reviewed some of the specifics with Board members. Discussion ensued regarding specific types of furniture. Mr. Paradise noted that the \$40,000 storage cost would be removed from the \$5.5M set aside for the project.

Mr. Eccles suggested that research be done regarding the old furniture liquidation. Mr. Blasch advised that by buying the classroom furniture in bulk as proposed the district is actually saving money because rather than doing one or two classrooms per year the price would be less expensive to do the entire school.

There was Board consensus to move forward with the new furniture at the Poquessing facility. Mr. Koziol did not consent.

6. Items for Approval

a) Letter of Engagement between Neshaminy School District and S.A.G.E.

Mr. Wilson advised that Mr. Profy has prepared the letter of engagement and a motion will be presented at the next board meeting for approval.

b) Approval of the 2006-07 Preliminary Budget

Mr. Paradise advised that the Board must adopt a Preliminary Budget at the upcoming Board meeting. Mr. Paradise advised that he was looking for Board input regarding some of the concerns facing this upcoming budget. Fuel oil is a major concern. Mr. Paradise estimated that for every 10 cents that diesel oil increased, it would increase the budget by \$130,000. The district uses an average of 1M gallons of fuel oil and 300,000 gallons of diesel fuel for school buses. Fuel oil will be a significant, potential cost for the district. The County wide consortium bid was opened late this afternoon and it is not yet available.

Mr. Webb stated that the Finance Committee has been diligently working to prepare a budget. There is an increase of an additional \$8.6M over last years budget. Mr. Webb's concern is how do we minimize the ever increasing costs of running the district, but still provide the services and programs that the students need. Mr. Webb noted that one of the items discussed was the alternative school at Tawanka. Mr. Webb wanted to make it very clear that he was not recommending the closure of Tawanka. The services are very valuable and they play a very important part of the education process. Tawanka was chosen as the school to close due its size. The past board believed that by opening an alternative school they could provide in house the alternative education services that were being contracted out to other districts. Hence, it would cost less money to the district than paying an outside firm. Further, it was thought that Neshaminy could provide the services to other districts, making it even more profitable to our district. The plans did not, however, did not come to fruition.

2001-2002	Alternative Education Costs	\$1.4M
2006-2007	Alternative Education Costs	\$3.3M

Currently, 90 students are contracted out of the district to receive their education and the average cost is \$19,000 each for a total of \$1.7M. The alternative had on average 43 students at a cost of \$37,000 per student, plus the costs of repair to the building, etc. Tawanka has over 19 staff members, which includes a full time principal, physical education teacher, guidance counselor, etc. for 43 students.

Mr. Webb believes there are some options. These same services could be provided in possibly one of the other middle schools within the district. By doing that the cost of Tawanka would be eliminated and the building could be rented to a neighborhood friendly business, much like at the Eisenhower facility. Another alternative would be to do as previous Board's had suggested and take in surrounding students from other districts on a fee basis and take in enough money to offset the expenses.

The Board needs to direct the Administration to follow through on one of the suggestions or come up with some other alternatives. Once again, Mr. Webb reiterated that the services provided are very valuable.

Mr. Eccles questioned if there was any further discussion regarding the closure of Neshaminy Middle. Mr. Bowman noted that the Board does not want to have the situation where redistricting would need to occur twice and that would be the outcome of closing Neshaminy Middle School prior to the completion of the high school.

Mrs. Cummings inquired whether there would be space in Maple Point for the Tawanka students. Mr. Wilson suggested that the Board could consider modulars that are going to the high school that are scheduled to be temporary, the Board could consider keeping some of the modulars and moving the alternative school up to the high school at some point. Most of the age group that is in the alternative school is high school age. Dr. Muenker and Mr. Paradise are going to provide the Finance Committee with some other recommendations.

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Ms. Boyle inquired whether the services provided at the alternative school could be provided in other settings. Costs for these students are provided from various sources, mental health, court system, etc.

Mr. Webb reiterated that the alternative school is a great asset. The problem is that it is a dedicated building, with a dedicated staff (19), and 43 students. This is very expensive. Some staff is duplicated and could be eliminated if the program were held within another district building.

Mr. Bowman suggested looking to see if some further revenues could be obtained from Tawanka and find a way to provide the services as efficiently and cost effective as possible.

Dr. Muenker noted that the district does not want to hurt our own Neshaminy students. Everyone wants to support our kids. The question is to what level and how can it be done. Some adjustments may need to be made to provide relief. The district can not only look at the upcoming 2006-07 budget, but must look into the future. In hind sight maybe the alternative school should have been made a part of the construction project at the high school.

Dr. Spitz is willing to look into the option of accepting students from other districts.

Mr. Wilson added that at the time that the alternative school was being formed community members from the area were very vocal as to the number of students and what type of services would be provided at the Tawanka facility. The district was unable at that time to continue to pursue allowing students from other districts to attend the Tawanka facility.

Mr. Wilson strongly recommends that a special education student from another district should not be accepted into the program. A committee must be formed in order to be part of the selection process for students attending the facility from other districts.

Mrs. Cummings questioned the possible closure of an elementary school. Mr. Bowman noted that when the new high school facility is complete an overall survey will need to be done and redistricting will occur only one time.

Dr. Muenker advised that a student attending the district from outside the district would be charged a fee of \$12,000 per year.

Mr. Webb requested that Mr. Paradise provide statistics regarding staffing and enrollment for the past ten years. Mr. Webb notes that even though today the district has less students, staffing has increased. However, when there is a decrease of 1,057 students and the staff increases by 57 employees, it is cause for concern. Mr. Webb recommends that the Board approve all positions before they are filled and the Board should eliminate any position that the Board feels is no longer needed upon the recommendation of the Administration.

Discussions ensued amongst Board members regarding staffing and enrollment projections.

Ms. Boyle noted that each board member could not begin to micromanage the district.

Mr. Paradise suggested that it would be more beneficial if the board could come up with goals and numbers they had in mind and then direct the Administration to fulfill.

Mr. Koziol noted that 80% of the budget is personnel and the board is responsible for the budget, so the board should have the authority to govern that 80% of the budget and approve all new people before hiring.

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Mrs. Barrett noted that the district is in declining enrollment and choices will not be easy, however, the board certainly needs to look and make some difficult choices in order to keep the educational programs in tack. Declining enrollment and expenses continue to increase.

Mr. Webb raised a question regarding vocational education. Neshaminy spends \$8.4M per year and the nearest school district, Bristol Township, only spends \$7M and Pennsbury only spends \$5.7M. Mr. Webb is concerned whether the district is getting the most for the dollars.

Mr. Wilson responded that the courses are electives that the students take at the high school to obtain their credits. Mr. Wyatt elaborated that the Vocational Technical program at Bucks County Technical High School is a vocational/occupational/trades preparation program. The technology educational program at the high school is truly an exploratory program. A student leaving Neshaminy after tech education is not going to be hired by the carpenter's union.

Board discussion ensued regarding the cost of vocational education and comparisons with other districts in the area.

Mr. Wyatt noted that the technology vocational program and science programs are linked by state standards. Mr. Wyatt invited Board members to come and visit the programs and experience what the programs offer students. Mr. Webb is just concerned with the \$5M costs for running the programs.

Mr. Bowman noted that Neshaminy cannot make a direct comparison to Central Bucks or other districts, since Lower Bucks now has a comprehensive Tech School.

Mr. Webb further discussed the costs of health insurance. The figure for health insurance is \$18.2M of which \$2.3M covers retirees. The district funds all these health insurance benefits.

Mr. Koziol requested an analysis to see if there could be some savings in the bus situation if the travel distances for students in the elementary school would be instead of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile for walkers it would be increased to $1\frac{1}{4}$ mile and the middle schools went from 1 mile to $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile. What savings would be obtained?

Mr. Koziol requested the cost differential between lead teachers and administrators. Mr. Koziol would like the district to consider hiring two people to fix computers with A+ certification and possibly doing away with the position of the lab aides. Mr. Koziol feels that the aide position is not as critical as it might have been ten years ago.

Mr. Paradise commented that with regards to the transportation distances it is certainly possible; however, there may be substantial concerns. Mr. Blasch noted that it may be feasible, however, there needs to be safe walking distances and safe walking areas. If the walking distance is increased, it may force students to unsafe walking areas. PennDOT will determine that situation.

Dr. Spitz inquired how many lead teachers were employed by the district. Mr. Wilson responded that he thought the number was 14.

Mr. Webb advised that there was \$14.6M in the fund balance. Suggestions have been made that since these funds existed we allocate monies from the fund to eliminate an increase in this year's millage. As of June 30, 2005 the Fund Balance was \$14.6M of which \$5M was budgeted for our current fiscal school year. The district has a preliminary allocation for the upcoming school year of \$5M which leaves a balance of \$4.6M or \$4.7M plus any of the fund balance from the current year that may be left over. The state recommends that the district retain at least 3% of the Fund Balance for reserves which is about \$5M. The bottom line is that the district may have approximately \$2M to use if needed, in addition to the \$5M already taken. The Fund Balance is in no way the answer to the

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district's financial situation. Just as at home, if you spend more money than you make and use your savings account to pay your expenses, eventually you will run out of money.

c) Appointment of Treasurer

Mr. Paradise noted that the Appointment of Treasurer will be on the public meeting agenda. There was Board consensus that Mr. Paradise should be appointed Treasurer.

d) Approval of Langhorne Borough Tax Collector

Mr. Paradise advised that the Langhorne Borough Tax Collector was elected and decided he did not like the job and resigned. Therefore, the Borough will appoint Ellyn M. Schoen as Tax Collector. A motion will be presented at the public meeting.

e) Agreement for exchange of services with Lower Southampton Township

Mr. Paradise advised that Ms. Drioli contacted the school district to see if the district had a field aerator. Mr. Paradise advised that the district does have this type of equipment. Ms. Drioli stated that the Township would like to aerate some ball fields and, in turn, Mr. Paradise commented that the district would like to have some of its parking areas swept in the Spring. Mr. Paradise thought the services could be exchanged. Ms. Drioli made an inquiry to the Board of Supervisors and the Township Solicitor suggested that a written agreement be drafted so these services could be exchanged.

Mr. Profy advised that this agreement is an intergovernmental cooperation agreement which is specifically provided for in the statute and Mr. Paradise will maintain a ledger with the value of the services provided by the school district and the value of the services received by the school district from the township. If the services provided become unbalanced the party with a positive balance has the right to defer providing additional services until the balance is restored. Both governing bodies are maintaining the ledger.

Mr. Bowman stated that it is possible to have a good working relationship with the Township.

Mr. Profy stated that an agreement is necessary due to the indemnification. One of the parties is performing a service and an injury or damage occurs provisions are within the agreement that the party responsible for any injury or loss or their insurance carrier who will be responsible for such loss.

f) Bids/Budget Transfers

Information distributed prior to the meeting. Mr. Paradise reviewed the following bid:

Bid No. 07-11 School Agendas

Bid Amount: \$ 21,579.35

The bid is for agendas – both student and teacher editions for all secondary schools.

Mr. Paradise advised that the monies to pay for the agendas comes out of the per pupil allocation which is given to each school.

Mrs. Cummings inquired whether the high school students really use the agendas and what the consequences are if the students did not have the agendas in their possession. Mrs. Cummings is certain that the middle school students use the agendas, but would like to know how many high school students use the agendas.

Mr. Wyatt advised that at the middle school level the agenda handbooks are used as a means of communication between the home and school. Students write their assignments in the agenda book. Parents sign the agenda books. Teachers mark the agenda book accordingly. The student handbook portion is in the front of the agenda. At the high school level students are expected to have the

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agenda book with them at all times. Students make the choice. The agenda book acts as a hall pass and the district encourages teachers to use the book to sign the student in and out of the classroom. At the high school level the agenda book is also the student handbook which has all the rules, procedures, and expectations. Certainly, some students do not use the agenda book. That is not however the district's expectations for the students.

Mr. Eccles inquired whether there could be a determination as to the use at the high school. Mr. Eccles suggested a survey be done by the Playwickian staff to see the use of the agenda books.

Mr. Paradise advised that the bid and Budget Transfer Report (Working Copy 06-4) will be presented for approval at the public meeting.

7. Superintendent's Report

No report.

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Mr. Bowman stated that a date will be set in the near future to continue addressing the employee drug testing policy and school discipline policy.

b) Educational Development

Dr. Spitz advised that he spoke with Mr. Wyatt regarding the MPC course regarding the PSSA scores. Implementation will take this fall and will involve 9th grade and special education students and then 10th and 11th grade special education and plus some regular students.

c) Finance and Facilities

Mr. Webb announced that a meeting will take place on Wednesday, May 10th at 7:00 p.m.

d) IU Board

No report.

e) Educational Foundation

Mrs. Cummings advised that the Spring Raffle is underway and the prizes are as follows:

- \$300 Topper Spa gift certificate
- \$150 Dinner Gift Certificate
- \$50 Dinner Gift Certificate

f) Technical School

Ms. Boyle advised that a meeting took place on April 24th and awards were distributed for the students. Currently union negotiations are ongoing and the next meeting is scheduled for May 22nd.

g) Technology

Mr. Koziol advised that a meeting will be scheduled for May. The consortium that is being created in Bucks County will benefit the Neshaminy School District. It will provide tremendous internet speeds and this will be an integral part of our Technology program.

Mr. Bowman inquired how the long term technology plan fits into this year's budget.

9. Future Topics

10. Agenda Development for the May 17, 2006 Public Meeting

11. Other Board Business

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Mr. Eccles advised that the Board was invited to Oliver Heckman Elementary School this evening by Ms. Deacon. Unfortunately, the Board could not attend due to the meeting.

Mrs. Barrett complimented Mr. Paradise on the equipment swap with Lower Southampton Township. Mrs. Barrett attended a session at Senator Tomlinson's office regarding grant writing for the communities and wanted the school board to be aware that a speaker at the symposium that stated that school districts and other government entities can get significant grant money if they combine efforts with another government entity.

12. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Bowman seconded the motion. The Board approved the motion with nine ayes. Mr. Eccles adjourned the meeting at 9:40 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary