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NESHAMINY TEACHERS GIVE OVERWHELMING APPROVAL TO TENTATIVE AGREEMENT FOR NEW CONTRACT

Ratification Vote Sets Up School Board Action Next Week

LANGHORNE, PA (June 3, 2013) — Members of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers voted overwhelmingly Monday night to ratify the tentative agreement on a new contract reached last week with the Neshaminy School Board.

Ratification by the NFT means that a vote planned next week by the School Board is the last step needed to conclude more than five years of difficult negotiations and put a new contract into effect with the certified staff of the Neshaminy School District. If the Board ratifies it, the agreement will replace the previous contract, which expired at the end of June 2008.

“Clearly, NFT members agreed with our bargaining team that the agreement achieved an acceptable balance of educational values, financial considerations and professional standards,” said NFT President Louise Boyd. “While reaching agreement required some tough tradeoffs, we were able to preserve key principles that are important to us as professional educators and to our students—issues that directly affect the overall quality of education in Neshaminy schools.”

NFT leaders said just over 80 percent of the union’s members turned out for a meeting at Carl Sandburg Middle School Monday evening, where the ratification vote was preceded by a lively discussion of the agreement. The vote tally on ratification was 487 in favor, 21 against.

In deference to the School Board's consideration of the agreement and its approval process, NFT officers and bargaining team members declined to comment publicly on the specific provisions of the agreement. However, they addressed some general terms of the deal that caused them to recommend it to their members as what Boyd and NFT Vice President Anne Schmidt called "an agreement worth supporting."

On the financial side, the agreement recognizes the value of NFT members' work with salary adjustments that will help teachers catch up for the five years they have gone without a new contract—and without any raises. However, balancing those pay gains are significant new costs to teachers for the District's health insurance plan.

NFT leaders and members said that in the end, the agreement's provisions on professional issues made the last several months of talks worthwhile. The tentative agreement finally came together over the Memorial Day weekend as Schmidt and School Board President Ritchie Webb worked vigorously to resolve some final questions.

"The agreement addresses issues such as class size and preserving a role for teachers in decisions that affect our students," Schmidt said. "We were not able to say that even just a few months ago."

That stand drew praise from other teacher leaders.

"By insisting that the contract respect and include their voices in educational decisions affecting their students, Neshaminy teachers took a difficult but principled stand for professionalism in education," said Ted Kirsch, president of AFT Pennsylvania. "Despite persistent attempts to claim the stalemate stemmed from disagreement over finances and health care, this was always—at its very core—a matter of respecting the professional input of teachers, who are on the frontline of education."

Boyd stressed that the agreement requires teachers to make significant sacrifices in terms of employee contributions for health care and forgone retroactive pay. "However," she said, "it also protects key elements of earlier contracts that will help safeguard the quality of education and productive labor-management relations in the Neshaminy schools."

"This has been a tough process," Boyd continued. "The board still must act, and we anticipate a favorable vote. Once that happens, everyone—teachers, administrators, community members—will be able get back to focusing on the most important thing we do: educating Neshaminy students."

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