

**Trail begins student tech initiative**Brooke Williams / Published: June 3, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School District plans to supply each student with a Chromebook for the upcoming school year.

During a Lackawanna Trail School Board meeting on Monday night, Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas detailed the one-to-one student technology initiative.

In this scenario, every student and teacher will have a laptop loaned out to them, which he said will fit into different scenarios the district may find itself in this fall.

“If we start in the brick and mortar, they will not go to waste,” he said. “Those Chromebooks will still be used in a one-on-one initiative to blend traditional education that we’ve come to know and do best here at Lackawanna Trail with a blended online model.”

The 2020-21 academic calendar approved last month begins on Sept. 8 with two teacher in-service days.

“Last month, I asked the board to approve this calendar, but I also made a statement that if we don’t go back to the brick and mortar immediately in the fall and we have to start online, we will start earlier,” he said. “Aug. 24 was going to be the cyber start, if indeed it was warranted. That is off the table. That is no longer happening.”

“In September, we are going back to school, whether it be traditional brick and mortar, whether we have to start online, or whether we start through some combination, a hybrid system,” he added.

While it would be premature to say which plan will go into effect this September, Rakauskas assured that Lackawanna Trail will be prepared for any of those three options.

He estimated the overall cost of this technology initiative at around $292,000, but said funding from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act will cover a significant portion of it.

Afterward, the board approved the purchase of 404 Chromebooks at a cost of $107,084.24 from assigned fund balance, as well as the authorization of $184,582 through the CARES Act.

Monday was originally planned to be a work session, but the board changed it to a voting meeting in advance. Board member Adrian Bianchi was absent from the meeting.

Rakauskas said the district has been looking into options such as hot spots for families who do not have internet access at home.

Monday was also the final school day for Lackawanna Trail, so Rakauskas applauded all students for putting in a strong effort.

“I know how difficult of a year this has been for everybody, none more difficult than for the students who had to make the transition from regular education in the brick and mortar to an online education after the mandatory school closure,” he said. “Through all the difficulty and all the challenges, you did it.”

Teachers already take time in the beginning of each school year to review material from the previous year with students. Expecting gaps to be greater this fall, Rakauskas assured that teachers will take even more time to ensure students don’t fall behind.

The district plans to launch an online survey soon for parents to share their biggest challenges from this year, what worked well, their concerns for next year, and more.

David Thorne, board president, said the school district still awaits guidance from the state government on a lot of the decisions that need to be made.

“We’re at the mercy of the governor and the secretary of education for the most part at this point,” Thorne said.

Principal Mark Murphy provided an update on end-of-year events for the senior class.

Plans for a virtual class night scheduled for June 12 at 5 p.m. have been taking shape. About an hour after the ceremony, a community parade with a route to be determined will begin.

The seniors still want to stay on campus for their graduation ceremony, so the district hopes to accommodate that, he said.

Plan A is June 30. If it’s possible to hold a somewhat traditional graduation, Murphy knows it won’t be possible to do so indoors. He plans to watch Centers for Disease Control guidelines.

“I’m using June 26 to June 30, probably excluding Sunday. If there’s a good patch of weather there and it’s appropriate for the CDC guidelines to do something here at the stadium, then we’ll exercise Graduation A,” he said.

“I think it’s trending in the right direction that we would be able to gather here responsibly at the high school,” he added.

However, it would likely be necessary to limit the amount of guests per graduate, use the home and away bleachers for guests, ask everyone to wear masks and social distance, and modify the ceremony in a few other ways.

If these dates aren’t available either because of CDC guidelines or poor weather, the plan is to commit to July 17.

“If by that time we can’t gather responsibly, we will host some sort of a hybrid graduation similar to class night,” he said. “Then we would have an in-person diploma distribution here at the school.”

Principal of Student Management Shannon Kuchak reminded that Lackawanna Trail will continue holding Children’s Produce Market events for all district families at the high school throughout the summer. The next dates are June 18, July 9 and 23, and Aug. 6 and 20.

More information will be sent out through the Remind system and posted on ltsd.org.

The school board also approved the following:

 The appointment of Michael Mould as the school board treasurer for the 2020-21 school year at a stipend of $600. (Mould abstained from the vote and requested that his stipend be divided evenly between athletics, music and arts programs in the school district.)

 Student handbooks in both schools for the 2020-21 school year.

 Nicole Weisenfluh to teach extended school year from July 6 to Aug. 6.

 Adoption of the following policies: 006.1 Attendance at Meetings via Electronic Communication; 335 Family and Medical Leave; and 626 Federal Fiscal Compliance.

 The 2020-21 NEIU Special Education Services Contract.

 A Title III memorandum of understanding with the NEIU19 Consortium for the 2020-21 school year.

 A due process settlement with student #20047.

 Student meal prices for the 2020-21 school year, including high school lunch ($2.90), high school breakfast (free), elementary lunch ($2.70), district-wide reduced lunch ($0.40), and elementary breakfast (free).

 A one-year renewal (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021) with Tri-County Insurance for naming rights to the high school library for $2,500.

 A one-year renewal (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021) with PS Bank for naming rights to the high school auditorium for $5,000.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to meet again on June 29 at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom. Visit ltsd.org prior to the meeting for access information.