

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
March 23, 2010

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on March 23, 2010, at the Maple Point Middle School, Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President
Mr. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice President
Ms. Irene M. Boyle
Mr. Scott 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
Mrs. Patricia Boylan
Mr. Kevin Kane
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan

BOARD MEMBER ABSENT:

OTHERS: Approximately 300 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 legal and personnel issues.

Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Announcements

Mr. Webb stated that the student representatives would not be in attendance this evening.

Public Comment

Annamarie Miller, Langhorne, PA, opened by inviting seniors and retirees to contact the district about the S.A.G.E. program and offer valuable life experiences, which would help the educators and students of the school district. Ms. Miller also mentioned that the music program is an important curriculum for the students, because it teaches them self discipline and team work. Ms. Miller stated that the specials teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, and all staff are indispensable to the high quality of education in the district. She reiterated that the quality of education in the Neshaminy School District must remain high if the community is to hold together. She pleaded to the unions to find a way to come to an agreement for the sake of the children.

Angela Manning, Langhorne, PA, school teacher in Burlington School District, commented on a possible rumor about cutting the kindergarten program in the Neshaminy School District. Ms. Manning voiced her opinion that the kindergarten program is extremely important to the future of reading and math education in the higher grades. Ms. Manning also suggested that the Board consider researching a "Pay to Play" program in an effort to save money for the district.

Marlea Partlon, Langhorne, PA, math teacher at The Learning Center, noted that many people have a misconception of The Learning Center at Neshaminy, which is an alternative school. She stated that the alternative program is an extraordinary program with dedicated staff members that help troubled children overcome their emotional and academic struggles in school. Ms. Partlon noted that other less costly alternative programs are not as appropriate and valuable as The Learning Center at Neshaminy.

Grant Passman, Jamison, PA, guidance counselor at The Learning Center, congratulated the Neshaminy School District and School Board for creating the premiere alternative school in this area, which is The Learning Center at Neshaminy. Mr. Passman stated that the program at The Learning Center has had a profound impact on the lives of troubled students. Mr. Passman expressed his hope that the district and community can find a way to maintain the viability of this fine school, which will be money well spent.

Margie McCurdy, Trevese, PA, ISS aide at Poquessing Middle School, offered suggestions for saving the district money in response to an email request from Mr. Paradise. Ms. McCurdy suggested that the district raise the taxes of apartment units within the district. Ms. McCurdy stated that her research into the matter found that if the taxes were raised \$500 per unit, per year, in just the Feasterville area alone, it would earn the district a half million dollars for the year. Ms. McCurdy's second suggestion was for the district to remove illegal students or charge tuition if they are to continue being educated in the Neshaminy school system.

Paula Miller, Levittown, PA, a teacher in the Philadelphia School District, commented on the benefits of the swimming program in the Neshaminy District. Ms. Miller implored the Board to reconsider cutting the swimming program because she feels it offers so many benefits to the students and residents of the district.

Stacy Kirsh, Langhorne, PA, asked that the Board account for the funds from the money saving decisions that have been recently made. Ms. Kirsh also inquired if there has been any pay raises in the district, namely the administration, within the past two years, because she is confused as to where the money may have come from.

Mr. Webb responded that the Board would address these questions at the appropriate time, which would be during Board comment.

Steven Kramer, Villages at Flower Mills, Langhorne, PA, commented that he is aware of all of the proposed budget cuts, lack of contracts, and outsourcing and he wants to know where the money is from the savings. Mr. Kramer also stated that outsourcing the busing would not be cost effective for the district.

Natalie Caruso, Langhorne, PA, student at Neshaminy High School, asked that the Board carefully reconsider any plan to discontinue the swimming program. Ms. Caruso mentioned that the program is important to many people and it would be greatly missed if it were to be eliminated.

Daniel Giacomelli, Middletown resident, voiced his opinion on his opposition towards the elimination of middle school sports and co-curricular activities. He also stated his opposition to the elimination of jobs and various programs within the district as a means of budget cutting. Mr. Giacomelli indicated his support for eliminating illegal students.

Casey Young, ninth grade student at The Learning Center at Neshaminy, explained that he is a student at The Learning Center at Neshaminy. He offered his testimonial to the value and importance of The Learning Center and how much it has helped and supported him with his problems and his transition into high school.

Krystina Aster, a Neshaminy student, stated that she attends The Learning Center at Neshaminy. Ms. Aster praised the staff members of the school and describes the school as a warm and caring environment. Ms. Aster said that the school has helped not only her, but also many other students to excel where they would have previously failed.

Steve Young, Langhorne, PA, Author, asked the Board to consider the consequences to cutting the alternative school. Mr. Young stated that The Learning Center has been very instrumental in helping his son and the many other students who need guidance in coping with their problems. Mr. Young said that he feels that sourcing out the alternative school would cost the community much more in the future than any savings that may be gained now.

Mindy Anderson, Levittown, PA, President of NESPA, said that as a member of the Neshaminy Support Staff she and her colleagues are always willing to offer budget saving ideas and suggestions. Ms. Anderson stated that many of the ideas that have been suggested in the past for reducing operating costs have been implemented and they will continue to offer their ideas because of their devotion to the students and the district.

Steve Rodos, Villages of Flower Mills, Langhorne, PA, thanked the parents, staff, and support staff for their comments at the meeting. Mr. Rodos voiced his opinion that he feels the need for further clarification on certain budget expenses. Mr. Rodos stated that there is further research needed to find additional savings for the budget.

Susan Maier, Levittown, PA, voiced her comments relating to the outsourcing of food services in the school district. Ms. Maier stated that the cost savings should not be the main focus, but rather the health and safety of the children should also be considered. Ms. Maier indicated that other districts that have used alternative food services have been cited for many more risk factor violations in comparison to Neshaminy. Ms. Maier contributes this to the long term employment and dedication of the Neshaminy food service workers.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- Sandburg Middle School raised approximately \$2,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society through a fundraiser called "Pasta for Pennies."
- Students from the Learning Center at Neshaminy received awards at a luncheon on March 10th. The students were being honored for their weekly commitment to the Veteran Home's residents and staff.
- Neshaminy High School's Family and Consumer Science Department prepared and donated Hamantashen and Irish Potatoes to the nursing facility at Attleboro Nursing Home.
- The District Elementary Music Festival was held on March 21st.
- The Jr. Prom was attended by over 600 students and was held on March 20th.
- Graduation will be held on Wednesday, June 9th, rain date will be Thursday, June 10th.

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Burns presented the minutes of the February 23, 2010, Public Meeting and the March 9, 2010, Work Session Meeting. Upon motion of Mr. O'Connor and seconded by Ms. Boyle the Board unanimously approved the minutes of February 23, 2010, and March 9, 2010.

Approval of Treasurer's Report, Check Register, and Exonerations of Personal and Per Capita Tax

Mr. Paradise presented the following for approval:

- February, 2010 Treasurer's Report, subject to audit
- Check Register – February, 2010
- Budget Transfer Report 10-4
- Personal and per capita tax exonerations for February, 2010

Mr. Eccles moved that the February, 2010 Treasurer's Report be approved, subject to audit, Check Register for February, 2010, Budget Transfer Report 10-4, and the Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations for February, 2010 be approved and Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

Mr. Koutsouradis inquired if the services provided for the payment of check No. 185001; Dan LePore & Sons for caulk work in the amount of \$6,000 was completed at the time of renovation of the high school.

Mr. Paradise replied that check No. 185001 was a payment made to one of the vendors of the high school. Mr. Paradise stated that the Treasurer's Report will show 1.7 million dollars remaining on the high school construction project, which will be used to pay vendors.

The Board unanimously approved the Treasurer's Report, subject to audit, Check Register for February, 2010, Budget Transfer Report 10-4, and the Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations for February, 2010.

Certified and Support Personnel Actions

Dr. Muenker presented the following for approval:

- Elections – Certified Personnel
- Resignations and Leaves of Absence – Certified Personnel
- Elections – Support Personnel
- Sabbatical Leaves – Support Personnel

Dr. Muenker recommended the approval of the personnel report for certified and support personnel.

Mr. Koutsouradis moved the Certified and Support Personnel Reports be approved. Mr. Eccles seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved said report.

Motion: Approval of Revised 2009 – 10 School Calendar

Mr. O'Connor presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, inclement weather forced the closing of school on February 10, 11 and 26, 2010; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the Pennsylvania School Code, it is necessary to revise the calendar in order to meet the minimum state child accounting and attendance regulations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of School Directors approves the attached revised school calendar which schedules the last day for students in grades Kindergarten through 11 as June 18, 2010, and the last day for teachers as June 22, 2010.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that June 9, 2010 is designated as the date for the Neshaminy High School graduation.

Mrs. Cummings seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

Mr. Webb stated that the motion for the Summer School Programs for 2010 has been tabled.

Motion: Approval of Proposed School Calendar for 2010 – 11

Mr. Eccles presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, each year the Board of School Directors must establish an official school calendar for the coming year; and

WHEREAS, the six participating school districts of the Bucks County Technical High School strive to establish a common school calendar; and

WHEREAS, the Board of School Directors reviewed the proposed calendar at the March 9, 2010 Public Work Session; and

WHEREAS, the proposed calendar was forwarded for comments to each of the employee bargaining groups.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board of School Directors adopt the attached school calendar for the 2010 – 11 school year.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of School Directors specifically designate Section 1502 holidays: December 23 and 27, 2010; February 21, 2011; and April 21 and 22, 2011 as five official local school district holidays.

Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

Motion: Approval of Revised Board Policies #500 and #518

Mr. Koutsouradis presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, in order to keep District Board Policies updated and current, revisions are recommended by the administration to the Board Policies Committee for review, and

WHEREAS, recommended policies meet the requirements of Federal Law; and

WHEREAS, after review by the Board Policies Committee, the District is ready to recommend:
Revised Policy 500 – Non-resident Students
Revised Policy 518 – Child Abuse

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board of School Directors approve the revised Policies as recommended by the School Board Policies Committee.

Ms. Boyle seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

Motion: Approval of Student Disciplinary Action

Mr. Morris presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, a disciplinary hearing of the Neshaminy Board of School Directors was held on March 10, 2010.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board of School Directors accepts the recommendation of the Neshaminy School District administration and hereby determines that the student be expelled from Neshaminy High School for the completion of the 2009 – 10 school year and for the entirety of the 2010 – 11 school year and approves the adjudication as prepared by the solicitor.

Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

Federal Programs

Dr. Muenker advised that the Federal Program can be found on pages 66 and 67, which will include the summary of activities starting in July, 2009. Dr. Muenker stated there were no recent activities to report.

Other Board Business

Mr. O'Connor requested from the Board a cost comparison in fuel oil and electricity from the refurbished high school from last year to this year.

Mr. Paradise agreed to provide the requested information.

Mr. Morris thanked the students who spoke at public comment. Additionally, Mr. Morris suggested that the budget cuts should be reviewed by all concerned not only the School Board.

Public Comment

Steve Rodos, Villages of Flower Mills, Langhorne, PA, suggested that the district research the cost savings benefit of solar energy panels in schools. Mr. Rodos reiterated his previous suggestion of the Star Program as a possible fund raising program. Mr. Rodos inquired whether it would be possible to have cell phone towers on the premises of Neshaminy school grounds. Mr. Rodos further suggested that the Board investigate the possibility of a cyber school.

Stacy Kirsh, Langhorne, PA, declared that her question regarding the funds that were saved due to budget cuts has not yet been answered.

Mr. Webb countered that as previously stated; her question would be answered during Board Comment.

Steven Kramer, Villages of Flower Mills, Langhorne, PA, once again asked the Board to make a decision on budget cuts.

Kirsten Hogg, Levittown, PA, a student at the Learning Center, stated that The Learning Center has provided many advantages to her personally as well as other students and asks the Board not to close this school.

Danielle Foster, Middletown resident and Neshaminy School District employee, affirmed that she enjoys living and working in the Neshaminy School District. Ms. Foster stated that as a taxpayer she is requesting that the Board answer the questions that have been presented.

Board Comment

Mr. Eccles inquired if a response has been received from the union representatives in regards to ideas for saving money.

Dr. Muenker replied that one suggestion has been received. The suggestion is, "Perhaps everyone could give one day's pay per year from administration on down. Food Services could offer a reasonable percentage of their profits to Neshaminy in order to keep their jobs. Sincerely, A Dedicated Employee." Dr. Muenker added that the Board will continue to solicit and forward any further comments and suggestions that are received.

Mr. Paradise opened his remarks by acknowledging the difficult task that the Board faces in creating a balanced budget. The nine dedicated members of the Board volunteer their time and take their responsibilities very seriously. Mr. Paradise noted that every question or suggestion that was presented in public comment has a comparable answer. In response to the suggestion that the apartment complexes in the township be charged more taxes, Mr. Paradise declared that this is illegal according to the Pennsylvania Constitution. Mr. Paradise further explained that the Board does not have the authority to raise taxes high enough to cover the revenue that is needed for this budget. Mr. Paradise remarked that the township has experienced a 19% increase in the cost of healthcare, which results in millions of dollars in costs for employee benefits. There has also been a 72% increase in retirement benefits as well. These two items result in over 5

million dollars in additional costs for the coming budget. Mr. Paradise offered this information in response to the questions asking where the money is being used. He established that the money is being used in healthcare cost, retirement payments, unemployment costs, maintenance and supply costs, to name a few. In response to the question of a discrepancy in fuel bills from year to year, Mr. Paradise noted this is due to the difference in the usage of oil versus natural gas. Mr. Paradise ended his comments by emphasizing that the budget process has been and will continue to be a public process.

Mrs. Cummings commented about the dedication and support that the Board holds towards The Learning Center and the alternative program it represents.

Mr. Koutsouradis urges everyone to work together going forward.

Mr. Morris inquired if there was an update regarding the construction of the high school and as to whether it is on budget.

Mr. Paradise replied that the construction cost is on budget at slightly over 70 million dollars versus 100 million dollars for a new school. Additionally, Mr. Paradise refuted an earlier public comment that the renovation costs were higher than what a new school would have cost, stating these facts to be absolutely untrue.

Mr. Morris also asked if the Board has received a check from the township.

Mr. Paradise responded that the request has been made.

Mr. Webb explained that four years ago there was 14 million dollars in reserve. Because no budget cuts were made over those years, the reserve dwindled to 1 million dollars. All of the district's income has been reduced due to the worst economy in 75 years. Mr. Webb addressed the question of raises for the administration. He explained that raises were given to this group, because they settled a contract two years ago. This was the same contract that was offered to the staff. The administrators made concessions in their health benefits and they gave up their retirement incentive. They pay 15, 16, and 17 percent towards their health insurance. These concessions have saved the district money, and therefore, the raises that have been given are justified. Mr. Webb stated the Board would like to see a similar settlement with the staff, because they do not want to see the loss of jobs. Mr. Webb said that there is a limited amount of money and that the Board is left with the choice to either cut expenses or cut programs. Given that choice, the quality of education for the students must come first.

Adjournment

Mr. Eccles moved the meeting be adjourned and Ms. Boyle seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary