

AEL Leadership Forum

VOLUME 17, ISSUE 1

AUGUST 2024

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept. 10, 7:00 pm
AEL Executive Board
Meeting, via Zoom

Sept. 17, 6:00 pm
Network
Representatives
Meeting, Virtual

Oct. 8, 2024
7:00 pm
AEL Executive Board
Meeting, via Zoom

Oct. 15, 6:00 pm
Network
Representatives
Meeting, Virtual

Nov. 12, 2024
7:00 pm
AEL Executive Board
Meeting, via Zoom

Nov. 19, 6:00 pm
Network
Representatives
Meeting, Virtual

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Setting the Tone for the Year

By Tracey Ahern, AEL President

As we embark on a new school year, it's crucial to recognize the significance of setting the right tone from the very beginning. The start of the school year is more than just an opening chapter; it's the foundation upon which the rest of the year is built. For us, as building administrators and coordinators, it's the time to establish expectations, foster positive relationships, and create a supportive environment for both staff and students. Our leadership during this period can set the course for a successful and productive year.

The Association of Educational Leaders (AEL) is here to support you every step of the way. Whether you're navigating the complexities of Unit II membership, managing

the demands of your role, or seeking ways to enhance your professional development, AEL is your partner in this journey. We understand the unique challenges that building administrators and coordinators face, and we're committed to providing the resources, guidance, and advocacy needed to help you succeed..

Membership in AEL is more than just a badge—it's an opportunity to engage with a community of like-minded professionals who share your commitment to excellence in education. This year, we are excited to bring more opportunities to meet the diverse needs of our members. We are launching a series of mini workshops on important topics such as the

Blueprint for Maryland's Future, an introduction to



AEL for new members, and engaging sessions like "Chat with Our Executive Director" and updates on negotiations. These sessions are designed to equip you with the knowledge and tools you need to navigate the year ahead.

In addition to these professional development opportunities, AEL has also added new benefits for our members. We are now offering opportunities to apply for AEL coverage of conference fees (see

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Setting the Tone...

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*Tracey Ahern,
AEL President*

detailed information in this newsletter), allowing you to expand your learning and network without the financial burden.

Furthermore, we have planned fun social events to foster camaraderie and strengthen our community.

Our collective strength lies in our ability to come together, share our experiences, and advocate for the issues that impact our ability to do our jobs effectively. Compensation, workload, and the broader conditions of our work environment are not just personal concerns; they are collective issues that require a united front. To truly leverage our numbers, we

need active participation. Showing up, sharing your voice, and contributing to our discussions are vital. Our members bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and creativity to the table. Together, we can brainstorm innovative solutions, advocate for fair compensation, and address workload issues in a way that reflects our collective wisdom and shared goals. Remember, there is strength in numbers, and our power to influence change is amplified when we stand together.

However, as we advocate and lead, it's important to proceed with caution. The professional relationships we cultivate with colleagues are the backbone of our work,

and maintaining clear boundaries is essential. Following procedures, documenting appropriately, and upholding professional standards are not just best practices—they are safeguards that protect our integrity and effectiveness as leaders.

As we move forward, let's approach this year with a renewed sense of purpose, a commitment to our collective strength, and a focus on maintaining the highest standards of professionalism. AEL is proud to stand with you, and we look forward to achieving great things together this year.

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.

A Two-Way Street

By Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

I hope that by the time you have begun reading this article, you have already read and appreciate the excellent article written by Tracey Ahern, AEL President. Her contribution to this newsletter sets out a comprehensive agenda and call to action for our membership. It sets goals and expectations for the current school year. It is exceedingly worthy of your consideration and will hopefully inspire you to **participate in AEL's programs and goals.**

A labor union is an organization of workers formed for the purpose of **advancing its members' interests** in respect to wages, benefits and working conditions. Once formed, public sector unions, like their private counterparts exist by a matter of right, not privilege. While some would

characterize AEL as "just an organization", it is far more than that. It is the designated, recognized and approved union that is the bargaining representative for all AACPS Unit II employees. It also serves as a representative of its members in disciplinary matters as



well as providing internal benefits to its members that include a Sick Leave Bank, employment advice, and updated information associated with labor related issues, but to name a few.

AEL is proudly an unaffiliated union which means it is not a part of or associates with a national, state or local union. AEL is autonomous. This autonomy

comes with a price. It places more responsibility on its members and leadership if it is to achieve success at the bargaining table, during grievance procedures or a successful outcome in a disciplinary matter. Reliance on the participation of its membership is essential to achieve its goals. While our membership numbers have increased, it is critical that membership participation increase as well. AEL, as referenced in President **Ahern's article, is prepared** to encourage this participation by hosting virtual and onsite programs to inform, as well as to obtain feedback from membership. Your participation in these events is encouraged.

During the last school year there has been a significant increase in disciplinary investigations. Most of these investigations involved issues between fac-

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Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

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Two-Way Street ...

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Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

ulty and administration or between principals and their assistant principals. There is considerable concern that performance issues are being confused with disciplinary matters. The former should be treated as part of an evaluation process, while the latter should be dealt with through an investigatory and thereafter, due process procedure. Added to the problem is the continued attempt by faculty, through TAAAC, to introduce climate surveys as a means of challenging school-based leadership. **To date, AEL’s opposition** to the use of this methodology has been accepted

by the BOE, but there is no guarantee that this support will continue. These areas will continue to be concerns and membership will have to be aware and be involved. AEL will provide training on how to properly handle disciplinary matters and how to defend against an adverse decision. AEL, with your help and input, will work to improve the due process procedural requirements that currently fail to provide protection. AEL will continue its opposition to climate surveys. All of this will require your involvement.

In short, there is more to being a union member than paying dues and there is more to being a union than simply engaging in collective bargaining. While individual members can support the collective bargaining effort by appearing at Board and County Council meetings, real participation is being engaged in AEL committee work, and probably most importantly, supporting each other in the workplace. The individual member needs the group as much as the group needs the individual member. **Value the “RIGHT”** to be a union member by becoming involved.

Free Help When You Need It: Call Rick

If you need help, advice or just need to ask a question, please remember to contact Rick Kovelant. He is AEL’s legal counsel and has a wealth of experience in assisting our members. He is a valuable resource and **available to you as part of your AEL membership**. He can be reached at 443-848-8022.

Here's to a New Year!

By Edie Picken, AEL President/Director Emeritus

Will Myers and I spent most of the day at Southern High School manning the AEL table at the HELP Conference. Our hope was to meet, greet, and gain new members into the fold.

We had a wonderful time meeting new Unit II folks and reconnecting with those we have known over the years. After lunch, I stayed to listen to Dr. Bedell. He shared an overview of the AACPS strategic plan, the new cell phone policy, and revisions to the grading policy.

He concluded by sharing some well-deserved and necessary statistics in response to negative commentary on social media. I applaud him for his directness because there is no place for this type of vitriol. Our country has been embroiled in enough of it and the school system clearly does not need to engage in it either, particularly not by just the community, but by employees.

I mention this because AEL has had to handle some situations where Unit II members misused social media. AACPS employees are keenly aware of the expectations

for appropriate, responsible use of social media platforms. It is extremely frustrating to have to deal with instances like these when as responsible adults and employees know better. I would hope that our members would use better judgement so that they are not found in a situation that could cost them their job.

The negative commentary focused on the superintendent's hiring practices. I was glad to hear him state the facts. He provided specific numbers of his cabinet's makeup, he addressed the hiring process, and spoke directly about hiring and promoting from within. He feels it is his responsibility to mentor and support those who want to take on new positions and responsibilities when they are ready. I have heard him speak before and spoken directly to him on occasion and I find him to be an honest, forthright, caring, engaged superintendent. Will and I stopped him when he first came into the building and asked him a few questions. He took the time to listen and engage in that

dialog saying he would follow through and meet with a couple of folks at the Board to try and resolve the problem of which we spoke. Dr. Bedell already proved he will follow through when he addressed an issue AEL had last year during negotiations. He is more open to having thoughtful, collaborative, problem-solving conversations than our previous superintendent, which is definitely a needed improvement when it comes to communication.

Clearly there will be more on your plates. Workload continues to be a major focus of AEL, particularly when the negotiating team goes to the table to fight for greater compensation. Be assured, those representing you at the negotiating table do fight on your behalf. In previous editions of this newsletter, the negotiating and budget processes have been explained in detail. Even Dr. Bedell finds these processes "interesting." In his previous position he only had to work with the Board of Education to get his budget

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*Edie Picken, AEL
President/Director
Emeritus*

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Conflict Resolution

By Mike McNeill

Conflict resolution is always one of the most popular topics for leaders.

Conflicts in the workplace are stressful for everyone. Not only for the people involved but for the people who collaborate closely with them as well. Leaders need to learn the best tips and tactics to resolve conflict quickly and constructively.

Are there any new conflict resolution strategies or techniques that your leaders need to know that may be missing in your training program?

If you already include conflict resolution in your training program, you should keep it updated to provide your leaders and staff with the most current information available.

Some useful tips you can include are:

- Focus on the behavior and events that created the conflict and what you can do to find a solution.
- Actively listen to your staff and hone in on the facts. Your staff need to feel like their opinion matters, and that you value their input. Get all the pertinent information and ignore the **“he said, she said,”** and **finger-pointing**.
- Include those involved in creating a plan to solve the problem.
- Give feedback. Let the staff involved know what you expect from them.
- Reassure your staff when they make a mistake and help them learn how to prevent it from happening again in the future.

Follow up periodically to be sure that the solution is effective, and the conflict has been resolved.

New Year...

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approved. Here, he not only has to get approval by the Board of Education, but that is followed by the County Council. If the County Executive/County Council does not approve the funding of the superintendent's budget, then it is back to the negotiating table. This is not his fault. It is this ridiculous cart

before the horse process that is the problem. He has a challenging time ahead of him to meet budgetary needs and requirements resulting from the Blueprint. In spite of that, AEL will continue to negotiate for higher compensation for the work you do.

So, in conclusion, have a great new school year, support one another, take time for yourself, and make sure you read the AEL newsletter and other communications coming from the executive board. AEL is here to support you in every way we can and **membership's participation** at every level will make this year a great one.

AEL Highlights 5- Star Recognition

AEL's 5-Star Recognition program allows AEL members to recognize colleagues who go above and beyond the call of duty.

Chandler, Linda-- Old Mill Middle South Ms. Chandler goes above and beyond to support our school community. During the holiday season, she planned spirit days, treats for staff and students, and ensured that all members of our community had what they needed to maintain a positive school culture. Ms. Chandler is a true servant leader who carries the burdens of our entire community on her shoulders. She takes the time to cultivate and nurture community partnerships and emphasizes the importance of relationships by encouraging our school community to care for each other. She leads by example and is a true Servant Leader.

Fox, Lenora-- Mayo ES Lenora has advocated for all elementary school principals serving at smaller schools. Thank you- Lenora!

Gormley, Mary Beth-- Lothian Elementary Mary Beth is a seasoned principal, and a highly effective and reflective practitioner. She continues to try to stretch and grow her capacity to grow teachers and student learning. She is electing to take on a new AMA (all means all) initiative at her school this year, which requires reflection and an evaluation of practices to improve yourself as a leader. I love how she continues to reinvent herself and her strength at each school she leads. She is also an unwavering advocate for equity, which should be a model for others.

Austin, Lori-- Crofton Woods Elementary Ms. Austin is always an advocate for her families and provides support for all families. She works tirelessly to ensure that her students are all included in school activities and academics. She is an active listener and truly responds to each families' needs.

Riley Jeffers, Karen-- Coordinator of Elementary Mathematics Karen has been a welcomed new addition who came to the Curriculum & Instruction team last February. Her perspective, knowledge and flexibility impressed many of us on the team as she came during a time when many new initiatives were taking place. She was instrumental in obtaining and now implementing the new REVEAL Mathematics curriculum which will provide students with opportunities to grow their skills in mathematics using researched based methods. The methods that she used to roll out the new plan, build communication, training, and gain feedback for the new curriculum adoption was truly amazing. Karen's dedication, innovation, and leadership as a Coordinator have proven to be impactful and not only in mathematics at AACPS, but beyond, as well.

To nominate a Unit II member, please complete the google form- [AEL Highlights- 5 Stars](#)



Calling all AEL Members



Do you have a conference that you would like to attend?

AEL will sponsor **5 members** who attend a conference by reimbursing personal funds for the registration fee up to \$500!

September 1, 2024-June 30, 2025

If you are selected, the following will need to be completed prior to your reimbursement:

- ⇒ Submit proof of attendance to the conference
- ⇒ Write an article for the next AEL Newsletter sharing information with your colleagues.

To be considered for this opportunity, please complete the link below. All submissions should be received at least 45 days in advance of the conference start date. Notification of decision will be made 15 days from the submission date.

Link: [Conference Link 2024-25](#)

Questions- contact Stacey Smith, smsmith1@aacps.org

[AEL Executive Board will determine eligibility for reimbursement.](#)



New Members

Lindsay Abruzzo, Principal, Magothy River MS
Kristen Addleman, Assistant Principal, Arnold ES
Tonya Baker, Assistant Principal, Seven Oaks ES
Phillip Casolo, Assistant Principal, Broadneck HS
Karen Chislom, Assistant Principal, Brooklyn Park ES
Barry Cyrus, Assistant Principal, Severn Run HS
Jocelyn Fox, Assistant Principal, Piney Orchard ES
Melissa Fuson, Assistant Principal, Benefield ES
Natalia Gelin-Eddins, Assistant Principal, Old Mill HS
Courtney Gompf, Assistant Principal, Arundel MS

Selicia Hardy, Principal, Pershing Hills ES
Rodney Harrison, Assistant Principal, North County HS
Nicole Levy, Assistant Principal, Quarterfield ES
Shawn McCoy, Assistant Principal, Marley ES
Lauren Milburn, Assistant Principal, Wiley Bates MS
Brian Ruehle, Assistant Principal, Phoenix Academy
Maura Shaul, Assistant Principal, Glen Burnie Park ES
Erin Simmons, Coordinator Birth to Five
Cheryl Slack, Assistant Principal, Severna Park ES
Kayla Zipp, Assistant Principal, George Cromwell ES

2024-25 AEL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE/BOARD/STAFF

Tracey Ahern (2022-26)	President	P, Richard Henry Lee ES	(o)410-553-2200	tahern@aacps.org
Stacey Smith (2022-26)	1st VP	P, South River	(o)410-956-5600	smsmith1@aacps.org
Brian Love (2022-26)	2nd VP	Admin, BMAH	(o)410-761-8950	bllove@aacps.org
John Wojtla (2022-26)	Secretary	P, High Point ES	(o)410-222-xxxx	jwojtla@aacps.org
Ryan Sackett (2023-2025)	Treasurer	C, Secondary Mathematics HS	(o)410-222-5383	rsackett@aacps.org
Shira Dowling	Director at Large	P, Rippling Woods ES	(o)410-760-7900	sdowling@aacps.org
Kristy Snyder	Director at Large	P, Piney Orchard ES	(o)410-672-7591	klsnyder1@aacps.org

Network Representatives

Kirk Greubel	Network 1	(Southgate ES)	kgreubel@aacps.org
Angie Riccluti	Network 1	(Overlook ES)	ariccluti@aacps.org
Melissa Connelly	Network 1	(Woodside ES)	mccconnelly@aacps.org
April Umile	Network 1	(Jacobsville ES)	aumile@aacps.org
Anna Ory	Network 1	(Marley MS)	aory@aacps.org
Karla Barlow	Network 1	(Woodside ES))	kbarrow@aacps.org
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Michalene McDonald	Network 3	(Crofton MS)	mmcdonald1@aacps.org
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Tamika McPherson	Network 3	(Southern HS)	tlmcperson@aacps.org
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