

**Trail to continue in-person learning** BY KEVIN MCCONLOGUE Press Examiner Nov 11, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board announced Monday that despite the rising numbers of coronavirus cases in Wyoming County, that the district will continue with in person learning.

Wyoming County was recently moved into the state’s substantial category for risk of coronavirus spread (with cases jumping in the last three weeks from 101 to 247). When a county is in the substantial spread category, the Department of Health recommends that school districts in the county move to fully virtual instruction.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said that he talked to the state Department of Education and was told schools moving fully virtual in substantial spread is only a recommendation, not a mandate.

“We are not going to move to fully virtual,” Rakauskas said. “We believe in our safety plans in both of our school buildings. We have our fully remote option for students if they choose to do so, Trail believes that they can safely stay open, even with rising cases in Wyoming County.”

Rakauskas said that around 80 percent of students in the elementary school attend in-person classes every day, with the others attending remotely. The number of students attending in-person classes at the high school is around 50 percent.

Trail also announced that it will be delaying the start of the winter sports season by two weeks from Nov. 20 to Dec. 8. Winter sports teams will still be able to condition, but cannot start official practices or participate in scrimmages against other schools.

“We think the best way to look at winter sports is to study the science, watch what other schools are doing, and stay laser focused,” Rakauskas said. “Our main focus is keeping all of our students safe.”

The board tabled a vote for an early renewal of Rakauskas’ contract after members of the public raised concerns that there was not proper time for the public to review the details of the contract.

“The community should have input on a contract of this magnitude,” resident Lynn Stevenson said. “As far as I’m concerned, this should not be voted on tonight because the board was not transparent with the public about this.”

Resident Suzanne Green echoed the same statement, saying that “this is nothing against the superintendent’s job performance, because he does a great job, but the public should have more time to review the contract.”

Board member Brian Petula made the motion to table the vote until next month’s meeting, saying “this is the educational leader of the school district, and we need to be transparent.”

Rakauskas’ contract renewal would take effect July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2026 at a salary of $125,198 per year.

In other business, the board approved the purchase of 32 SMART boards from a COSTARS authorized reseller for $50,000. It also approved use of a CDW-grant for $9,013.80 to purchase projectors for the new boards.

The board approved the adoption of the following policies: lesson plans, immunizations and communicable diseases, health examinations/screenings, telework, physical exam, penalties for tardiness, job related expenses, working periods, sick leave, responsibility for student welfare, safety, school calendar, public attendance at school events, and school visitors.

The board also:

Approved the hire of Tera Conway as a long-term substitute elementary learning support teacher starting on Dec. 1 for a period of 90 school days at a prorated salary rate of $54,374.

Approved the extension of Lauren Keyes substitute paraprofessional position ending on Nov. 18, at a pay rate stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement.

Approved the hire of Jake Bedford as the Junior High basketball coach for the 2020-21 season, at a stipend of $3,750 according to the LTEA contract, will not be paid if the season is canceled.

Approved the hire of Lauren Keyes as a volunteer basketball cheer coach for the 2020-21 season.

Approved the hires of Jeffrey Marx and Chaz Ross as volunteer wrestling coaches for the 2020-21 season.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board will hold its next meeting on Monday, Dec. 7, at 7:30 p.m.