

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
January 10, 2012

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on January 10, 2012 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. Mike Morris
Mr. William Oettinger
Mr. Mr. Mark Shubin
Mr. Anthony Sposato

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mr. Anthony Devlin
Mrs. Theresa Hinterberger

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS: Approximately 700+ persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire
Chuck Sweet, Esquire

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

None

4. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- Last day of strike is designated for Thursday, January 19th, children returning Friday, January 20th.
- Elementary child care will continue for the duration of the strike in 6 of the elementary schools.
- Some of the following activities will resume: boys and girls basketball, boys and girls bowling, boys and girls winter track, wrestling, cheerleading, boys and girls swimming. Practices for the high school's musical will be scheduled, along with the high school students to compete in the upcoming PMEA music tryouts scheduled for Saturday, January 21st at William Tenant.
- High school seniors have been contacted and invited to report to school for a half day opportunity starting Wednesday, January 11th, to work on their graduation project.

5. Public Comment

Kevin Gallagher, IT analyst, Middletown Township, stated that the innocent Neshaminy children are not responsible for the contract problems and should not be used as bargaining chips. He said to do so by the union is simply immoral and wrong. Mr. Gallagher said that the NFT's actions will define them as strikers and not educators and questioned if that is how they want to be remembered.

Mike Caputo, retired business owner, Penn del, expressed his outrage over the teacher's strike. He said the children's futures are slowly slipping away. Mr. Caputo asked what lessons this action is teaching the

children. He remarked that this is about power, money and greed. He commended the Board for their courage and resolve to save the school district and he told them to stand firm for as long as it takes.

Gail Thibodeau, self employed Middletown Township, remarked that the NFT is not working without a contract, but rather they are working under an expired contract with all the benefits, which is the most generous contract of all surrounding school districts. She said there is no motivation for the senior teachers to reach an agreement. Ms. Thibodeau said that the union leaders have caused a division between the community and the teachers with inaccurate and untruthful remarks about the Neshaminy School Board. She declared that the community has become quickly united in favor of the Board, due to unpopular actions such as Work to Contract and the current teachers strike.

Almando Carrasquillo, retired State Trooper, Laurel Oaks, said that his remarks are not against the good, ethical teachers or against unions, but is directed towards those who would use the children as pawns in their conflict with the Board. He questioned why the NFT does not understand that the school district simply does not have the resources to sustain their unreasonable demands. Mr. Carrasquillo warned the junior teachers that if the NFT were to achieve their demands, it would result in them becoming the union's acceptable "collateral damage." Mr. Carrasquillo ended by declaring that there is a long line of unemployed teachers that would gladly step in and provide the district with better results for what is being generously offered.

Jennifer Bourton, financial services, Langhorne, said she supports the Board's decision to suspend negotiations during the current strike. She stated that the union has become a blight on the teaching community in Neshaminy. Ms. Bourton said the NFT has not attempted to negotiate a contract reflective of the economic reality in which we exist. She thanked the Board for standing up for the students and for their financial sanity, which has been lacking in the district for some time.

Steve Pirritano, self employed Feasterville, said the strike is a reprehensible action against the children. He said the NFT is trying to use the children as a wedge between the parents and the Board. Mr. Pirritano stated that the teachers are the most highly compensated in the state, but sadly we cannot say that the students are the most highly educated in the state. He said that he supports the Board in their decision not to negotiate during the strike because it is hurting the children, just as our country will not negotiate with those who intend to do us harm.

Angela Manning, New Jersey teacher, Langhorne, said that with the money that has been paid out for retirement bonuses, the district could have built 8 new computer labs in each of the elementary schools and hired 4 full time certified computer business teachers to teach those classes. Ms. Manning stated that if the NFT is serious about making concessions, this is one that should be made now. Ms. Manning advised the NFT that she is struggling to support her family and make ends meet and she cannot afford a tax increase in order to meet their demands.

Margie McCurdy, Neshaminy support staff employee, Feasterville, offered 2 suggestions for negotiation. She suggested that all certified staff pay 8% towards their health insurance for the first 3 years and pay 100% for all family members that would be included in the coverage. Or, all NFT members and their family members would be covered and the employee would pay 17% of the monthly premium. She stated that these are reasonable plans and the Neshaminy taxpayers should not be required to pay for teachers family members while the community is struggling to pay their own healthcare. Ms McCurdy informed the teachers that their actions are hurting their image and the former respect that the students had for them.

Zack Heinemann, Neshaminy student, Levittown, voiced his support for the teachers who have sustained and influenced him in his education and his life. He praised these teachers as a wonderful group of people who are dedicated and committed to providing students with a quality education. Mr. Heinemann said that remarks against the teachers are being made out of bias and those making the remarks are unaware of the

qualities that he has witnessed in his interactions with the teachers who have helped to mold him into the person he is.

Terry Dittes, auto worker, Levittown, stated that he is not upset by the teachers strike, but he is upset that the Board has shared the negotiation information with the public. He said that negotiations should be in the back room. He declared that he is against publishing teachers' salaries to the public. Mr. Dittes stated that it is irresponsible of the Board to cancel negotiations while the teachers are on strike.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired business executive, Middletown Township, stated that he moved into the district over 20 years ago because of the excellent reputation of the Neshaminy School District. He said that the ranking of the school district is no longer as desirable as it once was. Mr. Alfonso stated that the NFT has distorted the results of where the district actually ranks in the state in an effort to deceive parents and taxpayers. He said that Neshaminy's science and writing, which were not reported, have the worst scores, with a rank of 281 in science and 312 in writing out of 500. Mr. Alfonso declared that the Pennsylvania Department of Education ranks Neshaminy at 245 out of 500.

Stacy Kirsh, educator, Middletown Township, stated that she is sad that it has taken a strike to make parents take an interest in what is going on in the district. Ms. Kirsch said that the Board has shown disrespect for the students and the educational process by cancelling negotiations during the strike. She said the Board is not doing everything in their power to bring the dispute to an end.

Cara DeLorenzo, World Language teacher, Washington Crossing, commented that the current stalemate has been created by everyone involved. She said there needs to be an end to the finger pointing and blaming the union. Ms. DeLorenzo pleaded for everyone to come together and talk until it is resolved.

Tara Huber, English teacher, Huntingdon Valley, remarked that teachers know firsthand what the students need in order to succeed. She said that teachers have had a voice in recommending class size, program improvements, teacher training and the needs of special education students. Ms. Huber said the Board is now proposing contract changes that will take away the teachers' equal voice. Ms. Huber urged the Board to take this item off the table, respect the teachers and resume negotiations.

Marian Reed, Neshaminy teacher, Philadelphia, stated that while Neshaminy teachers have been called names recently, they have also received support from parents and neighbors. She said that teachers are aware that times are tough and they are willing to sacrifice for the future of the schools and they have offered a proposal with savings of millions of dollars to the district, including a modified healthcare plan and an 8% contribution by teachers. Ms. Reed also stated that the teachers' voice has made Neshaminy schools better and the Board wants to silent that voice. Ms. Reed implored the Board to come back to the table and work for a fair settlement.

Louise Boyd, Neshaminy teacher and President of the NFT, Furlong, remarked that two camps exist in the contract struggles, which are the Neshaminy School Board camp and the NFT camp. She said that the camp with Mr. Webb and the School Board would give teachers less say in what happens in the classroom, it would treat them as pawns not partners, and decisions would come from the top down. In the NFT's camp they know that teachers want to improve schools and they want to be full partners in the educational process. She said that the Board should work with teachers and listen to them as has been the practice for the last 30-40 years in Neshaminy.

William O'Connor, employee of a Science & Technology Publisher, Langhorne, offered his support for the School Board and advised them to stay the course. He stated that the 10 year projected increase in contributions by the Neshaminy School District to the PSERS fund went from \$62 million to \$67 million. Mr. O'Connor remarked that the NFT wants the Board to use any reserve money to subsidize its contract demands, without any consideration to needed building repairs, PSERS crisis, or money to balance the budget. He said if the reserve money was depleted for NFT demands, the end result would be program cuts

and the children's education would suffer. Mr. O'Connor said he wholeheartedly supports the Board's decision to halt negotiations with the NFT during the strike. He declared that the community will not allow their children to be used as pawns. He said if the NFT wants the Board to resume talks, it is time for them to go back to the classroom.

Chris Torchia, Neshaminy teacher, Langhorne, said she is proud of the voice that the teachers have in the schools. Ms. Torchia said they have the right to play a strong roll in educational matters. She advised parents that all the things they like about Neshaminy schools are probably because the teachers have a voice. She said that the Board should not silent that voice and bankrupt the children's educational futures.

Paul Notwick, Neshaminy teacher, Levittown, said he hoped that the contract could be settled without the strike, but they are standing up for what is right. He said the Board has rejected proposals that would save the district millions of dollars. Mr. Notwick stated that it is not right that the Board has cancelled negotiation sessions during the strike. He said it is time to end the impasse and get back to the business of education.

6. Items for Approval tonight

a) Overnight Trips

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the following trips:

- Neshaminy High School Ski Club Trip to Okemo Mountain and Stratton Mountain in Vermont - January 20 - 22, 2012
- Neshaminy High School Boys Indoor Track to Penn State University for the Annual Kevin Dare High School Invitational - January 20 - 21, 2012

Mr. Webb made a motion to have the above overnight trips be approved and Mr. Congdon seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said trips by a vote of nine ayes, and zero nays.

7. Items for Approval at the January 24th Public Board Meeting

a) Revised Board Polices

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the Following:

- Revised Policy #534 - Suspension and Expulsion
- Revised polices #232, 332, 432, 532 - Restrictions Upon Possession, Smoking and Tobacco Use
- Revised Policy #512 - High School Diploma

Mr. Webb stated that at the January 24, 2012 Public Board Meeting the above revised policies will be agenda items.

b) School Director Recognition Month

Dr. Muenker stated that at the January 24, 2012 Public Board Meeting there will be a proclamation made to honor the School Directors of Neshaminy.

c) Election of Board Member to the intermediate Unit Board

Dr. Muenker stated that at the January 24, 2012 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion presented for the approval for the Election of a Board Member to the Intermediate Unit Board.

d) Response to the Auditor General's Audit for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2007 and 2008

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the January 24, 2012 Public Board Meeting the Response to the Auditor General's Audit for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2007 and 2008 will be presented for approval.

e) Solar Energy Power Purchase Agreement

Dr. Muenker stated that at the January 24, 2012 Public Board Meeting the Solar Energy Power Purchase Agreement will be an agenda item.

f) Approval of the 2012 – 13 Preliminary Budget

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the January 24, 2012 Public Board Meeting the Resolution Authorizing 2012 - 2013 Proposed Preliminary Budget will be voted on. The PSERS amount is correct from 12.19% to the 12.36%.

g) Bids/budgets transfers

Mrs. Markowitz stated there was one bid 13-12 for High School Boiler Replacement – Boiler Room K.

Bid No. 13-12

Bid Amount: \$277,000.00

Bid Description: Replacement of 1974 Boilers at area K in the Neshaminy High School with 5 year old boilers from Neshaminy Middle School, which will result in energy efficiency improvement from 80 % to 92%. Project was budgeted at \$350,000.

Mrs. Markowitz recommended the approval of this bid, due to the timing of taking the boilers out of Neshaminy Middle School.

Mr. Webb made a motion to accept bid No. 13-12 and Mr. Shubin seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said bid.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Budget Transfer Report (Working Copy) 12-2 has two transactions.

1. Funds needed to cover travel expenses for Pupil Services staff for workshop registrations and mileage.
2. Funds are needed for upcoming workshops.

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for January 11th, at 5:15 p.m. Topics will include work regulations, high school diploma, nepotism, and the use of electronic communications.

b) Educational Development

Mr. Shubin informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for January 23rd, at 6:30 p.m.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised the Board that solar energy power was discussed

d) IU Board

Mrs. Cummings informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for January 17th.

e) Education Foundation

Dr. Muenker informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for February 13th, at 4:00 p.m.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis advised the Board that the last meeting was a re-organization of the Board. Mr. Koutsouradis is President, John Doyle, of Bristol Borough, 1st Vice President; Gary Sanderson from Pennsbury is 2nd Vice President.

g) Technology

Mr. Congdon advised the Board that the date of the next technology meeting will be announced at the next Board meeting.

h) Ad Hoc Facility Use Update

Mr. Oettinger announced to the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for the second week in February.

9. Public Comment

Almando Carrasquillo, retired State Trooper, Laurel Oaks, remarked that the Board is not responsible for publicizing the salaries of the NFT. He said the information is available from the Department of Education. In rebuttal of an earlier public comment, Mr. Carrasquillo said that backdoor negotiations are what got the district in the predicament it is in today. He said that no official document is on record or can be substantiated for the last backdoor agreement that was made many years ago. Mr. Carrasquillo said that most union members who strike do not get paid, but the NFT does not lose money because of the 180 day requirement for students, because the days lost during a strike are made up. Mr. Carrasquillo said that the teachers have a defined benefit with their retirement fund, which is different from the public sector that has a defined contribution. He explained that if the teachers fund loses money, it is made up by the taxpayers with PSERS. Mr. Carrasquillo concluded by advising the media if they want to hear from students regarding the strike, they should keep the comments anonymous to protect them from retaliation.

Stephen Pirritano, self employed, Feasterville, said that he does believe that teachers make a difference; however, that difference can only be made in the classroom and not on the picket line. He stated that the current situation that gives teachers equal say does not make anyone responsible. He said that out of the 13 surrounding school districts, Neshaminy is the only district that has the "equal say clause" - including Central Bucks School District, who ranks 7th in the state of Pennsylvania. Mr. Pirritano declared that teachers will always have a say, but someone has to be in charge and take responsibility and that authority should remain with the superintendant of the school district.

Larry Pastor, business executive, Middletown Township, remarked that from 2002 to 2008 \$40 million has been added to the budget for compensation to teachers and this is what has broken the budget. He said contrary to what the NFT claims that they are working without a contract, they are actually working under the old extravagant contract and now they are asking for \$30 million more. Mr. Pastor said that the taxpayers and parents are trying to improve and change the district for the children, but the NFT does not have that same goal. He urged the Board to stand firm and know that the taxpayers are behind them 100%.

Jagger Bolendorf, student, Feasterville, commented that he likes his teachers, but the fact that they choose to sit at their computers and not teach the students is beyond his understanding. He questioned why the use of iPads is necessary and why isn't the money used for better purposes. Mr. Bolendorf said if the teachers are professionals, as they state, why then are they wearing NFT shirts during school hours. He also asked why teachers should expect a raise when the lesson plans being used are state issued.

Brian Weiner, operations manager, Middletown Township, he is saddened that due to the strike, he has been unable to listen to his daughter's remarks about her school day. He pleaded with everyone involved in the contract dispute to do their jobs - parents to parent, leaders to lead and teachers to teach.

Kim May, Neshaminy teacher, Newtown, said she has never taken any vengeance against a student. She asked why every one of the nine Board members allows people to come to the podium and suggest that a teacher would retaliate against a student because of the parent's comments. She challenged the Board members to name one teacher that has taken anything out on a student.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired business executive, Middletown Township, said he believes that 20% of Neshaminy teachers are excellent, 50% are adequate, and 30% are worthless. Mr. Alfonso voiced his

concern for those students who receive free lunch because of financial hardship, wondering how they are getting along during the strike. He told Dr. Muenker that he will volunteer to provide lunch to 3 children during the strike.

Paul Adler, parent, Levittown, commented that no one benefits from this strike. He cited an example of how his son was hurt because his school ice cream party was cancelled due to the strike. Mr. Adler said he understands that a fair contract is desired, but the NFT has to consider the district's budget and try to come to an affordable resolution.

Cara DeLorenzo, Spanish teacher, Washington Crossing, said it is understandable that people have different opinions, but she takes exception to some of the comments. She stated that she would never harm a child, she uses her own creative lesson plans and she does not sit down during a class.

Butch McClinton, parent, Levittown, commented that both sides must negotiate and bear in mind the taxpayers who work hard for their livings. Mr. McClinton explained an incident involving his son, who was home from college and visited the picket line in order to bring coffee to two of his favorite teachers. He said one of the teachers on the picket line called his son an expletive without provocation. Mr. McClinton expressed his dismay and outrage, why anyone would behave in such an appalling manner, especially a teacher who is supposed to be a professional.

10. Future Topics

None

11. Agenda Development for the January 10, 2012 Public Board Meeting

None

12. Other Board Business

Mr. Profy recommended to the Board that they approve the settlement of the Real Estate Tax Assessment Appeal of Physical Fitness Centers of Philadelphia, Inc. for Tax Parcel No. 22-057-020-006 via fixing the 2011 Tax Year Assessment at Two hundred Forty-Five Thousand Two Hundred Fifty (\$245,250) Dollars and the 2012 Tax Year at Two Hundred Thirty-one Thousand Six Hundred Fifty (\$231,650) Dollars.

Mr. Webb made a motion to approve Real Estate Tax Assessment Appeal, Tax Parcel No. 22-057-020-006 and Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

13. Board Comment

Mr. Shubin commented that while emotions are running high right now everyone should remain respectful and considerate. He said there is no place in this district for threats, intimidation or violence. He said he supports reform and change for the district. Mr. Shubin stated we need an operating model that is sustainable and not built on the 2001 model of the past contract. He said the district does not have the luxury of negotiating a contract from a point that is not sustainable from a budget perspective. Mr. Shubin asked the teachers to go back to work and to stop involving the children in this way.

Mr. Congdon remarked that he was highly offended by a teacher's accusation that every Board member allows comments about teachers retaliating against students. Mr. Congdon said that every speaker has the freedom to voice their opinion and it does not necessarily reflect the Board members' positions. Mr. Congdon said he has recently received approximately 450 emails of which about 440 were overwhelmingly in favor of the Board. He said out of the other 10 that were from teachers, one was particularly venomous and way out of line. Mr. Congdon said he has never once heard a Board member speak in such a manner. He expressed his dismay why anyone would walk out on a job that starts at \$47 thousand up to \$98 thousand in 11 years time. He concluded by stating that if the NFT wants to be rewarded with a contract

they must stop this ill-timed strike, they should never implement another WTC action and they should stop driving the reputations of the Neshaminy teachers into the ground.

Mr. Koutsouradis remarked that the recent strike is not accomplishing anything but harm to the parents and children in the district. He further stated that the NFT cannot claim that they did not have a choice in this matter because they had every choice. Mr. Koutsouradis remarked that the timing of the strike was, indeed, ill-timed having it commence on the same day as the Arch Diocese announced the closing of 40 some schools due to economic reasons. In rebuttal to the teacher who wrote a derogatory email saying that the Board members positions should be renegotiated, Mr. Koutsouradis said this was already done this past November and it was called an election. He declared that the community has spoken and they chose who they wanted on the Neshaminy School Board. Mr. Koutsouradis concluded by saying that they should try to negotiate and resolve this dispute and keep the venom out of the rhetoric.

Mr. Morris acknowledged that the latest proposal from the NFT has a savings of \$879 thousand, but when you consider the "Me Too" clause, it would cost the district an additional \$1 million; therefore, the entire proposal would cost the district \$30 million. The early retirement fund will have cost the district nearly \$9 million to date. The total healthcare cost from the past 10 years is \$35 million, which is money that was not spent on education. Mr. Morris said that the NFT is choking the public financially. He also added that the healthcare coverage was suspended when the teachers strike began. Mr. Morris declared that he takes it personally when an NFT member points their finger at every Board Member and holds them responsible for remarks made by the public speakers. Mr. Morris said he thinks the CBA signed in 2002 giving free health care is illegal and fraudulent.

Mrs. Cummings thanked the community for the emails supporting the Board. She urged the NFT to go back to work, stating that we must have respect for each other during these hard times, but the children must come first. Mrs. Cummings said that the NFT should remember that the Neshaminy District cannot afford retro pay, is limited by Act I and cannot offer installment plans and she added that the teachers must contribute more than 8% toward the healthcare plan.

Ms. Boyle encouraged both sides to listen to each other and refrain from offensive rhetoric. She said that the budget speaks for itself and the funds are simply not available to give the teachers the contract that they want. She asked the teachers to come back to the classroom and do the job that they are being paid to do. She reminded the NFT that the Board is doing the job that it was elected to do.

Mr. Webb expressed his appreciation to the community for their tremendous support and all the emails that have been sent. Mr. Webb emphatically declared that it is not true that teachers will not have input in educational matters if the equal say clause is changed. He acknowledged that teachers are very important and the school district wants their input, but someone must be the boss and be held responsible. Mr. Webb said that whether or not there would be retaliation against a child or parent for speaking out against the NFT, there is a perceived intimidation and this is why people are voicing their concerns. He said that no one is saying it has happened, but the fear of it is present.

13. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Shubin seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:18 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary