

LT board approves cyber plan

Brooke Williams / Published: March 13, 2019

The Lackawanna Trail School Board voted Monday night to approve a contract with VLN, a cyber charter group.

The board has been considering VLN as an alternative for the Northeast Online Learning Academy through the Northeast Educational Intermediate Unit, which the district currently recommends to students and families wanting to pursue cyber education.

VLN could recoup some funds the district loses from paying for students within the district to attend charter schools and also provide a better education for these students, although the district prefers to keep students in brick and mortar schools, superintendent Matthew Rakauskas has said during discussions of switching platforms.

Board member Kevin Mulhern said a letter he wrote to the district's elected officials about a month ago in regard to their positions on charter and cyber schools has mostly gone unanswered. He said he received a quasi response from Senator Lisa Baker's office, but that's all.

"This board is nine elected officials in this area. We're asking three other elected officials to at least give us the time of day and the common courtesy of a response," he said. "Even if they don't want to come to this board meeting, I think it's very disappointing to the public."

Rakauskas echoed the importance of hearing back from senators and state representatives.

"What this school board can do about the way we're robbed through cyber schools is nothing more than getting information out there," he said. "The people Mr. Mulhern talks about have a vote."

During Monday's meeting, board members voted in favor of an E-Rate wireless access point upgrade for the elementary school at a cost of \$40,727.40.

Business manager Keith Glynn noted in last week's work session that the board would need to commit to including this cost in next year's budget, but 60 percent would be offset by revenue.

The board also approved the 2017-18 single audit that Murphy & Dougherty Co. prepared for the school district, which showed a fund balance of approximately \$3.2 million.

"We're in a financially strong position, ready to evaluate this next year's budget," Glynn said.

Rakauskas told the board new signs placed at the elementary center warn that the parking lot is only open to people going into the school or the nearby Christy Mathewson Park. This also includes 24-hour surveillance signs.

He said garbage from outside sources was found in the elementary school's dumpsters, and while it may have been dumped there innocently, it can be considered theft of services.

"We think we're over those issues now and we want to have a great relationship with our neighbors in the community," he said.

The dumpsters are not locked because it would be an issue with the garbage trucks, but Rakauskas said the district will take that step if it becomes a consistent problem even with the signs.

Rakauskas also said he will present his recommendations for the 2019-20 school calendar next month.

The board authorized the business office to advertise a financial services request for a start date of July 1, 2019. The purpose is to see if another bank could give the district a better interest rate, Glynn said.

A first reading of the child abuse policy was approved, as well as second readings of the following policies: nondiscrimination in employment practices; discipline of students with disabilities; behavior support; screening/evaluations for students with disabilities; enrollment of students; admission of students; confidential communications of students; student records; suspension/expulsion; school wellness; food services; and acceptable use of internet, computers and network resources.

Board members approved Kelly Hopkins as the English department chair at a stipend of \$2,470; Jim Becchetti as an equipment manager at a stipend of \$2,600; and Joel Nietz as a golf coach at a stipend of \$3,460.

All positions are for the 2019-20 school year.

Charlie Cobb, Mark June and Jeffery Edwards were approved as volunteer assistant baseball coaches for the 2018-19 season.

Mary Smarkusky was also approved as a volunteer track and field coach for the 2018-19 season.

The board met in an executive session beforehand to discuss these positions, as well as a personnel issue.

Rakauskas said the drama club will put on 'Kiss Me, Kate' March 29 and 30 at 7 p.m. and March 31 at 2 p.m.

The unified track and field team consisting of special education and non-special education students is also set to begin March 19.

High school principal Mark Murphy congratulated Trail student Tia Brooks for qualifying for PMEA State Band in Pittsburgh.

Elementary school principal Brian Kearney said through a grant from the Lackawanna County Farm Bureau, students will participate in a mobile agriculture lab on March 23.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to meet for a work session on Monday, April 1 at 7:30 p.m.