

## Back to school night visitors greeted by protesting teachers

25 Sep 2009 — Bucks County Courier Times

Neshaminy

Scott Kuzemka stood outside Walter Miller Elementary school Thursday as about 40 district teachers were carrying signs in peaceful protest seeking a new contract.

An unemployed, single parent, Kuzemka lives in the Cobalt Ridge section of Middletown and his son, Scotty, attends Walter Miller.

The Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, about 700 members, has been working without a contract for about a year. The union, in a flier distributed Thursday night, said the district is unwilling to compromise and has taken a "we win on all points, teachers lose on all points" position at the bargaining table.

The teachers want both parties to compromise, that all bargaining be in good faith and that both sides must want to negotiate.

Meanwhile, Kuzemka is struggling to make ends meet, working odd jobs two, maybe three days a week.

"At least they have a job," he said. "I have applications in all over the place. There isn't much out there. I am doing some air conditioning work about two days a week.

"It's tough. The economy is bad. I don't begrudge them a living. They have to do what they have to do. It really doesn't bother me that they are there, but they should be on the sidewalk out by the street and not in front of the school," said Kuzemka, standing in front of the Walter Miller school.

The teachers from the district's middle schools and high school were standing peacefully outside the eight Neshaminy elementary schools during Back to School Night for parents. At Herbert Hoover, Samuel Everitt and Miller, the teachers were positioned on school property, a violation of state law, according to Neshaminy school board president Richie Webb.

There were about 40 teachers at both the Hoover and Everitt schools on district property in front of the schools.

At Oliver Heckman Elementary School, the teachers were off school property and on a sidewalk, school officials said.

"The problem is you have parents here tonight to form a bond with their children's teacher. When you have teachers handing out leaflets, it's not about the kids, but about themselves," said Webb, who was at Everitt for the event.

But he said he was pleased with the teachers' behavior. They greeted each parent as they entered and some hugged parents as they walked in. Many parents just walked by, took a flier and continued to talk on a cell phone. Some parents ignored the teachers and walked into the schools.

Webb, after reviewing an opinion from the law firm of Sweet, Stevens, Katz and Williams of New Britain, warned the teachers union about picketing on school property Thursday.

"Picketing of all forms, including the wearing of signs, may be conducted only in a lawful manner, and only on public property adjacent to Neshaminy School District property. Any violation of this directive will result in the request that local law enforcement officers enforce the requirement that picketing not be conducted on school district property," Webb wrote in a letter dated Thursday to Louise Boyd, president of the teachers federation.

Despite the teachers congregating at the rear entrance of the Everitt school, Webb stood nearby and said, "I

don't see any advantage in calling police."

The Courier Times was unsuccessful in reaching Boyd for comment. Teachers declined comment Thursday night.

Webb said the vast majority of parents he spoke to were "aggravated" by the teachers carrying signs at the schools.

"They are afraid to say anything because they have children in the schools," he said.

But some parents spoke out in support of the teachers.

"It's peaceful from what I see; they are not intimidating anyone. They have a right to assemble," said Brian Scott of Langhorne.

Katie Tuomi, also of Langhorne, was having trouble finding a parking spot at Miller. She said she is "absolutely" in favor of the teachers.

"I am all for them. I agree with the teachers," Tuomi said. "I have two children in the district and the teachers do an excellent job of teaching them. They deserve what they are looking for."

George Mattar can be reached at 215-949-4165 or [gmattar@phillyBurbs.com](mailto:gmattar@phillyBurbs.com)

*"Back to school night visitors greeted by protesting teachers" Bucks County Courier Times 25 Sep 2009: B5*