

Jarod's Law inspections have been going on again in our district over the last few weeks. These are the detailed site checks by the county health department to make sure our schools meet the very exacting requirements of the law, which was enacted after the tragic accidental death of a young child in an Ohio school.

The program is now in its second year and the inspections are far more detailed than they were last year. A great deal of the responsibility for being prepared for the inspection falls on our custodial staff, especially our head custodians. At the Intermediate School, one of our larger buildings, the head custodian accompanied the inspector through every step of a six-hour inspection. We don't have the final reports in hand yet but I'm pleased to say that throughout the district we've been told we're doing very well.

All of our custodians are unsung heroes in our schools. They clean up the worst messes, work inside and outside in every kind of weather, and are often asked to be in two or three places at once.

Each school has a custodial staff, with its size determined by the size of the school. A head custodian supervises that staff. Those head custodians are responsible for the physical condition and safety of the whole building, and it's something in which they take a lot of pride. They know every inch of their schools, inside and out.

It's not an easy job to keep a school that might be 30 or 40 years old or more in pristine condition, especially with hundreds of children pounding through every day. Every day our custodians sweep and mop floors, clean bathrooms, load and unload supplies and move them around the building, and sweep sidewalks, steps and driveways. They help with carpentry work, plumbing, painting and electrical repairs. Custodians cut and water grass, trim shrubbery and keep the grounds neat. They shovel snow and spread salt on icy walks. When school is out they work on bigger jobs, like washing windows and walls and buffing floors. In the summer they tackle the biggest jobs, like stripping floors throughout the building. One of our custodians said that you don't know what hot is until you've run a floor stripper all day on the third floor of an un-air-conditioned school in the middle of July.

Head custodians also do all of the above, and more. They supervise all the custodians in the school, which includes duties like completing performance appraisals. They keep all the maintenance records, operate and maintain the heating and cooling systems, and handle some of the electrical and plumbing repairs. A head custodian might be wielding a mop one moment to clean up a spill, and a few minutes later be sitting around a conference table meeting with city, county or township officials and a principal. It's a job that requires a lot of versatility.

"The best part of the job," said Bill Vitatoc, the head custodian at West Elementary School, "is the satisfaction of having school ready to open every morning, with the building clean and ready to go. When school opens and things are running smooth, it's just a nice, satisfying feeling."

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