

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

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

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on October 13, 2009, in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center 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
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Frank J. Koziol
Dr. William H. Spitz

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Mrs. Patricia Boylan
Dr. Geeta A. Heble
Mr. Kevin Kane
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan

BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT:

Ms. Irene M. Boyle
Mr. Richard M. Eccles
Mr. William D. O'Connor

OTHERS: Approximately 100 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Anita E. Walls

SOLICITOR:

Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

Prior to the start of this meeting the Board held an Executive Meeting which began at 6:00 p.m. and concluded at 7:10 p.m. Mr. Webb further advised that several Board members were absent this evening. Mr. O'Connor is out of town on business; Mr. Eccles is working and Ms. Boyle recovering from surgery.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:13 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. Lisa Reiser is a parent, homeowner and candidate for Neshaminy School Board. Yesterday there was a letter to the editor published in the Courier Times which describes her reaction to the teacher's picketing at all three Back to School Nights which Mrs. Reiser attended. Mrs. Reiser was disappointed and angry to be confronted in that way. It did not matter to me that teachers were smiling and very polite and did not block anyone's entrance to the schools. It was a disturbance and a distraction to the real purpose of the evening. However, there is more to it than that. I hold my children's teachers in very high regard and I have a number of teacher friends in the district. The teachers that I know are not unreasonable and unrealistic. They really do care about their students and go above and beyond to encourage the love of learning. They exemplify excellence in education. They stay late and they work hard. So why is it that I found myself speaking harshly to picketing teachers on Back to School Nights? The teachers that I know do live in the real world and understand the financial hardship that exists in our community and for too many of our families. They understand that it is realistic to expect to contribute to health care costs when the contract

is finally negotiated. So why is there such a gap between the teachers I know and their recent actions? My question is what strategy were union leaders using in having the teachers picket? Whose needs were they serving? What exactly was the anticipated outcome of making teachers picket and leading them to believe that parents would react favorably? Would anyone really be happy to see a picket line and be eager to walk through it? We all have heard accusations that one side or another is posturing, avoiding negotiations, adopting an I win you lose position. Plainly, it is going both ways. To be clear, what the Board is offering is fair and appropriate with regards to salary and medical benefits, but many of the other points on either proposal aren't even mentioned on the other proposal. The two teams have a lot to talk about. So, leaders, I am urging all of you to move passed the "I'm not, if they're not" dancing around the negotiation process that we all have been subject to. We are way past due to come together and truly bargain in good faith. Our community does not have time to waste and we just can't afford the game playing any longer.

Peyton Jones and Bridget Vambran, 8th grade students at Maple Point Middle School, advised that Maple Point Middle School will be celebrating Veteran's Day on Tuesday, November 10th. This is a wonderful way for our students and community to show their appreciation for the sacrifices that our local veterans have made and to celebrate the courage that our veterans have shown in defending our country. The students invited any veterans and community to attend the celebration at Maple Point the morning of November 10th. Attendees should arrive at the auditorium lobby at 11:00 a.m. Any veterans who are interested in attending should contact Maple Point Middle School.

Mrs. Ellen Lockyer, Swan Point Development, advised that she is concerned about the future of the Neshaminy School District and all its taxpayers. Mrs. Lockyer has tried to follow the developments between the Board and the union very closely for the last 22 months. Mrs. Lockyer read that a taxpayer had circulated a Petition, so she asked him to e-mail a copy. It basically asked the Board to withdraw their offer and offer 0% increase for two years and 2% for the third and fourth year. Mrs. Lockyer has taken the Petition to 27 homes in the development and she has received a signature or signatures from 24 of the homes. This is a total of 38 signatures. Two homes abstained because of connections with a district that they have and one refused for other reasons. This is a small survey. It has been fun and she met new neighbors. It has taken 20-60 minutes speaking with the individuals. However, it is very reflective of the attitude of the taxpayers. This is an 88% positive response for a firmer stand than what the Board is offering the union. Mrs. Lockyer did not do this to be anti-teacher. This is a wake-up call to the union and Board. Mrs. Lockyer is a daughter and grand-daughter of teachers. A lot has changed since her mother retired from teaching. Teachers used to be on the lower end of the professional pay scale. That is no longer the case. Mrs. Lockyer's neighbors are receiving reductions in pay of 3%-5%, lay-offs, increasing in their premiums in health care, some self-employed needed to freeze pay of their employees. Many people are shocked with the 6% increased that is being asked for. No one that signed the Petition objected to a salary freeze for two years. Mrs. Lockyer commends the Board for whittling down \$14M deficit, but a lot was asked of the community and parents. We don't know what the future holds. We need to be prepared. The Board, the taxpayers and the union need to be fiscally prudent. Based on this petition a huge majority are in agreement.

Mrs. Sharon Rudnitsky, Feasterville, PA, stated that she has three children in the school district. As a parent, she has been very upset with the way the teachers are handling this contract dispute. When the teachers were picketing at Back to School Night they wanted the parents to be aware of what is happening and we would be sympathetic to their position, but it did the opposite. It made us very aware of their wants and not their needs. Mrs. Rudnitsky thought she had a good relationship with the teachers at the elementary school. They have been great with her children and she has enjoyed interacting with them. They are very good at what they do. At the Back to School Night that feeling disappeared. They will not even work with us on the health insurance issues. Where in today's workplace does any employee get free health insurance for them, their children and spouses? Mrs. Rudnitsky's husband has \$80.00 per week taken out of his pay for health insurance for her and the children. There are a handful of parents who are self-employed trying to support their family on half of what these teachers make. They need to pay between \$1,000-\$1,200 per month for health insurance. The teachers need to do the right thing, and they personally know what that is. Mrs. Rudnitsky cannot believe that all 700 teachers are in agreement with

the union and Louise Boyd. This is not a win or lose situation. This is about doing the right thing for everyone.

Mr. Steve Rodos, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, PA, welcomed back Mr. Paradise to the district. Mr. Rodos wanted to read the definition of negotiate and negotiations. Unfortunately, the definition contains some words which neither the teacher's union nor the Board seem to understand. These words which meaning needs to be understood in order to define negotiate are conference, discussion and compromise. Without an understanding of what is supposed to be accomplished, the issue goes no where. Mr. Rodos will address the teacher's contract no longer. However, Mr. Rodos would like to see the Board enter into a contract with the Support Staff rather than threaten them with outsourcing. Mr. Rodos addressed the education of the 8,000 students. The Philadelphia Inquirer ran an article regarding math programs and how they have raised the scores in Philadelphia and surrounding counties. Mr. Rodos would like to know is their program better or worse than Neshaminys. Unfortunately, no one ever speaks about education. Mr. Rodos stated that last year these items were offered for elimination: middle school instructional opportunity period, middle school sports, senior citizen tax assistance program, closing of schools, eliminate K-5 reading program textbooks, eliminating capital reserve contribution, raise aquatic fees, eliminate elementary guidance counselors, eliminate reading specialists, eliminate elementary librarians, etc. Mr. Rodos does not understand how this improves the education of the students in the Neshaminy School District. Mr. Rodos read about school closings based on excess capacity of schools the district can trim its operating costs by millions of dollars, so those resources can be redirected to teachers and textbooks, rather than maintaining empty classrooms. Mr. Rodos urged the Board to think about redirecting the funds to education when talking about closure of schools. Many things can be left to children and grandchildren, but as a community we can leave to the children and grandchildren the one item that will last forever, a good education.

Mr. Douglas Emslie, Levittown, PA, stated that he is a parent and taxpayer and after attending the Back to School Night at the high school it was quite a fiasco and Mr. Emslie says to the teacher's union "shame on you for turning that into a union intimidation event." To the Board it is time to hold firm on the offer, because economic times are tough, people are cutting back; they are losing jobs, having trouble paying their mortgage and taxes, etc. Mr. Emslie is a business owner and pays 100% of his healthcare coverage. Take the offer off the table. Go a lot lower and a significantly higher contribution to health care.

Mrs. Joanne Emslie, Levittown, PA, stated that she was very unhappy with Back to School Night and she was frustrated that every teacher in Neshaminy High School was wearing a federation tee shirt or they wore a shirt saying "Neshaminy solidarity." After visiting all the classes it is very annoying to listen to the teacher's say the children are the most important thing to them. When the union calls a strike they are not going to cross the picket lines and they are not going to teach our children, who they claim are the most important things to them. As a parent and taxpayer this is extremely frustrating. The offer is extremely generous. The teachers were bullying at the Back to School Night. It was very disruptive that the teachers from the other grades were outside picketing at the high school Back to School Night and vice versa. Mrs. Emslie cannot understand how the union can make you wear shirts? It is highly inappropriate that the teacher's wore the federation tee shirts on Back to School Night when they are talking to the parents of their students. The parents are your bosses. We pay your salary. Can anyone from the union explain to Mrs. Emslie why can none of the teachers discuss this? It needs to be talked about. The problem needs to be solved.

5. Items for Discussion

a) **Senior Citizens Tax Assistance Program**

Mr. Paradise stated that the program was started 31 years ago. \$1.77M has been rebated to seniors over the course of the years. The program has been approved about eight times with increased rebates and increased income allowances. The present program allows for household income up to a maximum of \$15,000 per year, age 65 or older is applicable and rebate is up to a maximum of \$500.00. This is all in addition to the homestead/farmstead that everyone receives and also in

addition to the PA property tax rebate that is provided by the state lottery fund with rebates up to \$650.00.

Mr. Paradise provided the Board with a handout with three plan alternative options:

Plan A – Increase Income eligibility maximum to \$18,000

Increase rebate amount maximum to \$650

Flat rebates for income levels: \$0-\$8000 – rebate \$650

\$8,000-\$15,000 – rebate \$500

\$15,001-\$18,000 – rebate \$300

Plan B - Increase income eligibility maximum to \$18,000

Maximum rebate remains \$500

Update rebate percentage factor for income range based on a table

Plan C - Increase income eligibility to \$16,500

Increase rebate to \$1,000

Update rebate percentage factor for income range based on a table

Mr. Paradise advised that the program starts in January so it would be good if the Board could vote on a plan at the next Public Board meeting, however, there would still be time in November.

Mr. Koziol questioned Plan C and Mr. Koziol stated that the Board has discussed this in the past and Mr. Koziol feels that it is time that the Board does something. Mr. Koziol is in favor of Plan C.

Dr. Spitz questioned the district expenditures of at least \$200,000. Mr. Paradise stated that each plan would remain within the \$200,000 budgeted amount. Mr. Paradise feels comfortable with each of these Plans. Mr. Paradise does not know exactly how many people will apply and how many people are eligible. It all depends who applies.

Dr. Spitz stated that it was an item of discussion and three Board members are not present this evening. Mr. Webb stated that this is strictly an agenda item.

Mr. Koziol made a motion to place Plan C on the agenda for Board approval. Four board members were for Plan C, one board member for Plan B and one board member for Plan A.

Mr. Webb stated that Plan C would be placed on the Public Meeting agenda on October 27th.

6. Items for Approval Tonight

a) Overnight Trip

1) Neshaminy High School Senior Class Trip to Orlando, Florida – April 7-10, 2010

Dr. Rattigan presented the Senior Class trip to Orlando, Florida to Board members. There is no direct cost to the district. Mr. Blasch is in favor of a class trip; however, the minimum number is 100 students. Dr. Rattigan stated that 25% of the students or 175 would need to show interest. Were other destinations considered? Fundraising and families would cover the expenses of trip. This is a cost to the taxpayers, since the fundraising is supported by the taxpayers. The cost of the student fees covers the chaperones. Mr. Blasch thinks that the district should be looking at trips where more students can participate and not just a small percentage.

Mrs. Cummings stated that other trips are also taking place during the year, so there is no guarantee that you would get more students to participate. Seniors could possibly pay for their own trip by working.

Dr. Spitz inquired what was the motivation for this class trip and a senior class trip. Dr. Rattigan stated that the advisors and class officers feel that there is again interest in such a trip. Dr. Spitz inquired whether

other districts are offering trips of this nature? Parents feel obligated and pressured to allow the students to participate. Dr. Rattigan stated that other districts do run trips.

Mr. Koziol stated that in years past the students took a trip to Washington, D.C. and it is still there. Students could learn a great deal by traveling to Washington. Mr. Koziol feels that more students would be involved and it would not have such a high price tag. Mr. Koziol would like to see the students visit history, rather than Disney.

Mrs. Cummings cannot see denying this type of trip when the Board is permitting the Choir to travel to Bermuda, etc. Mrs. Cummings noted that if students are interested they should be able to go. Mr. Koziol stated that a band trip is also being run at approximately the same time which will be costing students \$1,500. This just seems astronomical. The community is paying for this through fundraising. Some parents feel pressured into paying same and they cannot afford same.

Dr. Spitz stated that this class had a trip last year.

Mr. Koutsouradis asked who picks the destination. Dr. Rattigan stated that it is the class officers and advisors. Mr. Koutsouradis stated that he would love to see the students go to Washington, however, the students are picking where they want to go.

Mr. Webb stated that the great concern is for those who cannot afford the trips. Economy plays a huge part; however, if the parents want to pay and they want to raise the money, Mr. Webb does not want to stand in the way.

Mr. Webb took a roll call vote and the tally indicated that there were four ayes (Mrs. Cummings, Dr. Spitz, Mr. Webb and Mr. Koutsouradis) and two nays (Mr. Koziol, Mr. Blasch).

Mr. Profy stated that it was not necessary to have five votes and, therefore, there was consensus for the senior class trip.

7. Items for Approval on October 27, 2009 Public Board Meeting

a) American Education Week – November 15-21, 2009

Dr. Muenker stated that it will be held the week of November 15th. Schools will be open for visitation by parents. Excellent opportunity to visit the schools and see what is happening.

b) Bids/Budget Transfers

Mr. Paradise advised that there are no bids for approval. Mr. Paradise advised that Budget Transfer Report (Working Copy 10-1) will be presented for approval on October 27th.

8. Superintendents Report

Dr. Muenker advised that the Pennsylvania Crime and Delinquency Division have asked certain grade levels to participate in the 2009 Survey. This is an important tool for government. The District will also use the information to apply for grant opportunities and better understand the students. The survey takes about 45 minutes to complete and will be done prior to November 13th.

Dr. Muenker stated that on October 19th will be a dedication ceremony related to the opening of the high school. This is an open house for the public and everyone is invited to attend.

Dr. Muenker reminded all to attend the Veteran's Day programs at the specific schools.

Dr. Muenker stated that the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center dedication will take place on November 18th at 7:00 p.m.

Students and employees will be able to participate in the H1N1 immunization. This is strictly voluntary. Further information will be distributed regarding times and places. Absences are being monitored in all schools. Some districts have chosen to close for a day, etc. Our district is being diligent and keeping on top of the situation.

9. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

No report.

b) Educational Development

Dr. Spitz advised that the committee met on September 21st at the new learning center at the High School. Information was received on strategic planning, status of the Keystone exams and implementation. There was a presentation regarding the elementary science program and the other by the lead teacher in the social studies department. A tour was taken of the learning center and everyone was very impressed. The gym area is a bit small, but possibly something will be able to be done regarding that. The next meeting is scheduled for November 16th.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised that a meeting will take place on October 28th in the Board Room.

d) IU Board

Dr. Spitz advised that a meeting is scheduled for next week.

e) Educational Foundation

Dr. Muenker advised that the foundation will be holding a fundraiser this fall which will be a "Flyers Basket." The next meeting will be on November 9th at 8:00 a.m.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis stated that the tech school will begin negotiations with the teacher's union regarding the contract. Next meeting is scheduled for October 26th.

g) Technology

Mr. Blasch advised that a meeting will be scheduled before the next Work Session.

10. Public Comment

Ms. Louise Boyd, President of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, stated that the teachers of Neshaminy are professionals and loyal to both the union and our students. Ms. Boyd again asks the Board to negotiate rather than threaten. A few in this audience speak about me or the union as separate from the teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, etc. Ms. Boyd pointed out that the members clearly demonstrated their individual and collective support, not just of me, but of each other and to our profession and to the process of negotiating. Not ashamed. We will continue to expect real negotiations. Back to School Night, intimidation, inappropriate, disruptive, WOW! The parents I met with, what a success. Their we were, sharing between us, among us. What was going on. Not one bit of disruption. Not at an elementary school not at a middle school, not at the high school. Mr. Webb we stand together and ready for real negotiations.

Mr. Larry Pastor, Langhorne, PA, stated that there is opposition to the teacher's Back to School Night at the elementary and middle school levels. The actions of the last week were quite startling, because the actions of the teachers have really enlightened the community. The gap has really become clear. The petition that was referenced earlier is Taxpayers for a Fair Neshaminy Budget which has had over 1,000 signatures over the last eight months. The Petition wants the offer withdrawn and the community does not want that to be a starting point for negotiations. Keep that in mind. That offer was made prior to the collapse of the economy. The same offer would not be put on the table today. It is inappropriate and excessive. However, Mr. Pastor understands the reality of collective bargaining and a starting point that

is reasonable. They have an action which states that they rejected same totally. They don't want to come back to the table until health care is taken off the table. A reasonable offer is a 0 raise and a 25% contribution to health care. Mr. Pastor stated the definition of "greed" is a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (as in money) then is needed.

Mr. Mike Morris, school board candidate and industrial sales representative, stated that he has spoken to hundreds of people within the district. Everyone thinks that this offer is more than fair. Look around. 9.8% of people in the community are unemployed. The real unemployment rate is 17% plus. One out of every six households are underemployed, 10% of your friends, family members and neighbors are unemployed. This is on a rise for the next couple of years. Pay freezes are a hot topic since the public is coming to your door demanding same. The average employee is paying 20%-35% of their health care insurance and it is not the gold plated health care the teachers have. Mr. Morris is suggesting that the teachers take the offer of paying 15%, 16% and 17% of the health care for the next three years. Sounds more than fair. A 3% increase is unfair to the taxpayer. A 6% increase is outrageous. Enough is enough. Pay for the health care and come to the table and negotiate. The Board is not making any money; they are here to represent the public. Come to the table with fair negotiations. Shame on the teachers for showing up at the Back to School Nights and picketing. The public has been turned against you and you can thank the NFT members. The public is behind Mr. Webb and the School Board. Please be willing to negotiate with the NFT and Support Staff. Mr. Morris encouraged the public to go out and vote on November 3rd. Three open seats are available on the School Board and it is important that people fill the seats who can balance a check book.

11. Future Topics

None.

12. Agenda Development for the October 27, 2009 Public Meeting.

13. Other Board Business

Dr. Spitz commented that public comment during school board meetings is not an appropriate place for politics and hopefully, candidates will refrain from doing so in the future.

Mr. Webb stated that he will reach out through Dr. Muenker to get together with the union and find a mutual date for discussions.

14. Adjournment

Mr. Koziol moved that the meeting be adjourned and Dr. Spitz seconded same. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary