

AEL Leadership Forum

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 5



JUNE 2026

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 18,
4-7 pm
(General Meeting
starting at 5 pm)
AEL General
Membership
Meeting/Social—
Blue Dolphin,
Crofton

Virtual Link:
[https://
meet.google.com/
neb-mhgw-aaz](https://meet.google.com/neb-mhgw-aaz)

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Doing More with Less

By Tracey Ahern, AEL President

This year felt like one long exercise in doing more with less.

Less certainty. Less staffing stability. Less funding than our schools need. Less progress at the bargaining table than we pushed for.

And yet every day, principals, assistant principals, coordinators, and special assistants across this county unlocked buildings, answered impossible questions, managed crises, supported staff, comforted families, solved problems, attended events, wrote plans, balanced budgets, and somehow kept moving forward.

That work often goes unnoticed.

It should not.

Thank you for doing it anyway.

As we head into summer, there are a few things I want members to know.

First, negotiations. We reached a tentative agreement that includes a 2% Step Equivalent Increase and a 3% COLA contingent upon County Council funding. The current telework agreement will continue for another year. The Board withdrew its Student Language proposal, and AEL withdrew its Evaluation and Rating proposal after the Board declined to provide a counterproposal.

I know some members have asked why we are voting before the County Council takes final action on the budget. The answer is simple. Ratification allows us to move forward immediately if funding is approved. Waiting until after the Council vote would delay implementation and could delay the compensation package itself. Ratifying the agreement does not change the funding contingency. It simply positions us to move forward if and when the funding is approved.



If you have not voted, please do. Participation matters.

Second, full book negotiations.

The questions and comments submitted during ratification tell me something important. Our members have ideas.

Questions about telework. Questions about workload. Questions about flexibility, compensation, evaluations, and working conditions.

Good.

Those are exactly the conversations we need to be having.

Some of the suggestions submitted, including flex time for evening and weekend work and addi-

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Doing More with Less...

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*Tracey Ahern,
AEL President*

tional telework opportunities, are ideas that AEL has discussed and will continue to discuss through the Workload and Compensation Committee. Other ideas will likely become priorities as we move into full book negotiations.

Over the next year, we are going to take a hard look at every article in the agreement and ask whether it still reflects the reality of the work. Some language has held up well. Some has not. We need members engaged in those conversations because the best ideas rarely come from a negotiating table. They come from people doing the work every day.

Third, the TAAAC School Satisfaction Survey.

AEL's position remains unchanged. Members should not be engaging in discussions, presentations, analysis, or action planning related to school-level survey results until AEL has had the opportunity to meet with AACPS leadership regarding the purpose of the survey, the use of the data, and expectations for Unit II members. We have communicated our concerns and will continue to keep members informed as those conversations move forward.

Fourth, the future of AEL.

This summer we are forming a committee to take an honest look at where we are as an organization and where we should go next.

That means examining every option. Affiliation with AFSA. Affiliation with MSEA. Building additional internal capacity through dedicated staff and legal support. Remaining independent. Other possibilities we have not yet considered.

This is not a recommendation for any particular path.

It is a recognition that organizations should periodically ask themselves hard questions.

No decisions have been made. No decisions will be made without member input. But we need people willing to help gather information, ask questions, and do the work necessary to help members make informed decisions.

If that interests you, please complete the committee interest form.

We are also building an AEL Grievance Panel. End-of-year ratings and evaluations are being finalized, and we know concerns will arise. If you are willing to help review concerns and support fellow members through that process, we could use your help.

Finally, a reminder.

AEL is not the Executive Board.

AEL is not the negotiations team.

AEL is not me.

AEL is 338 members.

The members who attended County Council meetings this spring.

The members who answered calls for action.

The members who volunteered for committees.

The members who asked hard questions during negotiations.

The members who quietly support colleagues every day.

That is AEL.

The strength of this organization has never come from a title. It comes from members who are willing to engage, speak up, and support one another.

Get some rest this summer. Spend time with your family. Read something that has nothing to do with education. Go somewhere without checking your email every ten minutes.

Then come back ready.

We have important work to do.

Hoping Your Summer Has No Appeal

By Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

The school year has ended, but the work continues. While students and faculty will be home for the summer, Unit II school-based employees can enjoy the peace and solitude of empty school buildings and central office can relish the reduced traffic at Riva Road. Frankly, spending time with family and friends or taking a vacation would be preferable to sitting in a vacant venue. For some, however, the summer adds another wonderful activity, the Evaluation Appeal. Hopefully many of you will be able to miss participation in this activity, but I would be remiss if I didn't share some thoughts for those that are currently and sadly participants and those who may become participants in the future. Your ratings are available instruments for management to justify reassignments and placements. The rating determines, among other things, (but in an educational sense) if

you play well with others (faculty and students). It also seriously examines your ability to follow instructional guidelines and responsibilities. All these performance decisions are made by your immediate supervisor, who you can only hope has provided constructive criticism and analysis before concluding that your performance does not meet his/her expectations.

Many of you have had the unfortunate experience of receiving an evaluation that, in the opinion of your supervisor, resulted in an overall failing "grade." In some cases, the evaluator merely finds you are performing at a "developing" or "ineffective level." This "report card," if you will, is usually the byproduct of a less than satisfactory Growth Plan result that was initiated during the school year. Since the Growth Plan is likely the catalyst for the evaluation, it is critical that you protect yourself once

you are placed on this plan. First, it is extremely important that you clearly understand the expectations that are required and incorporated into the plan and most importantly, confirm your understanding in writing with your supervisor. Any misunderstanding of these goals will be used to support a failure of the plan on your part. Get a clear baseline understanding at the beginning rather than wait to challenge the interpretation at the conclusion of a rating. Second, document, in writing, a summary of your meetings with your supervisor during the implementation process. Once again, it may become critical to your final evaluation in that what was discussed may not support the finding that was reached and incorporated into the evaluation. Third, keep track of the key targeted meeting dates and if they were missed by your supervisor, make note of the missed dates. If you

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*Rick Kovelant, AEL
Executive Director &
General Counsel*

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No Appeal ...

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“Your rating is a key component of your continued assignment, salary continuation or, in some cases, your retention as a Unit II employee. Documentation can be a vital factor in a successful appeal.”

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Executive Director and
General Counsel*

reasonably request a change of date and one is not granted, keep a record of this as well.

Evaluations are subject to appeal since they may form an integral basis for your transfer or “demotion” and most importantly, the redlining of your salary at the new position. You must take steps to challenge the results. The initial appeal process is as follows:

“A Unit II employee who is dissatisfied with any items of his/her rating may appeal to an AACPS and Association of Educational Leaders (AEL) joint appeal committee, provided the member has notified the rater of his/her intention to appeal and has submitted a written request, stating the items contested, to the Executive Director of Human Resources, within ten (10) work days after the receipt of a final rating or if there is no rating, by July 15th.

He/she may also provide written comments in response to his/her rating that shall be attached to the rating and included in his/her Official Personnel File. In conformance with the procedures outlined in The Evaluation Appeal Procedure document, which is jointly agreed upon by AACPS and AEL, the joint appeal committee shall provide a decision to uphold, alter, or remove the rating.

If the Unit II employee disagrees with the decision of the joint appeal committee, he/she may appeal that decision to the Superintendent or his/her designee within ten (10) work days of the joint appeal committee’s decision.”

The Appeal panel is comprised of two members appointed by AEL, two members appointed by the BOE, and a third neutral party acceptable to the panel participants. A

majority decision is required to sustain or correct an evaluation. For more information, please contact me.

Appeals can challenge both substantive and procedural defects in the rating. While challenges to a rater’s conclusions of a substantive nature are more difficult to challenge, bias, misinformation and the like can support the need for reevaluation and a change in the actual rating. Procedural defects such as missed or non-existing meetings often result in an evaluation being corrected.

There is no reason to forgo challenging a rating that you believe is incorrect. Your rating is a key component of your continued assignment, salary continuation or, in some cases, your retention as a Unit II employee. Documentation can be a vital factor in a successful appeal. Always available to assist you in this matter!

Making the Most of Our Virtual Workdays

By Stacey Smith, AEL First Vice President

As Unit II leaders, we are fortunate to have access to virtual workdays that provide dedicated time to focus on the many responsibilities that support our schools, staff, and students. These days are an important benefit that allows us to step away from the daily demands of our buildings and devote uninterrupted time to planning, analysis, communication, compliance tasks, professional learn-

ing, and other leadership responsibilities.

While virtual workdays require supervisor approval, there are no restrictions on when they may be used throughout the year. This flexibility allows leaders to select days that best align with their professional responsibilities and workload demands. Whether preparing for a major school initiative, reviewing data, completing required reports, engaging in strategic planning, or simply creating space for focused work that is often difficult to accomplish in a busy school environment, virtual workdays can be a valuable tool for increasing productivity and effectiveness.

As educational leaders, our work extends far beyond the school day. Tak-

ing advantage of these approved virtual work opportunities can help us manage responsibilities more efficiently while supporting a healthy work-life balance. Thoughtful use of virtual workdays ultimately benefits our schools by ensuring leaders have the time and space needed to complete high-quality work that advances student success.

As we plan for the coming months, consider how these days might support your goals and priorities. School-based Unit II members will have five days, and non-school-based Unit II members will have 10 days to utilize.

By using this benefit intentionally, we can continue to strengthen our leadership practice and better serve the AACPS community.

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Stacey Smith, AEL First Vice President





5-Star Recognition

As I reflect on another successful school year, I want to take a moment to recognize two outstanding members of the South River administra-

tive team, **Ms. Chelley Choulis** and **Mr. John Halmi**. Serving as first-year assistant principals is no small task, yet Chelley and John have

embraced every challenge with professionalism, dedication, and a commitment to our students, staff, and families. Throughout the year, they have worked tirelessly to learn the many facets of school leadership while building strong relationships and supporting the daily operations of South River High School. Their willingness to learn, collaborate, and serve has made a positive impact on our school community. Whether working with students, supporting teachers, partnering with families, or helping lead important initiatives, both have demonstrated a deep commitment to the Seahawk community. Chelley and John have been tremendous additions to our school-based administrative team, and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside them. I look forward to seeing their continued growth and leadership in the years ahead.

**From~ Stacey Smith,
Principal**



Chelley Choulis



John Halmi



Can't attend in person? Here's the link to connect to tune into the AEL update. <https://meet.google.com/neb-mhcx-aaaz> **General Membership Meeting 5 pm.**

Nominate a fellow Unit II member for 5-Star Recognition!

<https://forms.gle/mNz1cx2QTQEc4jkH7>

Another School Year Complete...So What's Next?

By Edie Picken, President/Director Emeritus

As the school year comes to a close, this is a good time to reflect on all you have accomplished. While some days were challenging, they do not define the year. Remember that everyone gave their best with conviction, compassion, and pride in serving students, staff, and the community.

First, congratulations to those who are retiring! Now you will be able to enjoy the things you may have put off during your career. The adjustment to retirement can take time for some, but it is truly rewarding. As I finish my fourth year of retirement, I have enjoyed both longtime interests and new ones. I encourage all retirees to join the Maryland Retired School Personnel Association (MRSPA) and the Anne Arundel Retired School Personnel Association (AARSPA). Both organizations offer many ways to stay informed, involved, and connected. For more information,

visit their websites: www.mrspa.org and www.aarspa.org.

Second, for those continuing their work with AACPS, please take time for yourselves this summer. It is important to start next year rested, renewed, and ready for what lies ahead. You have earned your annual leave, so use it! Relax and spend time on activities that bring you joy. When you are away, give yourself permission to disconnect and step back from work. As I shared in a previous newsletter, work with your department colleagues to divide responsibilities so tasks are covered during absences. Sharing the workload helps everything run more smoothly. I also offered additional suggestions in earlier newsletters, which are available on our website, www.aelaacps.org.

Finally, AEL's Executive Board and Negotiating Team have worked tirelessly to advocate for what you deserve.

Negotiating with the Board is challenging and often frustrating, especially when reasonable requests are repeatedly denied. They have also stood behind Unit II members facing unjust discipline and continued working to strengthen AEL. Still, AEL cannot do this work alone and needs your support.

When an Executive Board member asks you to show up in numbers, the request is made with purpose. Other groups, such as TAAAC and SAAAAAC, consistently mobilize their members, and that visible support makes a difference. I understand that attending can conflict with family or school responsibilities, but if you are able, please consider your presence is, especially during budget discussions. I end with this because the Executive Board will soon hold its annual retreat to review the year, reflect, and plan changes that better serve our members. Their work is done for you.



2025-26 AEL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE/BOARD/STAFF

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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.