

**LT board swears in new member**Brooke Williams / Published: December 11, 2019

The Lackawanna Trail School Board swore in Brian Petula as a new board member on Dec. 4 while electing David Thorne as board president for another year.

Petula, as well as returning board members Thorne, Robert Minick, Michael Mould and Joseph Ross, took their oath of office in front of Wyoming County President Judge Russell Shurtleff at the board’s reorganization meeting.

Philip Stark was also elected to serve another year as vice president of the school board.

In a regular meeting that followed, Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas discussed a potential compromise to issues brought up with the district’s single bus stop policy, which was adopted ahead of this school year.

Parents in the district have publicly voiced their concerns about the policy change at board meetings, describing scenarios where students would need to use different bus stops.

Lackawanna Trail administrators have cited safety concerns in the decision to change the policy, as well as easing the burden on bus drivers and district employees who need to sort out the confusion with multiple students going to places other than their designated stops.

“It would be dangerous to go back to the way it was,” Rakauskas said. “It was inefficient and unsafe.”

However, he said some flexibility in the policy is warranted and suggested making exceptions for families who could prove a hardship that requires their child to use more than one bus stop.

“I think it’s reasonable to open it up to that possibility again, but not just any time, anywhere, spur of the moment calls or changes,” he said.

Rakauskas has been drafting a form that parents would potentially fill out explaining their situation for administrative review.

Business manager Keith Glynn said if the district revises its policy, the accommodations should have to be consistent each day of the week.

For example, if a student rides one bus in the morning and a different bus in the afternoon, he or she would not only be able to do this on certain days of the week.

Rakauskas said if the district revises the policy, changes would not go into effect until 2020.

The board also approved the appointment of Jennifer Boccadori as the elementary physical education teacher at a salary $49,660 and Stan Harder as the equipment manager at a stipend of $2,600, both beginning Jan. 2.

Ed Gaidula was also appointed as the full-time athletic director for the 2019-20 school year at a stipend of $12,000, effective Dec. 21, with Ross voting no. Gaidula formerly served alongside James Becchetti as co-athletic director, whose resignation is effective Dec. 20.

The board also approved a rate of $65 per athletic event for game managers, with Petula, Ross and board member Adrian Bianchi voting no.

There was no need for game managers with co-athletic directors, Rakauskas explained, but with Gaidula now holding the position on his own, a game manager would cover any events that he is unable to attend.

When Harry Powell formerly served as athletic director, the district did not use game managers, although they have been used in the past.

Glynn said there is availability in the athletics fund to cover pay for game managers if needed, which would be used sparingly.

The board also acknowledged the resignation of Stacy Stuenzi from her paraprofessional position, effective Dec. 20, which leaves a second paraprofessional opening at the district.

In his superintendent report, Rakauskas welcomed the new K-12 Principal of Student Management Shannon Kuchak to her first board meeting and noted that January is School Director Recognition Month.

Mark Murphy, high school principal, congratulated the football team, cheerleading squad and marching band on a successful season.

Along with technology coordinator Kristen Kurpis, Murphy attended a data quality summit with the NEIU 19, which he hopes could improve the district’s future reports to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Last year, he believes the district’s attendance rates and Career Readiness Indicator were reported inaccurately.

“When the public is looking at our School Performance Profile, we believe as a district we did much better than what was reported to the Department of Education and I can provide you that information,” he said.

Brian Kearney, elementary principal, said the district submitted its Title I reports in October, which came back as compliant.

K-6 students collected about 700 boxes of pasta for the St. Francis of Assisi Soup Kitchen in Scranton, and the elementary STEM program also received $500 from ExxonMobil, he said.

The board also approved the following on Dec. 4:

\*Dan Jones as a volunteer wrestling coach and driver for the 2019-20 season.

\*A sixth grade class field trip to New York City in early November of 2020 at no cost to the district.

\*An intermittent family medical leave request from Kathy Ewing for up to 12 weeks in the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, effective Dec. 2.

\*A proposal of services from Van Strien Consulting for the E-rate program in the 2020-2021 funding year at a rate of $3,000 for category one requests and $2,000 plus two percent of committed funds for category two requests.

\*Authorizing the Sweet, Stevens, Katz and Williams law firm to approve an assessment appeal settlement on property ID #0790207000113 in Dalton Borough at an assessed value of $36,000.

\*Student disciplinary adjudications for students #25133 and #24062, with Thorne and Mould voting no.

\*Work session and regular meeting dates for 2020.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to meet for a work session on Monday, Jan. 6 at 7:30 p.m.