

NESHAMINY

Teacher talks center on health care

The next negotiation session is scheduled for Dec. 15, officials said.

By RACHEL CANELLI

After another health care-focused negotiation session late last week, the Neshaminy School Board and the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers still don't have a deal, officials said Monday.

The parties were supposed to review plan comparison information from Independence Blue Cross, but they didn't have all the information needed from that insurance company, said board member and spokesman Ritchie Webb.

The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching union president Louise Boyd for comment.

Webb said the board and the teachers should receive more data from the insurance company for their next bargaining meeting on Dec. 15.

The board wants the teachers to start contributing a percentage toward their insurance premiums, while the teachers have so far proposed no change to the current package.

Although teachers do not pay any percentage of their health care premiums, they do pay \$15 for co-pays and \$5 and \$20 for generic and brand-name drugs, respectively, through Personal Choice, as reported by the district's human resources department.

Boyd previously said that health care was the only issue the board was willing to discuss. Webb has responded, "Without some kind of movement in insurance, there's no money to do anything else."

In June, neither side formally accepted a fact-finder's recommended three-year teacher labor deal that called for a 3 percent salary increase but no change to the health care package, administrators said.

Almost five months later, the teachers continue to work under the contract that expired at the end of June without any salary increases. The sessions are being held under state-appointed mediator Jill Leeds-Rivera, officials said.

"Once we get something going, hopefully it will all fall in line," said Webb, who conceded that the talks are moving slowly. "I believe it will take time. I don't know how long it will last, but I'm optimistic that we will come to some type of agreement in the future."

Rachel Canelli can be reached at 215-949-4191 or .