

Parents protest teachers' demands

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Neshaminy

While the school board again said the teachers' protest was illegal, the educators said they just want to negotiate a fair deal.

After Neshaminy teachers picketed the district's elementary and middle back to school nights, several parents Wednesday night decided the high school event was their turn.

Even though members of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers once again held signs requesting negotiations and fliers for a fair contract outside the building, a dozen parents stood at the Middletown high school's driveway with posters of their own.

While some drivers honked their horns in support, a few gave the parents thumbs down.

"Their timing couldn't be more inappropriate," Middletown dad Ron Liedtka said of the educators' protests.

A self-employed business owner, Liedtka can't afford \$2,000 a month for health insurance, so he goes without.

"I'm not saying they're not worth it," he said. "We just don't have it. This is a slap in the face. It's either ignorance, arrogance or greed."

But union President Louise Boyd said she was once again proud of the educators and their display of solidarity.

"The parents have the right to protest as they see fit," she said. "Our point is not to get people upset, but to get back to the table. We want some real negotiating."

While the school board asked the union members not to position themselves on school property since it's a violation of state law, the police weren't called because the educators picketed peacefully.

Board President Ritchie Webb said he was disappointed that more parents didn't protest. But, he said, "they're probably afraid their kids will be retaliated against."

"I think it's intimidating and aggravating to parents to see them protesting," he added. "It takes away from the students and makes it about the teachers."

Boyd called Webb's retaliation comments one of the most hurtful things a public official could say about educators.

"He should be ashamed," she said. "The best thing about our jobs is the kids."

The teachers have been working without a new agreement since June 2008. The last bargaining session was in August and no more meetings have been scheduled, Webb said.

He added the board wants to negotiate, but without concessions to health insurance, there's no reason to get together.

The board's position has been an annual 3 percent salary increase, including steps, and a requirement that employees pay 15 percent, 16 percent and 17 percent toward health care premiums over three years. Although the union rejected that offer, the district's administrators in March accepted a deal for themselves that mirrored that contract, officials said.

The board claims the union's proposal remains unchanged, with a request for a total 6 percent annual salary hike, including steps, and a requirement for no change to the medical insurance package, said Webb. Boyd has denied those claims, but she hasn't revealed the union's offer.

"We want the public to be aware of what's going on and how ridiculously unfair it is," said Susan Loncosky, a Middletown mother of three. "It's not personal. My sister teaches in the district. We're not saying we don't like the teachers. We're talking about their demands."

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