

**LTSB holds firm on modest tax increase**Brooke Williams / Published: June 12, 2019

The Lackawanna Trail School Board plans to vote on a final 2019-20 budget later this month.

“The final budget will still include the recommended tax rates that we discussed,” business manager Keith Glynn said at Monday’s meeting. “The final budget will also include the repeal of the per capita tax.”

The board discussed a minimal tax increase in May, where Glynn cited a 0.97 percent increase in Lackawanna County (increase of 1.6 mills) and a 0.17 percent increase in Wyoming County (increase of 0.16 mills).

On Monday, he said the final rates are 167.28 mills Lackawanna County and 93.96 mills Wyoming County.

However, the elimination of the per capita tax would provide tax relief for both counties in the end.

“Overall, on average, our taxpayers should see a decrease in taxes in Wyoming County and a very small increase in Lackawanna County,” he explained.

Other areas of the budget have remained the same since last month, but Glynn mentioned that through the new Lackawanna Trail Cyber Academy, the district hopes to offer an internet reimbursement of up to $500 to families who choose this option, provided that they fulfill certain requirements.

Also during Monday’s meeting, the board approved an agreement with Creditech Collection Services, a third party service used for outstanding debts due to the district.

Creditch adds an 18 percent fee for unpaid debts.

The board voted 7-2 in favor of approving James Becchetti and Edward Gaidula as co-athletic directors at a stipend of $6,000 each for the 2019-20 school year.

Board treasurer Michael Mould voted no, citing “serious concerns” about the efficiency of having two individuals performing these duties. Board member Joe Strauch also voted no.

“I think if it was the most efficient way to go, more institutions would have gone that way,” Mould said.

Board member Debby Naylor agreed with these concerns, but voted yes, noting that the contract is for one year and they should be given a shot.

The board approved a Title III memorandum of understanding with the Northeastern Educational Intermediate United 19 Consortium and a special education contract with the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18 for the 2019-20 school year.

A second reading of Policy 251: Homeless Students was passed, with Strauch voting no.

First readings of Policy 204: Attendance and Policy 217: Graduation were also passed despite drafts not being available yet, as they were originally intended for June 24.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas explained that they will be available for the upcoming meeting, but asked the board to approve the concepts of the policy changes in order to get the process moving quicker.

High school principal Mark Murphy said the attendance policy would be revised to reflect requirements for Lackawanna Trail’s new cyber school, as well as a truancy elimination plan to attempt to settle absentee issues outside of court first.

The district has already been following this elimination plan for years, but it hasn’t been included in the policy, Murphy explained.

The graduation policy revisions would include Keystone Exam requirements, college and career readiness efforts and the number of credits required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Later this month, Policy 251’s adoption will be up for vote, as well as second readings of Policies 204 and 217.

The board approved Christopher Hooker as a secondary English language arts teacher at a salary of $56,588 (step one, master’s) and Matthew Landsiedel as a secondary special education teacher at a salary of $51,668 (step one, bachelor’s +12). Both are to begin in the 2019-20 school year.

The board also acknowledged the resignation of Jenna Alderman in the music department, effective July 1, and the resignation of long term substitute teacher Jessica Norris, effective May 9.

The board granted naming rights of the high school auditorium to PS Bank at $5,000 for one year with the option to renew.

Mould was appointed as treasurer again for the 2019-20 school year at a stipend of $600, which he requested be divided evening between the arts program, music program and booster club.

A Conrad Siegel GASB 75 valuation and related services agreement totaling $5,100 for the years ending June 30, 2020, and June 30, 2021 was also approved.

The board approved a wrestling team trip to Kutztown University this July at no cost to the district, but denied Heather Warriner’s request for unpaid leave in the 2019-20 school year.

Later this month, the board will vote on 2019-20 students handbooks for the elementary center and high school, as well as approving a PATH contract for next year, effective July 1.

PATH provides an alternative education setting for students in special education if necessary.

As part of the budget, the board will vote on approving a 2019 homestead and farmstead exclusion resolution.

Student lunch prices for the 2019-20 school year are also up for a vote. The elementary lunch price has increased by five cents.

The board will also vote to approve two paraprofessional positions, an extended school year appointment, two mentor positions and an assistant wrestling coach.