

Court sides with district over salary increases

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NESHAMINY

Based on a recent court ruling, Neshaminy teachers won't be getting salary increases for earning academic credits until a new contract is reached, the school board announced Monday.

The Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania's opinion issued earlier this month upholds an order by the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board. That board dismissed a charge in September 2008 by the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers that the district engaged in unfair labor practices when the board refused to adjust the educators' salaries for earned academic credits after the contract expired in June 2008, according to court documents.

The union appealed with the state court the state labor relations board's refusal to issue a complaint against the district, court records said.

Like many public school districts, Neshaminy provides salary increases for experience and education. Academic credits are usually reviewed in July, October and March. Once contracts expire, though, many school districts usually freeze salaries, providing no annual percentage increase, or additional increments for longevity or education, said district officials.

As they negotiate, teachers and school boards are expected to maintain the "status quo." That means the employer must continue operations-including paying for health care in Neshaminy's case-and the employees have to keep working, court documents said.

The union alleged that the board was obligated to adjust its members' salaries for credits earned during the year. But the court said the status quo doesn't include periodic wage adjustments. "Finding no error by the [state labor relations] board," the court said, "we affirm its order."

Neshaminy educators argued that earning academic credits is different from longevity pay because the teachers choose to work for those credits, while experience is gained over time. The court disagreed saying the union members also choose to remain working for the same district.

Until the two sides agree to a settlement, no increases are due, the court said. And the board already withdrew its offer to make those increases retroactive for the 2008-09 school year, said board President Ritchie Webb.

The newspaper was unsuccessful Monday in reaching union President Louise Boyd for comment. Webb said the school board is pleased.

"We're very happy with the court ruling," he said. "That's been our position all along. Until we can negotiate a fair and reasonable contract, there will be no increases. It really has nothing to do with whether the teachers are worth the money. We just don't have the money."

It was unclear Monday if the union could also appeal the court's decision. No future bargaining sessions are scheduled, Webb said.

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