

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

January 13, 2010

Damascus Cluster Testimony before the Montgomery County Board of Education

Dr. Weast and Members of the Board:

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 regarding the county's operating budget. First, we greatly sympathize with the Board as they face what will surely be a huge budget deficit. Hopefully, we are near the end of the current recession; however that will not alleviate the cuts that are needed now. With this said, I would urge the Board to give great consideration to each potential budget cut. Robbing our children of the type of education that is needed to sustain a vibrant economy will only ensure future recessions and further budget cuts.

The Damascus Cluster is in full support of the Superintendent's Maintenance of Effort level request. The Damascus Cluster, however, recognizes that avoiding cuts at this point is highly unlikely. If cuts are necessary, the Damascus Cluster would urge the Board to avoid a "slash and burn" approach and instead use a targeted approach to determine how to reduce the budget. We would also urge the Board to consider the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities as a guideline, as this document represents a collaborative effort regarding what is important to maintaining our children's first-rate education.

One MCCPTA priority that the Damascus cluster feels very strongly about is **ensuring academic support for students needing assistance and/or enrichment**. We need to make sure every student has help filling in the gaps in his education, whether that child is struggling or accelerating in comparison to his peers. We **can not** reduce the number of staff in our schools and still meet this priority. That means Staff Development, Reading teachers, Reading Initiative teachers and Focus teachers must remain in place. This includes the staff for the Center for the Highly Gifted at Clearspring Elementary. 150 students and 6 staff make up our Center for the Highly Gifted, if this program is reduced as a result of budget cuts, which 30 children and 2 staff will be asked not to return?

The famous comedian Bill Cosby said “I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.” While these words may have been said in jest, they hold a timely lesson for us today. We will never reach a consensus on what items should be cut from our budget, but the cuts will still need to be made. We in the Damascus Cluster ask that any proposed cuts be determined with the utmost forethought by the Board and with our children’s best interest in mind.

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

Sincerely,

Dawn Lee
Damascus Cluster Coordinator