



TJAAG Admissions Recommendations

Executive Summary

TJAAG supports an admissions process that accomplishes the following requirements and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with FCPS to identify a bold TJ admissions overhaul that strives toward representative diversity among students and staff, emphasizes Portrait of a Graduate skills and character traits, and promotes a Caring Culture within a challenging STEM learning environment. TJAAG demands an admissions policy that accomplishes the following goals:

1. Conduct outreach that increases awareness of TJ and application support to develop a diverse applicant pool
2. Overhaul admissions to recruit and equitably select a diverse, well-rounded student body from all corners of Fairfax County and other draw districts
3. Set metrics to assess progress toward these goals and achievement of the TJ mission

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¹ TJAAG defines underrepresented groups as demographic groups that are traditionally underrepresented in STEM and/or at TJ, including students who are: girls, Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, neurodiverse, English language learners, or from underrepresented middle schools (Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology: Improving Admissions Processes Research Proposal, FCPS white paper 11/17/2020; Michael Rodriguez, TJAAG. Middle school disparity analysis).

Conduct outreach that increases awareness of TJ and application support to develop a diverse applicant pool

- Increase accessibility and support for historically underrepresented groups at TJ¹ throughout the application process, including in-school outreach events.
- Increase awareness of TJ offerings and application opportunities among all elementary and middle school students and families, including targeted effort within particular communities previously underserved by TJ.

Overhaul admissions to recruit and equitably select a diverse, well-rounded student body from all corners of Fairfax County and other draw districts

- Recruit and select a diverse class across all demographics, experiences, talents, and pursuits to build a culture of inclusivity and prioritize collective merit over individual achievement.
 - » Any intellectually curious student who has ability and interest in TJ and would thrive there should have equal access and chance of admission.
 - » Holistic measures should emphasize characteristics highlighted in the FCPS “Portrait of a Graduate”. These character traits in the student body are critical in achieving TJ’s mission²: to provide challenging and extensive curriculum to students with “high ability, aptitude, and interest” in STEM; to develop the whole person academically and ethically in leadership and communication; to foster “respect for individual and cultural diversity;” and prepare “responsible citizens and leaders in the 21st century” to be productive in a global community.
 - » If a hybrid merit lottery is implemented, the seat set-aside should be used as a second look and selected after the lottery draw to compose a well-rounded class of diverse perspectives, such that there is no prototypical high-scoring applicant.
- Distribute all 550 seats proportionally across geography.
 - » Regardless of admissions criteria or selection method, TJAAG advocates for a minimum allotment of seats divided geographically as 5-10 seats per middle school or equitably proportional across high school pyramids, not by region.
 - » TJAAG maintains its support for a lottery approach for ALL 550 seats³, as FCPS proposed in the original merit lottery⁴.
 - » If the hybrid merit lottery with a seat set-aside is established, those seats must be subtracted from their geographic allotment. We firmly reject any distribution of seats that inequitably favors a small set of feeder schools.
- Evaluate each applicant individually according to circumstances and opportunities afforded them, not against other applicants with very different circumstances and access to opportunities.
 - » According to the Virginia Department of Education, Governor’s Schools provide “opportunities beyond those normally available in the students’ home schools.”⁵

² Fairfax County School Board Blue Ribbon Commission on Admissions: The Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. 2004.

³ Rachel Lei, TJAAG. A Robust Case for Merit Lottery.

⁴ TJ Admissions Merit Lottery Proposal, 9/15/2020.

⁵ https://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/governors_school_programs/?fbclid=IwAR2lwQIcpEYgJTPFRYi268dc6z0ZhGyI50sMFiYBlNZB-U5eY-0qX11zIJI

- » However, not every student has equal access to the same opportunities, whether they be determined by individual circumstances/background or local school offerings.
- » TJAAG advocates for consideration of socioeconomic status, level of parental education attainment, years in AAP, level of middle school STEM course offerings, and STEM afterschool activities offered at the applicant's base school⁶.
- » TJAAG rejects the use of teacher recommendations in admissions due to demonstrated biases and potential for external influence. Certain students may not shine in a teacher's eyes, but it does not reflect their merit.

⁶ TJAAG has researched and analyzed differences in offerings at FCPS middle and high schools and can provide this research upon request.

Set metrics to assess progress toward these goals and achievement of the TJ mission

- Provide a statistically significant positive trend in the percent enrolled of each underrepresented group until representative diversity is reached across all draw districts within five years.
- Implement data collection, monitoring, and annual reporting to evaluate trends and successes among eligible students, applicants, and admittees.
- Demonstrate positive trends in students' perceptions of inclusion and Caring Culture.
- Measure the the long-run impact of a TJ education by evaluating how TJ graduates reflect and demonstrate the school's mission values of inclusiveness, ethical decision-making, leadership, and responsible citizenry of a global community (see Blue Ribbon Commission for potential undergraduate-postgraduate metrics²).

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