

AEL Leadership Forum

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 6

SEPTEMBER 2016

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept. 15, 2016
AEL Executive Board Meeting, 5pm
AEL HQ,
2521 Riva Road,
Suite L-2, Annapolis

Oct. 20, 2016
AEL Executive Board Meeting 5 pm
AEL HQ,
2521 Riva Road,
Suite L-2, Annapolis

Nov. 7, 2016
AEL Fall Social
Hellas, Veterans' Hwy,
Millersville,
4:30 –7:00 Free
RSVP to Bob, leaf-
man65@gmail.com

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A new beginning

By Will Myers, AEL President

As we begin a new school year, I wanted to thank all for your support and efforts. AEL has made great strides in developing new initiatives, promoting member advancement, and marketing our brand.

Almost 90% of all Unit II personnel are current members. I think this is an amazing testament to the strength of our organization. If you know of a colleague who is not a member, please encourage them to join. The solidarity of our group is essential when dealing with our current Board of Education.

Each year AEL conducts a retreat for the Executive Team

and Cluster representatives. We review our mission, past accomplishments and plan new initiatives. Not surprisingly, compensation, reduced workload, and promotional opportunities are always at the top of our list. We spoke

about a need for more open communications on key issues; and of particular importance, we also see a need to grow our organizational leadership. Our meetings are open and listed on our website

www.AELAACPS.org. Currently,

we need representation for the Chesapeake and Glen Burnie clusters. AEL is always open to new ideas and suggestions. I encourage you to be active and involved.

Aside from compensation, healthcare is looming as the next big issue for all union

groups. As a result of an underfunded healthcare fund, talks have included discussion of raising prescription costs and perhaps health plan premiums. Now more than ever your voice needs to be heard. I encourage you to be active, involved and informed.



‘Cannot’ and ‘will not’: A distinction with a difference

By Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

During a recent meeting AEL meeting it was announced that 90 percent of Unit II employees are members of AEL. This is the highest participation rate that I have personally seen in the last 25 years. In the course of examin-

ing the AEL Mission Statement (for those that need to refresh their recollection, it is embodied in the Negotiated Agreement and found on Page 7, it is clear that either AEL is “doing right” by its members or the school system

is failing to win “hearts and minds” by its conduct. Perhaps it is a combination of both.

While AEL membership has dramatically in-

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‘Can not’ Or ‘Will not’?...

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The Board said it “cannot” do this. In reality, it said it “will not” do this.

creased, so has AEL’s frustration with management’s attitude toward the union. The school system’s negotiating process, has taken a path designated to divide the membership of AEL. As you may recall, current compensation is the result of the Board of Education’s decision to reduce pay raises for all Unit II employees to 1.25% because AEL membership would not sacrifice challenged school stipends payable to a small portion of its members. Those non-union employees in Unit V and VI received 2% pay increases without any attending sacrifice. This was the first attempt to divide AEL members.

Currently, AEL is at impasse, in part over the Board’s position that Unit II members who no longer have any further step increases available will receive no additional compensation. Those who do have steps available are being offered a 1% pay increase. This is another attempt to manipulate AEL into favoring one group of its members at the expense of another. These divisive activi-

ties are, in reality, an attempt at “union busting”.

The frustration with the negotiation process has been the subject of past articles in the *AEL Forum*. The frustration, however, is exacerbated by the continued failure of the Board to distinguish between the words “we can not “ as opposed to “we will not”. Please consider the following as a recent example:

At a meeting with the Board concerning a change in health care pharmaceutical coverage, all unions were told that the health care fund would not be sufficient to provide coverage for employees unless further employee contributions were made. The Board was quick to point out that although it had received \$10 million in a one time funding source from the County, this fund was necessary to offset, in part, the Board’s past underfunding of its past health care contribution in order to provide pay raises to all employees. Neither AEL nor any of the other bargaining groups had agreed to this methodology. In discussing the shortfall of an additional \$10 million needed to sup-

port the fund, the unions requested that the Board go back to the County and request the funding rather than increase the cost to the employees for a problem the employees had not created. The Board said it “cannot” do this. In reality, it was saying it “will not” do this.

The failure to distinguish between “can not” usually meaning there is a legitimate reason for not acting and “will not” usually meaning regardless of any reason at all no action will be taken, will continue to produce impasse as an extension of a failed negotiating process. This is where we find ourselves at the moment. In the past, management and the unions, in general, and AEL, in particular, were able to find solutions through good faith negotiations. Unfortunately, until the Board is willing to understand the difference between “cannot” and “will not”, and cease its efforts to divide union members in order to weaken AEL, the new normal will be the continued use of the third party impasse procedure to resolve our issues.

HOW UNFORTUNATE!

Get involved!

By Edie Picken, Assistant Principal South River High School, AEL Secretary

As an AEL member for more than 20 years, and former TAAAC member, at one time I was one of those “arm chair complainers” challenging “What is AEL doing for me?” I spoke to then president Bob Ferguson about my concerns. He invited me to an AEL Executive Board meeting so I could observe firsthand what the association does. I accepted the invitation and have remained involved since.

Currently, of those serving on the Executive Board, four have been actively involved for well over 30+ years. To them we owe a debt of gratitude. They have been our voice; they have been the history of the organization; and they have remained committed to working for Unit II. They are and remain mentors. They have worked with and helped newly elected Executive staff take on their roles and understand their responsibilities. They have taught us a great deal about the global involvement the association has representing AEL on a variety of committees. These four will at some point in the near future be heading into retirement, with some of the others currently on the Executive Board close behind. The question is: Who will take on these critically important positions once these dedicated people move on? It is important to re-

member the organization works hard to get the best for the employees AEL represents. Like any level of government, a platform can be put forth, but the players have to reach consensus or agreement in order to move forward. This is not always easy.

In recent negotiations, it has not been easy to get what AEL strongly believes Unit II employees deserve: compensation for our ever increasing workload. It has been a contentious negotiating process; yet, AEL continues to push for the level of compensation we are due. The majority of Unit II employees still are three steps behind. The Workload Committee was able to get the special Professional Leave Days (the explanation of these days can be found on the website). Though not what AEL was hoping to gain, it was something. Not satisfied with the state of negotiations, a survey of membership was conducted to get input about AEL going to impasse. Your vote mattered! AEL is now at Impasse. Hopefully, the result of this process will lead to AEL receiving the desired compensatory relief for which it continues to fight. We took a stand and now we move through the layers to come to resolution. That being said I return to the original question: Who will take the helm when those who have the history and knowledge leave? You. It is necessary for each mem-

ber to think about what he/she can do for Unit II.

As mentioned above, AEL is represented at a variety of levels. For example, AEL is represented at benefits review meetings, particularly medical/dental/visual. There is representation on the School Board Nominating Committee. AEL provides representation at rating and other performance appeal hearings. These are only three examples, yet AEL does much more.

Unless others are willing to get involved it is possible that the association will no longer exist. That would mean no one to negotiate on your behalf or provide you with support and representation that AEL currently affords its members.

The Executive Board Meetings and Socials calendar are posted on the AEL website home page (www.aelaacps.org). Executive Board meetings are held at the AEL Office, and the socials are typically held somewhere central to everyone. I encourage all of you to attend at least one of these meetings, even if it is the fall or spring social. It will give you greater insight into what the organization actually does, and I am certain you will trade in the “arm chair” for a more active role once you have a better understanding of what AEL works toward achieving each and every year.

“These four will at some point in the near future be heading into retirement, with some of the others currently on the Executive Board close behind.”

Edie Picken

Back to school: Making the magic happen

We are underway! As educational leaders across the county know, the launch of a new school year doesn't just happen — it takes careful consideration and lots of planning. Here are some thoughts and ideas from your colleagues on how they prepared for this year and previous years and some of the practices they have found useful in getting themselves, their staffs and students ready for the year ahead.

Tim Merritt, *Principal, High Point Elementary*

Every summer High Point Elementary Principal Tim Merritt works on transforming himself. He uses the summer to refresh himself and change things. “You have to as a leader reinvent yourself,” he says. “I take a hard look at myself and try to reinvent my leadership. I try to find an innovative approach to an existing event or program. I ask: Is there a different way to approach an event?”

Merritt, who has been at High

Point since 2003, thinks reinvention is important especially when you are working with the same colleagues. “You’ve got to find a way to motivate those people year in and year out... You have to try to reinvigorate and regenerate them.” But he also says new principals going to new school could also benefit from some reinvention.

He uses the excitement of a new school year to get everyone on board with any new ideas.

“The beginning of the school year gives you a great opportunity to get off on the right foot,” he says. “All teachers got into this profession because of the excitement for learning.” It’s at the beginning of the school year when the excitement is the strongest. “The staff comes back refreshed and I try to capitalize on that.”

Last year’s back to school theme is “training camp.” “We try to zest it up a little. We tie it into instruction ...

“One of our initiatives is guided reading. We are going back and reviewing the norms, etc.,” he says, which can seem a little basic, but he likens it to professional football’s pre-season. “Just like Joe Flacco who has to

practice throwing even though he already knows how. As teachers, we need to polish up our skills too.” To get into the spirit, High Point teachers were invited to wear their favorite team gear (even Steeler fans) and the opening agenda included stretching and calisthenics. Merritt says it can be a little corny, but the teachers seem to appreciate that it’s always something different.

Popular practice: Staff

One of the most effective back to school practices at High Point Elementary happened the first time by accident, according to Merritt. About four years ago Merritt had to miss the first day teachers were back to take his daughter to college. He juggled the schedule a little and instead of using the first day to introduce his plan for the year, he had the teachers use the day to set up their classrooms.

“They loved it,” said Merritt, and he had their undivided attention the next day. With their classrooms in order, the teachers “were much more focused and open to listening to my agenda.” They have stuck to that schedule ever since.

Go team!

Back to school means opening day

By Shauna Kauffman, Principal, Arnold Elementary

This time of year I always have mixed feelings when I hear commercials for Back to School supplies and clothes. I know summer has to end sometime, but am I ready? Then I pull out my To Do list I created for the new school year and think of my vision for this year. Yes. This is good. How am I going to make this happen?

As administrators you might say the first day teachers are back is our "Opening Day" of the season. It's game on! It's our opportunity to kick off the new school year, set things in motion for a winning year, and bring everyone together as a team. A good coach, or principal, can bring together teammates from a variety of backgrounds and skills and make them one team. This is no easy task, as many of you know. However, the week teachers return is an opportunity we get only once a year. It's important to capture the excitement and hope of a new year, get to know each other, and motivate staff. Here are some ideas to welcome back your staff.

Put a coupon for a free ice cream in your August Welcome Back letter to staff so that they can enjoy a sweet treat. Even though you are telling them they have to return to school it makes summer last a little bit longer.

Prepare a nice breakfast or lunch for the first day so everyone can enjoy a meal together. For extra fun, serve the food yourself or include something extra special like a smoothie bar.

Give out a duty free ticket to each teacher so when they need some extra time during the school year they can redeem it.

Plan a team building activity and pair staff up outside of their departments or grade levels so they can get to know other people.

(Scavenger Hunt, Mini-golf, Bowling)

Go big and bring in the band. Literally. Have some students from the band come in and play some pep rally songs or the cheerleaders to get the



teachers to make up a new cheer.

Have a little fun! It goes a long way and helps with starting the year off on a positive foot.

For more ideas, check out *100+ Ways to Recognize and Reward Your School Staff* by Emily E. Houck

Building at team

By Jean Marie Hofstetter, Principal, Davidsonville Elementary

Have you heard Dr. Arlotto say we need to make sure our Professional Development is FUN? Yes, we have heard him say this more

the veteran and new staff plus learning their way around the school.

Each activity involved movement. One of our

“FUNest” sessions was the Green Gator (our school mascot) Scavenger Hunt. Teachers were organized into grade level



than once. That’s why Davidsonville Elementary planned an August Staff Development Week filled with engaging activities focused on getting to know

teams and given a sequence of 10 locations inside and outside our school. Each spot had a Green Gator with direc-

tions to the next location. Teams were directed to take their cell phones and snap a picture of their colleagues by each of the 10 DES Gators.

The first team back with its 10 photos won the special Gator prize. Each picture was funnier than the next as teams tried their hardest to create memorable expressions and poses.

By far the funniest shot was the team joyously perched on top of the Principal’s Desk when they were directed to find the Principal’s Office. This activity served its purpose as a FUN Ice Breaker for the new year.

Students: Meet and greets

Troy Herman, AP, Meade Middle

Many schools have developed programs to help students manage the first day jitters. Some schools are hampered by budget or lo-

gistics but never by imagination. According to Troy Herman, at Meade Middle when the 6th graders arrive for their first day the entire staff lines the hallway applauding and cheering the students as

they walk to the cafeteria. “We do this to help break down the fears that many of them have as they enter the middle school level,” says Herman. “It’s a very positive event.”

Students: When they can't easily get to you, go to them

By Julie Little-McVearry, Principal Crofton Meadows

When I served as the Principal at **North Glen Elementary School** I found that it was difficult for many of our students and their families to secure transportation to and from the school due to the location of the school building which did not allow for walking from several of the neighborhoods served. In our efforts to close the achievement gap and to build partnerships, I along with my staff worked very hard to establish positive relationships with the students and their parents. I saw an opportunity to solidify our commitment

and reach out to the community by meeting on "common ground"... specifically, by going to them!

For many years, with class lists in hand, the staff and I loaded into several vehicles and drove to previously identified locations in the neighborhoods we served. Connect Ed messages and posted signs throughout the neighborhoods alerted the students and parents of our visit. We were met on street corners, at neighborhood pools, and in parking lots by children and parents eager to meet

their teachers prior to the first day of school. After several years, we partnered with our community church and the pastor and church members accompanied us and distributed filled book bags to students. This community outreach had an added benefit for our staff as it gave teachers and staff members insight into the lives our students lead outside of the school setting. This Back-to-School outreach gave us an opportunity to "Sneak-a-Peek" into the lives of our students!

Welcome new members

Dessolene Davis, AP, Crofton ES

Christine DeGuzman, Principal, Meade MS

Laura Espinosa, AP Sunset Elementary

Kendy Hinkle, AP Old Mill HS

Katelyn Hoens, AP North County HS

Holly Holman, AP Northeast HS

Charlette Manbeck, AP Severn River MS

Shanna Poole, AP, Chesapeake HS

Mandy Steiner, AP, Annapolis HS

Audra Wheatland, AP, Southern HS

John Wojtila, AP, Folger ES

AEL Mission Statement

The Association of Educational Leaders exists to ensure all Unit II employees are fairly and equitably treated in the course of their employment.

We commit to accomplishing this mission on behalf of Unit II employees by ensuring:

1. Adherence to our Negotiated Agreement.
2. All Unit II employees are adequately and equitably compensated for their responsibilities and work load.
3. Personal and professional needs shall be respected.
4. Fair, consistent and equitable practices shall be adhered to when dealing with hiring promotions, assignments and evaluations.
5. Fair, consistent, equitable practices in dealing with matters relating to discipline and conflict resolution.
6. Fair, consistent, equitable practices in resolving school and community conflicts.

The Association of Educational Leaders
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2016-17 AEL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE/BOARD/STAFF

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Jennifer Hernandez (2016-20)	Director at Large	(C, Div of Curriculum)		

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There are several Open Representative Director positions, please contact Bob Ferguson for more information.

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