

OAPSE Through the Lens of Its Members

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In less than a week, we three high school seniors will graduate from Perry High School and face the undivulged responsibilities and discoveries of the real world. Our education has done well to teach us the cognitive skills and information necessary to adapt into the world without a safety net. A specific organization that we have yet to grasp and have investigated is the Union, more specifically our school's staff Union called the Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE). OAPSE has the state branch that unifies each school in Ohio, and each individual school as their own subdivide. Each staff member in the Perry Local School District (PLSD) is a gear in the well-oiled machine of the Perry High School custodial and maintenance team. Denise Prior, the head of the Perry OAPSE branch, was instrumental in our understanding of the Union's functions and her responsibility as our district's representative. Dawn Gervan is the Head Custodian of the Perry Elementary School. This means that she is a typical custodian, and also is the general contact between the off-site maintenance building/crew, Jim Smith the Perry Schools' Director of Maintenance and Operations, and the rest of the PES staff members. Rick Daniels is on the maintenance and tech teams. He is one of the maintenance and tech workers. The last type of employee under the Perry Union is a landscape and grounds worker.

Starting with the OAPSE Perry District President, Denise Prior. According to Ms. Prior, the Perry Local School District has different crews in each building. There are five custodians in the high school, four in the middle school, four in the elementary school, three in the Perry Athletic Center (PAC), one grounds worker or landscaper, and one worker to cover the Board of Education, Manchester West, and Transportation buildings. She informs us that there are five staff members on first shift, nine on second shift, and four on third shift. What makes Ms. Prior different from the other custodians is that she is the PLSD "field representative_[1]." She defines this responsibility as her being the contact for the local Union and the Northeast District Union. As the Union President, she attends six meetings for each Union district each year, attends once a month "Labor Relations_[2]" meetings, welcomes new employees, and represents all of the Perry Staff in disputes or discussions with administrators. Because of her importance and role as a voice for the rest of the staff, Ms. Prior communicates considerably more often with Jim Smith. The positive relationship between Ms. Prior and Mr. Smith is what allows Perry administration to be open to her feedback; this is why she often sits in on custodial and maintenance job interviews and sometimes administrative staff interviews to test out the relationship. Things like this make

her very efficacious statement, “They respect us just as much as they do the teachers,” as heartwarming as it is.

Dawn Gervan is a member of the OAPSE under Perry, and is the PES Head Custodian and the first shift supervisor. Ms. Gervan is responsible for overseeing that the lunch room stays up to standards after the kids have finished chowing down, and any accidents that were a little too late to the bathroom are taken care of. Also, if anything that needs a “work order” or special attention from Ms. Gervan has been communicated by second and third shift, she gets it sorted out. For the sake of a smooth work day, it is very important that emergencies and special tasks are outlined. Keeping communication flowing and open keeps the routine steady between all of the different components to custodial work, such as the differences between shifts, buildings, and job requirements aligned. Another way that the different shifts within the schools stay in touch is through crossover periods that are built into their hours. By having the second shift come in to relieve the first shift, the first shift group can notify the second shift to any specific needs or differences in basic tasks for that day.

Rick Daniels is an OAPSE member working at Perry High School as a maintenance and operations technician, with an electrical background. Mr. Daniels works 7:00am to 3:30pm Monday through Friday, but is on call “24/7” every third week. He now continues his days by going through tasks depending on their highest priority, “usually if it’s something to do with an emergency system we get to those first. Heating, air conditioning, lighting...so kids can be in a classroom.” However, there can be up to four to five new tasks daily, although most of his work and those in his field, are carried over “from day-to-day-to-day,” and emergency cases “on average, probably...twice a week.” By means of communication, there are three maintenance workers for all of the PLSD, so “we see each other everyday,” and their determining location in the school “depends on the job,” although most of Mr. Daniels’ time is spent in the elementary school. In terms of the union itself Mr. Daniel is supported “in a sense of trying to keep everything fair for everybody.” Mr. Daniel also refers to the OAPSE union as a backing for rights, as example, “... can’t avoid or get away from dealing with safety factors and safety concerns.” OAPSE and Jim Smith are also connected in scheduling, and “...my boss [Smith] tries to be fair about over-time...the boss tries to divide it up, so that the people who want to work the over-time get a fair shot.” Mr. Daniel also compares his experience with working without a union where “things just weren’t fair... and some non-union companies, the people who do work a little bit harder, maybe get a little bit more, but they also, the people who work a little bit harder are also asked to do more,” although understanding why individuals may refrain from unions as

“...everyone gets the same reward, regardless of their work ethic.” So from experience he ultimately prefers working with OAPSE in the PLSD.

OAPSE is a union consisting of more than 34,000 members within 480 local districts. This union is used as a voice for individuals that serve Ohio’s students, community, and those taking advantage of public libraries, as well as, other public services. OAPSE’s intention is to fight to sustain better lives for active members, along with retirees. They’re also committed to evolving and executing effective and productive programs in the labor movement (oapse.org).

OAPSE, in correlation to Perry, provides many benefits to joining. According to OAPSE, union members make around \$3,946 more annually than non-members with the same job, along with a strong retirement. Members of the union also reap the benefits of healthcare, retirement security, legal representation, research, political action, in addition to legislative advocacy to matters important to participating/former members. OAPSE also provides access to training institutes and educational opportunities, like the advanced education program, where members and their families earn two free years at college, and the chance to a four-year degree. Classes are also provided through partnership of (EGCC) Eastern Gateway Community College and Central State University. Another is the Memorial Scholarship Foundation, where at least ten may be awarded to children of OAPSE parents. In addition, there is the advantage program, which grants members discounts of travel, credit cards, shopping, mortgages, cell phone plans, Car expenses, and insurance. This goes in hand with their “Family Fun Days” program where union members may receive special rates for various entertainment parks (opase.org).

In conclusion, OAPSE is a strong representative being considered the largest and strongest union in Ohio. Through the lens of members' experience it’s clear that the union through Perry is establishing itself as a supporter and ensuring rights are maintained. Overall, there are advantages along with disadvantages for working aside a union, each preference is best determined through involvement itself. So, while OSAPSE continues to reach their objectives and goals to ensure better conditions for school workers, the members can continue proudly defining the union as is.

1. Field Representatives: A person who represents the union in a field. They're responsible for negotiating contracts, resolving disputes, and advocating for the rights of union members. They also work to build relationships with employers and other organizations to achieve the interest of the union's district and its members.
2. Labor Relations: Union officers meet with administration, such as the Board of Education and other Northeast (Ohio) District Union members, to discuss wages, contracts, regulations, hours, and more. If a recent change has negatively impacted the staff members of our district directly or indirectly, this is the appropriate time to discuss said matters.
3. Work Order: A task or job for an employee that can be scheduled or assigned. Such orders may be requested or created internally within an organization. They also may be created as follow ups to inspections or audits, in addition to products or services.