

LEADERSHIP FORUM

The Newsletter of the Association of Educational Leaders, Anne Arundel County

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'Nothing is impossible'

Profile of Will Myers, Principal of Severna Park High School

by Denise Hofstedt

With the patience of a long distance runner and the dedication of a boy scout, Will Myers heads for work every day focused on making a difference in the lives of the students and staff of Severna Park High School (SPHS).

After more than 30 years in the system, Myers welcomes the daily challenges of being a high school principal in Anne Arundel County. He sees his role as part cheerleader, part visionary. "It is easy to fall into a vortex of negativity," says Myers. "My job is to say 'nothing is impossible.'"

When others question the value of increased testing, he embraces its reality. "Testing makes us more aware of how students are performing," he says. "We are able to look



Will Myers

at that data and provide appropriate and specific remediation for those who need it." In discussing the controversial system-wide conversion to the four-period day, Myers can only find the good. "The four-period day provides the opportunity for in depth study in any curriculum," says Myers. "Students also have the ability to earn 32 credits over four years. They can concentrate on a subject."

For Myers, work is all about the students. "To Will, the kids are the most important thing," says Craig Reynolds, an assistant principal at SPHS. "He works to maintain a safe, secure environment for learning."

Reynolds notes that Myers is a bit of a boy scout. "Will believes that education is more than just learning the 'three Rs'—you have to educate the whole person. He feels

character building is important," says Reynolds. Myers was responsible for bringing an award winning character-building program to SPHS.

The Golden Rule

Myers himself tries to live by the Golden Rule. By all accounts, when he divides up the workload he takes his share. He shows up at events even when he is not the "administrator in charge." In the fall, during the first semester of the new four-period day, Even though it meant more work for him, Myers decided to take teachers off the duty schedule to facilitate their adjustment to the new workload, according to Reynolds.

Myers has been known to attend workshops for teachers to familiarize himself with what it takes to get the job done. "He tells you what he expects from you and he is right there with you if you need his help," says Kathy Kubic, who worked with Myers as a department head and then as an assistant principal. She says one of the most significant things she learned from working for him was that "sometimes simply listening to a person is more powerful than any words you can say."

"Some principals are managers — Will Myers is a leader," says Kubic. "People want to follow him — he is focused and has very high goals but he is very appreciative of his staff."

Myers' sincere, personable approach also makes it easy to work with him and for him, says Reynolds. He notes that Myers believes in empowering his staff. "He knows how to delegate authority. Once a person has earned his trust, he lets them fly. He trusts individuals to do the job," he says.

His Background

Born in Baltimore City, Myers' family moved to Anne Arundel County in the 1950s. He truly grew up in the system, attending

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Dates to Remember

Feb. 17
MAESP Assistant Principal Conference
Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab, Laurel
8:30 p.m.
For more information visit:
www.maesp.org

March 15
MAESP/MASSP Legislative Reception
Gov. Calvert House, State Circle, Annapolis
6:00 p.m.
For more information visit:
www.md-massp.org

March 25
AEL Spring Membership Meeting
The Rose Restuarant Comfort Inn-BWI Airport
6:00-9:00 p.m.
See flyer inside for more information.

May 1- June 1
Budget Hearings
Watch for information on the public hearings on the budget.
Plan to attend both meetings.

Critical help comes in time for negotiations

With the forecast of a difficult budget process the County Council and the County Executive, this president has made an unprecedented move by bringing Dr. Larry Lorton on as a Consultant to provide insight and recommendations as to how AEL might proceed with the County and State governments.

All members of AEL are concerned with the ever-changing role and additional responsibilities that at times come into conflict with our primary role as administrators for student

achievement. It is my hope that Dr. Lorton will compliment and enhance the Executive Board and our negotiating team as we proceed through this 2003-2004 budget process. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Lorton to AEL.

Thanks to all who attended the Maryland Rally for Education. Your support is appreciated.

Please plan to attend the MAESP & MASSP Legislative Night at the Calvert House in Annapolis, March 15 at 6:00 p.m. As always, we need your support. ■

*President's Column
by Charles Jansky*

Will Myers, from page 1

Lake Shore Elementary, George Fox Junior High School and Northeast High School. He earned a Bachelor of Science and Master of Education degrees from Towson State University. He began his tenure with the AACPS in 1972 as a social studies teacher at McArthur Jr. High. After several years he became a department chair and was encouraged by the school's leadership to look into a career in administration. He has worked at six of the county's 12 high schools, most recently being named principal at SPSHS in 2001.

According to Harry Calendar, who met Myers while working at Annapolis High School in the late 70s and is now principal at Chesapeake High School, there was never any doubt about Myers ability to lead. "Everyone knew he was going to do well. He has a willingness to work and sincerity about what he is doing," he says. "He doesn't dwell on things. He is consistent and does not practice self-promotion."

Going to the Next Level

Myers says his greatest challenge is maintaining the focus of stakeholders to give the students the best opportunity for success.

Though Myers leads one of the best schools in the state, he strives to make it better. "I would like to do more to enhance the educational experiences of our students," he says. "I want to be ranked nationally with the best. We're very, very good. The challenge is to go to the next level and get our school the recognition it deserves. Our school system is excellent. Our high schools do an excellent job. I know all my colleagues work day in and day out to make it a successful experience for their students." He

notes that tight budgets have made his job tough. "We are paying a nickel for a dollar song. We don't have the resources we need. But we are able to meet the challenges we face because our people work so hard. We do the most with the minimum," he says.

With school safety being on the minds of many in the county, Myers contends that the AACPS is one of the safest school systems in the country. "Safety is always a concern... it is a piece of our day, but not the biggest. Instruction is still 'number one.' We can't live in fear, but we have to live in reality."

He says the best part of his job is coming to work and being with people that he likes. "My job is almost fun all the time.... There is something different every day. There are always challenges, but I still like it," he says. When not at work Myers can most likely be found running. He competes in numerous races every year including usually: two or three marathons, a couple of 50-milers and a 50K. He has won the title of the Annapolis Striders Championship Race series Iron Man for the last 18 years.

After more than 30 years in education, Myers remains enthusiastic about his work and is willing to share advice. "There is no easy seat. No matter what school you're in, you are going to work hard. There is no such thing as an eight-hour day." He suggests getting a lot of sleep, eating well and maintaining a positive outlook. "If you are willing to work hard, it is rewarding. At the end of the day, you know you've made a difference.... Maybe it's the boy scout in me, but I am always going to leave my camp ground better than I found it," he says. ■

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Will Myers

Exercising your right to grieve

There has been a longstanding observation that you enhance your contract rights at the grievance table as opposed to the bargaining table. This is true in both private and public sector collective bargaining models. To make this work, however, you need to exercise your right to grieve. The AEL/ Board of Education Agreement recognizes a unique grievance procedure that allows Unit II members to seek redress for violations of the contract. Since most alleged violations bring into question an interpretation of the contractual terms, it is important that these questions, where appropriate, be tested and resolved before an independent source.

Grievance procedures available under the Negotiated Agreement are set out in Article 16. A "grievance is defined as a ...claim by a Unit II member that the member has been directly and adversely affected by a violation, misinterpretation, or application of provisions of the Negotiated Agreement concerning the salaries, hours, or working conditions of Unit II members". While a disciplinary action may impact these designated areas, unless the action is related to the provisions of the Negotiated Agreement, it is not covered by the Negotiated Agreement, but instead, a separate procedure set forth in Board policy and State law.

Assuming the contract provisions are violated by your supervisor, you begin the process on your own by requesting an "Informal Level" conference with the supervisor whose decision you are questioning. While there is no stated time period for the initiation of this conference, it should be done promptly and I would encourage it to be in writing. This writing should reference the request for informal resolution and address the specific conduct or interpretation of the Negotiated Agreement that is being challenged. At the Informal Level you are on your own. You need to discuss the matter in a firm yet respectful, manner but don't expect resolution.

Following the Informal Level, our contract requires you to seek a formal resolution through a Level One grievance with the same individual. This must be filed the sooner of five duty days

following the informal decision or 10 duty days after the grievance was presented. A written decision is required within five duty days thereafter.

If you are still aggrieved or if no decision is rendered within the allotted time, you have five duty days thereafter to file the grievance with the AEL Grievance Committee. This is a Level Two grievance step.

You can do this by mailing all pertinent information to the AEL President, who will assign it to the designated committee members. If the committee deems the grievance valid, it shall, within five duty days, request a hearing before the head of the department in which the Level One grievance was filed. Within 10 duty days a hearing will be held and a decision rendered.

If an adverse decision is reached at this level and the decision was not made by the Superintendent or one who directly reports to the Superintendent then the issue is filed as a Level Three grievance with the Superintendent within five duty days. Thereafter, the Superintendent shall meet and render a decision within 10 duty days following the referral.

The Fourth Level occurs when there is an adverse ruling made by the Superintendent. In this event, the Board of Education is notified that AEL and the employee are submitting the issues to the American Arbitration Association for advisory arbitration. Although the decision may only be advisory in nature, there is an associated value. It gives the organization and the administration an understanding of their respective positions regarding the issue being grieved. It forms a basis for future negotiations and, more often than not, a third party can be persuasive in convincing a side that its position is not well reasoned or correct. Settlements do occur.

In the next issue of this newsletter, I will discuss disciplinary review and how it differs from contract disputes. We will also discuss AEL's responsibility to assist in these matters and how AEL can initiate suit in the absence of an individual grievance. ■

*A Message from Richard Kovelant,
Executive Director & General Counsel*

The Association of Educational Leaders

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Letters to the Editor welcomed

We encourage members to use this newsletter to share their opinions and ideas. If you would like to express your thoughts on the issue of the day (i.e. the reduction of pupil personnel workers and its impact on your school) or time saving tip or a creative solution to a common problem, please send your submission to: Don Smith at 410.349.1764 (fax) or Denise Hofstedt at 410.421.5832 (fax), dmhofstedt@verizon.net.