

June 22, 2009

Board of Education
RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
70 Prospect St.
Ridgefield, CT 06877

Re: Statement on Proposed Change to Contractor for
Ridgefield Public Schools' Food Services

Chairman Austin Drukker & Board Members;

I am the supervising cafeteria worker for the Veterans Park Elementary School. I am also the President of the Ridgefield Cafeteria Workers Bargaining Unit represented by CSEA SEIU Local 2001.

Tonight you will be considering a recommendation regarding the cafeteria workers. Our members have gone through five changes of companies since our work was originally contracted-out by the Board. Every time it has happened, at a minimum, there has been a disruption to the quality of the service provided to our children and on most occasions there was a negative impact to our wages and/or benefits. At worst, the impact to the children we serve was significant and new employees' wages and benefits were reduced to the point where the company could not compete for new workers.

To recap the changes to contractors:

1. Marriott was the first company:

Our members lost wages and benefits. The health insurance was replaced, but with an inferior plan and a co-pay of 36%. Our pension was significantly reduced when we were no longer in the School System Pension, and fewer of our workers were even eligible because hours were cut. New employees' wages were reduced by several dollars.

2. Then, Marriott combined with Sodexo:

When Sodexo began running the day to day operation. There were changes made that impacted the way services were provided.

3. Then Sodexo became our sole employer:

When Marriott stopped providing cafeteria services, our members lost access to some Marriott employee benefits.

4. Then Sodexo lost the contract to Whitsons:

A complete disaster. Promises made by the company were never fulfilled. People were recruited that were not screened, nor were they fingerprinted. Many people only worked a few days. There was more work piled on our members but, we did manage to hold the program together.

5. Then Sodexo (now spelled differently) became the new employer (again).

We were able to move Sodexo to agree to honor our previous contract. And now we have negotiated a new contract through 2011. We made up some ground for the first time. It was a difficult contract.

Our members have never been able to make up the difference that we lost when the Board initially contracted-out the cafeteria services. And we have never been able to keep up with wage and benefit increases negotiated by the Board's other employees. However, our members have always had the best interests of our children at heart and it is for that reason that we are speaking out.

We have the following concerns:

- 1.** We have a contract in place with Sodexo. Although we think that the most ideal situation for our schools' children would be for the Board to bring cafeteria services back "in-house," our contract with Sodexo is a fair agreement and should be allowed to continue. That would provide the least disruption to the children and our members. We have "labor peace" with Sodexo and unless it can be shown that there is an extreme difference between the quality of services provided, then Sodexo's revenue contract should be renewed. Under the Municipal Employees Relations Act, recourse for dispute resolution would be binding interest arbitration. Under the National Labor Relations Board, our final dispute resolution is to strike. We have never had to resort to that before, and with our contract in place we would not be eligible to strike now.
- 2.** If there is a change of company, and to preserve labor peace, then the Board should ensure that all food services employees are rehired. The Board should also provide for the current contract remaining intact with equal or better wages and benefits.
- 3.** In the event of a change to the contractor, any training or retraining required be done prior to school opening in the fall, so that there will be a minimum of disruption to the children. That way any issues regarding quality services can be worked out prior to any students' involvement.

Our members feel that we have become pawns in a bad chess game where the pieces are continually battered and bruised. Every time the Board looks into changing companies, we have to worry about where our next meal is coming from, whether we will still have a job, whether our own children will have health insurance during the transition and whether it will be continued after a new contract is negotiated and we also have to worry about what adjustments the children we serve will be subjected to.

We think enough is already too much. We want to continue to do the jobs we were hired to do. We want to continue to provide the great services we have provided over the years. We want to be able to do our jobs without disruption and to not be in a state of continual apprehension.

Please take our concerns into consideration when finalizing any decision regarding the food services contractor.

Thank you for hearing our concerns.

Maureen Hulse

President, Ridgefield Cafeteria Workers Chapter
CSEA SEIU Local 2001

CC: First Selectman Rudy Marconi
CSEA SEIU Local 2001 Executive Council Members
CSEA SEIU Local 2001 Legislative Action Committee Members
Municipal Division Council Officers & Chapter Presidents

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