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AS THEY PREPARE FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL NIGHTS, NESHAMINY TEACHERS SEEK COMPROMISE WITH NEW OFFER

LANGHORNE, PA (September 13, 2011) —Neshaminy teachers are preparing for back-to-school nights beginning this week, and they are looking forward to learning more about students and their families when parents visit classrooms across the Neshaminy School district over the next four weeks.

“As we pledged over the summer, wherever parents and students are, we will be there,” said Neshaminy Federation of Teachers President Louise Boyd.

NFT leaders and bargaining team members said today that they will not allow issues related to their ongoing contract talks with Neshaminy School District to intrude on the back-to-school meetings, even though some extreme critics of the teachers have called for community members to confront school staff and faculty during back-to-school nights.

“We will continue to present our positions in appropriate public forums as negotiations with the school district move forward,” said bargaining team member Jeff Dunkley. “But we will not respond to confrontations in our classrooms.”

NFT bargaining team members said they want parents and the rest of the Neshaminy community to understand that teachers have continued to press for compromise in the talks.

“We want to make it clear that we want a resolution to these prolonged talks—just as much as parents and others do,” said NFT negotiator Marian Reed. “NFT members remain committed to the give and take of the bargaining process. In that spirit, teachers have offered a new proposal

that would cut \$21 million from district costs over the life of the contract. Teachers and school officials are now reviewing that proposal.”

While much of the news coverage and public debate has focused on economic issues such as pay schedules and healthcare costs, teachers who are in the classroom every day on the frontlines of public education know first-hand that a new contract is about much more than just those financial questions.

“It is also about issues such as class sizes and setting priorities in our curriculum,” said Mary Cwiklinski, also a member of the NFT bargaining team. “For example, under a class size proposal supported by the Neshaminy School Board this summer, enrollments in elementary school classes would increase by two to four students.”

Teachers pointed out that the priorities embraced by the school board included dropping physical education for 10th graders, eliminating foreign language courses for 8th graders and abandoning class size standards for special education that have helped make Neshaminy programs successful. Those decisions were made during the budgeting process on the basis of fiscal constraints. But the board refused to reinstate any of the cut programs—even when unanticipated state funding became available.

Collective bargaining and the framework established by a new contract would allow teachers a voice in these kinds of decisions that directly affect the children in their classrooms. “For Neshaminy educators, that is just as important as the economic issues that get all the attention,” Boyd said. “And some of the choices made by the school board make it clear that its members could benefit from listening to teachers.”

Neshaminy teachers have just begun their fourth year of working without a new contract. Talks between the NFT and the school district have taken on new life in recent weeks as the two sides have exchanged current financial and workforce information necessary to calculating the costs of various proposals.

Representatives of the two sides will meet on Monday to clarify that information. The bargaining teams expect to schedule new negotiating sessions later this month.

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