

LT looks into cyber academy

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Published: April 13, 2016

The Lackawanna Trail School Board on Monday heard from three of its high school faculty members interested in creating a district-sponsored cyber academy to stop or reverse the out-migration of students from brick and mortar learning over the years.

Librarian Kelly Hopkins, social studies teacher Katie Lane and technology teacher Boyd Semken each shared components of their research which they hoped would create some positive outcomes in the future.

Lane said that after she had heard about some of the dire financial stresses the district was faced with this winter – partly with students leaving the district for other cyber or charter school programs, a general call went out to high school faculty about what they could do, and 25 faculty members responded positively.

Hopkins was up first and spelled out some cold facts about the district having to provide funds for a student who no longer wished to attend Trail.

“We want our students to work within the Trail community,” Hopkins said, noting that if 12 regular students and six learning support students returned to the district, the projected savings the first year would be \$200,000.

Semken provided a Power Point presentation, entitled ‘Lackawanna Trail Cyber Academy,’ and he said in-house cyber programs were presently underway at such school districts as Old Forge, Pittston and Montrose.

“We’re most concerned about academic rigor, adaptability and customizing the curriculum for Lackawanna Trail,” Semken said.

He identified the three most common technology platforms found in Pennsylvania as VLN Partners, K12 and NOLA-Edison Learning, and spoke briefly about each, with VLN showing remarkable savings in districts where it is employed, and 50 percent or more students returning to brick and mortar schools.

NOLA-Edison, Semken said, is being used for summer schools throughout the region and is made available through the Northeast Intermediate Unit.

Superintendent Matt Rakauskas said he felt the board was literally on board with getting the students back in the ‘brick and mortar’ school, but noted that given it’s availability he would prefer the platform that’s already in northeast Pennsylvania and using the option of NOLA Edison looking at summer school in the months ahead.

Lane said she was interested in the “push-factors” of why some students didn’t want to be in Trail, and asked the district about exploring an option of having a “safe haven classroom without social stressors.”

She added, “As teachers we want a quality education that prepares students better, and we want to make sure they stay with us.”

The school board and audience gave the three a round of applause for their presentation.

During the regular meeting, the board:

*Gave a third reading to Division of Federal Program PDE Policy Adoption addressing allowability of costs, cash management, conflict of interest, procurement and travel reimbursements.

*Added Joseph Moss in social studies to the list of substitutes.

*Approved an academic calendar for 2016-17 that sees the first day of classes for students as Aug. 29 and has targeted June 2 as the tentative graduation date, barring extra snow days during the winter.

*Approved a 2016-17 contract with ProCare for athletic training (\$22/hr), physical therapy (\$100/hr), and speech pathology (\$60 hr).

*Approved an agreement with Abington Heights School District for occupational therapy (\$56/hr) for 2016-17.

*Appointed Otylia Dugan as football cheerleader adviser.

*Approved a memorandum of understand with the teachers bargaining unit on stipends for Hybrid Summer School (as discussed previously using the NOLA-Edison platform) for the summer of 2016 only to the tune of \$900 for regular courses and \$990 for physical education. Board members Michael Mould and Karl Beichler voted against with discussion that three 10-hour weeks of physical education in the summer does not adequately match up with Sept.-May regular offering for PE.

*Approved the Nutrition Group Inc as the food service management company to be utilized by the district in 2016-17.

*Approved Kevin Dikeman's request to accompany an all-state choir student to the PMEA conference in Hershey. A discussion followed that although this trip arrangement was approved by the family, that in future such an accompaniment should include two responsible adults.

*Approved a list of potential graduates for 2016. Board member Joe Strauch voted against, noting that current state law makes such action moot. The board said if further research confirmed that the practice would be withdrawn in the future.

*Approved a request to send a team of Trail sixth graders to Harrisburg for the state K'Nex competition May 13.

*Approved a first reading of a school policy on Naloxone.

*Approved a list of standardized tests for 2016-17.

*Approved the retirements of high school science teacher Donald Rupp and elementary assistant cafeteria manager Debra Reynolds.

In the superintendent's report, Rakauskas noted PSSAs would be administered third through sixth grades beginning Tuesday (Apr. 12) starting with English Language Arts.

Board member Strauch reported on a visit to the Susquehanna County Career Technology Center along with board member Kevin Mulhern and high school principal Mark Murphy with both board members attesting to the program as "impressive."

In other administrator reports:

*Murphy thanked the board for its support of the hybrid summer school arrangement.

*Asst. high school principal Brian Kearney said the 'Good Guys' program would be next Friday featuring Sean Heffron, a 1995 Trail grad.

*Elementary Center Principal Brian Kelly spoke of the success of the three days a week after-school program which was in its fifth of six weeks. Also the children's produce market which reached out to 83 families the first time out was now up to more than 120 families and would be happening again on Tuesday (Apr. 12) and open to all families with students in the district, and had no income restriction. He said that LTEC would also be having its annual art show on April 28 at 6 p.m.

*Special education coordinator Stephanie Russell said it was IEP time of year for her, and she thanked Mrs. Jessica Witinsky and Mrs. Erika Chang for their help with the transition program.

*Curriculum director Tonia Ross underscored the PSSAs with Keystones to follow in May. She also talked of an available \$10,000 grant in the area of reading intervention.

*Business manager Keith Glynn said he was still looking at all avenues for savings in the budget and would be looking at the possibility of monetizing delinquent taxes.

He also noted the district received a Basic Education payment since the budget moved forward in March and some transportation funding also had come to the district.