

LEADERSHIP FORUM

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The power of a coach

AEL Member and National PTA Award Winner Reggie Farrare

By Denise Hofstedt

In the rough and tumble game known as middle school, Anne Arundel County has a “coach” that has been guiding middle school students for 32 years. A teacher for 21 years and an administrator for the last 11, Reggie Farrare has spent his entire career coaching middle school students as they make the transition from elementary to high school.

Farrare is a coach by nature and an administrator by choice. Growing up in Vienna, on the Eastern Shore, Farrare admits his incentive for attending school was to play sports. His competitiveness on the playground spilled over into his efforts in the classroom. He was successful in both arenas. When he had the choice to go to college or Vietnam, he chose college – specifically the University of Maryland – Eastern Shore in Princess Anne. His course of study was his favorite subject in school – industrial arts. When faced with the decision to work in the field of construction or education, he chose education.

He was hired for his first teaching position before he officially graduated, taking an assignment at Marley Middle School, a position he kept for the next 21 years.

After his two decades in the classroom, Farrare was drawn to administration because of its parallels to his second love — coaching. “When I started coaching, I saw the power of influence you could have with students. I saw administration as an opportunity for that kind of influence,” he says. He earned a Masters Degree in Administration and Supervision from Johns Hopkins University in the mid-90s. In 2004 he was honored with a Life Achievement Award presented by National PTA.

The Impressionable Middle Schooler

Few educational leaders in the county know middle schoolers like Farrare, who is currently the Principal at MacArthur Middle School. “Middle school kids are unique. The old clique is true – ‘there is no student like a

middle school student,’” he says. “In elementary school, the kids cling to you. Middle school students want to distance themselves from you but eventually they realize they need you. They are very impressionable. Middle school is the best opportunity to make a difference in a child’s life.”

And that is a responsibility that Farrare does not take lightly. He reminds his staff regularly to be careful, because “one thing you do or say to a child can make a difference — for the positive or for the negative — in that child’s whole life.”

Farrare notes that in his three decades with the county school system, the middle school transition experience remains the same, but the world around has changed and continues to change. “Our job as educators is to give students the tools to deal with the change,” he says. “I learn from children and their experiences. We have to communicate with students to become aware of what they are thinking... what’s worrying them, what’s important to them. We have to spend time talking to them and really listening to them.”

Know Your Customer

To do your job well, you have to know your customers. “Every individual you meet is unique,” he says. “You have to try to understand that uniqueness before you attempt to educate them.” Farrare’s daily priority is to spend time with his students. If he’s not in a meeting, he can be found on bus duty in the morning and the afternoon. He tries to be in the hallway during the change of classes and he often works the la carte line in the cafeteria where he sells snacks and offers his opinions at no extra charge.

When it comes to keeping the lines of com-



Reggie Farrare, Principal, MacArthur Middle

Dates to Remember

March 17-19, 2005
MASSP Spring Conference
Ocean City, MD
For more information, visit www.md-massp.org

April 16-19, 2005
NAESP Conference
Baltimore, MD
For more information, visit www.maesp.org

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AEL nominating process to begin

At the moment, AEL is enjoying the benefits of a three-year contract signed last Spring. During this tranquil time, this Executive Board is working to refine and print the final contract language, pay scales and time-lines for incentive pay.

*President's Column
by Charles Jansky*

This Spring we will see the budget process rev up and the School Board nominating convention wheels begin to turn. At same time, AEL will be looking for its future leaders as we begin the process of nominating members for the 2005-06

Executive Board.

Any board member will tell you that participation on the board is difficult but satisfying. Board members, past and present, have felt a great weight of responsibility and have been willing to take risks so that AEL members are given a fair shake.

It is a great opportunity for those ready to "give back" to the profession. If you would like more information about serving on the board, contact me or any member of the Executive Board. Thanks. ■

Reggie Farrare, from page 1

munication open between the school leadership and the students Farrare "walks the talk." He starts building bridges with students before they are technically his students. "I go to each elementary school and introduce the 5th graders to our program. I want to be the first adult contact they have with middle school. I take them through the registration process. My goal is to set up an open dialogue. I want to make sure they have a face with a name." He follows up with a visit to every classroom the first and second day of school. "I want them to know what they can expect. I am trying to prepare them for the experience," he says.

A truly approachable principal, Farrare has established formal and informal forums to facilitate the flow of information.

In addition to meeting monthly with the elected student government, in a formal way with agendas and minutes, Farrare recently established a Student Council. This group of hand-selected students acts as an advisory committee to Farrare. Information and resolutions flow both ways — the council presents problems to him and he presents problems to the council. Among the committee's purposes are to increase communication between the staff and students and demonstrate to students that they can affect change. "We are showing the students that they can change things, instead of just complaining." He has found the council informative. "What matters to them may seem trivial to adults — but it's a big deal to them," he says.

The Challenges

Among the greatest challenges middle school leaders face today is student discipline. In addition to the county's program and student code of conduct, a school should have a structured school-wide discipline program. "We tell our staff — our school is what we make it. The staff has to buy into the program. Discipline is everybody's job," he says. It's the "buy-in" that gives a discipline program consistency and fairness — two key components in the middle school child's life. "Middle school students have a keen sense of fairness. They will accept the consequences of their actions as long as they think it's fair," he says.

Fans of the Coach

The members of his staff are among his biggest fans. "Whatever program Mr. Farrare considers implementing, students are at the heart of his decision," says Joyln Davis, Assistant Principal at MacArthur and a colleague of Farrare's for the last three years. "Not a week goes by that I do not hear him say, 'We do what is best for the kids.'"

School secretary Sharon O'Hara praise Farrare for his honesty, caring and commitment. "He's introduced programs we never had before like the National Honor Society and the Student Council. We have more after school activities. And he just got a grant so we could offer a workshop for staff," she says.

Davis says that Farrare views the administrative staff at MacArthur as a team. "He never takes credit for what we may succeed in, yet always takes the blame when something goes wrong. He is the first to build us up and commend us for what we are doing well," she says. ■

"Middle school students have a keen sense of fairness. They will accept the consequences of their actions as long as they think it's fair."

Reggie Farrare

Unity

Born out of adversity, a new coalition has been formed. AEL, together with TAAAC, SAAAAC, and AFSCME have joined forces and formed a new “alliance,” “Coalition of Educational Employees,” in an effort to address those issues that have a global impact on all school employees. This process began with the collaborative support each bargaining group provided the other during the recent fight over health care providers.

The mission of this organization is an important tool for allowing all bargaining units to talk

with one voice when it involves issues that transcend our respective members — insurance and related universal benefits provided to all employees, for example. Work load issues and out sourcing may be others. As a new organization, the coalition will take part in the selection process of new School Board members. Interviews with Board candidates will be conducted. As a coalition there is greater strength in numbers.

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

The purpose of the coalition not only recognizes that there is a benefit to a united effort on the part of all employee groups, but most importantly recognizes that our primary mission is to provide representation to the “specific” and “defined” needs of our individual members. In other words, our first area of responsibility is to the individual members we represent. The bargaining groups believe, however, these needs can be even better served with joint cooperation in certain areas.

It was clear that when we all worked together during the insurance crisis we were able to command the respect of the public, the court, and when the day was done the Board itself. There is no reason to suspect that we can’t maintain this momentum and still serve our individual member’s needs. We may have our differences, grievances, and challenges — after all friends can disagree. We can’t allow these disagreements to become distractions when one voice is needed.

These are, as they say, exciting times. If there was ever a need for involvement, input, fresh ideas and new approaches it is now. Complacency can only erode those very items we have fought for at the bargaining table and in some instances the courtroom. If the unions as an entity have committed themselves to this involvement, it should only seem appropriate that the individuals who are represented commit themselves to taking an active role in their unions. Our membership percentage remains in excess of 95%. As a group we are obviously doing something right. We need however, to raise the level of individual involvement to this mark. Run for office. Volunteer for a committee. Come to a membership dinner. Unite!!! ■

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Improved Membership Communication

Join the AEL E-Mail List

If you would like to be added to the AEL Member Flash News List -- a membership service that will email you time-sensitive news and information (no junk, promise), send in your e-mail address to AEL Newsletter Editor Denise Hofstedt at dmhofstedt@verizon.net. Please do not send your school email address. Thanks to those who have already sent in their addresses.

(If you need help setting up a “free” email address, i.e. hotmail.com, contact AEL Newsletter Editor Denise Hofstedt, dmhofstedt@verizon.net.)

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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, please send your submission to: Don Smith at 410.349.1764 (fax) or Denise Hofstedt at 410.421.5832 (fax), dmhofstedt@verizon.net.