

Extra work

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after school events and activities including dances, athletic events, band, class trips and clubs and organizations, said Dan Williams, president of the LLEA.

"Sometimes it takes these type of actions to pique [the community's] interest," Williams said. Williams said he felt it was time for parents and community members to become more involved and aware of "how much we actually do for little or no pay."

Some of the year-end activities and events that might be affected by the action of the LLEA include the senior class trip to Washington, D.C., the prom, Class Night, and the Junior and Senior Honor Society inductions.

However, School Board President Charles Boytin said the administration has set about a plan, through Superintendent Robert O. Roberts, to "ensure that the kids don't lose all their extracurriculars."

Boytin added, "We're going to attempt to maintain as much normalcy for the children as possible." Roberts' plan of action includes assigning school administrative personnel, school board members and parent volunteers, primarily from the parent/teacher organizations, to chaperone and assist with student activities.

"We have approximately eight field trips that either start before or end after the school day," said Roberts. These trips include a Lake-Noxen Elementary School fifth grade trip to the Philadelphia zoo, a sixth grade Lake-Noxen Elementary trip to Baltimore and a sixth grade Lehman-Jackson Elementary trip to Philadelphia. These trips have been taken care of, as well as the senior's class trip to Washington, D.C., May 10-13.

"What we're doing now is we're working on the junior, sophomore, and freshman class trips," Roberts explained. "We have some administrators assigned to those trips and we have put out a letter to the various PTA's and PTO's asking for volunteers to help us out."

Roberts said the prom and graduation are not in any danger of cancellation as the

teachers will fulfill all agreements about contractual positions, allowing the junior class advisor to chaperone the prom, while graduation practices take place on school time, allowing faculty in charge to continue to assist. Advisors to the Junior and Senior Honor Societies will prep those students during their normal workday, and then the building level principals will handle the induction ceremonies.

But plans to cover Class Night, a yearly event held by the graduating seniors, who perform skits and songs as a farewell to their alma mater, have not been solidified. Traditionally, most of the seniors participate in the fulfilled night. Likewise, the sixth and seventh grade trip to Knoebel's Grove and the freshman trip to Hershey Park, two non-academic class trips scheduled for Saturdays, are proving difficult to cover.

"It is very difficult for me to assign administrators to work on Saturday," Roberts said. "Without someone from the school who has the authority to act on the school's behalf, it would be pretty tough to send those trips out with just parents."

Roberts emphasized the safety of the students and finding enough qualified volunteers. "It's pretty difficult to take 100 or 125 kids to Baltimore or New York City with people who have not had any type of training in chaperoning and watching out for the little tricks the kids like to play."

Boytin promises the willing assistance of all nine board members, himself included. "Personally, I will take off the necessary time from work, with vacation time from my employer, to support any field trips that these kids need to go on," Boytin said. "If they need a chaperone, I am available."

Board president, union attorney lay out positions

By ELIZABETH ANDERSON
Post Correspondent

After nearly 17 months of negotiations and the expiration of their contract in Aug. 2001, members of the Lake-Lehman Education Association (LLEA) feel it is time for the school board to act.

"The public has to be aware that the teachers are working without a contract," said John Holland, attorney for the association. "Last time they worked without a contract two years. The board has to stop this nonsense once and for all."

Recently, Charles Boytin, school board president, answered some of the association's charges, saying, "The teachers keep screaming all we want is a contract. We have offered them a contract. They just don't want to accept it with the terms that are in it."

Boytin praised the caliber of the Lake-Lehman teachers, but stressed he had a responsibility not only to the children and the teachers, but to the taxpayers "to hold the line."

While the school board and the teachers' association may disagree on many things, they see eye to eye in one area. Both agree they disagree on two key topics — health care benefits and salary increases.

"This is a very simple issue," Boytin added. "We just have a difference of opinion. What they think is a fair and modest raise for their contract and the demands they have are not something that the district sees as fair and modest."

The difference of opinion is about 2 percent. The teachers are asking for a wage and salary increase of 4.75 percent per year over five years. The district has countered with an offer of 2.75 percent. "We are

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John Holland
Attorney for teachers' union

willing to pay what the average increase is in other school districts in Luzerne County," Boytin said. "The last four or five districts have been in the 2.5 to 2.7 range and we are at 2.75." Both parties feel their offer is fair and equitable.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, teachers were granted average salary increases in excess of 6 percent for the 11 years prior to 1993-94. A significant downturn has occurred since that time (See Table), with average salaries increases never rising above 5 percent. The PDE attributes this in large part to an increase in the number of lower paid, less experienced teachers due to rising enrollments, reduced classroom size and vacancies created by teachers who accepted early retirement incentives.

The teachers are looking for what they once had, according to Holland. He explained the association gave the board numerous concessions in the last contract settlement three years ago and that puts the teachers behind in the game. "Last time, the teachers took a wage freeze. They took concessions on health care and went to a less expensive health care for new teachers," Holland explained. "They gave up their early retire-

ment plan. Gave it up totally," he went on to say. "We're asking that it be reinstated."

According to the board, there is presently a two-tier health care insurance system with some teachers having Blue Cross/Blue Shield and others a managed care program. Boytin said the board is offering a health care program and paying for it 100 percent, a benefit most of the public does not enjoy.

"It's not like we're saying to the teachers you get nothing," he said. "We're offering them health care and we're offering to pay for that health care."

Boytin went on to explain his position. "I don't see the people in the general public getting a 4.75 percent pay raise, but I do see the general public paying for a lot of their health care costs that the teachers do not have to pay for. It does bother me."

Holland ended by saying he wished to "throw down the

gauntlet" to the board members. "I challenge them to speak out publicly at the next board meeting and say 'Hey, this isn't

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Charles Boytin
School Board President

right.' We need to get this contract settled and do the right thing for our teachers."

Boytin said he is being realistic, and doing his best to balance the interests of kids, teachers, taxpayers and school needs. "I'm willing to give a pay raise. I'm willing to pay for your health care," he said. "I'm just not willing to give as much as you want and pay for as much as you want for health insurance. I just can't."

Average Salaries Of Professional Personnel In Luzerne County 2001-2002

School District	Full-Time Average Salary	Rank of 14
Crestwood	\$57,395	2
Dallas	\$51,560	12
Greater Naticoke Area	\$56,771	4
Hanover Area S	\$55,621	6
Hazleton Area Career Center	\$50,958	13
Hazleton Area	\$54,004	10
Lake-Lehman	\$49,949	14
Northwest Area	\$54,368	9
Pittston Area	\$55,658	5
West Side AVTS	\$51,648	11
Wilkes-Barre Area	\$58,075	1
Wilkes-Barre Area AVTS	\$55,431	7
Wyoming Area	\$54,799	8
Wyoming Valley West	\$56,944	3
Average for Luzerne County	\$55,302	

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