

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
September 14, 2010

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on September 14, 2010 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
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
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mrs. Patricia Boylan
Mr. Kevin Kane

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. Kim Koutsouradis

OTHERS: Approximately 200 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

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 7:14 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

Mr. Koutsouradis was not present for the meeting.

4. Public Comment

Richard Sypek, retired chemical engineer, Langhorne offered his full support to the School Board. Mr. Sypek stated that the economy continues to struggle thereby making it more difficult to negotiate the contract with the NFT. He believes that the "work to contract" action is a form of bullying, which is against the School District policy. Mr. Sypek commended the Superintendent for outlining the duties of teachers and he suggested that the consequences for teachers not complying with the outlined duties be clearly specified. Mr. Sypek speculated why the teachers would allow their union to intimidate them into a "work to contract" action when teachers, by definition, are supposed to be dedicated to teaching.

Gil Howland, retired, of Langhorne questioned the concept of early retirement with free medical coverage. Mr. Howland said that he disagrees with the policy of accumulating days of paid time off. He feels that if the days are not used within the calendar year they should not be carried over.

Mark Shubin, sales executive, Langhorne, thanked the Board for keeping the public informed of the current status of the negotiations. Mr. Shubin acknowledged the profession of teaching as one of the noblest professions. Mr. Shubin declared that the "work to contract" action is morally and ethically wrong and he called on the members of the NFT to tell the leadership that this is not the proper thing to do. He implored the teachers not to bring the negotiations into the classroom and not take their responsibilities lightly. Mr.

Shubin stated that he would like to have an open and public debate on the issues of the teachers' contract. He called on the NFT to come to the public with their views so the parents will know both sides of the issue.

Steve Rodos, substitute teacher, Villages of Flowers Mill, Langhorne, suggested that Neshaminy School District investigate the possibility of an assessment appeal on houses sold since July 1, 2009, similarly to what Central Bucks School District has instituted. Mr. Rodos stated that early retirement should not be covered by the state pension requirements. He said the teachers are well paid and the taxpayers do not owe them any additional money or benefits once they retire. Mr. Rodos urged the Board to stand firm on their original offer to the NFT, which he states is fair under the current economic conditions. Mr. Rodos would like to see negotiations have more focus on the education of the children rather than on the welfare of the union members. Mr. Rodos reiterated his support for computer education in the elementary schools and for full day kindergarten. He thanked Dr. Rattigan for creating a study group to find an approach and cost for implementing a full day kindergarten. The findings of the study indicated that it was not feasible at this time.

Matt Pileggi, computer programmer, Levittown, asked the Board if the \$36.8 million dollar cost of benefits include the cost of benefits provided to retired staff. He wanted to know if so, how much of that amount goes to inactive staff members, or if not, where is that cost accounted for in the budget? Mr. Pileggi further inquired if the new contract would include already retired staff members who are covered under the previous agreement. Mr. Pileggi asked from which financial reserve the District would make up the difference in funds payable to retirees to meet the minimum requirements under the state guarantee of pension plans. Mr. Pileggi would like the Board to explain what options are available to pay for these funds in the future.

Gail Thibodeau, self-employed, Langhorne thanked the School Board for being accessible to parents and taxpayers to answer questions. Ms. Thibodeau states that bringing the contract disputes into the classroom is unacceptable. She said the "work to contract" action is hurting the students. Ms. Thibodeau declared that a teacher would not accept doing the minimum allowed from a student, but that is what that staff is doing under the "work to contract" action. She implored the teachers to remember their commitment to educate and be a positive influence to students. Ms. Thibodeau asked the teachers to make the decision to stop the "work to contract" action and give their best efforts in the classroom.

Louise Boyd, teacher and President of the NFT, Furlong, stated that the NFT has consistently stated that they are available for talks anytime. Ms. Boyd said that on August 25, 2010 with the Board's healthcare broker present, they responded to every question regarding their counter proposal. She said that the NFT anticipated a meeting for August 26th, 27th, 28th or 29th, but the earliest the Board was available was September 23, 2010.

Larry Pastor, Business Executive, Middletown Township, voiced his support for the Board's position. Mr. Pastor declared that the previous contract included outrageous benefits and it should be abolished completely and the new contract should start from scratch. Mr. Pastor urged the Board to continue to inform the public of all details of the negotiations. He estimates that retro pay, which the teachers are requesting, would cost an unacceptable \$10 million dollars to taxpayers and he requested that the Board reject this request. Mr. Pastor stated that the retiree health plan must be eliminated and the Neshaminy taxpayers will not allow any contract that does not include 15% healthcare.

Charles Alfonso, semi-retired sales executive, Langhorne, mentioned that he does not understand how some teachers who are performing at the top of their ability can justify receiving the same compensation as teachers who are not performing. He also expressed his disappointment that Neshaminy test scores rank 98 in the state, while the teachers are getting such a high compensation compared to other districts in the state. Mr. Alfonso stated that it was disgraceful that the classroom walls are bare, the teachers will not attend "Back to School Night," and they are refusing to write letters of recommendations for students. Mr. Alfonso said that these functions, along with others, are part of a teachers' responsibility whether they are

written in a contract or not. Mr. Alfonso concluded by advising the Board to re-write the entire contract under new and reasonable terms and to dismiss the teaching staff and rehire only those teachers who are dedicated to teaching and care about the best interests of the children.

Anne Schmidt, teacher and Vice President of the NFT, Holland, stated that recently the Neshaminy administrators have focused more on classroom aesthetics rather than academics. Ms. Schmidt said that the focus should be on such things as obtaining additional teaching staff, repairing equipment in a timely manner, responding to the requests for special education teachers, providing training for the staff of autistic students, gathering feedback from teachers on the new elementary report card, developing a staffing process for AE teachers that gives building assignments prior to the first week of school and focusing on AYP. Ms. Schmidt called for the Board and Administrators to regain their focus before the anger and resentment grows beyond repair.

5. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Muenker advised the Board on the following:

- A dedication ceremony will be held on Sunday, September 19th, at 1 p.m. for a new Hall of Fame structure in the entrance way to the Harry Franks Football Stadium. The initiative is \$120,000 and is funded entirely by private donors. To help with the cost individuals can purchase engraved bricks for \$100. For more information contact members of the Hall of Fame committee or the Athletic Department at Neshaminy High School.
- Dr. Muenker presented awards commending Dr. Charles D'Alfonso, Mrs. Peggy Lutz, Mrs. Ronnie Walker, and Mr. Scott Prendergast from Lower Southampton Elementary School for their outstanding heroic efforts for saving the life of a faculty member during a medical crisis at Lower Southampton Elementary School, on Tuesday, August 31st, 2010.
- "Back to School Night" will be held Thursday, September 16th, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for all three middle schools. The majority of teachers have indicated that they will be unable to attend. Administrators will be available to welcome parents from 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium.

6. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for October 14th, at 5:30 p.m., and the agenda will include underdevelopment.

b) Educational Development

Mr. O'Connor informed the Board that the next meeting will be held on Monday, September 20th at 6:30 p.m. They will be discussing the PSSA results.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for October 27th.

d) IU Board

Mrs. Cummings informed the Board that the first meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 21st.

e) Education Foundation

Dr. Muenker advised the Board that the Education Foundation met Monday, September 13th, and the upcoming events include the fall basket and the drawing will be held on November 15th. Tickets are \$5.00 each and can be obtained in the District Offices. The proceeds will be used for future scholarships for students pursuing a career in education. The next meeting is scheduled for October 11th, at 8:00 a.m.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis was not present.

g) Technology

Mr. Congdon advised the Board that the first meeting is scheduled for October 20th, at 7:00 p.m., in the Board Room.

7. Public Comment

Carolyn Montgomery, Penndel, housewife, stated that she has served on the PTO Board for Hoover Elementary School for eight years. Ms. Montgomery asked if the teachers do not attend "Back to School Night" if a follow-up Back to School Night would be possible.

Dr. Muenker replied that request would be looked into.

Joan Thomas, retired, Langhorne expressed dismay over the NFT's demand for free healthcare and retroactive pay increases in light of the high unemployment rate that the nation is currently facing. Mrs. Thomas stated that she and her husband currently pay over \$600.00 a month for their healthcare and as a taxpayer she does not understand how the teachers can make outrageous demands.

Jennifer Westin, recently unemployed, Feasterville stated that her son is starting his first year at Poquessing Middle School and she would like to know how parents will be informed of homework assignments and upcoming events since the websites are not currently being maintained and the teachers are not going to attend "Back to School Night."

Denise Banks, self-employed, Hulmeville, recommended that the teachers who are not going to attend "Back to School Night" would at least leave handouts for the parents in an effort to keep communications open between teachers, parents, and students. Additionally, Ms. Banks said she feels the websites need to be kept up-to-date as a communications tool between teachers and parents.

8. Future Topics

None

9. Agenda Development for the September 28, 2010 Public Board Meeting

None

10. Other Board Business

Mr. Paradise addressed the question of the total amount of benefits that was in the working draft of the budget stating that it does include retiree benefits amounting to in excess of \$3 million dollars. Mr. Paradise also responded to the question of whether the new contract would also apply to existing retirees, stating that it does apply to existing retirees. To the question regarding PSERS, Mr. Paradise responded that it is not known at this time what the increase would be, because it is involved in legislative action. Mr. Paradise said that there are no reserved monies from the State of Pennsylvania to pay for these benefits so it would have to be paid from tax revenue putting a tremendous burden on the school district.

Mr. Morris assured the public that he would not be a party to any questionable negotiations. Mr. Morris said that once the School District gets past the difficult negotiation sessions there will then be time to concentrate on important issues such as computer classes. Mr. Morris commented that after three meetings with no offer from the NFT, an offer was presented at the fourth meeting and the written proposal was received by the Board members on September 6th. Mr. Morris declared that it was impossible to have a meeting on August 26th, 27th, 28th or 29th, because the Board needed time to view the data. He stated that it is impossible to consider the offer because the District does not have the additional \$10 million dollars in revenue needed for this proposal. Additionally, Mr. Morris declared that he would not support a retro pay increase for the NFT. Mr. Morris stated that he is an elected representative for the taxpayers of Neshaminy and he takes this responsibility seriously. He said that it would be shameful for any teacher who does not attend "Back to School Night." He noted that the Board has been consistently transparent with their account of the facts and he challenged the NFT to bring to the Board's attention any

discrepancies. Mr. Morris urged the public to make their voices heard through their state representatives and vote for the no strike bill.

Mr. Webb clarified that the written proposal was received on September 3 by the School Board Labor Attorney and subsequently was forwarded to the Board members. Mr. Webb verified that the present negotiations are bargaining off the existing 2002 contract. He stated that any proposed changes would be changes to the old contract. Mr. Webb pointed out that the Neshaminy School District simply does not have the funds to pay for the salary increase that the NFT has requested. Furthermore, Mr. Webb explained that even with an allowable tax increase the additional revenue would not cover what is needed for the salary increase. Mr. Webb stated that the Board will not support a retro pay increase because the funds would have to come out of this year's budget, which is impossible. Mr. Webb acknowledged his support for Dr. Muenker for his professionalism and accomplishments during these difficult times.

Mrs. Cummings implored the teachers to prepare letters of recommendations for senior students. Mrs. Cummings stated that the teachers should do the right thing for the benefit of the students.

11. Adjournment of Meeting

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Morris seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary