

AEL Leadership Forum

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 5 DECEMBER 2020 / JANUARY 2021

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec. 9, 2020
**AEL Executive
Board Meeting**
5 pm
via Google Meet

Jan. 13, 2021
**AEL Executive
Board Meeting**
5 pm
TBA

Feb. 10, 2021
**AEL Executive
Board Meeting**
5 pm
Via Google Meet

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So, What is AEL Up To?

By Edie Picken, AEL President

First, I hope that all are remaining safe and well as we continue to forge through our days with COVID. As frustrating as it is, we need to remind ourselves that we will get through it and we will be better and stronger for it. What our condition calls for is grace, compassion and understanding.

As you heard, one of our faithful and loyal members, Nelson Horine, lost his wife just before the holidays. All of AEL sends its condolences and support to Nelson and his family as they try to get through what should be a joyous time but instead grieve their loss during this tumultuous time in the world.

So, what's happening in AEL's world? Negotiations finally have started. Yes,

after months of trying to get the process started, it was not until recently the negotiating team had its first meeting with the Board. Needless to say, the process continues to be an arduous one, as well as



Edie Picken, AEL President

contentious. Understand, we have made every concerted effort to get these conversations started but to no avail. The Board held off, as it has over the last several years, until just before the Superintendent presents his budget to the Board of Education. This certainly

does not make school-based employees feel valued. The higher ups negotiate their salaries before the rest of us. TAAAC just got out of impasse with

what they could get for the current year. AEL has the current year. We are negotiating for the next

year. The process is frustrating. No matter what letter, or words of alleged encouragement are sent to us via Bob Mosier, the fact remains that the Superintendent has already made his budget and now it is up to AEL to try and get what

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we can. We have made an initial request that will hopefully be accepted and approved; however, what everyone needs to understand—the Superintendent and the Board of Education can come to a unified agreement on his budget, but it remains in the hands of the County Executive and County Council whether the budget will be funded and to what level. As my predecessor, Will Myers, always said, “This entire process is the cart before the horse.” Unfortunately, this process is law, and so it will be incumbent upon us as an organization to engage more actively with the State Legislature to try and get the process changed so we don’t have to feel like Oliver Twist asking for more.

One thing that has become regular practice at the Board is the creation of new job titles that lead to sizeable salary increases for those who are anointed to those positions. The number of folks who make up Units V

and VI has more than raised eyebrows, especially when those salaries are increased by \$7,000 to \$10,000. It’s interesting that these positions and salaries are approved without much, if any, questioning. The Superintendent presents it to the Board, and for the most part, it is just universally approved with little to no discussion. Yet, when the rest of us put forth for what we feel we deserve, while smartly keeping in mind what the economy looks like, it becomes a back and forth, yes or no.

In order to understand some of what it is we ask for on behalf of Unit II, I encourage you to read Rick Kovelant’s article in this issue about COLA vs steps. This is a very important article that sheds light on what these two actually mean and what they do for 342 Unit II employees.

Moving on into the holidays and soon to be new year, please be mindful of taking care of yourself and your

families. Our tendencies are to be workhorses on behalf of those for whom we are responsible and dedicated. Take time to do things you enjoy even within the parameters and protocols in place. There is no telling how long we will be in our current state of virtual education. That being said, please put yourselves first whenever you can. Our charges look to you for direction and support. If cannot do that for ourselves, we cannot do it for them.

AEL will keep you updated on the work we are doing through negotiations and other committee work. If anyone would like to become more actively involved, let us know. There are several committees on which we could use your help.

Best to all of you for a safe and healthy holiday season.

Steps and COLAs: Do They Really Mix?

By Rick Kovelant, AEL Executive Director and General Counsel

There are some things in life that seem to go together. For example, Lucy and Ricky, nitro and glycerin, rum and coke, and cookies and milk to name but a few. In some cases, other things appear to go together, but not quite. With reference to Unit II compensation, the almost “fits” are salary steps and COLAs. During the course of negotiations, these two almost compatible methods of funding salary increases are seemingly the most difficult to understand (perhaps more so than figuring out St. Thomas Aquinas’ the “number of angels on the head of a pin”) and thereafter its application to the salary scale. This difficulty is attributable to the failure to understand their evolution and what they were meant to accomplish as opposed to their current use. A bit

difficult to explain but I will give it my best.

Salary steps have been widely used in governmental salary scales for certain governmental employees. For example, when I was employed as a law clerk to a judge in Washington, DC, I was placed in a job group and assigned a step location within that job group. Again, by way of example, I was designated a GS8, step 5 employee. As I progressed each year in my job, I did not leave the job group, I simply increased another step. Absent a reclassification of my duties, I would never leave the original job group, but I would proceed along the steps until they were exhausted at the top end. Much like the current Negotiated Agreement,

each step advancement carried with it an incremental fixed percentage resulting in a pay increase.

In the case of Unit II, that incremental pay increase is approximately 1% between steps. I should now add it is the equivalent in value to a 1% COLA.

Placement on the Unit II salary scale has little to do with your longevity of employment as an administrator. Transferees into Anne Arundel County from outside of the system, or even within the system from Unit I, may have a higher or lower step placement than another Unit II employee who has been an administrator for a longer period of time. This obviously impacts where your Unit II position starts from a salary perspective. Also, keep in

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mind, even your transfer (re-assignment) from one school to another will, depending on student population, impact your compensation and its impact on corresponding steps. Movement on the salary scale steps is universally applied, placement is not. OK, so we have determined that not everyone on the scale with the same years of administrative experience is in the same place as others. The question is however, what value (or not) is there in accepting an enhanced step movement as a pay raise or a catch up for past unfunded compensation as opposed to bringing compensation current and/or enhanced by a COLA? Is this really a distinction without a difference when you con-

sider the effect of a step advancement (1% increase) or a COLA of 1% applied to your current salary?

Before discussing the solution to this rather significant quandary, it is necessary to understand just what a COLA used to mean and then understand what it has become. A “COLA” originally meant a cost-of-living adjustment taking into account inflation and other economic factors. It was usually tied into a US Department of Labor statistical adjustment for a given metropolitan area. In our case, it could have been tied to Washington, DC or Baltimore, etc. Once determined, it was used to ensure that the value of compensation would be in alignment with the current value of the cost of living

in that designated area. In other words, it was a tool used to make sure the value of compensation was not lost to inflation among these other factors. It was not a pay raise per se. It merely meant the pay would be adjusted to the current market. These adjustments are currently made in a similar form for those of us (myself included) who receive Social Security. Sure, my check is more this coming year, but, it has only adjusted for inflation to make sure my award remains in step with the economy or so they say.

Getting back to my question (in case you forgot by now, “What value or not is there in accepting enhanced step movement as a pay raise or a catch up for past unfund-

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Steps and COLAs...

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ed compensation as opposed to bringing compensation current and/or enhanced by a COLA?), consider this:

1. If the current salary scale runs out of available steps and no further steps exist, the only increase available without expanding the scale is the use of a COLA (not really a correct one, I would submit). Keep in mind that some day you may find yourself at the end of the scale and your pay at the top could be frozen without the use or misuse of a COLA.
2. Funding of COLAs and steps are always based on what the County ultimately agrees to fund. Regardless of a negotiated agreement, Unit II always holds its

breath regarding funding and if it doesn't occur, we are back arguing the COLA versus step issue.

3. As long as your salary is increased each year by an acceptable amount, is it really important how you arrive at that increase? Maybe the best of all worlds would be to have the step progression, but increase the value between steps in addition use a traditional COLA to its current market value is consistent with the economy. This is not to suggest that negotiating for recovery of the value of steps that were unfunded and lost should be abandoned, but does it matter if the value of that loss is paid for by a simple percentage salary increase? Keep

in mind that moving along the "step road" as a tool for catching up for the loss in past years will only move you more quickly to the end of the scale and potentially into the abyss leaving you with only a "COLA" to fund additional compensation.

I must admit, Unit II employees have been given "Diet COLAS" over the last several years compared with Unit VI employees, who have no salary scale with steps but do have the ability to be reclassified – resulting in higher compensation, a new job title and essentially the same duties. It is about time the Board and the County look to properly increase compensation to Unit II employees and if it entails adding more sugar to the now Diet COLA, so be it! I say let's sweeten the deal!

"If the current salary scale runs out of available steps and no further steps exist, the only increase available without expanding the scale is the use of a COLA..."



New Members

Rachel Amstutz, Principal, Monarch Academy

Kory Tvedt, Assistant Principal, Lothian Elementary

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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2020-21 AEL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE/BOARD/STAFF

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| Gene Summers (2020-24) | 1st VP | (Coordinator, World/Class Lang.) | (o)222-5424 | esummers@aacps.org |
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