

Strike day arrives

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By Christian Menno

Staff writer

With Neshaminy teachers set to strike Monday, it is clear that the teachers union and the school board have been able to find little, if any, common ground during three-plus years of negotiations.

But if there is one thing on which they seem to agree, it's that the power of the public can affect how this bitter dispute plays out moving forward.

In recently released statements from both sides, Neshaminy residents are urged to take an active role in pushing for a settlement.

The Neshaminy Federation of Teachers requests that community members call the district offices to demand that the school board "negotiate in good faith." The school board, in turn, is asking residents to call the NFT offices to persuade them to seek an "affordable" deal.

While phone calls to both offices are sure to start flowing, the Internet has already been bombarded with the opinions of parents, taxpayers and teachers - all willing to weigh in on this sensitive and complicated issue.

Frustration - with the decision to strike as well as the board's announcement that all future negotiation sessions are suspended during the work stoppage - is the most common theme in comments on the Web. But some try to take a more positive approach - offering ideas that could bring the sides closer to a contract.

"(I) still don't agree with the NFT and their decision to strike, but the board is just as culpable," said one reader in the comment section of a Courier Times story posted Sunday. "Both sides need to be forced into a room and not allowed out until an agreement is reached."

District teacher Cara DeLorenzo posted a plea toward the school board to reconsider suspending talks on the NFT's Facebook page.

"I am not sure what your motive is, but what I know for sure is that if we all decide to refocus our intentions to finding resolve, it can happen," read the post. "It is not impossible. Let's be the change we want to see in this world, where people in our community, in our country, and around the world truly practice the skill of compromise and find the way to a more positive, civil world. ... It is never too late to put the boxing gloves down and talk this out."

Some Courier Times readers, however, feel the board was right to cancel the contract talks scheduled for January.

"The board is absolutely right to cancel negotiations. It does not move the impasse any closer to conclusion to have the teachers negotiate (with the leverage of a strike). I do not blame the board one bit," the comment read. "The new contract must reign in the out of control contract costs."

Resident Peggy Letherland made a similar post on the Neshaminy Info Facebook page operated by former school board member William O'Connor Sunday.

"I had three kids go through the district and I am not impressed with (the teachers') job performance," Letherland said. "Stand tough school board, we are behind you. My taxes are high enough and it ends here."

District teacher Kim Molnick Ross, a visitor to the NFT Facebook page, shared her unique perspective on the strike.

"This is hard on everyone ... students, parents, teachers," she said in the post. "I can now say I have been on many sides of a strike. I was a student in Neshaminy when they were on strike for 13 weeks (in 1980-81), a parent of a student in Pennsbury when Pennsbury went on strike about six years ago and now a teacher in

Neshaminy. The bottom line is, everyone needs to sit down, negotiate and get this settled. Please Board, negotiate! Enough is enough!"

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