

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING
PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
January 13, 2009

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on January 13, 2009, in the Board Room of the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President
Mr. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice-President
Mr. Joseph 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
Dr. Sandra Costanzo
Dr. Geeta A. Heble
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan

OTHERS: Approximately 22 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Anita E. Walls

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

Mr. Webb advised that an Executive Session was held prior to the meeting from 6:15 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

No announcements.

4. Public Comment

Mrs. Stacy Kirsch, Kilburn Road, advised that she wished to speak about full day kindergarten and implementing same into the Neshaminy School District. Mrs. Kirsch advised that the district needs to meet AYP which is adequate yearly progress, which are the PSSA standards. Educational practices need to be renewed. The A.M. /P.M. tradition is a discriminator. The P.M. students lose many academic days due to early dismissals or when academic classes are cancelled. The district needs to modernize its practices to meet today's competitive educational standards. By implementing a full day kindergarten program it forces the important initial school experience as the social, emotional, and academic foundation that will be future learning and success in school. Full day kindergarten students benefit from more educational time, time to begin learning to read and write, to explore activities and develop academic and social skills. Starting a full day kindergarten program is less stressful for children because they will have the time needed to develop interest and activities fully. Students who attend full day kindergarten receive significantly higher basic test scores in 3rd, 5th and 7th grades. There is really only one drawback which is the initial cost. Implementing full day may be higher than half day but it will save money in the long run. It will lead to higher academic achievement. It will support literacy and language development and will benefit children socially and emotionally. It would essentially lead to decreasing costs by reducing retention and remediation rates. There are ways to supplement the program. Council Rock is charging the high school students \$100.00 for a parking pass. The last few passes are auctioned off to the highest bidder. This year those passes went

for \$800.00 a piece. This is a way to supplement. Another savings would be the elimination of the mid day bus run. All students would ride the bus together. State grants are a program. Neshaminy School District is known for its Blue Ribbon teachers and staff and their excellence in educational leadership. Half day kindergarten was acceptable in the past. But it is time to move forward. Our students can not be left behind. Upper Moreland has implemented full day kindergarten for the 2008-09 school year. Full day kindergarten will increase the desirability of Upper Moreland School District to potential home buyers and will enhance the quality of the school district. This needs to be focused upon and the benefits it will provide to everyone who lives in this area. The Accountability Block Grant is very good and is a way to fund and would possibility be available.

Mr. Patrick Miller, Laurel Oaks Drive, moved to the area this past spring and part of the reason for moving to this area was the school district. Neshaminy School District is very attractive. Mr. Miller is very happy with the district. Mr. Miller stated that forty years ago it was natural to go to half day kindergarten. This was the first experience in school for the majority of children. Now, children are already attending pre-school. These children are so ready to attend kindergarten, full day kindergarten. The children are ready for full day kindergarten. More stimulation time is needed. Learning time would be expanded and interaction with teachers would be greater. Mr. Miller researched two studies online which indicated that progress in literacy, math and general learning skills through full day kindergarten. It allows smaller group interaction with teachers. Mr. Miller feels it would be beneficial for our district to implement full day kindergarten.

Mr. Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, commended Dr. Muenker, the School Board and High school administrators for the orderly opening of another section of the high school. Mr. Rodos is concerned about the possible closure of an elementary school in the hopes that it might save money. Mr. Rodos noted that for every dollar spent on early education this year, the district will save \$7-\$10 which will not have to be spent on remedial education in later years. Therefore, \$1M spent on full time kindergarten this year will save Neshaminy School District \$7M-\$10M later on. Closing an elementary school will assure taxpayers that Neshaminy will never have room for full day kindergarten. This will ensure an increase in future taxpayer expense. This is a guaranteed increase of 10-13 mills per home solely because of the reluctance to invest less than 1.3 mills today. In addition, closing an elementary school will destroy neighborhood pride and studies show that the fair market value of homes in the area surrounding a closed elementary school will decrease on average by ten percent. By consolidating classes you will not utilize less staff. The number of students is fixed by contract. Moving students from building to another will not decrease the number of staff needed in the elementary schools. Mr. Rodos reviewed some of the things discussed at the Finance and Facilities meeting. Cooperation is necessary from everyone to have Neshaminy School District move forward. Mr. Koziol's idea of raising the low income tax credit to include more taxpayers should be considered. The teacher's contract needs to be settled. Teaching today's youth is harder than ever before. If teacher's make mistakes a generation is lost. The worth of the teacher far out values their pay. Union and the School Board could handle this year similarly to what Pennsbury is going to do. They will continue the current contract with step increases and teacher's paying \$150 per month per employee towards their own health care. This will be a win for them, the students, taxpayers and School Board. The School District will save enough money through this to institute full day kindergarten. The union would thereby gain some new members and satisfy those employees whose debts are starting to fall behind. The taxpayers would save 10-13 mills per home, per year in taxes from remedial education, students would gain the benefits of the early education and Neshaminy School District would continue to increase their test scores on the PSSA. Thinking out of the box could benefit everyone.

5. Items for Discussion

a) High School Construction Update

Mr. Paradise advised that the 35,000 square foot section was opened two weeks ago. Total completed area is about 70%. Mr. Damion Spahr provided a power point presentation which provided photographs of the new section which has been opened.

Mr. Damion Spahr provided the following detailed update regarding the schedule and contingency:

- Phase 2A is completed and turned over to the district
- Unit D Science Wing will be completed in June, 2009
- Unit B Administration Wing will be completed in June, 2009
- Unit C renovation will be completed in Summer, 2009
- Phase D5 Guidance Area demolition is on schedule to allow for the start of Phase 2F which is the Band room addition
- Old Lincoln Highway is completed with final inspection taking place this afternoon
- No other major contingency items
- Project is entirely on schedule with some areas being ahead of schedule

Mr. O'Connor inquired regarding a gravel access road which may require paving. Mr. Spahr advised that it does not necessarily need to be paved, however it needs to be maintained.

Dr. Spitz inquired regarding the contingency and change orders. Mr. Spahr advised that change orders for December were approximately \$18,000. As approaching the final phase the contingency concern begins to go down and refocusing on the final demolition phase and for that reason the contingency funds are being managed accordingly to be able to accommodate any future problems.

Dr. Spitz inquired regarding the parking area which is being required by the Township. Mr. Spahr advised that whatever is necessary will need to be taken care and this issue will need to be addressed with the Township.

Mr. Paradise advised and stressed that the project is not running out of money. Mr. Paradise advised that \$3.2M was budgeted for contingency, however, that is assuming that every single dime of the project was spent as budgeted, and thankfully, that is not the case. Savings have been received in various areas such as asbestos removal, etc. Also, early on in the project our investment returns were higher. A combination of spending less money in some areas and raising more money through investments has given the district more than the \$208,000. The financial aspect of the project is on track and is monitored intensely. The law requires that any funds left over need to be spent on the high school project.

Mr. Eccles noted that the Township is still holding approximately \$395,000 of the district money for land development fees and permits which the district will hopefully see being returned.

b) 2009-2010 Working Draft Budget
Must be Made public on or before January 29, 2009

Mr. Paradise has advised that the Board has already had several meetings regarding the upcoming budget. Mr. Paradise provided to the Board a proposed preliminary Budget document which remains confidential as of this date. It will need to be made public on or before January 29, 2009.

Mr. Paradise advised that the revenues are making this particular budget very challenging. This is not unique to the school district. This is the basis of the financial issues facing the country. Real estate transfer taxes are down, investment incomes is very low, primary real estate tax, merchantile taxes are down, etc.

Current year projected revenues are due to be down over \$2.7M. The economy has changed so dramatically in the last several months that the budget projections and formulas used for the last thirty years are not working this year. The State of Pennsylvania is struggling just as much as the district. There is not assurance that the state revenues which have been there in the past are still going to be there in the future. Mr. Paradise did budget some minor increases in transportation subsidies and special education subsidies.

Mr. Paradise advised that the Fund Balance is depleted and Mr. Paradise provided the Board with a Fund Balance 5 year history. At the end of this year the balance left if the actual use occurs would be approximately \$1.2M. The revenues in the current year are expected to be approximately \$2.5M short, and if that occurs the \$1.2M may be at risk. Mr. Paradise is not counting on any fund balance for this upcoming budget.

Mr. Paradise noted that projected expenditures are up 4.9% or \$7.8M. Salaries for all bargaining groups are budgeted at 0% increase. Employee benefits are budgeted at 2009-2010 anticipated costs with roughly a 10% increase.

Mr. Paradise advised the following:

- Staff savings from consolidation of facilities is not yet included
- Expenditure reductions for lower fuel oil and diesel fuel costs are included
- Projected reduction from the Technical School budget
- Capital purchases will need to be examined
- Additional funds for increased bus runs next year for 9th grade at high school
- Rental Income from Neshaminy Middle not yet included
- Potential revenues from delinquent taxes
- Revenue has been included for the rental of Tawanka by the IU

Mr. Paradise reviewed the preliminary budget document with the Board. At the present time there is an excess of expenditures over revenues at this time of \$9.5M.

Mr. Eccles stated that currently the district without the fund balance use is \$14M away from a balanced budget.

Mr. Paradise provided a sheet of 2009-2010 Budget input/suggestions from Finance & Facilities Committee.

- Review fee schedule for rental of facilities
- Focus on "user fees"
- Remove old courses from the course selection book
- Duplication of services with Technical school
- Reduce lead teachers and/or department heads
- Extra curricular activities should be "pay for play"
- Principals and department heads should meet with the Finance and Facilities committee to support and defend their budget requests for 2009-2010
- New board policy regarding "letters of agreement" with any bargaining unit, without Board approval

Dr. Muenker advised that a Facilities and Finance meeting of Administrators is scheduled for next Wednesday to share all this information and what the Administration could do to contribute to the charges in front of the district.

Mr. Paradise noted that it is the intention of the district from the top on down to deal with this issue aggressively.

Mr. Koziol stated that the Wall Street Journal and other major publications are painting a bleak picture for the economy. Consumer spending is dead.

Mr. Koziol urged everyone to participate in the project and would like too see the Facilities and Finance meetings televised. More meetings need to be scheduled for the Facilities and Finance to address these hard issues.

Mr. Eccles stated that most economists are looking at a 15-20% unemployment rate in the near future. Mr. Eccles proposed the following suggestions:

- Consider a hiring freeze on all non-essential personnel
- Eliminate over-time
- All bargaining units consider voluntary give backs at this time
- Look at an earned wage tax

Mr. Webb noted that several dates have been selected for the Facilities and Finance meetings.

c) Alternative School Relocation

Dr. Muenker advised that this is an item for discussion. Proposed locations need to be determined and discussed. Educational Development meeting is scheduled for January 22nd. This topic will be further discussed at the meeting scheduled for January 27th.

6. Items for Approval

a) Overnight Trips

Dr. Heble presented the following trips:

- i) Neshaminy High School Ski Club Trip – Killington, VT - January 23 to January 25, 2009
- ii) Neshaminy High School Ski Club Trip – Killington, VT - February 27 to March 1, 2009
- iii) Neshaminy High School Cheerleading Competition – Ocean City Convention Center, Ocean City, MD – February 27 – March 1, 2009

Mr. Blasch made a motion that the trips be approved. Mr. Eccles seconded the motion.

Mr. Koziol questioned why the trips were cancelled from the Poconos to go to Killington. Mr. Koziol is concerned that mixed messages are being sent. Mrs. Cummings stated that the venue needed to be changed since it could not accommodate all the students that wished to participate. Mr. Koziol feels that this is setting a bad example. Mrs. Cummings stated that this is a club and students are paying for the trip themselves. The district has no cost involved.

The motion passes by a vote of eight ayes and one nay (Mr. Koziol).

b) Term of Bucks County Technical School Authority Representative

Mr. Paradise advised that the term of the Neshaminy School District's representative to the Bucks County Technical School Authority expires at the end of the month. Mr. Kevin Yeingst is the current representative. Mrs. Cummings advised that Mr. Yeingst wishes to continue with this position. This matter will be voted upon for an additional term for Mr. Yeingst to the Bucks County Technical School Authority at the public meeting on January 27th.

c) BCIU #22 Rental Agreement for Tawanka

Mr. Paradise provided a summary to Board members for their review. Action will be needed to direct the Solicitor and the Business Administrator to prepare a lease agreement for approval by the IU and the school district.

Mr. Eccles is concerned about the use of the facility by the community. Mr. Paradise is recommending to the Board that there would be no use by the community just like Neshaminy Middle. This would incur costs to the taxpayers to have it be used by the community. Mr. Paradise noted that the IU has made it clear that they do not wish to incur any additional costs.

Mr. Paradise advised that the IU is willing to allow same, however, it would totally be the district's costs, however, in the past, when the district has closed a facility we have not permitted any community use. Outside fields can be used, however, inside the building no use is permitted.

Discussion ensued regarding the use of the facilities by the community.

Mr. Paradise advised that since this will be a triple net lease any negotiations for use of the building will need to occur between the lessee and the potential users of the building. The district can not be involved in said process.

d) Realtor for Neshaminy Middle

Mr. Paradise advised that he has interviewed several commercial realtors and would like to have Board approval at the end of the month to enter into an Exclusive Agency Agreement (Lease) with Binswanger of Pennsylvania. Mr. Paradise noted that the only way to get any money for this property is to get same on the market ASAP.

Mr. Eccles thanked Mr. Paradise for interviewing several realtors.

Mrs. Cummings inquired regarding St. Mary's use of the property. The district does not want to limit its options with respect to a larger tenant and this is the necessity for a larger realtor to utilize that building to its maximum potential.

e) School Director Recognition Month

Dr. Muenker advised that a motion would be presented at the end of the month to honor School Director Recognition Month.

f) Tax Collector Compensation Program

Mr. Paradise advised that each taxing authority must set the salary schedule for the collection of taxes for the upcoming 4 year term. The Board must adopt same by February 15th. Discussions have already ensued at the Facilities and Finance Committee meetings. The tax collectors presented a presentation and discussion regarding same. Another meeting is scheduled for January 21st. Mr. Paradise provided a handout to the Board with data (historical and proposed) to assist the Board in making this decision. Each tax collector is paid from three different taxing entities – the County, the individual municipality for whom they work, and the school district.

Mr. Paradise will need Board approval prior to February 15th.

g) Election of Board Member to the Intermediate Unit Board

Dr. Muenker advised that there will be presented at the end of the month an election of a Board member to the Intermediate Unit Board.

h) Revised Board Policy #512 (High School Diploma) and New Guideline

Dr. Rattigan advised that there will be one revised policy for the Board's consideration. Many districts are approving policies which require students to achieve a proficient rating on PSSA or similar test in order to graduate from high school. Research shows that it is working well. This will be effective with the class of 2010, the current Juniors. Student's struggling have a option to be placed in an intervention program for help.

The students are aware of this policy. The students do not have the policy but they have been alerted to same and some students are already in the intervention course.

Dr. Rattigan noted that various things are being considered when identifying students for intervention course.

Mr. Eccles stated that on November 13, 2007 this was approved and instituted. Ms. Boyle noted that the intervention policies have been in effect. It is already in the current policy, however, the implementation has not been complete.

Board members questioned that all students are aware and it is of great concern. Dr. Spitz and Mrs. Cummings inquired as to where it states in the course selection booklet that students must pass the PSSA or otherwise they will need intervention.

Mr. Eccles referred to Mr. Menio's comments from November, 2007 regarding the issue of graduation requirements. Several other districts are making the change and the director of the IU is looking at this as a positive direction. Mr. Eccles is concerned about the 41% of seniors falling below proficient.

59% of the students can read and write/41% cannot. If they don't pass the PSSA, they need to take the course.

Dr. Costanzo explained that the school improvement plan made the recommendation for PSSA proficiency being a requirement for graduation. The district felt at the time that the curriculum was aligned and the students were supported in every way possible in order for them to be proficient on the test. That was a year of study. The recommendation did go to Board policy for clarification. Intervention needed to be put into place, however, be sure that the curriculum was aligned that students had every opportunity to be successful.

Mr. Eccles believes that there is a lack of enthusiasm to take the PSSA testing. Why should the taxpayers have to foster the expense. Why should this not be a summer course that they must go to summer school if the student cannot pass. Why should the children that want to learn suffer.

Mrs. Cummings noted that some students missed proficient level by one or two points. Those students had to take it over, even by missing by a very small margin.

Mr. Eccles cannot believe that only 59% of students are proficient. Mr. Eccles is concerned that these students are being taken away from their normal school day classes to attend the class regarding the PSSA proficiency. We do not want to hinder their learning. Dr. Costanzo advised that many students are scheduled during study halls or not allowed to take an elective.

Dr. Costanzo advised that the classes are fully funded by the accountability block grant.

Dr. Spitz is concerned that it is not stated in big bold letters that if a student does not pass the PSSA, they will need to take a remedial course.

The Administration and staff has notified students very clearly that this was coming. Dr. Heble advised that when it was suggested that the district make same a graduation requirement the district spoke about providing a positive incentives for those students who were probably were not doing as well because there was no incentive. Dramatic increases in scores have occurred in the past year.

Dr. Costanzo advised that the district is in the process of identifying students now, and they will automatically be given the remedial course to be placed on their upcoming schedule.

Mr. O'Connor is concerned that the word is not out to students. The message has not been appropriately conveyed.

i) Bids/Budget Transfers

Mr. Paradise advised that there are no bids and Budget Transfer Report (Working Copy 09-3) with three transactions.

7. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised of the following:

- PA Association of School Retirees provided a Language Arts grant for \$500 toward bookbinding machine

- Maple Point Middle School will receive a Quick Link to be used with Special education students
- Two Neshaminy students performed at the Kimmel Center during the Holidays with Peter Nero and the Philly Pops
- Maple Point adopted a new program called "Adopt a GrandParent" which took place at Attleboro
- Charitable efforts took place throughout the district during the holidays to Red Cross Homeless Shelter
- Upcoming drama at high school entitled "Hide and Shriek"
- Sports: Boys' Basketball plays Pennsbury, Wrestling team welcomes Council Rock North
- Hall of Fame Night – Saturday – Athletes will be inducted at 7:00 p.m.

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised that the next meeting will take place on January 27, 2009 at 6:00 p.m.

b) Educational Development

Dr. Spitz advised that the next meeting will take place on January 22, 2009 at 6:00 p.m.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Koziol advised that a meeting will take place on January 21, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

d) IU Board

Dr. Spitz advised that the next meeting will take place on January 20, 2009.

e) Educational Foundation

Dr. Costanzo advised that a meeting will take place tomorrow morning to distribute 29 teacher grants with the focus being technology. \$20,000 in total will be awarded. The next meeting will take place on February 8, 2009.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis advised that on December 16th the committee elected Gene Dolnick as President and Harry Kramer as Vice President. In honor of school board recognition month at the next meeting scheduled for January 26th a banquet will be held and prepared by the students of the tech school.

g) Technology

Mr. Blasch advised that a meeting took place on January 12, 2009. Representatives from the certified staff were in attendance from the elementary and secondary schools. Participation was great. The goal for technology is not to have any budget increases for this upcoming year. Technology is currently in the third year of the four year plan. Reality is that computers do not last forever. Global Connect was discussed and dry runs have been made and this will be implemented in September. This will aid in employee, parent, teachers, etc. communications. Each student will have the Z drive in order to implement student/staff communications from their home. All teachers have voice mail which makes them accessible for parents.

Mr. Blasch stated that the next meeting is scheduled for February 9, 2009.

9. Public Comment

Mr. Howard Lindner, Langhorne, PA, advised that the Hall of Fame Ceremony will take place in Auditorium from 5:00 – 6:30 p.m. on Saturday. The Hall of Fame committee will induct 22 athletes. Mr. Lindner stated the high school is beautiful. There is pride and a great job has been done and the students feel good.

Mr. Lindner recognized the death of Mr. Joel Baba. Mr. Baba was a great representative of Neshaminy School District. He had such great dignity and pride. He was an unbelievable man. Neshaminy lost a monument of a man. He was small in size but big in heart and pride. His gym classes were loved by all

students. For Neshaminy High School to have Mr. Baba as a teacher and administrator was a gift from God.

Mr. Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, advised that the Neshaminy debate team has many members who are becoming eligible for the finals which will take place in the month of February.

10. Future Topics

Dr. Muenker advised that a meeting date was necessary for the next Strategic Action Committee Meeting. The next meeting will take place on February 2, 2009 at the High School in the new Performing Arts Center.

11. Agenda Development for the January 27, 2009 Public Meeting

12. Other Board Business

Mrs. Cummings advised that she has received questions from former Neshaminy Middle School student parent's regarding field day for the 9th graders. Field Day is a big event. Maple Point traditionally does not have field day and the 9th graders go on a field trip. Discussions need to take place with the Physical Education department regarding same.

13. Adjournment

Mr. O'Connor moved that the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Eccles seconded same. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:09 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary