

Extra! Extra! Student journalists address strike

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By Christian Menno

Staff writer

When Neshaminy High School teachers and students return to class Friday after an eight-day, district-wide teacher strike, most will be greeted with the new issue of *The Playwickian*.

And they'll quickly discover that this edition it is not your average school newspaper.

Instead of shying away from addressing the contentious contract dispute between the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers and the Neshaminy school board, the student journalists and editors tackled the issue head-on.

And they did it on their own. The newspaper staff's adviser is a teacher and was walking the picket line while the students put together the newest edition.

The NFT is scheduled to meet for contract talks with the school board Thursday. Union officials said they hope for an "accelerated negotiating schedule." Board President Ritchie Webb said he looks forward to attending the talks.

The two sides will also need to address the process of nonbinding arbitration, which is required by state law after a teacher strike. The teachers hit the picket line Jan. 9 and have been working under a contract that expired in 2008. The two sides are struggling to come to terms on issues such as retroactive pay and contributions toward health care premiums. The latest offers by both sides were included in the recent *Playwickian* issue.

The paper usually isn't printed in January, but the staff agreed that something like this could not wait until February, when the strike would've been over for nearly a month. Everything from the reporting to the page layout was rushed to meet deadlines.

"Immediately when they announced the strike I thought that we needed to do this," 17-year-old Editor-in-Chief Josh Reznik said Thursday. He and other staffers met at the high school to prepare the newly printed issue for distribution to students, teachers, district administrators and hundreds of community members.

Before the decision, Reznik said he wanted to make sure that if the paper was going to be printed, it was done right.

"We got together and talked about what we wanted in (the issue)," he added. "We decided that it had to have an equal balance. And if it looked like we weren't going to be able to do that then we would've scrapped the whole thing."

Reznik even wrote a letter to readers on page 2.

"On behalf of the editorial board of this publication, I invite everyone to read the articles and formulate his or her own stance on the issues. It is my hope, along with the editorial board, that this publication will provoke meaningful conversation of the talking points that has led to the teachers union declaring a strike."

Reznik describes himself as pro-student. In other words, he does not take sides with either the teachers or the school board.

But that doesn't mean there aren't members of his staff who do.



"We have a lot of varying opinions here," Reznik said. "And we hear anger toward both sides in the dispute when you walk down the halls."

And these differing views are well represented in the paper.

On page 3, for example, one story describes how the strike could have a negative effect on students taking Advanced Placement courses.

"For the past two weeks, students have been preparing for AP exams and learning the course material without the aid of their teachers," wrote page editor Rachel Rotteveel. "Even though all the class time will be made up by the end of the year, the dates of the AP exams will not be delayed. In effect, the time added at the end of the year does not allow any extra prep-time for national (AP) exams. How will this loss of class time affect students hoping to obtain exemplary scores on their AP tests in May?"

Rotteveel then lists a few tips for students attempting to study on their own.

Just below that story is a piece written by page editor Melanie Matyi with the headline "Students stand in support of teachers during strike."

In the piece, Matyi argues that "circulation and wide acceptance" of "untrue statements delivered as facts" about the teachers and their stance is the "real problem driving the growing insanity surrounding the multi-faceted situation...."

Other stories include a brief history of labor unions, interviews with teachers, parents and students - specifically seniors fearful that graduation plans could be affected by the strike or the possibility of a second work stoppage.

Reznik even sits down with Superintendent Louis Muenker to talk about the overall state of the district.

But the story the staff is most proud of can be found on the back on the newspaper.

Written by page editor Samantha Pipe, the piece describes the dedication of each and every Neshaminy student still contributing in athletics, the school play and all the other extra-curricular activities that students chose to keep going during the strike.

Added Reznik: "That just says a lot about who Neshaminy students really are."

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