

# LEADERSHIP FORUM

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

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## 'They are children first...'

*Patti Kelly meets the challenges as principal of Marley Glen*

By Denise Hofstedt

The decision to leave the classroom to take on the role of administrator is often a difficult one. At first glance, making the conversion means trading the daily rewards of working directly with students for a number crunching, paper pushing, sometimes isolating routine. But as those who have made the transition will tell you, it is the desire to reach beyond one classroom that propels them to a greater leadership role.

Highly acclaimed special education teacher Patti Kelly left the familiarity of life as a resource teacher to take on the challenge of administration — a challenge is what she was handed.

In her first two years as a principal, Kelly has been leading Marley Glen School, a special school serving a variety of students, including pre-school to high school-aged students with mild to severe disabilities and pre-k students with and without disabilities. Of the 100 pre-school students presently in the school, 85 - 90% attend their home school for kindergarten. Marley Glen is also the center that houses the behavior program specifically for students with cognitive and behavior challenges—both a primary and an intermediate class.

More challenges lie ahead for Kelly as the system prepares for a 2006-07 merger between Marley Glen and Ruth Easton. Following the merge, Marley Glen will serve as a comprehensive childhood education center with students in pre-school to primary school. Ruth Easton will serve middle to high school aged students.

Kelly has embraced the planned changes. "It will give us the opportunity to be more focused on the needs of young children. Our staff development can be more streamlined

toward the needs of younger children." In addition, Kelly says the school will have a more traditional feel — it won't seem so different.

Kelly has always had an interest in education and special education in particular. Having a relative enrolled in a special education program growing up, Kelly has empathy for children with special needs.

### Early On

She began her teaching career after earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education from the University of Maryland, College Park. In 1987 she graduated from Loyola College with a Masters of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology. She holds a Pupil Personnel Certificate and an Administration Certificate as well.

Among the most significant changes in special education over the last 30 years is the idea of inclusion. "My relative had a separate classroom down at one end of the building. It's not that way anymore," she says. "There is more knowledge about ways to educate students with special needs and more sharing between groups of people. There are more opportunities [for students with special needs] and that



Patti Kelly

### Working with Students with Special Needs

Patti Kelly, who has 30 years experience in special education, has two suggestions for teachers working with students with special needs. The first is that the teacher should try to focus equally on work habits as well as academic skills. "If you do one and ignore the other, [the student] won't be successful... the student won't be in the least restrictive setting he or she could be... [he or she] won't achieve."

She also thinks general education teachers need more ideas on how to work with students with special needs. "If you can handle them better, you can teach more to everyone," she says.

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## Patti Kelly, from page 1

builds confidence.... We look at a student's strengths and know of more ways to compensate for weaknesses."

With the introduction of the Alternative Maryland State Assessment, special educators have a more effective measurement tool. "It's not perfect, the teacher has to do too much of the work but it's a step in the right direction," she says.

She believes that the Anne Arundel County School System approach to special education is on the right track. "There has been a lot done with inclusion and accountability," says Kelly. "There is more sharing and more information. We need to continue to provide training and staff development and give general education teachers the training they need." She especially would like for all teachers to be made aware of a greater variety of reading strategies.

In addition, she is also keen on the greater use of technology in the classroom. "We need to keep learning about and investing in technology," she says. "Kids [who have not had success using traditional learning strategies] have

help families stay more intact and have them assume more responsibility. Students would be closer to a familiar environment, making transition back to the home school easier. And the county could save money.

### Philosophy and style

Kelly has a simple philosophy toward education: "Each student deserves an opportunity to maximize their learning. Sometimes you have to do it in a different way."

She encourages educational leaders to think of students with special needs as children first, and then that they have special needs. "With the right accommodations and right structure, every child can be successful," she says.

Kelly's leadership style has been described as "collaborative" by several of her colleagues. "She has a gift for listening and making good decisions," says Jeanne Marie Hofstetter, Principal at Bodkin Elementary and a former Kelly mentor. "She has good solid judgment." Kelly was a special education teacher at West Meade Elementary while Hofstetter was the principal. "It is her interpersonal skills that make her good at her job. She is a very understanding person. She is an advocate for the students and has an understanding of parents' positions and can support teachers' positions."

AACPS Special Education Director Diane Black agrees, "Her decisions are based on what is right for the children. She is a very caring and very intelligent person who is focused on students and staff."

Kelly confesses she is detailed-oriented and involved. "I care a lot about students and staff. I get comments and input from people then do my job... I make the final decision."

### Life as a new principal

Kelly has found that indeed life as a principal is a challenge. "I knew it would be hard – you have to get used to the pace.... You go from the moment you walk in the door. I feel good about it. I have learned to love it here. Having a great staff is very helpful as a principal."

She says the toughest part of her job is staying on top of everything. "You have to know something about everything," she says. ■

*"With the right accommodations and right structure, every child can be successful."*

Patti Kelly, Principal,  
Marley Glen School

## Writing effective IEPs

Having written hundreds and hundreds of IEPs in her career in education, Patti Kelly, when pressed, offers some advice on how to write an effective plan. "I like the idea of keeping them shorter and having more meat in them... they need to be more to the point," says Kelly. "Identify specific needs – often we see a list of things all children need." An effective IEP includes what the child really needs to be successful. You have to make them specific because if the student ends up working on too many things, he or she will show progress on nothing. Think of independence. Give them 'wait' time – give them the chance to do it themselves."

been successful using new technology."

Kelly feels that AACPS, building on its success with the Marley Glen behavior program, can and should develop more alternative programs like it. That way, students slated to go "non public" can stay within the system. It would

## It has been an honor

Being paid a fair wage for our long hours, health care, working conditions for administrators and defending administrators during the grievance process will always be in the forefront for our members.

An item on the horizon that concerns many of the AEL Executive Board members is a new rating instrument for administrators. Louise DeJeus, Rocco Ferretti and I will be working on this as it progresses.

This year I am proud that all four unions formed a coalition to preserve our health care coverage for our groups (although the struggle continues).

I am satisfied with our three-year contract that provided steps yearly, automatic mileage re-

imbursement and 3% yearly COLA for three years.

In closing, I would like to thank my Executive Board and AEL members that sit on committees when I ask them to represent AEL

Whether asked by me or by anyone to sit on a committee, always think about how that committee work will affect our group. If you have questions on a particular situation, do not hesitate to contact Rick, Don, myself or any of the board members. We are always there for our members.

It has been an honor to serve as your president for the last six years. Hope to see you at Yellow Fin on Thurs., June 23 at 4:30 p.m. ■

*President's Column  
by Charles Jansky*

## Building on our success

It is hard to believe that the school year is quickly coming to an end and we now find ourselves starting a second year of the Negotiated Agreement with the Board of Education. For some, in light of the TAAAC funding of a 4% COLA, the agreement we reached looks short of the mark. When TAAAC was offered a 3% COLA, somehow the agreement looked a lot better. What a difference a one percent raise

to another bargaining group can make when we compare our package. It is unfair, however, to measure success or failure at the bargaining table by comparison with other unions. Our package in its entirety met our goals and purposes at the time it was negotiated. It provided salary enhancements through revised salary scales and increased travel allowances with no real questions asked. The package pleased our membership then and it should continue to please our membership through its term. This is not to say we don't try to improve.

We will always build on our contract provisions. This is a fluid process and we don't intend to remain stagnant. We are always encouraging your input before we negotiate and we even accept criticism when we conclude the process. In short, the negotiating team needs your help

and suggestions. Now is the time to let us know how you feel and what we can do to improve the contract. The AEL demographics are always changing. As our AEL population ages, the concepts important to the older segment of our membership differs from the concepts important to our younger members. Arriving at an internal balance of ideas and desires becomes a task in of itself. In short, we need to hear from you

now, not later. We begin our preparation for negotiations of the future agreement once we ratify our existing contract. Join the team and get involved.

I have been representing this group since 1989 and providing consulting services prior to that time. I enjoy the work, the professionals I work with, and the challenges the Board of Education presents. I hope you can find time to join me in this endeavor as we go forward. I would like to recognize the leadership of Charles Jansky and the Executive Board and extend my thanks. They work long and tireless hours to keep this organization on top. Special thanks to Don Smith who keeps the administrative affairs of AEL in order so that we can work in other areas. Thanks to all of you who have helped and assisted AEL. Have a great summer. ■

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

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### Story ideas and 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 an issue (i.e., "climate surveys") or a time saving tip or a creative solution to a common problem, send your submission to: Don Smith at 410.349.1764 (fax) or Denise Hofstedt at 410.421.5832 (fax), dmhofstedt@verizon.net.