

**LTSB approves sewage, paving projects**Brooke Williams / Published: February 11, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board has approved two projects for sewage and paving.

At its meeting on Monday, the board gave district administration permission to engage with an engineering firm for services related to the sewer plant at Lackawanna Trail High School, then approved the solicitation of bids to replace necessary sewer plant components.

The board aims to spend a maximum of $15,000 for this project from the assigned fund balance.

Maintenance and Transportation Director Rick Kordish said the filter tank is 44 years old and needs replacing. The aeration and clarification components are still in good condition, as they were replaced in 2008.

“It’s badly due,” he said, noting that work would likely begin once the school year concludes.

The district will comply with any requirements from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Kordish said.

The board also approved a paving project with Gordian, a purchasing network conglomerate that did the pre-bidding work with the district, for $606,824.62.

The district plans to repave most areas of pavement between the high school and elementary center, including the parking lots, business manager Keith Glynn said.

The board also joined other public schools in adopting a resolution for charter school funding reform. The district hopes to push legislators to adopt a funding model for cyber charter school tuition that’s more fair to public schools.

As it stands now, public schools such as Lackawanna Trail must fund tuition for students living in the district who attend cyber charter schools, causing a significant financial burden.

This resolution will be sent to Harrisburg and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.

“We’re looking at as many avenues as we can to try to address this problem that’s been largely, almost totally ignored,” said Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas.

The board also approved the Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit 19’s budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, with Lackawanna Trail contributing $15,263.43. There has been no change since last year.

The board tabled a vote approving the first reading of the entire Lackawanna Trail Policy Book, with the exception of 17 policies that don’t require changes.

The board also approved the following on Monday:

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

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

\*Retirement of Anthony Josephite from his maintenance position, effective Feb. 14.

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

\*Tina Gavin’s request for unpaid leave March 18-20.

\*Laurel Kinback and Jessica Bentley as unified sports track and field coaches for the 2019-20 season at a stipend of $750.

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

\*Mary Smarkusky, Marty Kerzetski and Bill Burnell as volunteer track and field coaches for the 2019-20 season, tabling a vote on Lori Swanchak for the same position.

\*Mark June as a volunteer junior high assistant baseball coach for the 2019-20 season.

\*Jeffery Edwards as a volunteer assistant baseball coach for the 2019-20 season.

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

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

\*An art 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 is scheduled to meet for a work session on Monday, March 2 at 7:30 p.m.

**Trail presents school performance profile**Brooke Williams / Published: February 11, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School District administration used a presentation geared toward school performance on Monday to highlight differences in education quality with cyber charter schools.

The district’s principals prepare the presentation each year, using data from standardized test scores, plus the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile and Future Ready Index.

The goal is to highlight academic accomplishments and inform the public of plans to improve areas in need of growth.

“In addition, we’re going to expand the comparison a little bit differently than other years to our underperforming cyber charter schools that rob this district and other school districts of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually,” said Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas.

The data presented was based on the 2018-19 school year.

Lackawanna Trail High School scored 72.3 percent for its SPP, ranking 12th out of 33 schools in the Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit 19’s region, according to Principal of Student Management Shannon Cuchak.

The presentation also included neighboring Tunkhannock Area School District, which is part of NEIU 18.

When considered alongside only junior-senior high schools, LTHS ranks fourth out of 12 schools, Cuchak noted before bringing up a graphic of cyber and charter schools that currently enroll students living in the school district.

On the high end was Howard Gardner Multiple Intelligence Charter School at 63.3 percent. The rest of the schools Cuchak pointed out were in the red, with Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School at 59.1 percent, going down to ACT Academy Cyber at 30.6 percent.

“This data shows that these schools are not being held accountable for our students’ academic achievement,” she said. “What’s not up there, and I think might be more important, is that these schools aren’t accountable for social and emotional skills as well.”

Principal Mark Murphy also mentioned the success of Lackawanna Trail Cyber Academy, saying it provides a better quality platform for students who want it, and at a fraction of the cost to taxpayers. The academy also allows students to have blended schedules with the brick and mortar schools.

LTHS test scores were as follows:

Seventh grade PSSAs: English language arts, 76.4 percent advanced/proficient (state average 60.3); math, 48.6 percent advanced/proficient (state average 38.5).

Eighth grade PSSAs: ELA, 67.1 percent advanced/proficient (state average 57.7); math, 45.7 percent advanced/proficient (state average 32.4); science, 72.9 perfect advanced/proficient (state average 58.0)

All Keystone Exams: literature, 56.9 percent advanced/proficient (state average 56.7); biology, 47.4 percent advanced/proficient (state average 54.7); algebra, 46.9 percent advanced/proficient (state average 39.1).

Based on test scores, as well as Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System projections, Murphy said the high school could benefit from an additional math faculty member to continue providing the same level instruction as this school year.

“There’s some things that I’ve done with the master schedule that were maximizing the instruction of the math teachers that we have, but truthfully, to go forward and continue to provide that level, we would need an additional faculty member,” he explained.

Grades 7-12 have performed well in ELA, so he doesn’t believe any additional resources are needed at this time.

With the potential retirement of a biology teacher who supplements the textbook with his own materials, Murphy noted that it would be necessary to find a replacement and offer an updated curricular series to continue achievement in science.

Principal Brian Kearney revealed that the Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center ranked 10th out of 49 schools at 74.2%, and fourth overall when only considering school-wide Title I programs.

Likewise, he highlighted local charter and cyber schools, which performed in the range of 30.6-59.1%.

LTEC scores were as follows:

Third grade PSSAs: ELA, 72.8 percent advanced/proficient (state average 61.9); math, 63.8 percent advanced/proficient (state average 56.0).

Fourth grade PSSAs: ELA, 66.2 percent advanced/proficient (state average 63.6); math, 50.0 percent advanced/proficient (state average 46.2); science, 87.2 percent advanced/proficient (state average 77.8).

Fifth grade PSSAs: ELA, 69.0 percent advanced/proficient (state average 58.5); math, 42.3 percent advanced/proficient (state average 43.1).

Sixth grade PSSAs: ELA, 60.0 percent advanced/proficient (state average 63.0), math, 36.4 percent advanced/proficient (state average 39.0).

Moving forward, he hopes to continue the implementation of a multi-tiered system of support in grades K-6 and increase math intervention strategies in grades 3-6.

Additionally, he recommended the continued use of using data to drive instruction, as well as continued implementation of Study Island for grades 5-6 to benefit at-risk students in math.

Cuchak noted that in the 2017-18 school year, total tuition payments for Pennsylvania cyber and charter schools surpassed $1.8 billion, which would pay the average salary of 27,000 teachers.

Tonight, Lackawanna Trail officials have a private organizational meeting planned with an advocacy ambassador from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. Representatives of neighboring school districts have also been invited to attend.

Together, they hope to push elected officials to move forward with legislation that could alleviate public schools of the financial burden of funding cyber charter tuition.