

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
October 27, 2009

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on October 27, 2009, in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center in the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

ADMINISTRATORS:

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

SECRETARY: Mrs. Anita E. Walls

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

SOLICITOR:

Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

Mr. Webb announced that prior to the meeting an Executive Session was held for Board members regarding personnel matters and legal issues at 6:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Announcements

None.

Public Comment

Ms. Sarah Oliveira and Mr. Chase Fullen, 8th grade students at Maple Point, advised that Maple Point Middle School will be celebrating Veteran's Day on Tuesday, November 10th. This is a wonderful way for the students and community to show appreciation for the sacrifices that our local veterans have made and the courage they have shown in defending our country. Sarah and Chase invited the community to a celebration at Maple Point Middle School. Attendees should arrive at the auditorium lobby at 11:00 a.m. Veterans should contact Maple Point Middle at 215-809-6230 or register at the main office in Maple Point.

Mr. Sy Goldstein, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, stated that the district was very frustrated with a \$15M gap in the budget. The problem is that we would like to prevent this from happening again. Mr. Goldstein stated that in the March 19th Courier Times it was reported that the average school teachers earns \$76,000 in Neshaminy, that does not include health care, but it does include a lot of benefits i.e., health care, generic co-pays for brand name drugs, receive large lump sum cash payment upon retirement along with free health care package until age 65 and receive salary credit for enrolling in non-master degree courses. In addition, Neshaminy teachers work fewer contract hours and no summers and have fewer steps before

reaching the top of the salary scale than any other district. The 3% they are being offered right now, in three years from now the district will have incurred an additional \$5M in debt. If we listen to what the teachers want, the district will incur an additional \$10M in debt. According to the NFT for any negotiation to be successful all involved parties must come away with something they want. What do the taxpayer's receive, what do the students receive? Mr. Goldstein cited a quote from Simon Campbell, a Lower Makefield School Board Candidate stating that a freight train is going to smash into every school district in this Commonwealth inside of three years. Some school districts will face bankruptcy, others will send out property tax increases of 10%-15%. The ugliest and most severe part will hit in 2012. This has nothing to do with any increases. This is done by the legislators, but the taxpayers will have to pay same. Not one nickel of this spending will educate one child. There is a difference between teachers and teacher union officials. The teachers union does care about children's education or the welfare of taxpayers, their only business is collecting union dues and it is a multi-million dollar business. Teacher's strikes are unacceptable and should be deemed illegal, like they are in 37 other states. Mr. Goldstein stated that before any final decisions are made the district should get the facts on paper for everyone to see. Estimates of the additional district needs over current income for one, two and three years from now. What will it be at a zero percent increase, 3% and 6% increase? It should include additional pension costs which are coming up and also the 3% already given to the Administrative staff. Where are the increases going to come from? Taxes are limited to a certain percentage increase by law. How much more will we pay in taxes in the upcoming years?

Mr. Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, questioned the check register regarding a training item. Further, Mr. Rodos stated that money could be saved in the transportation department, I.U. expenses, tech school expenses, and outside professional expenses. Mr. Rodos urged the Board to drop the idea of hiring outside contractors and take care of the people that take of Neshaminy which is the Support Staff. It is not fair to them to outsource these jobs to perhaps save the taxpayers some money.

Mrs. Mindy Anderson, Twin Oaks, President of the Neshaminy Support Staff, asked whether anyone knew what it is like to do your job to the best of your ability when you are being shown that you are of no value. We take care of special packages every day. Each and every one of those special packages are the children of Neshaminy who deserve this special treatment. Mrs. Anderson knows what the staff does every day because she is one of those workers. Neshaminy support staff jobs are much more than cleaning floors, typing memos, driving buses, etc., we go over and above on a daily basis to take care of the children who we love. Mrs. Anderson provided the Board with another 360 names to add to the 900 names previously submitted in support of keeping the support staff jobs. Each school board member was provided with an envelope.

Mr. Scott Brigham, Penn Crest section of Langhorne, PA, stated that he has been employed as a bus driver by Neshaminy School District for 24 years and is a proud member of the Neshaminy Educational Support Professionals. We are professionals and we have been working without a contract since July, 2009. The School Board is now entertaining bids to contract out all support staff positions. Most of the employees work hard, live and pay taxes within the district, and we are not just a number on a bid spec. We are people who are feeling the hard times and need our jobs to survive. Contracting out will not help the district in the long run. It will create a bigger problem down the road when the contract with the outside contractor needs to be renegotiated. The outside companies are not interested in the students, parents, or even the School Board. They are interested in making as much money as they can. Council Rock is a perfect example and they are trying to buy their buses back so they can take their fleet back. Support staff works hard for their money and we have been giving back to the district since 1993 when the two tier wage system and benefits package was instituted. The support staff has saved the district thousands of dollars over the years. Every year the bus drivers are told that we are the most important people in the student's lives. It is time to show us how important we are. Negotiate a fair contract and don't give our jobs away to outside companies.

Mr. Larry Pastore, Langhorne, PA, business executive, stated that he also noticed the check register and he focused on the checks written to the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers over \$40,000 which represents the dues collection which are eventually used for PAC money by our school district and by the administration. Mr. Pastore stated that the support staff should aim its discussion at the NFT because the NFT is your enemy. There is no longer money available. The Board is not an evil group that is looking to outsource jobs just for the

hell of it. The Board is looking at all options because the money is not there. Why is it not there? Because there is an excessive Neshaminy Federation teacher's contract which has been for the past ten years. Mr. Pastore thanked Mr. Goldstein for his discussion on the existing contract.

Mr. Pastore represents a group that is growing which is Taxpayers for a Fair Neshaminy School District Budget. For over a year many of us have been writing and speaking to express our anger regarding the current contract and more importantly the outrageous demands the NFT is making for the new contract. This display of greed, at the expense of taxpayers suffering through the worst economic environment since the Great Depression is the finest example of exploitation I have ever seen in thirty years of business.

It is time to stop elected officials and public worker unions colluding to spend our money and send us the bill. I believe the Board can win against the self-serving unions that have dominated this district for thirty years and stop them from legally extorting taxpayers. It is your duty to do that.

There is no doubt that teachers should be respected, valued and fairly paid. Let's be clear, there is no protected group here. Consistently their behavior indicates they believe their extraordinary compensation, and the enhancements they are now demanding are entitlements. When they don't succeed in getting their way, they attempt to intimidate a School Board meeting, disrupt back to school night and threaten strikes.

Long ago, in the good old days, when all workers enjoyed free health care and retirement plans, taxpayers could afford taxes for the then underpaid public worker, including teachers. Those days are gone forever. The teachers in Neshaminy should be ashamed of their expectation for a continued free ride on the back of struggling workers who are facing disappearing wages, benefits and job cuts in the private sector.

In these desperate economic times as you think about your personal situation on the Board and everyone in Neshaminy thinks of theirs, the following questions need to be asked and it is all about fairness:

Do you pay for healthcare? Teachers don't!! Teachers are demanding continued free healthcare coverage. One can assume forever, at the expense of taxpayers.

Do you have premium healthcare coverage? Teachers do!! They are demanding continued Rolls Royce Plan: PC 15 and single source RX plan. The premium RX plan costs taxpayers \$1M more annually.

Have you lost healthcare? Teachers can't!! Also after ten years they can retire with fully paid health care insurance for family to age 65.

Have you received a raise recently? Teachers are demanding salary increases that exceed 6%-7% with steps every year!!

Have you lost your job? Teachers by law cannot be laid off for district financial conditions. Not fired for performance or strikes. Really a job for life.

Have you lost your defined benefit pension or have no pension? Teachers have a defined benefit plan (which almost no one has) Formula: 40 years worked x 2.5% = 100%. So teachers' averaging \$90K would get that for life. They also have tax free unmatched 403B retirement accounts. Most private workers only have a 401K, many recently stopped matching.

Is your 401K a 201K? Lucrative teachers' pension is guaranteed by taxpayers. The pension fund is now in trouble and Neshaminy's contribution will increase \$1,500,000. So we pay in higher taxes!

Do you get a \$30,000 bonus when you retire? Teachers get \$28K now and are demanding \$30K.

Do you and your family have fully paid for health benefits in retirement? Teachers do!!

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Do you get a bonus just for going to work? Teachers do! Longevity pay. And extra pay for any extra curricular activity. Gym night, etc.

Do you get full benefits for part time work? Teachers do! NSD has 15 part time teachers with fully paid benefits.

Do you get a raise if you do not perform? Teachers do! Teachers get automatic raises not based on performance and not based on accredited Master degree curriculum.

Do you work less and get paid more? Teachers do! They are demanding more preparation time and less classroom time.

Taxpayers cannot support this level of compensation which is outrageous. It needs to be fixed. The Board needs to stand firm and pull the current contract and start over. Contain costs and do not move an inch on this contract. Don't let this union bully you.

Student Representative

No report.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised that on October 20-21 the high school had a special program for 9th graders entitled "Making High School Count." It addressed transitional issues: time management and study skills. The goal of the program was to provide and reinforce the positive messages that counselors and teachers are giving to their students during these critical times and help students understand that anyone can be successful if they choose to be.

Dr. Muenker advised that the Kaleidoscope of Bands competition took place and it was held indoors and it was a successful evening. Many neighboring districts competed.

Maple Point and Carl Sandburg are celebrating with Veterans Day programs. Carl Sandburg also invites any veterans to attend their program. Information can be obtained on the Sandburg website.

Neshaminy families received information regarding the H1N1 flu vaccines and further updates will occur when the information is received by the district. Forms should be returned to school by Monday, November 2, 2009.

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Walls presented the minutes of the August 25, 2009 and September 22, 2009 public meetings for the Board's approval. Upon motion of Mr. Blasch and, seconded by Mr. Koziol, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the August 25, 2009 and September 22, 2009 public meetings.

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

Mr. Paradise presented the following for approval:

- September, 2009 Treasurer's Report, subject to audit
- Check Register – September, 2009
- Personal and per capita tax exonerations for September 2009

Mr. Paradise pointed out to Board members the Summary of the 2004 Bond Issue Capital Project Fund Accounts. Balance is depleted to \$672,601.31. One of the agenda items for the Facilities and Finance Committee meeting will be the need for a new capital improvement note sometime in the near future.

Mr. Paradise responded to the check register question regarding "Ghost Training" and stated that it is a three day workshop for training to utilize software that makes an image of every single computer on the school district network.

Mr. O'Connor questioned the EZ pass payments to New Jersey. Mr. Paradise advised that several New Jersey schools are within the ten mile perimeter that the district must transport students to. Buses travel every single day to New Jersey. Mr. O'Connor questioned the \$11,000 payment to St. Mary's for training purposes regarding sports. Mr. Paradise advised that it is for high school sports trainer services and it is one-third of the annual payment.

Mr. Koziol moved that the September, 2009 Treasurer's Report, subject to audit, check register for September, 2009 and personal and per capita tax exonerations for September, 2009 be approved and Mr. Blasch seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said reports.

Bids/Budget Transfers

Mr. Paradise advised that there are no Bids and Budget Transfer Report (Working Copy 10-1).

The Board unanimously approved same.

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 Support Personnel

Dr. Spitz moved the certified and support personnel actions be approved. Ms. Boyle seconded same.

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

Motion: American Education Week

Mr. O'Connor presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, public schools are the backbone of our democracy, providing young people with the tools they need to maintain our nation's precious values of freedom, civility, and equality;

WHEREAS, by equipping young Americans with both practical skills and broader intellectual abilities, public schools give them hope for, and access to, a productive future; and

WHEREAS, public education employees, be they substitute educators, custodians, teachers, bus drivers or librarians, work tirelessly to serve our children and communities with care and professionalism; and,

WHEREAS, public schools are community catalysts, bringing together adults and children, educators and volunteers, business leaders and elected officials in a common enterprise;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board of School Directors hereby proclaims November 15-21, 2009, as the 88th annual observance of American Education Week.

Mr. Koziol seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion.

Motion: Senior Citizen Tax Assistance Program

Mr. Koziol presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, the Neshaminy School District has provided a Tax Assistance program for senior citizens since 1977. The funding for this program has been increased eight times since its inception, along with increases in both the rebate amounts and income levels which determine eligibility. Since 1977, the district has distributed more than \$1.85 million to qualifying senior citizens in our community; and

WHEREAS, the Neshaminy School District continues to be concerned with the increased burden on senior citizens caused by escalating real estate taxes; and

WHEREAS, the Neshaminy School District recognizes that a number of senior citizens have become ineligible due to small increases in social security income over a number of years.

NOW, THEREFORE, in an attempt to keep pace with this tax burden and today's high cost of living for those on fixed incomes, I move to modify the Senior Citizens Tax Assistance Program as follows:

*Increase income eligibility from \$14,999 to \$19,999

*Increase rebate maximum amount from \$500 to \$650

Mr. Eccles seconded same.

The Board unanimously approved same.

Federal Programs

Dr. Muenker stated that the Board will be updated each month on the federal grants and monies received to date is \$1.8M.

Other Board Business

Mr. O'Connor inquired whether there was Board consensus to have Mr. Profy research to see whether it would be possible to have a referendum placed on the upcoming election ballot regarding the Neshaminy teacher's contract and capping same. There was Board consensus and Mr. Profy stated that he would look into the possibilities of having something placed on the ballot.

Public Comment

Mr. Doug Emsley, local businessman stated that he is concerned that ever increasing energy bills, which are before the Congress, including oil, electric, and gas will put a strain on taxpayers as well as the school district. Further, the Obama health care plan will also present future burdens on individuals and in the upcoming years the school districts will be faced with increases into the teacher's union retirement plans. All of these shortfalls will occur and where will the monies come from. Mr. Emsley also stated that PSSA scores are declining and this is a direct reflection on the teachers and what they are doing with the students.

Mr. Chris Graham, Langhorne Borough, PA, stated that he is a financial and estate planner and he wished to share comments that he made back in June, 2008 and some comments this evening about where we have been and where we are now. Mr. Graham looked back at comments, layoffs in the financial world and building sector are happening, transportation companies are shutting down, Merrill Lynch was taken over because of a financial crisis in this country. Mr. Graham read at the meeting of May 4, 2008 that unemployment was approaching 5%. Unemployment rate is approaching 10% currently. Mr. Graham stated that unemployment would probably hit 18% by the end of the first quarter next year. Mr. Graham had a list of 1,098 homes in zip code 19047 which are up for foreclosure. Teachers this is not a personal attack against you. This is economics. Look at yourselves and say "I'm really lucky to have a job." Mr. Graham's recommendation to the Board is pull the existing offer off the table. The District cannot afford same. Pension crisis will hit in the next 3-4 years. Congress is thinking about raising fuel costs. Why not give back? Everyone else is paying for their benefits. Mr. Graham stated that this has been the best year for his business because his business prospers when there is financial crisis.

Mr. Solis Basen, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, questioned the figures in the motion for the Senior Citizen Tax Assistance Program. Mr. Webb stated that the motion was changed in order that more people would qualify for said program.

Board Comment

Mr. O'Connor wished to remind everyone that the pension plan is not just a teacher's pension plan, but a state worker's pension plan. There are options to minimize the impact to taxpayers and honor our commitment to state employees, but for that to change our elected officials in Harrisburg need to make the change. Those same officials are also covered under this very same pension plan. Taxpayers need to contact their elected officials in Harrisburg and encourage them to keep after reforms that can save taxpayers money and still honor the commitments.

Mr. Koziol stated that in a couple days the citizens will have the opportunity to decide the direction of the school district by going out to vote. Mr. Koziol encouraged everyone to get out and vote. This election will have the most impact, because hardly anyone votes. 10%-12% of people vote. Get out and VOTE!! Vote for the person that best represents your individual needs. This is a great Board. They take a lot into consideration before taking a vote. They will need help in the future. Get the best people to help the Board. They need help, direction, ideas and support. The highest taxes paid are real estate taxes, and yet only 10-12% of the people help pick the people to make the decisions. Do your research and get out to vote!

Adjournment

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Blasch seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anita E. Walls". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary