

**LT aims for ‘unified front’ on cyber costs**Brooke Williams / Published: January 15, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board hopes to form a “unified front” with other school boards in the region regarding the issue of cyber charter school reimbursements and accountability.

At Monday’s meeting, board member Brian Petula said he has been in touch with Harry Mathias Jr., the Pennsylvania School Boards Association advocacy ambassador for the region who could help Lackawanna Trail get on the same page with other districts.

Under state law, school districts need to fund tuition for students who live in the district, but prefer a third party cyber platform.

With a few bills moving through the state legislature that address these issues, Petula said he wants to ensure the district’s representatives are aware of the opinions of regional school districts.

“I think this is a big opportunity this year,” Petula said. “As a new board member, I think it’s one of the biggest financial impact areas in our budget. This is an opportunity to hopefully bring some dollars back to our school district.”

The school district launched its own cyber platform this year to potentially bring students back to the district, which high school principal Mark Murphy said drew in 23 students last fall. This quarter, 15 students still use the platform.

Murphy said some students have returned to the brick and mortar schools full time, while others have transferred out of the school district.

About 17 of the 23 students have been full-time cyber students, while the rest have taken advantage of the opportunity to have blended schedules.

“Overall, the feedback from parents has been very positive,” Murphy said.

The board received recognition on Monday in celebration of the PSBA’s School Director Recognition Month.

“I know it is a job that often takes a great deal of time and effort and it has many pressures,” Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said. “It is deeply appreciated what you do for the Lackawanna Trail School District.”

This year’s PSBA theme is “Strong school board governance = increased student achievement.”

In February, the principals of both schools will put on a presentation highlighting standardized test scores and school performance profiles, which Rakauskas said will show the board how this theme is taking place in the district.

Elementary principal Brian Kearney and Murphy both invited the board members to their schools for two separate days of activities next week.

The board approved its Act I resolution for the 2020-21 fiscal year, promising not raise the rate of tax support by more than the 3.3 percent index established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Board members also approved a performance audit report from Auditor General Eugene DePasquale for fiscal years ending July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2018, as well as a corrective action plan.

The audit found that the district failed to conduct the required amount of fire drills and misreported foster students in the district, resulting in an underpayment of $41,547 from the state.

Rakauskas said both of these areas have been addressed.

A contract between the district and the Lackawanna Trail Education Support Professionals Association was also approved, effective Jan. 1, 2020 through June 30, 2025, with board member Joseph Ross voting no.

The board also approved the following:

\*A contract with DeHEY McAndrew for preparation of 1094-C and 1095-C forms for the 2019 tax year.

\*Acknowledge the retirement of Kathleen Morris, secondary secretary, effective this March.

\*Appointment of Jim Kotz as the mentor for elementary physical education teacher Jennifer Boccadori at a stipend of $450 for the 2019-20 school year.

\*Robert Houser’s intermittent family medical leave request for up to 12 weeks of leave, effective Dec. 9, 2019, to Dec. 8, 2020 (retroactive approval).

\*Lawrence Rudock as a substitute bus driver for Nichols Bus Company for the 2019-20 school year.

\*Kristin Pietrzak as a part-time, non-leveled paraprofessional substitute at 4 ¾ hours per day at a rate of $12.53 per hour from Jan. 14 to Feb. 6. Pietrzak was also approved as a part-time non-leveled paraprofessional at $13 per hour with the same hours, starting Feb. 7.

\*Tina Gavin as a part-time Level I paraprofessional at 4 ¾ hours per day at a rate of $13 per hour, to begin on Jan. 14.

\*Amber Mosier as a temporary Level III paraprofessional at 4 ¾ hours per day at a rate of $13 per hour, to begin on Jan. 14 for a 30-school day employment period.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board has a work session scheduled for Monday, Feb. 3 at 7:30 p.m.