

Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations D a m a s c u s C l u s t e r

**Damascus High School – John T. Baker Middle School
Cedar Grove Elementary - Clearspring Elementary – Damascus Elementary
Rockwell Elementary – Woodfield Elementary**

April 15, 2009

Damascus Cluster Testimony before the Montgomery County Council

Council President and Council Members:

As a representative of the Damascus Cluster schools, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share our community's concerns with you, our elected officials, with regard to the county operating budget.

First, do you know what the fish said when it ran into a brick wall? "Dam!" Perhaps you're feeling the same way. We greatly sympathize with Council members as they face difficult decisions during a tight budget year. Added to that is the understanding that it probably won't get any better next year. If there is anything positive in all this, it is the way in which our county and school employees have demonstrated their willingness to forego their previously negotiated Cost of Living Adjustments for the greater good. This is truly appreciated by us all.

As we look at the proposed budget presented by the Board of Education, we note the necessary cuts. Just as you do, we struggle to prioritize the many valuable programs within our school system. Picking and choosing is just plain nuts because someone inevitably comes out a loser. As school advocates though, we stress that education is a necessary investment for our community and its future.

As we all pull together in this economic crisis and make the necessary sacrifices, we applaud those principals in our cluster who have stated "we'll adjust". There are still a few concerns that remain however:

- Due to the likely delayed funding of planned CIP programs, we would like the County Council to reconsider the position cuts in the Division of Maintenance. We will need those workers to maintain our aging buildings.
- Outside of the MCPS budget but affecting schools nonetheless, we support funding the current compliment of Educational Facilities Officers and crossing guards. Safety in our schools (and on the way to and from) is of utmost importance. As a parent of regular walkers to elementary school, our crossing guard offered so much more to the community than simply crossing our children safely. She was aware of issues in and around the neighborhood and reported them as necessary.
- We also support the current compliment of Health Room Technicians, again a position that does so much more than take temperatures and apply ice packs.

Regarding the Federal stimulus funds, we urge the council to carefully consider any future implications of utilizing these funds to replace the county's obligation to educational funding. Since one can't overuse an analogy, think of that fish now with the following dilemma: Does he go for that juicy worm on the hook? It's mighty tasty and it will get him out of that dammed up lake. But if he does, will he be able to swim in the lake next year? Guess it depends on if the fisherman follows the "Catch and Release" laws.

Thank you for your time and your efforts on our behalf.

Sincerely,

Leslie Cuneo
Damascus Cluster Coordinator

Kristin Tribble
Damascus Cluster Coordinator