



TJ Alumni Action Group Position Statement in Support of a TJHSST Merit Lottery

Who We Are

The Thomas Jefferson Alumni Action Group (TJAAG) is a group of more than 1,000 TJ alumni advocating for an admissions policy at TJHSST that promotes student representation, reflects its draw districts, and creates an improved antiracist student culture that provides the quality educational experience needed to grow future STEM leaders.

Statement of Support

The Thomas Jefferson Alumni Action Group proudly supports Superintendent Brabrand's proposed merit lottery for Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology (TJHSST) admissions. This plan allows the school to welcome previously untapped talent in Northern Virginia, considerably increasing the representation of Black, Latinx, Asian American subgroups, and economically disadvantaged students, and distributing STEM opportunities throughout the region.

Historically, TJ admissions decisions have relied heavily on TJ Entrance Exam test scores. Studies have shown that performance on entrance exams is linked to income and preparedness rather than aptitude and merit. In fact, the majority of students currently accepted to TJ have taken some form of test prep prior to admission. In 2020, 96 students were accepted into TJ from one test prep center alone. These test prep courses can cost up to several thousand dollars effectively blocking low-income families from participating, and resulting in many extraordinary students without access to elite test prep being excluded from TJ.

Decades of previous reform efforts have failed to fix the lack of representative diversity in the Jefferson student population, as the FCPS board's own data showed. It is time for more comprehensive reform. TJAAG believes that instituting a merit lottery is the exact kind of bold move needed to fix a chronic problem. ■

Recommendation for ongoing equity and diversity measures at TJHSST to ensure a culture of inclusion

Disparity of access to TJHSST is a complex, systemic problem that will not be solved solely by changing the TJ admissions process. FCPS will need to address ongoing and systemic bias in the AAP pipeline, current curriculum and TJHSST school culture. For these reasons, we recommend implementation of the following ongoing equity and diversity measures:

- Implementation of a **TJHSST Equity and Diversity Task Force** to monitor and study the efficacy of implemented diversity and equity measures in the AAP Pipeline, TJ admissions and TJ school culture. This task force would also ensure that the Admissions committee is trained in the latest anti-bias methods and follows best practices in applicant SIS and other human elements of review.
- **Review of the AAP pipeline** and implementation of measures to address inequity and bias in Advanced Academics within Fairfax County
- **Address TJHSST school pedagogy and culture**

Addressing the School Pedagogy and Culture:

- Expand racial discussions to all aspects of the curriculum including STEM subjects.
- Train teachers to implement anti-racist curricula and inclusive teaching methods.
- Reserve extracurricular sessions, 8th period sessions, assemblies, readings, and elective classes for intersectional

and diverse curriculum, education, and discussion.

- Make the TJ faculty more diverse.
- Survey the TJ Faculty, Administration, and Student Body on the climate of inclusivity and diversity at TJ, and their perspectives and preparedness to discuss race, class, and other issues.
- Hold students accountable for racial/class issues in a similar fashion to honor code violations, and hold teachers and administrators accountable for comments regarding racial bias and other forms of discrimination.
- Ensure that the administration and faculty take a public stance on the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion at TJ.
- Address disparities that low-income students face and provide a concrete support system for these students.
- Dedicate college and career resources specifically for Black, Latinx, low-income, first-generation, and other underrepresented students.
- Mandate that all clubs discuss how their mission statement relates to diversity and inclusion.

Details on these School Pedagogy and Culture recommendations can be found starting on page 20 of our [Recommendations Report](#).

Overview of full TJAAG Recommendations Report: Admissions & School Culture

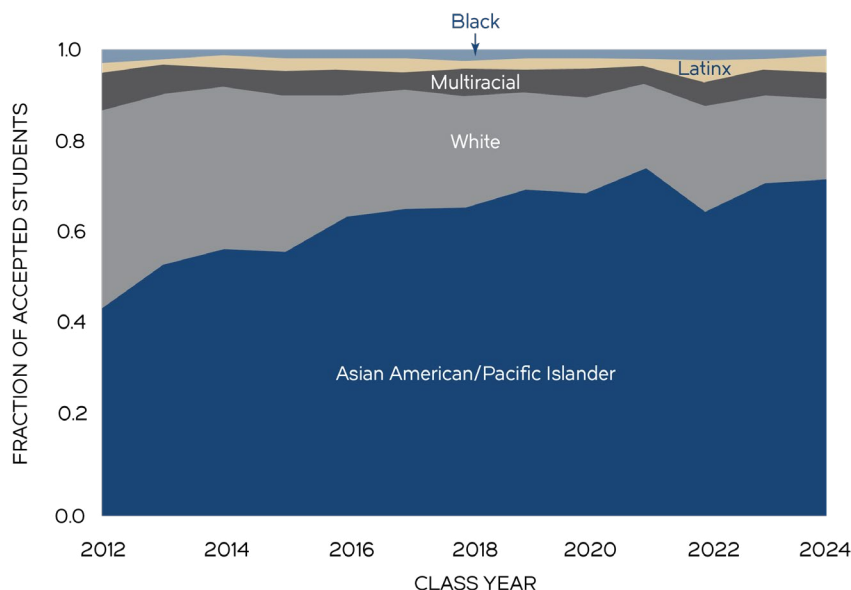
The Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (or “TJ”) is consistently ranked as one of the top high schools in the country. Each year, thousands of prospective students apply to attend TJ, and the admissions process is considered to be highly competitive. Unfortunately, over its 35 year history as an elite magnet school, TJ has also gained a reputation for systematically excluding certain groups.

TJ has always had very low representation of children from Black, Latinx, Asian American subgroups, free and reduced price lunch (FARPL) recipients, and children with disabilities. Admissions statistics have been the subject of local and national media focus for decades.

The lack of opportunity for these groups to attend to TJ has real societal impact:

“America’s #1 High School” is educating the STEM leaders of tomorrow. Higher education and industry leaders have repeatedly emphasized the importance of having diverse students and employees, and TJ students need their education to give them the opportunity to collaborate and learn from a variety of perspectives to be successful. **Exposure to diversity enhances critical thinking and problem-solving ability, and even has impacts at increasing student satisfaction, motivation, general knowledge and intellectual self-confidence.**

In this report, the TJ Alumni Action Group (a group of more than 1,000 alumni addressing the issues noted above) analyzes inequities in TJ admissions and offers tangible proposals for improvements in TJ admissions and school culture.



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