

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES  
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
November 4, 2013

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on November 4, 2013 in the District Offices Board Room at the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President  
Mr. Scott E. Congdon, Vice President  
Mrs. Susan Cummings  
Mr. Stephen Pirritano  
Mr. Mark Shubin  
Mr. Anthony Sposato

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

Mr. Robert L. Copeland  
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz  
Mrs. Theresa Hinterberger

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Ms. Irene Boyle  
Mr. Mike Morris  
Mr. William Oettinger

**OTHERS:** Approximately 10 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 an Executive Session was held regarding litigation and personnel issues.

**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

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

**3. Announcements**

None.

**4. Superintendent's Report**

Mr. Copeland advised the Board on the following:

- Maple Point Business Computer and Information Technology Students recognize October as National Cyber Security Month.
- Student work exhibit at PAEA Conference and Senator Costa's Offices.
- Sandburg students celebrate Red Ribbon Week and raised money for the American Heart Association.
- The Playwickian receives Columbia Scholastic Press Association Silver Medal Award.
- Columbia Scholastic Press Association selects 2012 - 2013 Playwickian Staff Writer Dakota Kalman as Gold Circle Award Winner.

**5. Public Comment**

Steve Rodos, retired, resident of Villages of Flowers Mill, commented that the school consolidation project should move forward without delay. He stated that to take no action would be a mistake and it would actually be taking a step backwards. He said the students deserve better functioning schools.

**6. Items for Approval at the November 19th Public Board Meeting**

**a) Private Transportation Contract for 2013 - 2014**

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Transportation Contract for 2013 - 2014 is for the Lakeside Youth Services and the total amount is \$22,734.00.

Mr. Webb stated that the Private Transportation Contract for 2013 - 2014 will be an agenda item at the November 19th, Public Board Meeting.

**b) Neshaminy High School Diploma for Veteran**

Mr. Copeland stated that the Neshaminy High School Diploma for Veterans is for any veterans who left high school before receiving their high school diploma to serve in the armed forces. We would now like to honor those veterans by presenting them with their high school diploma.

Mr. Webb stated that the Neshaminy High School Diploma for a Veteran will be an agenda item at the November 19th, Public Board Meeting.

**c) Bids/Budget Transfers**

Mrs. Markowitz stated that there were no bids and there was one Budget Transfer (Working Copy) 14 - 2 with two transactions and numerous sub transactions, which will be an agenda item at the November 19th, Public Board Meeting.

Mr. Shubin asked what type of contracted services are being referred to.

Mrs. Markowitz stated they were substitutes for teachers, clerical, and custodian.

Mr. Shubin asked if this was the new method of the substitute's services.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that is correct.

**8. Committee Reports**

**a) Board Polices**

Ms. Boyle was not present.

**b) Educational Development**

Mr. Shubin informed the Board that no meeting is scheduled for this month.

**c) Finance/Facilities**

Mr. Webb advised the Board that the next meeting has been scheduled for November 21st, and the topic will include school consolidation plan.

**d) IU Board**

Mrs. Cummings informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for November 19th, at the Tawanka facility.

**e) Education Foundation**

Mr. Copeland informed the Board that the committee has put out their applications for grants so teachers and staff members can start to plan for innovative projects.

**f) Technical School**

Mr. Morris was not present.

**g) Technology**

Mr. Shubin advised the Board that at the last meeting they discussed some of the events that occurred over the summer and the next meeting will be scheduled soon.

**h) Ad Hoc Facility Use Update**

Mr. Oettinger was not present.

**8. Public Comment**

Steve Rodos, retired, resident of Villages of Flowers Mill, suggested that in order to further benefit senior citizens in property tax relief, the Board vote to raise the household annual income limit from \$20 thousand to \$40 thousand and the rebate amount be raised accordingly. Mr. Rodos also asked for confirmation about the possibility that the Board is looking into outsourcing of busing and custodial services. Additionally, he asked how the full-day kindergarten is progressing and if the new outsourcing of substitute teachers is effective.

**9. Future Topics**

None.

**10. Agenda Development for the November 19th, Public Board Meeting**

None.

**11. Board Comment**

Mrs. Cummings asked for an update on full-day kindergarten.

Mrs. Markowitz verified that the Board is looking into bids for outsourcing transportation and custodial services.

Mr. Copeland said that full-day kindergarten has been very successful and there is an ongoing evaluation being conducted. He also said the outsourcing for substitute teachers is working satisfactorily so far.

**Mr. Webb read the following statement:**

In recent weeks, the Neshaminy community found itself embroiled in another controversy. But this latest issue has nothing to do with labor contracts, or test scores, or educational programs. No, this disturbance has nothing to do with those things, but it does have a lot to do with pride and tradition of the Neshaminy School District.

Of course, I am referring to the complaint filed by one of our residents with the State Human Relations Commission over our use of the Redskin mascot.

Many people have said to the Board that this is a waste of time and money when we should be focusing on education. I agree with you that there are more pressing issues to be addressed in our district, but we do not have the luxury of ignoring this complaint. We take great care with all the issues brought before this Board, especially when they become legal matters.

I respect the opinion of the resident who brought this topic up at a couple of previous Board meetings. I also hear the voices of the many whom have written to us or who have taken to social media outlets to defend our Neshaminy heritage. There is no denying that this controversy has sparked very strong feelings from within our community.

I, and every member of this Board also feel very strongly about this issue because all of us have a bond with the proud Redskin tradition. Like you, none of us would support the use of a mascot that promoted an unhealthy stereotype. And I guess this is where the problem lies. Most of the community regards the Redskin mascot as a proud tradition, while a few see it as a racial insult.

We researched the definition of Redskin to see when it became a racial slur. In our Neshaminy libraries, we found a copy of a 1961 edition of The Oxford English Dictionary which defined Redskin as an American Indian. Nothing more, nothing less.

A 1966 edition of Webster's Third New International Dictionary also defined Redskin as an American Indian. We saw the exact same definition in the 1971 and 1980 editions of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

It wasn't until we saw the 1982 edition of Webster's Third New International Dictionary that the definition of Redskin included a blurb that it could be considered as an offensive expression.

We here in Neshaminy were first referred to as Redskins back in 1930 - that is more than 50 years prior to the dictionary term being altered. I think it is safe to say that our mascot was a time-honored tradition long before anyone was offended by it.

Some people have said that Redskin is a racial slur every bit as insulting to Native Americans as are other racial slurs that I dare not speak at this meeting. But I do not agree because Redskins was a name created by Native people.

The Redskin name is a source of pride to many different tribes and Native people.

The Redskin is the mascot at a number of predominantly Native American Schools.

And the expression Redskin has been given validation by so many natives, including the ones who designed the logo.

As for the resident who obviously feels differently than many of us, this is clearly a very personnel matter to her. While I respect that, I am also concerned by how little regard she has at how an unwelcomed change of our mascot could affect us.

Back on October 25th, this same resident posted the following statement in the Rant section of the Bucks County Courier Times, and I quote...

"Neshaminy spends \$1.5 million on non-educational extracurricular activities that only some kids participate in. It's time to use those funds for educational programs that all students are entitled to."

Unquote.

Extracurricular programs are very important to the well-being of our students, providing them with healthy outlets in a world full of unhealthy distractions. Yet, this Neshaminy resident seemingly wants to take those healthy outlets away from our students. Not only does she want to rid this district of its mascot, she apparently wants to eliminate the teams and organizations that proudly use that mascot.

I am sorry that this resident is so strongly upset by the Neshaminy Redskin name, but I just cannot find it in my heart to say that our mascot is a racial insult. Everywhere you look in this district, we honor the strength and pride of the American Indian, and the Redskin is a symbol of our belief.

Did you know that eight (8) of our athletic teams have a Mr. or Ms. Redskin award presented annually to the athletes who best represent such qualities as work ethic, spirit, leadership, and community service? Would this resident have us rid this district of those awards, too?

What about the annual Mr. Redskin talent competition, an event that has raised and donated more than \$5,000 over the past 3 years for charitable causes such as UNICEF relief efforts in Japan following that horrible Tsunami? Should we get rid of that, too?

We honor our Redskin heritage with every student who graduates, with every community cause we serve, with every touchdown we score!

The mascot for the Wellpinit School District, locate on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit Washington is "Redskins." On their website they ask the question WHAT IS A REDSKIN? They answer with "Redskin" is a racial descriptor for Native Americans and one of the color metaphors for race used in North America and Europe since European colonization of America.

Our mascot was not a slur or an insult when adopted 85 years ago and it is not today.

We are proud to be Neshaminy Redskins!

**12. Adjournment of Meeting**

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Pirritano seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 7:25 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns  
Board Secretary