

Neshaminy students protest teachers' actions

27 May 2010 — Bucks County Courier Times

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A group of Neshaminy High School students Wednesday staged their own protest by standing in the hallways after third period and refusing to go to their next class, officials said.

The event, which witnesses estimated involved hundreds of juniors and seniors, lasted several minutes before administrators ushered the pupils back into their classrooms, according to Superintendent Lou Muenker.

The teens said they were protesting in response to the teachers doing only what's required by their contract and nothing extra, including writing recommendations and attending events such as graduation. The teachers have been working without a contract since June 2008.

The initial plan, which was sent via mass text, was for students not to attend any classes for the rest of the day. But the teenagers knew that wouldn't work, said 18-year-old senior CJ Colando, business editor for the Middletown high school's newspaper.

"The teachers are being immature," said Colando, who participated in the late morning protest. "It's not right. They're taking their frustration out on students. It's not our fault the teachers have a conflict with the board. What they're doing is only going to get people angry."

But Colando said he can also see the flip side of that coin.

"The board's had two years to negotiate with the teachers, so it's the board's fault, too," he said. "It's really easy for the board to point fingers when the economy's bad. If the teachers' demands were as ridiculous as they're made out to be, they wouldn't be as committed as they are. They would give up. But they just want to negotiate."

School board members have said they're trying to set up a bargaining session with the teachers union. Their last negotiation meeting was in January, but the two sides have been at a standstill since last summer, officials said.

The board has offered an annual 3 percent salary increase, which includes steps, and a requirement that employees pay 15 percent, 16 percent and 17 percent toward health care premiums over three years. The board claims the union's proposal remains unchanged, with a request for a total 6 percent annual salary hike, which includes steps, and a requirement for no change to the medical insurance package, according to administrators. Louise Boyd, president of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, has denied those claims but hasn't revealed the union's offer.

The board is also considering outsourcing some support staff jobs and cutting various programs and positions from a list of 15 items to attempt to close a \$5.6 million budget gap, officials said.

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