

Trail officials pleased with district response to positive virus test More infections may prompt switch to virtual learning.

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Lackawanna Trail School District’s superintendent acknowledged Monday a setback after an employee tested positive for COVID-19 this week, but said the response fell in line with their plan to educate students in person.

A Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center teacher reported the test to district officials Sunday. That afternoon, administrators informed the parents of 15 students in the teacher’s class that their children would need to temporarily switch to virtual learning and self-quarantine for 14 days.

“We were ready for that,” Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said during a Lackawanna Trail School Board meeting held via Zoom.

The district brought all K-12 students back for a full reopening Thursday.

Rakauskas commended the teacher for following protocol by immediately informing elementary Principal Brian Kearney of the positive test. Everything continued according to plan, Rakauskas said, from reaching out to local and state health officials for guidance to informing the greater community via Remind and the district’s website.

“It was a very well-oiled machine,” he said. He told the public he appreciates their comments, both supportive and critical.

Citing privacy reasons, he didn’t disclose any other details about the teacher’s COVID-19 case to the public.

Having one positive test within the district doesn’t fall in line with the state Department of Health’s recommendations to temporarily close schools, he said.

If two to four students or employees test positive within a 14-day period, however, it’s likely that Lackawanna Trail schools would pivot to virtual learning and shut down for three to five days.

Kearney said the positive test was a “bump in the road” which officials expected to face, and he’s satisfied with the district’s response. He called last Thursday’s start to the school year positive for all students, regardless of the format their learning is taking this year.

“We are in full educational mode right now and we will continue to be in that. … We will keep these kids moving forward and educating them while at the same time ensuring their health and safety,” he said.

Principal Mark Murphy said the high school also experienced a positive start and students have been adapting well to the changes. He noted that the Lackawanna Trail Cyber Academy through Virtual Learning Network Partners remains on hold.

Like many schools across the country, Murphy said VLN has been experiencing delays due to the availability of technology for online learning. Students enrolled in the cyber academy, which differs from learning virtually simultaneously with brick and mortar students, won’t be penalized for days they missed.

In other business, the board:

Hired Amy Hughes for a maintenance II position at a starting rate of $14 per hour beginning Sept. 15.

Approved David Duchnik and Amy Kishbaugh as private vehicle drivers for the 2020-21 school year.

Approved a first reading of the following policies: Lesson plans, immunizations and communicable diseases, health examinations and screenings, telework, physical exam, penalties for tardiness, job related expenses, working periods, sick leave, responsibility for student welfare, safety, school calendar, public attendance at school events, and school visitors.

Approved a student tuition waiver request for Illion Simpson for the 2020-21 school year.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to meet again for a work session Oct. 5 at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom.

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