

LEADERSHIP FORUM

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

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When there is a failure to communicate

As we look back at the past year, I have had an opportunity to reflect upon what we have accomplished as an organization and what work still needs to be done. While AEL has been successful in negotiating an economically rich contract, we have allowed ourselves to become complacent in other areas. I have tried to find a common theme that runs through this concern and in doing so I have become fixated on the word “communication”.

In my mind, the inability to properly communicate with the upper level administration, and even among ourselves, has given rise to more grievances, conflicts and sometimes just outright mean-spirited remarks and actions.

For example, I have written a number of letters on behalf of one member concerning an incident involving several students at the school. Although litigation was threatened by one of the parents against the administrator and the status of the issues remained unresolved at the judicial court level, I have yet to receive a response from the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent or staff counsel. In the meantime the issues raised in my correspondence and verbalized to the staff counsel’s secretary are still unanswered — a failure to communicate? At first I thought it was an oversight but after numerous phone calls and assurances I would receive an answer, the phone has not rung and the mail has contained no letter. As a result no relief was provided.

**by Richard Kovelant,
Executive Director & General Counsel**

In several other incidents regarding the duties and responsibilities of administrators I have encountered different communication problems. In one instance, an administrator was disciplined, in part for failure to keep a promise to arrive at school at a designated time to complete an assigned task. During a discipline hearing, the supervisor offered surveillance camera footage to establish that the at-fault administrator was 10 minutes off the mark. Was this really worth the time and effort to prove a point so that discipline could be imposed? Wouldn’t it have been better to have a discussion, i.e. communicate, about what the real issues were rather than become involved in this type

of a cloak and dagger approach?

Recently, we have been watching the develop-

ment of an HR promotional practice that runs afoul of our Negotiated Agreement. In short, HR has decided on its own to ignore the promotional procedures and utilize its own. Obviously, this is unacceptable. However, only a few people who have been through this “new” promotional scheme have called to protest the violation of the Negotiated Agreement. Thus, we have two failures to communicate. The first is HR’s failure to read and abide by the contract requirements and express its “need” for a waiver; and the second, a failure of AEL members to communicate their concerns regarding this violation. We can’t remedy a contract violation unless

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Dates to Remember

March 27 - 29

**MD Association of
Secondary School
Principals
Spring Conference**

“Strengthening the
Administrator-Student
Connection”

Ocean City, MD
Clarion Resort
Fontainebleau
Hotel Deadline: Feb 25

May 8, 9 & 10

**MD Association of
Elementary School
Principals**

*Annual Principals
Conference*
“Orchestrating
Student Achievement:
The Principal as
Conductor”

Ocean City, MD

New Year's Resolution: Know your rights

In keeping with my image that I am a man of few words I wanted to take this opportunity to call your attention to the Executive Director's discourse on communication or the lack thereof. This is a critical topic requiring your attention. A wide range of issues have developed among our members as well as with the Administration.

As we sit still during a four-year agreement waiting for the promised compensation there are many issues of which we must be mindful. The issue of understanding your rights and responsibilities under the Negotiated Agreement is of paramount importance. Our success at a grievance hearing can be as important as our success at a bargaining table. In the upcoming issues of the newsletter we will be reviewing these matters in detail, announcing workshops on this issue and providing simple "how to" lists

on the subject. There have been entirely too many instances when our members' rights have been violated and we were not made aware of the situation until it was too late to provide assistance. In many cases, our

members have been the cause as well as the subject of these violations. We have never abandoned a member when help was needed and war-

ranted, however we can't provide a service when we have no knowledge of the need. Please take time to learn the contract provisions, the timing for grievances and the time frame associated with appeals. The rights you protect may just be your own.

So make one of your New Year's Resolutions to read the Negotiated Agreement and make sure that you know your rights. Hope you had a happy Holiday Season and as always we welcome your involvement. ■

Announcing: A Professional Partnership with Rochlin & Goldman, PA Attorneys at Law

Your AEL Executive Committee through Rick Kovelant, Executive Director, is pleased to announce a New Professional Partner: Rochlin and Goldman, P. A. Attorneys at Law. In its quest to bring exclusively to AEL members quality professional services and benefits we are proud to introduce Paul Rochlin and Howard Goldman. Paul and Howard are offering unmatched legal experience and counsel to AEL members AND members' immediate families at AEL member exclusive special rates and fees.

Between them, attorneys Rochlin and Goldman bring nearly 92 years of combined legal practice to AEL members and families. Both are experienced criminal defenders in District and Circuit courts. They bring extraordinary skill to personal and family matters including wills, deeds, property settlements in domestic disputes, traffic and Maryland Vehicle Ad-

ministration issues, and real estate closings. Paul's and Howard's superb résumés also include extensive knowledge and experience in Worker's Compensation and non-workplace accidents involving personal injury both at the pre-suit mediation or arbitration level as well as litigation. AEL members may contact Rochlin Goldman directly. Or, if fees and rates or other information is desired in advance AEL members may contact any AEL Executive Board member, Rick Kovelant (Executive Director and Legal Counsel) or Larry Lorton (Administrator). Paul and Howard can be reached at 410-602-0222 or prochlin@rochlingoldman.com or h.goldman@rochlingoldman.com. Visit the AEL website [www.aelaacps.org] for a direct link to and details about Rochlin and Goldman as well as other Professional Partners serving AEL members' professional and personal needs on an exclusive basis. ■

We have never abandoned a member when help was needed and warranted, however we can't provide a service when we have no knowledge of the need.

by Bob Ferguson
AEL President

When there is a failure to communicate...

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we are made aware of it. (If I were cynical, I would expect a third communication failure when I inform the administration of the matter and it fails to respond.)

In the old days we were able to pick up the phone without going through a menu, reach an actual person and discuss issues before they became problems. This is no longer the case. It is easier for some to ignore these matters in the hope they will go away, or believe that in some way their position will be supported by their silence. A “failure to communicate,” as noted in the movie, *Cool Hand Luke* can only lead to dire consequences. While I can’t believe the skill of communication is lost, I do believe it has been abandoned. One-way conversations are never productive and in the labor-management arena, and they can often be destructive. The formal negotiation process should not be the only time we sit down across from each other. Life and work go on between sessions — countless issues come up that can be easily dealt with, if done in a timely manner.

Within AEL

On an intra-AEL note, we need to practice communication skills at all levels of our membership. In particular, we need to know the difference between what is “questionable conduct” and what is a “performance evaluation” issue. Not all conduct requires an investigation of wrongdoing when a simple conference to understand what transpired will do. In too many instances this year we have turned on one another to investigate conduct as a policy matter when in fact the behavior being investigated was really performance-related. In some cases this allows the investigator to step outside the evaluation process and impose disciplinary sanction. When this happens, the parties involved don’t communicate with each other, as would otherwise be required as part of the evaluation scenario. In other words, as an administrator you need to be able to distinguish between those areas of conduct that may require discipline and those that are appropriate for a goals conference review and in extreme situations a plan of action. They are very different issues.

Our Plans

In the effort to achieve better communication, we are planning on increasing the frequency of this newsletter, sponsoring contract workshops, and as visiting with you during the year. We would like to continue to report on specific incidents involving our members so that we can all learn how decisions among our group and the decisions reached by supervising administrators, including the Superintendent and his deputies, impact our members’ rights. We will be more vocal at Board meetings so that the Board, which at times appears detached from these matters, can learn more about the value of “communication”. As always, we welcome your “communication” on these important matters. To be continued..... ■

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AEL website update

AEL’s website contains helpful information for members about AEL business. Most AEL Educational Partners and Professional Partners have direct web links on the site with more in the works.

Visit aelaacps.org for the latest information as well as archived issues of the AEL Forum Newsletter and other material.

The Association of Educational Leaders

P.O. Box 74

Severna Park, MD 21146

Association of Educational Leaders

Officers, Board and Staff

Bob Ferguson, <i>President '07-'09</i>	410.718.2441
Will Myers, <i>1st Vice President '07-'09</i>	410.956.5600
Charles Jansky, <i>2nd Vice President '07-'09</i>	410.437.0464
Louise DeJesu, <i>Secretary '06-'08</i>	410.222.6409
Barry Fader, <i>Treasurer '06-'08</i>	410.222.1660
Reginald Farrare, <i>Director '07-'09</i>	410.674.0032
Linda Ferrara, <i>Director '07-'09</i>	410.222.3865
Rocco Ferretti, <i>Director '06-'08</i>	410.222.3851
Edie Picken, <i>Director '07-'09</i>	410.969.9010
<i>Executive Director Richard Kovelant</i>	410.897.0747
1957 Valley Rd., Annapolis, MD 21401	Fax 410.897.4885
<i>Administrator Larry Lorton</i>	Phone 410.647.5847
P.O. Box 74, Severna Park, MD 21146	fischlort@comcast.net
<i>Editor Denise Hofstedt</i>	Phone/Fax 410.421.5832
	dmhofstedt@verizon.net

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 Denise Hofstedt at 410.421.5832 (fax) or dmhofstedt@verizon.net.