

December 19, 2018

Dear Damascus High School Community,

The past seven weeks have been a very trying time for the Damascus community. The sexual assault allegations in the football locker room are more than disturbing; they are a direct violation of our core values as a community and raise many questions going forward.

As a school district, we have appreciated the concerns raised by parents and students about student safety, as well as the need for greater communication about the steps Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is taking in the wake of this serious incident.

Recently, the Damascus High School administration and senior officials from MCPS met with parent leaders from Damascus, including the Parent Teacher Association president, Booster Club president, and Damascus Cluster leadership from the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations. These groups met to discuss next steps in investigating the incident itself; reviewing the culture of Damascus athletics and MCPS athletics more broadly; supervising of student athletes; providing support for students and families impacted by this incident, and ongoing communications.

At the appropriate time in the legal and law enforcement process, MCPS will be initiating its own investigation of the locker room incident. A number of questions about the incident, as well as the overall culture of the Damascus football program including allegations of hazing and bullying, have been raised. We take these issues very seriously. Last week, the State's Attorney's Office for Montgomery County shared with us its intent to continue and expand its investigation at Damascus to include a broader review of the culture of the athletics program. We appreciate this review and will work closely with the State's Attorney's Office to support this next phase of the investigative process.

While the law enforcement and legal processes continue to unfold, we must ensure that our students and school community are supported. To that end, there have been teams of psychologists and counselors at Damascus High School to provide support as needed. In addition, Dr. Jeffrey K. Sullivan, director of systemwide athletics, has shared resources with the MCPS sports community and communicated a plan for enhanced education with students and coaches to ensure that everyone is promoting a positive environment free of hazing, bullying and harassment.

Last night, the junior varsity football team and parents met with Principal Casey Crouse; Mrs. Diane D. Morris, area associate superintendent, MCPS Office of School Support and Improvement; Dr. Sullivan; and other Damascus High School and MCPS staff to discuss the locker room incident from October 31, 2018, and to continue the healing process. Our student athletes are strong and deserve to know that we are proud of them for the way they represent Damascus in all that they do. In early January 2019, they will convene again for their annual banquet to celebrate the successes from the season. This is a group of young people whose accomplishments as a team continue to deserve recognition.

Communication is essential as we move forward. To the extent we can provide clarity and answers to questions, we will. For example, there are rumors that students involved in this incident on October 31 were transferred to Damascus High School or expelled from other schools. This is not true. All students involved in this incident live in the Damascus High School service area; no student was on a transfer, either for athletic purposes, behavioral purposes, or for any other reason.

We in the school system are committed to providing ongoing updates and open lines of communication as we work together in the months ahead. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Casey Crouse, Damascus High School principal, at Casey_B_Crouse@mcpsmd.org, or Ms. Diane Morris, MCPS associate superintendent, at Diane_D_Morris@mcpsmd.org. We also will continue to engage with parent leaders in Damascus who have been advocating strongly on behalf of Damascus High School during this difficult time. Finally, during the holiday season, we will continue to keep those affected by the incident in our thoughts and prayers; this has impacted our students and the entire community and we must come together in support of one another.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Andrew M. Zuckerman, Ed.D.

Chief Operating Officer

Montgomery County Public Schools