

**$22M LT budget a mixed message**Brooke Williams / Published: July 1, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board adopted a final budget for the 2020-21 school year totaling $22,055,000 on Monday, which decreases taxes by 2.43% in Wyoming County and increases them by 2.51% in Lackawanna County due to a tax reallocation.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, this board made a commitment to not raise the overall tax revenue of the district and to commit to a zero tax increase budget,” said Keith Glynn, business manager. “With these millage rates, the board does accomplish that. Unfortunately being a double-county district, we do have to have a tax reallocation.”

This brings Lackawanna County to 170.88 mils and Wyoming County to 91.68 mils in real estate taxes.

“This budget was really at the beginning of this process balanced,” Glynn said. “Once the pandemic hit, we did suffer a lot of lost revenue in our expectations, so we’re going to be short approaching on a million dollars in this budget.”

This isn’t $1 million of operating costs, he clarified, noting that about $300,000 makes up capital improvements, and there’s a $250,000 contingency because of the uncertainty with the pandemic.

“I didn’t want to leave us shorthanded in unexpected costs,” he said. “Then there’s about $450,000 of overage in expenses, and the big part of that is lost revenue.”

Otherwise, he said the final budget is similar to the proposed budget presented in April.

The board also approved its 2020 Homestead and Farmstead Exclusion Resolution.

“Lackawanna County residents will see their bill drop by $1,402 and Wyoming County will see a drop of $2,612, but the overall impact per property that qualifies is $239.51,” Glynn said.

In other business, the board approved Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas as the district’s pandemic coordinator.

“This dovetails with the health and safety plan that every school in Pennsylvania needs to put together,” Rakauskas said.

He invited parents to participate in a virtual town hall on July 8 at 7 p.m. about plans for reopening schools. A link to the meeting will be posted on the district’s website.

The board also approved a three-phase reopening plan for athletics, which is subject to change.

Athletic Director Ed Gaidula said Phase 1, June 30-July 11, gives coaches an opportunity to meet with players outdoors in small groups.

Phase 2, July 13-24, allows for limited capacity in the gym and weight room. Phase 3, beginning July 27, opens athletics at a larger capacity with restrictions still in place.

The plan, available on ltsd.org, outlines protocols for athlete screenings, sanitation of facilities and equipment, social distancing, and more.

“We have to have a personal responsibility or we will go backwards,” said Principal Mark Murphy. “We’re looking forward to getting the ball moving, but at the same time, we know that the slightest slip up from any one of us in that chain could mean going backwards or having to shut programs down.”

The board also approved the following:

A contract with Pivot Physical Therapy for athletic training at $24 per hour.

The appointment of Dr. Rajah Mulloth as the district physician for the 2020-21 school year at a stipend of $10,000 to be paid in full unless any sports season(s) is canceled.

First readings of Policy 103: Nondiscrimination/Discriminatory Harassment — School and Classroom Practices; 104: Nondiscrimination of Employment Practices; and 249: Bullying/Cyberbullying.

A three-year naming rights agreement with Penn East Federal Credit Union for the elementary center library for $5,000.

Extend the required use date for the remaining senior class activity fund balance from June 30 to July 31.

Acknowledge the retirement of paraprofessional Judith Huester, effective June 30.

The appointment of Ed Gaidula as athletic director for one year at a stipend of $12,000.

Nicole Pizzola as the Interact Club adviser at a stipend of $2,500.

Jeffery Marx as the Humanities Department chair starting in the 2020-21 school year at a stipend of $2,470.

Joel Nietz as the girls head varsity basketball coach starting in the 2020-21 season at a stipend of $5,550, which won’t be paid if the season is canceled.

Ben Domiano as the boys head varsity basketball coach starting in the 2020-21 season at a stipend of $5,550, which won’t be paid if the season is canceled.

Acknowledge the resignation of Ashley Chuck as head volleyball coach, effective June 30.

Ben Simmons, Steve Jervis Sr., and Colin Golden as volunteer assistant football coaches.

Michelle Fahey as a volunteer field hockey coach.

John Yanniello as a volunteer coach for boys basketball and baseball.