

## Trail tax hike up to 13.9 percent

by Robert Baker

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Lackawanna Trail School Board members warned taxpayers six weeks ago that they could be in for a hefty tax hike for 2016-17, and on Monday they delivered.

School property taxes will increase by 8.6 percent in the Lackawanna County portion of the district and by 13.9 percent in the Wyoming County part of the district.

A \$20,500,469 budget was approved which will see taxes jump by 12.56 mills to 158.56 in Lackawanna County and by 10.84 mills to 88.71 in Wyoming County.

A mill is equal to \$1 in tax for every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Business manager Keith Glynn said he recognized the burden on the taxpayer but felt there was a lot of sacrifice to go around including pay freezes on support staff, faculty and administrators.

Board member Joe Strauch, who along with Karl Beichler voted against the budget, said he hoped "by this time next year" the business manager could see to eliminate the \$10 per capita tax that was being levied in both counties.

Factoryville resident Lynn Stevenson said, "It isn't looking good to have our taxes keep going up. I know people who have moved out of the district due to the tax structure, and I really can't blame them."

And then she held up the front page of the previous day's Scranton Times-Tribune which had a large article called "Grading Our Schools" which showed the Lackawanna Trail School District ranking in the bottom third in the region according to test performance and other measures.

"Now, how are people going to be able to sell their homes with news like this?" she asked.

"Maybe you should take that up with the paper," Superintendent Matt Rakauskas said.

Rakauskas said he understood the data the newspaper was trying to get out there, but he just didn't like the way it was packaged.

"Look we know we have some work to do but there's more than just what's reported in the paper.

Curriculum director Tania Ross said the data is from 2014-15 and the district won't have 2016 results until August when she plans to make a public presentation to the board and the Times-Tribune will be invited.

In other business, the board accepted the resignation of special education director Stephenie Russell effective June 30.

The board has chosen to hire Amie Talarico to fill the position at \$77,000 a year, effective July 1.

In speaking to the budget, Business Manager Glynn negotiated a new 5-year contract for himself that accepts a pay freeze at \$80,000 a year and then guarantees him a pay increase at two percent a year for four years.

Superintendent Rakauskas who had three years left in his contract decided to terminate what had been negotiated two years ago, and he, too, accepted a pay freeze for 2016-17 with two percent raises in each of the next four years. He is presently paid \$115,000 a year.

The board adopted a student wellness policy, following a third reading Monday.

It also approved a Memorandum of Understanding between the Lackawanna Trail School District and the Support Staff regarding a pay freeze agreement, which Glynn said saved the district \$420,000.

Another Memorandum of Understanding with the teachers association shifts play in softball and baseball from junior varsity to junior high.

Also on Monday, the school board accepted the resignation of Nancy Brown as yearbook adviser, and the position was being advertised internally.