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LT names marching band director

The Lackawanna Trail School Board voted unanimously Monday night to appoint Kevin Dikeman as its marching band director.

The discussion, however, from the public did not mirror the same unanimity.

About two dozen persons attended the meeting including around eight students.

Kelsey Hopkins said she had been with the marching band since third grade, "and I want to express my concern that we may not compete in the future."

She said she had good memories of participation in past Tournaments of Bands and also had some letters from current students and alumni who had similar concerns about the program's future.

Kevin Thorne, a son of school board member David Thorne, walked up to the board table and simply said, "I hope we can compete competitively."

Board president Mark Lombardi said to Hopkins and Thorne that there had been discussion about a different form of competition called Cavalcade and wondered what they knew about it. They both expressed some positives about it, but felt Tournament provided a better opportunity to do their best.

Missy Bower, mother of retiring marching band director Katie Bower, said she was concerned about keeping the marching band program quality "where it is right now."

She asked the board to table the matter of considering Mr. Dikeman that evening.

"I know the time and energy that it takes and I think to not table it does a disservice to the kids currently in the program," she said

Assistant principal Mark Murphy said he once led a Tournament of Bands Top Five contender at his previous school and remains a member of the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association.

"You have to know that there is not agreement in the musical community about whether TOB is the best way to go," he said, noting he had been criticized for it by some in the academic community.

He added, however that "excellence" was the key word and felt the candidate not only had the credentials but would want to maintain a level of excellence.

Board member Thorne expressed concerns that the program might take right turns under Mr. Dikeman but did recognize his commitment to the school.

The board then voted 9-0 to approve Dikeman, and Thorne expressed concern to Murphy that he hoped the students who would be disappointed needed to be encouraged the next day.

In other business, the Trail board did approve a list of potential snow make-up days to the 2013-14 calendar, if necessary. They include June 13, the day of graduation; May 2, an Act 80 day that could be returned for instructional use; April 21, Easter Monday; April 18, Good Friday; and then start adding June 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, with graduation for high school seniors to be moved from Friday, June 13, to Monday, June 16, and then for each day after that is used as a snow date, the graduation date would be extended a day.

Superintendent Matt Rakauskas said, "We hope we don't need to use them."

The board also adopted revised school policies on 'Acceptable Use of the Internet' and 'Electronic Devices,' which in their present form will allow students, grades K-12, during the 2014-15 school year to not only bring devices such as smart phones, I-pads and tablet computers to class but use them as integral parts of the learning environment.

There was almost no public discussion about the new policies, but elementary principal Tonia Stoker shared a survey that she said represented about one-third of the students.

A few appointments were also announced Monday night including present football coach Steve Jervis as asst. baseball coach, Eric Green as asst. track coach, and Brink Powell as special education secretary.

An elementary school curriculum guide was also approved.

At the end of the 3-hour meeting, Dave Bowman of Southwestern Energy said his company which has local headquarters in Lemon Twp., would like to offer a defensive driving program to the high school called 'Alive at 25' which it offers at other locations in the country.

Principal John Rushefski said he would like to consider it for the next school year.

