

## 'It's destroying our community'

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By From staff reports

Carla Grace is a Lower Southampton resident whose daughter Hannah is in kindergarten at Joseph Federbar Elementary School.

Grace and Hannah worked with Grace's sister Tasha Gindele for much of Monday afternoon cleaning their car while striking NFT members marched up and down across the street along Heights Lane.

"I'm a little annoyed," Grace said of the striking union members. "I'm a little frustrated. They could have come up with some other way (to resolve the contract impasse)."

Grace said she's concerned her daughter will fall behind on her studies. She said the teachers union members should be more willing to contribute to their health care expenses.

"I think how much (money) they make is outrageous. They should be thankful they have a job. They should suck it up. (They) have a job," Grace said.

The picket line "is not where we want to be," said an NFT representative walking with fellow strikers in front of Federbar and Poquessing Middle School.

"We all want to be in the classroom," said Christine Richardson, a sixth-grade science teacher at Poquessing. "It's a sad day for Neshaminy."

Richardson said the union had no other choice but to strike because the school board isn't willing to compromise.

"We want to get to the table and get this settled," the 19-year district veteran said. NFT leaders were waiting for a call all weekend from the school board to start talks, she said. They never got one.

"They have to be more willing to compromise," Richardson said of the school board. The 8 percent the NFT is proposing for members to pay toward their health care premiums "is still negotiable," she said.

Canceling the two negotiating sessions scheduled for this month shows the board's "unwillingness" to resolve the contract impasse, Richardson said.

The teacher, brought to tears as she discussed the strike, said she and other NFT members do not want to be on the picket line.

"This is so painful. I want to be back in there with (the students). It is destroying our community," Richardson said.

She and other NFT members handed out a flier with information about the union's reasoning for the strike to passersby.

"The board continues to stir up hard feelings in our community with hurtful rhetoric and attacks on teachers and our schools," the NFT said in the flier. "Sadly, a strike is the only way left to persuade the board to reach a fair settlement. Our students can't afford to wait any longer."

In the flier, the NFT encourages residents to call the district's main number and encourage the school board to return to the bargaining table.

Dozens of NFT members assigned to work in Neshaminy schools spent much of Monday walking back and forth in front of their respective schools with little interaction for much of the day with nearby residents or passers-by.

Some of the striking union members served as delivery persons to stock their colleagues at each school with water and snacks for the day.

NFT members at Walter S. Miller Elementary School stopped en masse at 11:10 a.m., gathered in a circle and took time out to have a snack together. Then they headed back to the picket line, sporting their "ON STRIKE" signs, and walked back and forth along Cobalt Ridge Drive.

Unable to park on district property during the work stoppage, the striking NFT members parked their vehicles along roads in nearby neighborhoods.

They expect to be back on the picket line every day for the rest of the week, said Richardson.

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