

Curriculum guides unveiled at Lackawanna Trail

Bob Baker 2/5/2014

The Lackawanna Trail School Board got a first look Monday night at updated curriculum guides proposed for use by its junior and senior high school students.

During the board's regular monthly work session, Principal John Rushefski said that the guides set the tone for scheduling for the 2014-15 school year, "which believe it or not is right around the corner."

He said that he and assistant principal Mark Murphy and curriculum director Janice Joyce met with the department chairs, and they, in turn, with their faculty "to make sure what's in print is what's in practice."

In the junior high guide for grades seven and eight was some clarification about band and chorus credit as well as clarity about new graduation requirements, "making sure the language is more precise."

The senior high guide for grades nine through 12 also has more clarification about graduation requirements.

Joyce entered the conversation to underscore that all students must now pass a Biology I exam mandated by the state, and Rushefski added some comment about honors courses as well as a relationship with the Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center for vocational education.

The board is expected to approve the guides at its Feb. 10 meeting.

While the secondary school administrators had the floor, they also addressed some upcoming initiatives dealing with teaching effectiveness, writing across the curriculum, mid-term exams, advance placement and Keystone Exams.

Regarding effectiveness, Murphy noted that student learning objectives (SLOs) would be required of every district and every teacher.

Murphy noted that in the state's recent evaluation of Lackawanna Trail High School the only "yellow flag" concerned writing across the curriculum, and while language instruction will not change, a greater writing emphasis will be added for other courses.

Perhaps the most controversial part of the initiatives was the elimination of mid-term exams.

Both Joyce and Rushefski said that testing was difficult recently because of weather days and coinciding with students facing other tests with Keystone exams.

Rushefski said that by the year 2017, advance placement courses would be available to only the top 10 percent of students as different from the present top 14 percent.

Joyce also addressed a time table about Keystone Exams required by the state and anticipated that civics and American history would become the fifth curricular area to be tested beginning probably in 2015-16.

"The goal of all of this," Rushefski said, "is to make sure that Lackawanna Trail is in agreement with moving from where we are to where the state is taking us."

In other business, the board addressed a recent public hearing the previous Monday at the Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center regarding an overhaul of its electronic devices policy as well as acceptable use of the Internet.

Board member David Thorne said he thought the hearing was "excellent" although he would have liked to have seen more of the public out, and knew the weather could have been a factor. He said he was most impressed with how Trail teachers are already using the technology for the benefit of students.

Board member Joe Strauch said that with anticipated expanded use of devices, the school district would need to increase its bandwidth.

Superintendent Matt Rakauskas agreed the district would need to invest more funds for that purpose, and he would provide the board with a plan.

Thorne said, "I know we're going to crawl, then toddle, then walk slow but we will need to make the investment. We need to look at a short-range plan to prioritize spending that will commit needed resources."

Parent Christy Clarke was in the audience and expressed a concern about the disparity between the students who can afford the devices and those who can't.

"We're already seeing students who have devices doing their homework using them as opposed to others who don't have them. Doesn't that also create issues?" she asked.

Elementary principal Tonia Stoker said, "Our goal is to make sure everyone is technologically literate."

Murphy also noted that "We did talk about devices not driving the curriculum, and we definitely don't want to have a wedge between the haves and the have-nots.

He thanked Clarke for her input, and acknowledged, "We do have to keep an even playing field for all."

In other business, Board president Mark Lombardi took time out at the front end of the meeting, on the day after the Super Bowl to acknowledge that one of the victorious Seattle Seahawks' assistant coaches, John Glenn, was a Lackawanna Trail High School graduate. He said that with the birth of a child last fall, "It's been a great year for John."

On the agenda for next Monday's meeting at 7:30 p.m. at the Trail Elementary Center in Factoryville will be the resignation of Katie Lane as marching band director and appointment of Carlee Laubach as boys' volleyball assistant coach and a yet unnamed person to be track coach. The board will also address the appointment of a Lackawanna Trail representative to the Northeast Intermediate Unit #19 Board of Directors, a position presently held by Mike Mould.

In addition to approving the curriculum guides, the board will also have a second reading of school policies dealing with 'Acceptable Use of the Internet' and 'Electronic Devices' and a first reading of a policy dealing with 'Search and Seizure.'