

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

February 6, 2008

Damascus Cluster Testimony before the Montgomery County Council

Council President and Council Members:

I, along with Kristin Tribble, represent the Damascus Cluster schools. We would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of our community and to share our concerns with our elected officials with regard to capital investment. We also appreciate your accommodating our busy PTA week by allowing us to testify tonight.

We sympathize with Council members as they face difficult decisions during a tight budget year. As school advocates though, we stress that education is a necessary investment for our community and its future.

Damascus Cluster is made up of eight schools with Damascus High being the third oldest high school in Montgomery County and Damascus Elementary holding the honor of being the second oldest elementary school (1934). At this time, none of our schools are slated for a facility modernization let alone replacement. Under the current recommended CIP, the bathrooms at three of our schools are scheduled to be renovated in the next few years (FY2009 – Baker MS, FY2010 - Damascus HS and Damascus ES).

The community has come to accept that we will take what we can get and are overjoyed that working bathrooms may finally be on the horizon.

Our most serious concern in Damascus is actually a cluster away. Damascus High School is now within 10% of capacity. The opening of Clarksburg High School greatly improved our previous overcrowded conditions. Baker Middle School is now at capacity, following its recent addition. Cedar Grove Elementary School (shared with Clarksburg Cluster) is approximately 20% over capacity but we see relief in our near future when Clarksburg Elementary School #8 opens in 2009. That all said, we are concerned at the increasing overcrowding in Clarksburg with the unfortunate likelihood of a spillover into Damascus Cluster. The new Rocky Hill Middle School in Clarksburg Cluster is utilizing portables and is over capacity by 14%. The projections for future growth do not indicate any relief for Rocky Hill, only disastrous overcrowding.

The Board of Education has approved an expanded feasibility study to address the issue of overcrowding at the middle school level in our sister cluster. The study would look at building a new middle school within Damascus Cluster to accommodate the growing population in neighboring Clarksburg. It would also look at a possible addition at Montgomery Village Middle School in an effort to shift student population to the Watkins Mill Cluster. The study is needed to determine the most cost effective and least disruptive solution to this real problem and we need the funds to put this into action.

As you face the many decisions before you, it is perhaps time for the Council to consider increasing the Spending Affordability Guidelines and to explore creative ways to finance such an increase. We in Montgomery County need to keep pace with our growing population and that means NOT delaying the funding of new schools and additions. It also means taking care of our existing schools. We have a fiduciary responsibility to fund the maintenance of our existing infrastructures so as not to increase their costs later down the road. We know that's a tough row to hoe and we don't envy the choices you will have to make. But please carefully consider the ramifications of approving less than the recommended amount for our county schools. We urge you to remain committed to our children, teachers, and our community.

Sincerely,

Leslie Cuneo
Damascus Cluster Coordinator

Kristin Tribble
Damascus Cluster Coordinator