I would like to remind parents to send coats and/or jackets with your children to school. Students will go outside for recess on any day in which the wind chill is 32 degrees or higher, precipitation permitting. Please make sure that children come dressed for the weather and for conditions on the playground. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact me.

The FY 2017 Operating Budget—A Call to Fund Our Future

Interim Superintendent Larry Bowers submitted a $2.4 billion Recommended Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2017 to the Board of Education on December 8. Mr. Bowers’ operating budget recommendation includes investments to improve student literacy and math skills; build the cultural proficiency of staff; foster stronger partnerships with the community and our families to support students; and better organize the district to ensure every student is prepared for college and careers.

There are a variety of ways that you can learn more about the MCPS budget and become involved in the budget process this year, including the new Budget 101 website; Neighbor to Neighbor small-group discussions; Parent Academy workshops; and an overview video and other budget materials available on the MCPS budget webpage. Visit the budget webpage at

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/budget/

to read more about these resources and how to make your voice heard.

Plan Ahead for Next School Year

The Montgomery County Board of Education has approved the calendar for the 2016–2017 school year.

School will begin on Monday, August 29, 2016, and is scheduled to end on Friday, June 16, 2017. The calendar was developed in partnership with the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, the school district’s three employee associations, and the Montgomery County Region of Maryland Association of Student Councils, as well as other community members and school system leadership. The calendar can be found on the MCPS website and will soon be available in seven languages—Amharic, Chinese, English, French, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

~ Bill Collins, Principal
MCPS OPERATING BUDGET:
Let Your Voice Be Heard

Interim Superintendent Larry Bowers’ proposed Fiscal Year 2017 Operating Budget is intended to strengthen the school system’s foundation, which has been squeezed by eight years of difficult economic times. The recommended budget increase is a modest 4.5 percent, which will pay for the same level of services for more than 2,500 new students and includes limited investments to improve students’ literacy and math skills; build the cultural proficiency of staff; foster stronger partnerships with the community and families to support students; and better organize the district to ensure every student is prepared for college and careers.

MCPS needs full funding of its budget this year to prevent further cuts and to begin reinvesting in education. Anything less than full funding would likely require further cuts that could impact every school.

Share your ideas and views on the importance of funding the MCPS operating budget with our elected Montgomery County officials—the Montgomery County Board of Education, the County Executive, and the Montgomery County Council—through emails, letters, short videos, and testimonials.

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett held budget forums to seek input from residents about the county’s budget priorities. The last forum will be begin at 7 p.m. on January 25 at BlackRock Center for the Arts, 12901 Town Commons Drive, Germantown.

Budget 101: The Budgeting Process Explained

MCPS has launched a new online resource to help the community better understand how the district builds its operating budget and funds its schools. The site was created to answer questions that parents, students, staff and community members have asked about the MCPS operating budget. The site shows where the district’s funding comes from, how it’s spent, and how our schools are staffed to ensure we are meeting the needs of every student. Visit www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/budget-101/ to check out this new resource.

Presupuesto 101: El Proceso Presupuestario Explicado

MCPS ha lanzado un nuevo recurso en línea para ayudar a la comunidad a entender mejor cómo el distrito escolar arma su presupuesto operativo y financia sus escuelas. El nuevo sitio de Presupuesto 101 fue creado para responder a muchas de las preguntas que los padres, los estudiantes, el personal, y los miembros de la comunidad han planteado sobre el Presupuesto Operativo de MCPS. Este sitio le mostrará de dónde provienen los fondos del distrito escolar, como se gastan, y cómo se provee el personal a las escuelas para asegurarnos de estar cumpliendo con las necesidades de todos los estudiantes. Visite www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/budget101/budget101-spanish.html para probar este nuevo recurso.
How is the decision made to close schools during bad weather?

Information about the weather is gathered from many sources, including The National Weather Service, Accu-Weather, the news media and by actual inspection of roads, school driveways, and sidewalks throughout the county.

Weather conditions in surrounding counties are also gathered and factored into forecasting conditions for Montgomery County students and considered for those students attending non-public schools in other areas. Information from these various sources is factored into the decision.

Weather conditions or continuing impact from severe weather or other events such as a widespread power outage, may cause a delayed opening, early closing or closing for the day. The most severe conditions within the county are used as the basis for the decision-making criteria. A uniform procedure to close all schools is maintained so that the school system can respond quickly to emergency conditions and protect the safety and well-being of students and staff who attend both public and non-public schools and receive transportation services from Montgomery County.

Schools closed or delayed opening:

For early morning decisions, road inspection begins at 3:00 a.m. so that a decision can be announced by 5:00 a.m. through MCPS emergency information sources and media, such as radio, TV and websites.

Early dismissal:

All announcements will be made by 11:00 a.m.

More about school closure, delayed opening, and early dismissal:

The decision to close schools because of weather (or other widespread situation impacting safety) is always for the entire system.

MCPS buses transport 96,000 students every day, and of these, 16,000 students are transported to schools beyond their home school attendance area. To close by cluster or zone would mean students living in a less affected area might be unable to attend their school and vice-versa. This creates unequal access to the instructional programs and making sure each student receives the required days of instruction becomes difficult.

School must be accessible for all students to be given the ability to participate in instructional programs. In the case of non-public school closings for schools located outside of Montgomery County, the Department of Transportation works with schools on an individual basis to assure each student receives the required days of instruction. However, in the interest of the safety of all students and staff, whenever Montgomery County Schools are closed all transportation services to public and non-public schools are cancelled.

What about after-school and/or weekend activities?

After school activity cancellations will be announced in the same manner as regular school closings. The county's Interagency Coordinating Board for the use of public facilities makes weekend closing decisions. They can be contacted at 240-777-2706, or visit the Montgomery County website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cupf/info-cupf/emergency.html for information about cancellation of after-school or weekend activities.

Learn more about school closure, delayed opening and early dismissal at these websites:

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/emergency/closings/

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/emergency/sources.aspx
I hope everyone had a wonderful, and restful holiday and winter break. Although I get so excited for the season to arrive, I am more than ready for the elf on the shelf to head back to the North Pole and the decorations to come down. My fondest memory this Christmas was the excitement of my first grader as he handed us the gifts he purchased at the Holiday Shop on Christmas morning. Thanks to our PTA volunteers, my son truly understands the beauty of giving.

The PTA has been very busy gearing up for some great activities to kick off 2016. Bingo Night is Friday, Jan 29. Take a night off from cooking since the 5th grade will be selling pizza, drinks, cookies, and candy. You can also pre-order Chick-Fil-A sandwiches and nuggets. YUM! We will have lots of great prizes to give away. After we clean up all the bingo cards we have our “Feelin’ Groovy” Book Fair from February 1-5. Tuesday, February 2, you can break out your tie dye shirts and peace signs and join us for an evening of reading, crafts, and games at our Book Fair Family Night.

The Science Fair will be the following week on Wednesday, Feb. 10. This is a great way to introduce even the youngest scientists to the scientific method. Even if your child does not have a project in this year’s science fair, I encourage you to attend and be inspired to enter a project next year. On Feb. 12 we will have our Valentine’s Day classroom parties. Similar to the Halloween parties, our kids love this tradition.

Looking ahead, we have our Sock Hop and Silent Auction on March 18. Dust off your parachute pants, lace gloves, shoulder pads, and hair scrunchies so you can channel your inner Madonna or Michael Jackson at this year’s 80’s themed dance. More details will follow soon. We are still looking for donations for our wildly popular Silent Auction to be held the same evening.

Whew! What a line up. Again, I have to thank all the amazing volunteers we have at Damascus Elementary School that make it possible for us to offer so many great activities and programs for our students and families.

~ Melissa North
PTA President

Volunteers aren’t paid,
Not because they are worthless,
But because they are priceless.
~Anonymous

**READING INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

The Read-A-Thon has ended but keep reading! Students who read 350 minutes during the month and turn in the Reading Incentive Program calendar earn a coupon for a free personal sized pizza from Pizza Hut. They will also be entered to win a free pizza lunch at school donated by Weis! Turn in three out of the four months calendars and be able to attend our end of the year Reading Incentive Party!

Please contact Tara Owens at tara.owens@ymail.com with any questions.
THE SCIENCE FAIR IS COMING!

Come to the Science Fair on **Wednesday, February 10** from 6 p.m. to whenever we’re done! Last year we were done by 7 p.m., had the gym picked up by 7:30, and were celebrating by 7:45.

We will be setting up trifolds and non-perishable project materials on Tuesday, February 9. Tables will be set up by our amazing volunteers by 3 p.m. and we plan to be in the gym until 5:30 p.m. (or whenever we’re sent home). We ask the kindergarteners to arrive no later than 5:45 p.m. on Wednesday so we can set them loose ASAP with their medals and science projects in hand. During the classroom visits, the student scientists were informed of most of the following, but here’s an excerpt from our Science Fair DOs and DON’Ts:

**DO** participate! **DO** bring your parents! And anyone else who wants to come, of course - this is not a drop-off event. **DO** use photos, drawings, markers, pens, glitter, and display your scientific and artistic talents on your trifold! **DO** ask DESScienceFair@gmail.com for help if you need it! **DO** bring your materials, if appropriate. There will be curious preschoolers attending the fair, so don’t bring anything that might hurt them. **DO** take everything home after you have received your medal and gotten your picture taken. Take lots of pictures to share with the Year Book committee.

**DON’T** bring live animals, open flames, fire extinguishers, explosives, corrosives, toxic chemicals, sharp objects, or items requiring special handling.

**DON’T** put any of your experimental materials on the floor or under the tables, and please **DON’T** let anyone sit or play under the table; science is exciting enough!

**Science Fair Statistics**

This year, we have an outstanding turnout of 124 participants to date! We sometimes receive late entries, but we can’t include them in the published statistics. As you can see, our student scientists are amazing!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant by Grade</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>124</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UPCOMING EVENTS AND IMPORTANT DATES

JANUARY
22: Parents Helping Teachers Group
22: Second Marking Period Ends
25: NO SCHOOL – Teacher Professional Day
26: After-school Group Piano
28: PTA Chili Cookoff for DES Staff
29: PTA Bingo Night, 6:30 pm

FEBRUARY
1 - 5: Book Fair
2: After-school Group Piano
2: Book Fair Family Night, 6:00-8:30 pm
(no PTA meeting this month)
3: Report Cards Distributed
4: Book Fair evening hours, 6:00 – 8:00 pm
5: Parents Helping Teachers Group
8-12: Bus Driver Appreciation Week
9: PTA Spirit Night at Chipotle, 5-9pm
10: PTA Science Fair
11: Cluster Band Concert, Grades 4&5
12: Jump Rope for Heart
12: Classroom Valentine’s Day Parties
13: NO SCHOOL - President’s Day
16: After-school Group Piano
17: Cluster Strings Concert, Grade 5
19: Parents Helping Teachers Group
23: Cluster Choral Concert
26: EARLY RELEASE

STAY CONNECTED

Are you receiving emails from the PTA? If not, email Laurie Murtaugh at laurie.murtaugh@verizon.net to be added to the list to stay up-to-date about upcoming events and activities.

Did you know your Damascus Elementary School PTA has a Facebook page? "Like" us on Facebook to stay up-to-date on PTA news and activities.

https://www.facebook.com/damascusPTA
SUMMER CAMP
REGISTRATION UNDERWAY

The Montgomery County Camp Guide for Recreation and Parks Programs is now available and registration began Jan. 19. Register early as many programs fill up quickly. The guide features dozens of specialty camps, summer fun centers, and multi-interest and therapeutic camps, all with programs and activities that include aquatics, arts and crafts, sports, and dance.

PARENTS HELPING TEACHERS WORKGROUP

Thanks to Roberta Sherwood, Theresa Tenzer, Karen Reyes, Nancy Bailey, Jody Chapin, Gerry Choulas and Christine Derby for helping out at the Parents Helping Teachers Workgroup on December 18. Thanks to Roberta Sherwood, Theresa Tenzer, Nancy Bailey, Jody Chapin, Christine Derby and Gerry Choulas for helping out on January 8.

We were able to complete many work requests for the teachers, and we thank so many parents and caregivers that share their time to help out the teachers and staff.

Upcoming workgroups are scheduled for the following Fridays from 9:30-11:30 am:

January 22
February 5
February 19

We meet at the front office and will train you on anything you need to know. If your schedule permits, please come and join us!

~ Gerry McBrinn-Choulas
Co-chair

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

#MCPSFundOurFuture

Let MCPS know why you think it’s important to fully fund the FY 2017 MCPS Operating Budget. Parents, staff, students, and community members are invited to send short (15-second) video recordings to pio@mcpsmd.org in which they talk about why fully funding the MCPS operating budget is essential. MCPS will compile these videos on the MCPS budget website and send them out on the district’s Twitter feed. Remember, when sharing your thoughts and ideas about the operating budget on social media, use the hashtag #MCPSFundOurFuture.

The Spring issue of the Montgomery County Guide for Recreation and Parks Programs will be available Feb. 4 and registration begins Feb. 16.

The guide features hundreds of programs and activities including aquatics, arts and crafts, sports, and dance. Visit the Department of Recreation website to view the guides online at:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/

Print copies are also available at county recreation centers, park facilities, government buildings, and libraries.

All volunteers and visitors to Damascus Elementary School are required to be scanned in. Please don’t forget to bring a Photo ID (driver’s license) when visiting the building. Thank you!
In December, we had almost 100 volunteers give 341 hours of time! Wow! I want to take this opportunity to recognize some of the people who volunteered time and resources during the month of December.

First, thank you to the Read-a-thon team who made this event a huge success. The Read-A-Thon took hundreds of hours of time from helpers in both November and December.

Second, thank you to all who made our holiday shop happen. Students had a wonderful time shopping and then wrapping holiday gifts for the special people in their lives. Thank you to our holiday elves: Karen, Jen, Nora, Veronique, Roberta, Christine, Stephanie, Melissa, and especially our organizers, Suzie and Mollada.

Third, thank you to all who have been able to help with the Parents Helping Teachers workgroup. We have accomplished an amazing amount preparing classroom materials for our teachers!

Thank you also to Roberta and Christine who helped during vision and hearing screening.

Thank you to Karen, Roberta, and Christine who helped during breakfast and lunch in December.

Finally, thank you to the more than 35 kindergarten parents who helped make gingerbread houses. This is a wonderful memory!

~Christine Derby, Chair
derbyjc@bellatlantic.net

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**VOLUNTEER NEWS**

**Breakfast and Lunch Helpers**

This is an ongoing opportunity. We need helpers each school day, one for breakfast and one for lunch. You can sign up online at:

bit.ly/DESmealhelpers

**Parents Helping Teachers**

This is a workgroup to help teachers prepare classroom materials by copying, cutting, and laminating. We meet Fridays from 9:30-11:30 am, and we always welcome new helpers. The next meetings are January 22, February 5 and February 19. No preregistration is necessary; just show up at the main office.

**Book Fair February 1-5**

There are many opportunities during the school day, and an evening opportunity for Family Fun Night on Feb. 2. Sign up online at:


**Science Fair Set-up February 9**

Set-up is the day before the actual science fair on February 10. You can indicate that you can help on the Science Fair Registration Form.

**Jump Rope for Heart - February 12**

Mr. Lee is looking for parent helpers during this annual event. Sign up on the forms that went home for Jump Rope for Heart or contact Mr. Lee directly at Joonhyuk_Lee@mcpsmd.org.

**Valentine Parties**

Friday, February 12, 3:00-3:40 pm. More information on how you can help will be coming from room parents soon.

If you have questions about any of these volunteer opportunities, please contact Christine at derbyjc@bellatlantic.net.
OPEN PTA COMMITTEE CHAIR POSITIONS

Here is a list of the open PTA committee chair positions we have not yet filled for this year. This is a great way to get involved and there are slots to fit every schedule. Don’t be intimidated – the PTA board is here to help you every step of the way and it’s a great way to get to know people in the school. Please email desptamail@gmail.com if you have any questions about the positions. Feel free to ask a friend to co-chair with you. The more the merrier!

Kindergarten Orientation

Work with the kindergarten teachers to plan the kindergarten orientation events for May 2016. The previous committee chair is more than happy to lend a hand to help and share her advice.

Staff Raffle

Work with the staff to come up with fun activities and organize a raffle to raise funds for our school.

Grandparents Day

Work with the school to organize the 2016 Grandparents Day held the half day before Thanksgiving. Main duties include providing the refreshments and helping the volunteers to direct the visiting grandparents through the school. The outgoing chair has offered to guide the new chair in this role.

BE THE CHILI CHAMP OF DES!

Thursday, January 28

Whip up your finest pot of chili and let the teachers decide which is the best. The winner will receive a $25 gift card to GrillMarx!

Are you more Chef Boyardee then Chef Ramsey? We are in need of other donations as well. Please bring non perishable/refrigerated items to the Staff Lounge the previous day(s) or by 10 a.m. on Jan. 28.

Here's how to enter the cook off:

1. Sign up at: http://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0e49aba928a20-chili

   We can take up to 10 participants only. We are looking for a variety of entries, so be creative!

2. Bring your chili entry to school in a Crockpot before 10:30 a.m. on Jan. 28.

3. DES Staff will be our official judges—hope they come hungry!

4. Winner will be announced and notified by the end of the day.
SOCK HOP AND SILENT AUCTION

The DES Sock Hop and Silent Auction will be held on **Friday, March 18**. This has been a fantastic event for our students and families as well as a tremendous fundraising opportunity for the PTA.

We are always looking for donated items from families and businesses to help make the Silent Auction a success.

If you are interested in donating an item, please contact Beth Walter at **bwalter425@comcast**.

Look for more information on classroom baskets in early February. Thank you for your support!

PAINLESS FUNDRAISING

Many companies and stores offer money and credits for supplies and equipment to schools based on the purchases of customers. THAT'S RIGHT, you can help OUR SCHOOL support OUR KIDS just by doing your regular household shopping – at no additional cost to you!

- Box Tops for Education
- Labels for Education
- Coke Rewards Points
- Ink and Toner Cartridges
- Amazon Smile
- Giant
- Safeway
- Harris Teeter

Find more information on the PTA website at: **www.damascuspta.com/fundraising/**

Have an item for the next newsletter? Send it to **diane@loomisdesign.com** by February 10.
GET CAUGHT READING!

Catch your child reading and send your photo and caption to diane@loomisdesign.com by February 10 to be included in the next newsletter.

Kade Owens was caught reading. Santa knew exactly what would make this reader smile!

Carli Desmond was caught just hangin’ with a good book!

Colton North was caught reading to his best friend, Harley. Man’s best friend enjoys books too!
OOPS!

Our sincere apologies go out to Unlimited Auto Roadside Assistance and The Children’s Center of Damascus. We accidently left their ads out of the PTA directory. Please patronize these businesses and others who support DES.
Make dinner a selfless act by joining us for a fundraiser to support Damascus Elementary School. Come in to the Chipotle at 9815 Main St in Damascus on Tuesday, February 9th between 5:00pm and 9:00pm. Bring in this flyer, show it on your smartphone or tell the cashier you’re supporting the cause to make sure that 50% of the proceeds will be donated to Damascus Elementary School.
You are invited to our annual Fall Book Fair!

Our Scholastic Book Fair is a reading event that brings the books kids want to read right into our school. It’s a wonderful selection of engaging and affordable books for every reading level. Please make plans to visit our Book Fair and be involved in shaping your child’s reading habits.

Book Fair dates: February 1 - 5

Shopping hours: Monday 9:20am – 4:00pm
Tuesday 9:20am – 4:00pm
Wednesday 9:20am – 4:00pm
Thursday 9:20am – 4:00pm & 6:00 – 8:30pm
Friday 9:20am – 2:00pm
(hours are subject to change)

Family Night - Tuesday, Feb. 2 from 6:00 – 8:30pm

If you are unable to attend the Fair in person, we invite you to visit our online Book Fair at scholastic.com/fair. Our online Fair is available from February 1 – 5.

We look forward to seeing you and your family at our Book Fair! Remember, all purchases benefit our school.

Our most exciting activity in our book fair is FAMILY NIGHT!

- Dress in your finest groovy gear!
- Play games
- Win prizes
- Make crafts
- Listen to a story read by Mr. Collins
Join us for an **NIGHT**

**Rescheduled For**
Friday, January 29th at 6:30pm

In the DES gym.

Chase away those winter blues with a fun evening of bingo at Damascus Elementary School. There is no charge to participate in bingo night – all supplies and prizes are provided by the PTA.

Pizza slices, soda, water, chips, cookies and candy will be sold by the 5th grade to help raise money for their end-of-year celebration. You can also still pre-order Chic-Fil-A sandwiches and nuggets. Just complete the form below and return with payment by **Tuesday, January 26th**. If you already pre-ordered chicken but can not attend bingo night on the rescheduled date, please contact Kristin Peake (peakebling@gmail.com or 301-482-0263) for a refund.

---

**Pre-ordered Chic-Fil-A Form**

Name: ____________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chicken Sandwiches - $4.00</th>
<th>6 Chicken Nuggets - $3.50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Number of sandwiches: _______ Amount Due: $_______

Number of nuggets: _______ Amount Due: $_______

Total Amount Due: $_______

Please send cash or check made out to DES PTA

Sorry, no refunds are available on pre-orders.
“Your Outdoor Project Experts”

Design & Installation
Landscape Design* & Installation
Water Garden Design* & Installation
Outdoor Lighting
Paver Patios & Walkways
Retaining Walls
Drainage Improvements

Landscape Maintenance
Yard Clean Up, Spring & Fall
Pond Clean Out & Maintenance
Lawn Fertilization & Weed Control
Aeration & Seeding
Edging & Mulching
Tree & Shrub Pruning
Tree Removal & Stump Grinding
Mowing & Trimming & Weeding
K-9 Clean Up
Leaf Removal
Gutter Cleaning
Snow & Ice Management
Handyman Services

Estimates are Free!
* Fee for Design Work

301-253-0475
www.damascusenterprises.com