

LEADERSHIP FORUM

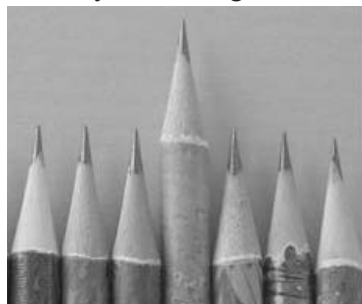
The Newsletter of the Association of Educational Leaders, Anne Arundel County

Vol. 6, No. 4
September 2010

Why life in the middle is a really good place to be

by Chris Mirenzi, Principal, Magothy River Middle

When I tell people that I work in a middle school, frequently the response is, “Oh...that age group is so difficult”. The quintessential “middle-child” of public education often gets a negative response. But I always say the same thing - I like working in a middle school. I find that middle schools encompass the best of two worlds – elementary and high school. I can say this having extensive experience in



both levels. I spent my first nine years of teaching as a high school teacher. High schools provide students with some

truly dynamic learning opportunities. What we teach in high schools today far outstrips what many college students were learning a generation ago. Elementary schools provide a different kind of wonder. There, students go in not knowing how to read or write, and leave making inferences and doing science projects. The elementary school environment is always so pleasant; they are all so nurturing and cozy. For the last eight years, I have lived the elementary school life through my own children. Seeing it through them, I have sometimes wished that I had made my career at that level.

The challenges in a middle school are real, but surmountable, and the turn-around time is relatively quick! In three short years, the middle school must bridge the enormous

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Leading a building for the first time

by Mary Beth Gormley, Principal, George T. Cromwell Elementary

As I venture into the new road on my journey, I reflect on past experiences and look forward to new learning. I have had many opportunities in my path that have helped to prepare me to take the leap into leading a building. I have worked with many extraordinary leaders, and I was able to build a repertoire of skills from the challenges they allowed me, as well as the guidance along the way.

Looking ahead to the school year, I am filled with excitement, hope and just a little apprehension. My first step was getting to know the school. I was fortunate to be able to spend time with Karen Markovic, the former principal, as she helped me to explore and understand the Cromwell vision,

mission, trials and triumphs. Delving into the data, I tried to picture students whose faces I didn't know, thinking about where they were headed and challenges or supports they might need.

I have spent the latter part of the summer getting to know the staff, establishing relationships with those leaders that will help us move the shared vision forward. The dialogue that ensued, focused on looking at data, collaboration and impacting student achievement was tremendous. This was probably the most rewarding part of the summer, and certainly an essential piece for laying the groundwork for the year.

I know there will be hills to climb dur-

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Upcoming Events

AEL Executive Board Meeting
All AEL members are invited

Oct. 4
5:00 pm
Belvedere Elementary School, Arnold

Nov. 11
5:00 pm
Belvedere Elementary School, Arnold

Look for the next issue of Leadership Forum in mid-November.



AEL website
www.aelaacps.org

Providing you with the opportunity

We work diligently to provide for our school community using the resources available to us.

Hopefully you have had the rare opportunity to relax and enjoy the summer months. For many of you I am aware that construction and other school related situations may have prevented or postponed your relaxation. Remember it is hard to work efficiently and effectively when you are exhausted so take time to “smell the roses.”

Having said that, we are beginning another school year and we are being told that we will have to do more in our schools with less money. For those of us who have been around for a while that is nothing new. As a group, administrators are a hardy group who are passionate and dedicated to our school communities. We work diligently to provide for our school community using the resources available to us.

*by Sue Errichiello
AEL President*

This is the last year of our contract and as you all know the existing contract has not been funded even with the modifications made in 2009. We will be entering renegotiations this year. There are quite a few items

that will be negotiated along with the monetary issues. It will be contentious to be sure and the proposed outcome may be less than desirable but we will work diligently to reach a fair and equitable agreement that recognizes your dedication and hard work. You will be kept in the loop through the AEL email blasts. Stayed tuned!

One of the seven “survival skills for the 21st century” listed in the book *The Global Achievement Gap* by Tony Wagner is the need for “Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influ-

ence.” This is the purpose of an organization like AEL. We provide you with this opportunity if you choose to access it. To maintain our organizational integrity and to guarantee effective communication it is critical that we have cluster representation from every cluster. It is my intention to visit the Principal meetings to garner your support in selecting a representative to sit on the executive board. We meet each month to receive updates that should be shared at each cluster meeting. If you are interested in representing your cluster please email me at serrichiello@aacps.org and let me know.

I want to welcome **Paul Deroo** as the new AEL treasurer. He was nominated and elected at the organizational meeting in June. Thank you Paul for taking on this responsibility. I also want to send my thanks to **Donna Spencer**, **Barry Fader** and **Linda Ferrara** for giving of their time and talents over the years. You will be missed at our executive meetings.

Last year we began to ask our colleagues to share some of their experiences with us through the newsletter. I would like to continue to do this. If you have some experiences you would like to share or ideas that you would like to share please let us know. This is your newsletter and a wonderful way to collaborate with colleagues at all levels.

Thank you for your support. ■

Annapolis High featured on NPR

On July 7, National Public Radio featured a story on Annapolis High School, “A Work in Progress”. You can listen to the broadcast at www.NpR.org, search “Annapolis High School.”



New challenges bring new strategy

During the summer break we have all had an opportunity to enjoy our families, to take time to pursue those things that give us pleasure and to hopefully take a moment to reflect on where we have been and where we want to be as the school year begins. Due to the current difficult economic times, this reflection has taken on a different perspective for AEL and its leadership. Let me explain.

When I began representing AEL as the Executive Director and General Counsel, the collective bargaining process was still evolving and the relationship between Unit II employees and the Board was becoming more sharply defined. AEL, over the

years, has moved forward from merely a “meet and confer” mentality focusing on educational issues to a full blown representative of its members. In other words, AEL became a union. It developed a union voice, a union attitude and a union committed to improving the wages and working conditions of its members. All the while, AEL maintained its professionalism and never compromised its commitment to be the best it could be in delivering excellence in educational leadership. AEL has, for the last 20 years, “gone it alone”.

As we approach the new school year, the challenges of the economy and indeed, the less inclusive attitude of upper management and its disregard for contractual commitments, AEL must redesign itself and regain its voice. To this end, the challenge is to maintain AEL’s independence and to find strength in a coalition with other employee groups who share the common goal of providing the best possible representation for their members. While some may suggest that there may be an inherent conflict in this approach, I disagree. An alliance of similarly minded unions can only strengthen the cause of the individual member. There is strength in numbers in a united front.

By now many of you have seen the Coalition of Educational Employees’ advocacy ad that appeared in the Capital Newspaper on Sunday, September 4, 2010. If you haven’t seen

a copy, please go on line and obtain one. The Coalition, which is comprised of AEL, TAAAC, SAAAAC and AFSCME, collectively believes that its members and the public need to know the truth about the administration’s indifference, as well as the lack of respect the BOE has shown its employees in approving the Superintendent’s contract and salary package. This is not strictly about money. The issues transcend the pay package. It involves an arrogance directed at the very core of the collective bargaining process. It is an example of an attitude that “we can do what

we want, to whom we want and whenever we want to do it”.

The administration has abandoned

the promotional process and protocol. Qualified administrators remain locked in their respective positions or returned to the classroom in order for out-of-county hiring by the administration to occur. Many of you have contacted me for advice, but have declined to take action because you are fearful of retaliation. Some of you have appealed adverse disciplinary actions, only to have us both learn that road blocks have been created so that timely resolution not occur. The BOE’s recognition of other educational employee groups has been extended in order to undermine the exclusivity of AEL.

While we have “sat back” and allowed this erosion to occur for any variety of reasons, we must now move forward. Please note that in the preceding sentence I used the word “we”. While I remain hopeful that “we” will include all of our members, I know that it will also have to include the Coalition and the power that only an alliance can bring to a fight. While job duties, rates of pay, supervision, etc. all differ amongst the Coalition members and while we can appreciate that each member of the Coalition has a duty to the members it represents, we can’t face the future alone. The ad illustrates the administration’s lack of respect for its employees’ efforts, as well as the failure to share the economic pain. We need to go forward collaboratively in order to regain the respect that

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

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2010-11 priorities for the Office of Curriculum & Instruction

By Andrea Kane, *Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction*

The vision for the Office of Curriculum and Instruction is to work in support of the school system's Strategic Plan. Our office works to ensure that curriculum is effective in helping every student meet and exceed the rigorous standards for academic performance set forth by MSDE. In addition to the overarching function of leading our school system in researching, developing, and implementing quality curricular programs, our office has identified certain priorities that we believe will prepare our students to be critical thinkers in a 21st Century Workforce. Some of those priorities include:

- establishing common elements for all curricular documents to include a focus on cross disciplinary literacy
- collaborating with curricular offices, community stakeholders, parents, and teachers who are committed to 21st Century culturally proficient values to develop innovative curriculum that will serve to eliminate academic achievement gaps both among student groups and gaps in meeting and exceeding performance

standards and meaningfully engaging all students in learning experiences relevant to the needs of our local and global communities

- aligning all curriculum with Common Core Standards, and
- supporting teachers and administrators by providing professional development that emphasizes best instructional practices for implementing curriculum that addresses diverse learning styles.

As we all know, this school year presents a set of challenges in regard to academic achievement and AYP that calls for greater collaboration and a laser like focus on student learning. Changing demographics, increased student enrollment, families in crisis, building teacher capacity, compliance with proposed COMAR regulations for health education, financial and environmental literacy can be added to the list of critical issues facing school leaders today. The Office of Curriculum and Instruction is here to provide academic leadership and support to schools as we embark upon these challenges together. ■

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New challenges, new strategies...

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has already been lost and to stop the further decline in respect that continues to erode your rights as employees.

When Sue Errichiello became President, she wanted to make sure that AEL was not about me. I never thought that it was. So there is no confusion about what I am about and what

AEL is about and its place in the bargaining process, we need to go forward with the Coalition and make the BOE and the public understand that respect is as important as a pay raise.

As always your thoughts are welcome, but your actual participation and support would be greatly appreciated. ■

Some of the reasons educational leaders join AEL

By Larry Lorton, AEL Administrator

- Lobbying at local and state levels on issues of particular interest to members
- Assistance with and support for professional issues and challenges
- Legal services access; Attorney referral plan for both professional and personal matters
- Assistance and support in crisis
- Grievance and appeal support and representation
- Direct representation in contract negotiations
- A professional association administered by and for AEL members
- Access to news and information of concern to educational leaders in our county
- Legal publication on topics of particular interest to AEL eligible membership

The view from the middle...

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gap between an elementary-child learner and a young-adult thinker. Middle school students arrive largely undeveloped. With the increased academic demands of middle school, some students falter where they had once been successful. They have new distractions, and social challenges, far bigger than ever before. They are aware of more, yet at the same time less able to comprehend all they see. They are growing and developing at a rate that compares only to their first years of life. Disorganization and confusion may take over their world.

Students come to us acting largely out of childhood compliance and leaning heavily on our support. They enter our school largely seeking our attention and our approval. But sometime during their middle school years, all students reach a cross-road... and we get to have input as they make their decisions about which way to go. This crossroad may occur in 6th, 7th or 8th grade. It may occur quickly or may span several months. But when it does occur, we can make a huge impact. In some cases, it is the last chance we have to influence them to the degree that some of their future decisions

will. If we do our job correctly, they leave on the verge of independence, using informed thought-processing skills, and having opinions of their own. If we miss the opportunity, students become disenchanting with education, and all the clichés apply.

Most definitely, my counterparts in elementary and high schools face equally significant rewards and challenges. I am grateful for the unique accomplishments of their schools.

In a middle school, I can look both ways and “see” high school and elementary school students. I can walk into a 6th grade classroom and see the nurturing environment of an elementary school. Just one floor up, I can enter an 8th grade classroom and see students and hear discussion that I would otherwise presume to be from a high school. The dramatic physical and emotional differences in our children, the short number of years we have them, and the potential to direct a student toward an academic path that extends to college is all very exciting. I like having a foot in both worlds. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that I am a middle child... ■

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Leading a building...

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ing my journey; I am no stranger to the hard work it takes to impact student achievement. I have watched and worked alongside some of the best in this county, and I am a better person for those experiences. I still don't know what I don't know, but I have every confidence that I will learn those things as I traverse my first year. Answers to my questions are just a phone call or an email away, and I am ever grateful to my colleagues and mentors who are on the other end.

As I close this article, I can't help but think about the smiling faces of the children who have shown up to register, to pick up

assessment scores or to stop in to say hello. Their eyes are bright, filled with eagerness only a child can have, hopeful for a wonderful school year. I am reminded of the reasons we chose this career path, of what an honor it is to impact student achievement, and how lucky we are to grow older in the love of children. ■



The Association of Educational Leaders

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