

Trail revising Internet, device use policies

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Lackawanna Trail board members got a first look at proposed Internet use policy revisions and electronic device use at its first work session of the year on Monday night, Jan. 6.

Policy #815, entitled "Acceptable Use of the Internet," and Policy #237, which addresses use of electronic devices on school property, will have first readings at the board's regular meeting on Monday, Jan. 13.

A policy on the use of the Internet has been in place since 2012, but the proposed revised policy is more detailed, and extensively defines federal and state law concerning pornography, obscenity, terrorism, and bullying in relation to the use of electronic devices.

It also lists 23 types of uses prohibited by students or district employees when accessing the Internet on school property or while using devices that are school property.

The proposed revision of the policy on the use of electronic devices (which superintendent Matthew Rakauskas called the "bring-your-own-device policy") is a dramatic reversal of a policy established in 2009. That policy strictly prohibited the "possession of laser pointers...cellular telephones, picture phones, telephone paging devices...by students during the school day."

The new policy opens with the statement that the district "recognizes the need to provide access to technological resources," which includes "all existing and emerging technology devices."

It goes on to list a number of currently popular electronic communications devices in common use and considered acceptable. Unacceptable devices for in-school use include gaming devices, laser pointers, modems or routers, and televisions.

Several prohibitions on the use of electronic devices on school property are listed, which includes use of such devices in "locker rooms, bathrooms, health suites, and changing areas."

Both policies were to be posted on the district's website prior to the first readings.

A public meeting to discuss the proposed policies before they are considered for adoption will be held at the elementary center on Jan. 27 at 7:30 p.m.

Recent school closings due to weather has prompted the district to change the school calendar to include make-up days on Jan. 20, April 17, and June 4, 5, and 6, with graduation on June 6. (Schedule changes are listed on the district's website.)

"Having five school closings so far in the school year," Superintendent Rakauskas said, "has put a strain on teachers and students to absorb the missed classroom work."

Director Joseph Strauch stated that he fully supports the changes, but wondered why the district needs the board's approval of the initial calendar before the school year begins, but does not need the board's approval when the superintendent makes changes to the calendar during the school year.

"There should be something in district policy," Strauch said, "that states that the superintendent has to have board approval for reasonable changes in the schedule during the school year."

Board president Mark Lombardi objected to Strauch's suggestion.

"We're treading on slippery ground," he said, "when the board starts binding the superintendent to get board approval for every schedule change. That's a micro-management approach. The superintendent's administrative team has the ability to use its judgment on needed changes in the schedule. I, for one, will tread very carefully on language limiting that ability."