

ETHICS IN GIVING



An anonymous email sent to the Chicago Public Schools last year detailing allegations against Chartwells-Thompson Hospitality, the district's largest food vendor, has triggered off investigations that thousands of dollars worth of gifts were given to a high-ranking CPS employee. The email sent to the tribune, if validated, would establish a possible violation of the district's ethics policy. City employees are not allowed to accept gifts worth more than \$50 from businesses that contract with the city particularly in cases where the employee's decisions can influence the bidding process. The inspector general for Chicago Public Schools, James Sullivan, is investigating the allegations against Chartwells-Thompson Hospitality, which signed a new \$53.2 million food services contract with CPS in May. According to the email Chartwells-Thompson Hospitality gave the CPS employee skybox tickets to Green Bay Packers games in 2009. Tickets for the games, which included Brett Favre's anticipated return to Lambeau Field as quarterback of the Minnesota Vikings, skyrocketed between \$3,000 and \$5,000 and could have commanded rates as high as \$10,000 to \$15,000 according to some sources. Allegedly chartered buses to Lambeau Field for additional Packers games in 2008 and 2009, as well as dinners at upscale restaurants were also included. While the employee in question could not be reached by phone, CPS officials acknowledged that an investigation was under way. District spokeswoman Robyn Ziegler said in a statement, "Since the (inspector general) investigation is ongoing, we cannot comment specifically on it at this time". She went on to add that as a matter of course all CPS employees are regularly reminded of their responsibility to adhere to all ethics regulations via periodic e-mails, trainings and weekly newsletters. "Like many other companies, we have a policy not to comment on speculation, rumors and allegations." company spokeswoman Ayde Lyons said. Chartwells-Thompson Hospitality which is a division of the global food distributor Compass Group Inc., has a close relationship with the city's public school system and has over the years spent hundreds of thousands of dollars towards student welfare. Last school year, Chartwells donated \$39,000 for six scholarships to allow CPS students to pursue careers in the culinary arts, as well as an additional \$30,000 to buy backpacks and supplies for a CPS back-to-school drive. In addition, it gives \$20,000 annually to the late Maggie Daley's After School Matters charity, which counts Bloomer as a board member. Bob Bloomer is, incidentally, the Chartwells regional vice president. As company spokeswoman Jean Saunders says, "We're a part of the community, and we believe pretty strongly we should give back to the community. Our community is Chicago. We're not encouraged; we're strongly advised to make sure we support the community".

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