

Trail school board addresses resignations

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Lackawanna Trail school board accepted the resignation of suspended English teacher, Michael Petherick, at its meeting last Tuesday night (Oct. 14). The resignation was effective immediately.

Petherick had been suspended after facing felony criminal charges in 2012 dealing with an alleged assault of a girlfriend, who had no affiliation with the school district.

In an arrangement with district attorney Jeff Mitchell, Petherick pleaded guilty to only misdemeanor charges in July, and his attorney Kurt Lynott said then that his client hoped to one day get his teaching job back.

However, when it came time for sentencing in September, President Judge Russell Shurtleff said that after looking at the pre-sentence investigation, including pictures of the victim after the assault, he could not accept the plea arrangement and ordered Petherick to stand trial Oct. 20.

(Petherick appeared before Senior Judge Brendan Vanston on Monday and rather than face a trial agreed to a plea arrangement which held him accountable for a felony assault. Judge Vanston then immediately sentenced Petherick to 9-23.5 months in county jail and a \$500 fine, and he was taken into custody.)

At last Tuesday's meeting, the resignation of Michael Mould from the Northeast Educational Intermediate Unit board of directors was also accepted.

Of his three years on the NEIU board, Mould said, "It's been all good for me, but it's time for someone else to take the lead."

The NEIU serves the school districts of Lackawanna, Wayne, and Susquehanna counties as well as part of Wyoming County. It serves as a link between member school districts and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Mould motioned that Kevin Mulhern be appointed to fill his unexpired term on the NEIU board through June 30, 2017. The motion was carried.

Lauren McNamara was appointed to the elementary school as a long-term substitute for a business, computer, and information technology teacher position. The recommendation is for the first semester of the 2014-2015 school year at an annual salary of \$46,000 as per the collective bargaining agreement.

In new business, Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas stressed that the district is trying to get as many students registered as possible before the launch of Bring Your Own Device school policy on Nov. 3.

The BYOD is to allow students to use their electronic devices in their class for educational purposes and to become engaged in the lessons by using their device.

"We're fast approaching and looking forward to that day," said Rakauskas.

Lackawanna Trail Elementary Center Principal Brian Kelly added that the technology coordinator at the school, Kristin Kurpis, has shared great ideas with the staff on how to implement the BYOD policy into their curriculum.

"It's very appropriate for the elementary center," added Kelly.

At the high school there are two students registered for the BYOD, noted assistant principal Brian Kearney. Through daily updates throughout the school, faculty and staff are working to ensure students complete their registration forms on time.

"We're excited to see how it works," added Kearney.

Rock Kordish, transportation director at Lackawanna Trail, noted that Oct. 20-24 is National School Bus Safety week. On Tuesday, Oct. 21, bus drivers Mary Smarkusky, JoAnn Ritter, and Sandy Fulkersin will volunteer their time and school buses to teach grades K-6 about bus safety.

They plan to spend around 10 minutes at the end of school lunches to cover bus rules and safety.

High school principal Mark Murphy informed the board about a new initiative put into place to report bullying.

The Blue Form, which was developed in-house at the high school, allows students the chance to report any bullying they may be facing in a confidential manner.

"The assumption is we always know what's going on with students socially, and the truth of the matter is we don't," commented Murphy.

The form is available in hard copy only and will not be shared, mailed, or posted online. It includes a space for the student to describe the problem, a space to list witnesses if there was bullying involved, and a series of yes or no questions.

"It's one tool we're currently using, it seems to be pretty effective," added Murphy.

The end of the first marking period is fast approaching and parent-teacher conferences for the high school are scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 12, from 5 to 8 p.m.

The next school board meeting work session is scheduled for Monday, Nov. 3, at 7:30 p.m.