

UPCOMING
EVENTS

Feb. 25, 7 pm
Open Forum w/
Rick Kovelant,
Executive
Director/
Attorney
(virtual)

April 16, 6 pm
AEL Information
& Q&A Meetings
(virtual)

June 18, 4-7 pm
AEL General
Membership
Meeting/Social—
Blue Dolphin,
Crofton

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AEL Leadership Forum

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Standing Firm for Unit II Employees

By Tracey Ahern, AEL President

Negotiations are beginning but starting them after the Superintendent's budget is submitted significantly limits the opportunity for meaningful negotiation. While one meeting has occurred, it would be disingenuous to suggest that this process currently reflects a true spirit of collaboration. The current discussions leave AEL leadership questioning the Board's commitment to working meaningfully with Unit II employees as partners.

This concern has carried over from the previous round of negotiations and remains unresolved. As a result, frustration continues to grow as AACPS leadership moves toward impasse rather than engaging in substantive negotiation. The impasse process delays negotiated compensation for Unit II employees and shifts decision-making away from the bargaining table, instead of addressing the concerns and perspectives raised by AEL. This approach limits meaningful dialogue and collaboration on

compensation decisions.

It is also important for AEL to be clear with all Unit II members: the Board retains the authority to reinstate the 5 percent negotiated salary enhancement for the 2025–2026 school year, as well as the agreed-upon virtual workdays. These include five days for school-based employees and eight days for non-school-based employees, which may be used at any time prior to July 1, 2026, with supervisor approval.

We know that money is tight. We understand the real pressures of the current economy and the fiscal constraints facing AACPS. We also know that Unit II employees have been working within a compensation structure where a significant portion of our membership is paid below the expected range for the scope, responsibility, and accountability of their roles, despite assurances at the



AEL President Tracey Ahern and AEL Liaison Will Meyers enjoyed seeing members (and giving away door prizes) at the Membership Meeting/Social in December.

time the pay band structure was created that AACPS would commit to bringing compensation in line with the standards outlined in the compensation study. Adding to this concern is the continued lack of a clearly articulated structure or formula that explains how Unit II pay is determined. Reviews of school leadership salary information show inconsistencies across similar roles, school sizes, and levels of responsibility. Unit II employees performing comparable work can earn markedly different salaries, without a transparent or defensible rationale for those differences.

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Standing Firm...

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“It is unreasonable to continually expect administrators to give more and more of their time... to meet expanding expectations from supervisors, while members of other bargaining units are compensated for work performed beyond their workday. . .”

*Tracey Ahern,
AEL President*

Unit II employees are also routinely expected to work well beyond the contractual workday without compensation, based on broad language tied to the position itself. It is unreasonable to continually expect administrators to give more and more of their time, often at the expense of their own families, to meet expanding expectations from supervisors, while members of other bargaining units are compensated for work performed beyond their workday. Phrases such as “other duties as assigned” can be mismanaged, resulting in expectations that fall outside what is reasonable or sustainable.

At the same time, Unit II employees are expected to hold staff members accountable to high standards while also creating a climate where staff feel supported and valued. These expectations can, at times, be in direct conflict. When leaders do hold staff to clear expectations and professional standards, climate survey results are then used against them, often without adequate context, balance, or support from supervisors. This places leaders in a no-win situation and discourages honest accountability. Unchecked workload expectations, inconsistent accountability structures, and unclear compensation models make burnout and turnover inevitable and threaten the system’s ability to retain

experienced, effective Unit II employees.

Unit II employees continue to serve as the system’s middle ground. We are responsible for holding staff accountable, building relationships with families and students, maintaining safety/security, addressing attendance challenges, and driving performance outcomes for every learner. We are expected to uphold Board expectations and hold the line, often without clear guidance, shared responsibility, or consistent backing. This is not sustainable leadership. It undervalues the role Unit II employees play in maintaining stability, continuity, and progress across AACPS.

In response, AEL is exploring potential affiliation opportunities to further strengthen our position at the bargaining table and expand the support available to our members. This includes ongoing discussions with organizations such as AFSA and MSEA to better understand how affiliation could enhance advocacy, legal support, bargaining expertise, and long-term organizational stability. No decisions have been made. Our focus remains on careful review and alignment with the priorities of our membership. As the process of exploration unfolds, information will be made available to all Unit II members so that collaborative conversations and next steps are determined. AEL will continue to push for what we believe in and what we believe

we deserve. Our work matters. Our expertise matters. Our voices matter. Strong schools require supported leaders, not leaders expected to absorb pressure from every direction without meaningful partnership.

Thank you to everyone who attended our Winter Social and General Meeting, whether in person or virtually. Your engagement, thoughtful questions, and continued support matter. It is essential that our membership remains engaged and continues to ask questions of both AEL leadership and AACPS representatives. An informed, active membership strengthens our collective voice and ensures transparency, accountability, and shared understanding as negotiations move forward.

As this message was being written, a new option emerged to address the 2025–2026 negotiations impasse. This option raised new questions about pay bands and how placement is determined. These questions will remain a central focus in upcoming discussions with the Board. There must be a clear structure that explains how pay band placement is determined. This development has also sparked important conversations among our members. That is a positive outcome. The more we talk, question, and seek understanding, the stronger and more informed we become

Back to the Future

By Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

Forty years ago, in 1985 B.C. (before computers), I was approached by a good friend and neighbor who was an administrator at AACPS. He knew that I was an attorney and thought I might have some knowledge about collective bargaining. In particular, he inquired whether I had any knowledge about public employee unions and how their contracts were negotiated. I told him that I was familiar with public unions and the restrictions imposed upon public unions in Maryland. He asked if I would be interested in working with a group of AACPS employees, predominantly school based administrators (principals, assistant principals, coordinators, some HR staff and special assistants) who were the members of Unit II, a recognized bargaining unit. Unit II employees are represented by an organization known as the Association of Educational

Leaders (AEL). As this was a potential field of law that was of interest to me, I asked to meet with AEL's leadership and, after doing so, my services were engaged to follow in the footsteps of AEL's retiring Executive Director. My duties and responsibilities included participating in negotiations and providing representation during disciplinary matters, filing grievances on behalf of members and providing internal legal assistance to the Executive Board.

Reflecting back over the years, I realized that the process of negotiating on behalf of public school system employees was, is, and will continue to be, the most difficult and challenging type of negotiation. Public employee negotiations are far different from labor negotiations in the private sector. Over the years, individual participants may

change, but the process as remained the same. Unlike collective bargaining in the private sector, there are few options available to school based public unions to bring about favorable negotiated agreements. For example, the ability to strike or walkout are traditional techniques that can be employed in the private sector but are prohibited by law to school-based public unions.

Perhaps the largest impediment to the bargaining process is the relationship between the Superintendent, the Board of Education and County Government and AEL. The Superintendent is a contract employee of AACPS. His position is analogous to a CEO of a company. Because Marland law considers the Superintendent to have expertise in educational matters, deference is given to his/her request for adequate

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*Rick Kovelant, AEL
Executive Director &
General Counsel*

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Back to the Future ...

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“The irony associated with this process is that AEL and AACPS are required by law to negotiate generally in good faith, wages, hours and working conditions.”

Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

funding to meet the needs of the school system. To this end, and in an effort to prepare a financial budget, information is gathered from the AACPS department heads. Unfortunately, financial requests from the unions are not involved. The Superintendent’s budget request simply does not consider the requests of AEL or any other bargaining group at the time his/her recommendation is submitted to the BOE for consideration. Instead, the Superintendent unilaterally puts a place holder in his/her budget that he/she believes is adequate. This placeholder is not a product of any negotiation. In fact, the BOE has been quite happy to adopt the

placeholder methodology since it forestalls the negotiation process so that any “negotiations” concerning compensation are put off until after the Superintendent’s placeholder is submitted to the BOE. Rarely, if at all, has this compensation placeholder been enhanced by the BOE as a result of subsequent negotiations.

Consider this: AACPS has no independent source of funds. The AACPS budget is funded by the County who, as you know, is not a party to any negotiations with any of the AACPS unions. Even if the AEL contract is ultimately ratified, the AACPS budget is still subject to the County’s approval. If approval is denied and the

budget is thereby underfunded, the non-negotiated placeholder, which often is part of the ratified contract, is subject to being rejected. Further negotiations would be required at that point.

The irony associated with this process is that AEL and AACPS are required by law to negotiate generally in good faith, wages, hours and working conditions. As far as negotiating “wages,” in reality, the process as described above is really no negotiation at all. To the benefit of the BOE and the detriment to AEL, and indeed, the entire negotiation process itself, the BOE does what it can to slow walk negotiations so that its budget submission to the County is without any agreement on the part of AEL.

In summary, the Superintendent submits a budget request without any input or consideration of AEL’s request. The BOE passes a budget with an arbitrary compensation placeholder submitted by the

Free Help When You Need It

If you need help, advice or just need to ask a question, please remember to contact AEL’s legal counsel **Rick Kovelant**. He 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**.

Back to the Future ...

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“The impasse effort undertaken at the moment is a step forward in asserting AEL’s discontent with the current negotiation process.”

Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

Superintendent before negotiations are concluded and relies on the County to provide funding of this budget. The last 40 years have provided little or no deviation from this process, and unless the process is challenged and hopefully amended, the results will continue to support the fact that compensation negotiations simply become meaningless.

Over the years, I have grown to understand that while remedies are few, they are not non-existent. The most important available remedy is to demonstrate and exercise strength through numbers. Forty years ago, AEL membership was not comprised of over 80 percent of eligible Unit II employees as it is today. It was far less. Using the membership population and standing up against inequity in compensation by going to impasse and not accepting an

inequitable distribution of compensation is a show of strength and determination. In the end, it may not achieve a satisfactory result, but it will demonstrate that more than 80% of Unit II employees are prepared to be on the right side of fairness and let the administration know, in a collective voice, that it will not accept a non-negotiated unfair offer. This was the attitude of AEL 40 years ago when it voted overwhelmingly to “work to rule” and not accept nonacademic assignments beyond a reasonable workday that acted to diminish the

compensated value of Unit II salaries. This attitude/commitment must continue today if collective bargaining has any chance of survival and AEL is to have a future as the designated representative of Unit II employees. The impasse effort undertaken at the moment is a step forward in asserting AEL’s discontent with the current negotiation process. I can hope that it will be followed with more steps, so the future is not the same as the past. If the process is not challenged and hopefully changed, the results will, unfortunately, remain the same.



Five Principals Nominated for Leadership Award

Three elementary school principals, a high school principal and a charter school principal make up the five finalists for the 2025–2026 George Arlotto Leadership Award, presented annually to the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Principal of the Year.



“We couldn’t be more proud of these three educational leaders,” said Tracey Ahearn, AEL President and Principal at Richard Henry Lee Elementary School. “They are smart, dedicated, committed leaders and we are fortunate to have them in our county creating safe and inclusive learning environments that engage learners and inspire teachers.”

This year’s finalists are:

- Jessica Alvear, Ridgeway Elementary School

- Cheryl Ann Cox, Walter S. Mills-Parole Elementary School

- Ryan Durr, Meade High School

- Kim Jakovics, Monarch Academy Glen Burnie

- Jed Kling, Windsor Farm Elementary School

Finalists will be celebrated at the Excellence in Education Awards Ceremony, hosted by the Education Foundation of AACPS, on Friday, April 24, 2026.

Durr and Cannady honored by MASSP

Two AACPS educational leaders were honored recently by the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). Dr. Ryan Durr, Principal of Meade High School was



named 2026 Maryland High School Principal of the Year while Andrea Cannady, Northeast Middle School Assistant Principal, was named Maryland Middle School Assistant Principal of the Year.

The state awards are given annually by MASSP to recognize the work of outstanding instructional leaders in leading teaching, learning and student

achievement, and fostering cultures that promote success for all stake holders.

According to Durr, “This is a tremendous honor for our entire school community, and I am truly surprised, shocked and deeply humbled to receive this recognition. This award is not about me. It is about the Meade family. As I tell our scholars daily, ‘It’s a great day to be a Mustang,’ and I am incredibly proud to be a part of such a dedicated, passionate, and supportive school community.”

Cannady noted, “Being named Maryland Assistant Principal of the Year is an incredible honor, and it speaks to the strength of our North-

east Middle community. Every day, I am committed to building a culture where students feel valued, staff feel supported, and families feel connected.”

The state award, given in collaboration with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, makes Durr and Cannady eligible for national awards.



Get Out of Your Office and ... Walk!

By Edie Picken, President/Director Emeritus

The holidays are over, and you're back to work. While it's easy to stay in your office handling tasks, regular short walks are important for your health and help clear your mind.



Take a walk when you've been seated for 45 minutes; it boosts energy and lets staff know you're available and supportive. Even on busy days, make walking a routine — whether through the halls or outside — to benefit

both your well-being and visibility.

Health experts suggest taking three 15-minute walks daily. Take your first walk at the start of the workday when classes begin and students are usually well-behaved.

The second walk can be during lunch duty—avoid standing with staff and instead move around, engaging briefly with students and colleagues.

The third walk can happen after dismissal; check in on different areas, chat as needed, then return to your office.

These are recommendations. You can determine when the best times work for you.

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.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

December Social: Engagement and Information

On December 18th, they may have come for the free dinner, but they stayed for the AEL updates and the chance to connect with friends and colleagues. AEL members in attendance on site and on line were able to get their questions answered about a variety of concerns. Don't miss out on the next gathering — *upcoming events listed here.*



AEL LEADERSHIP FORUM



GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING/SOCIAL #2

June 18, 2026
4-7pm, Blue Dolphin
(Crofton, MD)



AEL INFORMATION AND Q&A EVENINGS

APRIL 16, 2025

Mark your calendars. These will be hosted virtually from 6-7pm. Information will come out prior to each Information/Q&A session.

OPEN FORUM WITH RICK KOVELANT-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/LAWYER

February 25, 2026

Time: 7-8pm

Mark your calendar. Information will come out prior to the Open Forum date.



5 STAR HIGHLIGHT

Amy Cornelius, Shady Side Elementary School

Amy has worked tirelessly for the past few years to support the teachers and staff at Shady Side. Amy knows all the students' needs and their success. She is knowledgeable in all areas to support teachers in learning and growing as they support their students. Amy creates systems and structures to celebrate students and staff and creates a culture of collaboration, trust, and encouragement. Leading together with her has been an experience that has brought both joy and growth to myself and our school.

Nominate a fellow Unit 2 member for the 5-Star Recognition!

Link: <https://forms.gle/mNz1cx2QTQEc4jKH7>

AEL Grant Application Due February 6th

AEL Mini Grants are here! Tracey Ahern communicated this program at the December membership meeting and social. The Executive Board felt it was important to provide other means of support to its membership. This year, we are offering four mini grants of up to \$2,500 each. The grants are intended to provide monetary support for creative programs/projects that currently do not receive adequate or no funding.

The application is attached and will be due by February 6. All information is included with the application. Be sure to review the information and application carefully before submitting. The Executive Board will assess applications based on the rubric provided. Any questions you may have feel free to reach out to any Executive Board member. Applicants must be a Unit II employee and AEL member in good standing.

The due date is February 6, 2026 by the end of business to Edie Picken, President/Director Emeritus at epicken.ael@gmail.com

2025-26 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
Jessica Alvear (2025-27)	2nd VP	P, Ridgeway ES	(o)410-222-6524	jalvear@aacps.org
Ted Nilsson (2025-27)	Secretary	AP, Southern MS	(o)410-867-0050	tnilsson@aacps.org
Lindsay Abruzzo (2025-27)	Treasurer	P, Magothy River MS	(o)410-544-0926	labruzzo@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

April Umile	Network 1	Jacobsville ES	aumile@aacps.org
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AEL Office, 2521 Riva Road, Suite L-2, Annapolis, MD 21401



AEL GRANT PROGRAM 2025-2026

The AEL Executive Board determined it wanted to provide other forms of support to Unit 2 members, in particular in the form of mini grants.

This year, there will be four (4) mini grants awarded not to exceed the amount of \$2,500/grant.

Any AEL member engaging in creative projects and/or programs that currently does not receive monetary support from any other sources for the project(s)/program(s), with the exception of matching funds to adequately conduct the project(s)/program(s) may complete the attached form for consideration. ***The project(s)/program(s) originator(s) and overseer(s) must be Unit 2 employee(s) and AEL member(s) in good standing.***

Please make certain that you submit the requested information by the deadline date indicated on the application.

If necessary, an AEL Executive Board officer may reach out for additional information if the group feels additional information/insight is needed prior to making a decision.

Thank you and we look forward to seeing what new, creative, and insightful ways Unit 2 people are providing opportunities for excellence.



Eligibility: Any AEL Unit II member in good standing is eligible to apply for one of four (4) mini grants. Said AEL member must be the individual who designed the project, implements the project, and provides ongoing updates on the project/program progress and completion via an approved timeline. The project/program must be allowable/acceptable by AACPS and focus on a specific need leading to student improvement.

Conditions: Any application must be submitted no later than the assigned due date. The application must include all requisite information. None of the grant money may be spent for administrative expenditures (i.e. any form of payment for work done or coursework taken by the AEL member). All money must only be spent on materials needed but may include transportation expenditures (i.e. school bus field trip transportation). A clear detailed itemization of expected expenditures must be included in the application. ***Any unused funds must be returned to AEL at the conclusion of the program/project.***

Purpose: The purpose for applying for the mini grant is that no other funding has been received to support the program/project.

In order to effectively and fairly evaluate submitted grant requests, AEL will use a scoring scale. The scale will consist of ratings of 1-5 for each of the criteria listed below, with 1 being lowest and 5 highest.

1. Is the proposed grant request aligned with AACPS expectations for increasing student/staff performance?
2. Was all requisite information provided and clearly states the purpose of the project/program?
3. Is the timeline for the project/program achievable?
4. Does the timeline indicate specific points where progress will be assessed?
5. Were the expected expenditures for the program/project clearly delineated and acceptable?

Note: Any applicant who at the time of the application is an AEL member in good standing and no longer a member with AEL after receiving the grant, will be required to repay all grant money in total.



AEL Grant Application Form

Submit this application electronically to: Edie Picken at epicken.ael@gmail.com

All Applications must be submitted by: **February 6, 2026**

Title of Project or Program:

Program/Project approved by Supervisor (If a principal is applying, then his/her NAS signs. If it is an AP, Coordinator, or Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Safe & Orderly Schools, the immediate supervisor signs):

Printed Name:

Position:

Person(s) Completing the Application and Position(s): (This should be the person(s) originating and overseeing the project(s) or program(s):

School, or Office if not School Based, Phone Number:

Explain the Purpose of the Project or Program (Attach additional pages if necessary):

Expected Outcome(s):

What Group of Students and/or Staff are expected to benefit from the Grant: (Include the total number in addition to group/staff description)

Provide an Itemized Detailed Expenditure Accounting of How the Grant Money Will Be Spent, which includes matching funds you may have received: (You may attach a separate sheet if you need additional space)

Timeline of the Project/Program (You may attach additional pages if necessary):

Is the proposed grant based on matching funds? Yes ____ No ____ If yes, attach the terms and conditions of the associated matching grant.

Have you submitted a grant request for the same project to any other sources and if so, have you received grant funding for this project? Yes ____ No ____

Grantee, represents and certifies that all information provided herein is true and correct to the best of its knowledge, information and belief, and acknowledges that AEL is relying on the information provided and that it may be required to provide such other and further documentation as may be required on an on-going basis to supplement the information provided for herein. Please be advised, AEL reserves the right not to fund this grant, in whole or in part, its sole and absolute discretion. The Grantee further acknowledges that it will not rely upon any representation made by any person or persons on behalf of AEL except that which is signed in writing by the President.

I/We have read the above and agree:

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Signature

Date

AEL OFFICE USE ONLY. DO NOT COMPLETE ANY ITEMS BELOW:

Date Application Received:

Date Reviewed By AEL Executive Board:

Date Grant Approved:

Date Grant Denied:

Date Response Sent to Applicant:



AEL Grant Application Scoring Rubric

	1 Incomplete and/or lacking adequate explanation	2 Has some information but does not include all requisite information to support a grant	3 Provided information that may support a grant but needs more details	4 Good information, may need to ask additional questions for clarification	5 Excellent. All requisite information included with sound explanation, timeline, resources, etc. and achievable
Is the proposed grant request aligned with AACPS expectations for increasing student/staff performance?					
Was all requisite information provided and clearly states the purpose of the project/program?					
Is the timeline for the project/program achievable?					
Does the timeline indicate specific points where progress will be assessed?					
Were the expected expenditures for the program/project clearly delineated and acceptable?					