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President
CUPE 382
March 07, 2022

Re: Daytime Custodial Positions

We have been informed that the employer is considering removing daytime custodial positions and laying off some number of CUPE 382 employees. Over the last 25 years, CUPE 382 has seen more than its fair share of cuts. We were once 350 members strong, now we are down to roughly 240 members. I recall sitting in on budget talks and hearing trustees say “we have to cut furthest away from the classroom.” The proposed cuts to daytime custodians would be directly felt in the classroom.

Daytime custodians are essential to the Greater Victoria School District. They are critical to the maintenance, cleanliness, and safety of our facilities. Any cuts to CUPE 382 and daytime custodians would exacerbate current maintenance deficits in our aging buildings and reduce the safety and cleanliness of all buildings throughout the school district.

Cleaning duties

On top of their regular cleaning duties, daytime custodians also respond to emergent cleaning need. They are regularly called to clean up spills, replenish toiletries and soap dispensers, clean up after pizza days, and sweep the floors and wipe the tables down after lunch. Daytime custodians are also a key figure in green initiatives such as the Recycling Program. They empty the outside garbage bins several times a week. They also handle daily biohazards like, vomit, blood, feces and urine. We are worried that without daytime custodians, Principals would have to do this work, or worse, the work would not get done. I would not be proud to see vomit in a hallway, roped off with caution tape, waiting for the afternoon shift. The cleaning that daytime custodians do is paramount for keeping down the spread of Covid and other communicable diseases.

Safety duties

Daytime custodians are the school districts frontline defense for daily safety concerns. At 5 AM they arrive at the school and walk around the building looking for safety issues that may have occurred overnight. This could be needles, broken glass, feces, transient people camping in doorways. They also address any graffiti that was put on the building overnight. This graffiti is often violent or threatening, rude, or offensive. These concerns need to be resolved before students arrive.

Preventing slips, trips, and spills is crucial to the daytime custodian's workload. Slip and trip related injuries can have a tremendous impact on the school district community. During the rainy season, water is tracked into the building on peoples boots and clothing. When left unattended, the water becomes a slipping hazards. Daytime custodians are constantly cleaning up the water in the hallways. They are also integral to the emergency snow removal plan. During extreme weather events, the school district must keep the sidewalks snow and ice free. Daytime custodians are outside, shoveling snow and applying ice melt to the sidewalks and parking lots. Removing daytime custodians would make our grounds and buildings unsafe in poor weather.

They also play critical roles in safety and emergency response plans. Daytime custodians are members of all site-based health and safety committees. Their firsthand knowledge of the facility is indispensable for the success of these committees. Daytime custodians are also critical members of all fire drills, earthquake drills, and lockdown drills. They are one of a few people with keys to the emergency earthquake supplies. They monitor the halls and the grounds to identify people they do not recognize and ask, "hello can I help you?"

Maintenance duties

The school district has some of the oldest buildings in the province. Resolving maintenance concerns in a timely way is critical to preventing larger expenses down the road. Daytime custodians are the keystone of all maintenance work. They are often the first to identify a maintenance need. They are always looking for vandalism and safety issues. When they find a concern, they rope it off and call for an immediate response. They then make work orders and phone calls to the relevant departments. They often communicate with the technician to provide vital information about the job. When the technician arrives, they will consult with the custodian, to help find the specific work area. The custodian will follow up on jobs, to see what the status is on work that has not been done yet.

Covid duties

A science-based decision was made to increase the cleaning and disinfecting of public spaces to avoided COVID related hospitalizations and deaths. All schools in the province reinstated day time custodians. At that time, School District 61 was a leader. They have always had daytime custodians.

Tragically, the virus has killed millions of people worldwide. Since the beginning of the pandemic, daytime custodians have been the school districts first, front-line defense against COVID. They have worked as essential service workers, every day, to keep the schools safe. Unlike other essential service workers, they did not receive the bump in pay.

We are not through this pandemic yet. Vaccine uptake, especially among children, is not where experts would like it to be. Another variant could rise at any time. Even when we move to the endemic phase of this virus, we will still need daytime custodians to keep the community safe. We should be showing our thanks and appreciation to the daytime custodians, not talking about cutting their jobs. We believe it is disrespectful and reckless to consider this as a viable area to cut.

Conclusion

Over the years, there has been significant cuts to our workforce. Every cut has had real impacts on our ability to deliver on the goal of a safe and healthy school environment for students, staff, and visitors.

The worker ratio of 350 workers to 2 managers roughly 25 years ago has shifted to today's reality of 240 workers to 7 managers. That is just for our department. We do not know how many managers have been added to the district as a whole. The delivery of health and safety, and maintenance goals has not changed, only the ratio of workers able to address the problems has changed.

This additional management has put an undue administrative burden on our labour. Many of our workers feel frustrated by the layers of bureaucracy now involved in their work. The cost of these administrative demands is clearly proportional to our ability to deliver on our goals. Our workers take time away from their work to deal with the demands of the additional administration. These demands take workers away from their primary tasks. This cost is measurable.

It is apparent to our local, that without good faith consultation, the current management structure will result in the erosion of the work goal delivery that is in the best interests of all. We have aging infrastructure that other districts don't have. As a result, we have maintenance, safety and cleaning needs that other districts do not have.

Only workers can fix these problems. The best way to address the needs of the community is to keep our workforce strong. Any cuts to CUPE 382 will be directly felt in the classroom. Any cut to CUPE 382 will have an immediate effect on the health and safety of our communities.

We implore you to reconsider cutting daytime custodians.

With respect;
Paul Knapik
President CUPE 382