



Trail board reviews newspaper assessment

Pat Farnelli

Lackawanna Trail School District administrators responded at Monday night's school board meeting to a collection of news articles, "Grading our Schools," which appeared in a recent Scranton Times-Tribune.

The article charted data from area schools regarding performance in academics and standardized testing. Curriculum director Tanya Stoker said that the data included in the report was from the 2013-14 school year.

The 2014-15 data is being compiled right now, and another presentation will be given at an October school board meeting responding to that data.

Lackawanna Trail's enrollment for the 2013-14 school year was 1035 students. The graduation rate that year was 89 percent. Of the student body, 40.7 percent were economically disadvantaged, which met the state requirement of 40 percent economically disadvantaged to qualify for Title 1 funding. Special education students comprised 15.8 percent of the student body, and English as a second language students were counted as .37 percent of the total student population.

Keystone and PSSA test results were included in the report. The PSSA math and reading tests were administered to students in grades 3-8, and the PSSA science tests to fourth graders.

Keystone exams were given to students in Algebra 1, biology and literature classes.

Beginning in 2017, students will be required to demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams in these areas in order to graduate.

PSSA scores for the Elementary Center were: 76.3 building level score; Math 72.06; Reading 62.65; science and biology 86.60; writing 58.44; and grade three reading 68.11.

The indicators for closing the achievement gap were met at 100 percent for the science and biology section.

For the high school, scores on the PSSAs were: math/Algebra 1: 66.81; reading literature: 79.08; science/biology 67.27; and writing 75.81. The scores dropped five points in math from the previous year; all other scores went up.

The school's participation rate was 99.40 for most of the standardized testing.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education grades schools based on their indicators of academic achievement and on their indicators of closing the achievement gap.

Donna Selva, a former teacher in the district, attended the meeting to address the test scores.

She said, "my major areas of concern are reading and writing. The reading scores in the elementary center are not good. The reading scores have gone down over the past two years, and I think that is related to decreasing the number of elementary teachers per grade from four to three, and the resulting increase in class size."

She noted the school's grades by PDE, and said, "Out of 19 areas in which we could have bubbles colored in for meeting standards, we only have eight. What the public thinks of our school is critical. We have to improve our image."

A brief presentation on the capital building improvement projects was given.

Superintendent Matt Rakauskas assured the board and visitors that school will be opening on time, Monday, Aug. 31, and that the roof project will be substantially completed by Aug. 21. "There may be some finishing touches left by the start of school on Aug. 31, but the roof and soffit and fascia will be finished by the original opening day of school," Rick Kordish said.

Policy 115, entitled "Career and Technology Education," was tabled, which was scheduled for its fourth and final reading. Rakauskas said, "This policy needs more eyes and opinion, so we are putting it back for our policy committee to work on."

Another policy, 819 titled "Suicide, Awareness, Prevention and Response" was unanimously adopted by the board.

Several tabled field trips were removed from the table and recommended for approval, all at no cost to the district.

The board approved setting an hourly rate for the school year for subcontracted photographers at \$15 per hour with a cap of \$20 per hour of supplies related to the contracted event, documented with receipts. All additional supply costs would require pre-approval from the district administration and business office. These subcontracted photographers would be hired as needed, since the position of public relations director has been eliminated. Other photography will be used as it is made available by faculty, staff, students and the public.

Debra Ellsworth's resignation as an elementary paraprofessional was accepted with regret.

The board approved the payment of bus contractors at the state formula for the 2015-16 school year, although the state formula has not been released yet. It will be available when the state budget is approved.

A list of bus contractors and drivers was approved for the 2015-16 school year, as well as a list of substitute drivers and private vehicle contractors.

The elementary and high school curriculum guides were approved for the 2015-16 school year. Board member Joe Strauch voted against the high school curriculum guide, voicing his objection to the elimination of one of four music teaching positions for the 2015-16 school year.

Courtney Wood was approved as a volunteer field hockey coach. Yvonne Kwiatkowski was approved as a volunteer girls volleyball coach.

Executive sessions were held after the work session Aug. 3 from 8:05 p.m. until 10:02 p.m., and prior to Monday's meeting from 6:30 to 7:27. The purposes of the executive sessions were for the superintendent's evaluation, personnel, and a real estate proposal.