

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
BOARD STRATEGIC ACTION COMMITTEE
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
March 9, 2009

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on March 9, 2009 in the Board Room at Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Dr. Geeta A. Heble
Mrs. Patricia Boylan

SECRETARY:

Mrs. Anita E. Walls

OTHERS: Approximately 65 persons from the public, staff and press

BOARD STRATEGIC ACTION COMMITTEE MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m. Mr. Webb announced that an Executive Session was held prior to the meeting from 6:30 p.m. to present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Webb requested everyone join in the pledge of allegiance.

3. WELCOME AND MEETING OVERVIEW

Dr. Muenker advised that meetings have been taking place on a regular basis in order to speak about initiatives and issues of interest for the school district. These additional meetings were designed to devote the attention to very specific topics. This evening's discussions will take place regarding the budget and full-day kindergarten. We will begin our evening by inviting the high school administration to the podium. At one of the last sessions the elementary administrators provided a presentation and at the last meeting the middle school administrators provided a presentation regarding their student allocations and how their dollars are spent.

4. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

a) High School Administration Presentation

Mr. Menio distributed to Board members a copy of the presentation. Mr. Menio provided the following information:

- The allocation afforded the high school is divided into two categories: Academic programs (70%) and athletic/co-curricular programs (30%).
- Curricular Programs – Basic process entails budgeting for fixed expenses:
 - Copier paper
 - Detention Salaries
 - Duplicating Equipment Lease
 - Forms
 - Graduation

- Handbooks Membership
- Mileage for shared teachers
- Scheduling Materials
- Technology replacement/upgrades
- Text book replacements
- Toner cartridges

The remainder of the building allocation is divided among the 13 departments in the building. Each department typically works with three basic funding categories – General Supplies, Textbooks, and AV Supplies. The department chairperson monitors the budget allocation for their department and individual department members made their budget requests to the administration through the department chairperson.

English, Fine Arts, Library, Math, Health/PE, Science, Social Studies and World Languages are grouped collectively by budget category (1100's) while the balance of the academic departments, Special Education, Family & Consumer Science, Tech Ed, Business, Guidance, and Principal's Office have their own budget codes.

The newest variable at the high school next year will be the introduction of ninth grade.

Because the typical allocation for the individual departments is adequate, if special needs exist during a specific year, the departments will self identify funding amounts they could divert to the department in need. This typically occurs in the area of textbooks. Unused funds in this category have been diverted to the English department to eliminate reading selections that have been limited to classroom copies only.

Mr. Magdelinkas provided the following information:

Co-Curricular/Athletic Programs

Fixed Expenses:

Registration & league fees for athletics and co-curricular programs

Officials

Variable Expenses:

Equipment

Supplies

Tournament Fees/Dues

Uniform replacement & purchase

Prior to finalization of all expenditures, Central Office approval is obtained.

Mr. Magdelinkas stated that with the 9th graders attending the high school next year he has identified approximately \$100,000 in savings when the three ninth grade teams become one ninth grade team in most instances. The \$100,000 is strictly coaching salaries. There will be added savings with regard to transportation, supplies, uniforms, etc.

Coaches come in the fall with a list of items needed. The items are replaced based upon need. Prioritization takes place and lately we have been looking to extend the life of items for an extra year or two and looking to move contests closer to home in an effort to cut expenses. Every three years the uniforms are replaced. The equipment is recycled and reconditioned as best it can. Equipment safety is a priority.

Mr. Koutsouradis questioned mileage for the teachers. Mr. Menio stated that this is for travel between buildings and with the ninth grade moving to the high school this should decrease. This is a contractual obligation when using their personal vehicle. The mileage rate is \$.34.

Mr. Eccles inquired what is the co-curricular budget and percentage of students involved in extra-curricular activities. Mr. Magdelinkas stated that it is approximately 50%-60%. Mr. Paradise advised that \$1.6M is

spent in the four secondary schools (high school and 3 middle schools) for co-curricular programs which is a per pupil allocation. The dollar amount is higher for the high school and is distributed over many more accounts.

Mr. Paradise advised that the proceeds from ticket sales at the athletic events go into the general fund which is miscellaneous revenues.

Dr. Spitz asked for any ideas or concepts that the high school administrators can come up with to help with the upcoming budget. Mr. Menio advised that they are using electronic communication to save money. All teachers at the high school currently have a computer on their desktop. Principal's newsletter will begin going out electronically which has been a success at the middle school level. Student handbook could also be posted electronically.

Dr. Spitz inquired regarding the Course Selection Book which is distributed to over 800 students.

Dr. McGee is responsible for student scheduling and the student information system has the ability to perform a number of tasks – online course requests which will be looked into for the upcoming school year. This would have potential savings of \$4,400 which is the cost of publishing the course selection books.

Ms. Boyle questioned the type of paper used by the district. Mr. Paradise advised that the paper product is competitively bid and is purchased for the entire year for the entire school district.

Mr. Koziol inquired how the teachers look at the money they are allocated. Mr. Menio stated that in the past the thought process was if I don't spend it, I will lose it. Currently, the district is attempting to move away from that type of thought process.

Mr. Koziol would like to see some type of reward system for those with the most cost savings.

Mr. Koziol inquired as to how is the allocation amount determined? Mr. Paradise stated that it is the per pupil allocation times the projected enrollment based on prior year numbers which may be slightly up or down. Every budget year this is discussed and this year's projection is about a 3% increase which will probably be decreased.

Transportation could also play a role in savings by possibly reducing the number of late runs after school and cut the volume of buses down. Have clubs meet on specific days in order to have more economics with bus transportation.

Mr. Koziol asked whether the capability to network to copiers is available at the high school.

Mr. Basen inquired regarding the student manual and what does it contain. Mr. Menio stated that it provides the rules and regulations and expectation of behavior at the high school. Sign offs and permission slips are included which also contains the agenda/schedule section. Many students use this section for homework assignments and many students and teachers use this section.

Mr. Sypek inquired what is the size of the budget and what if you were given 10% less to work with? Mr. Menio stated that the budget amount is approximately \$537,000 for curriculum. If that cut were made of 10% I would be compelled to apply that cut and make the most equitable cuts as possible.

Mr. Eccles questioned what is the percentage of certified staff and students using computers? Parents are very appreciative of this computer usage. Mr. Menio feels that it is probably about 50% at this current time. Teachers are posting their web pages which are very helpful to students and parents.

Mr. Webb stated that he would much rather see the people in the department decide what cuts should occur. The Board needs your help to look at all the positions, transportation, supplies, etc.

b) Full Day Kindergarten

The Board Strategic Action Committee has discussed full day kindergarten (FDK) and extended day kindergarten (EDK) at four of its last five meetings. The group has also heard discussions regarding the benefits of a full day kindergarten program along with information pertaining to the realities of the District budget. The decision regarding kindergarten affects other District decisions.

Dr. Rattigan provided Board members a handout regarding Kindergarten Option 2009-2010, a true and correct copy of which is attached hereto and made a part hereof. (Attachment A).

Dr Spitz inquired regarding the difference between an extended day vs. full day kindergarten. Dr. Rattigan advised that the extended day is to help those children who need the extra time to prepare themselves for the full first grade program.

Mr. O'Connor was seeking an endorsement on one of the options vs. another. Dr. Rattigan stated that research shows that a full day kindergarten contributes to increased school readiness, higher academic achievement, improves student attendance, supports literacy and language development, benefits children socially and emotionally, and decreases costs by reducing retention. Dr. Rattigan stated that all the other options provided have included extended day kindergarten. The committee's first choice was full day kindergarten. Second option would be to accept some form of extended day kindergarten.

Dr. Muenker advised that Option C includes full day kindergarten in all schools and the elimination of the six pre-first programs which would cost the district approximately \$800,000. The district is not privy to the financial package or support the state and federal government would provide.

Mr. O'Connor inquired that if one of the options were chosen would that preclude the district from closing an elementary school.

Mr. Blasch has been a proponent of early childhood education and the importance of same, however, the district's deficit issue at this time is severe and Mr. Blasch does not see how the Board can begin to entertain even a slight increase in the budget by implementing full day kindergarten. Ms. Boyle agrees with this statement. Ms. Boyle feels that if the District is attempting to reduce costs you cannot proceed with another approximately \$1M program. Mr. Webb is also in agreement with same and it does not make economic sense at this time.

Mr. Koziol inquired whether the Accountability Block Grant could be used for this purpose. Mr. Koziol does not know whether it is more appropriate to use the funds towards the tutoring program or use the funds toward full day kindergarten. Dr. Muenker advised that accountability dollars are disappearing.

Dr. Muenker advised that the full day kindergarten program should not leave the table; however, where the district is in 2009 it may not be feasible to support same. Conversations need to continue in the future.

Ms. Boyle noted that if the grant monies were lost and the district instituted a full day kindergarten program, the district would need to follow through with same. Dr. Spitz noted that Pennsbury eliminated same due to financial reasons. Dr. Spitz feels that a grant cannot fund the money for the full day kindergarten program.

Mrs. Cummings pointed out that Option J has a savings to the district which would have one class per building and eliminate all pre-first. Dr. Rattigan pointed out that the extended day program would apply only to new incoming students and those students at the end of this year who would have proceeded to pre-first would not have that option and would need to repeat the kindergarten year.

Mr. Koziol stated that out of 501 school districts, 480 districts have full day kindergarten.

Mr. Eccles is always concerned with the four schools who did not achieve AYP. Mr. Eccles feels that we should eliminate some programs and get some help to the children who need same. There are serious problems within the district not only the Title 1 schools, but also at the high school level. Where do we go from here?

Mr. Blasch noted that everyone knows the district does not have the money to fund a full day kindergarten program for this upcoming school year.

Mr. Webb made a motion to table the full day kindergarten program for this upcoming budget year. Mr. Blasch seconded the motion.

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

c) 2009 – 2010 Budget Development

Mr. Paradise provided Board members with a list of 72 items to be considered for cost reductions for the District. The Board proceeded to go through the list and discuss the items.

1. Energy Use Reimbursement fee for facility use and fee schedule for rental of our facilities. Who is the appropriate payer of the fee, those who participate and use the facilities or the taxpayers of the school district? In many cases it was decided that the organizations using the facilities could bear a greater cost. These are optional activities and possibly money could be recovered to help pay the expenses.

Mr. Koziol is concerned that the people using the facilities are our own taxpayers and this will only be hurting the children using said facilities. Mr. Eccles is concerned as to where are the children going to go?

Mr. Eccles feels that the certified staff should be charged with the duty of seeing what programs should be cut? Mr. Eccles is concerned that the Board is not addressing the main issue. The main issue is concessions. The Administrators and Certified Staff should tell the Board which programs they don't need. Mr. Eccles is adamant that when it comes to students and keeping them off the streets at night he will not budge on the issue. Mr. Eccles has fought for the children in the community to have a place to play and continue to participate in sports.

Mr. Eccles stated that in the last two years \$7M of the reserve fund was used and now there is nothing left.

Dr. Spitz stated that it is not the staff's decision as to what programs should be cut; it is the Board's decision.

The Board decided to consider increasing "user fees" for facilities.

3. Review Lead Teachers program and Department Heads for release time.

A report was provided to Board members from Curriculum and Instruction. Dr. Heble provided Board members with an overview of the job description. Dr. Heble advised that there is not an overlap in services.

Mr. Paradise advised that the Administration is not suggesting the elimination of lead teachers, this was a suggestion provided. Dr. Spitz is pleased to see the overview. Mr. Koziol would like to know what the

savings would be. Dr. Muenker stated that there are problems which the district would face in order to attempt to alter the structure of the program and work assignments.

Dr. Muenker advised that the release time is equivalent to approximately six (6) positions. Dr. Muenker suggested that this should be further examined by the Educational Development Committee.

Dr. Spitz stated that the primary function of this District is to educate students. We cannot educate them if we do not have a curriculum program, which is what lead teachers are responsible for. The whole idea of eliminating lead teachers could be detrimental because of the leadership role they play with regards to the curriculum of this District. Mr. Eccles was in agreement with Dr. Spitz, but could it be taken one step further and really examine every course and its merit and need in the graduation process. Dr. Spitz asked for the Administration's recommendation regarding this issue and contractually how is the district bound.

Dr. Spitz does not feel comfortable deciding issues of curriculum matters which have a direct educational impact on the students. Mr. Eccles disagrees due to the fact that he feels that the extra-curricular activities are a place where students learn a great deal of knowledge and life skills.

Mr. Blasch feels that it would be beneficial to hear from the lead teachers and see exactly what is done during the course of the day and the job that they perform.

Mr. Basen stated that the Board and the Administration should do what you are asking the elementary staff, middle school staff and high school to do. The assignment was given to each school to bring savings and cuts and Mr. Basen feels the Board and Administration should be doing the same at this time.

Mr. Koziol asked that Dr. Muenker provide information regarding the other school districts in our area and what is their procedure regarding lead teachers and department heads.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Patrick Miller, Laurel Oaks, Langhorne, PA, stated that he is a stay at home father and stated that a \$14M deficit is a huge amount of money, but it needs to be taken care of one dollar at a time. Blanket cuts cannot be made and Mr. Miller is happy that the Board is looking at it that way with regards to the educational programs. The district could have the opportunity to make money. This week registration took place for classes at the pool. The lines were ridiculous. It was only \$50.00 to register for ten classes. This fee should be at least double and the district could be putting this extra money into the general fund. Mr. Miller thinks that it is a great idea to charge for parking permits at the high school. Mr. Miller would like to advertise full day kindergarten to people outside the district. Other communities would like to take advantage of this situation. People are willing to pay for this service and parents would be responsible for getting their children to the district. This would be an opportunity to make money.

Mr. Paul Schneider, Langhorne, PA, state that he is a self-employed public relations consultant. Mr. Schneider stated that he has had a drop of income, but his insurance costs have gone up thirty percent. Radical change needs to take place, programs need to be cut and the Board needs to be strong. If the Board cannot make these hard decisions and cannot make significant changes, there will be certain students who will no longer be within the district due to the fact that their parents will not be able to afford to remain in this area.

Mr. Bill Harley, Feasterville, Lower Southampton, PA, stated that he is laid off from a sales/marketing position. Mr. Harley stated that a meeting took place at the Lower Southampton library sponsored by the Senior Task Force at which time two of the Board members were in attendance. Mr. Harley stated that the meeting was called by the Senior Task Force in opposition to the teacher's contract. The residents requested that the offer on the table currently be pulled off the table. If an offer were to come back it would be no raise

for two years based on today's economy. Teachers should pay 50% of their premiums and the school would pay 50% of their premiums. Mr. Harley's last employer paid 49% and Mr. Harley paid 51%. It is not unreasonable to ask them to share in their health care costs. The County has not placed an increase on taxes for this upcoming year. The School Board needs to do the same thing. The worth of homes is diminishing. People are losing equity in their homes.

Mr. Frank Sosky, Langhorne, PA is retired and a new resident to the district. Mr. Sosky feels that the revenues are staying flat from year to year. If the revenues stay flat and the costs keep increasing this district will face a real problem. The district could be compared to GM and what has occurred in their situation where the union workers just began running the company. The school board needs to hold its line with regards to the contract position. The board needs to take an appropriate attitude towards the situation.

Mr. Paradise referred earlier to the per pupil allocation of 3%, not with regards to the teacher's contract.

The Board proceeded to continue analyzing the cost reductions.

4. The pools should be closed – too expensive, too old to maintain.

Mr. Paradise noted that this idea was provided by a resident and should there be any consideration given by the Board to this idea.

Mrs. Cummings stated that the pool is used by the swim team. Mr. Eccles wanted to know dollar amounts of what it costs to maintain and operate the pools.

Mr. Marvin Dickler stated that students in other areas are required to pay a fee to belong on the swim team. His grandchild needs to pay \$800 per year. Before closing the programs you need to approach the people using the programs and see if they would be willing to pay a fee to enjoy said programs. People would be willing to pay within reason.

Mr. Paradise noted that the pools are a self-supporting program. Mr. Minotti stated that in 2007-08 the cost to run the pool for electric, gas, heat, chlorine, cleaning supplies, maintenance, etc. is approximately \$26,000 per pool. The custodian costs per pool is approximately \$64,000 which also includes benefits. The custodian also has job descriptions which are over and above the duties of the pool. The custodian is a general custodian performing other duties within the school. There are two pools and approximately \$6,000 is spent on each pool for regular maintenance.

5. All Principals and Support Staff Department Heads will be expected to meet with the Finance & Facilities Committee to support and defend their budget and staff requests for 2009-10.

Mr. Paradise noted that this has been an ongoing process for the last several weeks.

6. High School release time should be modified and/or reduced.

Mr. Paradise provided a report for complete teaching load release time and special duty time at the high school.

Dr. Spitz asked if there are any cases where the teacher may not need a release time every day, but possibly only certain days within the week. Dr. Heble stated that this is being looked into.

7. Mr. Webb stated that agreement has been reached with that item.

8. Course consolidations have taken place and the minimum class participation in order to hold a class has been raised.

9. This option is currently in progress.

10. Efficiency of all secondary schools is being studied at this time.
11. Internal communications at all schools is being dealt with.
12. Review bus routes, fuel costs, etc. Mr. Paradise has requested a complete review of all bus routes, as well as recommendations from the transportation department for increasing walking distances, and other changes to reduce costs.

Mrs. Cummings asked regarding late school buses and stops being made within the community.

The state has specific recommendations and the district has its own guidelines. Safety is of a concern with this issue.

Consolidation is a key issue and could result in savings. Coordination is critical. Change will occur and students will need to possibly walk further which will present safety issues in some instances, but this will need to be addressed.

13. Eliminate late transportation runs. Elimination of these runs could save approximately \$390,000. Private school runs are a major part of this cost. Maybe only one late bus could be eliminated. Discussion ensued regarding the issue and the ramifications of same. The Board requested to know what the cost savings would be to eliminate the 5:15 run.
14. Eliminate mid day kindergarten bus runs. The savings from eliminating same would be approximately \$85,000. Parents would be responsible for the middle day pick-up and drop-off. The Board was in agreement that this could be a possible savings and should be followed through.
15. Will be discussed at a later time.
16. Stop buying food for Board and Committee meetings. Savings of approximately \$2,200. The Board was in agreement to eliminate same.
17. Eliminate Winter Track – Indoor – for boys and girls. Activities should not be singled out and should be discussed as a whole. This is over and above the Spring Track which the district offers. There are approximately 60 students who participate in Winter Track.

Mr. Eccles feels that it is not right to single out any one sport.

Mr. Dickler feels that the parents should be given the opportunity to pay to play. Give the students the advantage. Mrs. Cummings stated that the parents are already paying for things that are not covered.

18. and 19. Item #18 focuses on the expense of funded athletics and eliminating co-curricular. Item #19 focuses on pay to play. The suggestion would be to develop “participation fees” for certain more expensive sports or a fee for all sports to raise revenue and offset the cost of these expensive programs. Currently, the district spends \$1.6M in co-curricular/student activities programs.

Mr. Paradise noted that a fee structure could be created in many different ways.

Mr. Eccles stressed that the contract issues need to be resolved. The Board is looking at cutting programs and the contracts are not resolved. These employees have been taken care of by this district for years. Mr. Eccles is appalled and the true fact is that students will be affected.

Mr. Webb would like to know what would need to be charged per pupil to allow the activities to continue.

Board discussion ensued regarding the value of athletic and co-curricular activities.

Dr. Spitz stated that if a general activity fee would be charged to every pupil it would be approximately \$400 per year, per pupil. A general activity fee is charged in the state of New Jersey.

Mr. Paradise advised that the Board has no choice but to make cuts.

Mr. Basen attended the Lower Southampton meeting of the Senior Task Force. The community is behind the Board not giving any increases.

Dr. Muenker advised that challenges like ours exists in every school district at the present time.

Dr. Rattigan introduced the Administrators present at this evening's meeting:

Mr. Alex Menio

Mr. Tom Magdelinskas

Dr. Rob McGee

Mr. Colin Trickel

Mr. Bill Ritchey

5. ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Spitz moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary