

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
June 5, 2012

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on June 5, 2012 in the Gymnasium 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
Mr. Anthony Sposato

ADMINISTRATORS:

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. Mark Shubin

OTHERS: Approximately 300 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire
Charles N. Sweet, Esquire

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 read a statement regarding TLC. He said the principal of TLC presented some alternative solutions to cutting costs at TLC, which were very encouraging. He said that neither of the plans could move forward without the NFT acceptance of the plan without the threat of conditions or a grievance. Mr. Webb stated that the middle school issue could be resolved if the teachers worked an 8 hour day instead of a 7 hour day. The extra hour would be used for team meeting time, teacher conference time, etc. Mr. Webb said the district continues to be disadvantaged by the current CBA that confines them inside the box; nevertheless, he gave the Board's commitment to try to save the TLC program. He said he is not making promises, but he is hopeful. Mr. Webb remarked that the Neshaminy School Board is taking every precaution to protect everyone and any threats will be dealt with legal action. Mr. Webb mentioned a press statement from the NFT that accused the Board of taking no action regarding an alleged threat against a teacher on Facebook. Mr. Webb said an official of the NFT notified Dr. Muenker of the alleged threat and said that it was reported to local authorities. The NFT member directed Dr. Muenker to keep this strictly confidential. Dr. Muenker and Mr. Webb sought the advice of the district's solicitor as to what the district's responsibility was regarding the incident, while respecting the confidentiality request. Now the NFT is accusing the Board of taking no action. Mr. Webb said the NFT has deliberately put an unfair spin on an already volatile situation for their own purposes. Mr. Webb stated the district is ready to assist the authorities at any time regarding this matter. Mr. Webb concluded by thanking the families of Neshaminy for their support and said we will get through these dark days by standing together.

4. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker stated that he is confident that within the next two weeks, that a recommendation for a balanced budget will be presented to the Board for the 2012 – 2013 school year. Dr. Muenker said that they will be reviewing the recommendations of the IOP and TLC. He also stated that a lot of hard work was put into this effort and he is hopeful for a completion by June 19th; however, if that is not possible adjustments will be made to the calendar.

5. Public Comment

Marianne Bender, patent office employee, Levittown, voiced her support for the School Board. Ms. Bender said that she is aware that the Board would not be considering cutting the IOP if the teachers would be willing to make concessions. She said if the teachers really cared about the students they would not be striking at the end of the school year. Ms. Bender mentioned that half of the teachers have not been teaching for the last half of the year and this is a shame for the students.

Charlie Burns, sales manager, Highland Gate, thanked the School Board members for standing up for the community. He said they have a difficult job and the NFT comments towards Board members have only made it harder. Mr. Burns said the Board members are not in this dispute with the NFT individually, but as representatives for the entire community. He said it is the NFT leadership against the 70,000 residents of the community. Mr. Burns said the NFT could sign the contract and there would be an end to the problem.

Lynn Duminiak, computer technician, Middletown Township, said that as an employee of the district she is familiar with teachers who are dedicated and hard working. Ms. Duminiak implored the Board and the NFT to come to an agreement and put an end to the strike

Almando Carrasquillo, retired State Trooper, Langhorne, said there are good teachers mixed in with the teachers who only care about money. He said those teachers do not care about the profession – they taint the teaching profession. Mr. Carrasquillo said the NFT is a union out of control. He said the teachers were offered a good contract in 2008 and they declined it and now they are declining another fair contract offer.

Gail Thibodeau, self-employed, Langhorne, informed the public of a “Put Students First” rally that is taking place on Monday, June 11, 2012. She urged everyone to attend and that car pooling will be available. Ms. Thibodeau said that the rally is to support Pennsylvania House Bill 1369, which would insure that Pennsylvania school children are no longer treated as second class citizens and would give them the right to receive a strike-free education as the children in 37 other states in the nation.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, said that while the teachers walk the picket line, the parents are united in the effort to take back the schools and make the education of the children the goal instead of employment and benefits. Mr. Pirritano stated that if the members of the NFT have anything to say regarding the contract negotiations, they should address their comments to him and not his children.

Butch McClinten, Levittown, remarked that any program that provides extra support for the students, such as IOP or TLC, should not be cut. He said it only hurts the students and the money should be found somewhere to keep these programs active.

Charles Alfonso, business executive, Langhorne, stated in rebuttal to some teachers’ claims of threats from members of the community, that he received threats from a teacher and the spouse of a teacher in the past and the NFT did nothing about it. Mr. Alfonso asked the Board to not approve any requests for time off during the strike or during the rest of the school year and to pull the offer off the table immediately.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, said the Board should stop linking educational programs with teachers contracts. He said it is the Board’s responsibility to broaden the programs rather than cut them. Mr. Rodos voiced his opposition to funds being held in reserve, while educational programs are in jeopardy of being eliminated.

Debbie Vossah, disabled teacher, Bensalem, asked why TLC is not classified as a school and what would it take to categorize it as a school. Ms. Vossah inquired if cutting programs such as TLC and IOP is just a way of eliminating teachers. Ms. Vossah said that other students are not forced to give up special classes as the students of TLC are doing.

Andrea Bernek, manager of a local business, Langhorne Manor, commended Joann Holland for proposing the 2 budget options for TLC. Ms. Bernek said although the students at TLC do not have all the benefits as students in the High School have, they are still content and they are learning. The caring and supportive atmosphere is more important to them and she implored the Board not to cut TLC.

6. Items for Approval tonight

a) Approval of suspension (furlough) and demotion of certified staff

Mr. Webb read the following motion:

WHEREAS, The Board of School Directors directed the Superintendent, the Business Administrator and such other members of the School District's Administration team who the Superintendent deemed necessary to undertake various studies related to program requirements, staffing capacities and needs; and

WHEREAS, the School District Officials did conduct such studies and prepared for consideration by the Board, a plan detailing such findings and recommendations to these matters; and

WHEREAS, the Board hereby concurs with the Superintendent's recommendations and authorizes the Superintendent to undertake such measures as are necessary and prudent in order to obtain approval from the Department of Public Instruction of the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the recommended courses of action and to undertake such other actions as are necessary to advance the purposes of this resolution.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of School Directors concurs with the recommendation of the Superintendent to curtail or alter the educational programs in the School District, which will affect a change in the School District's organization.

The Board hereby authorizes the Superintendent of the School District to seek approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to reduce professional staff to meet the circumstances outlined above.

Mr. Congdon seconded the motion.

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

7. Items for Approval at the June 19th, Public Board Meeting

a) New and Revised Board Policies

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the following policies:

- Revised Policy 124 – Employed Background Checks
- New Policy 811 – Acceptable Use of the Computers, Network, Internet, Electronic Communications and Technical Services Policy
- Revised Policy 518 – Child Abuse Reporting

Mr. Congdon asked if revised policy 124 will prevent employees hired before September 28, 2011, from having background checks.

Dr. Rattigan stated that every employee was asked to sign off in December of 2011, stating that they were not arrested or convicted of any of the charges listed in the form.

Mrs. Hinterberger stated that there are two parts to the policy. Current employees had to sign off that they were not arrested or convicted of any of the charges that are listed in the form. All new hires must complete this form and there are also more restrictions based on the types of activities they may have been involved in. She said that all new hires will need their clearances even before they are interviewed for a position. Also for active employees they must report an arrest within 72 hours of an offense.

Mr. Webb stated that at the June 19, 2012 Public Board Meeting the above revised policies will be agenda items.

b) Approval of State Mandated Food Price Increase

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the June 19, 2012 Public Board Meeting they will be asking for an approval of the increase for the elementary from \$2.05 to \$2.15, and secondary from \$2.45 to \$2.55.

c) Approval of Budgetary Increase for Federal & Other Programs 2011 - 2012

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the June 19, 2012 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion made to modify the current budget for all federal programs.

d) Facilities Professional Services/Consultants for 2012 - 2013

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the June 19, 2012 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion made to approve the Facilities Professional Services/Consultants for 2012 - 2013.

e) Approval of Year End Budget Transfers

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Year End Budget Transfers is a Board resolution that is approved every year under the current instructions of the Auditors General's Office.

f) Homestead and Farmstead Exclusion Resolution

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the June 19, 2012 Public Board Meeting the Resolution Authorizing 2012 - 2013 Proposed Preliminary Budget will be voted on.

g) Local, State and National Contract Participation Authorization of 2012 - 2013

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Local, State and National Contract Authorization of 2012 - 2013 will be an agenda item.

h) Approval for Fund Balance Commitment for PSERS

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Board must approve a motion before year end if any Fund Balance will be committed.

i) Bids/budgets transfers

Mrs. Markowitz stated there were three bids and one budget transfer.

Bid No. 13-02

Bid Amount: \$77,261.43

Bid Description: Supplies for physical education programs and various team sports for the school year 2012 - 2013.

Bid No. 13-05

Bid Amount: \$84,796.65

Bid Description: Various supplies for the maintenance of District vehicles for school year 2012 – 2013. Quantities on this bid are estimated. The actual quantities purchased may vary from this estimate but will not exceed the total recommended for award.

Bid No. 13-09

Bid Amount: \$26,999.20

Bid Description: Classroom and art supplies for the 2012 – 2013 school year which include: paints, drawing paper, brushes, markers, yarn, cloth, and other arts and crafts materials for classroom use.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Budget Transfer Report Working Copy – 12 – 06 has three transactions and one sub transaction. Bid No. 13-02, 13-05, 13-09, and Budget Transfer Report Working Copy 12-06 will all be presented at the June 19th, Public Board Meeting for approval.

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle thanked Dr. Rattigan and the members of the policy committee for all their hard work and also stated that the next meeting will be scheduled in the fall.

b) Educational Development

Mr. Shubin was not present.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised the Board that the next meeting has not been scheduled.

d) IU Board

Mrs. Cummings informed the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for June 12th.

e) Education Foundation

Dr. Muenker informed the Board that there were five senior scholarships awarded in the field of education.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis stated that there were no updates to report.

g) Technology

Mr. Congdon advised the Board that the date of the next technology meeting will be announced at a later date.

h) Ad Hoc Facility Use Update

Mr. Oettinger announced to the Board that at the last meeting discussions involved building utilization, student enrollments, now as well as in the future, building capacities, ways on how to better utilize buildings. The administration was assigned to come up with three plans on building utilization.

Mr. Oettinger made a motion to spend up to \$20,000 for the Ad Hoc Committee to do a study on the best way to utilize district buildings.

Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion.

Mr. Koutsouradis stated that he agrees the study should be done because the administration is otherwise occupied at this time and cannot conduct a study.

The Board approved said motion by a vote of seven ayes, and one nay, (Mrs. Cummings). (Mr. Shubin was not present.)

9. Public Comment

Charles Alfonso continued his request to the Board to pull the current offer and rewrite it with a 35% healthcare contribution and a 5% pay cut. Then the negotiations can begin to meet half way. Mr. Alfonso also requests that the Board deactivate the NFT's access to the Neshaminy's email network. He concluded by thanking the members of the community who have supported his protest against the teacher's strike.

Angie Manning, New Jersey teacher, Langhorne, said not all teachers are like the NFT. Ms. Manning advised those teachers who do not support the NFT to stand together and protest the policies of this union.

Deb Daughterman, homemaker, Langhorne Gables, asked if the students have been approached for any ideas to save money for the district. She also asked the Board to comment what will happen if the teachers continue to strike longer than they are legally allowed to do so.

Joan Thomas, retired, Langhorne, said she is confident that the Board does not want to cut any programs, but the plea to keep programs should be made to the NFT not the Board. She said that the NFT is completely unreasonable and she is also picketing against the teachers strike and she is getting overwhelming support from the community.

Deborah Metz, parent, Langhorne, inquired why the teachers are picketing on school property. Ms. Metz said this is illegal and it is the responsibility of the administration to put a stop to the use of school property for the purpose of union picketing.

Ryan Weiner, operations manager, Levittown, stated that his daughter, who is in first grade, has been very upset over the teachers strike. She, as well as many other children, love school and want to learn and the strike is a disgrace.

Debbie Vossah, disabled teacher, Bensalem, said that both sides need to come to an agreement without any name calling or violence, because the children are watching the example that is being set. She implored the Board to accept the offer of Plan A that was presented by Joann Holland to keep TLC.

Barrett Oterson, parent, Levittown, said she organized a study-in at Walter Miller Elementary School on June 5th for the sake of the children who want to learn and are being prevented from doing so because of the teachers' strike. She mentioned that the picketers continued to picket while the study-in was in session.

Kayla Davidson, student at Walter Miller Elementary School, Levittown, voiced her disappointment that she and her classmates missed their orientation trip to the middle school due to the teachers strike. She sadly stated that the teachers do not care about the kids.

Stephen Pirritano, self-employed, Feasterville, thanked the chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for going forward with the school consolidation plans. He asked Mr. Webb to confirm if the public meeting to interview the candidate for superintendent is still scheduled for this week and what is the time and place. Mr. Pirritano also requested that the budget reserve fund be explained once again. Mr. Pirritano said he was very disappointed that the seven district principals who attended the Education Development meeting did not offer any alternative or solution to the elimination of IOP. He said Ms. Holland from TLC was the only one that came prepared and gave viable alternatives to reduce expenditures for TLC.

Almando Carrasquillo, retired, Langhorne, asked if he could get a copy of revised policy 124 and revised policy 518 so he can review them and give recommendations to the Board. He suggested that there may be a way to do random background checks for employees with no cost to the school district. Mr. Carrasquillo thanked the teachers who attended the field trip yesterday. He stated that those teachers

were in fear of retaliation from their peers and found it necessary to hide their cars. Mr. Carrasquillo said he will attend the rally in Harrisburg on June 11th and urged all parents and taxpayers to participate.

10. Future Topics

None

11. Agenda Development for the June 19, 2012 Public Board Meeting

None

12. Board Comment

Mrs. Cummings said she is pleased that the Board is committed to the TLC program and Ms. Holland presented a solution, which is very encouraging. She said the NFT needs to negotiate a new contract so that the district can move forward and initiate new programs. Mrs. Cummings also thanked the parents and families in the district for their understanding and support during this second teachers strike.

Mr. Congdon said that we are in troubled times and people who recognize this reality do whatever they can to keep their jobs and contribute to society. He wonders why the NFT cannot face this reality and put forth the proper effort to retain their positions and give back to the community. Instead they are working to contract and striking and this is totally unacceptable. He asked the teachers to stand up and put forth the proper effort to show that they deserve what they are already getting and prove that they care.

Mr. Oettinger stated that he is on the negotiation team and he is very frustrated at the approach of the NFT and their legal counsel. He said they are continuously berating the school board. Mr. Oettinger said that it is easy for the NFT to state publicly that they are willing to meet any day, any time; however, it is not as easy to schedule dates for negotiation meetings that are agreeable and workable for all parties.

Mr. Koutsouradis asked the NFT to think about their actions of putting themselves first and the children second twice in one year. He said the strike has penalized all the students in Neshaminy. Mr. Koutsouradis said he has heard from a countless number of parents asking why the teachers cannot see how good they have it during these hard times when other people are barely hanging on.

Ms. Boyle thanked Ms. Holland for her presentation at the Education Development meeting. Ms. Boyle said the discussion about the IOP was very enlightening. She concurred that being on the negotiation team is very frustrating and she added that the Board is determined not to waiver in their obligation to the community.

Mr. Morris stated that the meeting to interview the candidate for superintendent will be June 7, 2012 at Maple Point from 6:30 pm – 8 pm. He said the questions will be pre-arranged and the public will have an opportunity to provide their opinions. Mr. Morris said that when asked about what educational programs should be cut, Louise Boyd, NFT President, stated it is not her problem and this speaks to how she feels about the welfare of the students.

Mr. Sweet remarked that the strike must be over when the law mandates that it end. He said there are still 11 days left to complete the required 180 school days, so school must resume on June 15th, so the school year will end by June 29th. An injunction will be filed to end the strike by June 15th.

Mr. Webb said that he takes exception to the public comment that the Board was being punitive when ending programs in order to eliminate teaching positions. He said the members of the Board have children and grandchildren in the district and they would not hurt the kids. They will only cut a program because there is no other choice and certainly not to punish the NFT.

Mr. Webb explained the fund balance by saying that \$2 million was carry over from the previous year, which was used to pay bills, so the fund balance was approximately \$16 million. To balance the current budget,

\$3.9 million was used, leaving \$12 million. Then \$4 million was put into the PSERS fund, because PSERS is constantly increasing. The \$8 million remaining is a reserve. The policy is to maintain a reserve of 4% - 8 %; therefore, the \$8 million reserve is \$4 million short of the maximum (\$12 million) or about \$1.8 million over the minimum (\$4 million). The \$1.8 million is what can be used for district needs. Mr. Webb said this shows that there is no huge amount of money that is unaccounted for. He said anyone who questions this should go back and look at past fund balances and see the evidence. Additionally, he said that the sale of the Neshaminy Middle School netted \$6.3 million, but there is an estimated \$40 million in capital improvement needs. Contrary to the NFT suggestion that they be given the reserve money and then the district should borrow what is needed for improvement needs, Mr. Webb said this is simply not prudent. The amount that can be borrowed falls under the limits of Act I.

13. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Koutsouradis seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:00p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary