

NESHAMINY

Board plans workshop to enhance communication

As long as members stick to working out relationship bugs and not business, the retreat won't violate the Sunshine Act, an official said.

By RACHEL CANELLI COURIER TIMES

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To get along, the Neshaminy school board is going to get away.

With a multi-million dollar deficit, possible building closures and contract negotiations in the district's future, the Neshaminy school board members agreed they need to be on the same page.

On the administration's recommendation, the board agreed to a workshop/retreat in the near future to "get everyone in place" to deal with the business in Neshaminy, said Superintendent Paul Kadri Tuesday night.

"I think it is a great idea," said board President Richard Eccles. "We [need] someone to come in and help with overall communication, direction and leadership of the board, cabinet and administration ... someone who knows Neshaminy and the people who live, work and truly care for our schools and community."

Eccles suggested former Superintendent Howard Wilson, but since the details of the workshop are still being decided, it is unclear if he will attend.

Officials said that disagreements among board members and administrators and behind-the-scenes conflict have caused frustration and strained the cohesiveness of the board.

While administrators did not detail the issues, Kadri described the "distraction" as unhealthy.

Board members, too, did not specify the problems, but residents noted obvious tension during meetings and disagreements, for example, over the budget, personnel positions and school closings.

"This board will not experience a more critical moment than this," said board member William O'Connor. "If we cannot resolve several serious issues, then we will be unable to move forward as a unit and, quite frankly, I cannot see myself serving on this board any longer if this continues. Maintaining the status quo is not an option."

Administrators said the retreat would focus on board members working together. The meeting's date, time and location were not disclosed.

As long as the board sticks to interpersonal relationships and not "agency business," the workshop would not violate the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act, according to Melissa Melewsky, media law counsel for the state newspaper association.

"I think it's fine ... [to work] out bugs..." she said Thursday. "But [the board members] have to be extraordinarily careful that they don't cross the line. That would be a problem."

Although Kadri said the idea had the unanimous support of the board's nine members, no public vote was taken.

"This doesn't guarantee success, but it does give us the opportunity to address lingering concerns," Kadri said. "The entire community should be encouraged by this immediate effort of cooperation. We're here for the students and community. [This shows] our willingness to become stronger."