

MCCPTA Testimony Damascus Cluster

November 10, 2011

Damascus Cluster Testimony before the Montgomery County Board of Education, Facilities Hearing

Damascus High School

Of greatest concern to our community is Damascus High School (DHS), one of the oldest school buildings in the county. Our infrastructure is failing and parent complaints are on the rise.

Though Damascus High School provides the quality education expected in Montgomery County, our facility is, quite simply, old. Originally built in 1950, our building was last modernized in 1978. It now has so many repairs and modernization needs as to warrant a new facility. Flooring repairs, window repairs, auditorium repairs, gym repairs, HVAC total system replacement – the list of major repairs and renovations goes on and on for Damascus High School. We urge that replacement of this facility be made a priority.

The following are Damascus Cluster comments about DHS submitted to the superintendent's office earlier this year:

Damascus Cluster Comments, June 2011 – Capital Improvement Program

Damascus cluster schools request the following maintenance efforts be expedited by the county in order to continue to provide a positive environment and a quality education for our students at Damascus High School. One of the two oldest high schools in the county, the Damascus community would like to secure a date to repair our crumbling infrastructure or, better yet, replace our building.

HVAC

Continue to replace entire system as the climate control is inconsistent. Complaints are frequent and issues are constantly being reported, including air quality concerns due to excessive heat/cold and from the pipes leaking from condensation because they need to be rewrapped. We request continued support for the HVAC replacement projects being planned for this summer (Restaurant Management and Technology Education room) and for complete HVAC system replacement through FY14.

GYM FLOOR

Small gym floor needs to be redone. Pieces continually break up; the floor gets patched to maintain safety; however it is increasingly difficult to repair. The floor needs to be replaced. Many individuals use this gym including students for PE classes, student club activities, and community groups. Gym space is highly sought after and as we continue to focus on wellness for better health, many will benefit from a gym that is safe and accessible.

WINDOWS

Windows leak during hard rains, including into some stairwells. Wet stairwells are an obvious safety issue. Some leaks are due to the brick structure's age.

AUDITORIUM

Our auditorium should be renovated to include new lights, sound system, new stage floor and new seating. The auditorium projects for the lights, seating and sound panels were scheduled in previous CIP budgets (lighting, FY10; sound panels, FY11 to FY12; seating, FY14) but, for unknown reasons, were removed. The stage flooring has become a safety issue.

STADIUM SEATING

DHS requests additional stadium bleachers due to insufficient seating. This is an ongoing concern as DHS has a strong athletic program and our stadium seating is not sufficient.

ARTIFICIAL TURF FIELD

Though not a priority compared with school infrastructure, our community would like to request support for an artificial turf field and additional stadium seating. Field space is limited as well and we are forced to hold many practices at other locations to accommodate all teams.

One Damascus High School parent writes: "We realize every school will get its turn; however the well being of our students is now coming into question. It is no longer an issue of discomfort. Students need the basics of shelter, safety and security before going to that next level. We feel it is time to look hard at the list of schools needing replacement, and to make every effort to bring Damascus High School to the forefront."

The Damascus community urges the Board of Education to please keep replacement of Damascus High School a priority.

Damascus Elementary and Middle Schools

Of course our elementary schools also have needs...

Clearspring Elementary

- Front drive needs to be repaved
- Playground blacktop needs to be totally redone. Holes in the macadam are dangerous as students run and play
- Gym floor seal is cracking- again- which is, of course, dangerous to students in PE classes.

Woodfield Elementary

- Gym floor needs to be replaced
- Air conditioning and heating system frequently break down with a strong variation in temperature at times from room to room.

Damascus Elementary

- Facility replacement requested
- HVAC needs total system replacement
- School roof needs to be replaced
- Interior and exterior need repainting
- Would like to expand parking lot and to re-assess the car-rider drop-off design

Cedar Grove Elementary

- Continue to fund the second half of HVAC replacement for summer 2012
- Continue to fund bathroom renovations for FY 14
- Urges that the new Clarksburg Cluster Elementary stay slated to open in August 2014

Baker Middle School

- HVAC needs total system replacement

MCCPTA understands that the county has tight budget constraints. Damascus area schools have requested what we feel have been ongoing, unresolved issues and capital improvement projects necessary for a safe and effective learning environment for our children.

The Damascus Cluster would also like to state for the record that we oppose the delay in the building of the new Clarksburg/Damascus middle school. We are a growing community and new school construction needs to reflect our growth. We also oppose the 10-year delay in modernizing Damascus Elementary School – a school that is 80 years old! Please weigh the cost of a decade of repairs and renovations to a school that will ultimately be replaced.

We urge the Board of Education to listen to us and allocate sufficient funds to move these capital improvement and facilities construction projects forward.

Of course capital improvement also includes technology. We in Damascus request that measures be taken to reduce the discrepancy in technology between MCPS facilities. While interactive white boards and the latest computers have made their way into MCPS middle and high schools, our county elementary schools lag behind. Some elementary schools seem to be flagship schools for the county – equipped with all the latest bells and whistles - while others still have chalkboards (not even dry-erase boards). We understand that while modern technology does not necessarily advance the elementary school 2.0 curriculum, the all-important exposure to technology is expected by county elementary school parents. Please address this variability between new and not-so-new county schools. Our older schools should meet the same high technology standards as our newer schools.

Our CIP comments having been said, not all Damascus Cluster feedback is for “wants and needs.” On an up note, our principals have favorable comments as well. Clearspring Elementary School reports that their new bathrooms are beautiful and their new skylights mean less heat on hot days (and are therefore more energy efficient). Woodfield Elementary School has a nice new blacktop and a classroom has been renovated to accommodate their PEP students, and Lois P. Rockwell Elementary school reports that “they are in “good shape” and grateful that they are in the queue to have their playground equipment replaced.”

Damascus cluster schools thank you for your continued efforts to modernize our county schools and to keep Montgomery County, Maryland one of the premier areas in the nation for families to live and to learn.