

## Board votes to ratify support staff contract

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Neshaminy

The support staff needs to agree with the details when they vote tonight to make it official.

Eight down. A little more than 500 to go.

The Neshaminy school board during a special meeting Wednesday night agreed 8-0 to ratify a contract with the district's support staff. Board member William O'Connor was not present for the meeting.

But members of the Neshaminy Educational Support Professional Association also need to agree with the details when they vote tonight to make it an official deal.

The agreement, though, already has some public support. Several parents and residents told the board they appreciated the sacrifices made and both sides coming together.

"Thank you for saving jobs," said Middletown mom Susan Loncosky. "Bus drivers, secretaries, aides + they're everything to us. We're very glad we're keeping everybody we have."

Middletown resident Howard Lindner echoed Loncosky's praise, especially for retaining the bus drivers, who are "so vital to the district." Lindner added that it's time to move forward and get the teacher's contract done. The educators have been working without a contract since June 2008.

The Neshaminy Federation of Teachers reportedly canceled a June 30 bargaining session with the board asking for more time to prepare. The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching union President Louise Boyd for comment.

The support staff's five-year deal includes no outsourcing and no salary increases until 2012-13 when support union members would get 2.5 percent and 3 percent in 2013-14. It also requires support staffers to contribute 15 percent towards insurance premiums, said board President Ritchie Webb.

And if the teachers negotiate a better health plan, the support union's agreement includes a clause that lets them upgrade their health benefits, too. But the support staff deal does not affect the administrators agreement from April 2009, officials said.

The support staff also would give up the single source prescription plan, which allows employees to pay a \$5 generic fee for \$20 brand name drugs when generics aren't available. Instead, employees will pay \$5 for generic, \$30 for brand name and \$50 for non-formulary drugs. They will also kick in 10 percent each for both vision and dental coverage, according to Webb.

Current retirees would start paying the same rate as active workers for their medical coverage. Also, anyone retiring after June 30, 2011 won't receive health insurance through the district, he said.

If an employee opts out of receiving health through the district, they get 25 percent of what the district pays for their medical insurance, which is 85 percent of the cost. Before, they'd receive 37 percent of what the district paid, which was 100 percent, administrators said.

The deal will create a cost containment committee and phase out longevity pay. Anyone hired after 1993 won't get bonuses for hitting certain milestones with the district, officials said. The 270 full-time and 282 part-time support union members include bus drivers, janitors, food services workers and others. They have been working without a contract since July.

Steve Rodos of Middletown congratulated both sides for coming to an agreement, but said he hopes similar concessions are also taken to the teachers union because "otherwise, it kind of closes the door on the savings."

Board member Kim Koutsouradis thanked the support staff, who he called "hard-working professionals truly putting the community first" and said he was pleased with the contract, which required a lot of work. Koutsouradis welcomed the teachers union to do the same.

Even though the deal would not save the district as much as outsourcing custodial, food, grounds keeping and transportation services-which would've banked more than \$30 million over the next five years-the agreement's \$2 million a year savings in the same time period is three times the savings of the board's original offer, said Webb.

Middletown resident Larry Pastor asked the board for detailed specifics on the savings to the district. Webb said the board would provide those figures during next week's meeting to approve the budget.

Superintendent Lou Muenker added that the administration also appreciates the tough decisions the support staff leadership made.

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