

LT Board hears from VLN representative

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Lackawanna Trail school board got more information about a new cyber platform, which it is expecting to vote on next month.

Last week at the board's work session, superintendent Matthew Rakauskas brought up the possibility of the district switching from the Northeast Intermediate Educational Unit's cyber platform Northeast Online Learning Academy to VLN.

Present at Monday's meeting was Jamie Marshall of VLN Partners, who gave a presentation about the educational and financial benefits of switching to VLN.

He said VLN used to be a "holding place" for teachers until they could find jobs in brick and mortar schools, but this isn't so much the case anymore, as a lot of the VLN teachers care about their jobs in addition to being highly qualified.

Marshall noted that unlike other platforms, VLN has a homeroom period, daily office hours, rigorous and challenging coursework, as well as intervention tactics to keep students on track.

The platform also has video math and writing labs that are available without an appointment, which is beneficial since math could be difficult to teach online.

Marshall spoke of how VLN would market its product toward Lackawanna Trail students who are currently enrolled in other cyber charter schools.

He said to "break even" and save the district money, the district would need to bring back 2.4 students to Lackawanna Trail.

Marshall said VLN has partnered with seven or eight other area districts.

Students in VLN receive a computer, printer and scanner, so instead of just clicking on answers, they're scanning and showing their work to teachers.

VLN would also customize 10 courses per year for Lackawanna Trail in addition to offering courses from its catalog. Students who graduate from VLN would also receive a Trail diploma.

Rakauskas said the board will vote on switching to VLN in its March meeting, and said the issue of cyber charter schools taking money from the district and its taxpayers needs to continue to be addressed.

Board secretary Kevin Mulhern announced that he wrote a letter requesting a special meeting in March with Senator Lisa Baker and other government representatives to discuss this issue.

If they cannot attend in March, he asked that they provide a list of dates that work for them.

"We can't do a thing. The people Mr. Mulhern is contacting could. They have a vote," Rakauskas said.

Elementary center principal Brian Kearney announced that the school received a \$500 grant from Liberty Petroleum in collaboration with ExxonMobil for the STEM program.

Principal of school management Rebekah King said grades 7-12 received training from Sandy Hook Promise for the Safe2Say program, which allows students to report concerns anonymously through mobile and online platforms.

The board also approved a resolution with Municipal Revenue Service for the agreement of sale and purchase of tax claims for 2019-21 with Public Asset Management.

The district will also contribute \$15,106.12 to the NEIU's upcoming fiscal year budget.

Bids from Vector Security to upgrade security in the elementary center and high school were approved, as well as an Interscholastic Unified Sports Memorandum of Understanding between the Special Olympics of Pennsylvania and Lackawanna Trail to form a unified track and field team.

The board collectively approved a first reading of the following policies: nondiscrimination in employment practices, discipline of students with disabilities, behavior support, screening/evaluations for students with disabilities, enrollment of students, admission of students, confidential communication of students, student records, suspension/expulsion, school wellness, food services, and acceptable use of internet/computers/network resources.

The board voted to deny Support Staff Grievance 19-1 and to approve the senior class trip to Six Flags Great Escape Lodge and Indoor Waterpark this May at no cost to the district.

The board approved Scot Wasilchak as a track and field assistant coach with a stipend of \$3,450.

Will Burnell, Marty Krezetski and Lori Swanchak were approved as volunteer track and field coaches.

The board acknowledged the resignation of Laurel Kinback, assistant marching band director, and approved special education teacher Erin Merkel's request for child rearing leave to begin in May.

Board president David Thorne announced an addition to the agenda that was discussed in the executive session.

Board members approved one day of unpaid leave for a district employee.

The Trail School Board will meet for a work session on Monday, March 4.