

District, teachers remain at odds

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Neshaminy

The school board president said the teachers think the district's being unfair because they aren't getting what they want.

When parents attended back-to-school nights at Neshaminy middle schools Thursday night, their son's or daughter's classroom teacher wasn't the only educator greeting them.

Other members of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers were outside the middle schools, wearing their union shirts and handing out fliers regarding contract negotiations with the school board.

While the educators' handouts encouraged parents to urge the district and school board members to negotiate a fair deal, board President Ritchie Webb said he was embarrassed for the teachers.

Union President Louise Boyd, though, said the educators' goal was to get out information to the community and she was proud of her members for doing so.

"I am not surprised by the display of unwavering resolve that was displayed last night by our membership," Boyd said. "The Neshaminy Federation of Teachers has a long history of standing together to bargain for a fair contract. It is an honor to work with and for such loyal and effective professionals."

The teachers' leaflets claimed the district doesn't understand the basics of bargaining or how to successfully negotiate a fair contract. The union handout said all parties have to come away with something they want and both sides must be willing to compromise, bargain in good faith and want to negotiate.

The union said the district wants the community to think everything's under control, but that's not the case. The educators claim the school board has been unwilling to compromise on any issues by taking a district wins/teachers lose stance on all points and has failed to bargain in good faith.

The union also claims the district ignored the union's multiple attempts to start bargaining before the state mandated timeline of January 2008.

"The district is foolishly heading down a path that leaves the NFT few negotiating options," the fliers said. "We want to continue teaching this year, but we also want a fair contract."

Webb said the union's leadership is taking its members in the wrong direction.

"I can't believe they're so out of touch with people who have been laid off and are struggling to pay their taxes," said Webb. "The teachers haven't lost anything. I think our teachers are wonderful people, but they live a sheltered life, to a certain degree. Their version of us being unfair is not giving them what they want."

No more talks have been scheduled, but the board's willing to sit down with the union at any time, any place, Webb said. However, the educators must be prepared to make some sacrifices, including contributing to their health benefits, he added.

"Hopefully, we can get everybody back to the table," said Webb. "We value their service, but we just can't afford to pay more."

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rachel will call or e-mail parent comment if we get it.

Where other staff contracts stand:

Negotiations are ongoing between the school board and the Neshaminy Educational Support Professional Association. That agreement expired at the beginning of July. So far, talks have been focused on health benefits. Another meeting is expected within the next month.

The board already has approved new three-year deals through June 30, 2012, with the 13 Neshaminy Administrative Support Association members and the district's eight confidential secretaries.

Similar to the agreement reached with the district's Administrators Association and offered to the teachers, the contracts include 3 percent annual raises, the elimination of retirement incentive programs, coverage under Blue Cross PC 20/30/70, and health insurance premium contributions of 15 percent, 16 percent and 17 percent over three years.

Source: Neshaminy school board

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