

## NESHAMINY

## School closings still on table

*Senior citizens were disappointed that the board will not consider closing an elementary school.*

By RACHEL CANELLI COURIER TIMES

If you thought the Neshaminy school board wasn't going to consider closing a middle school next school year, you were wrong.

Since to close a school the district must follow the state's strict timeline, the board Tuesday night reopened that discussion to keep those options on the table while they still can.

In addition to considering closing the Tawanka Learning Center, the board will also look at closing Neshaminy Middle School. That school was scheduled to close after the high school's renovations are complete next year and ninth-graders move there, officials said.

Hour-long public hearings to discuss closing each school will be held starting at 6:30 p.m. March 14 in the Maple Point Middle School auditorium in Middletown. The board can't make a decision until 90 days after that meeting, said district solicitor Thomas J. Profy III.

Administrators are expecting a large number of retirements this year and they believe consolidating schools now could make for a smoother transition. That also wouldn't prevent the board from continuing to pursue closing other schools in the future, officials said.

More than a few hundred people filled Maple Point Middle School's auditorium where the meeting was held to fit the crowd.

Just as board members disagreed over which schools to close, the audience, too, was split between a large population of senior citizens who claim they can't afford taxes and parents who don't want to see schools close.

Parents like Karen Gatewood of Middletown said they don't disagree with realigning the schools, they just want more information.

"I hope before you make a decision, you listen to the [experienced] people you hired," she said. "It will be a mess if you just make a decision to appease [a certain group] of people."

With declining enrollment, decreasing investment income, and a \$12.7 million deficit, Neshaminy has to look at consolidating underused schools, or cutting programs, said Joseph Paradise, business administrator.

The district can't legally raise taxes to fill that budget gap, which could cost some communities as much as \$1,000, Paradise added.

Other residents pointed out that many senior citizens on fixed incomes could be forced out of their houses if their taxes keep going up.

"Put a proposal out there. Give yourselves [the time] to look into [this] properly," said retired Middletown resident Marvin Dickler.

Last month, the majority of the board voted not to close a middle school or elementary building in the next school year because they didn't have data on redistricting.

The board did, however, agree to consider closing the Lower Southampton building where the district's alternative program, Tawanka, is housed. That program will still be maintained elsewhere in the district, and two undisclosed education facilities have already expressed interest in the property, according to Superintendent Paul Kadri.

But a few board members didn't think that was enough. Frank Koziol proposed the board look at closing an elementary school, specifically Herbert Hoover, to save a total of more than \$3 million to help ease the burden on senior citizens. The majority of the board, though, disagreed and did not support that motion.

"I think it's premature," William Spitz said. "It's unfair to ask us to select a particular building in such a short period of time."





Langhorne resident Charles Lauble Jr. discusses the Neshaminy school district during Tuesday night's board meeting at Maple Point Middle School. STEVE GENGLER / **COURIER TIMES**