

NESHAMINY

Policy would prohibit solicitors from contributing to campaigns

Most Lower Bucks school districts said they don't have such a policy, administrators said.

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The Neshaminy school board might soon tell potential district solicitors to put their checkbooks back in their pockets.

The board recently agreed to have its policy committee research enacting a rule that would prohibit future district solicitors from contributing to school board candidates' campaigns.

While there was no vote taken, the board members came to a consensus.

The idea was suggested by newly sworn-in board member William O'Connor. He said he wants the district to avoid getting involved in pay-to-play tactics where campaign contributors get lucrative contracts.

Although school boards in Pennsylvania are obligated to hire the lowest bidder for most contracts, such as those for construction projects, the district solicitor is an exception to that process, officials said.

"Good legal counsel is invaluable," O'Connor said. "We as a school board should do everything possible to give the public confidence that our appointment of a solicitor is not tied into campaign contributions."

This year, district solicitor Thomas J. Profy III personally contributed \$1,500 to a campaign to reelect board members Richard Eccles and Ritchie Webb, according to county documents.

Profy has declined to comment on the contributions. But Eccles previously defended the board's hiring of Profy as the best choice and not for political gain.

To reduce candidates' dependency on those funds, O'Connor also suggested that the district let contenders use the district's cable TV channel to communicate with voters.

Administrators in most Lower Bucks school districts, including Morrisville, Bristol, Bensalem and Pennsbury, said they neither have such a policy on campaign contributions nor plan to establish one.

Eccles, the Neshaminy school board president, added that he wants the committee to take a look at other group contributions, such as those from construction workers.

After the committee studies the plan, a proposal should be presented to the board for consideration, officials said.

"If we work together on this as a bipartisan measure, we can craft a solution that will help to ease the public concerns over pay-to-play without creating an advantage for any one political party," O'Connor said.