

**Lackawanna Trail raises parallel concerns** BY KEVIN MCCONLOGUE PRESS EXAMINER September 15, 2021

The statewide mask mandate for K-12 schools was the main topic of conversation in the Lackawanna Trail School District.

At a virtual school board meeting on Monday night, parents questioned board members about the enforcement of the mask mandate and how it is putting a damper on their children’s education. Parent Chelsea Gumble called the mandate “a war against children and their parents.”

“I’m asking you to give students and parents the choice,” Gumble said. “Some kids have trouble breathing for seven hours a day in masks. It doesn’t make for a healthy learning environment. I know this is tough on the administration and board too, but parents need to be able to make this choice.”

Parent Anthony Santarelli questioned the legality of the order. He asked because members of the state legislature have filed a lawsuit trying to block the mask order if it still needs to be followed.

Mark Walz, partner at Sweet, Stevens, Katz and Williams Law Firm and member of the Pennsylvania School Boards Solicitors Association said the order is legally binding unless a court says otherwise.

“The district has no choice but to currently comply with this legal order,” Walz said. “If a child were to get extremely ill and a school district was found to not be following the mandate, the district could face dire legal and financial consequences.”

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said the mitigation efforts have been helping. The district has only seen three positive COVID-19 cases so far this school year and continues to remain fully open with a virtual option for students who still might not feel safe enough to attend in-person classes.

“We know having to wear a mask isn’t the most ideal situation, but these mitigation efforts have been keeping students in the classroom,” Rakauskas said. “Even when positive cases do pop up, our administration has done a great job quickly conducting contact tracing so a case doesn’t turn into an outbreak.”

Masks weren’t the only thing raising concerns from parents. Parent Alicia Lee asked the board about the condition of the elementary school playground saying some of the equipment is in bad condition and some parents have been raising concerns about the playground not being properly maintained.

Elementary principal Brian Kearney said he has been receiving many calls about the condition of the playground and has a meeting later this week with the Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources about a possible g rant for new playground equipment.

“We have not ignored the condition of the playground,” Kearney said. “The playground is a very important resource for our children to be able to use. Hopefully these turn out to be productive meetings, so we can get these problems fixed.” In other business, the board approved:

■ a shared contract with the Lakeland School District to share transportation services to Western School for the Deaf for 2021-22.

■ the appointments of: Lynn Gower, high school cafeteria manager; Dawn Aten, high school cafeteria assistant manager; Scot Wasilchak, teacher mentor; Jennifer Wert, part-time paraprofessional; Danielle Dwyer, varsity basketball cheerleading advisor; and David Hopkins, marching band volunteer.

■ the resignations of: Tara Crum, confidential administrative assistant, effective Oct. 7; Joanne Wright, paraprofessional; and Alexandra Tompkins, varsity basketball cheerleading advisor.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board will hold a work session on Monday, Oct. 4, at 7:30 p.m. The zoom link will be posted at www.ltsd.org.