

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
October 11, 2011

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on October 11, 2011 in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center at the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President
Mr. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice President
Ms. Irene Boyle
Mr. Scott E. Congdon
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Mike Morris
Mr. William Oettinger

ADMINISTRATORS:

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. Richard M. Eccles
Mr. William D. O'Connor

OTHERS: Approximately 75 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

Mr. Webb stated that prior to the meeting there was an Executive Session held regarding personnel issues and contract issues.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

Mr. Webb announced that Mr. Eccles and Mr. O'Connor were not in attendance due to their work schedule.

4. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the Following:

- Neshaminy High School Roadies will be performing "Spooky and Kooky" 2011, on Wednesday, October 26th, at 6:00 p.m., and a second showing at 7:15 p.m.
- Congratulations went out to the 2010-2011 Playwickian editors and staff writers for receiving the Columbia Scholastic Press Association's Gold Medal Certificate of Excellence for High School Journalism.
- Times Publishing Newspapers, Inc is proud to announce the launch of their Teen Scene Feature in the October issue that will now run monthly in the Southampton Spirit and Langhorne Ledger. This newest addition to our papers will be written exclusively by the journalism students from the Playwickian newspaper at Neshaminy High School to help spread awareness of the school's many accomplishments, as well as its contributions to the community.
- TLC at Neshaminy was awarded an alternative education program grant called "Generation On."

5. Public Comment

Shannon O'Connell and Aydan Drake, 8th grade students from Maple Point Middle, invited the public to celebrate Veterans Day on Thursday, November 10th, at a Veterans Day ceremony at Maple Point Middle School at 11:00 a.m.

Angie Manning, teacher in New Jersey, Langhorne, stated that although she is a teacher in the state of New Jersey, her sympathies are with the Neshaminy School Board because of financial reasons. She said she has heard many versions from both sides and wanted to clarify her position.

Mike Caputo, retired, Langhorne, remarked that the dress code for Neshaminy teachers should be addressed in the new CBA. Mr. Caputo stated that too many of the teachers dress inappropriately, which displays a membership group-think type of mentality.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flower Mills, asked if the School Board would consider supporting any of the items proposed by Randi Weingarten, President of the AFT, regarding education reform. The points proposed were teacher evaluation system where performance was based on student growth not test scores, career ladders for highly effective teachers, tenure based on performance rather than seniority, among other improvements. Mr. Rodos stated that in the current contract there is a side letter indicating that all opt-out provisions will be removed on June 30, 2008. He asked the Board why we are still paying a medical opt-out when it expired in 2008.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, commented that he is an advocate for the home access system and he is happy to report that most of the teachers are participating in this important tool. Mr. Pirritano asked Dr. Muenker for his perspective on expanding this excellent parent/teacher tool. He also asked for an update on the dress code policy. Mr. Pirritano concluded by asking Mr. Webb to comment on the questions he submitted at the last Board meeting and any decision that may be forthcoming on the request to investigate the implementation of the Neshaminy voluntary retirement plan side letter.

Almando Carrasquillo, private investigator, Langhorne, asked if there was an expiration date in the new offer from the Board to the NFT regarding medical benefits and credits. He said if there is not an expiration date, he urges the Board to make one. He also asked the Board to reconsider giving the teachers privileges for using the school's computer system.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Langhorne, said that he wanted the entire Neshaminy community to know the recent results of the PSSA and SAT reports. He said that he is dismayed to learn that Neshaminy's ratings have dropped significantly within the last year.

6. Items for Discussion

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

Dr. Muenker stated that recently a challenging problem with parking at Walter Miller Elementary School has arisen. There has been another meeting with Dr. Muenker, Mr. Minotti, the Township Manager, and the local police to try to come up with some ideas for parking. Dr. Muenker requested the Board's permission to forward to Middletown Township a proposal for additional parking relief both short term and long term while looking for ways to work together to minimize the project.

Mr. Congdon asked what specific locations are involved.

Dr. Muenker stated it is the Walter Miller Elementary School.

b) Review and Discussion of Act 1 of 2006

Mrs. Markowitz advised that Neshaminy has received confirmation from the State regarding the debt and it is 1.7% for the coming year.

Mr. Webb announced that the Board will be able to raise local taxes about 1.7%, subject to some possible limitations or exceptions. This number is set by Act 1, which limits the amount a school district can raise taxes. The 1.7% is equivalent to \$1.9 million dollars.

c) PSSA Presentation

Karen Hessel, district consultant, gave a slide presentation on the 2010 - 2011 PSSA results. Ms. Hessel pointed out that while most schools in the district showed improvement in their scores with Neshaminy meeting AYP as a district for the third year in a row, the Neshaminy High School's performance remains a major area of concern.

Mr. Congdon questioned the necessity of so many categories of subgroups.

Ms. Hessel explained that the subgroups are identified in order to make the evaluation of a district more specific and detailed.

Mr. Koutsouradis asked if the report shows how Neshaminy compares to other school districts in the state.

Ms. Hessel replied the report does provide that information and it can be viewed by going to the public website.

Mr. Webb asked if a decrease in the percentage of proficiency is something to be concerned about.

Ms. Hessel noted that only if the percentage is significant such as 10%. She said a 1 or 2% decrease would not raise concern.

Mr. Morris asked if there is a plan in place to correct the drop in PSSA scores in reading for grades 9 to 11.

Ms. Hessel replied that Dr. Heble and the administration are working on a plan at this time.

Mr. Morris asked how Neshaminy can begin to correct the proficiency problem in the high school.

Ms. Hessel stated that there are several steps of corrective action that need to be taken and the students need to be made aware of the importance of these tests.

7. Items for Approval Tonight

a) Overnight Trips

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the following:

1. Neshaminy High School Cheerleading to a National Competition at the Ocean City Convention Center in Ocean City, Maryland on February 25th and 26th, 2012.

Dr. Rattigan stated that the cheerleader parents of the Shaker Boosters club will be organizing several fundraising opportunities for the cheerleaders to fundraise the cost of the trip.

Mr. Congdon asked what transportation will be used.

Dr. Rattigan replied that she will verify that information out.

Mr. Congdon asked who the chaperones are.

Dr. Rattigan stated that the chaperones are Mary Hart, Trudy Volinsky, Sue Fehrle, and Shirley Saba.

Mrs. Cummings asked isn't it true that in the past the transportation has been via bus.

Dr. Rattigan said that buses have been used depending on the number of students.

Mr. Webb stated that the approval will wait until the next meeting when the question of transportation can be verified.

8. Items for Approval at the October 25, 2011 Public Board Meeting

a) American Education Week

Dr. Muenker advised that American Education Week will take place on November 13 – 19, 2011. Parents will be able to visit their children's classroom during that week and observe. Information will be posted on the website forthcoming.

b) Bids/Budget Transfers

Mrs. Markowitz advised the Board that there were no bids or budgets transfers to report.

9. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next scheduled meeting is October 26th at 5:15 p.m. Topics will include PSSA proficiency for graduation as a requirement and also acceptable computer use by students.

b) Educational Development

Mr. O'Connor was not present.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised the Board that the next meeting will be Wednesday, October 12th at 7:00 p.m. Discussion will include the budget process for next year and possible building improvements.

d) IU Board

Mr. Eccles was not present.

e) Education Foundation

Dr. Muenker informed the Board that there was nothing new to report.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis advised the Board that at their last meeting, which was September 26th, the Board did approve a midpoint review and also approved a flexible benefit plan for the teaching staff that they will pay into. The next meeting is scheduled for October 24th.

g) Technology

Mr. O'Connor was not present.

h) Ad Hoc Facility Use Update

Dr. Muenker announced to the Board that the committee has met recently and continuing discussions are ongoing of what buildings are sustainable moving forward. Discussions will continue at the Finance and Facilities meeting on October 12th.

10. Public Comment

Rich Sypek, retired, Langhorne, asked the Board why the school district is spending money on hiring a consultant on evaluating the PSSA scores when this task can be performed by an administrator or assistant.

Jennifer Germano, self-employed, thanked the Board for their hard work during the lengthy contract impasse. Ms. Germano said that contrary to what the NFT has said, the community respects the teaching profession and the community is standing firmly behind the Board because they cannot afford the terms of the existing contract, or the requested terms of the future contract.

Mark Shubin, Business Executive, Langhorne, remarked that the district has to focus on what direction to take to improve the educational system in Neshaminy. Mr. Shubin declared that it is time to move on and progress cannot be held up any longer because of contract issues. Mr. Shubin said that areas of concern are leadership and curriculum.

Robert McCabe, self-employed, Trevese, questioned the relevance of the data provided in the PSSA results presentation. Mr. McCabe said that the only way to truly measure proficiency and improvement is to follow one student's achievement all the way through their 12 years of schooling.

Deborah Harker, banker, Middletown, voiced her concern that the high school has failed to make AYP for seven years. She implored the Board to formulate a plan to correct this problem.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Langhorne, voiced his disapproval of the administration presenting the PSSA results to the public. Mr. Alfonso said that these reports are presented to justify substandard performance in the district's curriculum. Mr. Alfonso said that he does not care about subgroups, but rather he cares about the school district as a whole. He said he prefers the statistics from the Department of Education in Pennsylvania, which is irrefutable.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flower Mills, said that he believes that the Special Ed IEP group deserves a good education as well as anyone else. He also stated that changing the class size or case load will not improve the situation and if this subgroup is not given the proper attention it would be a disservice to them as well as the community.

Almando Carrasquillo, private investigator, Langhorne, observed that the PSSA scores of 2009 were higher than the scores of 2010 and he attributes that to the Work to Contract. He said he wishes the younger teachers well, but he thinks the NFT is self destructing, similar to what happened to auto workers in Detroit years ago. He urged the younger teachers not to remain silent.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, asked the Board to see that Mr. Eccles receives his letter, which includes a number of questions that Mr. Pirritano would like to see addressed. He asked if Mr. Koutsouradis can elaborate on his suggestion of more transparency in the NFT elections. Mr. Pirritano asked if Mr. Webb would address the issue of PSERS and how it will impact the contract. He also asked for comments regarding the new legislation on criminal reporting for teachers.

11. Future Topics

Mr. Koutsouradis asked if Dr. Muenker will have someone in his cabinet contact the Board to explain how the District goes about keeping drugs out of schools. He would like to see if there are any further actions that could improve what is already in place.

Dr. Muenker responded that the district is doing its best to be proactive by using drug dogs, and educating the students on the dangers of drugs and he will look into the matter further on how the policy can be expanded.

12. Agenda Development for the October 25, 2011 Public Board Meeting

None

13. Board Comment

Dr. Muenker commented that he will speak with Mr. Pirritano regarding his questions on Home Access and the PSSA testing. He said that the dress code issue is being worked on.

Mr. Koutsouradis said he had been contacted in the past with some concerns from members of the NFT regarding the results of their elections. This is why he suggested the anonymous paper election with an outside party tallying the votes.

Mr. Morris said he supports Mr. Koutsouradis' suggestion regarding an outside party tallying the votes; however, he is skeptical about whether this will happen. He thanked the public for attending the Board meeting.

Mrs. Cummings said there has been discussions with the Educational Development Committee about the possibility of making a proficient PSSA score a graduation requirement for students. She also stated that there are still some hurdles toward making that a reality.

Ms. Boyle stated that the PSSA is a complicated system and she thinks the presentation that was given was stupendous. She said the public is welcome to attend the Educational Development Committee meetings and ask any questions or let their voices be heard.

Mr. Webb said the Special Ed case load follows state guidelines and he assured the public that the District cares very much about the students in Special Ed and there is no adverse effect on the students regarding the case load issue. Mr. Webb said that PSERS would be an exemption to Act I, which means that they could add to that.

Dr. Muenker explained that new legislation regarding criminal reporting for teachers is still a work in progress. All employees will be required to sign a form regarding their background and record and vowing to the truthfulness of the statement.

Mr. Webb stated that he has checked with the District's labor attorneys and has been informed that the early retirement incentive referred to as the "side bar" is legal and cannot be changed. He said that he will check into the opt-out matter and inform the public what he discovers. Mr. Webb said that Karen Hessel, the consultant for the PSSA report, has been an asset to the District and has guided Neshaminy to improve its rating and meet AYP and he stands behind the decision to engage her services.

14. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. Congdon moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:18 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary