

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
April 25, 2012

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on April 25, 2012, in the Harry M. Dengler Jr., Performing Arts Center at Maple Point Middle School. 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. Mike Morris
Mr. William Oettinger
Mr. Mark Shubin
Mr. Anthony Sposato

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz
Mrs. Therese Hinterberger
Mr. Anthony Devlin
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan

BOARD MEMBER ABSENT:

OTHERS: Approximately 100 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: John A. Torrente, Esquire

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 announced that prior to the meeting an Executive Session was held where personnel and contract issues were discussed.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- Dr. Muenker gave a brief presentation on the 2012 – 2013 excess of expenditures over revenues.
- From Singapore to Langhorne, PA - Making Global Mathematics a Reality.
- Neshaminy School District Art Show 2012
- National Honor Society Induction at Neshaminy High School.

Public Comment

Jane Crowell, Levittown, nurse, read a letter from her son, Patrick, who is a student at TLC. The letter expressed how TLC has changed his life and has helped him to work towards meeting his goals. Patrick's words made a passionate plea to the Board to consider how many students' lives have been improved by TLC and to keep the center open.

Casey Crossland, Temple University student, expressed how much TLC helped her while she was in high school. She said that TLC is irreplaceable and closing it would be a tragedy.

Joe Steinbrecher, Lower Southampton, senior at TLC stated that so many of his needs that were not being met at the High School have been met at TLC. He said the smaller setting contributes a great deal to the success of the students and he asked for TLC to remain open.

Grant Passman, Jamison, Guidance Counselor at TLC, remarked that in the past 10 years TLC has provided a quality level of service as a top alternative school in the area. He said that the program has increased services, while managing to cut operating costs by 50 percent. Mr. Passman said by keeping everything within the district and not outsourcing, they have been able to keep the level of services appropriate and retain control over the alternative school environment. Mr. Passman added that a current proposal from TLC has been offered that would further cut costs comparable to the Ombudsman Program

Jordan Loveless, Levittown, TLC student, commented that being at TLC has been a tremendous help to her and she is so grateful for the program. She expressed her wishes and concern for the program to remain open.

Chelsea Loveless, Levittown, graduate of TLC, stated that she struggled with poor grades and lack of motivation in high school. She said that TLC helped to get her to focus and to formulate a plan for her future. Ms. Lawless said that the teachers and staff at TLC provide the emotional support to students that other alternative schools do not provide. She said the students go to TLC because they want to and because they want to succeed.

Michelle Kaisinger, Langhorne, Recovery House Owner/Manager, commented that although her son is a gifted student, he did not cope well in the normal school environment. She said that from the time her son became a student at TLC the entire staff treated him with respect and subsequently the students learn how to treat others with respect. He has learned to be accountable for his actions and to take responsibility for his behavior. Ms. Kaisinger said that the students at TLC need stability and structure and she asked the Board to keep TLC open as well as the Sanctuary Room at Neshaminy High School.

Kevin Carberry, Penndel, metal fabricator, said he attended other alternative schools and no other schools provided the same support that he received at TLC. He asked the Board not to close TLC.

Josh Onisick, Springfield, Landscaper, declared that it would be a shame to close TLC because so many students benefit from the program. He said that it does not matter who the person is everyone fits in at TLC and everyone should have the chance to succeed.

Marlea Partlon, Langhorne, teacher remarked that for the past 7 years she has taught at TLC and shared her experience about the value of the program. She said that the program is a safe haven for at-risk students to help them rebuild their confidence and build character in a smaller setting. She said TLC has a most profound impact on the lives of students who most likely would have dropped out of school. Ms. Partlon told the Board to keep in mind that if they close TLC, they will be closing a cost efficient, successful alternative program that has served a population of at-risk students for 10 years.

Andrea Berneck, Langhorne, Party Facility manager, said that her daughter first showed signs of social and emotional difficulties shortly after she entered high school. Ms. Bernek said she was so grateful that her daughter was accepted into TLC and it has helped her tremendously to cope with the stress that she was experiencing. She expressed her appreciation to the staff for their support and compassion and their guidance that they have provided to her daughter and all the students at TLC.

Stephen Pirritano, Feasterville, self-employed, remarked that we all share in a generational responsibility concerning public education. Mr. Pirritano said he was affected by the passionate speakers who spoke in support of TLC. He said that ideally we would like to grant everyone's wishes: however, we cannot guarantee that all wishes will be granted, because we have a financial responsibility with limited resources.

Abby Sylvester, student at TLC explained how the program has supported her and the smaller classroom environment has helped her to conquer her anxiety and lack of self confidence. She also said that the teachers, aides and counselors take the time to listen and offer support. She asked the Board to remember this when considering program cuts.

Sharon Bremser, Feasterville, homemaker said she has a son who attends TLC and he is doing exceptionally well. She said she is familiar with other alternative programs, but feels TLC is the best one. She said the support and family-like atmosphere is not often seen in a school setting. Ms. Bremser said that as a parent it is disheartening to face the prospect of TLC being taken away.

Jassy Vossah, student at TLC said she likes attending TLC because the teachers are nice and it has helped her to improve her grades and have a better attitude towards school.

Debbie Vossah, educator, said TLC has shown her daughter respect, kindness and compassion. She said that the unconditional love, acceptance, patience and academic support that she receives from TLC is more valuable than any money that program costs could cover. Ms. Vossah asked the Board not to cut the program because it will hurt so many lives if this happens.

Diane Marseglia, Levittown, Bucks County Commissioner, said that the teachers and counselors at TLC helped get her daughter through a very traumatic time. She said that her daughter's success today can be attributed to the TLC program. Ms. Marseglia implored the Board to save TLC and the Sanctuary Room because it is something worthwhile that is working in Neshaminy and the program is truly saving lives. Ms. Marseglia said that statistically Neshaminy has the highest rate of teen suicide ideation or attempts, but it does not have the highest completed suicide rate and that is because of TLC and the Sanctuary Room. She suggested some ideas to reduce the cost of TLC such as double-teaming teachers or using per diem employees that would not require benefits.

Kate Marseglia, Levittown, 2008 graduate of TLC stated that after a heartbreaking family tragedy in which she lost her sister, she suffered from emotional and social anxiety and could not cope with the everyday stress of high school. She was referred to TLC by a social worker and they nurtured her through her depression, grief and anxiety. Ms. Marseglia said it would be senseless to close TLC because the kids there need somewhere to go with a relaxed learning environment that they need in order to survive.

Shannon McClintock, Langhorne, self-employed said that at TLC she received more attention and emotional support due to the smaller classroom atmosphere. She said that TLC offers great academics and a great education. Ms. McClintock said that the kids who need stability and support will be left without hope if the school is closed.

Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, retired said that as a substitute teacher he has witnessed the transformation of many students within TLC into responsible individuals with a future. He said it is a great program and should be retained due to its obvious success. Mr. Rodos implored the Board to look elsewhere for savings.

Motion: Termination of Delaware Valley High School Program Placement Agreement

Mr. Webb presented the following motion:

Upon motion of _____, seconded by _____, it was Resolved that Neshaminy School District terminate the Program Placement Agreement between the School District and Unique Educational Experience, Inc. d/b/a DVHS-Bucks for "disruptive" or "at-risk students" of the School District, effective at the end of the 2011-2012 school year; and

It is further Resolved that District Superintendent and Solicitor are authorized and directed to give appropriate notice to DVHS-Bucks of the termination of the Agreement and take such other action as necessary to carry this Resolution into effect.

Mr. Shubin seconded the motion.

Mr. Koutsouradis asked if Delaware Valley students will be coming back to Neshaminy campus.

Dr. Muenker responded yes.

The motion passed by a vote of eight ayes, and one nay, (Mr. Koutsouradis.)

Motion: Appointment of Substitute Hearing Officer for Personnel Matter

Mr. Webb presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, a dismissal hearing has been scheduled on an employee termination; and

WHEREAS, the Solicitor's office has voluntarily recused itself as acting as the hearing officer.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board of School Directors appoints William Thompson, Esquire as the substitute hearing officer.

Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Burns presented the minutes of March 27, 2012 and April 10, 2012. Upon motion of Mr. Congdon and seconded by Mr. Morris the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the March 27, 2012 and April 10, 2012 Board Meeting Minutes.

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

Mrs. Markowitz presented the following for approval:

- March, 2012 Treasurer's Report, subject to audit
- Check Register – March, 2012
- Personal and per capita tax exonerations for March, 2012
- Budget Transfer (Working Copy 12-5)

Ms. Boyle moved the March, 2012 Treasurer's Report be approved, subject to audit, Check Register for March, 2012 and the budget Transfer Report (Working Copy 12 – 5), and the Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations for March, 2012 be approved. Mr. Shubin seconded the motion.

Mr. Shubin asked Mrs. Markowitz to explain the certificate of deposit general fund element.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that that is where Neshaminy's investments are.

Mr. Shubin asked if this is ongoing.

Mrs. Markowitz responded that this is what is invested throughout the year.

Mr. Morris asked Mrs. Markowitz to explain on page 43, what the code other stands for.

Dr. Muenker stated that the code "O" indicates "other" or retirement. He added that the "R" code indicates resignation.

Mr. Morris asked if, on page 29, the \$1.89 million dollars paid out to Blue Cross is just for certified staff.

Mrs. Markowitz said that it is everyone in the school district that has Blue Cross as their policy.

Mr. Morris noted that the certified staff PC15 \$1.45 million dollars, retirees that are receiving the Independent Blue Cross \$254,000, certified staff under Keystone this March is \$170,000, United Concordia certified staff \$2,400, vision \$1,200, opt out \$115,000.

The Board approved said reports by a vote of eight ayes, and one nay, (Mr. Morris).

Certified and Support Personnel Actions

Dr. Muenker presented the following for approval:

- 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. Shubin moved the Certified and Support Personnel Reports be approved. Mrs. Cummings seconded the motion.

Mr. Congdon asked, if the retirees will still receive the \$27,500 retirement bonus if no settlement is made before then.

Dr. Muenker stated that is correct, if they have ten years of service in.

Mr. Congdon asked if 100% of medical benefits will be paid for all retirees.

Dr. Muenker stated yes until the age of 65.

Mr. Shubin asked what is the total number of retirees.

Dr. Muenker stated that there was one in January 2012, 32 by June 30th, and one in January 2013 for a total of 34.

The Board unanimously approved said reports.

Federal Programs

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that there were no updates to report on Federal Programs.

Other Board Business

Mr. Koutsouradis asked Dr. Muenker if all the students that are currently attending other alternative schools will be returned to Neshaminy if Neshaminy should implement the Ombudsman Program.

Dr. Muenker replied that each student is reviewed individually and if found to be necessary they would be involved in the Ombudsman Program.

Mr. Koutsouradis voiced his concern that students with more serious issues would be grouped together with other students if this is a “one size fits all” situation.

Dr. Muenker stated that every student has a different profile and this will be taken into consideration and the program is not a catch all program. It would be introduced as a pilot program and the cost would be greatly reduced. He added that if some students do not fit into the program well, then another solution will be considered. Dr. Muenker reminded everyone that TLC is a very expensive program and the district cannot afford it, so other solutions are being considered.

Mr. Congdon asked if the Ombudsman Program will include Neshaminy students only.

Dr. Muenker said the current program at Tawanka offers the service to other districts. What is being suggested with the Ombudsman Program would be for Neshaminy students only.

Mr. Congdon asked if the cost for students from other districts is funded by Neshaminy or by the student's own district.

Dr. Muenker responded that the student's own school district pays for their cost.

Mr. Koutsouradis asked if Neshaminy can provide the program on their own without having to outsource it.

Dr. Muenker said that the service that would be provided is not an attempt to duplicate the service, but to provide a new service at a greatly reduced cost. He said an attempt by Neshaminy to duplicate the service would not be as cost effective as what the Ombudsman Program will provide.

Mr. Morris asked Dr. Muenker if seriously delinquent students are sent elsewhere.

Dr. Muenker replied that delinquent students are not sent elsewhere. He said that in recent years the options to manage these students has diminished and other alternatives are being explored.

Mr. Morris said then we do not send these kids elsewhere.

Dr. Muenker replied yes that is correct because Neshaminy has an obligation to educate all.

Mrs. Cummings asked if students will still have the opportunity to attend some regular classes at the high school while participating in the Ombudsman Program.

Dr. Muenker said it is an option that is being examined.

Mrs. Cummings asked if someone from the IU can give a presentation during a public meeting.

Dr. Muenker replied that it is something that can be planned.

Mrs. Cummings inquired if any of the Board members could visit the Ombudsman Program at the Tawanka Center.

Dr. Muenker stated that they are welcome to visit the center.

Mrs. Cummings asked if there is a grant to help fund the Sanctuary Room.

Dr. Muenker said it had been previously funded through federal and state grant monies, which have now ceased.

Mrs. Cummings asked if the suggestion of hiring per diem staff is feasible.

Dr. Muenker said it will be researched and considered if found to be viable.

Mr. Shubin asked if neighboring districts have been compared to Neshaminy regarding alternative solutions and services.

Dr. Muenker said that Neshaminy has a very good program in which other districts have tried to emulate but are not as good.

Mr. Shubin asked what the cost per pupil for TLC is and what the cost per pupil in the regular school is.

Dr. Muenker said the costs vary depending on the time of year.

Mr. Webb said that initially the TLC program was intended to be a money maker, but the cost was so high that it was unaffordable to many districts. Mr. Webb said an estimated average would be \$35 - \$45 thousand per student.

Mrs. Cummings asked if those programs that have low attendance are being reviewed to cut costs.

Dr. Muenker replied that these programs are reviewed and evaluated.

Mrs. Cummings asked if team teaching would be a possibility in middle school.

Dr. Muenker it is a consideration that is being reviewed, which will vary from middle school to middle school and from team to team.

Public Comment

Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, retired asked Dr. Muenker to further explain the ombudsman program and how this will benefit the Neshaminy School District. He questioned whether it is accurate that this program will not cost the district anything and how is that possible.

Stephen Pirritano, Feasterville, self-employed asked Mr. Webb to address the Healthcare consortium and how it will impact negotiations. He also questioned new requirements for Neshaminy that have resulted from recent grievances saying that the district needs to fight these decisions. Mr. Pirritano stated that tough choices have to be made and he agreed that TLC is, indeed, a good program; however, the fact remains that the district cannot afford it because of the NFT's Rolls Royce healthcare plan, early voluntary retirement plan and salaries. He said that TLC could be saved if it weren't for the over the top expenditures required by the NFT. Mr. Pirritano said the community must stand together and stand with the Board against the union that is creating the problem.

Mike Bremser, Feasterville, implored the Board to keep TLC open for the sake of all the students who need the emotional and social support that TLC offers. He said the Board should not compare budget needs to the needs of these students who will suffer without TLC.

Debbie Vossah, educator, said that she feels that the Neshaminy School District most likely has other programs that may be wanted, but not necessarily needed, as TLC is needed. She cautioned that if TLC is cut, it will destroy many, many children's lives.

Board Comment

Mr. Shubin commented that the students at TLC should not be classified as weak students, but rather strong students as they have demonstrated with their exceptional speeches during the meeting. He said that the Board has a very challenging deficit and a budget to balance and he asked for any suggestions from the community for a solution to the problem. He said that difficult decisions will have to be made and it all comes down to a lack of funds.

Mr. Morris acknowledged that while TLC is a tremendous program and no one wants to cut it the Board has a financial responsibility to balance the budget. He requested that all individuals who spoke on behalf of keeping TLC open, to write a letter to Louise Boyd, President of the NFT, asking the NFT to concede and settle the contract so TLC can be saved and prevent other program cuts.

Mr. Sposato remarked that TLC is a great program and he agrees that as parents we must make our children stronger. He said we must teach them how to deal with adversity. Mr. Sposato repeated that TLC may not be saved if the money to keep it going cannot be found. He suggested that teachers and other interested parties look for grant money or offer other suggestions to the Board, because while TLC is worth saving, the money must be found somewhere.

Ms. Boyle said that TLC is one of the best programs and she wants to see it saved. She agrees that there are other programs that probably should be cut ahead of TLC and it disturbs her that it is always TLC that is considered first.

Dr. Muenker explained that cost savings associated with the Ombudsman program is included in the presentation. He said that the program is a credit recovery that is a way of delivering academic services to students to core basic subjects as an approved alternative program with a counseling component. He said that additional elective opportunities would be considered. Dr. Muenker said that bringing someone in to further explain the program will be considered. Dr. Muenker reminded the community that a large portion of the budget is salary and benefit costs and the situation will be examined between now and June, but cuts are inevitable.

Mr. Shubin said that the Ombudsman program has a website with important information and it can be found through a Google search.

Mr. Webb described that the healthcare consortium is a group made up of management and labor from various school districts. The purpose is to save on healthcare costs by obtaining a group rate. The Board of the consortium will obtain several plans for consideration and this will eliminate the expense of the district having to obtain a broker. Mr. Webb said that the consortium does not change the negotiation proceedings with the NFT regarding healthcare. He said that negotiations are still an ongoing process. Mr. Webb explained that the Board lost a recent arbitration of a grievance from the NFT regarding a one day suspension of a teacher, which resulted in the teacher receiving the one day's lost pay.

Mr. Koutsouradis asked what the one day's pay amounted to.

Mr. Webb said the one-day's pay for that teacher was \$517.89.

Mr. Oettinger asked if the district has any action pending regarding vaccinations.

Dr. Muenker said that letters were sent to all parents regarding their obligation regarding vaccinations and providing them with information on free clinics. The letter advised parents that any child without proof of vaccination will be excluded from attending classes as required by the state.

Adjournment

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Congdon seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary