

LTSB expecting to raise taxes

May 14, 2014

BY ROBERT L. BAKER

The Lackawanna Trail School Board gave its OK Monday night to a \$20.1 million proposed final budget for 2014-15 that could see Wyoming County taxes go up as much as 3.67 mills and Lackawanna County taxes go up 1.18 mills.

Trail business manager David Homish said the \$20,083,463 proposed budget was preliminary, and tax rates could fluctuate a little bit "because the state budget is not close to being passed at this time."

He noted that some changes being proposed include adjusting a special education subsidy, "which could be a good thing for us."

Homish said that \$9.1 million of the proposed budget was tied to salaries and \$5.2 million was tied to fringe benefits.

He also noted in his preliminary calculations that no adjustments had been made in the salary area because staffing is not completed at this time.

Homish said he should have better numbers available for the board's June 9 work session, and "very definitely" by the June 30 public board meeting. The board is mandated by the state to make a decision on a 2014-15 budget by June 30.

Eleven months ago, Trail's board approved a \$19.2 million budget that saw local taxes go up 0.97 mills in Wyoming County to 70.94; and up 0.69 mills to 135.35 in the Lackawanna County portion of the district.

In other business Monday, the board approved a school calendar for that begins with classes on Aug. 27, with a proposed graduation date on the following June 5 or June 12, depending on snow date usage.

The board also approved a second reading on an updated policy on bullying and cyber bullying.

Later in the meeting, during the superintendent's report, Matthew Rakauskas reviewed the Trail school district's Bring Your Own Devices (BYOD) policy that is to be fully implemented in the 2014-15 school year.

He said that the policy would be gradually integrated into the curriculum during the first marking period and was looking at Nov. 3 as the full implementation date.

Board president Mark Lombardi asked high school principal Mark Murphy about an arrangement with BING, a search engine on the Internet, that gains technology credits for the district the more its students, faculty and supporters use it.

Murphy said that with enough involvement from the community, the district could potentially earn enough credits to technologically outfit a school in one year.

Lombardi said that should be good news for those concerned about families who might not have the present means to afford 'smart' technology.

Board member Ned Clarke said that the Discipline Committee of the board (which is comprised of himself, Carol Selwood, Phil Stark and David Thorne) was scheduling a public meeting on June 2 at 7 p.m., probably in the elementary center library to allow for input on the school district's discipline policy.

He said the aim was not to revisit past matters but to examine how the district should move forward. Clarke said the public's input would be most welcome.

In her principal's report, Tania Stoker gave an update on her fifth grader's participation in a state technology competition.

The team of fifth graders Abigail Wilson, Anna Wohlgemuth, Isabella Coleman and Madison Norman, which took first place in the 'K'Nex Challenge' of the Northeast Intermediate Unit in early April, had returned from state competition in Harrisburg, where it received an Honorable Mention out of the 35 teams competing.

Stoker noted that a book fair was going on at the Elementary Center this week and a Family Fun Night would be taking place Thursday with incoming kindergarteners.

Murphy also noted that a number of students performing in Trail's recent production of 'Les Miserables' have been nominated for awards by both the Excellence in School Theater Arts program and another by the Scranton Cultural Center.

He acknowledged thanks for the board's approval of a list of 91 seniors who could potentially graduate June 13, if they continued to meet all of the requirements.

The Trail board approved a three-year contract reappointing Harry Powell as the school district's athletic director at \$15,000 a year.

Former long-time coach Sandra Spott was appointed field hockey coach at a stipend of \$5,500 a year, and Kelley Buck was appointed as assistant field hockey coach at a stipend of \$3,450 a year.

Local resident Missy Bower said that she didn't wish to take anything away from the field hockey program, but wondered aloud what the high school theater program might be able to do with the same financial resources, noting that her daughter Katie Lane, was presenting good quality theater - including the recent 'Les Miserables,' and she asked the board to look into the possible inequity of extracurricular compensation.

Both Lombardi and Clarke said it was duly noted.

In a Friends of Music presentation, parent Cathy Strauch noted that new marching band director Kevin Dikeman would be addressing FOM next Monday at 7 p.m. in the high school choral room, and he was expected to talk of plans for the band moving forward.

Strauch said the public was invited.

David Brace was appointed to a full-time maintenance position at the rate of \$14.60 an hour, and the board also appointed Dr. Rajan Mulloth as the school physician for 2014-15 at an annual stipend of \$10,000.