

Teachers union denies distribution of strike survey

By Christian Menno Staff writer | Posted: Sunday, December 4, 2011 6:00 am

A survey circulating through a district elementary school seeking teacher input on a potential strike did not come from the union, according to the officials from the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers.

District officials confirmed Friday that copies of the document— which appear to be an attempt to solicit opinions on the preferred path of negotiations — were circulating in the school.

On Friday, NFT President Louise Boyd, after reviewing a copy of the document provided to her by the newspaper, said in an email that NFT leadership had “nothing whatsoever to do with (its) formulation or distribution.”

“The NFT is NOT conducting any type of internal member survey at this time,” Boyd added.

The form, which does not include the NFT logo, asks teachers to mark “agree,” “disagree,” or “no opinion” to several options: to strike in January, to strike during PSSA testing week in the spring, to strike at another date in the future, to not strike; continue contract talks with the school board or hold out for a new deal pending the outcome of other district-related contracts.

The contracts for Neshaminy administrators and the district’s support staff expire in the spring. If teachers were to accept a new deal before that time, the “Me Too Clause” would guarantee that any benefits granted to the NFT must also be given to the other employee groups.

“NONE of the following is definite,” the ballot reads. “This survey is just a gauge for us to take to a NFT meeting. Your thoughts will be presented.”

An image of the document was posted by outgoing board member William O’Connor on his blog and Facebook page Friday morning. In the post, O’Connor — who chose not to run for re-election in November — said the ballot was distributed by the NFT.

Boyd called O’Connor’s claim that the survey came from the NFT or its leadership “reprehensible.”

“That is blatantly false and he should be held accountable for his misinformed accusation,” she added.

The newspaper Friday also acquired a second version of the document with instructions to return the ballot to a specific teacher at the elementary school. The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching the teacher whose name appeared on that ballot.

When told of this second ballot that included a teacher’s name, NFT officials reiterated their statement that the union was not supporting or sanctioning any such survey.

The ballot posted online by O’Connor did not include a name.

School board President Ritchie Webb said any plans to strike during PSSA testing week, offered as one of the ballot options, would be “a direct assault on the children.”

Since the last teachers contract was agreed upon in 2001, Neshaminy’s PSSA ranking among the 504 school districts in Pennsylvania fell from 153 to 245, according to district officials.

The board is considering mandating that students must attain PSSA proficiency in order to graduate.

While union members earlier this year voted to authorize NFT leaders to call a strike in the future, the union has made it clear that no work stoppage is definite at this point.

“If there is to be a strike, it’s because (the school board) refuses to negotiate,” Boyd said. “For nearly four years all we have heard is, take it or leave it from the board.”

Negotiations with the school board are set to resume Tuesday. The two sides remain far apart on many financial aspects of a potential deal. Board members have said the district cannot afford to pay for many of the union’s demands.