

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
June 1, 2010

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on June 1, 2010 in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center at the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President
Mr. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice President
Ms. Irene Boyle
Mr. Scott E. Congdon
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Richard M. Eccles
Mr. Mike Morris
Mr. William D. O'Connor
Mr. William Oettinger

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mr. Kevin Kane

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS: Approximately 800 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

Mr. Webb announced that prior to the meeting an Executive Session was held regarding personnel and legal issues.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

Whereupon Dr. Muenker made the following announcement:

Good Evening. Tonight I would like to share a few observations and comments with you, the Neshaminy Community. First, Neshaminy School District is a great school district. We have a cherished and long history of academic and extra-curricular success. We have excellent administrators, excellent teachers, and a dedicated support staff. With that said, these dedicated employees would not exist without the children that they serve. Far too often we tend to minimize, or at times, forget completely why we are here. Last week there were a number of students who stood up and reminded all of us that they count too. At the high school we had a brief and peaceful gathering outside the school prior to the start of the school day. The students were well behaved and returned to the school without fanfare. Unfortunately, we also experienced two fire drills that were set off by students causing interruptions to the school day.

As I share this information I can also share that our investigation to the most recent incident has proven fruitful. We also had students here at Maple Point gather upon being dropped off by their buses in the morning. Although many students were compliant by moving into the building to start their day, many others chose to stay outside. Despite repeated requests by administration and the Middletown Police, these students chose not to listen and stayed outside. Although we respect the student's right to assemble and exhibit free speech, this also becomes problematic in that we are also charged with the supervision of your children. Each day when you send your children to school, it is reasonable to assume that they will enter the school and be safe for the time they are with us. The assumption quickly arose when they did not

follow directions from adults, and in this case, three building administrators and the police. Therefore, unfortunately there were consequences from this unacceptable behavior.

Certainly, there is a lot going on for us in Neshaminy. We have two groups of employees who have been working without contracts. The NFT is approaching two years this June 30th, and the PSEA Support Staff has been working for one year without resolution. Layered on top of this is our obligation to approve a balanced budget by the end of this month. When I first assumed this seat as your Superintendent 18 months ago, I faced a budget deficit of over 18 million dollars. What was I thinking? With an eroded fund balance, and a rotten economy, and lost revenues, we had to recommend layoffs from all levels of employees. It was a drastic change of business in the Neshaminy School District. Despite that, we were able to keep a watchful eye on our educational extra-curricular programs and the result was a minimal disruption. Despite an Act 1 cap of 4.1% the final budget reflected a 2.29% tax increase or approximately \$92 for the average taxpayer. This year we began our budget journey with a 7.6 million-dollar budget deficit and as I speak we continue our quest to establish and recommend the appropriate path for our Board of Directors to approve at our next meeting. It is certainly obvious to our stakeholders that the greatest proportion of the budget is obligated to employee salaries and benefits. The challenge for our Board and employee groups is to find an equitable path for fair compensation that will also enable us to continue our fine history of providing both rich academic and extra-curricular programs for our students. I can report that the Board and Support Staff met last week and have additional meeting dates in front of them as they seek and mutually agree upon a resolution to their currently unsettled contract. I can also report the upcoming meeting with the NFT and the School Board this Thursday, June 3rd. It is my hope that the NFT and the School Board will commit to additional meeting dates beyond June 3rd. Currently, both sides need to recognize that there can be no resolution possible if the individuals refuse to meet. It is evident that there are hurdles to overcome. It is also my observations that there are many fine individuals on both sides of the table that have an obligation to all stakeholders specifically our children.

To that end, I must share that I am distressed over the most recent work to rule, or work to contract action taken last week. Although, I recognize the right of our teachers to employ this action, I am disappointed with many of the premises associated with it. Specifically, I worry most about the directive to our high school staff not to provide recommendations for our students who will be filling out applications to colleges and universities this fall. I remain puzzled by these tactics for being one's professional responsibility should be imbedded outside a written language that defines a day of work in the associated compensation. I would ask that the NFT, my professional colleagues, consider removing this part of their work to contract action especially with the recent return to the negotiation table.

Yes, we have a lot of important items in front of us, even with resolved contracts our ability to exist without major changes and how we operate will continue to challenge all of us. Decrease revenues, diminishing state and federal aide, a lowering of the Act 1 thresholds, increase obligations to retirement systems, are all lining up as our next obstacles for the 2011-2012 school years. Let us all agree to stop yelling and finger pointing and instead place a greater effort in seeking resolutions during these challenging times. Finally, remember we are here to support our children. Together I firmly believe we can make a difference. Let's continue the excellence that is embodied within our Neshaminy family. Thank you.

4. Public Comment

Chuck Torpey, school bus driver for Neshaminy, Feasterville, opened his comments by stating that he has received numerous offers of support over the past two weeks. Mr. Torpey declared that the transportation department appreciates the support and they are willing to work hard and do what it takes to keep their jobs. Mr. Torpey advised that in these economic times everyone should be prepared to sacrifice and give a little so that we can continue to give the students the best education possible. He also mentioned that the recent actions of the teachers are not setting a good example for the students.

George Heaney, school bus driver for Neshaminy, Trevose, encouraged the Board and the Unions to come together and resolve the current contract issues. Mr. Heaney expressed his concern for the bus drivers who have young families and are struggling to make ends meet.

Ellen Lockyer, self-employed, Langhorne, voiced her disappointment with the unwillingness of the teacher's union to make any concessions in order to come to a contract resolution. Ms. Lockyer stated that parents are willing to assist the teachers in the classroom when asked, e.g., fundraisers, class trips, and classroom assistance. Ms. Lockyer feels that the teacher's union, each time a contract expires, bullies the parents and taxpayers. She also expressed her support for the School Board in their negotiations with the teacher's union; however, she feels the Board is being too nice and too accommodating. Ms. Lockyer questioned why salary increases are even being offered considering the deficit of the past several years. She feels the teacher's union is willing to let the support staff be replaced with outsourcing, willing to let the new teachers lose jobs, willing to have librarians, counselors, and nurses eliminated from schools. Ms. Lockyer feels that the teacher's poor attitude is affecting the future of the Neshaminy students.

Sarah Evans, 7th grader at Maple Point, Langhorne, stated that many students do not understand the dispute between the teacher's union and the School Board. She stated that the students miss the availability of the teachers for extra help and it is the student's hope that the contract negotiations will be settled quickly.

Gail Thibodeau, self-employed, Langhorne, thanked the School Board members for their time and service to the Neshaminy School District. She also stated her appreciation to the Board for their concern for both parties and for presenting a generous offer to the teacher's union, while considering the wellbeing of the taxpayers. She requested that when an agreement is reached a list of specific duties of the teachers be made available to the public. Specifically, she indicated that maintaining bulletin boards, websites, posting grades, providing extra help to students who are struggling are duties that should be in the teacher's job description, but the Union considers them to be extras. Ms. Thibodeau said that she feels that the 15 percent contribution towards healthcare that the Board is asking for the teachers is not only fair, but is significantly lower than what many taxpayers in the township are contributing towards their own healthcare. Ms. Thibodeau acknowledged the teachers for the good education that her children have received; however, she said now is the time for the teachers to be thankful for the secure, well compensated positions, excellent healthcare benefits, and for the fair contract that they have been offered. She implored the teachers to speak out against their unreasonable union leadership.

Pete Spera, resident of the Neshaminy School District, Langhorne, explained that due to the struggling economy it was necessary for his company to take extraordinary measures in order to save their jobs in 2009. He said that the sacrifices were made from the President down to the newest person, which saved 90 percent of the jobs in the company. Mr. Spera voiced his objection as a taxpayer to the idea that he would have to provide more funding in order to give the teachers a raise when he hasn't received a raise himself in two years. Mr. Spera believes that the common sense approach means that the sacrifices have to be made from the top down to the bottom.

Stacy Kirsh, homemaker, Langhorne, said she understands the "work to rule" action. She questioned why there has not been a bargaining session since January. Ms. Kirsh does not think all of the focus should be on money and benefits. She stated that the size of classes and cutting programs are also important issues and parents should ask the Board exactly what has been offered to the teachers.

Mr. Webb countered that all the information regarding the contract offer was clearly posted on the website.

Cyndie Bowman, teacher and college professor, Feasterville, stated that the bickering and non-negotiating is counterproductive and must stop. She stated that it is an embarrassment to the district. She said that it is time that the teachers contribute to their health benefits. She further stated her fondness for the Neshaminy teachers; however, she feels that paying for their own benefits is a reality. She said it is time for

the teachers to start helping the district that they work for. She pleaded with the Board to negotiate a settlement, but cautioned them not to waiver on the issue of health care.

Joe Fantozzi, taxpayer, Levittown, noted that he formerly lived in Bristol Township and he remembers that the taxes were raised considerably when Bristol Township re-purchased their buses. He asked the Board to carefully consider this matter and not outsource the buses.

Anne Schmidt, Vice President of the NFT, Holland, stated that she has been a Neshaminy teacher for over 23 years. Ms. Schmidt said that it takes hard work to negotiate a contract and she feels that the district is unwilling or unable to put forth the hard work that is necessary. Ms. Schmidt asked the Board to come to the bargaining table ready to put forth the hard work that is necessary to resolve the differences for the sake of the community and the students.

Louise Boyd, NFT President, Furlong, said that scheduling a meeting to negotiate the contract is difficult. She stated that she feels that the Board waited for the NFT to make the first move to schedule the negotiation meeting. Ms. Boyd remarked that she is looking forward to the upcoming meeting and that she hopes the Superintendent will be in attendance.

B. Mitchell, Feasterville, stated that she is a senior citizen and has not had a raise in her social security benefits in several years. Ms. Mitchell said she pays for her health care and she fears that if taxes keep increasing she may have to leave Middletown Township. She wondered if the teachers realize how critical these economic times are. She asked that the teachers and School Board try to work together in order to settle their differences.

(At this point, the Neshaminy teachers exited the meeting en masse.)

John Ludwig, Public Employee in New Jersey, Trevese, noted that Pennsylvania is heading for the same bad situation that the taxpayers in New Jersey are experiencing. Mr. Ludwig declared that the taxpayers in Neshaminy are suffering and have had enough. He stated that he has been paying for his health benefits for over 22 years and it is time for the Neshaminy teachers to pay their fair share. He urged the Board to stand firm and not give in on the healthcare issue.

Cecelia Ridge, Neshaminy school bus driver, Levittown, expressed her concern for bus safety if the busing is outsourced. She stated that the Neshaminy buses and mechanics are far superior to the buses that they may get if the busing is outsourced.

Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, thanked Mr. Koutsouradis for his hard work with the technical school budget. He also thanked all the parents that came out for tonight's meeting. Mr. Rodos stated his disappointment in the decision of the teachers to walk out of the meeting. Mr. Rodos said this demonstrates that the teachers only consider their own views and do not care about the opinions of everyone else. Mr. Rodos advised the Board that there are ways to balance the budget without raising taxes. He presented his opinion regarding outsourcing busing costs and healthcare costs for teachers and retirees. Mr. Rodos reminded the teachers and the Board that it is their duty to come to the table and find a resolution.

5. Items for Approval at the June 15, 2010 Public Board Meeting

a) Approval of Budgetary Increase for Federal & Other Programs (2009 - 10)

Mr. Paradise advised the Board that there would be a motion at the end of the month Public Board Meeting to modify the current year budget for all of those programs.

b) Facilities Professional Services/Consultants for 2010 - 11

Mr. Paradise advised the Board that approval will be sought at the Public Board Meeting on June 15th, for the Facilities Professional Service/Consultants for 2010 - 11.

Mr. Webb stated that the approval of Budgetary Increase for Federal & Other Programs 2009 – 10 and the Facilities and Professional Services/Consultants for 2010 – 11 will be agenda items at the June 15th Meeting.

c) Calendar Addendum for Act 80 Day Reporting

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that approval would be sought at the Public Board Meeting on June 15th required by Pennsylvania Department of Education.

d) 2010 -2011 Bucks County Technical High School Budget

Dr. Muenker informed the Board that approval would be sought at the Public Board Meeting on June 15th for the 2010 – 2011 Bucks County Technical School Budget.

Mr. Webb stated that the Calendar Addendum for Act 80 Day Reporting and the 2010 – 2011 Bucks County Technical High School Budget will be agenda items at the June 15th meeting.

e) Approval of Year End Budget Transfers

Mr. Paradise advised that the Board will be asked to approve the year end budget transfers at the June 15th meeting in accordance with the Auditor General's Office.

f) Proposed Fee Increases for 2010 – 11

Mr. Paradise advised the Board on the Proposed Fee Increases for 2010 – 11 as follows:

1. Increase Aquatics Program Adult Swim Price by \$1 to \$5.00.
2. Increase CORE Swimming Program hourly rate by \$5 to \$40.00/hour.
3. Increase NRG Swimming Program hourly rate by \$5 to \$45.00/hour.
4. Increase Sporting Event Ticket price by \$1 to \$5.00.
5. Increase High School Season Student Pass Price by \$5 to \$20.00.

Mr. Paradise stated that there will be a motion on the agenda at the June 15th meeting to approve the Proposed Fee Increases for 2010 – 11.

g) Homestead and Farmstead Exclusion Resolution

Mr. Paradise provided to the Board a draft resolution, which will be brought for approval at the June 15th meeting.

h) Local, State and National Contract Participation Authorization for 2010 – 11

Mr. Paradise advised that there will be a motion made at the June 15th meeting for the approval of the Local, State and National Contract Participation Authorization for 2010 – 11.

i) Approval of Revised Board Policies

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the Following:

- Board Policy #505 – Discipline
- Board Policy #506 - Gangs

Dr. Rattigan stated that on Board Policy #505 the committee recommends adding gang activity, harassment and bullying/cyber bullying under Major Breaches of Discipline on page 3, line 9 through 11. She also stated that on Board Policy #506 a few minor changes were made to line 25 on page 1 and line 11 on page 2.

j) Bids/Budget Transfers

Mr. Paradise advised the Board on the Following:

Bid No. 11-21

Bid Amount: \$988,495

Bid Description: Roof Replacement at Miller and Ferderbar Elementary

Mr. Paradise stated that Bid No. 11-21 will be presented at the June 15th Public Board Meeting for approval.

k) Adoption of the 2010 – 2011 Budget

Mr. Paradise stated that at the June 15th Public Board Meeting the Board would be required to adopt a balanced budget in accordance with the State Law.

Dr. Muenker explained that the first and second look regarding healthcare is customary from the healthcare provider. He further explained that Neshaminy is not the only township that gets that sort of presentation. When the provider gives the first quote the township uses that as a starting point. From this point, the percentage may increase or decrease, so administratively the township must start with that first percentage quote because they have no other data.

6. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the Following:

- 15th Annual Bucks County High School Art Exhibit was held on May 25th, 26th, and 27th.
- Various spring concerts throughout the district.
- St. Mary Medical Center Injury Prevention and Performance Improvement Program.
- Neshaminy High School Adjudication results Orlando, Florida, May 14th.
- American Association of University Women Makefield Area Branch honored 7th grade scholars from Neshaminy School District.
- Sandburg Academic Recognition Dinner for 6th, 7th and 8th grade.
- The Senior Award Ceremony will be held on June 2nd.
- Graduation will be held on June 9th.

7. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that on May 27th the committee finalized the policy on discipline and gangs.

b) Educational Development

Mr. O'Connor informed the Board that their last meeting will be held on June 7th, at 6:30 p.m.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb stated that a date for their final meeting has not yet been set and will be forthcoming.

d) IU Board

Mrs. Cummings advised the Board that the IU Board is continuing negotiations with the teachers. The continuing negotiations include a counter proposal.

e) Education Foundation

Dr. Muenker informed the Board that their last meeting would be held on June 14th. He reminded the public of the chance tickets to drive a stockcar at Pocono Downs.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis advised the Board that the 2010-2011 Technical School Budget was passed, which will be voting back here at Neshaminy on June 15th. The next meeting will be held on June 28th at 7:30 p.m.

g) Technology

Mr. Congdon informed the Board that the next meeting would be scheduled for September or October of 2010.

8. Public Comment

Larry Pastor, Middletown Township, began his comments by stating that the demonstration of the Teachers Union walking out of the meeting is an insult to their sister union, NESPA, and to all who attended the meeting. Mr. Pastor stated that the teachers have been benefiting from one of the most lucrative contracts in the country. Mr. Pastor noted that local unemployment is at 9%, foreclosures are up, and taxpayer anger is at an all time high. He declared that teachers must realize that in today's world everyone must contribute to their healthcare, including the Neshaminy teachers. Mr. Pastor declared that the community should no longer have to subsidize excessive packages that teachers demand through their unions.

Mike Bittner, Feasterville, stated that he is a teacher in New Jersey. He expressed his concern and the concern of many parents regarding a possible teachers' strike. He asked the Board if they would give parents advanced notice should the teachers leave their posts, so proper arrangements can be made for the children.

Tom Peto, retired railroad worker, Langhorne, stated that he is retired and no longer gets raises, although taxes keep going up. He implored the Board to stand firm and not give in to the demands of the NFT.

Mark Shubin, sales executive, Langhorne, thanked the Board for providing the pertinent information on the website to keep the public up to date. He also asked the NFT to dialog with the community and advise the people of their position. Mr. Shubin acknowledges the good job that the teachers do, but he noted that the union is extremely powerful and people should be aware that the Board is at a disadvantage because of this. He urged the Board to maintain their strength and their commitment to a fair and equitable agreement for the taxpayers and the students.

Christine McManus, Human Resources Director, Levittown, asked the parents to unite and attend the meetings and fight for their children's futures. She suggested to the Board if they are not going to make the teachers pay for their healthcare, another option is to lower the type of healthcare plan offered. She said a lower plan would decrease the cost to the district and the teachers can afford a higher co-pay.

David Roach, Langhorne, mentioned that his son was one of the middle school students who protested last week and he is proud of his son for taking a stand. He stated that he wants to see the dispute come to an end for the sake of the students.

Delia Warner, Assistant Controller, Neshaminy Parent, stated her concern for the quality of education that her children will get at Neshaminy. She chose to keep her children in the Neshaminy School District while her husband, a U.S. soldier, was deployed four times. She said it appears that the biggest concern of the teachers is money, not the welfare of the students. She said she thinks the teachers should be thankful that they have jobs and if Neshaminy keeps running out of money they may not have jobs next year.

Howard Linder, Langhorne, thanked the members of the Board for putting in their time on a voluntary basis. Mr. Linder expressed his shock and concern that union members voted against other members to outsource their jobs. He said that the union must give back in order to keep Neshaminy going in a positive direction.

Bill Moran, retired, Langhorne, said that all the taxpayers must help the School Board. He quoted the percentages of tax increases over the past years and said it must stop. Mr. Moran said for that reason, the taxpayers must stand with the School Board on this issue.

9. Future Topics

None

10. Agenda Development for the June 15, 2010 Public Board Meeting

None

11. Other Board Business

Mr. Webb made a motion to approve Bid No. 11-21, in the amount of \$988,495 for roof replacements at Miller and Ferderbar Elementary.

The Board unanimously approved said bid.

Mr. Koutsouradis apologized to the public for the action of the NFT in not showing the proper respect. Mr. Koutsouradis read a letter from an elderly Feasterville resident regarding the hardship that the current economic times are placing on senior citizens. She has deep concerns about the possibility of rising taxes and her ability to keep her home. She is pleading with the teacher's union, because the taxpayers can no longer fund any more. Mr. Koutsouradis added his own comment by stating that during these tough economic times how could the Teacher's Union not want to negotiate a contract that would stop the bleeding of the taxpayers and give back to the community.

Mr. Webb mentioned that during public comment an opt-out offer was brought up and he stated that it is true that if two teachers are married one has the option of taking 37% of the premium. He further stated that it is true that the insurance is down 7% but it is up 2 million dollars over last year. As to the point of offering an alternative health plan, Mr. Webb stated that they had offered another plan, which had a 4 million-dollar savings. However, the 4 million-dollar savings was a limited time offer. There was a saving if the plan was accepted that year but it was not offered the following year. Mr. Webb noted that should a strike occur a 48-hour notice is required; therefore, parents would be notified in ample time.

Mrs. Cummings requested that Mr. Paradise clarify a statement made about the high school construction project being over budget.

Mr. Paradise explained that the high school construction project was under budget and had nothing to do with any deficit or proposed deficit this year or last year.

Mr. Morris thanked the parents and students for attending and he added more parents are needed at the meetings. He expressed his regrets for the teachers walking out of the meeting. He stated that he is looking forward to a settlement of the contract.

Mr. Webb commented that contrary to a statement made earlier about Dr. Muenker attending the negotiations, that this is not necessarily accurate.

12. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Mrs. Boyle seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:35 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary