

**Rakauskas gets 5-year contract**BY KEVIN MCCONLOGUE AND ROBERT L. BAKER Press Examiner 12/9/2020

Lackawanna Trail School Board elected Kevin Mulhern as board president Monday night in a virtual meeting. He succeeded David Thorne who was elected secretary. Robert Minnick was elected vice president, and he succeeded Phil Stark.

The board voted 7-2 to renew Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas’s contract for July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2026 at a salary of $125,198 per year with a pay freeze in the first year and a 1 and one-half percent raise each subsequent year of the contract. Board members Deborah Naylor and Brian Petula voted against renewing the contract.

Trail High School Principal Mark Murphy announced that there are two positive COVID-19 cases at the school, and that classes will be completely virtual until Friday, Dec. 11, with in-class contact resuming on Monday, Dec. 14.

Murphy said that the two cases are unrelated to each other, and that neither person was infected as a result of being inside the school. He added that a deep cleaning of the building would take place this week and that contact tracing has been done.

“Face-to-face learning is not dangerous,” Murphy said. “There has been no evidence that the virus has spread as a result of being in school, because of that we are going to do everything we can to remain open.”

The board also approved a revised COVID-19 travel policy for students and staff. The policy essentially follows the State Department of Health’s guidance regarding travelling out of state. If a person travels out of state, they must provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours, or quarantine for 14 days before returning to school.

Board member Joe Ross said that while this motion is necessary, enforcing it will be next to impossible because no one is required to tell administrators if you leave the state.

“We have seen the virus numbers go up after Thanksgiving because people aren’t following the rules,” Ross said. “Christmas and New Year’s are coming up and I am very concerned about a skyrocket in cases after that. People are still going to go party and see their families, it’s a recipe for disaster.”

Rakaukas said that most families have been very forthcoming about when they have to leave the state for any reason, and he trusts that the Trail community will make the right choices when it comes to keeping everyone safe.

The board voted to delay the start of the winter sports season until Jan. 4, 2021. Voluntary workouts, conditioning, and open gyms can continue Dec. 14-20 as workouts are paused this week because of the closure of the high school. Official practices for winter sports may begin on Dec. 21, dependent on local conditions related to COVID-19 data.

The board approved the following hires:

 Maddie Lengel for a maintenance II position, starting at a rate of $14/per hour;

 Kristin Pietrzak as a level I personal care assistant with a pay differential of $2.50/per hour;

 Michael Kishbaugh as a private vehicle substitute driver for the 2020-21 school year;

 James Michael Vasky as a substitute bus driver for the 2020-21 school year; and

 Tyler Rzucidlo as a volunteer junior high boys basketball coach for the 2020-21 school year.

The board also approved the purchase of 50 Dell Chromebooks from the assigned fund balance at a cost of $14,706, and My Math and Glencoe Math consumables from Smethport Area School District at a cost of $6,000.

Rakauskas said that January is School Board Appreciation Month and that the district still wants to be able to celebrate virtually. The district plans to celebrate the month at its Jan. 11 board meeting with recognition from administrators and students.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board will next meet for a work session on Monday, Jan. 4.