

Damascus HS-Major Capital Project P652114

As a retired employee who served as the Director of the Damascus Community Recreation Center for 17 years, I would like to support the County funding the expansion of Damascus HS, 25921 Ridge Road, Damascus, MD 20872.

History: The school was built in 1950 and is past the anticipated end of its building system's lifespan, requiring a comprehensive upgrade.

Reasons for Expansion: Low ceilings, narrow hallways, and stairs are pieced together in a maze-like layout, which is not conducive to students feeling safe. That, coupled with mold, water leaks (from the water heater expansion tank and the roof), asbestos, broken elevators, bugs, HVAC, and failing alarm systems in older buildings, has become prevalent at DHS. To provide a healthy learning environment for students, a safe, structurally sound, and durable building with sound engineering is needed within this community to enhance occupants' well-being.

- Based on KFI (Key Facility Indicators) assessment data, various building systems upgrades/replacements and programmatic requirements are needed. Key elements include moisture control, high-quality air filtration, non-toxic materials, and safe, resilient construction techniques. **LEED Certification:** As of 2022, MCPS has [28 buildings that are LEED Gold certified](#) and 8 that are LEED Silver. Under [Montgomery County law](#), county-funded buildings designed since FY2009 are generally required to achieve at least a LEED Silver rating or an equivalent.
- **Maryland Green Schools:** This is a voluntary certification focused on environmental education and stewardship. As of 2025, [113 MCPS schools \(roughly 53% of the district\)](#) have achieved this designation

Key certifications like [LEED](#), BREEAM, and [WELL](#) help ensure these standards are met through rigorous testing and, in some cases, real-time monitoring.

Recommendations: In 2022, BOE approved planning and design with completion in 2025. In FY23, an appropriation was approved for the architectural planning and design for this project. In FY24, appropriation was approved for construction funds. Fiscal restraints forced it to shift to the CIP. The BOE requested a one-year extension, with completion scheduled for August 2027. Construction expenditures were shifted to the outyears of the CIP, with a to-be-determined completion date, now recommended for 2031-2032. The recommendation is to build a new Damascus HS to accommodate the 700 additional students and relieve overcrowding in nearby schools, as suggested by the MCPS boundary

changes and increase in traffic on Route 27. This school is needed now; population growth warrants development.

Reassignments to Damascus High School

Under several options (notably **Option C** and others designed to relieve overcrowding), Damascus would see its attendance zone expand further south:

- **Kingsley and Lewisdale (from Clarksburg HS):** These Upcounty neighborhoods currently zoned for Clarksburg would shift to Damascus.
- **Laytonsville Area (from Gaithersburg HS):** Portions of the Laytonsville community are being considered for reassignment to Damascus to balance northern county enrollment.

As the oldest High School in Montgomery County, without a major, comprehensive renovation, it needs infrastructure improvements. Damascus High School in [Montgomery County Public Schools \(MCPS\)](#) is the top-ranked school for a Major Capital Project (MCP) due to its high Facility Condition Index (FCI) score, indicating a critical need for renovations. It is time to stop the delays.

To move forward, may we address the student body's concerns regarding the potential for bus journeys to another location?

- The project aims to increase DHS capacity from 1,543 to **2,250 seats**. It will include a major addition and renovations to address failing building systems identified by Key Facility Indicators (KFI).
- While it is proposed to use Crown HS as a holding school, Boundary options "E" and "F" specifically include the recommendation to use other schools that were constructed without having to bus to a holding school.

Example: The new Neelsville Middle School was constructed on the same site as the original building. The new facility was built on existing playfields on the west side of the site while the old school remained operational. Once the new building was completed, the old building was demolished and replaced with new recreational fields.

Reasons for concern regarding busing:

Key Concerns for Students and Families

- **Long Commutes and Transportation:** Concerns exist regarding increased travel times and traffic, particularly with busing students away from their local school.
- **School Stability and Community:** Families are worried about fracturing established school communities, especially with proposals that could move students away from Damascus High School.
- **Health Concerns:** Idling diesel buses and asthma are not healthy. The link between exposure to diesel exhaust and asthma has been borne out epidemiologically in studies indicating that children living along major trucking thoroughfares are at increased risk of asthma and allergic symptoms, 5 and of having objective evidence of respiratory dysfunction.
- **Sports and Scholarship Impact:** With 2 additional hours projected on a bus each day, this limits quiet study time and practice times. After school activity bus access.
- **Temporary Holding School Scenarios:** Proposals include using the new Crown High School as a temporary location for schools undergoing repairs, causing further uncertainty. Is the Crown HS really needed, or should the funding have been diverted to other High Schools?

CROWN HS 9410 Fields Rd, Gaithersburg, MD

Capacity:

The five-story school is designed for a student capacity of 2,219, with a core capacity of 2,700, to relieve overcrowding at nearby high schools.

- **Features:**

The building will encompass 358,000 square feet, including an indoor amphitheater, media center, performing arts wing, and athletic facilities.

- **Sustainability:**

It is designed for optimal solar orientation and will utilize solar panels and geothermal energy sources.

- **Location:**

The school is located on a 31.7-acre site at the intersection of Fields Road and Omega Drive in Gaithersburg, MD

- **Boundary Revisions:** The process includes reviewing boundaries for multiple schools, potentially impacting students across the district. Busing costs, missed

bus access, requiring parents or guardians to drive, or students to miss school if they cannot.

- **Boundary Study Process:** The proposed changes are in the study phase, with recommendations expected from the superintendent in February 2026. Are these recommendations public?

General Construction Concerns from a Community Standpoint:

Noise: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DEP/property-care/noise/construction-noise.html>

Navigation of Ease of Access: Can construction be done in the “NEW” building with different entryways than the “OLD” building's entrances to improve safety and supervision of workers and children if they were to stay on site? Are there gates that can come down to block access to certain areas?

YES, this project will take work, like any High School being expanded, but the end result is positive. This is a community with a long history of supporting the High School, working, and being part of the many families who gather to show pride in their children and the Damascus community. Our biggest concern is that it will be interrupted if the school is fragmented during the expansion process. Please thoroughly consider the nature of the Community as this project moves forward, as it is a community like no other that truly cares.