

District support staff votes to approve contract

25 Jun 2010 — Bucks County Courier Times

Neshaminy

It's a done deal.

The Neshaminy Educational Support Professional Association voted Thursday night to approve a contract with the Neshaminy school board, according to Gary Smith, regional field director for the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Since the board already ratified the agreement Wednesday night, the support staffers officially have an agreement with the district. While he would not release the tally, Smith said the support staffers' vote was overwhelming, but not unanimous.

"We're very pleased that we have an agreement ... (and) that we've been able to get to this position," said Smith. "We've always been willing to work with the district to help them in the past. Over 75 percent of our members are taxpayers, so we understand the impact of what happens when the district needs money. We look forward to working with the district over the next four years to work out cost containment and bring the district back up to what it should be."

The five-year deal, which is retroactive to the 2009-10 school year, 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, officials said.

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

That leaves an outstanding contract with the teachers, who've been working without a new deal since June 2008. The Neshaminy Federation of Teachers reportedly canceled a June 30 bargaining session with the board asking for more time to prepare.

In response to the support staff's deal, teacher union President Louise Boyd said, "As I've stated before, every negotiations has its own nuances. We will not be bullied into a take it or leave it form of negotiations regardless of the district's dealings with other labor groups."

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 also will kick in 10 percent each for 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 care through the district, he will get 25 percent of what the district pays for his medical insurance, which is 85 percent of the cost. Before, employees would 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'd been working without a contract since July.

Even though this 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.

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