

**Trail board hears bus policy concerns**Brooke Williams / Published: November 12, 2019

The Lackawanna Trail School Board continues to hear concerns from parents about a school district policy that only allows students to get on and off the bus at one designated stop.

A group of Lackawanna Trail parents attended Monday’s board meeting to discuss potential revisions to the policy, which the board passed ahead of the 2019-20 school year while revising the school handbooks.

Cathy Staffaroni has three children in the school district, two of whom are in the elementary center.

She said she wanted the board “to continue this conversation about the one-bus rule.”

While understanding that it’s “chaotic” for the district when multiple students have different busing accommodations, she said a number of situations could arise where students would need to ride a different bus than usual, especially with winter coming.

“This privilege where they could ride the bus home to someone else was taken away before we even knew there was a problem,” she said. “There was no communication to parents.”

“I don’t know that what we have works for everybody… We need to have certain situations where it could be a ‘yes,’” echoed Bridget Staffaroni.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said there was no intent to create difficult situations for parents, and he understands their reasoning for wanting exceptions to the rule.

“We probably could have done a better job communicating it and communicating it earlier. That I can’t go back on,” he said. “But the concept really is safety.”

Maintenance and Transportation Supervisor Rick Kordish, as well as elementary principal Brian Kearney, agreed that it was getting too hectic at dismissal time each day with a large number of students handing in notes to get on a different bus.

Staffaroni gave the board members information about an online portal system introduced in Riverside School District after it experienced a similar issue, and said the Parent Teacher Organization has discussed supporting a portion of the cost.

Board president David Thorne said the board will consider these concerns, but made no promises about the outcome.

“It’s worth pondering and it’s worth thinking about,” he said.

Also on Monday, the board hired Lauren Gratz as an elementary special education teacher to begin on Dec. 3 at a salary of $56,588, master’s level step 1. Gratz has been a frequent substitute teacher in the district.

Erin Merkel was appointed as her mentor at a stipend of $450 for the 2019-20 school year.

Board vice president Philip Stark was absent for Monday’s meeting.

The board accepted the resignation of James Becchetti, K-6 physical education teacher, co-athletic director and equipment manager, effective Dec. 20.

Rakauskas said the district plans to search for his replacement and hopefully fill the position by December.

Otylia Dugan’s resignation as the wrestling/basketball cheerleader advisor was also accepted. The board approved Sarah Richard to take her place at a stipend of $2,550 for the 2019-20 school year, with board member Joe Strauch voting no.

The board approved a private vehicle contract with Wayne Burns at the state formula to transport students to Summit Christian Academy, as well as a music department field trip to Nashville, Tenn. June 14-18 at no cost to the district.

Strauch voted no to the field trip, calling it “cruel and unusual punishment” to put 40 students on a bus for a 12-hour ride home after spending the day in an amusement park.

The board also approved the following volunteer positions for the 2019-20 school year: John Yanniello and Ben Domiano, junior high boys basketball coaches; Corinne Theil, junior high girls basketball coach; and Jeffery Marx, Chaz Ross and Jonathan Lynn, junior high wrestling coaches.

Monday was the final board meeting for Strauch, who served two terms on the board before losing his seat to Brian Petula.

In his superintendent report, Rakauskas said the Pennsylvania State Police have been riding on school bus routes across the state in an attempt to make bus stops safer.

A trooper recently rode on one of Trail’s routes, and this may occur again in the future unannounced.

With winter approaching, he reminded families to sign up for the REMIND system for important alerts about delays, closings and early dismissals. After piloting the 3-hour delay last year, Rakauskas said the district plans to use it again when necessary.

Kearney said three sixth grade students collected over 1,200 pairs of socks to donate to the NEPA Youth Shelter in Scranton. The school is also collecting pasta donations for the St. Francis of Assisi Soup Kitchen in Scranton through “Noodle November.”

High school principal Mark Murphy said he and technology coordinator Kristen Kurpis, who is in charge of the district’s Pennsylvania Information Management System reports, plan to attend a data quality network meeting with the Northeast Intermediate Educational Unit on Nov. 20.

The district has experienced issues with inaccurate graduation rates, as well as its Career Readiness Indicator being reported inaccurately.

“We’re going to try to track down the source of those problems,” Murphy said.

Murphy also congratulated the high school band for placing eighth at the Cavalcade of Bands competition in West Chester and said the public could purchase advance tickets for this Friday’s football game on Thursday from 1 to 3 p.m. in the main lobby of the high school.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to hold a reorganization/regular meeting on Monday, Dec. 2, at 7:30 p.m.