

MCCPTA Testimony
Damascus Cluster

January 11, 2012

**Operating Budget Testimony before the Board of Education -
Damascus Cluster Coordinator**

Damascus Cluster schools support the MCPS Operating Budget recommendations for Fiscal Year 2013. Performing a budget-balancing act in a sluggish economy while maintaining the integrity of the quality education system parents expect in this county is certainly no easy task.

Please keep the following in mind, when future funding capabilities allow:

An increase in staff salaries; not just for all teachers, but all support staff...from bus drivers to secretaries to building services. Many MCPS employees have quite a challenge to make a living and many work two jobs to make ends meet. The \$8.6 million proposed increase in employee salaries and compensation in Montgomery County budget compares unfavorably with the \$10.8 million proposed in neighboring Frederick County – a county with a lower population than Montgomery County. No need to remind you that MCPS employees have not had a cost of living adjustment in years. We need to be able to retain and recruit highly trained and effective teachers and quality school personnel.

Also, stipends have been cut for our class sponsors as well as general and academic support clubs. We need to keep our teachers and support professionals engaged and the programs they sponsor vital as part of a well-rounded education for our students.

We must keep staff development on the forefront especially in regard to training staff on new technology. We need to ensure funds are available for substitutes, and for conference and training sessions so that teachers can expand their skills; and be able to fund tuition reimbursement so our staff can further their education. We must also fund staff development teaching positions needed for direct teacher support at our schools.

In future budgets, funding for our para-educators needs to be reinstated -- the sooner the better. We need our para-educators back. Damascus cluster urges that future budgets see an increase in funding for these important members of our teaching staff. Every student, whether general ed or special needs, deserves the quality instruction essential to success.

The SRO program; a victim of budget cuts last year, will need to be revitalized in future budgets. The current structure has schools sharing their officers. Damascus Cluster schools prefer greater visibility of SRO staff and would like to see an increase in security staff so as to better align the ratio of students to security personnel. Every child deserves to learn in a safe, secure environment free of bullying and unlawful activities.

Technology: one of the most important aspects of a quality, modern education. Whether it's interactive white boards, computer labs, or Elmos, everyone can agree that advanced technology is an important component in a modern curriculum and that component has a direct impact on our nation's future in a market gone global. The US is a world leader, and Montgomery County students certainly have a bright future. Let's ensure they have the tools they need today to lead the world tomorrow.

On a positive note, despite a reduction in past budgets, SAT scores for MCPS students are up 25 points from two years ago at this time. There has also been an increase in the number of students taking Advanced Placement courses – always a positive sign. Also, let's remember that Montgomery County schools lead the state in successfully passing AP exams.

As you can see, MCPS schools have been able to maintain the high scholastic standards parents expect despite the lingering tough economy. But, one last thing...in regard to the Maintenance of Effort issue; please keep in mind we need to increase the funding floor once the economy recovers so we can remain one of the most premier school systems in the country. Damascus cluster schools thank you for the continued level of support as we look ahead to another outstanding year.