

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

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

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on March 8, 2011 in the District Offices Board Room at the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President  
Ms. Irene Boyle  
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  
Mrs. Patricia Boylan  
Mr. Kevin Kane

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Mr. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice President  
Mr. Scott E. Congdon

**OTHERS:** Approximately 40 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 Legal issues.

**1. Call to Order**

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

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

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

**3. Announcements**

None

**4. Public Comment**

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired, Laurel Oaks, Langhorne, requested and was granted, a moment of silence be observed to honor Dyan Pinckney, a Neshaminy teacher, who recently passed away.

Steve Rodos, semi-retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, proposed that the Board should focus on what should be done to better educate the children within the district. Mr. Rodos stated that he is amazed that at Neshaminy High School the math scores are higher than the reading scores and he suggested that more emphasis should be placed on reading. Mr. Rodos mentioned that the Board needs to continue to concentrate on necessary program enhancements such as computer classes at the elementary level, reading, smaller class sizes, and full day kindergarten. Mr. Rodos continues to question the advantage of a Charter School, but said he feels the development of a Charter School in Neshaminy is inevitable and parents will have to make a choice at that time.

**5. Items for Discussion**

**a) Budget Development**

Mrs. Markowitz advised the Board that as a result of the review of the 2011-2012 preliminary budget the update, as of the beginning of March is now at a projected deficit of slightly over \$9 million dollars. Additionally, the preliminary Governor's budget for the basic education funding will be at the 2008-

2009 level, which is a \$1.2 million dollar decrease from the current year. An attempt to reconcile the budget is ongoing until June.

Mr. Webb asked Dr. Muenker to comment on the Educational Assistance Program from the Governor's Proposed Budget Report. Dr. Muenker stated that the Governor's Report indicates that Neshaminy School District will receive approximately \$1 million dollars less in state funding, which has been used to support teaching instruction in previous years. Dr. Muenker confirmed that this was anticipated by the Boards; nevertheless, the news was very disappointing and will present new challenges for the Board.

Mr. Webb added that this grant money is not a budgeted item; however, since the district will not be receiving the funds, it will be necessary to procure the money elsewhere. Mr. Webb noted that Charter School reimbursement to the schools in the state of Pennsylvania amounts to approximately \$224 million dollars but under this proposal the home school would not receive any reimbursement.

Dr. Muenker affirmed the information.

**b) Comprehensive Annual Financial Report**

Mrs. Markowitz explained that the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report of the Neshaminy School District is brought to the Board as an informational item. Mrs. Markowitz stated that the report is divided into three sections, introduction, financials, and statistics. The information is presented in a manner that fairly represents the fiscal soundness of the District.

**6. Items for Approval at the March 22, 2011 Public Board Meeting**

**a) Summer School Programs for 2011 – Dr. Rattigan**

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board on the following summer school programs for 2011.

- 1) Secondary Summer School (for students in grades 6-12) will offer accelerated or enrichment courses and also make-up courses. The dates are as follows, July 5, 2011 to August 5, 2011.
- 2) Summer Fine Arts Program (for students in grades K-12) will consist of art, dance, instrumental music and Summer Stock and Summer Theater Workshop. The dates are as follows, art and instrumental will be held from July 5, 2011 through July 28, 2011. Summer Stock will be held July 5, 2011 through July 30, 2011, and the Summer Theater Workshop will be held July 5, 2011 to July 30, 2011.
- 3) Elementary math and reading camp (for students in grades 2, 3, 4, and 5) who meet established criteria. The dates are as follows, July 5, 2011 to August 5, 2011.
- 4) Summer Adventure Camp (for students in grades 3-8) will participate in adventure and team building activities.

Dr. Rattigan stated that each program is operated on a self-sustaining basis, except for the Elementary Summer Camp. Students will have to qualify for the summer camp based on criteria. There are grant funds to pay for the Summer Camp Program. Dr. Rattigan also stated that there are no changes to the programs except a \$10.00 increase in tuition to meet the rising cost of utilities.

Mr. O'Connor clarified that the Summer Theater Workshop Program is just for the elementary students.

Dr. Rattigan stated that she would double check the information.

Mr. Eccles inquired how the estimated expenses compare to last year's expenses.

Dr. Muenker stated that, due to current contract issues, the only difference would possibly be the principal's salary.

Mr. Eccles asked if that could be clarified.

Dr. Muenker agreed.

**b) Proposed School Calendar for 2011–2012**

Dr. Muenker provided the proposed school calendar for the 2011–2012 school year to the Board. Dr. Muenker asked the Board members to review same prior to the next Public Board meeting at which time they will be asked to approve same.

Mrs. Cummings inquired if there would be a date set for graduation 2011 by the Public Board Meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Dr. Muenker confirmed there will be a date set for graduation 2011 and also any make up plans for snow days that the district has encountered.

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

Dr. Muenker stated that the BCIU #22 2011-2012 Programs & Services Instructional Materials & Research Services Budget will be presented for the Board's approval at the March 22<sup>nd</sup> Public Board Meeting.

Mr. Webb inquired if the information regarding the cost will be received before the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Dr. Muenker stated that they are working on getting the information out before the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Mr. Webb asked if some alternative educational facilities be recommended.

Dr. Muenker stated that some alternate choices can be provided.

**d) Bids/Budget Transfers**

Mrs. Markowitz advised the Board on the following: Mrs. Markowitz stated there were no Budget transfers and there were three bids.

**Bid No. 12-02**

**Bid Amount:** \$76,778.07

**Bid Description:** Supplies for physical education programs and various team sports for the school year 2011-2012.

**Bid No. 12-14**

**Bid Amount:** \$155,300.00

**Bid Description:** Installation of a complete new automatic fire protection system installed for the TLC building located on the Neshaminy High School campus. This project was budgeted at \$150,000.

**Bid No. 12-15**

**Bid Amount:** \$61,948.00

**Bid Description:** Bituminous concrete paving resurfacing and repair at MPMS and Samuel Everitt Elementary.

Mrs. Markowitz stated that award is recommended to the vendor "Weatherproofing Technologies Inc." under existing consortium contract with AEPA (Association of Education Purchasing Agencies.) It is for roof repair at Schweitzer Elementary in the amount of \$796,387.02. It was presented at the Facilities and Finance Committee and was requested that it be brought up to the Board for consensus. Mrs. Markowitz also asked for the Board's approval on Bid No. 12-14 for sprinklers at Neshaminy campus – TLC building.

Mrs. Markowitz noted that Bids No. 12-02 and 12-15 will be presented for the Board's approval at the March 22<sup>nd</sup> Public Board Meeting.

Mr. O'Connor made a motion to have Bid No. 12-14 be approved and Mr. Oettinger seconded the motion.

The Board unanimously approved said motion. (Mr. Koutsouradis and Mr. Congdon were not present).

Mr. Webb stated that the funds being used are from the High School construction project.

There was Board consensus for the roof repair at Schweitzer Elementary. (Mr. Koutsouradis and Mr. Congdon were not present).

Dr. Muenker asked for the Board's consensus for the use of Neshaminy's baseball fields for Our Lady of Grace field and track team and also the Bucks County Bull Dogs baseball team on specific Sundays out of the next four months.

There was Board consensus for field usage on Sundays for Our Lady of Grace and the Bucks County Bull Dogs. (Mr. Koutsouradis and Mr. Congdon were not present).

## **7. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- Expressed appreciation to all of the organizations who made the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Challenge Day, which was held on February 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, a success.
- Maple Point Middle will be presenting the musical "Bugsy Malone Jr., on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>. Tickets are \$6.00 for general admission and \$7.00 for reserved seating.
- Carl Sandburg Middle School will be presenting Roald Dahl's "Willy Wonka Jr." on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> at 7:00p.m., & March 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m.
- The Neshaminy High School Drama Club will present its annual comedy show, Laughingstock, on Tuesday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, and Friday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m. in the school's auditorium. Tickets are \$5.00 and can be purchased at the door.
- Neshaminy High School SPIN (Student Parent Information Network) Group, would like to invite parents to a district-wide Cyber Bullying Presentation being held in the Neshaminy High School Auditorium on Wednesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, beginning at 7:00 p.m. Nationally acclaimed speaker, Tina Meier, will speak to parents of Neshaminy School District students regarding Cyber bullying and Internet Safety.
- The High School Health and Physical Education staff and parents received a special note of thanks for a successful "Gym Night," which was held on March 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>.

## **8. Items for Approval Tonight**

### **a) Overnight Trips**

Dr. Rattigan presented the following trip for approval:

- 1) April 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – Neshaminy High School – FBLA State Competition – Hershey Lodge, Hershey, PA.

Dr. Rattigan advised the Board that there is no cost to the district.

The Board unanimously approved said trip. (Mr. Koutsouradis and Mr. Congdon were not present).

## **9. Committee Reports**

### **a) Board Policies**

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next meeting will be on March 9<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. Topics being discussed will include concurrent discipline, lice infestation, and remote access.

**b) Educational Development**

Mr. O'Connor informed the Board that at their last meeting discussions included the Keystone Exams and the fact that Algebra I, Biology, English Literature, and Composition will be a graduation requirement in the class of 2015 as mandated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Also, in 2017 students will need to take an additional test in civics and government. Mr. O'Connor stated that the feedback from the keyboarding pilot program has been very positive and the recommendation has been to expand the keyboarding program to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades at Ferderbar and Schweitzer for the 2011-2012.

Dr. Muenker noted that due to fiscal constraints, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has postponed the Keystone Exams for one year.

Mrs. Cummings mentioned that a presentation regarding the testing procedure be conducted at one of the work session meetings.

**c) Finance/Facilities**

Mr. Webb advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for March 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

**d) IU Board**

Mr. Eccles informed the Board that the next meeting will be scheduled for later in the month.

**e) Education Foundation**

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that there is a Spring Phillies Basket being raffled to raise revenue for scholarships. For tickets contact Dr. Muenker's office.

**f) Technical School**

Mr. Eccles informed the Board that at their last meeting discussions included the Keystone Exams, programs for at risk students at the technical school, and budget constraints.

**g) Technology**

Mr. O'Connor advised the Board that at their last meeting discussions included utilizing video conferencing technology, using whiteboards, netbooks, computer and other technology assessment, WIFI technology throughout the district, and outsource hosting of financial software, and other applications.

**10. Public Comment**

Larry Pastor, Business Executive, Middletown, asked the Board to clarify statements made by the NFT in the Courier Times. Mr. Pastor asked for an estimated number of people who have contacted the Board in support of the NFT's position regarding the contract. He also asked the Board to describe the conflicting information regarding contributing or not contributing to healthcare. In conclusion, he asked the Board to clarify the issues around a deficit versus a surplus and how the budget actually works.

**11. Future Topics**

None

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

None

**13. Other Board Business**

In answer to Mr. Pastor's request for clarification regarding deficit versus surplus, Mrs. Markowitz explained that initially a review of all the department's needs is conducted resulting in an estimated deficit for the preliminary budget. Over the ensuing months, the expenses are reviewed line by line in an attempt to decrease the deficit. Mrs. Markowitz noted that the surplus is the fund balance and the state recommends that the district retains at least 5 percent of the budget as a fund balance. This fund balance is required as a safety net and it can also be used to help balance future budgets. Mrs. Markowitz said that a healthy fund balance is required to keep a healthy district.

Mr. Webb added that the budget is also a moving document, which is subject to change e.g., building repairs, possible lawsuits, and personnel changes. Mr. Webb quoted an excerpt from Governor Corbett's speech regarding collective bargaining, stating that collective bargaining means finding the spot where things work; in this case it's going to have to work for the good of the taxpayers. Neither side needs to lose in order for the taxpayers to win.

Mr. Webb outlined the healthcare benefits going back to the collective bargaining agreement in July, 2001. Mr. Webb noted that in subsequent years, the NFT has proposed certain changes to the healthcare plan, which would benefit the NFT. At no time, has the NFT ever proposed any contribution on their part to the healthcare plan. Mr. Webb said on January 29, 2008, the Board proposed a health plan Keystone POS C1F101, with a 10 percent co-pay. In August, 2010, the NFT offered to change co-payments from a PC15 to a PC20 and specialists to \$30.00, the NFT would also change some of the deductibles within the plan. The NFT claimed a savings of over \$3 million dollar for the district, which could never be substantiated. In January, 2011, the NFT also proposed an increase in the early retirement incentive from \$27,500 to \$30,000.

Mr. Webb also noted that the NFT proposed to change years of service from 10 years to 15 years and they proposed to include fully paid healthcare benefits for the employee and spouse only. Mr. Webb explained that on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Board made a counterproposal of 20/30/70, which is the plan that the administrators agreed to. Mr. Webb confirmed that the NFT has not accepted this proposal to date. Mr. Webb stated that it is important to note that the NFT has offered a savings not a contribution, and there is a big difference between a plan change and contribution.

Mr. Webb concluded by saying that the Board is very willing to negotiate; however, there is only so much money to go around and the district simply does not have the funds to continue providing free healthcare and the Board's responsibility is foremost to the children of the Neshaminy School District.

Mr. O'Connor noted that because there are increases in other parts of the NFT's offer, there is no net savings to the district. Mr. O'Connor asked Mr. Webb to confirm that the practice of sidebar letters is no longer used.

Mr. Webb confirmed the same.

Scott Bennett of Levittown asked for clarification regarding the expiration of the Board's current offer to the NFT that is on the table.

Mr. Webb explained that the Board's offer was a limited three year offer, which will expire in June, 2011. He also noted that it is yet to be determined whether the present offer will be rescinded. Mr. Webb stated that he, nor any other Board Member, has received any communication from the public expressing support for the NFT's position.

Mr. Morris asked if there are any actual figures regarding the overall cost to the district from the NFT's latest offer.

Mr. Webb replied that the Board has the figures from the NFT's previous offer; however, updated figures are not available at this time. He further explained that the attorneys for the NFT and the school district meet with Blue Cross to compare the figures and again no savings could be found.

Mr. Morris congratulated Dr. McGee on an excellent "Gym Night."

Mr. Eccles read a letter that he composed entitled, "The Hypocrisy of It All". (Please see below.)

### The Hypocrisy of It All

Years ago, you entered public service because you had a calling. You wanted to help people, make a difference, and give back to your community. There were times when you did not have a choice. Wages and benefits were not the deciding factor in this endeavor. You knew that working for the taxpayers was a sacrifice. I am not sure that this holds true today. We as a community, state, and country have become a nation of those who have and those who have not, and the gap is widening at an alarming pace. Working for the taxpayers has become the job of choice.

Presently, the Neshaminy School District is entering its fourth year of contract negotiations with our teachers (certified staff). My main concern and where the hypocrisy begins, is what our elected, paid, professional politicians are doing to maintain a semblance of sanity to control the ever growing, out of control government spending and lack of contribution to their taxpayer employed personal health care.

Over the last few years, I have watched, listened, and tried to rationalize the venomous outrage towards our employees in the Neshaminy School District. (Conversely, the total contempt that the union officials have shown towards the taxpaying public and using the children as a shield). After-all, paying for benefits and other fringes are new to the organized staff at Neshaminy and most other taxpayer employees.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Health Research and Educational Trust, private sector employees this past year paid an average \$4000.00, as their share of the annual family health insurance premium, an increase of 14 percent from 2009. Since 2005, worker's contributions to premiums have gone up 47 percent, while overall premiums rose 27 percent, wages increased 18 percent, and inflation rose 12 percent. That being said, paying 17% towards your health care premium does not sound that outrageous, unless you are a government/taxpayer employee.

Recently, a number of local governmental bodies announced some changes to what employees contribute to their personal health care premiums. This appeared in the Bucks County Courier Times on December 20, 2010. "County workers will contribute from zero up to 1.5 percent of their base salary towards their health care premiums, depending on whether they have single or family coverage, according to human resources director Meredith Dolan. Some union workers don't contribute towards their health coverage". Our elected, paid, professional politicians voted in favor of this. No outrage, no venomous attacks or remarks?

This appeared in the BCCT editorial "Thumbs Up" on January 28, 2011. "To changes in state House rules regarding health care contributions, expenses and vehicle leases. The new rules include a requirement that House members contribute 1 percent of their salary toward the cost of taxpayer-financed health insurance, beginning in November 2012". These are the same state elected officials in the Pennsylvania House that mortgaged our future by reamortizing their retirement fund and spread the cost over 30 years, for themselves and all state and local taxpayer employees. To make matters worse, according to "Why PA" a portal run by state.pa.us, "Commonwealth employees pay an average of \$55.00 per month for health benefits". No outrage, no venomous attacks or remarks?

Many of our local townships and municipalities have made health care headlines lately with pay freezes, salary cuts, and changes to health care deductibles or health care plans, all in a guise to make it look as if

something spectacular was being accomplished. Some local townships have put off negotiations of present union contracts until after elections or the economy changes in a positive way. In almost every case these township employees pay nothing towards their taxpayer health insurance. No outrage, no venomous attacks or remarks?

Many neighboring school districts pay much less than what the average private sector employee pays for health insurance. Some pay as little as \$65.00 to \$90.00 per month for family personal health care coverage and on top of that, receives 3% salary increases. No outrage, no venomous attacks or remarks?

This is where the hypocrisy lies. Why would or should the Neshaminy teachers pay two thirds or more per year for health insurance when the educator, municipal or county employee, and our very own elected officials pay much less. Our own elected, paid, professional politicians who make the laws in this State, pay only 1%? (and that is not until 2012). We twisted the hands of our support staff to pay 15% towards their health care insurance, only to find out if you worked for the County of Bucks you would only pay 0 to 1.5%

There needs to be consistency in the taxpayer employed public servants. The present situation across Pennsylvania will only worsen as school districts attempt to reach State mandated Act 1 limits. Over the last few years a number of courageous state politicians have proposed a state wide insurance plan for all school districts and municipalities. There was little support for this plan in Harrisburg and across the state. Although, this is exactly what our 501 school districts, 2566 municipalities and 67 counties need today and in the future. Stop the hypocrisy, the state has the power and legal authority to change the laws governing the taxpayer funded health insurance for our taxpayer employees. Now is the time for change, their needs to be a level playing field for all state, school district, county and municipal employees and taxpayers. Everyone needs to be on board or there will never be a settlement in Neshaminy, at least not a fair settlement to the taxpayers, nor should there be.

Presently, our Federal government contributes 75% of the cost of civilian federal employees' health insurance benefits. The taxpayer employees pay 25% of the cost and have a choice of plans that meet their personal or family needs. That amount can come very close to what the private sector is paying for health insurance. On the surface this plan sounds reasonable and equitable. A plan such as this mandated in the state of Pennsylvania, its school districts, counties, and municipalities would help create consistency and equity in this now convoluted mess. This option sounds like an easy answer to our present health insurance dilemma. Paying 25% of the cost for your personal health insurance brings the taxpayer employee closer to the private sector and removes this issue forever.

Over the last decade, I have watched the Federal and State governments, push and legislate, numerous laws that mandate local authorities establish, fund, and enforce their legislation. Unfortunately, this type of trickle down legislation has reached the breaking point on local districts and municipalities. This practice of trickle down legislation squarely places the burden of funding on the local authorities. It is time that our elected, paid, professional politicians take action to reverse this trickle down legislation and enact a state wide health insurance plan for our districts, municipalities, and counties. The basics are already laid out in the Federal plan. This will insure that taxpayer employees have a stake in their health insurance. All the Legislators need to do is replicate this plan. Although, this action will only address one major problem, many more exist.

Why has our state politicians not implemented this very simple health insurance plan? One major concern is that politicians do not want to cut workers, wages, or benefits, especially workers that vote. Most professional politicians "go along to get along", their main focus is to maintain the status quo and avoid decisions that will divide their voting districts, campaign contributors, and party leaders. Heavy lobbying by large influential and financially friendly groups such as the NEA (National Education Association), and AFT (American Federation of Teachers) will not allow such blatant behavior from the politicians it endorses and contributes to. It is far easier and politically safer to raise taxes, then to rattle and disagree with the lobbyist and political insiders. It is political suicide for the elected official to blaze territories that could



potentially upset the consentient flow of campaign funding into the party leaders coffers. It always amazes me that most decisions are based on political contribution and cash flow, rather than doing what is right for the community. Someone needs to represent the taxpayers and do what is right for the communities and its inhabitants not just the chosen few. Will one of our elected, paid, professional politician's step-up and do the right thing, even if it means you need to go outside the political parties comfort zone. Our lawmakers have the power to make this a reality.

Until these items are mandated by the state, numerous municipalities and school districts will continue to spend countless hours, weeks, months, and years in endless negotiation. Always looking over their shoulder, seeing what there neighboring school district or municipality is doing to settle their health care insurance problems. This vicious cycle will continue unless consistency is addressed. Our local authorities' time is better spent trying to improve our educational systems and communities. Presently, according to the Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA), 110 Pennsylvania school districts have their employees contribute nothing, zero towards their personal health care benefits.

Personally, I believe all taxpayer employees should be paying towards their health care premiums and that amount should be equal to what our taxpaying public is paying in the private sector.

This letter is by no means a show of support for the NFT. Nor is it a show of support for our other contract and organized groups within the Neshaminy School District. This letter is my personal view of our local school district, community, county, state and national governing bodies. We have numerous very important issues to address, this would eliminate just one. Who has the courage to stand up, be heard, and make the difficult changes and choices that must be made in order for our communities to flourish once again?

**14. Adjournment of Meeting**

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Ms. Boyle seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns  
Board Secretary