

LTSB hopes cyber charter costs trimmed

Brooke Williams / Published: April 3, 2019

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is showing support for Senate Bill 34 and House Bill 526, which could alleviate the district's cyber charter school costs if passed.

During Monday's work session, superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said many schools in Pennsylvania are supporting these bills because currently, school districts must pay tuition for students within their districts that opt for cyber charter schools over the brick and mortar schools.

"What these bills propose is that if a viable cyber school option exists within the school, that a student can still decide to go to Agora or Commonwealth Connections just like they can decide to go to a private school or parochial school, but they would have to pay it on their own," Rakauskas explained.

Since the district recently signed a contract with VLN Partners, parents who still choose to send their children elsewhere would have to cover the costs under these proposed changes.

"We're very hopeful that these bills will get some steam," he said, noting that board secretary Kevin Mulhern's efforts to contact area government representatives can also contribute.

Board president David Thorne said if the district could save on tuition costs for students who do not choose VLN, then a tax reduction might even be possible.

Rebekah King, principal of school management, recently attended a summit in Wilkes-Barre to help segue the district into VLN and said she is so far impressed with the company and its program.

"It's a quality program and it has homerooms where the kids have to check in, which is what we're missing," King said. "You have to check into homeroom every day. You're timed, every keystroke is recorded. Everything you kind of want out of NOLA, we're going to get out of VLN."

Board member Joseph Strauch pointed out that these bills only address cyber charter schools, but not brick and mortar charter schools.

Rakauskas said that while this is true, Lackawanna Trail's issue is more with the cyber end, unlike schools such as Carbondale Area, which has students transferring to Fell Charter School in Simpson.

Next week, the board will vote on Rakauskas' proposed 2019-20 school calendar which is projected to start Aug. 29.

In a presentation, he said the proposed calendar focuses on academic achievement, extends into June to avoid board amendments related to excessive school cancellations and has extended graduation options.

The proposed calendar will be made available on ltsd.org for the public to view.

The board will vote to approve contracts with Pivot for the extended school year. This includes athletic training at \$22.50 per hour; physical therapy at \$100 per hour; occupational therapy at \$100 per hour; and speech pathology services at \$90 per hour.

The board will also vote to renew an agreement with the Dalton Borough Police Department for the 2019-20 school year to employ a school resource officer at \$38 per hour.

The board will also vote to approve a contract with Nutrition Group Inc. for the 2019-20 school year.

Business manager Keith Glynn said this contract is the most beneficial to the district, with an anticipated loss of around \$42,000, but a guaranteed loss of around \$30,000.

“That’s very comparable to this year’s loss,” he said.

The appointment of Sweet, Stevens, Katz and Williams (John G. Audi) as the school solicitor with no increase in rates from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020, will be up for vote.

The board will also vote to approve the Lackawanna Trail School District Comprehensive Plan for 2019-2024.

High school principal Mark Murphy said the junior high 2019-20 curriculum guide and senior high 2019-20 curriculum guide up for vote next week do not include significant changes to course descriptions, but have updates regarding Keystone Exam requirements, Pennsylvania graduation requirements and changes in line with Trail’s college/career readiness initiative.

Elementary center principal Brian Kearney said the LTEC guide was revamped last year, so there aren’t elaborate changes this year, but there are updates about the reading series “Journeys.”

A second reading of Policy 806: Child Abuse will be approved, and the following policies will be adopted: nondiscrimination in employment practices; discipline of students with disabilities; behavior support; screening/evaluations for students with disabilities; enrollment of students; admission of students; confidential communications of students; student records; suspension/expulsion; school wellness; food services; and acceptable use of internet, computers and network resources.

Next week, the board will vote to approve Erin Merkel’s amended request for child rearing leave to begin in early May and end on Sept. 30, as well as the appointment of Lauren Hales as a special education long-term substitute starting in early May and continuing until Sept. 27.

The board will also acknowledge Mary DeNault’s retirement at the end of this school year, as well as Jamie Schirg’s resignation, which is effective April 5.

The board will vote to approve Mason Stiver as the assistant marching band director at a stipend of \$3,550 and Steve Beckish as a volunteer assistant golf coach. Both are to begin in the 2019-20 school year.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to meet on Monday, April 8 at 7:30 p.m.

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