

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES  
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
February 8, 2011

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on February 8, 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. Richard M. Eccles  
Mr. Mike Morris  
Mr. William D. O'Connor  
Mr. William Oettinger

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

Dr. Louis T. Muenker  
Mrs. Barbara Markowitz  
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan  
Dr. Geeta Heble  
Mrs. Patricia Boylan  
Mr. Kevin Kane

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

**OTHERS:** Approximately 60 persons from the public, staff and press

**SECRETARY:** Mrs. Jennifer Burns

**SOLICITOR:** Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

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

**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

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

**3. Announcements**

None

**4. Public Comment**

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Laurel Oaks, Langhorne, questioned the financial impact that a Charter School will have on Neshaminy School District. He asked for an explanation of how money is distributed to the Charter School. Mr. Alfonso voiced his concern regarding Neshaminy's operational budget if a deficit is created because of funds being designated to a Charter School. He also questioned if such a deficit would necessitate cutting programs from Neshaminy's curriculum. Mr. Alfonso questioned the suitability of a decision to open a Charter School in the District and asked the Board for clarification on the subject.

Ellen Lockyer, self-employed, Swan Point, voiced her support for a Charter School in the Neshaminy School District. Mrs. Lockyer stated that a Charter School offers an alternative within the District and a more democratic, competitive system. She stated that a Charter School will give the Neshaminy School District an atmosphere of greater parental involvement and will be a boost to the educational results for Neshaminy students.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, congratulated Barbara Markowitz for her recent appointment as Acting Business Administrator. Mr. Rodos asked the Board if this year's budget is starting with an 11 million dollar surplus. He commented that some of the negative themes that have been

discussed during public comment are inaccurate and nonproductive and do a disservice to everyone involved. Mr. Rodos declared that tenure does not keep bad teachers on the job. He explained that tenure is a guarantee of due process under the law. Mr. Rodos said that teachers should have Master's Degrees and deserve the respect just as any professional in their field of expertise. Mr. Rodos said that it is his understanding that once a Charter School is proposed and a plan and building is selected the School Board has little power to prevent the implementation of the Charter School. Mr. Rodos stated that he does not see the value in opening a Charter School in the Neshaminy School District at this time.

## **5. Items for Discussion**

### **a) Budget Development**

Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Board is required to adopt a preliminary budget on or before February 16, 2011, in accordance with the Pennsylvania School Code and Act I. She also noted that the proposed preliminary gap is 11.3 million dollars with no preliminary reductions at this point. Mrs. Markowitz stated that all items and requests will be reviewed and a final budget will be adopted by mid-June, 2011. Mrs. Markowitz noted that the Facilities and Finance Committee meeting was rescheduled for Tuesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Muenker confirmed that that Board will keep the public informed of the process, while the budget is reviewed line by line until it is finalized in June.

## **6. Items for Approval Tonight**

### **a) Approval of the 2011 – 2012 Preliminary Budget**

Mr. Webb presented the following motion:

WHEREAS, in accordance with Act I of 2006, the Board of School Directors has received a proposed Preliminary Budget for the 2011 – 12 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, the Proposed Preliminary Budget was made available for public inspection on form PDE-2028 effective January 19, 2011; and

WHEREAS, in order to further comply with Act I, the Preliminary Budget must be adopted by the Board of School Directors on or before February 16, 2011; and

WHEREAS, Act I further provides for "referendum exceptions", which must be submitted to and approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education on or before March 3, 2011.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2011-12 Preliminary Budget is adopted in accordance with Act I of 2006 and it shall be made available for public inspection as required by law.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the School District shall apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for exceptions specified under Act I as per the attached summary.

Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

Mr. Eccles asked how the present 4 to 5.5 million dollar state deficit will affect funding coming to school districts.

Mrs. Markowitz replied that it should not affect anything for the current year. She also stated that for next year the basic funding will be at the 2008 – 09 level of funding. The decision will not be made until approximately March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Muenker stated that since the state has not increased funding in the last two years, the Board took this into consideration when forecasting this new budget.

Mr. Eccles questioned whether the information received from the state is official or is it subject to change.

Dr. Muenker stated that until a decision is made, the information may change. Dr. Muenker further noted that there is a concern regarding grant money that may not be allotted for next year.

Mr. Eccles inquired if the increase in PSERS will be next year and not this year and what will the percentage be.

Dr. Muenker confirmed the statement as correct and the percentage is not yet known.

Mr. Eccles asked is it true that the amount may double or triple.

Dr. Muenker replied that doubling is a possibility. Dr. Muenker added that last spring the Board made a motion to divert some of the money in savings in anticipation of that cost.

Mr. Morris asked if the Federal funds are included in the School District's budget and what effect does the national deficit have on the state and the Neshaminy School District budget.

Dr. Muenker confirmed that Federal funding is a part of the School District's budget. He added that any reduction in Federal grant funds would present a challenge to the School District's budget.

Mr. Eccles asked Mr. Profy if any word was received back from Middletown Township regarding the half million dollars and is it reflected in the budget.

Mr. Profy answered it is being worked on and referred the question to Mrs. Markowitz.

Dr. Muenker replied it is not reflected in the budget.

Mr. Eccles asked Mr. Profy to explain how the matter is being worked on.

Mr. Profy replied the numbers are being examined and referred further explanation to Dr. Muenker.

Dr. Muenker explained that Middletown Township has been notified to reconcile the fees for the High School project and forward the information to the School Board.

Mr. Eccles requested that the matter be pursued by following up with a letter to Middletown Township requesting a full explanation regarding the said funds.

The motion passed by a vote of eight ayes, and one nay, (Mr. Eccles).

Mr. Webb made a motion for a zero percent increase in the final budget; however, in the event a tax increase is mandated, and only as a last resort, the 1.4 percent inflationary rate will be the maximum increase and the exceptions specified under Act I will not be used.

Mr. O'Connor seconded the motion.

The motion passed by a vote of seven ayes, and two nays, (Mr. Eccles and Mr. Congdon.)

**7. Items for Approval at the February 22, 2011 Public Board Meeting**

**a) Acceptance of the 2009 – 2010 Audit**

Mrs. Markowitz stated that at the February 22, 2011 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion for the acceptance of the 2009 – 2010 Audit Report.

**b) BCIU #22 2011 – 2012 Programs & Services and Instructional Materials & Research Services Budget**

Dr. Muenker stated that at the February 22, 2011 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion for the approval for the BCIU #22 2011 – 2012 Programs & Services and Instructional Material & Research Budget. Dr. Muenker noted that this is not the overall cost associated with the IU.

**c) Application of the School Lane Charter School - Neshaminy**

Dr. Muenker stated that at the February 22, 2011 Public Board Meeting there will be a motion for the approval for the Application of the School Lane Charter School – Neshaminy. Dr. Muenker noted that a hearing is scheduled for Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m., in the auditorium.

Mr. Eccles asked Dr. Muenker what the IU staff pays towards their health insurance.

Dr. Muenker stated that he will get the requested information.

Mr. Webb stated that he requested that Mrs. Markowitz provide a breakdown in the cost and the number of students provided for in the IU budget.

**d) Bids/Budget Transfers**

Mrs. Markowitz noted that there were no bids and there was one Budget Transfer Report (Working Copy 11-4), with three transactions. The first one is for funds needed to purchase IPAD, projector and flat screen for ESAP, and the second and third are for conferences. Mrs. Markowitz stated that the Budget Transfer (Working Copy 11-4) will be on the Public agenda meeting at the end of the month.

**8. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- On Wednesday, February 2, 2011 five students from the Business, Computer and Information Technology Department's Finance classes earned the distinction to represent Neshaminy High School and the Neshaminy School District in the Pennsylvania's LifeSmarts Challenge Finals.
- NBC News 10's Aditi Roy visited Cheryl Soltis and her Digital Electronic Arts classes at Neshaminy High School to film "The Teacher Says" segment.
- The Neshaminy High School Music Department will present Disney's Beauty and the Beast for 5 performances; February 9 – 12, 2011. Show times are 7:00 p.m. with a 1:30 p.m. matinee on Saturday, February 12th.
- On February 15th & 16th, the acclaimed day-long Challenge Day program will take place at Neshaminy High School in Langhorne, PA. Students and adults will experience the innovative workshop which is designed to break down barriers and promote school and community environments based in understanding, acceptance, and love.
- Congratulations to Neshaminy High School junior, Shannon Jones, who was chosen as a Scholastic Young Artist Gold Key winner for her 18" x 24" drawing, **Be Still**, created in Mrs. O'Neill's Advanced Art II class.
- Congratulations to Neshaminy High School student, Melissa Gansworth, who has been selected for the 2011 American High School Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall. She will perform with the Honors Orchestra as a principal trombonist.
- Poquessing Middle School Presents "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m., and February 26<sup>th</sup>, at 1:00 p.m.
- Reviewed the process for making decisions regarding school closings and delays during inclement weather.

Mr. O'Connor mentioned that the School District had some problems with the timeliness of the school closings and delay messages being posted on the website and parents not receiving a call at their work. He asked Dr. Muenker to address this issue.

Dr. Muenker replied that there were some technical difficulties regarding the Neshaminy TV channel and the call list problem was a result of human error.

**9. Committee Reports**

**a) Board Policies**

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for March 9th, at 5:30 p.m. Topics of discussion will be remote voting by Board members, memorandums of understanding, and also the lice policy in the District.

**b) Educational Development**

Mr. O'Connor informed the Board that the meeting has been moved to February 28<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 p.m. Topics of discussion will involve elementary computer education and also a report will be presented on a pilot program on keyboarding that has been in effect this year in several classes.

**c) Finance/Facilities**

Mr. Webb advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m.

**d) IU Board**

Mr. Eccles informed the Board that all pertinent information was covered in Dr. Muenker's report.

**e) Education Foundation**

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that the next scheduled meeting is on Monday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, at 8:00 a.m.

**f) Technical School**

Mr. Koutsouradis informed the Board that their last meeting was the Annual School Board Recognition Dinner. Mr. Koutsouradis stated that on February 9<sup>th</sup>, the SkillsUSA District 2 competitions will be held at Bucks County Technical High School. He also noted that Bruce Prendergast was elected President; Mr. Koutsouradis was elected Vice President.

**g) Technology**

Mr. O'Connor advised the Board that the next meeting will most likely be in March.

**10. Public Comment**

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Laurel Oaks, Langhorne, declared that tenure means that the teacher has a job for life. He stated that in his opinion tenure for teachers at the elementary and secondary school levels is not necessary. Mr. Alfonso said that tenure promotes mediocrity, laziness, complacency, and arrogance towards supervisors and management. Mr. Alfonso stated that tenure at the college level is another situation, because professors often need to be protected for speaking out and voicing their opinion.

Mark Shubin, sales executive, Langhorne, stated that tenure is being confused with accountability. He stated that tenure allows teachers with seniority to keep their job, even though they may not perform as well as other teachers with less seniority. Mr. Shubin said that providing tenure has no place in our system today, because it has ruined innovation and the necessary accountability that is needed in education. He described Charter Schools as a laboratory for education of choice, which is a powerful thing for parents and students. Mr. Shubin said that it allows parents to become more involved in the educational process and for teachers to become more creative, thus allowing our schools to prosper. Mr. Shubin asked for the School Board to support the proposition of the Charter School, stating that it will be good for the community.

Larry Pastor, Business Executive, Langhorne, declared that he is a strong supporter for a Charter School in the Neshaminy School District. Mr. Pastor stated that the unions, together with a political party, have caused the degradation of the quality of schools over the past fifty years. Mr. Pastor stated that this is changing now and Charter Schools are part of the change, because it is essential that parents have a choice on where their children will be educated and the quality of education that they will receive. Mr. Pastor urged the School Board to approve the Charter School. He declared that tenure will not exist in the near future as it does today. He said tenure is a job for life and it is helping destroy the quality of American education and it is the single biggest issue to be resolved. Mr. Pastor emphasized that there should be a zero tax increase and he questioned why the Board would send a letter to Harrisburg requesting exceptions and then put a resolution on the table that the exceptions will not be used. Mr. Pastor concluded stating, that since it is an election year, the public needs to know where each School Board member stands on the important issues on improving education in America.

**11. Future Topics**

None

**12. Agenda Development for the February 22, 2011 Public Board Meeting**

None

**13. Other Board Business**

Mr. O'Connor urged the citizens to press their elected representatives to fulfill campaign promises and pass "no strike" legislation. He suggested to the public that they put biweekly updates on their blogs and websites of what their elected representatives have done to further the cause for "no strike" legislation. Mr. O'Connor concluded by stating that the time for talk is over and the time for action is now.

Mr. Morris stated that he is here to serve the taxpayers and the students of Neshaminy School District and not to serve any union or political agenda. Mr. Morris said that he believes that there are no guarantees in the working world and he disagrees with the tenure prospect of a job for life. He noted that in order to be recognized as a professional one should act as a professional. Mr. Morris said that while he voted yes for the budget, he has no intention of raising taxes in order to give teachers free healthcare or an exorbitant bonus to retire. Mr. Morris stated that he looks forward to hearing public comment on the Charter School, because he believes in choice.

Mr. Eccles welcomed Barbara Markowitz and acknowledged that she is doing a fine job.

Ms. Boyle noted that tenure was a big issue during her 30 year employment at a university. Ms. Boyle stated that tenure supported freedom of speech and she feels that historically there was and still is a good reason for establishing tenure.

Mrs. Markowitz addressed Mr. Rodos' question regarding the fund balance, stating that there is an undesignated fund balance of 11 million dollars.

Mr. Webb added that the 11 million dollars was not accumulated in one year, but rather over a period of time.

Mr. O'Connor noted that the District also has to pay for 40 million dollars in building repairs.

Mr. Webb responded to Mr. Pastor's question asking why exceptions be proposed and then make a motion not to use them, stating that it was done to keep all options open. Mr. Webb stated that the goal is to come in with a zero dollar increase for the budget; however, there is a possibility that additional funds may be needed and this has to be taken into consideration. Mr. Webb noted that the Charter School cannot raise tax dollars, but they use tax dollars at the same rate as what it cost Neshaminy to educate per student.

Dr. Muenker concurred that the proposition of a Charter School in Neshaminy will have a significant affect on the budget. Dr. Muenker advised the public that further discussions will be held with School Lane Charter School on February 17<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Webb confirmed that if the teaching staff were to be reduced it would be done according to seniority.

**14. Adjournment of Meeting**

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Eccles seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns  
Board Secretary