The ‘RFP’ for Custodial Operations in HCPS Matters to Schools & STUDENTS in Hillsborough

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This week we will focus on the reality of what the RFP (Request For Proposals) means to employees, the community, public schools and ultimately our students in Hillsborough County.

Hillsborough School District leaders are saying the RFP sent out for Custodial Operations does not mean the outsourcing of those jobs is a done deal. Although an RFP is not a guarantee for implementation, even when a short list of choices is compiled, the mere fact that HCPS leaders say they are shopping around by researching the market should be taken very seriously.

Many companies specifically seeking to sell products or services to school districts in order to make a profit see an RFP as an opportunity to crack an account or get a windfall of revenue. Within this industry, sales pros call the reaction to RFPs of high worth the “rainbow effect” because of the race that ensues to get to the pot of gold. There is plenty of research district leaders can look at to know that outsourcing custodial operations will not save money or provide superior quality. Despite what they are wanting you to believe, by gathering information through a “fishing expedition,” HCPS leaders have expressed their clear intent to outsource.

There is plenty of research and clear examples of how outsourcing ends up costing more over time, and does not meet the quality standards that are desired:

Cleaning firms submit low-ball bids based on unrealistic staffing assumptions. When classrooms are dirty and parents complain, it costs the district more to boost staffing and improve cleanliness. Chicago Public Schools found this out with its custodial contract with Aramark. In the first 11 months of the deal, the company charged $22 Million more than budgeted, wiping out all the projected savings for the year. The company had to increase staffing by hundreds of workers after complaints about school cleanliness and the district’s failure to include some facilities in the contract.

**SODEXO & ARAMARK:**
Two of the biggest names in private management of custodial services are Sodexo & Aramark. These and many other companies will most likely be on the list of those applying to the request for proposals here in Hillsborough. Unfortunately, Sodexo & Aramark are also found on a long list of regulatory violators & lawbreakers throughout the United States. Aramark averages over half a million dollars a year in wage & hour violations, employment discrimination, and workplace safety & health violations from all over the country, while Sodexo averages $4.6Million in violations per year. These two companies are also responsible for TERRIBLE conditions in Chicago Public Schools. In report after report, the quality of cleanliness in CPS schools has been proven to be bad for children and schools. If implemented in HCPS, these subpar conditions will do an excellent job of driving families out of neighborhood public schools!

**GCA SERVICES (AMB INDUSTRIES):**
GCA Services currently provides custodial services to Collier County School District here in Florida. That school district, lost loyalty of employees, who now no longer work directly for the school district, and lost control of VITAL functions performed in the schools every day. GCA Services recently made the news for providing filthy classroom conditions for students in Utica, Michigan as their work has been substandard in schools & classrooms. Not only has the cleaning itself been poor, reports say due to poor training, and with high turnover among custodians, due to lower pay, the custodial staff has lost its sense of community within individual schools, as relationships are lost with students and staff. Additionally, AMB industries, the parent company to GCA Services, averages $8Million per year in violations against workers though discrimination, safety & health and/or wage & hour lawsuits.

**KELLY SERVICES:**
Kelly Services is the company that HCPS has contracted out for providing substitute teachers. Aside from the problems that have negatively impacted students since this contract began here in Hillsborough, at the
national level this company has had more than a dozen violations ranging from wage & hour violations to employment discrimination and workplace safety & health violations from all over the country that have amounted to $20.5 Million in total cost! Some as recent as 2017, and some costing up to $11Million alone.

**District leaders should be actively working within custodial operations to implement efficiency and cost saving goals NOW!**

The $800,000+ Gibson Report had many recommendations for improving efficiency, quality & decreasing costs through centralization *(NOT PRIVATIZATION)*!

*Centralization is the process or action of bringing activities together in one place.*

*Privatization is the transfer of business, industry, or service from public to private ownership & control.*

Aside from the district’s choice to ignore clear & plentiful research on increased cost and poor quality services, there is a deeper and more serious threat to employees in ALL of the blue collar position here in HCPS. As we’ve previously pointed out, new **School Board member, Steve Cona**, expressed publicly his desire to privatize more than just custodial services while running for his seat. It is no coincidence that early in his term the district has hastily sent out an RFP for custodial operations. This action shines light on the clear path to dismantling the ability for a large group of employees to negotiate collectively for their wages, hours & working conditions.

**Steve Cona** is the president of the Associated Builders & Contractors Gulf Coast Chapter. This association touts that it was formed *to ensure* construction projects are awarded to qualified and responsible low bidders, with their mission being to advance the “Merit Shop Philosophy.” While no one would argue the importance of strong qualifications & the hiring of responsible workers, the term “merit shop” is misleading in that context. Merit Shop simply refers to a firm or organization *without a labor union*, and we would argue that the absence of a union certainly does not guarantee workers are more qualified or responsible to work around our children every day.

School board members have a primary responsibility of ensuring limited public tax dollars have a POSITIVE impact on students, employees & the community - not ensuring the flow of public tax dollars is headed directly to certain outside profiteers. By ignoring the Gibson Report’s recommendation for centralization *(NOT PRIVATIZATION)*, increasing positions in custodial operations by 200 employees since 2014-15 and not looking to actually improve quality & efficiency from within FIRST, school district leaders have sent a message to employees, the public, and kids in Hillsborough County: that they would rather pay more to an outside company to do the job than manage responsibly and efficiently from within to serve students and communities.

**CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON ALL STAKEHOLDERS:** District leaders MUST conduct a legitimate social and economic impact analysis before ever producing an RFP for operational services of this size!

The effects of outsourcing go beyond monetary costs. In our neighborhood public schools especially, outsourcing can have unintentional negative impacts on students, teachers, principals, community residents, and businesses. A study of the potential impact of outsourcing should *be completed and made public* before any Request For Proposals is ever generated. These analyses have not been done for custodial operations, nor have they been performed in the past for contracts with companies like Kelly Services & Minimize USA, to name a few.

Moving forward, district leaders should include the potential impacts listed below; as appropriate; in their analysis:

- The expected change in staffing and personnel for the affected positions. *(District leaders would like you to BELIEVE that 80% of staff could go work for the private company...But in what capacity? For how long?)*
- The expected change in wages and benefits for affected workers. *(Without doing proper research across the state and country PRIOR, the RFP will ONLY produce misleading data on wages from the companies who want the contract.)*
- The expected impacts on social services and public assistance programs.
The racial and gender mix of affected workers, and any expected changes after outsourcing.
(We have revealed through our data, the custodians to be affected are: 80% Hispanic, 10% African American, 10% white. Of the 90% of Hispanic & Black employees, 60% are women)

- Requirements for staffing to live within the jurisdiction, and expected impact of contracting on where workers live.
- The expected economic impact on local businesses.
(Will an outside company provide supplies & materials from an out of county vendor?)
- Expected impact on tax revenue for jurisdiction.
- The expectation for background checks & fingerprint monitoring and how this process will be monitored and controlled and reported to the district on a regular basis.
(STUDENT SAFETY IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN!)

This practice will ensure that our School Board and the public fully understand the ramifications of any outsourcing decisions before the RFP is generated, before the contract is signed and before major loss and trauma is caused to our students learning conditions in Hillsborough County Public Schools.

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