

Teachers strike rumors swirl

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By Christian Menno

Staff writer

For several weeks there has been speculation the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers will strike as early as Monday.

A union representative Wednesday would not confirm or deny any plans for a work stoppage, saying only "the NFT does not deal in rumors or innuendo."

Neshaminy school board President Ritchie Webb remains adamant that until the district is given official notice of a teachers strike, all talk about a possible date is premature.

He did, however, acknowledge the rumors Wednesday.

"Where there's a lot of smoke, there could be some fire," Webb said, adding he's heard talk of an early January strike from several sources including district teachers, educators from other districts, parents and residents.

"I have heard the rumors very loud and clear," he said. "However, they are just rumors. The law requires the union to give the superintendent 48 hours advance notice of a strike."

NFT members voted last year to authorize the union's leadership to call a strike if and when it sees fit.

While the district will not jump to conclusions, Webb said there is a "game plan" in place in the event of a work stoppage.

"(If the district is informed of an impending strike) we will do everything in our power to address the public and use all of our resources to inform everyone," he added. "We intend to open as many elementary schools as possible. Though we won't be teaching classes there will be day care offered for a small fee. The members of the Neshaminy Kids Club as well as our professional staff, custodians and bus drivers would continue to service our community."

According to a question-and-answers section on the district's webpage, the length of any teachers strike is limited by state law.

"The union must return to work in order to complete 180 student days by June 14 or the last student day, whichever is the later. ... To complete the required days, classes cannot be conducted on a Saturday or Sunday, or other designated holidays," the website states.

Community and athletic activities using district facilities would continue as scheduled. Graduation would occur after 180 days of instruction.

Webb could not say for certain when the teachers would be required to return to their jobs if union leadership chooses to enact a work stoppage next week.

"The state Department of Education would provide those details to the union and to (the district)," he added.

The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching a Department of Education spokesperson for comment Wednesday.



It is unclear if a strike would affect the negotiation sessions between the school board and the union scheduled for Jan. 12 and 26.

"I don't know what the board majority would recommend in that case," Webb said. "Some (board members) feel that if there's a strike that we should cancel those meetings."

The two sides have met 38 times since the teachers' last contract expired in 2008.

Superintendent Louis Muenker said Wednesday if a strike were to occur next week, it would not affect PSSA testing week in March as teachers would be required to return before then.

He confirmed the union is permitted to strike only twice in one school year. Even if teachers were to conduct two separate strikes, the 180 days of class must be completed by June 30 at the very latest, Muenker added.

"Our students have completed about 80 days of instruction as of this Friday," he said.

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