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Lackawanna Trail superintendent discusses potential addition of programs

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FACTORYVILLE — Lackawanna Trail Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas announced the district is considering the addition of two new programs for the next school year, in an effort to keep more students enrolled in the school, during a work session meeting Jan. 3.

The first, the creation of a Life Skills class at the elementary center, would allow students currently living in the school district, but attending an out-of-district placement, to attend classes at Lackawanna Trail.

“The Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit (NEIU) 19 would support us in bringing those students back to the district,” Rakauskas said.

Director of Special Education Amie Talarico believes starting a Life Skills program in the younger grades would be a big asset to the district.

“We currently have a Life Skills program for students in our high school building (grades 7-12), so we’re looking to bring a program to the elementary center,” Talarico said. “We have a number of students enrolled in out-of-district placements at neighboring districts and the intermediate unit could provide services for here in the district. It would reduce the time spent in transportation and they would be exposed to their peers at Lackawanna Trail.

“We’d also like to streamline our program so we’re providing curriculum from the elementary grades through high school. There is a possibility of hiring a teacher to support the program, but it’s a cost benefit to the district and we currently have the space in the elementary center for the students.”

Rakauskas added NEIU 19 currently runs a high school automotive tech shop in the Carbondale area, which a few Lackawanna Trail students attend, and supplies the teacher and all equipment.

“The (intermediate unit) currently pays rent to a facility in the Carbondale area where students learn the basic automotive tech skills and they are looking at moving next year,” he said. “They put out a request to see if any schools in the area have the facilities where students would be able to attend half-day sessions. We have the space, but there are a lot of other questions to ask.”

According to Rakauskas, the district would be paid rent by the intermediate unit and would not have to hire additional staff members.

“It would be a bonus and benefit some of our kids who are currently transported to the other facility,” he said. “It would also be a cost savings and we’d be keeping our own students at Lackawanna Trail High School.”

Rakauskas estimates approximately 10-15 students would benefit from having the programs in the district. He added the discussions are in the preliminary stage and are expected to continue during the regular meeting in February.

In other news:

Members of the board of education will vote on the Act 1 Resolution during the Jan. 9 regular meeting. The board will either pass a preliminary budget which allows the opportunity to seek exceptions or pass a resolution that states it won’t go above the Act 1 index of 3.2 percent for any potential tax increase.

“My recommendation to the board is to pass the resolution that limits us to the Act 1 index,” Lackawanna Trail Business Manager Keith Glynn said. “The taxpayers did a huge part last year in helping us balance the budget and it was very difficult for them. Although I don’t believe the 3.2 percent will help us balance the budget this year, I think we’re going to be a little bit short; we’re going to have to get creative and potentially make cuts where it’s possible and needed.”

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