



One vision, one plan, and one inspiring partnership

Bentonville is a large school district located in the northwest corner of Arkansas, with 10 elementary schools, four middle schools, three junior highs, and one high school. The community it serves is perhaps best known as home to Walmart's headquarters, which brings continual growth and economic expansion to the local area. Largely because of this, Bentonville's student population has doubled over the past 10 years, and it continues to grow at a fast rate.

For many years, custodial services at Bentonville was managed in-house, and each school within the district handled its own housekeeping needs, which included making decisions about equipment, supplies, staff and other matters. Even though all the schools share the same vision for excellence, there was no oversight of the overall custodial budget, no formal approach to training, and no consistency in management from one building to the next.

Bentonville's executive director of Finance Dr. Sterling Ming recalled that when he joined the district in 2006, custodial

costs were higher than desired, and the appearance of facilities was not meeting up to the district's high standards.

Shortly after that, Ming approached the district about outsourcing custodial services and bringing all of the schools under one management team.

"What worked when the school district was smaller was no longer a good working model," he said.

Today, five-plus years into an custodial services contract with SSC, a visit to Bentonville's facilities tells a much different story. Buildings are immaculate,

support services staff are highly visible in professional uniforms, consistent supplies and products can be found throughout the school system, and **the district is saving an estimated \$300,000 annually on housekeeping expenses.**

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THE TRANSITION

Ming noted that the district went through a formal RFP process and narrowed the choices down to about four companies



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Executive Director of Finance at Bentonville

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before selecting SSC as its custodial partner in 2008. "One of the criterion we were looking for was that the service had to be cost-efficient," Ming said. "We also wanted a company that would truly be a partner with the district and have the same vision for cleaning services – a company that believed in excellence and paid attention to details."

To assure a smooth transition, the district addressed some of its concerns directly in the bidding process. For example, in the RFP, SSC provided assurance that current employees who were qualified and willing to work would have a job and that SSC would match their existing wages. Among other conditions:

- Special attention was paid to making employee benefits comparable.
- Enhancements, such as uniforms, were provided to support a sense of pride and teamwork.
- Employee training was instituted to support staff development.

ACHIEVING CONSISTENCY

In addition to maintaining existing facilities, which total about 30 buildings and 2.3 million square feet today, SSC also must plan for continual growth in the district, said SSC Resident Regional Manager Tim Tyler (who received SSC's Presidents Council Award for outstanding achievement 2013 in recognition of his work at Bentonville).

Some of the things SSC has done to enhance and streamline custodial services include:

- Bringing consistency to supplies and chemicals, and bringing employees up-to-date with OSHA guidelines.
- Providing better management and oversight of spending. SSC's buying power often enables them to save one-to two-thirds on the cost for equipment and supplies. With these savings, SSC has been able to replace older equipment, creating a safer, better environment for everybody, Tyler noted.
- Providing training to teach staff about using new products, etc. This supports a "more with less" approach, said SSC Senior Regional Manager Jerry Last.

Bentonville Superintendent Michael Poore, who joined the district just over three years ago, commented on the support the district has received from SSC's top management. He noted that SSC President Don Williams has made regular visits to Bentonville, which he said is consistent with the management style he sees within the on-site custodial team. "I sure appreciate his view of how to lead," Poore said of Williams. "It's coming from the top and filtering down. I think that says a lot."

TRUE TEAMWORK

When challenges or opportunities arise, SSC and Bentonville "always find a solution that works for both parties," Ming noted.

For example:

- When the community was impacted by a contagious infection, SSC came in nightly and disinfected all desks, light switches, etc., until the district got student absences under control.
- SSC donated \$10,000 toward a scholarship for Bentonville's district employees. "They understand that the support of our staff is so critical to our mission," Poore said.

RESULTS

Visible proof that the custodial partnership is working can be found in the buildings themselves.

"There's no trash anywhere, the floors are kept really clean, and you can tell good products are being used," noted Poore. "When visitors come to the district they're blown away by how our buildings look and how they operate."

Beyond this and the cost savings – which are estimated at more than \$1.5 million since the contract began – partnering with SSC has freed up principals to focus more on their instructional role, which Poore noted is critical to achieving the district's vision of excellence.

"I think the key is finding a company where there is a true partnership - a company that shares the same vision as the district," Ming stated. "How do you measure that success? Nobody looks at SSC as an outsourcing company, they just look at the employees as part of the district."