

Stop the gravy train

Free health benefits in Neshaminy are out of line.

Latest word out of the secret contract negotiations for Neshaminy school teachers is the union is holding out for continued free health benefits. The union president also expressed indignation that teachers "are going on [73] days ... without a contract."

The teachers should count their blessings.

If district negotiators do the right thing, Neshaminy teachers should be in the final days of free health benefits. And so every day the teachers work without a contract is another day of benefits they don't have to contribute a penny to, although they do pay \$15 for doctors' visits, and \$5 and \$20 respectively for generic and brand-name drugs.

Still, what a deal!

Folks working in the private sector haven't seen benefits like that since the Bush administration — the first Bush administration. Private sector workers long ago started footing the bill for employer-provided health insurance and now typically cover about 25 percent of a plan's cost.

As those contributions have risen and salary increases have remained relatively flat, most regular people haven't gotten a real raise in years. And so it is both thoughtless and insulting for union negotiators to demand that taxpayers continue to foot the entire bill for teachers' health benefits. Hey, the '80s are over!

The school board should hang tough on this issue. Indeed, public employees at all levels should be dragged into the real world where workers help shoulder the health insurance burden. The alternative in the private sector is that workers have no work because employers can't stay in business.

Likewise, public officials have to torpedo the bottomless-well mindset that has yielded not just overly generous health insurance for public employees but knock-your-socks-off pension plans and lax rules about vacation and sick time that enable workers to compile small fortunes for redemption upon departure.

This drain on already strapped taxpayers has to end.