

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES  
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
January 30, 2008

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on January 30, 2008, in the District Offices Board Room in the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

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

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

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

**OTHERS:** Approximately 200 persons from the public, staff and press

**SECRETARY:** Mrs. Anita E. Walls

**SOLICITOR:** Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

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**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Eccles called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

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

**3. Announcements**

Mr. Eccles apologized for the lack of space in the Board Room. Mr. Eccles advised that the meeting must begin in the Board Room; however, no decisions have been made concerning the schools. Mr. Eccles will present to the Board if the Board wishes to move the meeting. The only concern is that there are 20,000-40,000 people who watch the meeting on T.V. If the meeting is moved it will no longer be televised.

Mr. Webb made a motion to move the meeting to the Maple Point auditorium due to the large turnout. Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Eccles advised that it will take over one hour to move the meeting. Mr. Eccles adjourned the meeting.

Mr. Eccles reconvened the meeting in the auditorium at 8:15 p.m.

Mr. Eccles advised that currently there is a \$15M deficit in the budget, declining student enrollment, and under utilization of facilities. The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether or not the district can close facilities. In the best interest of all parties the Board has agreed to move public comment until after discussion has taken place which direction the Board will take. The Board will also not take a vote to close a school without public comment.

**4. Items for Discussion**

- a) Consolidation of Facilities
  - McKissick Facilities Study

- Short Term and Long Term Options

Mr. Vern McKissick explained that the meeting is a Work Session with the Board to discuss the various options presented. This is a process and the study began as a Facilities Conditions Assessment approximately one year ago. The report has approximately 600 pages. Buildings have had money invested and others are waiting. The report looks at those issues. Secondly, the report covers enrollments and it was found that Neshaminy's enrollment is declining. Programs were researched and the district's class size standards were taken into consideration. From that a practical capacity was reached. Neshaminy currently has 13,000 student seats available. Enrollment projects will go down to approximately 8,200 students. That difference of 5,000 seats is what immediately became apparent. The Board over the past six months has asked McKissick to develop a series of tools that they can use to look at these buildings and make a decision on a completely no subjective basis using hard numbers. Energy operating costs were researched. A number of variables were taken into consideration. All of the five options can interchange buildings. The study to date makes no recommendation as to a particular building. Full day kindergarten is included in all options. The Board has been provided with attendance area charts.

Mr. McKissick reviewed the five options with the Board and public:

- Option #2 – Consensus Option  
Close Neshaminy Middle School, Close Tawanka, Close an Elementary School
- Option #4  
Close Neshaminy Middle School, Close Tawanka, Close Lower South and Hoover Elementary.  
Construct new school (500 students) in center of district
- Option #9  
Configuration of K-4, 5-8, 9-12  
Close Neshaminy Middle School, Close Tawanka, Close Lower South, Buck and Everitt
- Option #10/Option #10(c)  
Configuration of K-2, 3-8, 9-12  
Close Neshaminy Middle School, Close Tawanka, Close Lower South, Hoover, and Everitt,  
Ferderbar and Schweitzer are converted into 3-8 schools with their sister schools  
Option #10(c) varies in that it changes grade configuration to K-1, 2-8, 9-12
- Option #11  
Hoover is converted to a fifth K-8 elementary/middle school, Ferderbar and Schweitzer are merged and become K-8

All options assume that the Alternative Education Program currently in the Tawanka Building would be moved to the maintenance wing at the Eisenhower building.

Mr. Eccles has advised that the Board has agreed to discuss the Options.

Mr. O'Connor stated that it is important that the Board not only weigh the financial and educational benefits of the various options, but also look for simplicity. Many of the options seem complex and many include realignment of grades. Mr. O'Connor feels that Option #2, the Consensus Option, makes the most sense and has the least amount of complexity.

Mr. Blasch noted that every option will cost the district money, because the options call for upgrades for every room of the schools that are affected. Every elementary school left open will have air conditioning installed. Mr. Blasch is aware that every person has a vested interest in their own school.

Mr. Webb noted that there is \$15M budget gap. If a few schools were closed, it would have an immediate impact and it would be approximately \$3M, in addition to the revenue. Mr. Webb also agrees that Option #2 would have the least amount of impact upon the district.

Mr. Koziol agrees that Option #2 will have the least amount of negative impact.

Mrs. Cummings feels that more dialogue needs to take place regarding the options.

Dr. Spitz agrees that he would like to focus in Option #2; however, redistricting impacts need to be looked at closely. The district has not done a redistricting study and that is what is missing within this report. Before any decisions are made the district needs to perform a redistricting study. It is premature to focus in on any one building.

Ms. Boyle feels the concept of Option #2 will have the least amount of impact; however, she agrees with Dr. Spitz that the district does not have the community impact that we need to make an educated decision.

Dr. Lou Muenker stated that regardless of any Option to be discussed for the 08-09 or 09-10 school year it absolutely requires a look at redistricting. It is the most unpopular concept any school district must face. Time needs to be taken to look at the census grid in the district and see who and when it will affect. It requires work and its needs to occur. You need to look into the future. In September, 2009 the high school will house the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and will be open to four grades. Redistricting is a very anxious moment within a district. Building staffing is critical. Dr. Muenker noted that the continued value of learning and the maintenance of integrity of the programs are essential. Everyone must work together or things will fall into jeopardy. Not everyone will be pleased. Express your opinions. Dr. Muenker knows that everyone loves their neighborhood school. The report must be looked at closely and walked through carefully. What is the best model? Which has the least amount of transitions? Dr. Muenker urged everyone to stay focused on the ending. The Board will need to come to closure with the recommendations provided. Dr. Muenker encouraged the public to forward e-mails and letters and to attend board meetings.

Mr. Eccles noted that the enrollment study has been started. Mr. Eccles noted that it is a different time with enrollment decreasing. We must remain a strong and vital district and that requires us to be fiscally responsible. The district needs to close schools. Mr. Eccles believes that it is necessary to close a middle school, elementary school and Tawanka. The district is facing a \$15M deficit, declining enrollment and under utilization of facilities. Unfortunately, that leaves the district no option than to close buildings. Emotions run high. The Board will do what they feel is best for the community and students. Children are the most important equation in the decision. The children are the least affected, since children adapt very quickly. The parents are the ones who really feel the emotion. Rest assured the Board will do what is right for the children.

Mr. O'Connor agreed with Dr. Spitz that a redistricting study needs to take place in order to show the impact on the communities. Mr. O'Connor stated that without such information he cannot make a commitment to the 08-09 school year.

Mr. Koutsouradis stated that he feels that the Tawanka facility could be closed in 08-09, however, he is in agreement with Mr. O'Connor that the other schools will need to wait.

Mr. Blasch noted that Neshaminy Middle was targeted for closing in 2009.

Mr. Webb noted that the \$15M deficit will equate to over \$500 for the average homeowner which could be offset by taking an additional \$7M for the fund balance for an increase of \$250-\$260. Mr. Webb has no desire to see a school close, but it is necessary. Mr. Webb noted that if the Board does nothing, eventually in years to come programs will need to be cut.

Mr. Koziol noted that there is a decreased student population and most people cannot afford the \$15M budget increase. Hard decisions will need to be made and why should taxpayers be paying for

schools that are 30%-40% empty. This decision will keep the taxes down. Neshaminy has the best group of Administrators and teachers in all of Bucks County. Mr. Koziol noted that something needs to happen this year for this year's budget.

Dr. Spitz commented that he has the same concerns as other Board members regarding this year's budget. It will be very difficult, however, this Board made a decision in the past that affects what we are talking about right now. If this Board was serious about wanting to close a building this coming school year it should have been discussed early and a redistricting study needed to be done by now. Board consensus was not to do anything with the facilities study until after the election. Now that there are some legalities that must be met there is a sudden rush. The Board had a chance to do it the right way and it would have given everyone plenty of opportunity to voice their opinions. The Board did not do that and now we are under the gun. Dr. Spitz will not support any plan to close an elementary building this coming school year. Tawanka is a different issue. The Board needs to agree where to house that program so that the students in that program can succeed. The closure of Neshaminy Middle has been on the docket for at least 5-6 years. The promise was made that Neshaminy Middle would close once the 9<sup>th</sup> graders are moved to the high school and not before. Dr. Spitz will support the closure of Neshaminy Middle at that time 2009-2010 school year.

Mrs. Cummings agrees with Dr. Spitz and the closure of Neshaminy Middle should take place in the 2009-2010 school year. Closure of Tawanka many years ago may affect students at Neshaminy Middle since they are those same students. If Neshaminy Middle closes at the end of this year we would then be affecting two grades and moving students twice. Students need to be moved one time and one time only. Mrs. Cummings noted that a plan for redistricting must be in place before schools are closed. Possibly a redistricting committee should be formed. Mrs. Cummings is not in favor of closing any of the elementary schools in the 08-09 school year. Mrs. Cummings feels a plan is necessary for the students at Tawanka.

Ms. Boyle stated that closing a school is never easy. The McKissick report was excellent in reflecting the budgetary impacts; however, it does not reflect the impact of the community. More data is necessary before closures are made. Ms. Boyle is not in favor of closing schools for the 08-09 schools year. Ms. Boyle will be in favor of closing Neshaminy Middle in 09-10. Ms. Boyle stressed that the Board cannot ignore fiscal reality.

Dr. Muenker noted that redistricting cannot be looked at first. The schools need to be identified and then redistricting can take place. A plan needs to be in place to identify which facilities and then which year said closures would occur. Statistics may not remain accurate from year to year.

Mr. Eccles asked that the Board take a vote to see if there was Board support to close a middle school and an elementary school in school year 2008-2009.

Mr. Eccles requested a roll call vote take place. The roll call tally indicated that the motion failed by a vote of six nays (Mr. Blasch, Ms. Boyle, Mrs. Cummings, Mr. Koutsouradis, Mr. O'Connor, and Dr. Spitz) and three ayes (Mr. Eccles, Mr. Koziol and Mr. Webb).

Mr. Eccles advised that the Tawanka facility will still be open for discussion regarding closure.

##### **5. Public Comment**

Mr. Kevin Knowles, Teacher at Neshaminy Middle School, and has been employed by the District for 35 years. What is being considered tonight is one of the most significant changes this district has considered in over 35 years. Mr. Knowles stated that currently Superintendent Kadri has been interviewing with a school district outside of Detroit, Michigan and is one of the top three candidates for the position. The school board and school district are obviously no longer listening to the Superintendent. This is an individual who was made Superintendent less than a year and half ago. A recommendation regarding a position at the high school was not taken by the school board. That was not the administrator

recommended by the Administrative committee. The Board must think carefully. A school that is at 100% capacity is not a school wherein you would want your children. These figures are very misleading. School programs and students are squeezed into space. If class sizes are maxed out learning is not conducive. If a mistake is made on this type of issue, you cannot buy out the kids.

Mr. Robert Tull, Levittown, PA, stated that about 15 years ago the Board had the same issues. Relocating of the maintenance facilities and Option #2 was considered by that Board back then and there was a preservation of the idea of keeping the elementary schools at the inside of the regular community. You can always revert back to the neighborhood school concept because it is so important to the community. Mr. Tull stated that Option # 2 should be further investigated and close Hoover and move the maintenance back to the Hoover location were it would be centrally located to all the schools.

Mr. Marv Dickler, Villages of Flowers Mills, Langhorne, PA, commented that he hopes that everyone in the room puts their priorities in the right place. Let's make sure politics don't get played up on that platform. The first and foremost interest is how we give the children the best possible education at the most reasonable cost. Cut the budget and don't put the children in a secondary position. The increase cost factor that this community is going to have to face is well above what the majority of the people in this community can afford. How do we fix it to give the students the number one education they deserve? That's the job and keep the damn politics out of the facility.

Mrs. Meg Offenback, Rockwood Road, is the President of the PTO at Samuel Everitt. Mrs. Offenback notices a couple of errors in the McKissick report. The company was paid money to perform this report. It may be a small error; however, it is an error. Is anyone checking to see if the report is accurate? A school closure is being based upon this report. Consider the location of Samuel Everitt. It is in the middle of a residential community. It is located in the middle of Forsythia Gate. The community cannot afford the increase of traffic volume if the facility is rented. The building cannot be left vacant. If that is the Board's decision it will open the possibility of vandalism, property value decrease, gang hangout, etc. What if you owned a home in that section? Ms. Offenback lives in that section. We do not want it. Please do not close Samuel Everitt Elementary School.

Mr. Solis Basen, Langhorne, PA, stated that he attends all of the Board meetings and Finance meetings. Mr. Basen has heard many pros and cons of closing a school, what school, etc. This is a very important decision. Mr. Basen is looking at a \$15M increase from last year's budget. If nothing is done this year, next year we will be \$30M above budget. This cannot continue for the parents of the students, seniors who are living in the area and something has to be done.

Mr. Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, stated that no one wants to close a neighborhood elementary school. Closing a school becomes an eyesore and will adversely affect the already declining enrollment. Closing schools shouts out that this is a neighborhood in decline. Closing a school in the middle of neighborhood is like a cancer which ultimately will destroy the neighborhood. With all due respect to the McKissick report please be careful when reading the charts. The report does not accurately reflect the fact that an entire person is needed to teach a class. Finally, the support staff works extremely hard and in the best interest of the students of Neshaminy School District. The support personnel should not be thrown under the bus in the hope of achieving some savings, especially when it has not calculated the extra cost of busing. The report does not appear to have a true handle on the savings which may occur from closing schools.

Mr. Steven Roosa, Langhorne, PA, has only been in the district for a short period of time and he absolutely loves the schools. The children love the schools. Mr. Roosa tried to obtain documentation regarding the closings. Even though the report is showing declining demographics in the next 10 years, last year was the highest birth rate nation wide since 1961. Mr. Roosa does not believe that enrollment will be down. Mr. Roosa is concerned that the same consultant who has done the study be the same consultant who prepares the redistricting evaluation. As early as 1991 these discussions have been going on about possibly closing a school. If the budget impact is \$500, please bill me.

Ms. Alma Deal, Langhorne, PA, is a resident for 54 years and her children went to the Pine Street School. Taxes are skyrocketing; however, her children always got a good education. Do not close neighborhood schools. Parkland School closed and the community school closed. Penndel school was closed and the school has been an eyesore for many years and still is. The area is aging and when the old people die off the younger people will move into our homes and they will have children. Has a study been done regarding that? How many rooms will be available when there is an increase in population? Much more studying needs to take place before any decisions are made. As far as taxes are concerned I do not think you will find too many people unwilling to pay more taxes to send their children to school.

Ms. Ann Roberts, Levittown, PA, stated that she is very disappointed in the school district. She has three grown children. One in high school does everything. Her other son is picked on at Maple Point for everything. Her son has needed to deal with bus problems; her son is being ganged up at the bus stop. Ms. Roberts does not feel that the staff is being fair with her children. Mrs. Roberts does not feel that her kids are angels, but 99% of the time they are blamed for crap. The high school has inconvenienced her daughter and she needed to pick her up. The Board decided to rebuild the high school and now we don't have the money and it is necessary to close elementary schools. Where is the money cut? Mrs. Roberts has had it with the district.

Mrs. Dawn Abbamondi, Langhorne Borough, PA, stated that she has two children at Oliver Heckman and a third child who will also be attending Heckman. Mrs. Abbamondi forwarded questions to Dr. Spitz, Ms. Boyle and Mr. O'Connor. Two replied back and she appreciated the response. Mrs. Abbamondi had the following questions: Why is the district considering full day kindergarten as it will add additional expenses to the budget? Mrs. Abbamondi prefers having her smaller children attend a half day program. Mrs. Abbamondi prefers a pre-first program. Mrs. Abbamondi also addressed the situation of the RN at the school locations. Mrs. Abbamondi feels that she can now complete the questionnaire which was sent home with her children from Dr. Rattigan. Mrs. Abbamondi stated that she prefers to drive her children to school due to safety reasons. To move walkers from Neshaminy Middle to Maple Point will cause the district additional expenses in busing. Mrs. Abbamondi appreciates the decision of the Board this evening to not close any schools in the 08-09 school year. She further stated that the Neshaminy state ranking has come down; however, she would not like her children to attend a district where most of the students could be possible valedictorians.

Mr. Brian Smiley, Marshall Avenue, stated that the students are first and foremost. If the students are put first, the answers tend to follow. Mr. Smiley is an architect and although McKissick has provided a fine report with suggestions, these are not the only answers for the district as far as what is important for the students. School size and student performance are tied together. School size is smaller and student performance is higher. Mr. Smiley spoke about transportation costs and the escalation of fuel costs. Mr. Smiley feels the overall plan for a school closing should be reviewed with the Court or some other larger planning commission board. To eliminate a school the community must be thought about first. Efficiency is a key word in these times. Mr. Smiley is okay if taxes need to rise. If student performance goes down, the aftermath is that property values will go down and, hence it will lead to a lower tax base.

Mrs. Kim Lafferty stated that she lives in the Georgetown development and a son at Neshaminy Middle and a daughter at Oliver Heckman. Mrs. Lafferty is a mother as well as an educator. Some of the comments that Mrs. Lafferty has heard this evening are "these are hard decisions to make" and "do what is best for the kids." Do not lose sight of the children over finances. If classroom sizes get higher it is not productive. The ratio between student and teacher need to be kept to a minimum. Different problems exist with students into today's classroom, ADD, Asperger's Syndrome, children with special needs, etc. Many of the students in a classroom have special needs and larger classroom sizes make it difficult to provide proper attention to every student. Mrs. Lafferty stressed to keep classroom sizes small.

Mrs. Susan Loncosky, Langhorne, PA, stated that she is the PTO president of Albert Schweitzer. Mrs. Loncosky has been in the district for 2 ½ years and 23 years in Pennsbury. It was hard to leave

Pennsbury, but she came to Neshaminy because of its great reputation. The development that Mrs. Loncosky lives in Durham Chase has already experienced a move for the students in past years. Please do not target the same schools when it comes time for redistricting. Please consider this. Mrs. Loncosky also expressed concern that if a school is closed the children residing in the apartments will be transferred to different schools. Mrs. Loncosky feels that if any students need to be bused it should be the children living in the apartments. The taxes are being paid by the people living in the developments, not the apartments. Vandalism has also occurred to playground equipment and it was done by vandals, not the children. If a school is closed in a neighborhood, vandalism will occur to the building. Mrs. Loncosky stated that money does matter, but the students need to come first.

Mrs. Debbie Matlock, Levittown, PA, stated that smart decisions need to be made not quick decisions. Closing Everitt will have a great impact on the community and the report states that it will have low impact. Any school closing in a community is a high impact. If the building were to be rented it would increase traffic for the community. Two students have already been involved in traffic accidents due to cars cutting through the neighborhood. A business in the middle of the community is not effective. Property values will go down, people will start leaving and that will not help Neshaminy. Two schools now are vacant Eisenhower and Tawanka, being partially used. How much money are those buildings costing? Where are the profits of those buildings? Figure out what to do with those buildings to get more money. The reality is that buildings will remain empty and rentals of the buildings will not actually occur. Most costs are due to staffing. Mrs. Matlock would like the Board to try to cut in that area and see what can be done with the new contract negotiations. Administration costs are also very high. See what can be cut in that area. Most of the people do not want any schools closed. When schools are overcrowded learning is not conducive. Enrollment is up at Samuel Everitt. Mrs. Matlock pointed out mistakes in the McKissick report. \$45,000 mistakes, number of 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, one extra stated, low impact rating, etc. Many schools in the surrounding area are already empty and they are not rented. There is no rental value.

Mr. Neil O'Grady, Langhorne, PA, stated that this is a difficult choice and the community cares a great deal. Someone will be unhappy with the ultimate decision that is made whether it be more taxes, school closing, redistricting, etc. Information is very important in the process. Mr. O'Grady would like to have access to more of the information from the McKissick report. Mr. O'Grady feels that some of the information that he received this evening is outdated. Mr. O'Grady is not clear on the assumptions used regarding the staff, how will the modulars be accounted for in the process, the statistics used for population are 2007 numbers, etc. Mr. O'Grady urged that accurate information be used and better information be provided to the public. Mr. O'Grady stressed that it would be wise if the community could work with the district regarding its decisions on school closures and redistricting.

Mr. Kevin Reardon, Langhorne, PA, noted that he has seen inconsistencies and would urge that better data be provided since this is a very frustrating situation for many families. Mr. Reardon would like to see each option contain what is actually covered in the renovation costs and the cost savings. Community impact is very critical in the process and the community needs better details and a report needs to be made available to the public, because the public will judge the Board on the decisions that are made.

Mrs. Andrea Bernek, Langhorne, PA, thanked the Board for accommodating the large crowd this evening. Mrs. Bernek spoke to the Board regarding her children and the situations they have encountered within the Neshaminy system. Smaller class sizes have been beneficial for her children. Her one son is experiencing difficulties within the district. Mrs. Bernek urged the Board to decide what will occur with the Tawanka building since those students are deserving of an education.

Mrs. Carolyn Montgomery, Levittown, PA, stated that she is the parent of a special needs child. The child has been out of the district, however, finally this year Mrs. Montgomery brought him into Neshaminy. Mrs. Montgomery is very happy with her son at Hoover. The Hoover program is fantastic and Mrs. Montgomery stressed that these programs need to continue.

Mrs. DiAnn Beyer, Levittown, PA, stated that she is a second generation Neshaminy graduate. Before closing schools please look at the budget closely. Other things go into the budget and other things can be cut before schools are actually closed. Look into the neighborhoods and communities, these families are concerned. Mrs. Beyer paid for her own college education and feels that the district may be putting the cart before the horse. Mrs. Beyer noted that in her own job experiences decision were trying to be made before all the information was made available. Mrs. Beyer stressed obtaining complete answers and do not rely on incomplete answers and incomplete data. Please do the homework.

Mrs. Deb Daughterman, Levittown, PA, stated that Hoover is the heart of a community.

Mrs. JiDelmaye Swope, Levittown, PA, would like to see a committee comprised of teachers, administrators, board members, community members, etc. The impact of a decision like this is major. More information needs to be made available and further investigation is necessary.

Mrs. Melissa Hartenberger, Langhorne Manor, stated that there will be teachers retiring within the school district and what type of impact will this have upon the budget. How much staff will be needed in the upcoming years? This will lead to lower teacher salaries. What impact will this have on the upcoming budget?

**6. Other Board Business**

**7. Adjournment**

Mr. Webb moved that the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Blasch seconded same. Mr. Eccles adjourned the meeting at 9:50 pm.

Respectively submitted,

Anita E. Walls  
Board Secretary