

TDSB trades council gets a cut of outside contractors' work

Kevin Donovan and Moira Welsh – Monday June 25, 2012
Staff Reporters

Jimmy Hazel

All outside building contractors hired by the Toronto District School board have to pay Jimmy Hazel's [trades council](#) a cut of their wages, documents reveal.

Those contractors have paid a total of \$2 million over the past 10 years to the Maintenance and Construction Skilled Trades Council, according to a TDSB official.

Funds — .5 per cent of every outside contract fee — are deducted by the TDSB from money owing the contractor and transferred directly to Hazel's Maintenance and Construction Skilled Trades Council, even though it does not perform the work. Several contractors have told the Star that contractors sometimes inflate their price for school board work to pay Hazel's group.



Jimmy Hazel

In the most recent one-year period, the TDSB contracted out \$42 million of work, according to a school board official, which under the contract provided about \$210,000 in additional funds to Hazel's trade council.

These outside contractors install playground materials, build school kitchens and perform other jobs the trades council cannot do.

Contractors have told the Star that these payments are not fair, since they bid through a tender system to do the job and they perform the work on their own.

“We have to pay Jimmy's group, it has always been that way,” said one contractor who, like six others the Star interviewed last week, asked that his name not be used because he feared losing business at the TDSB.

Another part of the contract Hazel's trades council has with the TDSB stipulates that contractors on most projects must employ union workers affiliated with the trades council.

The trades council is a bargaining unit for the roughly 900 maintenance and construction workers employed by the TDSB.

In a response to questions by the Star, Hazel said these “dues” are needed because his trades council acts as a representative of all workers including those who work for outside contractors. The dues help pay for that representation, he said.

Each contractor hired to do work Hazel's group can't do (such as designing and installing a school kitchen) must sign a document agreeing that the school board “shall deduct from monies otherwise due to the contractor,” according to the agreement Hazel has with the TDSB.

What is done with the payments to the trades council is unclear. Workers say they have tried for many years to get a full accounting but have been unsuccessful. The TDSB does not charge the trades council rent for its offices on school board property.

An ongoing [Star investigation](#) has found sky high charges by trades council workers for small jobs, including almost \$3,000 to install a simple electrical outlet in a school library. The Star has also reported on the close connections between the trades council, some trustees and provincial Liberal politicians. Workers are told to campaign for key politicians and risk losing their job if they refuse.

The trades council represents 14 skilled trades, including plumbers and electricians. In addition to the payments from outside contractors, Hazel's trades council receives dues from its own workers. Each one of those workers pays dues monthly to their individual union (about \$50) and they also pay more (about \$58) to Hazel's skilled trades council.

The deal that causes outside companies to pay Hazel's trades council traces back to 1998, according to school board insiders. It was a concession given by the TDSB so that the trades council would not grieve work given to outside contractors, even though many of these contracting companies are still required to use workers from unions affiliated with Hazel's trades council.

The .5 per cent is charged on both labour and material.

TDSB spokesperson Shari Schwartz-Maltz said the dues are considered a "temporary union membership" even though many of the workers at outside companies already pay dues to their own unions.

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