

LEADERSHIP FORUM

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

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Looking Ahead: Dollars and Sense

If you have been following reports coming from the Anne Arundel County Executive John Leopold's office, you cannot miss his dismal fiscal forecasts for Fiscal Year 2010 beginning July 1, 2009. It isn't unusual for elected officials at any level in any given year to predict budget doom and gloom. It is part of the political landscape.

However, given current economic conditions and accounts of decisions already made in some jurisdictions in response to forecasts, there is good reason to be concerned. Members of our AEL family are already adjusting to the economy's impact. Members of our AEL family are already reconsidering career decisions that until recently seemed solid and secure. The uncertainties can lead to insecurities and insecurities can lead to unhealthy and unhelpful contributions to the rumor-mill and wild conjecture about our futures.

The fact is, we have a multi-year contract with the Board of Education governing numerous matters -- including salaries and wages. Also, the Board has an inherent responsibility to honor our contract. Indeed, collective bargaining law requires contracts

to be honored except in the case of insufficient funds to underwrite them. If the worst happens and the Board declares a state of insufficient funds typically we would restart negotiations, demand the Board provide evidence accordingly, and then assist in resolving the problems.

If past experience is any indication of what is to come -- some veteran AEL members may remember those occasions -- reactions to tight budgets sometimes can bring out the worst people. For instance, it is one thing to promote arguments why the Board

should continue supporting Unit II; it is another to criticize another association in the process. It is one thing to defend our value and con-

tributions to the welfare of children; it is another to denigrate other employees' interests in the process.

Above all else, we must sustain our unity and press for our collective interests. Every AEL member needs to keep vigilant about budget discussions especially when the dialogue begins between the County Executive and the Superintendent; and then between county government and the Board. When any member hears something through the grapevine, take a moment and report it to me, an AEL Executive Board member, Rick Kovelant or Larry Lorton. Begin now to identify (formally or informally) those things that might save money through more efficient operations and pass them along.

If we end up in re-negotiations we will need all the ammunition we can muster to sustain recent gains. Every member can contribute to that process. ■

by Bob Ferguson
AEL President

Useful Info on the Website

AEL's website, www.aelaacps.org, contains virtually everything any member needs to know -- from salary and wage scales, through member rights and benefits, to archived AEL Newsletters and the newly initiated AEL Advocate. AEL Bylaws, Sick Leave Bank Policies

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Dates to Remember

Feb. 18
AEL Meeting
4:30 pm
South River HS

Feb. 26
Retirement Planning with Integrated Financial Solutions
Sponsored by AEL and TAAAC
4:30 pm
Severna Park HS

March 18
AEL Meeting
4:30 pm
South River HS

March 19 - 21
MD Association of Secondary School Principals Spring Conference
"Instructional Leadership-Overcoming Obstacles to Maximize Student Achievement"
Ocean City, MD
www.md-massp.org

April 22
AEL Meeting
4:30 pm
South River HS

AEL website
www.aelaacps.org

What's on Your Mind?

At the Dec. 17 meeting of the AEL Board, one of the members suggested that there are some issues facing Unit II needing attention, a response, a heads-up, an answer. The subsequent discussion speculated about what concerns are being felt universally among Unit II—maybe certain departments or job classifications—or schools—working conditions—what the future might hold in these uncertain times—or how AEL is going to handle certain matters. What do members see coming down the road that we need to get ready for now?

The discussion concluded with agreement that the next AEL Newsletter should seek more specifics. Anything on your mind can be submitted, anonymously or not, in two ways: (1)

email to Larry Lorton, AEL Administrator, at fischlort@comcast.net; or (2) by mail in c/o AEL, P.O. Box 74, Severna Park, MD 21146. Please provide enough detail so the issue can be properly addressed. Personal/professional issues will be handled with the discreetness expected.

As you know, last June the membership voted to more than double the size of

the AEL Executive Board primarily to improve communications and broaden the quality of agenda input and decision-making. (See the partial list on page 4.) These 14 new Representative Directors were created precisely to provide a direct, known, collegial link between AEL members and officers. Is it “on your mind” to serve as a cluster representative? AEL needs you. ■

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**by Larry Lorton,
AEL Administrator**

Inquiries regarding promotions, etc.

There have been a number of inquiries concerning recent promotions which affect AEL membership. Two issues creating much discussion are the advertising of positions and the selection of out-of-county candidates.

In a recent meeting with the Superintendent, there was an agreement that promotional practices should and would be reviewed. We should all be thankful that Dr. Maxwell is willing to listen and take action on our concerns. We have verification from recent interview panels that our concerns were conveyed to them.

We believe we have made progress in the right direction when considering promotional protocols. We are in the process of forming a Pro-

motional Practice Committee. Our goal is to re-examine the current guidelines for promotions and for advertising positions. We will have the opportunity to work on contractual language at the end of the current agreement.

We could all share stories from personal experiences of some unfair practices from the past. We can hopefully learn from previous mistakes and move ahead to a more transparent and equitable set of protocols for the future. Being part of the change process will take a united effort from all of our membership. Remember, our AEL meetings are open to all members. We are seeking more representation from all cluster areas. See page 1 for upcoming meeting dates. ■

Retirement Planning: Integrated Financial Solutions

Mark your calendar now for **Feb. 26**, Severna Park High School, at 4:30 for another popular Integrated Financial Solutions (IFS) seminar for TAAAC and AEL members. IFS seminars are for everyone giving any thought at all to their futures—those just starting out and those already retired.

Members of both associations have attended

previous sessions and found them helpful.

Unlike most such sessions, IFS seminars offer no promotions, no sales jobs, no corporate image-making.

IFS presents fundamental retirement issues in logical, straight-forward, understandable language. Attend this program and get your questions answered. Don't miss it! ■

The End Doesn't Justify the Means...

Last year, the AEL Bylaws were amended to increase the number of directors in order to include representatives from the various cluster groups and central office.

In an effort to recruit new talent, AEL President Bob Ferguson and I attended cluster meetings and spoke about the future of AEL and indeed Unit II members. AEL Administra-

tor Larry Lorton was kind enough to discuss these same issues with central office colleagues. In some part, our approach paid off and AEL now has additional board members who can provide hands-on representation, disseminate information, and bring their talents to assist all Unit II employees. I am proud to extend my appreciation to these new board members and welcome their input and participation in the AEL community. Thank you to: **Kurt Maisel**, Severna Park Cluster; **John Noon**, Southern Cluster; **Jeff Tillar**, Annapolis Cluster; **Donna Spencer**, Chesapeake Cluster; **Nelson Horine**, Central Office Cluster and to those who indicated their desire to serve after the publication of this article. We are still in need of volunteer board members in the remaining clusters. If you can spare a few moments of your time, please contact us so we can get you up to speed.

This is the second year of the AEL contract. While we appreciate the Board's efforts in advancing the negotiated agreement for funding, we are still at the mercy of the County Council and the County Executive to provide the negotiated dollars that were a part of the collective bargaining agreement. As we go to press, I approach the funding issue with "guarded optimism". The concerns, as always, are the preservation of jobs and workload. If cuts are made in Unit I, the other bargaining groups, or administrative support, the work that continues will clearly fall upon Unit II members.

Recently the Board of Education, through the Superintendent, agreed to the extension of the Care First contract. The result was an announced \$2 million savings to the system. While the end result may be commendable, the pro-

cess in which this was "achieved", or more correctly "ignored", was shameful. Many remember that when former Superintendent Smith and the BOE attempted to change health care providers without the consent of the unions whose negotiated agreements required their concurrence, a lawsuit was initiated to force the BOE to obtain the necessary consent. Following this

litigation, AEL and the other bargaining units agreed to relinquish their contractual right to concurrence provided the BOE:

- Give all units a seat on the Benefits Review Committee;
- Provide that any health care carrier insure by indemnification that no employee would have any loss in medical service with his/her current health care provider; and
- Ensure all health contracts be approved by this standing committee.

The recent unilateral decision by the BOE to renew the current contract directly violated the prior agreement in fact and in spirit.

The resulting extension, while perhaps a good result, should have been achieved through the agreed upon process. It would have taken little or no effort to honor a commitment and achieve the same result. There are still unanswered questions as to what extent, if any, the employees will share in the savings. After all, employees pay a portion of their health care coverage costs from their pockets. It was the purpose of the Benefits Review Committee to address these issues. It was not the purpose of the administration to act alone on behalf of the BOE. Some think we just need to overlook this turn of events and be grateful for what was accomplished. Maybe so, but I believe a joint decision by all the required participants would have made the result more meaningful. I don't believe you get to pick and choose which promises you agree to keep and which you elect to ignore. I do not think the BOE would be pleased if we taught the children a promise can be broken if the end result is good. A continued commitment would have been at least as valuable as the savings nobody said we would see. ■

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

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The Association of Educational Leaders

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AEL website, from page 1

and Procedures, business forms, access to member services and partnerships all are available with a click or two.

Judging from individual cases, the fact is that not enough members understand their rights and benefits. Too often members don't challenge something that has occurred in the course of carrying out their duties and responsibilities until it is too late or, worse, don't know a right has been ignored or violated because they aren't aware of them.

While the site will soon be undergoing an overhaul -- it is infinitely useful. Read your contract. Read your Association by-laws. You will find it all on the website -- www.aelaacps.org. ■