

## NESHAMINY

## Residents express views on contracts

By *RACHEL CANELLI*  
STAFF WRITER

Many are behind the school board's position to stick to its guns. Some, though, think you can't attach a price tag to a good education.

Dozens packed the Neshaminy school board meeting Tuesday night to express concern over financial issues, the lack of a new teachers contract, and the district possibly closing an elementary school in the future and implementing full-day kindergarten.

Among the several speakers, a few residents said taxpayers just couldn't afford the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers' requests. They said they were outraged that the 700-plus educators turned down a deal offering a 3 percent annual salary increase, including steps, and asking them to pay 15, 16 and 17 percent to their health care premiums.

"We're not an unlimited pot of gold," said Sy Goldstein, a retiree and Flowers Mill resident. "I don't mind paying taxes. It's important to have good teachers, but we can't just keep paying whatever people ask."

But a couple others pointed out that the educators deserve a good deal and supported the district working with the educators. They think the district should at least consider the union's counter offer of a 6 percent annual salary increase and keeping the health care package status quo with teachers paying nothing toward their health care premiums.

"We all know that teachers are the most important part of running a school," said Stacy Kirsh, 33, a Middletown mother and Pennsbury teacher. "It is because of teachers all of us can read, write or compute math problems. It is time respect is shown to this very valuable group of professionals. In order to attract good teachers, we need to compensate them and treat well. It is time to meet with the teachers on a regular basis in good faith to settle this contract."

Some audience members included teachers wearing their blue union T-shirts and white stickers displaying the number of days they've been working without a deal — 239.

"I do not believe in employee bashing because of salaries," said Steve Rodos, a retired attorney, Flowers Mill resident and Neshaminy High School substitute teacher. "An out of ordinary proposal should be made to settle the current impasse. There's a lot of give and take in negotiations. No one side should give everything, and no one side should take everything. It must work both ways."

While Middletown resident and businessman Larry Pastor, 54, said he thinks Neshaminy teachers are dedicated, professional and deserve a fair wage, he called the educators' requests outrageous and said they're already overly compensated.

"How dare you," said Pastor, referring to the teachers. "(The union) is assaulting the intellect and pocket books of (the people) in this district. We're all coping with significant increases annually for health care, yet the teachers ask for more and more. The union ought to be embarrassed."

Pastor added that he hopes the community speaks up because he believes that most taxpayers are behind the board. He also asked that the board conduct bargaining sessions publicly.

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





Dozens of residents attended Tuesday night's Neshaminy school board meeting to air their views on teacher contract negotiations.

BILL FRASER

**STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**