

NESHAMINY

Board members won't be allowed to call in votes

A motion to allow school board directors to cast their votes by phone narrowly failed.

By **RACHEL CANELLI**
STAFF WRITER

A policy that would've allowed Neshaminy school board members to participate in meetings by phone was disconnected Tuesday night.

The vote failed 4-5 with only board members William O'Connor, William Spitz, Susan Cummings and Joseph Blasch voting yes.

The process would've let no more than one director per meeting call into a public board meeting and vote via phone. And each board member would have been able to make such a request only once a year through the board president or superintendent, according to the policy.

O'Connor, who works in sales and marketing, requested the guideline so he wouldn't have to miss too many board meetings for unexpected business trips. He wanted the rule to allow two directors per meeting to vote by phone twice a year since his job takes him a few times a year to places like South Carolina, Puerto Rico and Germany. O'Connor said he missed two or three meetings in the last year.

Board member Richard Eccles expressed concerns that board members would miss too many meetings. But district solicitor Thomas J. Profy III said it wouldn't count as an absence if a board member participated via phone.

The policy would've given the board the ability to increase those numbers in the future, administrators said.

Profy also said the board member participating remotely could not have been used to reach a quorum. At least five other board members must be present to hold a meeting, said Profy.

Board member William Spitz favored the remote participation, which he believed could be monitored and adjusted to avoid abuse.

The concept already is used in some districts, including Council Rock, where a board member recently participated by phone for more than one meeting after having surgery, officials said.

And Neshaminy allowed board member Blasch to attend an executive session by phone, Blasch said.

Representatives of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association said 35 school districts across the state have adopted similar protocols.

After not allowing a councilman who was on military duty overseas to vote from his post, the Tullytown council later agreed to let members on active military duty vote by phone early last year.

But Neshaminy board member Frank Koziol argued the policy isn't necessary. By his calculations, only five votes out of more than 200 in the past few years failed due to a director's absence.

Board President Ritchie Webb said he could see why the policy might be beneficial, but he voted against the policy, too, because voting over the phone doesn't allow directors to look residents in the eyes. Webb was also concerned about members hearing public comment. Rachel Canelli can be reached at 215-949-4191 or .