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Lackawanna Trail may hire agency to collect delinquent cafeteria funds

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Members of the Lackawanna Trail Junior High Choir performed two songs during the beginning of the district's Board of Education meeting Oct. 9. From left, first row, Emelia Jones, Alyson Schirg, Lily Reid, Lilly Jagoe, Teagan Vokes. Second row, Helen Bellucci, Carolena Ryon, Leigha Joseph, Eliza Fotta, Deana Wilhelm, Ellsbeth Hunting and Mary Margaret Phillips.

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FACTORYVILLE — Members of the Lackawanna Trail Board of Education voted 8-0 to approve the business office to solicit bids for credit collection agency services for delinquent student cafeteria account balances during a regular meeting Oct. 9.

"I know it's a sensitive topic and we do our best to work with every family for the collection of student debt," Lackawanna Trail Business Manager Keith Glynn said. "We're not looking to send \$5 to a collection agency. We'll work with the board, if they pursue this, to set a limit that's significant. We'll try to pursue all means of working with families through a payment plan to keep the students eating, but also to make sure the cafeteria fund stays stable."

According to Glynn, the balance in the student delinquent fund used to be about \$150 any given year, however there has been an increase of about \$100 each month this year.

"This is not targeted at low-income families and we're not ever going to withhold a meal from a student," Glynn said. "Sometimes families forget about the student meal balances or choose to ignore them and they go delinquent."

Glynn added that losses in the cafeteria fund may end up having an effect on other areas in the district.

"We have a finite amount of revenue to work with as a school district," he said. "When we have an additional expense that we're not expecting, it leads us to have to take the money from general operations which, for the most part, is education."

Glynn anticipates a loss of approximately \$40,000 in the cafeteria fund this year.

Members of the board vote 8-0 to authorize the business office to solicit requests for proposal for food service management companies.

"This is no reflection on Nutrition Group's performance," Glynn said. "They have been a tremendous asset to the district. When we originally solicited for bids, we were doing so using all the district's staff. Since then, we've had many retirements and people who have left the district. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has granted us some exceptions to rebidding, but at this point they feel we've had such a significant change since our original request for proposal that they are requiring us to do so again."

Lackawanna Trail Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas announced there have been some changes in the way visitors are allowed to enter district buildings in an effort to improve safety.

Per Rakauskas, the biggest change is at the elementary center.

"(Visitors) used to buzz in and go into the main office to pick up their child or drop something off," he said. "We found that it needed to be tightened up. It's not anything against the parents, grandparents, and guardians, but we found our buildings to be too open."

Rakauskas added a new policy was instituted in the elementary center a few weeks ago that requires visitors to buzz in and wait in the area between the double doors for their child, who is then brought to them by an adult.

"It has become less welcoming to some, but we believe it's much safer," he said. "It's a balancing act for us between being a welcoming school and a safe school. I think we're doing both."

According to Rakauskas, the district is looking for candidates for a few open positions: junior high boys basketball coach, long-term special education high school substitute teacher, and a long-term substitute to teach Life Science, Anatomy and Physiology, and Health. Interested applicants should contact Rakauskas at rakauskasm@ltsd.org or 570-945-5184.

Rakauskas reported air quality and mold issues at the high school and elementary center have been addressed.

"We found levels of air quality that weren't as safe as they should be and the growing of some mold in very small areas," he said. "We immediately took action and moved students out of those areas. Our maintenance staff has done an excellent job getting those areas back up to where they need to be."

Rakauskas added the district hired two companies, Eagle Associates and Service Master, to help with the process.

Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center Principal Brian Kearney announced a lockdown drill was held in the building Oct. 9.

"We were completely locked down within two minutes," he said. "Our faculty and staff did a tremendous job."