

Pender school system plans layoff of 15 janitors

By Sam Scott
Staff Writer

Pender County Schools is laying off close to half its janitors, though no one will be fired.

Fifteen of 41 janitors - about one per school - will stay on the district payroll after July 1, said David Smith, the school district's maintenance director. Who stays will be largely based on principals' recommendations, he said. Each janitor will have the choice of taking jobs at the same pay with the private company hired to service the schools.

The others can continue in similar jobs with SSC Service Solutions Co., the Knoxville, Tenn.-based company selected by the school board earlier this month to take over cleaning duties, Mr. Smith said. Nobody will lose a job, he said.

The newly privatized janitors will, however, experience a schedule shift as more cleaning will occur at night, which Mr. Smith said was an attractive part of the change.

"It's simply not feasible to try to clean the schools when they're full of children," he said.

Mr. Smith said he was still waiting on replies from all principals concerning who they recommend to stay on the payroll. He did not know if any employees who have been affected were planning to leave.

The district is in negotiations with the company to finalize terms of the contract, though its benefits would not be financial. Mr. Smith said the contract would save only about \$6,000 in

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a \$1 million budget. SSC Service Solutions Co., however, would be able to offer better training and management, he said. Mr. Smith will remain in his position.

"The motivation is trying to improve air quality and cleaning in schools," he said.

Some schools in Pender County have had mold problems.

In 2002, Topsail High was shut down for three weeks while crews removed mold and improved the school's ventilation system.

The school system also has faced complaints about mold in other schools.

Parent Susan Newport, who had a child affected by mold, said it wasn't fair for janitors to be switched around while Mr. Smith remained. She said she planned to voice her concerns at the June Pender County Board of Education meeting.

Març Sosne, the outgoing Pender County superintendent, and Tom Roper, the chairman of the board of education, did not return phone calls.

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