

LT school board considering raising sub pay

Lackawanna Trail school board recommended increasing the daily substitute rate to \$90 per day to attract qualified teachers at its meeting Monday night.

The district currently pays \$75 per day, with \$80 for "bonus subs," which are subs chosen by the schools for their reliability and who agree to exclusively sub for the district. Bonus subs will now be paid \$95 per day.

The principals noted that the schools have had difficulty attracting and keeping qualified substitutes, and that the rate has not changed in quite some time, and is no longer competitive with neighboring districts. Many of the substitutes are on call for several districts, and live as far away as Scranton. When called to substitute, many teachers on the list will give priority to closer or higher paying districts if they call.

"That's a big jump, \$75 to \$90," said Carol Selwood.

The school board discussed several policies being considered for adoption.

Policy 138, an English as a Second Language program, was recommended for adoption next week, and was available for a final reading. The "Limited English Proficiency Program" is one of the services for which the district pays more than \$42,000 per year.

Matthew Rakauskas said, "Over the last three fiscal years, the IU (Intermediate Unit) has held the line: no increase. Now, they are recommending a three percent increase across the board for the IU budget." He seemed to question whether that was fiscally responsible for Trail.

Rakauskas said that board member Kevin Mulhern has to report back to the Intermediate Unit with the school board's response.

Both Mulhern and Rakauskas agreed that a "tiered response" would be more prudent for the district, which has only a handful of ESL students. This could amount to the district paying one-third less that they are currently, for the students in need of English as a Second Language services.

Board member Joe Strauch said, "We have enough (of a challenge) to pay for our own taxpayers, why should we be subsidizing the City of Scranton, or Carbondale? We are paying the same for services, whether we have zero percent or a hundred percent of our students using this program."

Rakauskas also spoke to the first reading of Policy 707.2, "Naming Rights," which he said that he has drafted himself. "This policy is similar to advertising rights for local businesses, but it involves naming school facilities after businesses," he said. "It is a way of generating some revenue for the district."

Rakauskas said that there is a rising trend for naming high school and elementary gymnasiums, auditoriums, cafeterias, and playing fields for businesses who contribute funds in exchange.

Strauch said that other schools who have a naming plan often have an honorarium plan, naming the building or field after a local notable or educator.

A third policy, "Acceptable Use of the Internet," was also discussed. This policy is being revisited by the board because the district is "slowly, gradually, carefully" transitioning to a "bring your own device" system. As part of this policy, the district plans to set up a student email account system through the school, using gmail.com as the server, which should be in place by next fall. This would allow the student email accounts to be created by the district but stored on the Google "cloud."

Two field trips to Washington, D.C. were discussed, but were placed along with three other agenda items on a consent agenda to be voted on at next week's meeting.

The board also tabled the treasurer's report, a substitute appointment, and a child rearing leave request until the next meeting.

A long-term substitute appointment was approved for Megan Horwatt as an Elementary Music substitute for the remainder of the school year. Miss Horwatt has been filling the position for the past two months. The board approved hiring her at a salary of \$46,000, prorated as stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement.

The school board meeting schedule was approved as amended. The only change was the Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2015 reorganization and special meeting for general purposes. There had been some discussion as to whether the meeting should be held during the first week of the month, or the first full week of the month (starting on a Sunday).

The board had several executive sessions, after last month's meeting and before and after Monday's meeting, for the purposes of personnel issues, support staff contract negotiations, and other contract issues, as well as several positions for coaches and teachers that have been advertised, board president David Thorne announced.

Its next meeting, a voting one, will be Monday, Jan. 12, at 7:30 p.m.