

Trail board addresses personnel matters

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A special meeting held by the Lackawanna Trail school board Monday addressed several personnel, tenure and tuition issues, but the board did not publicly address the matter of a high school English teacher and coach who has been charged with felony assault.

Michael William Petherick was recently charged with assaulting a former girlfriend in Magistrate Carl Smith's court, and the charges have been bound over to county court where Petherick will be arraigned July 12.

The public board meeting did not begin until about 8:20 p.m., when the board returned from a lengthy executive session.

Board president Mark Lombardi said that the executive session was held prior to the meeting because "there were several matters pertaining to personnel and or the tenuring process. We don't rubber stamp these things...We spent time on these matters and engaged in a very spirited discussion."

Two board members, Joseph Ross and Ned Clarke, were not in attendance. Joseph Strauch had sent a letter stating he would be otherwise occupied during Monday night's meeting, mailed from Paris, but was actually in attendance.

The board approved the appointment of Katelynn Kmick to the long term substitute chemistry/physics position for the first marking period of the 2013-14 school year, at a salary prorated, pending receipt of all clearances. This position is for the first 45 days of the school year while the regular teacher is on leave. Kmick has previously worked at the University of Scranton and King's College in the chemistry lab, and held a long term substitute position at the Old Forge School District.

Erika Chang was appointed for the temporary professional secondary special education transition coordinator position at a salary of \$51,810, step one, Masters column, beginning the first day of the second semester of the 2013-14 school year as stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement. She will replace a teacher who is retiring as of the first day of the second semester, and is being hired far in advance of her start date so that she can participate in start of the year activities and learn the ropes of the special education department. The position will focus upon the transition plan needed for students when they reach the age of 14. She will be working with special education students from kindergarten through 12th grade as well as some gifted students.

Jamie Schirg was appointed to the part-time elementary para-professional position, as scheduled, at the probation rate of \$12.73 per hour.

Dr. Stoker said that Schirg will be assisting the guidance counselor and also assisting with the child study team.

In extracurricular appointments, Mark Bennett has hired as boys and girls assistant volleyball coach at a stipend of \$2,325 per sport, as stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement. It was noted that Susan Robinson, head volleyball coach, recommended Bennett, who is from Throop. Jody Kwiatkowski, a "very strong supporter of girls' basketball," was hired as a volunteer assistant basketball coach.

Tenure was conferred to the following teachers, to be awarded on the first day of the 2013-14 school year: James Becchetti, Laurel Kinback, Christopher Gercken, Todd Peters, Erin Kropa, Katie Lane, Kathleen Snyder, Laura Evans, and Craig Muller. There were two no votes from Selwood and Strauch, and Mulhern abstained.

Tuition waivers were approved for the 2013-14 school year for 15 students, all said to be the children of district employees who reside elsewhere. Strauch cited section 1313 of PA school law, which he said prescribes how to calculate tuition for out of district students who attend the school. The tuition funds can thereby be recouped from the students' home districts, at no cost to their families.

Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said that the district has a policy which states that children of non-resident employees can attend here free of tuition.

Strauch said, "The tuition waiver policy is getting to be too expensive." He said that the cost per student per year was \$19,400.

Lombardi corrected Strauch, saying that the cost per student is actually just over \$15,000. "The cost per student is determined by taking the district's expenditures minus transportation costs, minus the total debt, divided by the number of students. However, some students cost us far in excess of \$15,000."

When asked if the students were from only one or two districts, Lombardi said that there were quite a few districts represented, and said that a record is kept of where the employees and their children reside.

Strauch said that 15 students cost approximately \$1.3 million to the taxpayers of the district, or about \$85,000 per student.

Christy Clarke, a parent, asked for the policy to be re-read, and then said that in her opinion, the wording is up for interpretation. Board secretary Judith Johnson said that the tuition waiver helps attract a better pool of educators to the district.

She recommended approving the students' tuition waivers, then looking into possibly recouping money from their sending districts later. The board voted 6-1, with Strauch voting no.

The board adjourned and went back into executive session. Lombardi announced that a meeting will be held on Aug. 5 at 7 p.m., preceded by an executive session.

"There are a couple of matters being closely monitored by the board," he said.

When asked if there was a decision regarding the English teacher and coach, he replied, "No."