

LEADERSHIP FORUM

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

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Back to School 2005

Improving the lot of educational leaders

Bob Ferguson takes the helm of AEL

By Denise Hofstedt

The workload educational leaders bear in Anne Arundel County is crushing. Experienced administrators are leaving the county or simply burning out. Something needs to be done to lighten loads, according to new AEL President Bob Ferguson.

"The plate is full," says Ferguson, who took office in June. "There simply isn't the time to get it all done. Talented hardworking administrators are being driven away by unrealistic demands."

A 34-year veteran of Anne Arundel County Schools and currently an Assistant Principal at Chesapeake High School, Ferguson has been described by his peers as: down to earth, no nonsense, old school and completely reliable. George Kispert, principal at Northeast High School describes Ferguson as a "go to" person. "He is very much tuned into what a job entails," says Kispert. "When he worked with me, I knew whatever I gave him to do, it would be done and done thoroughly."

Ferguson was raised, and his work ethic forged, in the blue collar town of McKeesport, Pa. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in social studies from Morehead State University in Morehead, Ky. and later a Masters in educational management from Loyola College.

Early in his career he was encouraged by educational leaders to pursue a career in administration. In his job, Ferguson sees himself as a problem solver. Part mediator, part ombudsman, he relates policy to a situation and tries to work out an amicable solution.

According to Frank Drazen, assistant principal at Broadneck High School, Ferguson has a gift for building a consensus. "He creates a team atmosphere," says Drazen. "Just

like when he was a football coach."

An Exceptional Listener

While Ferguson is known for speaking his mind, he is also known to be an exceptional listener – a trait that will serve him well as AEL President.

Drazen describes Ferguson as "someone people can go to and know he will listen."

Kispert agrees, "He is good at listening to others' opinions and internalizing them. To be a good leader within AEL, you have got to be able to put yourself in somebody else's shoes. Bob can do that."

Ferguson is also approachable. Open to suggestions and criticism, Bob will take it to heart things AEL members say, according to Kispert. "He will consider what will be in the members' best interest."

Severna Park High School Principal Will Myers applauds the election of Ferguson. "He has a real global perspective of the school system," he says. "He has been a teacher, coach, and an AP who has served many different roles. He has witnessed changes over time as a leader of AEL. He knows how we got here and where we're going. We couldn't ask for a better advocate. He uses his talent to work for us and bring the improvement we've been looking for."

The Power of AEL

A member of the AEL leadership for the last nine years, Ferguson believes in the power of AEL and encourages members to



New AEL President Bob Ferguson

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A tough act to follow

Thank you for the honor to serve as President of AEL. I know it won't be an easy job, but it is one that I will take very seriously.

It is humbling to follow in the footsteps of Charles Jansky. We are fortunate to such a wise and dedicated leader. He was the force that propelled us through tough negotiations that resulted in what I think

was a really good contract. He was instrumental in maintaining our health care package and mileage reimbursement. He was the glue that

held the Board together and had us working as a team representing the interests of AEL members. We can not thank him enough.

Many thanks also to departing Board member Leigh Reid for all her years of service to AEL.

As I begin my term as President, I honestly want to know what is important to you. I thought a good way to find out, is to host an informal discussion -- so mark "Bagels with Bob" on your calendar, Sat., Sept. 24, 9:00 -11:00 am. It won't take much of your time, but it will go along way toward improving our service to members. See you then. ■

President's Column
by Bob Ferguson

Bob Ferguson, from page 1

get the most out of their membership. "I have always appreciated the support of AEL," says Ferguson. "The staff is a great resource - you can ask questions and get answers. They can explain the contract to you when you're unsure. A phone call can keep you out of trouble or give you the rationale you need to work through a problem."

One of the misconceptions members have about AEL is that it is just a union limited to discussions of wages and salaries, says Ferguson. "AEL is much more than that," he says. "We tackle workload issues and anything else that

will help us do our jobs successfully."

Bagels with Bob

One of his first acts as AEL President will be to host a informal discussion with members. All AEL members are invited to "**Bagels with Bob,**" Sat., **Sept. 24** at 9:00 to 11:00 am at Radisson Hotel on 210 Holiday Ct. in Annapolis. (Call the AEL Office to reserve your spot, 410-349-1764.) Ferguson and the other AEL board members will be on hand for to listen to members concerns. "We want to find out what members are happy with and what they are unhappy with," says Ferguson. ■

Bagels with Bob

All AEL members are invited to share their concerns and comments with AEL President Bob Ferguson and the AEL Board at an informal get together...

Saturday, September 24

9:00-11:00 am

Radisson Hotel in Annapolis

210 Holiday Court

Call AEL at 410-349-1764 to reserve your spot.



This is a great chance to talk about the issues that are important to **you**.

Our work continues

Welcome back! As the school year begins, so does the work of AEL. We didn't sit quietly by however, waiting for the start of school. There have been several meetings with our new President, Bob Ferguson and the new Executive Board. In addition, there have been continuing committee activities regarding health benefits and joint salary studies, as well as discussions with executive staff regarding ongoing contract issues. Let me take a moment to bring everyone up to speed.

As you may recall, our contract requires the concurrence of AEL before health care providers and administrators can be changed. Last year saw the success of litigation we led to insure that the current coverage remained in effect, notwithstanding the BOE's attempt to change the

same. Our current discussions with the BOE has lead to an understanding that all employees will be able to maintain their ex-

isting health care provider regardless of any change in carrier. In other words, the Board will provide an indemnification for all employees so that there will be no financial impact on any employee in the event any insurance coverage is changed. Further, AEL and TAAAC have insisted that any cost associated with this indemnity must be paid by the BOE so that no employee would have to contribute to this expense. The BOE was also advised that the unions would not waive their current right of required concurrence prior to any proposed change. This committee's work is continuing and your suggestions and comments, as always, are welcome.

The Joint Salary Committee is a recently formed group consisting of AEL, TAAAC, executive staff, BOE members, County Council members, and community leaders. The mission of this committee is to conduct fact-finding in order to identify various types of pay scales and compensation methodologies and thereafter report to the BOE where the County stands in relationship to other subdivisions regarding salaries for teachers and administrators. The focus of these discussions has centered on the issues of recruitment and retention. Our position has been to find a method of compensation that appropriately and fairly pays our members a decent and respectable wage in comparison with their counterparts in surrounding counties.

Recent controversy has suggested that BOE and/

or the Superintendent have utilized "signing bonuses" and other placement techniques as incentives to attract administrators to accept employment in this County. As a part of the Coalition of Educational Employees, AEL has requested disclosure of relevant information regarding this practice. It is part of our mission to ensure that the hiring practices and compensation apply equally to all Unit II employees and that they are fairly and equitably applied. The effort to circumvent this negotiated practice is simply unacceptable.

On a more positive note, AEL was able, with the help and intervention of the Superintendent, to provide additional compensation for Assistant Principals in designated challenged schools. Our Agreement, although closed for three years was modified to permit the inclusion of these individuals.

At the time our Agreement was negotiated, the only individuals who were to receive the additional stipend were Principals. The

BOE agreed to the expansion of this group to include teachers. It was the Superintendent and AEL who were able to come together to rectify this matter. For this a thank you to Dr. Smith and Dr. Dennis Hirsch are in order.

As we approach a new school year we are continuously faced with new challenges. Your help and assistance is needed more than ever. As a new ad-

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

Not a Member? Join AEL now!

Dear Unit II Administrators: While this is not a negotiation year, your association has been busy protecting the rights and reputations of Unit II members. The cost of that representation has been covered by AEL. During the past year more than 23 Unit II members retired or sought jobs in other counties. It is therefore critical that those of you who have recently been appointed Unit II members join with us to strengthen the organization which is solely concerned with your welfare.

Join now! To join AEL simply complete and return the Membership Form (goldenrod) and Payroll Deduction Form (green) to me: Don Smith, AEL Administrator, PO Box 74, Severna Park, MD 21146

Sick Leave Bank Reminder. If you are not a current member of the Unit II Sick Leave Bank, contact me at 410-349-1764 for assistance.

If you are a current member of AEL you do not need to complete any new forms unless your position, address or phone number has changed.

Don Smith, AEL Administrator

The Association of Educational Leaders

P.O. Box 74
Severna Park, MD 21146

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.

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Our work continues...

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ministration of AEL takes office, we need to extend our gratitude to those who have worked so very hard on behalf of the organization and its membership in the past. The tireless effort of Charles Jansky as outgoing President should be recognized. Charles, like all other Executive Board members, volunteers his time. He has been devoted making your working conditions better. Charles was never too tired to lend a hand, give encouragement and just be there when needed. As Executive Director I can't begin to tell you how he has made my work easier. Thanks Charles for a job well done!

In addition, the Executive Board lost the services of Leigh Reid. Leigh served as President and was active and involved on the AEL Executive Board and various committees. Thank you Leigh for moving this organization forward and for your insightful participation. As to all Executive Board members who remained or came on board, thank you for your help, support and dedication.

To all AEL members not named or mentioned directly, get involved! This is a larger task than you can imagine. The issues are profound and your participation is needed more than ever.

Finally, the Executive Board has recommended the adoption of a more comprehensive Sick Leave Bank policy. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with these rules. They represent a fair and reasonable approach so that the largest number of Unit II employees can use these sick days.

Welcome back!

