

# LEADERSHIP FORUM

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

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## Managing professional change

Managing change is what educational leaders do – from daily class changes to adjusting to a new grade reporting system. For this issue of *Leadership Forum* we are bringing you insight from some AEL members who have experienced significant changes in the last couple of years. We asked them to share what they have gained from a major shift in their life/work.

### Donna O'Shea

*Principal, Crofton Elementary*

After being with Wichita Public Schools (50K students) for 19 ½ years, I moved to Maryland to be closer to my family. The last 12 years I served as principal, at three different schools, two were Title I. I originally thought I would move at the end of the '06-'07 school year, but was offered several principal positions around the area, beginning in January. Luckily for me, a former principal had moved back into the Wichita area and I was let out of my contract.

It was a rough start for me, as I followed the beloved Mr. Bark, at a school that was so unlike any other I'd ever been principal (the students are very rich, very white, very smart...) In addition, we were about 250 students over capacity. I was also working in an area where I knew only one other principal, Dr. Errichiello, who was my mentor. I was in contact with her about a month before I moved, trying to get the 'lay of the land.' I had to learn who to call in certain situations, and to tone down my style of discipline. Having an assistant principal, who had been there about a year, also helped tremendously. I spent the first semester not making any changes, giving the parents a chance to know me and to start building trust. Having been her three years now, I find I probably would have done a few things differently, but we live and learn. The most important thing to do is to get

to know the community, everyone--staff, students, parents, community members. Be present for everything, meeting everyone. I am a very open person and the parents soon learned that my door was always open. I sought advice from the CAC and PTA and then followed through with suggestions. Building a network of peers is hard to do when you're new to a county. Most principalships are filled with people who have worked in the same county as a teacher. You build relationships that will help you in the future. I try to get involved with my peers and will seek advice when I encounter new situations.

### Vickie Plitt

*Principal, Glen Burnie High*

When asked to compare my experience as Principal at Mary Moss Academy versus Glen Burnie High School, my initial response was, "A school is a school, why even pose the question?" Other than the obvious variances in the number of enrolled students and the size of the campus, what really changed? Although my first reaction might be an accurate assessment in most circumstances, in this case, the students made all the difference. The students at Mary Moss Academy are far from "the norm." There is a misconception that Moss students are not smart. If anything, they require more nurturing and directed instruction, which is available in a smaller classroom setting.

It can be more difficult to adapt learning levels to smaller class sizes. In a traditional school setting, students are grouped according to their academic abilities. An alternative school's faculty must teach to the masses and provide more individualized instruction with some students. Regardless of the learning styles of the students and the setting in which they are taught, instruction is guided by the

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## Upcoming Events

**AEL Board Meetings** are open to all AEL members. You are invited to observe, participate as desired, or present an issue or problem needing Board attention. The meetings will be held at Belvedere Elementary School starting at 5:00 pm.

Dec. 7	April 6
Jan. 4	May 4
Feb. 1	June 1
March 1	

*AEL Social  
Thursday,  
Jan. 7  
4:30-6:30*

*Clipper Room at  
McCormick and  
Schmick's  
(off Bestgate at  
the Mall)  
Complimentary  
hors  
d'oeuvres and  
refreshments  
provided.*



AEL website  
[www.aelaacps.org](http://www.aelaacps.org)

## Reinventing AEL

Dear Colleagues,

This time of year we are expected to especially recognize those things that we are thankful for in our lives. As an administrator, sometimes it seems to be a little difficult to find those things in our professional lives. There are those days when it may be particularly difficult. However, I am going to attempt to articulate what I am thankful for in my professional life when those days occur.

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*I am thankful to  
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I am thankful to be surrounded by dedicated colleagues whom I respect. I am thankful for the opportunity to represent these colleagues in what I hope is a professional and dedicated manner. Every first Monday of the month I meet with the AEL executive board and we work on issues that effect us as AEL members. I leave these meetings feeling thankful that there is such a group who is willing to develop ideas that will hopefully reduce the stress that we will need to deal with in our jobs.

I am also thankful that when asked to identify some of our colleagues who could share their ideas about accepting new positions in our system I could easily identify those talented professionals. I hope you enjoy reading about their experiences and hopefully you will feel equally thankful for being part of this talented group. If you would also like to share your experiences in our newsletter please let me know after all this is newsletter belongs to all AEL members. I hope you are thankful for that.

Over the next month we will be planning an after work event. The focus will be our contract and the impact of the upcoming negotiations as well as the opportunity to socialize with your colleagues. Please check out the website ([www.aelaacps.org](http://www.aelaacps.org)) for more information about this member event. See you then.

*Sue Errichiello, President*

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## Managing change...

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students' needs. We as educators are tasked with ensuring that each of them do learn and grow as individuals.

A traditional high school provides students with more opportunities for personal development to include extra-curricular activities, sports teams, clubs, organizations, and school-community events. While the alternative setting may not have "regular" activities to address students' personal enrichment, it's more important to concentrate on behavioral and emotional issues facing complex youth. The hope is to provide strategies to enable them to transition back into the mainstream as

productive members of society.

We will, as educators, encounter difficulties in the classroom, even more so in these trying socio-economic times. In the end all that matters is that every child has the right to a quality education. We must remember what aspired us to become teachers in the first place and strive to impart that wisdom to those in our charge. To quote Barbara Colorose, "If kids come to us [educators / teachers] from strong, healthy functioning families, it makes our job easier. If they do not come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job more important." ■

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## AACPS Employees: Taking Care of Our Own

By **Bill Jones**, TAAAC Executive Director,

As most readers may be aware, TAAAC is part of a coalition of employee organizations that represent AACPS employees. By name and bargaining unit the member organization are TAAAC (Unit 1), AEL (Unit 2), AFSCME, Local 1693 (Unit 3), and SAAAC (Unit 4). The Coalition of Educational Employees (CEE) made

a determination at its recent meeting to roadtest a voluntary intra-unit problem solving effort.

The effort is intended to provide an opportunity to resolve problems that occur between members of different bargaining units before complaints, appeals, or charges are formally filed. Matters re-

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## We are not alone

Shortly after former Superintendent Smith's announcement that a new health care provider would be selected for employees, all four bargaining groups decided it would serve the interests of all employees if a coalition were formed to cooperate with each other in those areas having a universal impact on all employees. The issue of health insurance for all groups provided the focal point for this coalition. It has since expanded to the point that the coalition, known as the "Coalition of Educational Employees" (CEE) is now seated as part of the Board of Education's Benefit Review Committee. This committee is involved in the review of vendor proposals that impact the areas of health insurance and retirement programs.

At a number of our regular meetings, the issue of formalizing the coalition has been discussed. TAAAC, SAAAAC and AFSCME have, along with AEL, recognized that the coalition has a value far beyond its participation in the Benefits Review Committee. The perspective each group participant brings to the table is invaluable in dealing with our common interests regarding school violence and the sharing of information on bargaining techniques and issues.

### CEE and the Grievance Process

In the past, AEL has been concerned with the methodology used in employee discipline cases and the increase in ex parte complaints brought by co-workers involving AEL members. To that end, AEL believes the coalition can help reduce the number of complaints and grievances that continue to consume members' time. CEE has adopted a policy, which was approved by the coalition members, to encourage an informal dispute resolution process among its individual members so that the current grievance process or need to file complaints with the Board is reduced. This is not to suggest that AEL, or any other bargaining group, is abandoning its grievance rights or the ability to seek appropriate redress for improper behavior. This is an effort to address issues as they arise to see if they can be resolved at the earliest level of intervention.

The informal methodology begins with a call from the aggrieved person to the appropriate union representative, who in turn contacts the union representative of the other party. If agreeable by both parties and their representatives, an informal meeting, off the record, is scheduled and all participants try to work toward a resolution. No minutes are kept, the meeting is informal and entirely without prejudice to anyone's rights. If this proves unsuccessful, then the matter proceeds as it would have without the early intervention meeting. I can report that this technique

has been tried and has worked very successfully.

### Building Clout

CEE can be thought of as the "AF of L-CIO Light". The coalition can, through its effective use of the number of individual members, have a great deal more strength in bargaining for global benefits, supporting or opposing legislation, and supporting or opposing Board policy, rule or regulation. One voice, but louder in some cases, is an effective tool. Building on the number of individuals involved in each bargaining group, plus their family members and their non-educational affiliations, empowers the coalition

and, in turn, its individual union members. We need to develop this profile so we can better present our case to the public as educa-

tional employees who all contribute to the education of the children of this county.

Neither AEL, nor any of the bargaining groups, are giving up their autonomy and, like all families there will be times, I am sure, we will disagree and find it necessary to address our own adverse interests. In this day and age however, there is strength in numbers. The Board belongs to its own association of boards of education and, of course, there is a reason for its membership. Similarly, we need to continue with our participation in CEE, because being alone out there is no longer an option that can serve AEL's individual purpose.

In the future, we will be sharing newsletter space with coalition members and writing articles on CEE activities so AEL members are informed, not only as to those bargaining issues unique to AEL, but to all employees. In this Newsletter you will see a piece written by Bill Jones, Executive Director of TAAAC. This is the first of many articles that we will be sharing with our members. As always, I invite your thoughts and comments. ■

by Richard Kovelant,  
Executive Director & General Counsel

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## Taking Care of Our Own...

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lated to personal problems, sense of hostile work environment, suspected disparate treatment, and a myriad of other problems may in some cases be more efficiently managed with less disruption to education, without disciplinary action, and without damage to clean personnel folders.

The consensus within the coalition is that some of the red tape can be replaced by a dollop of common sense if we could try to help resolve problems at the lowest level possible. Participation will be confidential and voluntary, and where necessary the coalition may be able to provide a professional mediator. More will follow as the problem is fleshed out of the next month or two. ■

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