

**LTSB happy with virtual HS response**BY KEVIN MCCONLOGUE AND ROBERT L. BAKER Press Examiner 10/21/2020

Lackawanna Trail School Board met last Tuesday (Oct. 13) to provide an update on the high school moving completely to virtual instruction for at least two weeks, while the elementary center remains open.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas acknowledged nine confirmed cases from the COVID-19 pandemic at the high school — two employees and seven students.

Because of its protocols in place the school put 100 students in quarantine and then decided it was perhaps more appropriate to switch the high school over to virtual instruction with the teachers still at the high school, after the building was deep-cleaned over the weekend.

“Unfortunately, we’re in this situation, but we view it as an opportunity,” Rakaskus said.

Board member Joe Ross said, “It’s a shame to shut down, but I congratulate the workers for everything done.”

Board president David Thorne said he wanted to offer a special thanks to the teaching staff for everyone to keep things going above and beyond. “My hat is off to these individuals. You’re in the trenches everyday,” and those in the board conference room, including Thorne, but probably less than half of the full board as well as those unmuted via Zoom, gave a loud round of applause.

In high school principal Mark Murphy’s remarks, he said the building had just completed its first day in a virtual setting for 100 percent of the students, “and I’m glad to see we can stay open. Congratulations to all of you for making it happen.”

He noted a participant by Zoom inquired in real time if there were another confirmed case of Covid-19, would the school close?

Murphy said, “Not necessarily,” but did not elaborate. He added, “I expect to return for in-school instruction on the 26th. I know this is a challenge for everyone and I particularly ask parents to create a distraction-free environment for their students. What has happened is not flawless yet, but it’s going to get better.”

Elementary Center principal Brian Kearney acknowledged that while his building is open on College Avenue in Factoryville, “It has not been without bumps in the road, but everyone is working hard, and frankly I would not want anyone else to be on my team. I really appreciate all of the effort from everyone.”

He added, “Things are going to look different.” He acknowledged an in-school Halloween-stlye event on Oct. 30 as well as a food distribution coming up.

Board member Brian Petula asked about those not able to get to a food distribution if there was a way to get the food to those who needed it. It was acknowledged later in the meeting that the Dalton Police were helping out with that function.

Maintenance manager Tom Scofield spoke a little about the deep cleaning that was done over the weekend. He also offered kudos to bus drivers for being adaptable as circumstances change.

Business manager Keith Glynn put out a call to anyone in the community who might be able to serve as a substitute as a teacher or teacher’s aide to let the district know, and it would check out the certification and clearances.

During the meeting, the board approved a series of measures involving the district’s internet. Those measures included the purchase of a Barracuda Web security gateway and a three year license and support through a CDW-grant. The purchase of a Cisco MerakiWeb firewall and five year license and support through ePlus.

Resident Joe Strauch raised an objection that competitive bids were not sought, but Glynn said the price seemed reasonable, but the upgraded electronic service was needed due to the nature of the request to fill immediate needs.

The board approved phase one of the Lackawanna Trail website redesign project with Design Done Right for $9,500.

School lunches will be free for the remainder of the school year for all students of the district and food distribution will continue taking place as it has during the past several months.

At the front end of the meeting, Shane Pagnotti of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association awarded a Recognition of Service Award to directors David Thorne (for 12 years of service) and Kevin Mulhern (for eight).

The board approved the hires of Martin Reynolds for a maintenance II position at $14/hour; Wendy Semken, part-time paraprofessional at $13/hour; Kenneth and Lizbeth Hansen, private vehicle drivers; Alec Rodway, junior varsity boys basketball coach at a stipend of $4,300; Camber Castellano, volunteer assistant cheer coach.

The board also approved a dual enrollment agreement with Lackawanna College, and approved a second reading to school board policies on lesson plans; immunizations and communicable diseases; health examinations/screenings; telework; physical exam; penalties for tardiness; job-related expense; working periods; sick leave; responsibility for student welfare; safety; school calendar; public attendance at school events; and school visitors.

There was also correspondence at the front-end of the meeting from the Factoryville Sportsmen’s Club encouraging adoption of a Lackawanna Trail School District shooting team. FSC said it would support the effort for the next 10 years, and share its facilities with the team.