

On October 23, the Valley Central teachers addressed this BOE regarding the fair treatment of all employees of the district. They stood in solidarity with those of us who “have been excluded from the family table”. Tonight, we have come to address this BOE as one of those groups who presently feel excluded from the table despite the fact that thirty out of forty-eight of our custodial and maintenance employees live and pay school taxes in the Valley Central School District and have children who attend or have attended school within this district.

A fair expectation for any employee should be the expectation to be able to afford to live in the community where you work and are paid. This requires a living wage. The federal government’s universal living wage is based on two guidelines:

- (1) the Fair Market Rent as established by HUD throughout the country for each municipality and all other areas (<http://www.universallivingwage.org>);
- (2) according to the federal government, a person who works full time should spend no more than 30% of his/her income on housing which would ensure that the person working will be able to afford basic rental housing, food, clothing, utilities and access to health care.

As of October 10, 2006, the Universal Living Wage for the Newburgh-Middletown-Poughkeepsie area based on a one bedroom rental unit is \$32,640 a year. The Universal Living Wage for a two bedroom rental unit is \$39,960 a year and \$48,960 year for a three bedroom rental unit.

Using these figures for comparison and considering the 2005-2006 salary schedule of the custodial and maintenance unit:

- A custodian on step one is \$7,188 behind the universal living wage.
- A head custodian doesn't reach the Universal Living Wage for a two bedroom rental unit until step 9 of the 2005-06 salary schedule. Therefore, by universal living wage standards, our head custodians cannot afford to start a family until they have worked in the district for nine years.
- Lastly, no one on the 2005-06 salary schedule for custodians, head custodians, maintenance workers and grounds-persons can afford a three bedroom rental unit in this area according to the Universal Living Wage.

Since the district certainly wants to treat everyone fairly, and Dr. Hooley has recently stated that District's "goal is to be fair to everyone" as quoted in the Wallkill Valley Times on November 1, 2006, it could be assumed that the fair raise this unit should receive would be on par with other employees of this District who are also contributing 10-15% toward their health premium. Were this true the custodial and maintenance unit would be offered no less than a 10.9% raise. This estimate is based on Dr. Hooley's recent salary negotiation for the 2006-07 school year, since he contributes 10-15% toward his health coverage. Dr. Hooley received a 10.9% raise. Please understand that this is not a criticism of Dr. Hooley's salary. We applaud this Board's goal of "recruiting, training and retaining highly qualified staff" and understand in order to achieve this goal that you must be competitive with other salaries in the area.

However, in order to not lose site of our concerns, let us explain our plight in terms of the Universal Living Wage formula. Even if the maintenance and custodial unit were to receive a 10.9% raise on their 2005-06 salary schedule:

- A custodian on step one is still \$4,414 behind the Universal Living Wage.
- A head custodian can afford a two bedroom home three years earlier—on step 6.
- And finally, the only person on the salary schedule for custodians, head custodians, maintenance and grounds- persons who could afford a three bedroom home would be a head custodian on top step.

Even with a 10.9% raise this scenario is not quite so ideal as these figures are impacted by the 10-15% health contribution which sets all these numbers back. We accept that every unit is making a contribution to health premium costs. But does this Board believe that it is fair for the custodial and maintenance unit, whose salary schedules are modest in comparison to other units, to be asked to contribute the same percentage toward health insurance premiums that superintendents are asked to contribute?

A 10% contribution to the Orange Ulster School District Health Plan for individual coverage is \$700.80 a year. A 15% contribution to the same plan for family coverage is \$2,286 a year. If you are making \$150,000 that might not seem like much; try making that contribution on \$32,000 a year and you do feel a pinch.

We ask that you look at the men and women of the maintenance and custodial unit who are standing with me tonight. These are my coworkers who attend to the physical plant that is Valley Central. Steve Puntar often describes Valley Central in terms of a 50 story office building—well, these are the men and women that keep this building running to service the needs of 5000 children and nearly 900 employees. Dr. Hooley has said that it is the District's goal to be fair to everyone. That is the hope of this unit—that you will be fair to us. Tim Brown mentioned at the last meeting that our salaries are \$10,000 below neighboring school districts. Yet our buildings are as clean, if not cleaner, and functioning better than most buildings in those school districts. Is this fair?

Dr. Hooley has been a district employee for five years and is the highest paid employee in the school district as he should be; he certainly bears a lot of responsibility for this District. But if there was a fire at the Walden Elementary building, I would bet a year's salary that Dr. Hooley would not be the first employee at that building as much as he cares about this District. The man I believe would beat Dr. Hooley to that building would be the Head Custodian --- and he would not only be the first man at the building; he would be the first through the door...and the fire department isn't that far away. That is his building and it has been his building for forty-six years. He has worked and lived in this district for forty-six years. He has paid school taxes here for forty-six years and his children went to school in this district. His son is a custodian in a neighboring district where he has been employed for seven years. His son's salary is only \$8,000 below his—in seven years his son nearly achieved what has taken this head custodian forty-six years to

achieve. Remember, only if this head custodian were offered a 10.9% raise on the 2005-06 salary scale would he be able to afford a three bedroom rental in this area according to the Universal Living Wage formula. He has been thousands of dollars behind neighboring districts for many years, which will continue to impact him long into his retirement. Yet despite this, I tell you with the fullest confidence that if something were to happen to that building, you can count on Walden's head custodian to be there, because he has given heart and soul to that building and its occupants.

I wish I had more time to tell you the stories of the rest of my brothers and sisters of the maintenance and custodial unit, because each one of the men and women standing with me tonight have a reason that they are still here at Valley Central. But I know that you have a lot of business before you this evening, so I will leave you with one last thought: Valley Central has always been described as a family. Sometimes families grow so large that you can lose sight of who belongs to that family.

In closing, I would just like to say that I hope that Dr. Hooley really means it when he says it is a District goal to be fair to everyone. It is our goal to have the district treat us fairly and to include us at the family table.