

Lackawanna Trail mulls collecting delinquencies

C.J. Marshall / Published: October 2, 2018

The Lackawanna Trail School Board is scheduled to vote on Tuesday to begin establishing a policy that will allow the business office to solicit bids for a credit collection agency to handle delinquent student cafeteria account balances.

Business manager Keith Glynn explained during the board's work session on Monday that a number of families in the district owe almost \$1,200 in school lunch fees.

The problem has been on-going and growing since December, Glynn explained, after the state passed a law saying school districts cannot deny a meal to any of its students.

According to figures provided by Glynn, one family now owes the district \$11, while others owe as much as \$30 to \$40. Those numbers, he cautioned, will continue to grow if something is not done about the situation.

"Although \$11 is negligible, we're trying to keep that figure from going to \$300," he said.

Other school districts have been experiencing the same problem, some much worse than others. If the problem continues to grow at Trail, he said, it could get to the point where the district could no longer support the school lunch program.

Glynn said the only thing the district can do now is call the parents or send them a letter, asking for the money. But in many cases, all they get is a hang up or a reply of "Too bad."

Cathy Strauch asked about the possibility of reducing lunches for students in arrears to a bare bones minimum. Glynn said this is not allowed under the law. While they can deny a la carte items and desserts, all students are entitled to the basic lunch, which costs \$3.80.

When people get into arrears for property taxes, Glynn said, the district uses Berkheimer to collect the debts. Trail could use a similar company to collect the school lunch fees. This would be more effective, because a collection company has several methods - such as issuing bad credit reports - to obtain the money.

The business manager also pointed out that the district has done everything possible to encourage people to sign up for the free or reduced lunch programs. Such applications are used to determine the amount of money the district receives from state or federal agencies. People who refuse to sign up and refuse to pay for school lunches are hurting the district in many ways.

"We have to take care of this very early on. Before it gets out of control," Glynn warned.

The board is also scheduled at its regular meeting on Tuesday to authorize the business office to solicit proposals for Food Service Management companies. The board is expected to approve the resignation of Joanne Corby, assistant cafeteria manager, effective Sept. 28. It is also expected to approve Jim Kotz's request to take the sixth grade class to New York City to Radio City Music Hall and Rockefeller Center in early November 2019.

High school Principal Mark Murphy reported that the Children's Produce Market will be moved to the high school, starting on Tuesday, Oct. 9. People will be able to pick up produce every second Tuesday at the high school from 3:30 to 6 p.m.