

District considers privatizing custodial services to cut costs

By Chad Livengood

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Hanover-Horton schools could reduce custodial services costs by 36 percent by hiring a private company, bid data shows.

The district received four bids from private cleaning companies. The lowest bid for \$295,525 came from West Michigan Janitorial Co. from the Grand Rapids area.

Superintendent Linda Brian said custodial services were budgeted for \$464,438 this year after the district cut one full-time position to save \$56,146.

“There is a significant savings,” Brian said of privatization. But the idea is unpopular among many union supporters in the district.

Privatizing could free up roughly \$123 per student for academic purposes in the 1,371-student district.

The Hanover-Horton school board will consider outsourcing custodial work and laying off its seven full-time and two part-time custodial employees at its Aug. 20 meeting.

Brian said the board is exploring outsourcing, but is not entirely set on it because of the impact on the employees who live in the community.

Yard signs saying “Privatization Hurts Us All” have been popping up around the district this summer as talk of outsourcing custodial services has spread.

“This board is proceeding very cautiously,” Brian said.

The administration and union are bargaining a new

contract.

Union officials said the Hanover-Horton school administration is being transparent about exploring privatization.

“This is being done with much more respect for the union than Napoleon was,” said Pam Schultz, president of the Jackson County Education Association, the countywide union representing all Michigan Education Association members.

Napoleon’s school board hired Enviro-Clean in May for custodial work at a savings of \$305,000 a year.

“My gut feeling right now is I don’t think they will privatize,” said John Smith, a custodian of 23 years and president of the Hanover-Horton Education Support Personnel union.

Getting rid of unionized custodians at public schools is the fastest growing privatization trend in Michigan public schools, said Michael LaFaive, director of fiscal policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland.

In 2006, the Mackinac Center found that 11.4 percent of the state’s public schools reported contracting custodial services, a 2.4 percent increase from 2005.

LaFaive said his 2007 survey is due out Aug. 9 and will detail how privatizing custodial services yields a greater percentage of savings than outsourcing food and busing services.

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