

Trail board looking into auto shop

C.J. MARSHALL / Published: January 11, 2017

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These students showed up at the Lackawanna Trail School Board meeting on Monday, honoring members for their service to the district. Among the participants were,

front row, from left, Maribella Rakauskas, Matthew Rakauskas, and Noelann Polkowski.

Second row, Elizabeth Harvey, Keaton Lisk, and Jackson Nordmark.

Third row, Jennifer Price, Kevin Thorne, and Matthew Merolla.

Back row, school board members Joseph Strauch, Adrian Bianchi, Philip Stark, Kevin Mulhern, Joseph Ross, and Ned Clarke.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is considering the possibility of allowing Northeast Intermediate Unit 19 to house its Auto Shop Program in one of the district's garages.

District Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas explained to the board during its regular meeting on Monday that the district would receive rent payments from the IU for the space used.

Several Trail students would be able to take advantage of the program, Rakauskas explained, along with students from other districts.

The IU will provide a teacher, the majority of necessary equipment, and insurance. The district will provide the facility, some of the equipment, maintenance, and supervision, Rakauskas explained.

The act would represent a savings to Lackawanna Trail, he continued, because the district currently transports students to and from Simpson for the program, which is now housed at the Carbondale Area School District.

The administration will also seek additional savings from the IU by requesting the contract waiver of the center-based cost for Trail students who attend the program - which is about \$4,000 per student.

Disposal of oil will be handled the same as for district vehicles. The oil is transported to Clark's Garage where they burn it for heat.

Transportation Director Rick Kordish explained during the presentation that oil disposal should not be a problem. He said they would simply plug the drains at the garage, and any oil spillage that may occur could be mopped up with a special substance, then disposed of in the proper manner.

The Auto Shop Program, Rakauskas explained, will teach students such skills as detailing, tire rotation and inflation, changing batteries, generators, alternators, and plugs, brake work, low level assessments and repairs of engines, transmissions, and exhaust systems.

Rakauskas said he will seek board approval for the program in February.

The board voted unanimously to approve Act 1 Resolution, confirming that the district will not raise the tax rate for the 2017-2018 fiscal year by more than 3.2 percent, the index established for the district by the Department of Education.

District Business Manager Keith Glynn later explained that the board wants to assure the community that it will be holding the line on tax increases this year, as a show of appreciation for local support last year when the district had to increase taxes by 12.5 percent in Wyoming County and eight percent in Lackawanna County.

However, Glynn also cautioned that the district is again going to be facing considerable challenges when it puts together the 2017-2018 budget.

Elementary and high school students made a special presentation to the school board during the meeting, thanking the members for their efforts in overseeing the district. January is School Director Recognition Month, and the board was presented books that had been purchased by students and donated to the school libraries in its name.

President Philip Stark and other board members thanked the students for the presentation, as well as the parents and grandparents who some with them, allowing them to attend the meeting.

During visitors comments, Cathy Strauch made a passionate plea to the board, asking that a fourth music teaching position be restored within the district. The position has remained vacant since 2015, due to budgetary restrains.

Strauch urged the board to somehow find the money to fill the position, explaining that the strain is too much on Kevin Dikeman, the concert band director, and the other two music teachers, to provide an adequate musical education for students in the district.

Candace Haft echoed Strauch's sentiments, saying that music has always been an important part of Lackawanna Trail's curriculum, with many students benefitting from the program.

Stark thanked Haft, Strauch and others for their comments, and told them the board will definitely take them into consideration when it goes over the budget for the 2017-2018 year.

Rakauskas informed the board that a report being prepared concerning the incorporation of a Life Skills program for the Special Education students in the elementary school will be postponed until February to give time to gather more information.

Special Education Director Amie Talarico reported that a grant has been received for the Special Education Life Skills program at the high school. However, Talarico explained that she cannot divulge any information about the grant at this time, until a press release has been issued.

In other business:

*The board approved the first reading of an anti-bullying policy for the district. A major change, according to board member Joseph Strauch will be that, if approved, the policy will also contain provisions concerning cyber-bullying.

*The board accepted the resignation of Gary Wilmet who served as Junior High Field Hockey Coach; Jason Wagner as Assistant Football Coach; and Sarah Brander as Assistant Field Hockey Coach.

*The board approved the hiring of Candace Haft as Volunteer Band Assistant; Judith Slocum as Volunteer Band Assistant; and Gary Wilmet as Field Hockey Coach at a stipend of \$5,100 per year. The vote was unanimous for each position, except Wilmet.

Strauch, who voted no, objected to the \$5,100 stipend, saying it could instead be applied to the hiring of a new music teacher for the district.