

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING
PUBLIC WORK SESSION MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
September 9, 2008

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public work session on September 9, 2008, in the Board Room of the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Richard M. Eccles, President
Mr. Frank Koziol, Vice President
Mr. Joseph Blasch
Ms. Irene Boyle
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. William D. O'Connor
Dr. William H. Spitz
Mr. Ritchie Webb

ADMINISTRATORS:

Mr. Paul J. Kadri
Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Dr. Sandra Costanzo
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise
Dr. Jacqueline Rattigan

BOARD MEMBER NOT PRESENT:

Mr. Kim Koutsouradis

OTHERS: Approximately 40 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Anita E. Walls

SOLICITOR:

Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

1. Call to Order

Mr. Eccles called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

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

3. Announcements

None.

4. Public Comment

Mrs. Chris Coia, Feasterville, PA, advised that the last meeting was appalling. Mrs. Coia advised that by January 1st there will be bullying laws on the books for schools, but with this Board there needs to be one in place for this Board. If there is an issue with the packets arriving in a timely manner, please do not sit at the Board meeting and state that I didn't get it in time to read same and then abstain from votes. This is a waste of everyone's time and energy. It is appalling since the Verizon customers get to watch a lot of public meetings, and it is an embarrassment to know that people in so many other school districts can sit and watch this meeting and see what goes on. Mrs. Coia feels that the latest books for college selection located in the Guidance Office of the High School are dated back to 2004. This needs to be up-dated. This is very disturbing. Mrs. Coia thanked people at the high school for getting her son's schedule straightened out. Mrs. Coia is still awaiting answers from people at the high school and she is becoming very impatient. Hopefully, someone will get her the answers that she needs. Mr. Kadri was copied in the e-mail and Dr. Heble spoke with her on Friday. Mrs. Coia is still waiting for answers.

Mr. Ed Kisselback, President of the Neshaminy Youth Wrestling Club, stated that the organization traditionally gets about 100 kids each year and is a sport that instills self discipline, self confidence, and a hard work effort which hopefully carries over into their academics which is strongly emphasized in the club. Neshaminy wrestling carries the Neshaminy logo which is a conscience choice with regards to the jackets, hats, sports

wear, etc. and it instills Neshaminy pride. It is an outstanding year for wrestling right now. The new coach has a great level of cooperation between the youth club high school, and the high school boosters. There is an amazing bright future for Neshaminy wrestling. There has been a great influx of younger families which are moving in. The teams are part of a new league called the Inter County Wrestling League which is literally nine times larger than the league they used to be a part of. The teams are expanding, however, the facility, Neshaminy Middle School is now gone. The district has been contacted and the Administration is being very helpful in finding the teams a facility, such a Gym 1 at the high School, however, only two mats can fit into the area, which could be space prohibited and when other districts come to participate at Neshaminy for matches. Mr. Kisselback has gone out and gotten mats donated, however, location is still an issue. Gym 3 in the High School would be perfect and also, Maple Point would be a good location. The wrestling season is six weeks long, starting January 10th and ends February 14th. Looking to get two to three home meets. Travel time is approximately 1 hour to get to meets. The league traditionally wrestles in the morning; however, the team will work around time restraints. Mr. Kisselback hoped that something could be arranged for location in order that everyone would be acceptable with the accommodations.

Mr. Solis Basen, Villages of Flowers Mills, Langhorne, PA, thanked all the individuals involved with the high school construction project for keeping same on schedule and budget. Mr. Basen further thanked the transition team on the closing and transfer of students from Neshaminy Middle School. Mr. Basen hopes that the Board and Superintendent get their act together. The Administration in the last three years has seen the budget go from \$140M to \$170M an increase of \$30M. During the last three years our enrollment has dropped ten percent. Staff has increased even with a large number of retirees. The PSSA results and the ratings of the 50 school district area show a drop to 44 from the top ten. That was published in the Philadelphia magazine. Two of the school districts within the 50 school districts had a median salary of over \$80,000 all the rest of the districts were around \$60,000-\$70,000 for a teacher. The cost per student for education has reached an all time high of over \$15,000 per student. Total costs at the special needs school is about \$29,000 to educate the student. To outsource this, these students could be educated by a private school which just opened in Warminster for \$8,750 plus transportation. That is a big drop from \$29,000. Work on that topic should be a priority this year. All the ratings and costs will be reflected in lower real estate values and tax increases. Mr. Basen stated let's go Neshaminy, let's get back on top.

Mrs. Lisa Reiser, Langhorne, PA, thanked Mr. Kadri for his detailed presentation at the last meeting regarding PSSA scores and No Child Left Behind, as well as the efforts he and his staff are making to keep the public informed. It is unfortunate when information is taken out of context and used in ignorance to discredit the district and Superintendent. It is beyond unfortunate when the negative remarks come from our own Board President. After such a thorough presentation by Mr. Kadri, Mrs. Reiser can only conclude that he was not listening, did not understand, or just plain did not care. Mrs. Reiser suspects that it was some combination of all of the above. His remarks were planned and rehearsed and it was disgraceful. Mrs. Reiser hoped that some of the Board members would be able to attend the upcoming PSBA conference which some of the student's are hoping to attend. There are a number of workshop titles which stood out as likely to benefit board members and the district in general: Transforming the strategic plan into a blue print for student achievement, Data teams – Who, When, Why Where and How, A district wide approach to student achievement for analysis, Family and Community Connections with schools enhancing student achievement for all children, Team Work the key to a Successful District Operation, the Government's Mosaic - How a highly effective Board/Superintendent Relationship Foster Top Academic Achievement and National Recognition in Era of No Child Left Behind. In addition, Council Rock will be speaking about how they made an investment of \$150,000 in capital improvements to reduce energy consumption by more than 30% and will save the district over \$3M. Something to think about. Speaking as a parent and community member Mrs. Reiser would prefer to hear how initiatives are being taken to get the information you need to effectively get the job done, rather than whining, complaining, and bashing your Administration. Wow Mrs. Reiser with the efforts of being informed, educated, think outside the box and plan for the future of Neshaminy children as Mr. Kadri has done time and time again.

5. **Items for Discussion**
 - a) **Update on School Opening**

Mr. Kadri briefed the Board and community on the following:

- Exceptional opening of school has taken place. Work behind the scenes has been remarkable. Busing, construction, students, staff, everyone worked together as a team.
- Staff is enthusiastic and students are ready to learn
- Air conditioning at the High School presented a minor glitch in the new wing but is presently being addressed
- Technology was operational on day one
- Transportation Department has done a wonderful job accommodating all students
- Enrollment is flat from the year before, which represents slightly more students than anticipated being enrolled – Some class sizes are slightly larger than expected
- The staggered opening at the Middle School level was very well received
- Maple Point class transitioning is working well – bus dismissal is going well/safety is of utmost concern
- Student attitudes are very positive
- Girl's soccer as a spring sport at the middle schools is being assessed at the present time
- High School schedules were ahead of schedule from last year – Dr. McGee and all Administrators at the high school have done a fine job concerning the student schedules
- High School Guidance has been increased in order to provide more personal touch by the staff. Every student will be aware of the assistance offered and where to go to get different information

Mr. Kadri advised that the emergency contact information on record for each student will be updated. This is a critical part of the district and a new automatic dialing system is being installed within the district to allow for the auto dialing of messages for emergency situations, i.e. snow cancellations, information purposes, and verifying numbers for validity. The district will begin the new pilot program within the next week to clean up the data base of phone numbers.

Mr. Kadri advised that fundraising efforts to obtain a new piano at the high school have been going well. Mr. Kadri was advised that the goal is very close to being reached and within the next month hopefully, a new piano will be placed at the high school to benefit the students.

Mr. Kadri noted that the Neshaminy Middle School Indian is located in the Neshaminy Middle School auditorium. Discussions have taken place regarding moving same to the high school and what the costs would be. The statue is currently made of paper mache type material and would probably need to be cast in bronze in order to be placed in a more heavily trafficked area. The quote of \$12,000 was received to cast and create a model in bronze on the statute. If interest is expressed, fundraising could begin.

Mr. Kadri advised that student achievement is the highest priority for the district this year. Possibly a consulting service could be brought in to assist the staff to be able to gain a level of expertise. State regulations require that a school improvement plan be submitted for the high school and presented to the Board for approval by October 14th. Mr. Kadri advised that very specific communications about individual students and their performance is the movement that the district is looking toward.

6. Items for Approval

a) Overnight Trips

Dr. Heble presented the following trip:

- i) Neshaminy High School – PSBA Student Delegate Program/Leadership Conference – October 15-17, 2008 Hershey, PA

Dr. Heble advised that the convention provides excellent information for the Student Council Officers. They will return with ideas to implement for the school year.

Dr. Spitz inquired regarding trip cost.

There was Board consensus for the trip.

b) Approval of Revised Board Policies

- Policy 522 – Student Wellness
- **Policy 126 – Facilities Dedication**

Dr. Rattigan presented the following revised policies to the Board. Regarding Policy 522 an addition has been made that the Food Services Director shall report to the Board periodically regarding the fiscal implications of implementing this policy.

Regarding Policy 126, it contains steps to follow in implementing the policy and will be available in the District Offices. The written nomination must contain examples explaining how the Nominee meets each of the criteria listed in Section III, Number 2 of this policy and the group is charged with the responsibility of verifying the information regarding criteria noted in the written nomination.

Mr. Eccles noted that approximately two years ago he brought up the idea of a wall at Neshaminy High School honoring employees and people who have done an outstanding job within the district. Many people deserve recognition and space could be running out. Would there be Board support for such an idea.

Mr. O'Connor noted that many people are worthy of praise and the district cannot just keep renaming facilities, wings, auditoriums, etc. However, people require acknowledgement and this type of wall could be a great consideration.

Mr. Eccles noted that possibly something could also be done for the veterans.

There was Board support to take the issue to the policy committee for further consideration.

c) Bids/Budget Transfers

No bids/budgets transfers.

7. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Kadri provided the following report:

- Neshaminy High School was recognized by the Pennsylvania Governor's Institute on Financial Education – Mr. Paul Coleman was in attendance. The test was administered to 46,000 high school students. Neshaminy High School had more students score in the top 25% on the test than any other school in PA and was ranked as one of the strongest in the nation.
- SPIN (Parent Group at the High School) is hosting a Question and Answer Meeting to speak about PSSA scores on Tuesday, September 16, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.
- Ferderbar student was recognized by Waste Management with over 4,000 Entries. The student is in grade one and was selected as the best.
- Barbara Markowitz, Director of Financial Services, received a Certificate of Achievement Plaque from the Government Finance Officers Association

8. Committee Reports

a) Board Policies

Ms. Boyle advised that a meeting will take place on September 17th at 6:00 p.m. Discussions will include personnel selection policy, participation of Board members, wellness policy and PSSA requirement for graduation and no-bid vendors.

b) Educational Development

Dr. Spitz advised that a meeting is scheduled for October 7th at 6:00 p.m. and discussions will include the school improvement plan mentioned earlier by Mr. Kadri.

c) Finance/Facilities

Mr. Webb advised that a meeting will take place on September 25th in the Board Room at 7:00 p.m.

d) IU Board

Ms. Boyle advised that the next meeting is scheduled for September 16th at 7:00 p.m. Cost savings initiatives will be discussed, i.e. medical benefits and alternative programs.

e) Educational Foundation

Mrs. O'Connor advised that a booth will be at homecoming with tickets being sold for fundraising purposes: Tickets - \$5.00 each or 3 for \$10.00

1st Prize – Eagles Tickets, etc

2nd Prize – Flyers tickets, etc.

3rd & 4th Prize – Gift Certificates to Red Lobster

Winner will be drawn after the third quarter at the Homecoming Game.

f) Technical School

Mr. Koutsouradis was not present.

g) Technology

Mr. Blasch advised that the next meeting is scheduled for September 15th. Agenda is being developed.

9. Public Comment

No Comment.

10. Future Topics

Mr. O'Connor was concerned about some areas of high school which had water concerns getting to certain portions of the building.

Mr. Blasch suggested that the original Indian statue could be placed in a glass case and transported to the high school for display rather than bronzing same.

Mr. Blasch inquired whether it was necessary to hire a consultant under the PDE requirement and are there state funds available for same. Mr. Kadri advised that the state has not yet determined how much money would be allocated to the schools. Mr. Kadri is moving as quickly as possible and details should be forthcoming at the next meeting. Improvement is necessary in certain areas.

Mr. Koziol stated that at the last meeting he spoke about the Senior Citizens Tax Assistance Program. Mr. Koziol calculated the basis if adjusted over the past thirty years. Mr. Koziol distributed same to all Board members. Mr. Koziol is looking for an increase in same. Mr. Koziol suggested that same be discussed at the Finance and Facilities meeting.

Mr. Paradise also provided a Board handout which shows that the program has been enhanced eight times and it was done to mirror the state program. However, the most recent changes have occurred due to the gambling revenues. The program starts in January and runs until June. Changes would need to occur very soon.

There was board consensus to make same an agenda item for the Finance meeting.

Mr. Eccles advised that a parent with two children approached him the other day and explained that she was having trouble paying bills and making ends meet. Mr. Eccles suggested that she try the district because they are always looking for substitutes, summer help, etc. The lady could not afford the sixty dollars for the background checks. Mr. Eccles proposed that the district attempt to do something in this type of situation. Mr. Eccles asked for the Board support in this matter and if Mr. Profy could provide an opinion regarding same. Mr. Webb suggested that employees should be reimbursed for said amount after they have worked a specific amount of time. Mr. Eccles stated that this is a hardship and the people need to be able to have proof of need.

Mr. Profy stated that a policy or program would need to be in place regarding same and could be waived if or rebated depending upon the status of the person making the application.

Mr. Blasch suggested that the district could pay the fees up front and then said fees could be deducted from the person's pay over a period of time.

There was Board consensus that Mr. Profy and Dr. Muenker look into the matter further.

Mr. Eccles suggested that public meetings need to take place in various school locations and not just at Maple Point. This would give all Board members the opportunity to visit the various schools. This would take the Board back into the community. Dr. Spitz stated that this would be very positive; however, the negative aspect is the televising capabilities. Mr. Eccles' is also concerned that many people do not want to drive up towards Maple Point in the evening.

Mr. Paradise advised that anything can be done, but a cost will be involved to make same mobile.

There was Board consensus to place same on the agenda for the next meeting to discuss further.

11. Agenda Development for the September 23, 2008 Public Meeting

12. Other Board Business

Mr. Webb thanked the Administration for getting the packages to Board members on Thursday.

Mr. Webb updated everyone that the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers and representatives from the Board of School Directors met in a Negotiations Session on September 3, 2008. This was the 11th meeting, including three meetings conducted in front of a State appointed fact finder. This was also the third meeting since July in the presence of a State mediator. The focus of the latest meetings has been on health benefits. The Board has continued to push for changes which will lower health care expenditures and have a major impact on the District's budget. Another meeting is scheduled for September 24, 2008 and discussions will continue at that time.

Mr. Webb stated that he received a call from a citizen which was concerned about the use of the word "subgroup" and that it refers to children. Mr. Webb noted that it was not meant to be taken in a negative way. Mr. Webb stated that benchmarks are set by the state and schools that do not achieve 56% or 63% performance thresholds can still meet AYP by meeting the safe harbor requirements. There are schools that did not make AYP, whose grades are much lower than Neshaminy, but their subgroups improved. Mr. Webb was just looking for clarification.

Mr. Profy requested an Executive Session after the meeting and adjournment can take place since no Board action will be necessary.

Mrs. Cummings suggested that since the issue of school closures will be addressed again this year, it would be a good idea if discussions were to take place as soon as possible so time restraints are not occurring.

Dr. Spitz noted that the discussion of said closures should probably begin in the Facilities and Finance meetings. Mr. Eccles would like to see same put on the agenda for the Finance meetings. Mrs. Cummings would like to have a committee formed.

Mr. Kadri noted that enrollment numbers, McKissick Report, framework of facilities, upgrades to facilities, etc. would need to be reviewed by the Board to set a direction and level of expectations and from there create a committee to get feedback.

Mr. Blasch suggested that an Ad Hoc committee be created to make a recommendation to the Board. Mr. O'Connor questioned would it be a focus on economics or education.

There was Board consensus to place same on the agenda so discussions could occur.

Mr. Koziol noted that this should also include discussion on the moving of the Tawanka program.

Mr. Kadri noted that criteria needs to be defined and that will become the framework on which same is evaluated.

Mrs. Cummings inquired whether it would be necessary to have McKissick return to refresh the Board. Mr. Kadri stated that it would probably be necessary to have that occur at a time in the future.

Mr. Eccles stated that it would be so much easier if he came to every board meeting and agreed with everything that was being said. Board members do not come here to be yelled at and called names. Mr. Eccles read the following excerpt from the National School Board's Association:

"You are elected to speak for the parents, businesses and local taxpayers, to represent their aspirations, values and priorities in educating the community's children. You speak on behalf of the public's interest as a whole, not from the perspective of an individual or special interest group."

Mr. Eccles stated that if he were grading this district on his children he would give it an "A", because my kids are doing great, but that is not what he was elected for. Mr. Eccles stated that he represents the whole community and if he needs to say something, he will say it. Is it premeditated, the word was used. Actually, Mr. Eccles thinks of a lot of the things while he is attending the meeting. We want to educate our children. Mr. Eccles will stand up for subgroups and the economically disadvantaged. Mr. Eccles will continue to fight for them. Fourteen and fifteen percent drops in these groups makes Mr. Eccles upset. Why should he care, he was elected to do a job. Mr. Eccles still disagrees with some things from the last meeting. Go to www.PAAYP and pull up the results, the community will see that problems exist. Mr. Eccles is not bashing Mr. Kadri. Mr. Eccles is concerned. Mr. Eccles commented that we have Title 1 schools that if they don't make it next year, will move into school choice. Hopefully, this will be discussed on the 16th. Mr. Eccles will continue to fight and voice his opinion for the students who need same. For the students that don't Mr. Eccles is excited for. Mr. Eccles stated that the bashing of him only makes him fight harder for the underprivileged and those that need the most help.

13. Adjournment

Mr. Blasch moved that the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Webb seconded same. Mr. Eccles adjourned the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Anita E. Walls
Board Secretary