

Trail board has new president

by Pat Farnelli

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Lackawanna Trail School Board held its reorganization meeting on Monday, Dec. 5, electing Philip Stark as its new president of the board.

Stark thanked the previous president, David Thorne, for a job well done. "I can speak for all of us when I say this," he said.

Vice president Ned Clarke was re-elected.

Later, Thorne thanked the board and administrators for their support during his tenure.

In other business, Curriculum director Tania Ross asked board members and administrators to push for reforms for cyber school laws.

Business manager Glynn noted that Lackawanna Trail School District anticipates spending \$786,000 on cyber schools this year for 46 students already enrolled, "and that is before figuring in the \$40,000 we are budgeting for our own cyber school program through the intermediate unit, Northeast Online Learning Academy."

"This is going to be a budget killer," Glynn said. "The cyber schools are sitting on fund balances in the multi millions, while we have a deficit here."

The board approved a stipend of \$2,000 for extra principal duties for Principal Mark Murphy for the 2016-17 school year. "We truly appreciate the hard work and dedication you are putting in," Clarke said.

The board accepted the resignation of Sandra Spott as head field hockey coach, effective Dec. 1.

"She's been involved with hockey as long as I can remember, and has brought well-groomed and trained hockey students to the playing fields," Clarke said. "We accept her resignation with regret and we will miss her."

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said that Spott has been coaching hockey at Trail for 26 years, and said she will be missed.

Murphy said, "I imagine her success this year may have contributed to her decision. What a great way to go out." The board roll call voted with eight directors to accept her resignation, with Thorne voting a firm, "No." "I do not accept," he said.

Mulhern spoke to the district's recent sports success, noting Steve Jervis' recognition as Coach of the Year for football.

"Boys football has had a tremendous run," he said, and said that the band performed well with them at games."

The cross country team sent a boy and a girl to state competition as well.

Board member Joe Strauch said that his constituents have approached him with three questions.

He asked if the schools are checking air quality for mold.

Rakauskas assured him that an extensive check was completed when the HVAC system was installed a year ago during capital improvements, and that the air is monitored.

Strauch next asked if the district is hiring outsiders rather than district residents, and was told that they are seeking to hire the best candidates.

Strauch also said that there are rumors that the schools will be closing in two years and sending students in two directions.

Rakauskas replied, "We are not shutting down. Finances are always a concern, but I am confident that we will keep our doors open."

It was noted that the district cafeterias serve 300 students every morning as part of the Universal Free Breakfast program.

Ross noted that a grant was received from author James Patterson, who has given a total of \$1.75 million for library programs. The grant of \$4,000 was given to the Elementary Center library to fund a new program, "Reading + STEM = Fun and Success." An additional 4,000 Scholastic points will enable students to read new books and create film trailers to promote them, which will also be used for coding activities.

Special education director Amy Talarico said that three students are currently enrolled in the Community Options work-based learning program, and will each earn about \$700 per month at a variety of offered work sites.

An unpaid leave for one day was approved for Tiffany Carpenter for Jan. 20, 2017.

Rakauskas noted that there will be no students in the school on that day.

Michael Sunseri was approved as a volunteer boys' basketball coach.

Chad Johnson, Jonathan Lynn, and Gerry Henry were approved as volunteer wrestling coaches.

An elementary band and chorus concert will be held Thursday at 7 p.m. in the high school auditorium. The high school concerts will be held on Dec. 15 and 20 at 7 p.m.