

## Davenport Schools Shouldn't Contract Out Custodial and Security Services

Written by Dave Stage and Jim Young  
Friday, 08 March 2013 09:55

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As the Davenport Community School District considers a proposal to contract out custodial services and campus security, we want to make sure that parents and citizens know who we are, why we are an integral part of Davenport schools, and why contracting out would not be beneficial for our students, their families, and the public.

We have deep roots in this community and this school district. You may know us as Dave, the former wrestling and football coach, or Mr. Jim, the guy who volunteers to be the "dunkee" for the dunk tank that raises money for McKinley School at the Fall Festival. Between the two of us, we have almost 60 years of custodial experience: Dave, a Marine Corps veteran, has worked for Davenport schools for almost 30 years, and Jim started his career with Davenport schools in 1985; he helped open up North High on its first ever day of school. We have given our lives to this district. Many custodians and campus-security staff have children that attended or currently attend Davenport schools. Like us, many of our fellow custodians are heavily involved in school-related activities like Dad's Club, Scouts, Boosters Club, and bake sales.

Our custodial staff keeps our schools safe, clean, and secure. Students, especially elementary-school students, carry a whole smorgasbord of different germs. We are proud to say that our staff does an excellent job of cleaning every nook and cranny of our school buildings. If a contractor cuts corners to boost profits, the end result will be a lot more sick days for students, teachers, staff, and their families.

We go above and beyond. There are countless school kids that learned to tie their shoes with the help of a custodian. We help lost students find their way to class. We help students who

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missed the bus contact their parents. We help injured students get to the nurse. When it snows, we react quickly to handle our responsibilities to clear snow around the building and keep kids safe. One of us, Dave, rebuilt and repainted Washington Elementary School's benches and picnic tables on his own time and at his own expense. Is a contractor, who may only clean a school building every once in a while, going to go the extra mile for our kids?

In an emergency situation, you want staff that students, parents, and teachers can trust. We are experienced, we are well-known, and we are trusted. In 1989, Jim walked into a room just as a school boiler suffered a minor explosion. Thinking quickly back to his training, he ran over and threw the emergency switch. Given the possibility for a further explosion, every moment was critical.

In contrast to our experienced and trusted staff, contractors have high turnover. Do we want unfamiliar, untrusted faces in our schools? That's not what parents deserve. One parent recently told WHBF Channel 4 that "we know who we're working with, who's around our children, and we feel safe with what we have now." We wholeheartedly agree. Why would the school district want to put that at risk?

Lastly, we are directly accountable to the school district. When things go right (or, very rarely, wrong), the school district and residents know who is responsible. With a contractor, no one will know who is truly in charge. Is it school officials or the contractor? Will the contractor rotate different staff through different schools and other job sites each day? How long could we get stuck with a contractor who does a substandard job?

The system we have now works. The school district shouldn't try to fix what isn't broken. It's not necessary to frighten countless custodial and campus-security workers' families and make them worry continuously about losing their jobs. It puts a damper on the local economy as families hold off on major purchases.

We encourage you to express your opinion to the school board. You can contact the board by sending an e-mail to [BoardComments@DavenportSchools.org](mailto:BoardComments@DavenportSchools.org). Please get involved in this important issue. The quality of Davenport students' learning environment is at stake.

*Dave Stage and Jim Young have been custodians in Davenport schools for decades and are*

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*both members of AFSCME Local 751.*