

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**

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council
On the Proposed Operating Budget for FY 2011

April 8, 2010

On behalf of the Damascus Cluster of schools, I am here to say – Invest in our future.

We live in a County where we have come to expect a standard of life that outshines that of our neighbors. This heightened standard applies to our jobs, homes, and of course, our public schools. We know that people and corporations move to Montgomery County because of this standard. The expectation is that if you live here, the bounties will exist. All these parts of our way of life are intertwined; without one, the others will certainly falter. If our school reputation falls, what effect will that have on the County as a whole? We must Invest in our future.

We understand that the current economic conditions are not the norm, and that school funding may fall short of our expectations. It's important to understand what one small change in the budget can have on the bigger picture.

An increase in class size seems simple enough, however, the affects on staff that accompany this change are staggering. Our teachers are trained to teach to each child's needs, whether the child is accelerated, struggling, or happily moving through the curriculum. More students in a class equals more variables in the way the curriculum must be taught, which can decrease the attention each student receives. Increased class size may also result in combination classes, such as an elementary school teacher with 4th and 5th grade children together. Knowing the rigors of the MCPS curriculum, it is unreasonable to believe that one teacher can affectively teach 2 curriculums simultaneously. Especially when these curriculums are not aligned, like in math, science and social studies. Additionally, if support staff, like Reading Specialists, Staff Development teachers and paraeducators are reduced in our schools, the students and intervention groups they serve won't have the academic support they so desperately need.

There are costs associated with budget cuts, and these costs cannot be easily quantified. Losses in education are hard to gain back. The people who work with our children are the most important factor to their future success. Invest in our future.

There exists an obligation to keep our schools clean, healthy, safe and secure. We are concerned about the reductions in Educational Facilities Officers and decreased hours for school health room aides. If only 17 EFOs remain within MCPS, which communities will no longer have a dedicated officer helping to keep the children safe?

In spite of the budget cuts, we must ensure a quality education program for our children; we cannot limit the offering of a comprehensive education for all. The town of Damascus is filled with people who have the students' best interests at heart. Please help us Invest in our future.