

## Seniors question board president on contract talks

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Neshaminy

Officials are working on scheduling another negotiation session.

Just in case they weren't already in the loop, the Neshaminy school board President Ritchie Webb Wednesday night met with some senior citizens in the district to fill them in on the board's side of the teacher contract talks.

During a forum with more than 30 residents, Webb explained the board's position and answered questions at the Villages of Flowers Mill in Langhorne. Union President Louise Boyd was also invited to the event, but declined since the union's policy is not to negotiate in public. She didn't comment further.

"(Teachers are) great people, who are dedicated to the students and the community," said Webb. "But if we can't get them to work with the board, we'll face even tougher decisions next budget."

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.

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.

Several residents said they didn't understand why the board's offer's still on the table if the educators already turned it down.

Other residents said the teachers are being reasonable. Former district educator Frank Champine said that the only way to reach a compromise is at the bargaining table, but there have been limited negotiation sessions.

"For the first time, talks are being conducted in the papers," he said. "It's a disservice to the community."

The district Web site says the union proposed a Personal Choice PC20 package, a plan that would cost educators \$10 for generic drugs and \$25 for brand name prescriptions, and zero premium contributions. The board offered a Personal Choice PC20/30/70 package, a plan that would cost teachers \$5 for generics and \$30 for brand name drugs, administrators said.

A woman who did not want to give her name said, especially in this economy, the teachers need to contribute to their health insurance premiums.

Webb also said the teachers want to expand the retirement incentive, which includes free health care for employees and their spouses until age 65, to a \$30,000 cash payment. The board proposed to eliminate both of those options, he said.

The teachers are working with frozen salaries under a contract that expired in June 2008, but the cost of their benefits to the district continues to rise. Webb said officials are working on scheduling another meeting to discuss a contract.

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