

NESHAMINY

Residents petition board for balanced budget, no tax increase

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Signed, sealed and delivered.

Two district residents presented the Neshaminy school board Tuesday night with petitions totaling 150 signatures asking the board for a balanced budget and new teacher deal without raising taxes.

Larry Pastor of Middletown presented the board with a petition signed by 100 people requesting a fair budget and to withdraw the current contract offer. The document also suggests that educators contribute at least 25 percent to their health care premiums and proposes no salary increase for two years and no more than two percent for two years after that, he said.

"We want a return on our investment," Pastor said.

Lower Southampton resident Connie Patrick also walked door to door for 50 signatures from people who are financially struggling in this recession.

"We're all in bad trouble," she said. "I'm angry and frustrated. They're dedicated with a special gift, but teachers have to compromise."

A few more speakers also reiterated a desire for a salary freeze, staff reduction, getting politicians involved in the process, and eliminating the full retirement benefits package, which is a current board position.

Board members did not comment and teacher union President Louise Boyd was not present for the meeting.

Meanwhile, business administrator Joseph Paradise said that officials continue to work on trying to find ways to balance a possible \$14 million deficit, which could mean a potential \$500 average tax increase.

The next budget-focused meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Monday in Maple Point Middle School located at 2250 Langhorne-Yardley Road.

In other business, the board tabled a motion to replace some elementary school furniture for \$200,000 until members could get more information.

Paradise told the directors that many pieces are the building's original furniture and unsafe. The facilities and finance committee narrowed down an initial list from \$1.2 million and recommended a multi-year approach beginning with emergency replacements, he said.

The district could use money from the capital reserve fund, in which Neshaminy had contributed \$500,000 for the past several years, excluding last year, said Paradise.

But that money is only for improvements, not balancing the budget, said board President Ritchie Webb.

Board members Susan Cummings and Kim Koutsouradis questioned the need for some of the furniture requests, including teacher and principal desks.

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