

Teachers go back to school

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Neshaminy teachers ended their strike Friday morning.

By Christian Menno

Staff writer

Neshaminy students and teachers returned to class Friday after an eight-day teacher strike.

High school educators gathered at the flagpole in front of the main entrance - as they did on the first day of school - to show their solidarity as a union.

While the strike did not bring about a settlement - and even stalled contract talks due to the school board's decision to suspend negotiations during the work stoppage - some teachers say progress was made.

"I truly believe (the strike) made a difference," high school English teacher Suzi Drake said outside the building Friday morning. "It made us feel strong about our individual desires to achieve this contract. It also helped to show the community that we are not going to be pressured into a contract that is based on flawed logic. For four years we've been saying the numbers (presented by the school board) are not accurate. I now believe the community is on our side. I know there are naysayers, but I live here. I hear (the support). I see it."

Teachers in the district hit the picket lines Jan. 9 and returned Friday in compliance with state law, which mandates that a strike must not prevent 180 days of instruction from being completed by June 30.

Union president Louise Boyd acknowledged the possibility that teachers could strike again in spring, which would push the last day of school back to the end of June. Negotiations are set to resume Thursday.

Drake added that her plan was to make Friday "business as usual."

"I love what I do," she said. "All of us (teachers) do. I've been thinking about my students the whole time (during the strike). I'm anxious to get back in and see them. We have curriculum to teach and tests coming up.

"If our kids think they're going to have an easy day because it's Friday and they've been off for a few weeks they are sadly mistaken - at least in my classroom," she said with a smile.

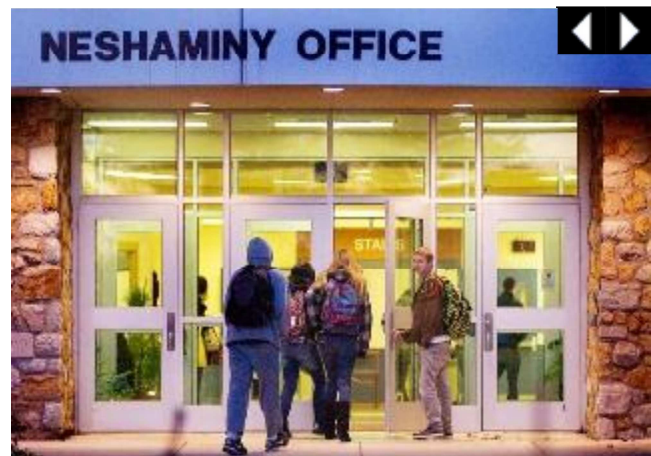
The Neshaminy Federation of Teachers has encouraged the public to contact the school board and demand that negotiations be intensified. After all, they said, teachers have been working under a contract that expired in 2008. The school board, in turn, suggested that residents call the NFT offices to convey the board's stance that the district does not have enough money to pay for their demands.

Dozens of residents who support the board have signed an online petition addressed to the NFT that calls for an end to any future work-to-contract actions and for a change in union leadership.

As she returned to the high school Friday, 17-year-old senior Molly K. Lichtner said that both of her parents are teachers so the dispute has caused some difficult situations for her.

"I've deleted some people on Facebook for saying some mean things about the teachers but at the same time I understand."

Lichtner said she realizes there are points to be made on both sides of the contract impasse. But, for now, she is just focused on resuming her last year as a Neshaminy student.



"I'm excited to be back at school because I have a lot of projects I want to work on," she added. "I've missed all my teachers and my friends. It's ridiculous to be out of school for two weeks. I feel like the NFT and the school board needs to sit down and really negotiate and to stop acting like children."

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