

LEADERSHIP FORUM

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

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The 'principal teacher' at Crofton Middle

A profile of AEL Member Richard Berzinski

by Denise Hofstedt

In a time where educational "reforms" pop up like Intranet messages from the Central Office, Crofton Middle School Principal Richard Berzinski has maintained his basic approach to education. His every action is driven by the question: "What is best for the student?"

This philosophy has served him well. He has been successful at raising test scores in the schools in which he has worked and was at the helm of Crofton Middle School when it received its Blue Ribbon Designation for 2001-02. His work at Four Seasons Elementary helped earn it recognition when it was chosen as the site to kick off President Clinton's national testing initiative in 1997. During his tenure at Quarterfield Elementary the school received National Recognition as a School of Excellence in 1988. That designation eventually became the Blue Ribbon School of Excellence award.

A principal in the Anne Arundel County school system for nearly 30 years, Berzinski believes in the basics. "I don't do anything special. I just try to do what's right for the students," he says. "A principal must work hard

and use common sense. If you do those kinds of things, the best opportunities for students will surface."

According to Pam McNeill, a teacher who worked with Berzinski for three years, he was always interested in what was best for each child. "His main thought is always, 'Let's do what's best for the children,'" she says.

He believes that a principal should be the "principal educator" in the building. Historically, there weren't principals, but "teaching principals," says Berzinski. "One of the teachers was designated as the 'principal teacher' in the school — the leader of the teachers. The principal is the main teacher in the building. It's my job to get teachers to work together," he says.

He has a knack for that, says Pam McNeill, a teacher who worked with Berzinski for three years. "When he goes into a new situation, he is ready to make good changes for a school — good for the school, good for the children," says McNeill. "He is able to sense what is needed and acts upon it."

Accolades for Berzinski come from parents as well. "Mr. Berzinski came to our school in 1997 after several years of academic stagnation, low teacher and student morale and serious disciplinary challenges," said a former Crofton Middle School PTA officer in an award nomination endorsement letter. "Just four years later, through his energetic leadership and clearly articulated vision for excellence, Crofton Middle School was awarded Blue Ribbon status."

Berzinski is a hands on leader. He greets



Richard Berzinski

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Dates to Remember

March 1

Approved Operating & Capital budgets are forwarded to the County Executive

March 3

**MAESP & MASSP
Legislative Reception**
Gov. Calvert House,
State Circle,
Annapolis
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

April 3

**AEL Spring
Membership Meeting**
The Rose Restaurant
Comfort Inn BWI
6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

May

AEL Elections
(Details to come)

May 1

County Executive recommended Operating & Capital budgets forwarded to County Council

June 1

County Council Approval FY2004 Operating & Capital budgets

June 20

Board of Education Approval of FY2004 Operating & Capital budgets

July 1

Approved FY2004 Operating & Capital budgets implemented

New membership newsletter unveiled

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Association of Educational Leaders Newsletter, *Leadership Forum*. The purpose of this quarterly newsletter is to facilitate the exchange of ideas among the AEL membership. This is your newsletter and we encourage you to share your ideas and opinions. We welcome Letters to the Editor, suggestions of members to profile, news about you or your school, and requests for assistance in problem solving. Send your submissions to Don Smith at 410.349.1764 (fax).

Following the money

Here it is — the newly redesigned AEL Newsletter. I know a change has been suggested by many of you over the years. Thanks for your patience and persistence. A special thanks to our Administrator Don Smith and Executive Director Rick Kovelant for their assistance. They are the heart and soul of this organization. They helped make the idea of improved communication to members a reality. Thanks also to our Executive Board for all its hard work.

Budget news

As you know, Dr. Smith has already proposed his budget to the school board for 2003-2004. Soon, it will go to the county executive for recommendations, then to the County Council. Throughout this process, public hearings will be held be-

fore a final budget is struck on June 1. Dr. Smith has proposed the 3 percent COLA negotiated last year for all employees. He is also proposing new initiatives along with the Bridge to Excellence Programs. The budget process is interesting and informative. If you are not familiar with it, take time to attend the County Council hearing.

Legislative gathering

Also mark your calendar for the Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals and the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals Legislative Reception on March 3 at the Gov. Calvert House in Annapolis. This is a good evening to learn the latest on state legislation that could impact you as a principal.

For more information, contact Bob Kanach at 410.975.9432. ■

*President's Column
by Charles Jansky*

The 'principal teacher'...

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students as they arrive, is in the hallway between classes and in the lunchroom. He is known to visit classrooms frequently to listen and lend a hand. "...his door is always open to all facets of the school," said Debbie Kappel, Crofton Middle's Art Department chairperson. "Students know him... they know he is there if they have a problem. He attends all of their extra curricular functions, from the annual play production to Destination Imagination competitions. Parents are extremely proud of Crofton Middle School and how far we've come under his leadership.... Teachers are more enthusiastic than ever because the climate he has instilled is a positive influence on learning."

McNeill says Berzinski brings out the best in his staff. "He steps back, looks, listens and observes before he says anything. He gets teachers to raise their expectations of themselves. When he evaluates a teacher, he is thorough and always says something helpful. He has a good sense of what teachers are able to do. He makes teachers want to get better at what they do."

"I learned a great deal from him as an instructional leader," says Daryl Watson an assistant principal at Chesapeake Bay Middle School who

worked with Berzinski for 18 months. "He sets a goal and has a plan to meet that goal," he says.

Originally from Western Pennsylvania, Berzinski earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Salem International University in Salem, W.Va. and a Masters in Public School Administration from Loyola University in Baltimore. He was hired by Anne Arundel County Public Schools in 1966 as a 5th and 6th grade elementary teacher and took his first job as a principal in 1972.

He loves to teach and still does it every chance he gets. He says the best part of his job is the instructional side — staff development with teachers and being in the hallways with students. He dislikes tasks that tie him to his desk and will often wait to do those kinds of things until the students go home — a practice that keeps him at work until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. often.

He says that over the past 30 years, the job has evolved so that there is less time with instruction and more time on the administrative side. "I spend too much time answering faxes, phone call and Intranet email and too little time with teachers and students," he says. "I fight to do the instructional part."

His advice to those new to the field is, "Don't forget why you're in this business — to educate students and children. It's easy to get bogged down in administrative trivia." ■

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New format opens communication channels

As you will note, this is the first edition of the new AEL "newsletter." It is a departure from our previous newsletters that have served this organization well in the past.

In my mind this format will be an effective tool that can be used by the AEL leadership to communicate to the members and by the members to communicate to the AEL leadership. We welcome members to share their viewpoints in the newsletter. In this manner we can improve our ability to discuss issues, share our thoughts and otherwise communicate with each other. It ushers in a new era and direction for this organization. The revised newsletter will also serve as a visible symbol of our group. It will be representative of what this organization and its members stand for and what we want the school system, our peers and the public to know about us and what we do. It can only improve our image and allow us a more professional and profound voice both within and outside the school community. I hope that you embrace this publication and support its mission.

The AEL Executive Board would like your input concerning the publication. If you have any suggestions that you wish to share please contact a member of the AEL Executive Board, our Administrator Don Smith or President Charles Jansky.

With the current change of administration and the new direction and initiatives set forth by the Superintendent, AEL's role on behalf of its members is more important than ever.

When Don Smith, Charles Jansky and I met with the Superintendent at the beginning of the year, I was left with the impression that he didn't really understand the need for a union that would represent the needs of administrators who act in a supervisory role. He seemed a little surprised to learn that on a per capita basis we have the highest percentage of employees (in excess of 90 percent) who are union members. I believe that this speaks loudly of AEL's ability to provide competent and affordable representation to its members as well as the feeling that the sys-

tem has not captured the hearts and minds of its supervisory employees. It was explained that AEL has never run from the hard issues when it comes to its members' welfare and benefits in the workplace and at the same time the organization and its members have never compromised the delivery of excellence in the educational process. This can be a tough balancing act at times when dollars are short and the needs of the system and its members are vying for these funds.

AEL has tried and will continue to look for unique, innovative as well as equitable compensation for its members and a fair contract that protects its members in the work environment. Through this newsletter we can provide the forum for the exchange of viewpoints and ideas. You will be kept current on topics that impact negotiations, job performance and the like. You will be kept up to date on information involving grievances and concerns of your fellow members.

In short, this publication will give us a new focal point of information and the ability to effectively communicate. I hope you welcome this new member service. ■

*Executive Director's Message
from Richard Kovelant*

Spring Membership Meeting set for April 3

Join your AEL colleagues at the Annual Spring Membership Meeting to be held April 3 at The Rose Restaurant at the Comfort Inn BWI Airport. The cocktail hour will begin at 6:00 p.m.; dinner at 7:00 p.m. and the program at 8:00 p.m.

The cost is \$25.00 for AEL Members; \$30.00 for non-members. RSVP by March 31 to 410.349.1764. Send checks to P.O. Box 74, Severna Park, MD 21146. ■

The Association of Educational Leaders

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Association of Educational Leaders

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Letters to the Editor welcomed

We encourage members to use this newsletter to share their opinions and ideas. If you would like to express your thoughts on the issue of the day (i.e. the reduction of pupil personnel workers and its impact on your school) or time saving tip or a creative solution to a common problem, please send your submission to: Don Smith at 410.349.1764 (fax).

