

THE ABINGTON JOURNAL

Lackawanna Trail Board of Education votes to stay within Act 1 index for any tax increase

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As part of School Director Recognition Month, students honored board members for their service to the district. From left, first row, first-grade student Maribella Rakauskas and sixth-grade student Matthew Rakauskas. Second row, kindergarten student Elizabeth Harvy, third-grade student Keaton Lisk, sixth-grade student Jackson Nordmark, second-grade student Noelann Polkowski. Third row, senior Jennifer Price, sophomore Kevin Thorne, senior Matt Merolla. Fourth row, board member Joseph Strauch, board member Adrian Bianchi, board president Phil Stark, board member Kevin Mulhern, board member Joseph Ross and board member and Ned Clarke. Absent at the time of photo were board members Karl Beichler, Michael Mould and David Thorne.

FACTORYVILLE — Members of the Lackawanna Trail Board of Education voted 6-0 Monday to approve a resolution indicating the school district will not raise property taxes for the 2017-18 fiscal year by more than the Act 1 index, established by the Department of Education, of 3.2 percent.

School property taxes were raised 13.9 percent in Wyoming County and 8.6 percent in Lackawanna County in the 2016-17 budget.

Eighth-grade student McKenzie Edwards addresses board members with concerns regarding the district's band and music education program. She would like the band director, Kevin Dikeman, made available to students more often during the school day.

"On two-hour delays, the junior high band does not get to practice because of our schedule," she said. "Some of us put a lot of time and effort into going to music festivals and sometimes we don't get the place we want because we didn't have the time to practice. During concerts, we all have to be playing at the same level and it's really hard when we don't have the practice time. We can all practice on our own, but having our band director there is the best way to interact individually and as a whole."

Cathy Strauch believes the district should hire another teacher for the music department.

“As a parent, I can see that if you don’t reinstate another music teacher, it’s going to be a big shame for the school because the music program is going to go way downhill. I know our budget has been tough, but if you can find the money, bring in another (teacher) because it’s not fair to Mr. Dikeman to try to do the work of two people and it’s not fair to all the students.”

According to Lackawanna Trail Superintendent of Schools Matthew Rakauskas, the district downsized its music department staff due to budget shortfalls.

“We had four music teachers in the district, two at the elementary center and two at the high school, for probably two decades,” he said. “With all the budget cuts that came through, we cut one teacher through attrition. Ideally, the system runs best with four teachers, but we were able to cut it to three without laying someone off.”

There is currently one full-time teacher in the high school, one full-time teacher in the elementary center and a teacher who serves both schools.

“Kevin Dikeman, the high school band teacher, was at the high school 100 percent for the past five years and now he splits his schedule between the high school and elementary center,” Rakauskas said. “It’s not as strong of a program as it was in years past, but I think we’re doing really well with limited resources.”

In conjunction with School Director Recognition Month, students from the elementary center dedicated books, which will be donated to the library, to board members. In addition, three high school students, Jennifer Price, Kevin Thorne and Matt Merolla, thanked board members for their support of various programs within the district.

In other business, members of the board...

- Approved the resignation of Gary Wilmet as junior high field hockey coach and approved Wilmet as the varsity field hockey coach for the 2017-18 school year, at a stipend of \$5,100.
- Approved Candace Haft and Judith Slocum as a volunteer band assistants for the 2016-17 school year.
- Approved the resignation of assistant football coach Jason Wagner.
- Approved the resignation of assistant field hockey coach Sarah Brander.
- Approved Lori Phillips, of Nicholson, as a nurse substitute.

The Lackawanna Trail Board of Education will hold a work session meeting at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 6 at the elementary center building.

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