

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
September 27, 2011

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on September 27, 2011, 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. Richard M. Eccles  
Mr. Mike Morris  
Mr. William D. O'Connor  
Mr. William Oettinger

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

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

**BOARD MEMBER ABSENT:**

**OTHERS:** Approximately 120 persons from the public, staff and press

**SECRETARY:** Mrs. Jennifer Burns

**SOLICITOR:** Thomas J. Profy, IV, Esquire

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

**Call to Order**

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

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

**Announcements**

None

**Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

Dr. Heble introduced Gina Chiolan, English/Drama teacher, who directs a program at Neshaminy High School called the Roadies.

Gina Chiolan explained that the Roadies perform shows to entertain and educate. She introduced three members of the Roadies, Kyle Duke, Kevin Murray, and Kaitlyn Jones who spoke about what a rewarding experience being members of the Roadies has been.

Kathleen Brewster, Principal of Albert Schweitzer Elementary School thanked Gina Chiolan and the Roadies for performing at Albert Schweitzer Elementary School on Friday, September 9th. The Roadies helped the students and teachers kick off the new S.W.P.B.S program. S.W.P.B.S stands for School Wide Positive Behavior Support. This program encourages students to make good choices with respect to behavior. Ms. Brewster presented a video of Albert Schweitzer students expressing what Cares behavior means to them.

Mr. O'Connor commented that Gina Chiolan is definitely one of the teachers who displays excellence and inspires her students to stretch beyond their own limits.

**Items for Discussion**

**a) Middletown Twp. Building Permit Fees Re: High School Project**

Mr. Webb announced that he was in touch with Middletown Township regarding the permit fees; however, he asked the Board to postpone the discussion until the October meeting to allow more time for the information to be received from the Township.

Mr. Eccles asked Mr. Profy if he has had any correspondence from the township.

Mr. Profy responded that a meeting is scheduled for October 4<sup>th</sup>, between Dr. Muenker, Mr. Minotti, and Debby Lamana, the Township manager, concerning this matter.

Mr. Morris asked Mr. Profy to confirm the dollar amount and when was the last time the township corresponded by letter.

Mr. Profy responded that the building and zoning permit cost was \$347,565.75, and he stated he does not know the date of the last correspondence by letter.

**Public Comment**

Howard Lindner, retired Neshaminy teacher, remarked that he was disturbed at hearing about a job posting in the high school for one coaching position to coach indoor track for boys and girls. Mr. Lindner stated that in the past he coached both boys and girls and he feels the coaching position should be filled by two separate people because of the differences in coaching both boys and girls.

Chris Fieldson, health and safety, Levittown, stated that he is among the taxpayers that support the position of the School Board. Mr. Fieldson asked the Board for an update on the negotiation process and if there has been any word on an impending teachers strike. He also asked if there is a two day notification requirement regarding a strike. Mr. Fieldson asked the Board to explain the process going forward should either side reject an arbitrator's recommendation.

Angie Manning, teacher in New Jersey, Langhorne, asked the Board to explain what, if any, concession was made by the NFT in the former CBA when they were offered the retirement bonus.

Mike Caputo, retired, Penn del, remarked that he takes exception to comments from the NFT that there has been violence directed towards them from the community, saying that this is simply untrue. Mr. Caputo feels that the NFT has been looking for opportunities to confront and intimidate parents at school activities. Mr. Caputo went on to say that the NFT takes comments out of context to support their accusations and agendas, which is unfair.

Gail Thibodeau, self-employed, Langhorne, voiced her dismay over the action of some members of the NFT, who sent hundreds of letters to Mr. Koutsouradis. Ms. Thibodeau said the action was appalling during a difficult time when the Koutsouradis family should have been shown empathy. Additionally, Ms. Thibodeau pointed out that some members of the community who have displayed signs supporting the School Board have received letters in their mailboxes from NFT members, which is another attempt to intimidate. She concluded by asking the Board for an update on the question whether the Board has heard from members of the community in support of the NFT's position.

Tricia Domico, analyst, Langhorne, voiced her concern for the hostility that has developed between the NFT and parents and taxpayers, due in part, to last year's "work to contract" action. Ms. Domico is frustrated by the lack of empathy from the teachers regarding how the hostility is affecting the children. Ms. Domico said it is time the teachers stop thinking about themselves and settle the contract so the school district can move forward.

Lee Kirsh, self-employed, Langhorne, commented that he believes that the NFT's positions are not reported in the press fairly. He also stated that positive comments towards the NFT are removed from a Board member's blog and only pro-school Board comments are posted. Mr. Kirsh reported that he has had no problem getting information from the NFT whenever he has requested it. He concluded by requesting that the dispute come to an end and get the community back to what it once was.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, stated that Neshaminy now finds itself debating on what is true and what is false. Mr. Pirritano asked if Neshaminy has found its Watergate. He said he wonders why those chosen to govern (in 2001) ignored one of history's greatest lessons - that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Mr. Pirritano remarked that the public trust has been violated and the public has not been given any process on how and why this has occurred - they have only gotten explanations that do not correlate with what has happened.

Almando Carrasquillo, private investigator, Langhorne, acknowledged that there are good and dedicated teachers in the district; however, he voiced his displeasure at those teachers who picketed "back to school night." He said he is not opposed to unions working towards fair pay and safer working conditions, but he is against the NFT's obsessive greed and destructive tactics.

Donna Kramer, member of the NFT, Langhorne, stated that she feels the School Board has not come out and publicly denounced violence and threats towards school teachers in the district. Ms. Kramer said the Board's silence and indifference has given it permission and encourages this behavior to happen. She requested that the Board verbally announce that violence and bullying will not be tolerated at Neshaminy.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flower Mills, advised the public that if they are unhappy with the educational conditions of the Neshaminy School District they should attend committee and sub-committee meetings and become more involved. Mr. Rodos said that complaining about the NFT does not solve anything. He asked the parents and the School Board to refocus their activities toward education and not salary structure. Mr. Rodos said everyone will have to unite without playing the blame game.

Larry Pastor, business executive, Middletown, stated that three untruthful statements were presented during public comment; those being that a Board member was charged with assault, that certain comments were erased from a Board member's blog, and that violence and threats were made against the NFT, all of which Mr. Pastor declares are untrue. Mr. Pastor said he was appalled at the recent barrage of letters sent by some members of the NFT to Mr. Koutsouradis. Mr. Pastor stated that this act, during a sensitive time for the Koutsouradis family, is despicable. He asked Mr. Profy if he could obtain a list of the names of the teachers who wrote these letters, because he would like to display them publicly.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Langhorne, expressed his disapproval of the NFT members who sent approximately 200 letters to Mr. Koutsouradis' home. Mr. Alfonso said that the NFT claims to want a fair contract and to negotiate to a middle ground, but they have turned down what has been offered. He said that the School Board has already offered a fair contract and, in his opinion, there is no middle ground because the NFT's counteroffer is more costly than the present contract. Mr. Alfonso advised the NFT to take the Board's overly generous offer or leave Neshaminy.

Mr. Koutsouradis thanked Mr. Pastor for his support, but said he does not think it is proper to reveal all the names of the teachers who sent letters because it would not be good for the community. Mr. Koutsouradis recommended to the members of the NFT who want a change to require an anonymous paper ballot in the upcoming union elections. He also suggested that they have a third-party count the ballots.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

Mrs. Burns presented the minutes of August 23, 2011 and September 13, 2011. Upon motion of Mr. Morris and seconded by Mr. Koutsouradis the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the August 23, 2011 and September 13, 2011.

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

Mrs. Markowitz presented the following for approval:

- August, 2011 Treasurer's Report, subject to audit
- Check Register – August, 2011
- Personal and per capita tax exonerations for July and August, 2011
- Investment Summary

Mr. Morris moved the August, 2011 Treasurer's Report be approved, subject to audit, Check Register for August, 2011, the Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations for July and August, 2011 and the Investment Summary be approved. Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

Mr. Morris asked Mrs. Markowitz for clarity on the amount of \$816,963.00 asking is this for the NFT members.

Mrs. Markowitz responded yes.

Mr. Morris also asked if \$1,693.00 was given to the retirees for healthcare at no cost to the member.

Mrs. Markowitz responded yes.

Mr. Morris asked if \$82,366.00 was for payment to Keystone for retirees, with no cost to the member.

Mrs. Markowitz responded yes.

The Board approved said reports by a vote of eight ayes, zero nays, and one abstention. (Mr. Morris abstained for the reason that he objects to the cost to the district and would like to see the NFT billed 40% of that amount.)

Mr. O'Connor asked, as a matter of protocol, if Mr. Morris' vote should actually be a nay vote instead of an abstention.

Mr. Profy stated that there are two options for any member who does not agree with the motion – a nay vote or an abstention.

Mr. O'Connor asked isn't it true that an abstention means you are withdrawing from voting, and since Mr. Morris is opposed to the motion each time it has come up, then technically speaking, shouldn't his vote be no.

Mr. Morris said if he were to vote no, he would not have an opportunity to state the reason for his "no" vote. Thus, if he were successful in gaining another four members to vote with him, then the motion would not pass.

**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
- Resignations and Leaves of Absence – Support Personnel

Dr. Muenker noted that on page 39, Elections of Support Personnel, the Board would not be voting on individual number five.

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

Mr. Congdon moved the Certified and Support Personnel Reports be approved. Mr. Eccles seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said reports.

**Motion: Approval of Revised Board Policy #702 – Fund Balance**

Mr. Congdon 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 702 – Fund Balance

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

Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

**Motion: Furlough Hearing Decision**

Mrs. Cummings presented the following motion:

As a result of the Hearing held on August 26, 2011, the Board of School Directors upholds the employee Furlough and adopts the findings of fault and conclusions of law as prepared by the Hearing Officer.

Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion.

**Federal Programs**

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that in September there was a PreK Counts Grant for \$74,100, which brings the total to \$775,196.

**Other Board Business**

None

**Public Comment**

Jennifer Bouton, financial services, Langhorne, stated that it has been her experience that whenever she has requested information from the NFT she was blocked from their site, her emails were unanswered, and she received no communication from them. She stated that the only answers that she has gotten have been from the School Board. Ms. Bouton stated that the NFT continues to handout propaganda flyers at public meetings in violation of a directive to cease such actions. Ms. Bouton asked the Board to continue to look into the matter of deducting dues from the payroll in an attempt to save money for the district. Ms. Bouton stated that one of the flyers handed out by the NFT was misinforming the public regarding \$1.6 million dollars that the Board received after the budget was approved.

Tony Sposato, small business owner, Levittown, stated that the teachers union refused to accept the Board's proposal, which would have saved the 8<sup>th</sup> grade foreign language and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade physical education program. Mr. Sposato said that the teacher's salaries, benefits, and healthcare are the main reasons why the students are not getting an education that they deserve. He also said that parents need to get involved in their children's education in order to make the necessary improvements. Mr. Sposato thanked the Board for doing a tough and thankless job and for doing it well.

Ben Schuhardt, parent of a Neshaminy student, Middletown, thanked the School Board for the time that they have given and for their patience and perseverance during a difficult period. He also thanked many of the teachers, for their dedication, particularly at Albert Schweitzer School. Mr. Schuhardt said the NFT is clearly not willing to accept the generous offer presented by the Board, so at what point do we declare an impasse and enlist the help of a third-party. Mr. Schuhardt asked the Board to state what options are available and bring this dispute to a close.

Mike Caputo, retired, Pennedel, implored the NFT to leave the children out of the dispute, stop the "Work to Contract," and get back to providing the children the education they deserve.

Almando Carrasquillo, private investigator, Langhorne, continued his comments saying that in the future if it was necessary, he would speak on behalf of any organization that was being treated unfairly, including a teachers union. However, he said he cannot understand why the NFT does not see the present offer from the Board for the generous proposal that it is. He told the parents, taxpayers and citizens that they all have a responsibility to mentor the children and teach them to become caring and involved citizens.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Langhorne, said that his easy-going disposition should not be confused with weakness or someone who can be intimidated. Mr. Alfonso has requested that the District Attorney investigate possible corruption in respect to the deceptive agreement between the 2001 Board member and the NFT. Mr. Alfonso declared that this secret agreement, which was not voted on by the 2001 Board, is illegal.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flower Mills, stated that the weakness in student proficiency rests with the high school students, while the elementary level students have scored in the 90 percentile in proficiency. He said that the failure to publicize the good scores of the elementary students is a disservice to the community. Mr. Rodos said he would like to see the school district be more pro-active in increasing student achievement at the secondary level.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Langhorne, announced that he has submitted eight questions to the Board Secretary to be put into the public record. He stated that he would now ask two of the questions of the Board. Mr. Pirritano asked who on the School Board or Administration in 2001 was involved in the drafting and/or negotiation of the letter of agreement between Mr. Schoenstadt and Mr. Knowles regarding the retirement bonus and health care for retirees. He also asked if any financial calculations exist that estimated what the cost of implementing the Neshaminy Voluntary Retirement Plan would be to the Neshaminy School District. Mr. Pirritano requested that the Board undertake an independent investigation to determine if any laws were violated and if so found they should be submitted to the Pennsylvania State Attorney General's Office. Mr. Pirritano submitted the following eight questions be added to the minutes and asked that the Board respond to them at an upcoming public meeting.

1. When was the act of following these so labeled "side bar agreements" set and implemented?
2. Who were the individuals that served on the Board at that date in time that supported this action of allowing "side bar agreements" and when was it first done?
3. Was the implementation of this act a change in Board policy or a change in Board Bylaws of Governance?
4. Who, if any, rendered a legal opinion to the Board of that date in time condoning such action(s) may be implemented?

5. When the action letter dated March 2, 2001 from Mr. Steve Schoenstadt to Mr. Kevin Knowles was committed who in the serving Board at the time and/or the Neshaminy School Administration was involved in its conception and or negotiation?
6. Is there any existence of notes or minutes from any Neshaminy School Board Executive Session or Public Meeting of the serving Board of that date in time that pertain to the discussion of and/or the negotiation of this agreement; The Neshaminy Voluntary Retirement Plan or by any other name it may have been known as?
7. Do any financial calculations exist on file or held by those that served at that time that estimated what the cost of implementing the provisions of the Neshaminy Voluntary Retirement Plan would be to the School District?
8. Was at any time before this agreement was implemented (the NVRP) was in but in front of the full sitting Board for their opinion or to vote on its approval?

Larry Pastor, business executive, Middletown, asked Mr. Eccles if he knew in 2001 of the existence of the letter of agreement between Mr. Schoenstadt and the NFT. Mr. Pastor said that the letter signed away \$40 million in tax dollars without the full approval of the existing school board and he would like to see this investigated. He said one man, the school board president, signed away a bonus and health care for retirees in perpetuity. Mr. Pastor declared that this is misappropriation of money and he wants the Board to comment on what is going to be done about it.

#### **Board Comment**

Mr. Congdon addressed several issues that were recently presented to him in a letter from NFT members. He said that if it is true that there has been any threat of violence against teachers by the public, this should cease immediately. Mr. Congdon said that he wants it to be known that he does stand up for teachers on a daily basis via email, phone and face to face. Mr. Congdon said his so-called silence has nothing to do with the growing division in the community. In response to the request for him to stand up for the teachers professionalism, Mr. Congdon said it is difficult to stand up for their professionalism when teachers demonstrate inappropriate dress codes, picket Back to School Night, display a lack of respect and self control during Board meetings, and the original Work to Contract action. Mr. Congdon concluded by stating now is the time to stop following the direction (of the NFT leadership) that has embarrassed the School Board and the District and start doing the right thing to gain back the respect that teachers deserve.

Mr. O'Connor stated that the High School PSSA scores are a problem and one thing that can be done is to make PSSA proficiency a graduation requirement. Mr. O'Connor urged the public to become involved in supporting a longer school day, saying that it is one of the most significant factors holding Neshaminy back. In response to Mr. Kirsh's allegation that pro-teacher comments are deleted from Mr. O'Connor's webpage, he stated that this is categorically untrue. Mr. O'Connor said that the issue is not with the teachers of the district, it is with the NFT leadership. He also repeated Mr. Congdon's remarks stating that he certainly disapproves of any threats of violence, although he is not aware of any truth to these allegations. Mr. O'Connor said the NFT leadership continually places the blame on others to deflect the focus away from their unaffordable contract demands. Mr. O'Connor reported that during a press conference held by the NFT they used an incident involving a shoving altercation between a secretary and a teacher just so they could make a baseless accusation against the School Board. He said that this confrontation between secretary and teacher has absolutely nothing to do with the School Board or bloggers or the angry vocal minority. Mr. O'Connor said he was shocked that the NFT would throw a member of their sister union, NESPA, under the bus publicly for their own purposes. Mr. O'Connor remarked that the NFT only cries foul when the incident involves people other than NFT members, but they fail to comment when NFT members are involved in intimidation or harassment. He stated that he did not create the public dissatisfaction, nor did the Board. The people are upset because the NFT took the battle to the children by declaring two "Work to Contracts" and walking out on parents during a public meeting. Mr. O'Connor said to the members of the NFT that their leadership has represented them poorly since the negotiations began and it has cost the teachers thousands of dollars that will never be regained. He ended by saying that this problem will not be resolved as long as this leadership is in charge.

Mr. Eccles said that he wanted to clarify that he did not defend Mr. Schoensadt; he was only advocating due process. He said that before making accusations one should first ask a question and give the accused the opportunity to explain. Mr. Eccles declared that he has nothing to hide and he is not uncomfortable about anything he has done in the past as a School Board Member.

Mr. Morris said he received a letter from the NFT asking for the School Board to take a stand against threats of violence against teachers. Mr. Morris stated he doubts that there is any validity to these claims of intimidation towards the teachers; however, he is opposed to any sort of bullying or violence. Mr. Morris declared his support for Mr. Koutsouradis' recommendation that the NFT have a private ballot election with a third party participating in the vote count. He said he urges the younger NFT members to elect a more reasonable group of leaders.

Mr. Koutsouradis advised the younger NFT members to stand up for themselves and push for an anonymous paper election with a third party tallying the votes, not NFT members.

Mr. Webb advised the public that anyone who has questions should feel free to send Board members an email or make an inquiry on the Neshaminy Board website and they will receive an answer. He said that the NFT must give 48 hours notice should they decide to strike and parents will be notified immediately via Neshaminy TV, phone message, etc. Mr. Webb said that he does not know what concessions were made by the NFT in order to gain the retirement bonus and retirement health care package. He is presently reviewing the minutes from 1997 - 2001. Mr. Webb said this agreement is too expensive for the district and it must be eliminated. Mr. Webb declared that the Board certainly does not condone violence, theft or vandalism from either side; however, he has heard reports of parents being vandalized by teachers and this is documented by a police report. Under the terms of the 2002 - 2008 contract the district must collect the union dues for the union. Mr. Webb said that the Board will always consider options such as Charter Schools as an alternative to improve the educational system of Neshaminy. He remarked that class sizes have not changed, although it was a consideration in the Board's original proposal, but was later withdrawn. At this time, there is no proposal on the table to change class sizes. He ended by saying the NFT is reviewing their numbers and whenever they are ready to sit down to negotiate; he will be willing to meet with them.

#### **Adjournment**

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Burns  
Board Secretary