



For Immediate Release

Bob Schiers
856.905.7851
Bob.Schiers@raspr.com

Dennis Boyle
856.905.7852
dennis.boyle@raspr.com

Neshaminy Teachers Shut Out of School District's Process For Defining, Updating Educational Priorities

December 16, 2010 - LANGHORNE, PA—Leaders of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers said today that school district officials have rejected their request to participate in the current process of updating and revising the school system's educational priorities and policies.

"We need to be able to know all the factors that must be taken into consideration as we work to finish a contract in our current negotiations with the district," NFT President Louise Boyd said. "It would be easier to find common ground if we can work together to set common goals." Over the last several weeks, teachers have asked repeatedly to meet with administrators who are examining the district's program and policy agenda.

Neshaminy School Superintendent Lou Muenker told Boyd this week that the district is working on its own to complete a document addressing educational priorities. He said that it will not be shared with staff until the end of the process, likely at faculty meetings.

"We are extremely disappointed," Boyd said of the administrators' decision, "that they apparently do not value the expertise and experience in the classroom that teachers can bring to these discussions. Neshaminy teachers have a solid record of collaborating on educational reforms and improvements within this district for more than 30 years."

She cited several examples dating to the 1970s, including:

- Over the last three years, the NFT and the school district worked together to plan and implement a district-wide labor/management team that has participated in training on collaborative data analysis in a program provided by the American Federation of Teachers national staff. This training gave teachers, principals and central office staff extensive hands-on opportunities to apply best practices in data analysis to comprehensive planning and the school improvement process.

- Through the last decade, teachers have been full participants in the adjustments made necessary by the federal No Child Left Behind law—helping to write new curriculum and devoting increased attention to testing, as well as expanding reading and writing across all programs.
- NFT members partnered with school administrators in the late 1990s to create a strategic plan for district operations.
- Teachers participated in the development of the district’s middle school curriculum, 1975-80.
- In the 1980s, teachers helped retool curriculum and instructional strategies when the school board decided to return to the junior high configuration.
- In the early 1990s, the district switched again to the middle school system, with teachers working with administrators to revise curriculum and programs to make a smooth transition.

“We hoped the district would see fit to continue this sort of collaboration, which has characterized the relationship between Neshaminy teachers and administrators for decades,” Boyd said. “But if administrators continue to go their own way, teachers will seek other avenues for offering the perspective from the classroom on the policies and priorities that make the most sense for their students.”

Boyd said alternatives being considered by teachers include convening meetings of school improvement committees—with or without their administrator-members—to begin addressing district-wide priorities and changes needed at each school.

A new video posted on the Neshaminy teachers’ website—www.NFTcommunity.com—highlights the importance of working together to continue Neshaminy’s legacy of the highest quality schools and teachers for each new generation of students.

The website offers community residents information on the progress of negotiations and the schedule for talks, as well as videos of teachers, parents and students discussing the importance of maintaining high-quality public education for Neshaminy children.

The next negotiating session is scheduled Dec. 28.

New data on teacher compensation may bear on that issue in the talks, Boyd said. A comparison of salaries with six other area school districts shows that Neshaminy pay levels have slipped behind those included in contracts signed in nearby school systems. Neshaminy teachers are working under a contract that expired in July 2008.

“It is so important that we listen to one another,” Boyd said. “We can’t find common ground unless we understand our differences and look for ways to move beyond them and do what is best for Neshaminy’s students.”

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