

School board, support union reach pact

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Neshaminy

If approved, it would mean no outsourcing to private contractors as a way to save taxpayers more than \$30 million.

The Neshaminy school board has reached a tentative agreement with the district's support union, board President Ritchie Webb announced Monday.

The board will hold a meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Maple Point Middle School, 2250 Langhorne-Yardley Road in Middletown, to review the specifics with the public and vote on the contract, said Webb.

Webb would not release details until the board has a chance to review them tonight. He did reveal that the agreement does not include outsourcing.

The board had been considering outsourcing custodial, food, grounds keeping and transportation services to save more than \$30 million over the next five years.

"This is very positive," said Webb. "It's a chance to save jobs. + We think that's a great thing. We (also) think the public has a right to know. Time is of the essence since we have a budget next week to finalize."

Support staff union President Mindy Anderson deferred comment to Gary Smith, region field director for the Pennsylvania State Education Association. Smith confirmed the temporary settlement and that support staff members will be voting on it Thursday night at Neshaminy High School in Middletown.

"We're very pleased there's no outsourcing," said Smith, who also wouldn't release details of the tentative agreement until his membership saw them. "Hopefully, we'll go from here."

The prospect of losing their jobs has rattled many of the 270 full-time and 282 part-time support union members, which include bus drivers, janitors, food service workers and others. Working without a contract since July when it expired, support staff members have protested and spoken out at school board meetings. Support union members were also disappointed after they approved a fact-finder's recommended contract, but the board didn't.

That four-year deal would have given union members no salary increase the first year and 3 percent increases each year for the remaining three years. The suggested contract also would have required the support staff to contribute 10 percent toward health care premiums, according to the report.

When talks began, school board directors said Neshaminy couldn't keep paying for a top tier health insurance plan. Support union members said they couldn't afford to contribute what the board was asking.

The board had originally proposed annual wage increases of 1 percent in the first year and 3 percent in the second and third years of a three-year contract with the support staff. Their union wanted a five-year deal with no wage increase in the first year - provided there's no employee contribution to health care premiums - and a 3.5 percent wage increase for each of the middle three years, plus a 4 percent increase in the final year of a five-year contract, according to Neshaminy's website.

The board had also initially asked the support staff to contribute 10 percent, 11 percent and 12 percent to a changed base medical plan over three years. The support staff union wanted to keep the PC-15 plan and pay percentages of 0, 2, 3, 4 and 5 over five years, administrators said.

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