



## LTSD tries to silence member

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BY ROBERT L. BAKER

The Lackawanna Trail School Board passed a resolution Monday night to make one of its members satisfy a remedy stated in a grievance and unfair labor practice the alleged offender said he did not make.

Before voting, board members said they could not address the actual grievance in public because it was a personnel matter.

When board member Joe Strauch objected to a vote being taken about him, he asked board chairman Ned Clarke if he (Strauch) would be given an opportunity to address in public how he intended to "satisfy the remedy."

"Absolutely," Clarke said.

Strauch also asked where in the laws governing public school boards does it say a school board can direct that one of its duly elected members take a specific action.

"We'll refer that to the solicitor," Clarke said.

When pressed by the public as to where the solicitor, John Audi, was, they were told he was not present.

Board member Mark Lombardi said there were numerous citations about directing a specific board member to act in a certain manner, but said he could not personally point to any one of them.

At odds is a website that Strauch created at [www.ltsd.info](http://www.ltsd.info) before becoming a school board member and which some feel should be removed since it is not the school district's official site which is [www.ltsd.org](http://www.ltsd.org)

"I want you to know that the action we're taking tonight was not done without thought and research," Lombardi said. "It is being done in the best interest of the district, the students, faculty, taxpayers."

With that the board took a 7-1 vote with Strauch voting no, and board member Carol Selwood absent

Parent Christy Clarke asked pointedly, "What is it you don't like?"

She added, "I personally go to the website all of the time because frankly I can't find current things on the school-sanctioned website."

She talked about hyperlinks down, athletic postings outdated, music information more than a month old.

"We (the school district) had four students including my son participate in District Orchestra last weekend and it was a very big deal, but there's no mention on the school website," she said.

On the site that Mr. Strauch one time helped to create at [ltsd.info](http://ltsd.info) is a photo of the students at District Orchestra.

"It seems like you're being one-sided on what you think should be on a website," Mrs. Clarke said. "This is not a criticism of the current webmaster who no doubt has other school duties, but here you have a parent who happens to now be a school board member and at no expense to anyone has chosen to put information online for the betterment of students, and you're trying to shut him down."

"Shame on the school board for taking such action tonight," Mrs. Clarke said. "I'm embarrassed in all of you."

Strauch then asked the board if he could speak to how he planned to address the relief the board sought but would not share with the public.

First, he said he would write a letter of apology to the school district's webmaster which he previously identified as Kelly Hopkins.

Second, he said he had already removed a Facebook page that had the potential to be read by the public as being critical.

Third, Strauch said "I will request the owner of the 'unofficial' LTSD public website to shut it down."

With that he turned to Cathy Strauch, his wife, who said she "absolutely would not shut the website down."

As no solicitor was present, there was no clarity as to whether steps outlined in the grievance had been met.

And, Strauch further pressed the issue about numerous Sunshine law and due process violations that he felt were made as the board addressed the union grievance involving him.

"I don't have those legal answers for you," Ned Clarke said.

The board president, however, did thank the 20 persons present for their attendance and acknowledged that normally the board just sees two or three persons in the audience.

"I want you to know we are dealing with issues that will remain difficult as we move forward," Mr. Clarke said.

Mrs. Clarke said, they would remain difficult if the board didn't understand the public's frustrations.

"Know that not a few of us here feel that with the action against Mr. Strauch, our first amendment rights are also being violated," she said.

In other business, the school board accepted the resignations of varsity track coach Mark Johnson and assistant football coach Vincent McClain.

It appointed Mark Petrewski of Factoryville as the new varsity track coach.

It also gave the green light to adding Jacke Healey and Brad Higgins as volunteer assistant baseball coaches and Stephen Joseph as a volunteer assistant track and field coach.