

**BREAKING:**

**Trail ready for tomorrow's reopening** By BROOKE WILLIAMS PRESS EXAMINER Sep 9, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board amended its Health and Safety Plan Tuesday night in a special meeting ahead of bringing students back on Thursday.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said ever-changing guidelines from top health officials led to three necessary amendments.

Mask requirements: Originally, students could remove their face masks when seated at least 6 feet apart. Now, students must wear masks all day with three exceptions: teacher-directed breaks, eating and drinking, and when a safety threat is posed.

Travel policy: Employees, students and volunteers returning from a state listed on the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s quarantine list must stay off school property for 14 days. Employees must use accrued time or lose pay for these days regardless of the circumstances.

Temperature checks: The district still plans to check temperatures each day with handheld scanners. However, if the circumstances warrant it, this may be changed to self-checks at home.

Board member Robert Minick voted against the amendments, as well as a separate motion to adopt the travel policy.

Administrators also spoke to their readiness for Thursday's full reopening with social distancing measures in effect, which differs from other schools either starting remotely or under a hybrid model.

“We are one of the few schools attempting to pull this off and I have all the confidence in the world,” said elementary Principal Brian Kearney.

Principal of Student Management Shannon Kuchak said acknowledging the pandemic may have increased economic challenges for families, dress code requirements have been relaxed.

She encouraged students to wear clothing that can be washed daily, but is still school appropriate. This year, students can wear hoodies, but they still cannot wear leggings, sweatpants or pajama bottoms. Length requirements still apply for bottoms, which cannot have holes or rips. Rules for logos haven’t changed.

The board also took time to hear a proposal from one of its members, Brian Petula, about forming shooting teams at Lackawanna Trail through the Scholastic Shooting Sports Foundation.

A petition circulated to gather support for the proposal received more than 230 signatures. Some students have already signed up and plan to participate, just independently from the school district at this time.

The proposal included two co-ed teams: sporting clays and action shooting.

“There has been a lot of interest in this so far,” Petula said.

The Factoryville Sportsmen’s Club has agreed to host the teams, and students wouldn’t ever bring their equipment on school property, he told the board.

“Our plan is to almost entirely fund the teams outside of the school district as well,” he added, mentioning sponsorships and donations as examples.

Around 10 prospective coaches have expressed a willingness to go through the national certification process through SSSF and work on a volunteer basis.

By having a shooting program affiliated with the school district, Petula said students would have another way to represent Lackawanna Trail.

“Going to Lackawanna Trail myself and growing up in this community, there is a strong culture for shooting sports,” Petula said. “To me personally, I feel like it’s a little bit of a shame that we have somebody going to states from Lackawanna Trail, and they’re not going as a Lion.”

Rakauskas said if approved, the union would expect bargaining in a stipend for coaches.

The board and administration also brought up concerns such as what transporting firearms on school vehicles could mean for the district’s insurance policy and their responsibilities if the Sportsmen’s Club ever pulls its agreement with the program or outside funding sources fail.

High school Principal Mark Murphy said in his tenure, there have been a number of proposals for other student activities that initially spark interest, but don’t sustain participation levels over time.

He added that while the district supports students in their endeavors, committing to many different activities diminishes the experience of others, including those that have been sustained for a long time.

“We need to realize that we’re a small rural district with a smaller pool of resources than some larger districts that do have these shooting teams,” Murphy said.

Then as a result, the district may need to make the tough decision to inactivate a program with waning interest, he said.

After an hour of discussion, board President David Thorne encouraged the public to keep talking and reach out to district officials with feedback or questions. The proposal won’t be on the agenda for a vote next week, but could be next month or later in the year.

The board also:

Voted for Petula as the Pennsylvania School Boards Association Section 4 advisor. (Petula abstained.)

Amended the Junior/Senior High Curriculum Guide to add Personal Development/Wellness and Study Skills to the seventh and eighth grade curriculum.

Approved bus contractors/drivers for the 2020-21 school year: Tina Barrasse, Pamela Sebjan and John Donahue (substitute/bus drivers); and Ann Marie Kalinoski (private vehicle contractor/substitute). (Kevin Mulhern abstained.)

Approved a temporary 30-day bus contract between the district and Schirg Bus Company.

Approve Alexis Johnson as a long-term secondary guidance counselor substitute from Sept. 8 to Dec. 15.

Approved Courtney Gwizdz as a long-term first grade elementary teacher substitute from Sept. 8 to Jan. 27.

Approved an intermittent Family Medical Leave request for 12 weeks between Sept. 8, 2020 and Sept. 8, 2021 for Ann Jones.

Approved an FMLA request from Sept. 9 to Oct. 29 for Rebecca Joseph.

Approved Lauren Keyes as a long-term paraprofessional substitute from Sept. 9 to Oct. 29. (Mulhern abstained.)

Approved a memorandum of understanding with the Lackawanna Trail Education Support Professionals Association regarding temporary maintenance substitutes.

Approved Steve Clancey for a maintenance I position beginning Sept. 9 at $23.35 per hour.

Approved Frank Lisk as a volunteer boys basketball coach for the 2020-21 school year.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to meet again on Monday, Sept. 14 at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom.