

Lackawanna Trail approves educational sabbatical for kindergarten teacher

FACTORYVILLE – The Lackawanna Trail School Board has approved kindergarten teacher Mary DeNault’s request to take an educational sabbatical for the second semester of the 2015-16 school year and the first semester of the 2016-17 school year.

Board member Kevin Mulhern commented on this issue.

“We had made some requests to this particular teacher to do it at a more opportune time, but we were denied that,” he said. “Unfortunately, school code tells us we have to do it. It has to get voted out. It has to go through, but we are impacting two years of a kindergarten class with this issue.”

Board member Dr. Michael Mould followed up on Mulhern’s comments.

“In my opinion, it (the sabbatical) is disruptive to the educational process or potentially so, and I’m concerned about that,” said Mould. “I’m also concerned about the timing of the sabbatical. I firmly believe in assisting administration and faculty members approving their skills, but I think timing is a huge factor and this is not an opportune time to fund this type of an undertaking.”

Mould said that by approving this sabbatical, the board will lay out in the neighborhood of \$30,000 to \$33,000 net cost.

“In my estimation, absolutely, this is not the time,” he stated. “But as Kevin (Mulhern) indicated, we have no choice based on state mandate.”

Mould voted in the affirmative, acknowledging the application is in order and, based on state law, the sabbatical must be granted.

School director Joseph Strauch also expressed his opinions.

“Timing is the critical part here,” he said. “It is most disruptive to the students. Their education will be hampered to some degree. It is also very disruptive to the administration.”

Strauch said he would vote ‘no’; however, he believes it would be cheaper to approve the request than to fight it.

Mould then mentioned he firmly appreciates all that administrators and faculty members have done to analyze their expenses for the coming year. He said they were thoughtful in terms of what they asked to be included in the instructional budget.

“You’ve been very conscientious,” he said of administrators and faculty members. “I think that should be publicly acknowledged.”

President David Thorne reluctantly agreed to the sabbatical.

In other business, the board voted to approve the district budget of \$20,340,969 for the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Business manager Keith Glynn thanked principals, department chairs and educators for helping him with the budget process.

“I want to thank Mr. Rakauskas (superintendent Matthew Rakauskas),” he said. “He spent a lot of time with me side by side with this budget. He was very influential. Thank you for the time and effort put in on everybody’s behalf.”

Also, high school principal Dr. Mark Murphy, in his secondary education report, thanked board members, administration, faculty and staff for prepping the graduation commencement, which was held outside.

“We dodged a few raindrops and we got through it,” he said. “Mr. Kearney (assistant principal Brian Kearney) and I are looking forward to making some improvements next year, whether we’re inside or outside.”

Thorne said it was a great honor to give a commencement address to the graduating students.

“It was an honor for me to speak with them,” he said.

Cathy Rist Strauch, treasurer of the Friends of Music Booster Club, commented on Thorne’s commencement.

“You did a beautiful job,” she said. “The whole commencement was beautiful.”