

**LT moves with cyber cost strategy**Brooke Williams / Published: February 5, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School District has entered the beginning stages of a new strategy to combat the burden of funding cyber charter school tuition.

The state mandates school districts to fund tuition for students who live in the district, but seek education through a cyber charter platform.

At a work session for the Lackawanna Trail School Board on Monday, board member Brian Petula said plans to form a coalition with other regional school districts have been moving along.

On Feb. 12, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association advocacy ambassador for the region plans to meet with Lackawanna Trail officials. Representatives from neighboring school districts have also been invited to attend.

Petula, who plans to attend Advocacy Day in Harrisburg this March, said PSBA has already identified key pieces of legislation for the coalition to push with its legislators.

“It’s one of the biggest issues and the most important thing we can do this year on the expense side,” he said.

With legislative action being the only solution, Petula said he wishes every taxpayer would join to make their voices heard with government officials like Sen. Lisa Baker.

“This is basically to stop the assault on our public school,” he said. “She needs to hear from every taxpayer in the Lackawanna Trail School District.”

Rather than spending upwards of $800,000 on cyber reimbursements each year, Petula said the district could be investing in its own schools. The cyber charter schools get paid significantly more than it actually takes to educate students, he added.

Board president David Thorne noted that there’s also no accountability for how cyber groups spend this money.

Speaking with legislators about this issue has not always yielded successful results, according to Petula.

“We want some personal responsibility coming from our legislators because there’s been a huge amount of deflection,” he said.

While people lead busy lives that prevent them from paying attention to everything in the news, Petula said this issue is “local, close to home, in our backyard, and it affects us deeply.”

At next week’s board meeting, principals Mark Murphy and Brian Kearney plan to present Lackawanna Trail’s standardized test scores for the high school and elementary center, as well as data from the district’s School Performance Profile and Pennsylvania Future Ready Index.

In this presentation, Kearney noted that the board will see comparisons in student achievement between Lackawanna Trail and these cyber platforms, showing the lack of accountability these programs have for education quality.

The board and administration encouraged the public to come see the presentation.

Next week, the board also plans to vote on the Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit 19’s proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year, July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, with Lackawanna Trail contributing $15,263.43.

Thorne said there has been no increase from last year’s contribution.

Additionally, the board will approve the first reading of the school district’s policy book, with the exception of 17 policies that do not require any updates since their adoption.

Rakauskas said updating the book in its entirety will put the district completely in compliance with PSBA’s standards.

Business manager Keith Glynn suggested the board put a paving project for both schools on the agenda as soon as possible. Working with Gordian, a purchasing network conglomerate that does pre-bidding work, the project would cost $606,824.62.

Going through Gordian would be a convenient and cost-effective choice, as well as in line with state bidding procedures, he added.

The board also plans to include the following on its agenda next week:

\*A stipend matrix for athletic events held after Feb. 10.

\*Approve the standardized tests lists for the 2020-21 school year.

\*Acknowledge the retirement of Anthony Josephite, effective Feb. 14.

\*Approve Marisa Ryon’s request for unpaid leave March 25-27.

\*Approve a unified sports coach for the 2019-20 season. The coach and his or her stipend are to be determined.

\*Approve an Interscholastic Unified Sports Memorandum of Understanding between the Special Olympics of Pennsylvania and Lackawanna Trail High School for the 2019-20 school year.

\*Approve Mary Smarkusky, Marty Kerzetski, Lori Swanchak and Bill Burnell as volunteer track and field coaches for the 2019-20 season.

\*Approve a representative for the NEIU 19 Board from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2023.

\*Approve the sixth grade class trip to Dorney Park in Allentown on May 26 at no cost to the district.

\*Approve MaryBelle Gilroy’s request to take 45 art students on a field trip to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City on April 17, at a cost of up to three substitute teachers for the day.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board has a regular meeting scheduled for Monday, Feb. 10 at 7:30 p.m.