

Trail reverses course on masking
BY KEVIN MCCONLOGUE PRESS EXAMINER Wednesday, January 19, 2022

The Lackawanna Trail School Board reversed course and approved a policy which gives the superintendent more power to implement things like universal masking.

At a virtual meeting Monday, the board voted 8-1 to revise the district’s health and safety plan. The revision gives superintendent Matthew Rakauskas the ability to require masks for all students and staff should there be a COVID-19 surge in the district or Lackawanna and Wyoming counties. The changes will take effect Jan. 24.

Last month, the board voted 5-4 to make masks optional inside school buildings, but after rising cases and pleas from parents to require masking again, changed its mind.

“This isn’t masking forever,” Rakauskas said. “This change gives us the ability to be flexible. It will be revisited on a monthly basis, but right now we think this is the best course of action to keep students in school.”

The district will also continue to look at a test-to-stay policy which has been implemented by some other districts around the state. In this policy, students and staff who are deemed as close contacts as someone who tested positive for COVID-19, will be allowed to take a test every other day for five days. If the test is negative, the student will be able to stay in school rather than have to quarantine. Anyone who tests positive will still have to quarantine. Rakauskas said this could be a way to keep more students in school and quarantine numbers down.

Board secretary David Thor ne announced he is resigning from the board effective Saturday, Jan. 29. Thorne, who has previously served as board president, cited personal and family reasons as the reason for his resignation.

“For more than 10 years, I have had the honor and privilege of serving as a director for the best school district in the state,” Thorne said. “I believe Trail can be a leader and set an example for other districts to follow, and I thank God my kids were educated in this district.”

The board voted to appoint Brian Petula to fill the rest of Thorne’s term as board secretary. Applications to fill the remainder of Thorne’s term are now available at www.ltsd. org. Rakauskas said interviews will be conducted over the next few weeks and the board hopes to fill Thorne’s seat at its February meeting.

High school principal Mark Murphy and elementary school principal Brian Kearney each gave a presentation on their respective schools PSSA and Keystone exam scores for the 2020-21 school year.

Of the high school students who took the Keystone exams, 40 percent scored proficient or advanced in literature; 30 percent in biology; and 28 percent in algebra. In the PSSA’s, 51 percent of s e v e n t h grade students scored proficient or advanced in ELA; 24 percent in seventh grade math; 38 percent in eighth grade ELA; 19 percent in eight grade math; and 47 percent in eighth grade science.

At the elementary level, the following amounts of students were proficient or advanced in the following PSSA categories: third grade math- 58 percent; third grade ELA- 67 percent; fourth grade ELA- 60 percent; fourth grade math- 41 percent; fourth grade science- 90 percent; fifth grade ELA- 53 percent; fifth grade math- 43 percent; sixth grade ELA- 53 percent; and sixth grade math- 45 percent.

“These numbers aren’t where we want to be,” Murphy said. “The amount of time kids have been out of school because of the pandemic has played a giant role in these numbers. I personally don’t think the state should have administered these tests last year, but the students were trying their best.”

At the beginning of the meeting, administrators honored board members for School Director Appreciation Month. Kearney played a video recorded at the elementary school, and board members were given a gift basket from the high school student council.

In other business, the board approved:

■ A resolution indicating the school district will not raise taxes for the 2022-23 fiscal year by more than the index established by the Department of Education of 3.8 percent.

■ A wastewater treatment plant operation contract with Hester Wastewater Services LLC in the amount of $1,900 per month beginning Feb. 1.

■ The purchase of a dishwasher system for the high school cafeteria from Rice’s Food Service at a cost of $27,413.03.

■ The appointments of: Levi Bennett, full-time maintenance II position; Micah Schneider and Seamus Nichols, bus drivers; Laura Evans, varsity field hockey coach; Jessica Bentley, assistant softball coach; Jillian Rojac, dramatics director; and Cody Youtz, volunteer wrestling coach.

■ The resignations of: Dan Demora, stagecraft director; and Brink Powell, dramatics director.

■ The retirement of Kathleen ‘Missy’ Bower, paraprofessional.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board will next meet for a work session on Monday, Feb. 7, at 7:30 p.m. The Zoom link will be posted at www.ltsd.org.