

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
May 24, 2011

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on May 24, 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
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
Dr. Geeta Heble
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan

BOARD MEMBER ABSENT:

Mr. Scott Congdon

OTHERS: Approximately 250 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 where labor and personnel issues were discussed.

Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Announcements

None

Public Comment

Frank Fry, Chairperson for the Department of Education at West Chester University, Wilmington, Delaware, stated that fourteen years ago he came and observed Neshaminy's physical education curriculum and requested to be placed in Neshaminy and to also have student teachers placed in the district as well, because Neshaminy's physical education curriculum was so strong. Mr. Fry said that there is currently a tremendous amount of brain based research that talks about the significance of physical activity as it relates to academic success. He also noted that the CDC as well as the Association for Supervision for Curriculum Development has also cited the need for physical activity as it relates to success in academic testing. Mr. Fry stated that West Chester University has a vested interest in the continued success of the physical education department at Neshaminy. Mr. Fry urged the Board to give this issue serious consideration.

Dylan Atkinson, student at Neshaminy High School, Langhorne, began by reading Neshaminy High School's Mission Statement. Mr. Atkinson stated that the 8th grade foreign language department is a vital part to the curriculum of Neshaminy. He also stated that the \$32,800 that would be saved by cutting clubs cannot be justified considering the benefits lost to students that the clubs provide, such as helping students to get into college.

Amy Geruc, teacher and Department Chairperson for the Physical Education Program at Neshaminy High School, stated that physical education is about cooperation, communication, organization, and respect. Ms. Geruc said that by cutting P.E. it not only affects the 10th grade but it affects the entire school. She said that as a parent she does not want to see her child go to a study hall rather than a physical education class. Ms. Geruc said that the physical education department is asking for a compromise for the 10th grade program rather than cutting the program. She concluded by stating that the physical education department educates the entire child, physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally.

Zak Heinem, student at Neshaminy High School, Levittown, commented that he took the advice of teachers and counselors to get involved with clubs and activities. He stated that cutting clubs and activities will not only alter students experience but their academic future as well. Without the added appeal and well-rounded appearance of clubs and activities it heavily impairs student's chances of getting into the college of their dreams. Mr. Heinem stated that without the clubs the high school as a whole becomes less appealing and less spirited to not only students but prospective residents of Neshaminy School District as well. He concluded by saying Neshaminy's goal should be to make Neshaminy more appealing to residents and not restrict the ability to prepare students for the world beyond.

Annie Kopera, student at Neshaminy High School, declared that all students are privileged to participate in Neshaminy's award winning physical education programs, which are some students only opportunity to achieve well-roundedness. This program also provides students to enhance their social and emotional learning. Ms. Kopera urged the Board to reconsider the many programs that are proposed to be cut because it is sending a message to students that diminishes the standards of excellence.

Heather Thomas, student at Neshaminy High School, stated that she is very involved in activities such as gym night and physical education classes. Ms. Thomas said that students look forward to P.E. classes throughout their day to get active. She also stated that the elimination of 10th grade P.E. would affect one of the most exciting and important events at Neshaminy, which is "Gym Night". Some of the teachers that are at risk for being laid off play an important part in putting together an experience like "Gym Night". Ms. Thomas concluded by saying P.E. shouldn't be a choice it should be a priority and a course that every student should be required to take.

Sean Weaver, student at Neshaminy High School, acknowledged that many of the students look up to the P.E. teachers and consider them as role models. Mr. Weaver mentioned that some of his best memories are in gym class. He implored the Board to consider other alternatives for cost savings.

Terry Martian, physical education teacher and Department Chairperson for Physical Education at Carl Sandburg Middle School, Langhorne, stated that children who are physically fit and active often do better in the classroom than those who are not physically active. She mentioned that Neshaminy has a Nationally Recognized Physical Education Program. Ms. Martian quoted a Professor of Pediatrics at Stanford School of Medicine, saying that P.E. in schools is one of the most important ways to help fight childhood obesity. Some of the other benefits are high grades, social skills, better sleep, lifelong fitness habits, and better self-esteem. Ms. Martian said that in a survey conducted by The Alliance in 2009, 92% of the parents surveyed considered P.E. and health education just as important as English, math, and science; furthermore, 96% believe that physical activity can boost their child's classroom performance. She urged the Board to reconsider their decision on this important matter.

Carl Sandburg Student Council informed the public of a walk-a-thon produced by The National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) and the Sandburg Student Council to help raise money for the American Red Cross to be used for the Earthquake Relief Fund in Japan and the series of tornadoes in the Southern states of the U.S.A. Carl Sandburg School raised \$4,300, which was more than any other Bucks County school in the area.

Patti Snider, parent of Neshaminy student, Levittown, asked the Board to please keep the physical education program stating that it provides a positive influence on a student's personality, character and self-esteem. She

added that given the choice of sitting in a study hall or participating in physical education most students would choose the latter.

Kevin Yenst, parent of students in Neshaminy, Feasterville, spoke about the future of education in Neshaminy School District. Mr. Yenst stated that he understands that times are hard, but cutting programs and teachers is only hurting the students. He said that the music department has felt its fair share of pain over the last few years. Mr. Yenst pointed out that students taking music have shown to excel in other aspects of their education, so he asked the Board to reconsider making any cuts to the music program and to think about who they would be hurting.

Kevin Kelly, health and physical education teacher in Pennsbury School District, Langhorne, stated that the Neshaminy Physical Education program has gained respect even at the collegiate level. He said that the plan to eliminate 10th grade physical education is not in the best interest of the district, because the program is one that is recognized at the state and national level and much hard work has been put into the program to meet the needs of all students. He stated that physical education provides physical, social, and emotional benefits to students that they cannot get from any other academic program. Mr. Kelly joined the other speakers in asking the Board to reconsider their decision to cut the 10th grade physical education program.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, spoke on behalf of the students of Neshaminy asking the Board to stop doing things *to* education and start doing things *for* education. Mr. Rodos said the Neshaminy School District is similar to the neighboring school districts in striving to achieve a goal of providing the same quality of education with less money. Mr. Rodos said he recently noticed that in comparing data the Neshaminy School District's PSSA math scores over the past few years have shown a marked improvement in the high school. He congratulated the teachers, principals and administrators for this accomplishment. Mr. Rodos urged both parties to do the right thing and pull together in the upcoming negotiation meetings.

Jerry Coleman, Twin Oaks Levittown, productivity consultant and event production, commended Kristin Nichols and the Neshaminy Music Department for doing an outstanding job. He also thanked the Board and Administration for their diligence in addressing difficult issues. Mr. Coleman noted that the Neshaminy Food Services Manager is working hard to provide healthy choices to students. He stated that he thinks the physical education program should be expanded as opposed to being cut. Mr. Coleman concluded by stating that if any cuts need to be made, it should include not only the arts programs, but equally placed on the athletic programs and other voluntary clubs.

Julie Hemmingway, student at Carl Sandburg Middle School, Levittown, asked the Board to keep the physical education program because it teaches students the importance of physical health. She remarked that physical education provides students with essential guidelines for healthy living.

Sarah Leonhauser, student at Carl Sandburg Middle School, Levittown, said that she does not want to attend a study hall rather than a physical education class because there are so many more benefits to physical education classes. She said that physical education contributes to students becoming responsible adults living a healthy lifestyle.

Morgan McCormick and Summer Santora, students at Carl Sandburg Middle School, Levittown, remarked that physical education can help to relieve stress and energize the mind and body.

Keara Bernek, student at Maple Point Middle School, Langhorne, said that kids need physical education because healthy bodies equal healthy minds.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired business executive, Laurel Oaks, Langhorne, asked Mr. Webb to address whether the Board can pass a new rule that is not specified in the CBA, such as a dress code for Neshaminy teachers. Mr. Alfonso remarked that the PSSA scores for last year placed Neshaminy at number 203 out of 500

Pennsylvania school districts and over the last 10 years the PSSA scores at Neshaminy have ranked the district at number 269 in Pennsylvania.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, began by saying that in this country we have a long history of one generation taking care of the next and what he sees of the next generation that tradition will carry on. Mr. Pirritano said that no one wants to see programs cut, but it will happen because the district does not have the money. He said changes must be made for the sake of generations to come. He declared that 80% of the budget goes toward payroll and now concessions must be made. He said that if the teachers give back some of the program cuts can be avoided.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- Stated that an update on the proposed budget will be provided in June.
- Spring events: art show, music programs, exhibits
- Senior Prom was held on May 21st, at the Crystal Ballroom in Philadelphia, PA.
- Reminded the public to visit Neshaminy's website for current and upcoming events.
- Graduation date is set for Wednesday, June 8th, at 6:30 p.m.

Item for Approval Tonight

Dr. Rattigan presented the following overnight trip for approval:

- Poquessing Middle School to La-Crosse, Wisconsin to compete in the Future Problem Solving International Bowl – June 9th – June 12th, 2011

There was Board consensus for said trip. (Mr. Congdon was not present.)

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Burns presented the minutes of the April 26, 2011 Public Meeting and the May 10, 2011 Work Session Meeting. Upon motion of Mr. O'Connor and seconded by Mr. Koutsouradis

Mr. Eccles noted that his absence from the May 10th, Work Session Meeting was because he was attending a budget meeting at the Bucks County Technical School.

Mrs. Burns so noted said request.

The Board unanimously approved the minutes of April 26, 2011 and May 10, 2011. (Mr. Congdon was not present.)

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

Mrs. Markowitz presented the following for approval:

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

Bids

Mrs. Markowitz presented the following bid. Information was presented prior to the meeting.

Bid No. 12-09

Amount: \$25,434.69

Bid Description: Classroom & art supplies for the 2011-2012 school year.

Mrs. Cummings moved the April, 2011 Treasurer's Report be approved, subject to audit, Check Register for April, 2011, and the Personal and Per Capita Tax Exonerations for April, 2011 be approved. Mr. Eccles seconded the motion.

Mr. Morris asked how much of the \$1.3 million dollars on page 54 is for the certified staff.

Mrs. Markowitz answered that \$1.1 million is for the certified staff.

Mr. O'Connor asked Mrs. Markowitz to identify the seven items marked HAB in the amount of \$16,500 on page 54.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that it is an employee local service tax that is remitted to Burkheimer.

Mr. Morris asked if there are any other certified staff healthcare expenses on the register.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that there is an expense of \$93,000 for Keystone, \$2,300 for dental care, and \$1,200 for vision.

The Board approved said reports by a vote of seven ayes, zero nays, and one abstention, (Mr. Morris abstained for the reason that he objects to paying for the certified staff's free healthcare and their bonus check for retirement, and he would like to see the Board bill the NFT 40% of \$12,000, 40% of \$2,500, 40% of \$93,000, and 40% of \$1.1 million dollars. He added that with these savings programs cuts would not be necessary.) (Mr. Congdon was not present.)

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 – Certified Personnel

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

Mrs. Cummings moved the Certified and Support Personnel Reports be approved. Mr. Morris seconded the motion.

The Board approved said reports by a vote of seven ayes, zero nays, and one abstention, (Mr. Morris abstained for the reason that he objects to the retirement bonus and free healthcare for individual no.29 of the certified staff on pg. 67.) (Mr. Congdon was not present.)

Motion: Appointment of Treasurer

Mr. Koutsouradis presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, each year during the month of May the Board must elect a Treasurer to serve for the year beginning July 1, 2011.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Barbara Markowitz, Acting Business Administrator, be appointed Treasurer of the Neshaminy Board of School Directors for the above term, beginning July 1, 2011.

Mr. Eccles seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion by a vote of eight ayes, and zero nays. (Mr. Congdon was not present.)

Motion: Approval of Special Education Contracted Services for 2011-12

Mrs. Cummings presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, the Neshaminy School District is required by law to provide special education and related services to children from pre-school through age twentyone; and

WHEREAS, a significant number of our students have severe mental and physical disabilities for which we do not operate programs.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Neshaminy Board of School Directors approves the contract for special education services with Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22 for the 2011 – 12 school year.

Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

Mr. Webb commended the administration for creatively finding a half a million dollars savings without impacting the children.

The Board unanimously approved said motion by a vote of eight ayes, and zero nays. (Mr. Congdon was not present.)

Federal Programs

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that there were no additional grants to report. The total in grants remains at \$2,146,496.

Other Board Business

None

Public Comment

Armando Carrasquillo, private investigator, Villages of Flowers Mill, stated that he was wearing a shirt to commemorate the Pennsylvania police officers who died in the line of duty. Mr. Carrasquillo drew a parallel to what police officers go through in contract negotiations and the sacrifices that they make compared to what teachers go through in contract negotiations. He agreed with a previous speaker that regardless of what the public wants some programs will have to be cut. Additionally, he said that there are some teachers who do not side with the NFT but they have remained silent and it is now time for them to speak up. Mr. Carrasquillo stated that the charter school intends to reapply and if they are accepted more jobs and programs will be cut. He said he does not understand why the NFT does not see the future.

Solis Basin, retired, Langhorne, congratulated Mr. Koutsouradis and Mr. Webb for their excellent work on the technical school budget. Mr. Basin stated that he has been attending meetings for many years and in listening to all the parents and students that have recently come to the podium to speak on behalf of their special interest he has yet to hear anyone propose a suggestion for solving the current problems of the district.

Maryann Bender, parent of Neshaminy student, Levittown, complimented the Board for their hard work. Ms. Bender implored the Board to reconsider cutting the physical education program and declared that she would rather see taxes raised in order to save this program. She encouraged the Board to pass the technical school budget and stated that she knows for a fact that they are not wasting money.

Mindy Anderson, President of the Support Staff, Levittown, stated that the support staff is vital to the support and operation of Neshaminy School District. Ms. Anderson said the proposed elimination of support staff positions will weaken already stretched responsibilities of the staff. She said that while support staff positions are being eliminated the work is still there leaving the remaining employees to be overburdened with added

duties and responsibilities. Ms. Anderson noted that the support staff has accepted the added responsibilities because they love the kids, the buildings, and their jobs. The proposed cuts not only affect the support staff it affects the students, parents, administration and staff. Ms. Anderson implored the Board to remove these job eliminations from the proposed budget, because the support staff has done their part and upheld their part of the agreement and should no longer be the target and means to balance the budget.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, thanked the support staff for being part of the solution and not the problem and he urged them to go to their state representatives and try and get some of the rules and regulations changed that the Board has to abide by. Mr. Pirritano asked Mrs. Markowitz to clarify whether the \$116.00 tax increase is for the total \$11 million dollars or just the \$1.4 million dollars allowed in Act 1. He also asked Mr. Webb to give an update on the Advisory Board and where the negotiations stand with the NFT. Mr. Pirritano clarified that at the last meeting he misunderstood Mr. Pastor's comments on vo-tech funding and stated that he does agree with Mr. Pastor that they have to revamp the internal vocational programs within the Neshaminy District and not the county technical school.

Larry Pastor, Business Executive, Middletown, apologized for any confusion regarding his previous comments regarding the vocational programs, stating that he was referring to the \$4 million dollars that is spent internally on said program. He said that the program needs to be revisited to find ways of improving it for the 21st century. Mr. Pastor voiced his amazement that the NFT continues to expect more from the Neshaminy taxpayers when the average income for residents in Neshaminy is \$63,000, while Neshaminy average teachers salary is \$82,000 putting them in the top 10% of American wage earners. Mr. Pastor asked Dr. Muenker to speculate that if the NFT were to agree to pay 17% of their healthcare contribution how many jobs and how many programs would be saved. He also asked the Board to comment on a recent flyer put out by the NFT claiming that they presented an offer to save 16.2% of healthcare costs. Mr. Pastor asked Mr. Webb to confirm if any taxpayers have contacted him or any other Board members declaring any support for the NFT positions.

Board Comment

Mr. O'Connor thanked the students who came out and represented their cause. He said that the current public education problems are not limited to our district or even this state or this country, it is a worldwide problem. Mr. O'Connor noted that if we do not take serious steps to fix the cost drivers and restructure our costs the problems are only going to get worse and the program cuts are only going to get more severe. He reiterated that he hopes the clubs and intramural activities can be put back into the budget to help minimize the impact to the students.

Mr. Koutsouradis thanked the students for their comments and he acknowledged that program cuts are a serious matter to the Board as well as to the students; however, by law the Board must present a balanced budget and 75% of the budget is going for salaries, therefore, some programs will suffer. He asked the public if anyone knows of any solutions to please come forward as the Board is open to any and all suggestions, but until that time concessions are needed in order to keep the programs in place.

Mr. Morris declared he has still not heard from the NFT regarding the alleged \$2.8 million dollar savings, nor has he heard anything further regarding the 16.2% savings claimed by an NFT negotiator. Mr. Morris suggested that students, parents, and taxpayers should write letters to the NFT asking them to settle the contract. He commented to the support staff that there are no guarantees in life and layoffs are happening all over the country.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the \$116.00 average tax increase is to cover the proposed gap of \$3.2 million dollars, which is a 4.2 mill increase. She also stated that if the Act 1 allowance and the exceptions were used it would be a .37 mill increase.

Ms. Boyle noted that a dress code for the certified staff is on the agenda for the policy committee and anyone interested in participating is welcome to attend. She also thanked the students for coming out and speaking

and stated that she would like to see more participation regarding any other issues about program cuts so the Board can get a bigger picture of what the public wants.

Mr. Webb stated that there are no current updates on the budget at this time. The Board has decided to choose two applicants from each of the three regions for the Advisory Board and next week the chosen participants will be called. In response to Mr. Pastor's question regarding if the NFT contributed 17% to their healthcare Mr. Webb said the estimate would be approximately \$4 million dollars in savings. He added that if this savings were to be realized it would save many jobs as well as programs. Mr. Webb confirmed that he received three calls from Neshaminy residents in support of the Board and no calls in support of the NFT's position.

Mr. Morris confirmed that he has also received several calls in support of the Board and no other Board members reported receiving any other calls.

Mr. Webb thanked Mr. Eccles for doing an outstanding job in representing Neshaminy in the Bucks County Technical School Budget negotiations.

Adjournment

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Ms. Boyle seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary