

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

November 12, 2008

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

Dr. Weast and Members of the Board:

This September, I had the pleasure of escorting a group of 8th grade Boy Scouts to one of the community forums. They were working on their Citizenship in the Community badge. I thought they would probably get fidgety and bored but to my surprise, I looked over and found them completely engrossed in the testimonies. They were, of course, transfixed by the testimony from one of their favorite teachers, Christopher Lloyd. They listened closely to the student from Gaithersburg High School. Interestingly, on the ride home back to Damascus, these 5 boys pretty much pounded you guys. Their question: Why were all the schools receiving Promethean boards when it was apparent that a new Gaithersburg High School was needed.

Now, my testimony isn't about Gaithersburg High School. I'll leave that to Steve Augustino. My testimony isn't about Promethean boards either. They are impressive. My point is that five 13-year old boys questioned the judgment that went into prioritizing funding. While the amount spent on Promethean boards can't compare to the amount needed to build a new Gaithersburg High School, these boys did not think the cool, high-tech boards were a necessity to their education. They thought a school that was falling apart was, in fact, more important. Perhaps these boys are wiser beyond their years. Perhaps these boys are already blasé about high-tech gadgets and are no longer impressed. But these boys knew what was important to receiving a good education: a safe place to meet and a good teacher.

To increase their education, perhaps I need to take these same boys on a tour of our 74-year old **Damascus Elementary** so they can see the leaking roof and the potholes in the driveway and the deteriorating breezeway that will soon be a safety concern for those walking underneath it. Maybe our tour should take in **Clearspring Elementary** too where 4 classrooms have no heat. We could then go over the 170 work orders submitted by **Damascus High School** in the past 2 years regarding their unreliable HVAC system. And many of these work orders cited multiple issues such as the 10 classrooms with air conditioning problems. I guess we could also point out to these boys that even the Middle States representatives called attention to the HVAC problems within the high school during their AFG review last year. I should also warn the boys of the slippery floors caused by dripping condensation from the overhead pipes that need to be wrapped.

By the way, these same boys already think the school system isn't very "green". They note how some classrooms are freezing during the warmer months and sauna-like during the winter. They see it as an incredible waste of energy and money.

So tonight we ask you to take care of what we already have. Don't fall behind in maintaining and upgrading our systems. We need the additional funding recommended for the **HVAC countywide project** to take care of what we already have. We need to continue the **Roof Replacement project**. Further, we need to **extend the countywide Bathroom Renovation** beyond this six-year CIP. Three of our Damascus schools will finally see those badly needed restroom renovations completed in the next school year if we stay on track. But we in Damascus sympathize greatly for those other schools that never made it onto the special list that gives you flushing toilets and working faucets.

While many of us disagree with Dr. Weast's choices from time to time, please approve his recommended CIP with amendments. We know the budget is tight and creative funding will be at a premium. You have some tough choices ahead of you. You have our respect for stepping up to tackle these issues and make those unpopular decisions.

Being first in the testimony schedule has its benefits...so before this sounds like a broken record: We can't afford to fall behind!

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Damascus Cluster schools.

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