

OUTSOURCING CPS CUSTODIAL WORK

By Sarah Hains

“No layoffs are immediately planned” for the 825 custodians working in Chicago Public Schools. But there is nothing reassuring in that statement whatsoever, especially for those whose families depend on their income.

In CPS Chief Administrative Officer Tim Cawley’s presentation to the Chicago Board of Education on February 26, 2014, he laid out in detail what he believed to be the problems with custodial work at CPS and why he wanted the Board to vote to privatize it through Aramark. There were, however, several glaring inaccuracies in his PowerPoint presentation.

1. “Too many suppliers.” Cawley is claiming there are currently over 1,000 suppliers but this CPS document shows there are actually only five: “Janitorial Supplies Priceshet Booklet 2013 – 2018.” http://www.csc.cps.k12.il.us/purchasing/uploadedfiles/how_to_buy/janitorial_priceshet.pdf.



2. “Principals are spending time and budget managing this area.” This is entirely CPS’s fault. For over 100 years, the engineers in the Operating Engineers Local 143 had been managing the custodians (http://local143.org/?page_id=13). The supply budget came from CPS central office. In 2012, CPS moved the engineers out of the schools and put the custodial supply budget into the school, making the principals responsible for managing the custodians and the custodial budget for the first time ever. This was also during a lot of other changes being imposed on the schools, including administrative churn at the networks and central office.

3. “Greener cleaning supplies.” CPS already approved the Green Cleaning Schools Act in 2008 (08-0827-PO6).

Now, CPS is going to spend \$260,300,000 over three years to privatize the custodial service in order to potentially save “up to” \$40 million in that same time period. That means that taxpayers will be paying Aramark nearly \$87 million per year to provide a service that was provided for free through the Operating Engineers. Furthermore, CPS has not produced much in terms of “efficiencies” by moving the engineers out of the buildings—the difference in total salary between 2011 and 2013 is -\$1,730,970.

This is classic disaster capitalism. Not only is this a completely suspicious contract that will more than likely end up costing additional money as it gets amended, with no accountability or penalty for failing to deliver on all the promises, but Mr. Cawley also successfully bamboozled the Board of Education into believing this was absolutely necessary and beneficial to the district. The Board report, the presentation

and the remarks made to the press all emphasize how dirty the schools are—this is a major part of the “crisis” that capitalism will rush in to save. In none of the statements on the cleanliness of the schools did anyone care to mention that custodial staff has been cut and the people who were trained to manage the remaining staff were taken out of the buildings. Principals should never have been in charge of managing the custodians, and now CPS is acting like a benevolent savior by allowing them to get back to their normal tasks.

The second “crisis” is CPS’s favorite go-to for implementing anything unpopular—the “we’re broke and need to find ways to save money crisis.” How is Aramark going to (not) save the district this money? By cutting staff, refusing cost of living wages and replacing humans with machines that will clean the buildings overnight. Aramark is notoriously anti-labor, which is probably why they were selected for this.

This is all for the children, of course. Mr. Cawley thinks test scores will go up (“custodial services...will result in an enhanced learning environment”) and principals will be able to “focus on instruction and family and community engagement.”

Currently, the custodians are part of SEIU Local 73. The union contract expires in 2015. The Aramark contract expires in 2017 with two options to renew. ■

Sarah Hains is a CTU researcher.

CHANGE IN CPS JANITORIAL STAFF SALARY DUE TO PLANNED OUTSOURCING

	8/1/2011	10/1/2013	Difference
Average salary	\$33,999	\$33,651	-\$348
Total salary	\$25,397,013	\$23,354,030	-\$2,042,983
Total employees	747	694	-53

Source: CPS Employee Position files:

cps.edu/About_CPS/Financial_information/Pages/EmployeePositionFiles.aspx