

District cuts costs by not replacing supervisor

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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School Board OKs plan to eliminate head buildings, grounds position by sharing duties among custodians

Rather than try to replace Carl Huenink, the longtime building and grounds supervisor for the Cedar Grove-Belgium School District, Supt. Steve Shaw developed a plan that gives more responsibility to lead custodians who have been with the district for several years.

The plan was approved 5-2 last week by the School Board with Aileen Dahlke and Dan Bruhn voting against the measure.

The plan will cost about \$57,000, which includes adding 1,080 hours to hire a part-time custodian or increase hours of current custodians and pay raises for the lead custodians, who will be responsible for scheduling cleaners and maintenance of their buildings and other district-wide duties.

That's less than if a replacement for Huenink is hired, so the district will save money, Shaw said.

Huenink, who retired June 30 after 34 years with the district, oversaw the construction of a new high school and elementary school and was involved in the planning for a high school technical education center and remodeling of the middle school (the former high school) this year.

"Carl knew the ins and outs of all these buildings and had developed relationships with vendors. He knew where he could get things for free or a reduced price," Shaw said. "We've decided to divide his responsibilities among several people. I looked at each of their skills and interests, and I think we have a good plan.

"The pride these people have in their work is phenomenal. You can see it whenever you go into a building."

The lead custodians, who will report to Shaw, are Steve Bares for outdoor maintenance and equipment repairs; Mike Ciske for the high school and district construction and repair schedules; Phil Burns for the middle school, district-wide safety issues and pool maintenance; Karla Testroete for the elementary school and ordering supplies for all buildings; and Kevin Runkel for heating, ventilation and air-conditioning issues at all buildings.

"I believe everybody is nervous about this, including me. I think these people can pull it off," Shaw told the board.

"Through the summer they've shown they've taken ownership of their buildings."

Shaw noted that every building has additional classrooms to clean yet the number of custodians has not increased. The lead custodians will be responsible for training those under them and

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will need additional training themselves for some jobs.

One person will be assigned to the middle school during gym-and-swim hours to make sure children and adults aren't roaming the hallways, Shaw said.

The lead custodians will meet with the principal and athletic director at their school to schedule custodians for athletic events and after-school activities.

Middle School Principal Jeanne Courneene said communication will be essential.

"It's a good plan, but for me it's all about clarity," Courneene said. "We have to be clear on what expectations are, who is cleaning and what they're cleaning."

If a principal requests something be done, Shaw said, he would expect that to be done. In evaluating the lead custodians, Shaw said he will confer with principals.

Bruhn questioned if the lead custodians is responsible for reprimanding a co-worker if a job is not done as expected.

"The crew I have now, I'm confident they'll do their jobs," Testroete said. "But I couldn't go to someone and say, 'That looks like crap.' I think if that happened, I would go to Mr. Shaw and ask, 'How should we handle this?'"

Bruhn commented, "My concern is if somebody thinks they're equal with somebody and now they're over you, I can see them being upset."

Board member Chad Hoopman said that happens in the business world all the time when promotions are made from within.

"I like the structure," Hoopman said. "It gives a sense of ownership to the five individuals and allows them to grow as employees as well. I'm intrigued by it."

Testroete said she and the others are nervous but eager to undertake the added responsibilities.

"We're excited about our new jobs," she said. "I don't think the power thing is an issue for us."

Shaw noted if the plan doesn't work, it can be changed.