

**Board approves COVID-19 resolution**Brooke Williams / Published: July 15, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board ensured on Monday that the district can meet its 180-day instruction requirement regardless of circumstances with COVID-19 this fall.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said when schools originally closed statewide for two weeks in mid-March, the days out weren’t originally counted toward the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s requirement.

However, the Pennsylvania General Assembly and Gov. Tom Wolf agreed on emergency legislation under Act 13 to account for such circumstances, he said.

“It gives the district the ability that if we do have to cancel school this year because of something related to COVID-19, we will get the hours and the days,” he said of the board’s resolution.

“If, for example, we start in the brick and mortar as we’re planning, and we have to revert back to distance learning full time or even through a hybrid model, this resolution is a statement as per the school code that because we’re still in an emergency situation, we would get credit,” he added.

This will be expressed in the district’s Phased School Reopening Health and Safety Plan, which Rakauskas plans to bring up for approval in August.

Principal Mark Murphy said certain juniors and seniors can expect calls from the high school in the coming weeks as their schedules are reviewed.

“One of the goals is to reduce foot traffic in the building and to reduce the overall number of students that have to be in the building at any particular point,” he said.

Some advanced upperclassmen may not need to take a full academic schedule to graduate.

“If students qualify in their junior and senior year and they only need one or two classes, which is totally possible, we are prepared to facilitate early dismissal for those students to pursue employment, internships, apprenticeships, dual enrollment, and also late arrival,” he said.

Also, Murphy said anyone interested in enrolling in the Lackawanna Trail Cyber Academy can attend a virtual information session on Aug. 5 at 6 p.m.

Orientation for seventh graders and transfers has been targeted for Aug. 25-27, which he said will have a virtual component, but allow students to tour the high school with their families.

At the elementary center, Principal Brian Kearney said social distancing plans are being developed.

“We’ve moved around some grade level teachers to accommodate for some larger grade sizes,” he said. “I think I have us in many of the classrooms, and we will get to all of the classrooms, where students will be safely spaced.”

The elementary center has also been finalizing plans for school meals, he said. Hallways will have one-way traffic, and Kearney expects recess to continue in order to get kids outside, but with restrictions in place.

Aug. 17-20 has been set aside for kindergarten registration, he added.

The administration stressed that students won’t need to wear masks all day, only when it’s impossible to social distance.

Business Manager Keith Glynn said the biggest roadblock for transportation is limiting the number of students on buses. Lackawanna Trail is targeting 48 per bus with staggered, assigned seating.

“For most of our buses, that is not a problem,” he said. “There’s only three buses that typically average over 48. Bus #2, bus #5, and bus #11.”

The district’s most recent survey asks about transportation plans, and parents can expect an affirmation letter from the director of transportation through the mail.

“If they can drive their students, that would open up seats for those who really don’t have that opportunity,” Glynn said.

Also, due to decreased need, the district has scaled back on Children’s Produce Market events this summer. The second July distribution has been canceled, and only one will be held next month on Aug. 20.

In other business, the board approved a resolution for the district’s 2020 bond issuance.

“We’re adding no new years to the debt and we’re adding no new money to the debt. We’re simply taking advantage of a better interest rate market,” Glynn said. “It should save us over the term of the debt around $200,000.”

President David Thorne said Rakauskas received a satisfactory-proficient superintendent evaluation for the 2019-20 school year.

“The board and the superintendent are in the process of developing goals related to the performance standards for the 2020-2021 academic year,” Thorne said.

The board also approved the following:

Agreement with ISS Solutions for network support services.

Renewed agreement with the Dalton Borough Police Department for the 2020-21 school year at $38 per hour (no increase from last year).

PATH contract for the 2020-21 school year, effective July 1.

Melissa Flynn as an outsourced independent contractor for social work services for the 2020-21 and 2020-22 school years at a salary of $39,000.

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

Acknowledge the resignations of Tina Gavin, paraprofessional; and Otylia Dugan, football cheerleading adviser.

Jessica Bentley as girls head junior high basketball coach for the 2020-21 season at a stipend of $3,850, which won’t be paid if the season is canceled.

Kristen Kurpis as head volleyball coach starting for the 2020-21 season at a stipend of $3,850, which won’t be paid if the season is canceled.

Keith Glynn and Vince Kalinoski Jr. as volunteer boys basketball coaches for the 2020-21 season.

Jeff Stage, Vince Kalinoski Jr., and Jeffery Edwards as volunteer varsity football coaches for the 2020-21 season.

Shawna Engle as a volunteer field hockey coach for the 2020-21 season.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board changed its public work session on Aug. 3 to an executive session. The board is scheduled to meet again publicly on Aug. 10 at 7:30 p.m.all.