



2020

TJAAG Recommendations Report Admissions and School Culture





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THOMAS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL
FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
6560

NO PARKING
STANDING
FIRE LANE

NO PARKING
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WELCOME TO
STATE OF THE
FUTURE

Overview

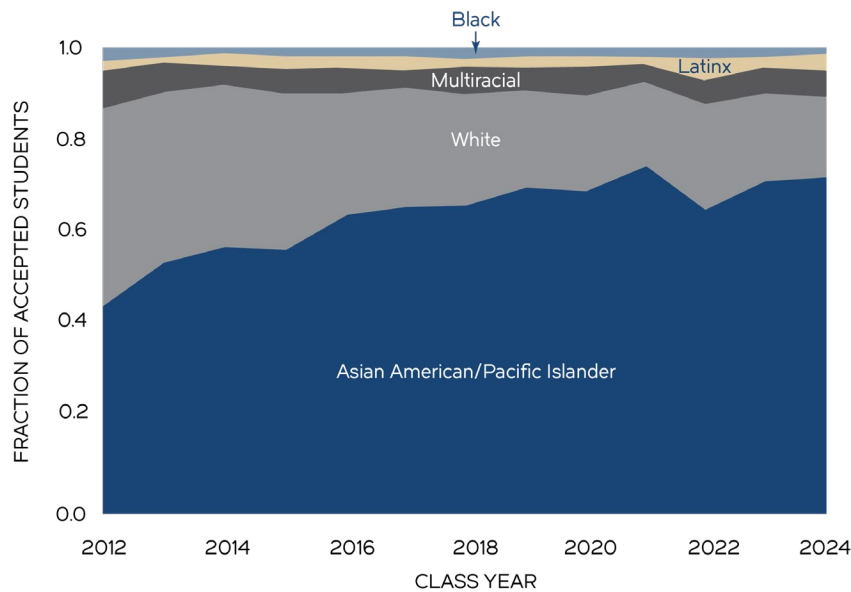
The Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (or “TJ”) is consistently ranked as one of the top high schools in the country. Each year, thousands of prospective students apply to attend TJ, and the admissions process is considered to be highly competitive. Unfortunately, over its 35 year 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 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.



Executive Summary

TJAAG recommends taking the following actions to make the admissions process more accessible and to improve TJ's school pedagogy and culture.

Admissions

Remove the admissions exam requirement and transition to a more equitable application process. Should the exam be still administered, make the exam more accessible by offering it on an opt-in basis during school hours and increasing the availability of fee waivers.

Build the TJ student body with an intentional focus on diversity and inclusion, similar to the process used by universities:

- Revise the Student Information Sheet to give students a chance to demonstrate character traits necessary for success at TJ.
- Raise decision-making standards for those involved in the Admissions process.
- Increase transparency around the admissions process for middle school families and faculty.
- Increase specificity and accountability for building a diverse student body by revising the regulations governing TJ admissions.

Consider additional strategic admission shifts:

- Lottery
- Socioeconomic status tiers
- Base elementary school draw districts

School Pedagogy and Culture

Implement the following changes to improve the TJ culture for faculty, administration and students of all backgrounds:

- 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.



This change is long overdue. **The underrepresented are not underqualified; they don't apply to TJ because they don't feel welcome.** Establishing a merit lottery levels the playing field in a way that creates a healthier culture and a stronger sense of belonging.

– Makya Renée Little, TJAAG President





Problem Analysis: TJ Diversity

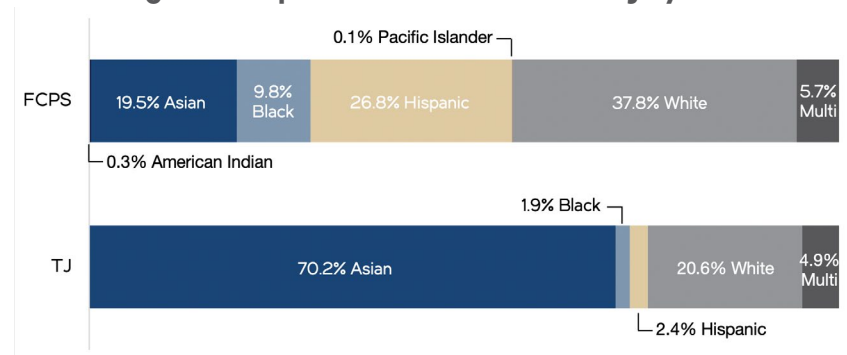
TJ is the premier magnet school in Fairfax County, but it has always had very low representation of children from Black, Latinx, Asian American subgroups, and low socioeconomic communities, as well as children with disabilities. The following section details key demographic trends highlighting the lack of diversity and inclusion reflected in TJ admissions.

Disparities in TJ Admissions

Racial Disparities

Representation of Black and Latinx students at TJ consistently fails to reflect demographics across FCPS, as shown in the figures below.¹

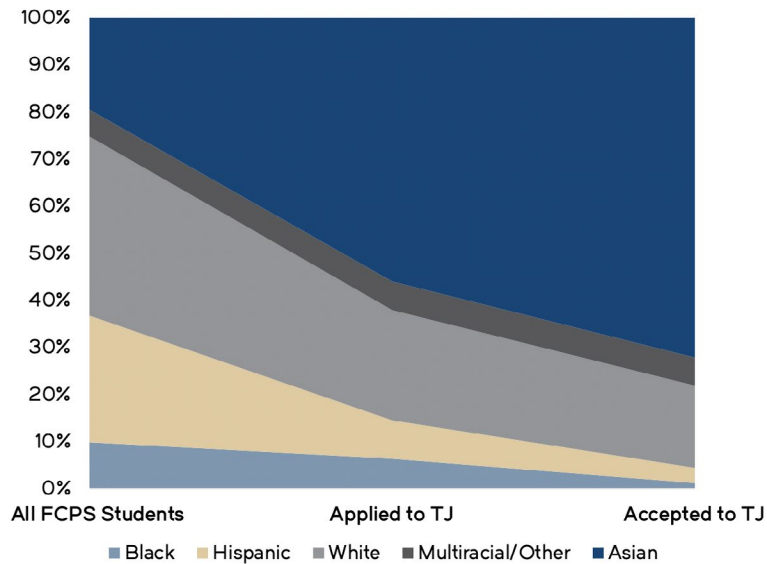
Figure 1: Representation in FCPS vs. TJ by race



Over the years, programs like Quest, Visions, and LIFT have attempted to counteract the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students at TJ. However, year after year, at every point of the TJ application process, the number of Black and Latinx students significantly declines when compared to the ratio of these students in Fairfax County.

¹ Based on [2019 FCPS Membership Data from the VA Dept of Ed](#) and the [2019-2020 NCES Data](#)

Figure 2: Demographics of applicants at each stage of the TJ admissions process



Economic Disparities

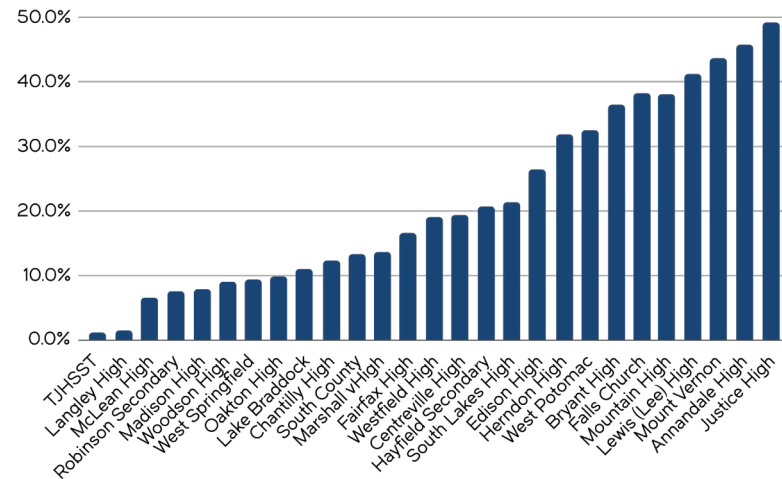
The Fairfax NAACP analyzed representation of low-income students at TJ compared to the rest of Fairfax county. TJ has the smallest population of students on free lunch (FL) of any high school in the county at under 2%, in spite over 29% of FCPS students being on free and reduced price lunch.

Figure 3: Representation in FCPS vs. TJ by FARPL status



This discrepancy is larger than at high schools in some of the most economically privileged areas of the county, such as Langley High School (3%), and McLean High School (6.5%), as shown in the subsequent figure.

Figure 4: Free Lunch percentages across Fairfax County public high schools



The Fairfax NAACP also conducted a benchmarking analysis comparing the percentage of economically disadvantaged students within TJ to percentages within the other largest counties' highest ranked high schools. Based on this metric, TJ once again severely under-performs in terms of educating economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 5: Percentage of economically disadvantaged students attending top schools in twenty largest school districts ²

Size	District Name	% Econ Dis. of #1 High School	USN&WR Rank of #1 High School
18	Philadelphia City	100	16
2	Los Angeles Unified	64	79
1	New York City	55	5
6	Broward County	46	221
19	Prince George's County	46	2014
5	Clark County	45	152
7	Houston ISD	42	29
16	Dallas ISD	41	6
10	Palm Beach	35	106
4	Miami-Dade County	33	72
3	City of Chicago (SD 299)	32	9
13	Gwinnett County	32	12
9	Orange County	31	940
8	Hillsborough County	22	679
20	Duval County	14	62
12	Hawaii DoE	14	558
14	Wake County	13	226
17	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	9	548
15	Montgomery County	6	90
11	Fairfax County	2	1

Regional Disparities

Specific “feeder schools” in Fairfax County are so dominant in the TJ application process that real estate ads mention being in their draw districts. For example, in 2018, more than half of the FCPS admissions came from only 4 middle schools: Carson, Longfellow, Kilmer, and Rocky Run. This is despite FCPS having 14 Advanced Academic Placement (AAP) centers that concentrate high-achieving students. ³

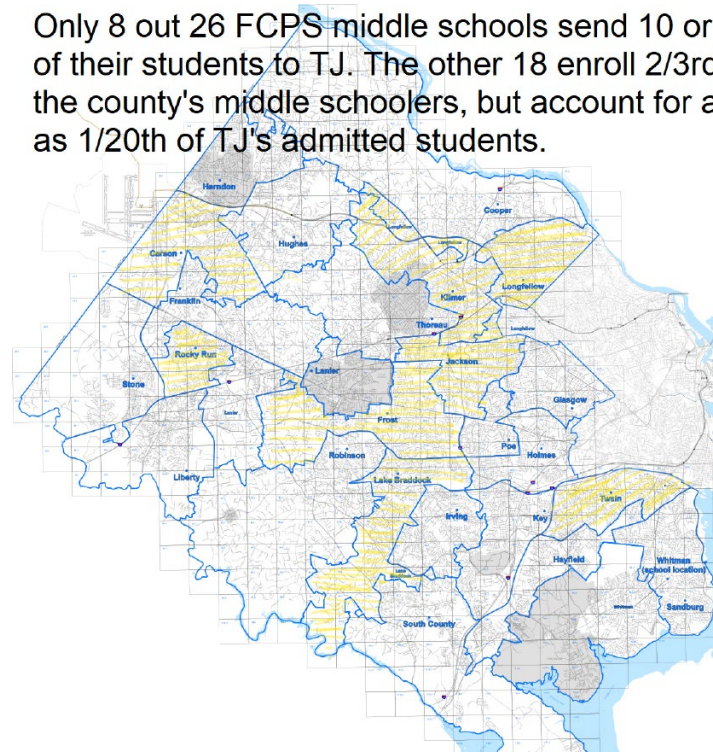
Half of the TJ student body attended only **five** middle schools (out of 26) in Fairfax County while half of the middle schools have “too few to report” (less than ten) students accepted into TJ.

² Data based on NAACP analysis of US News and World Report rankings

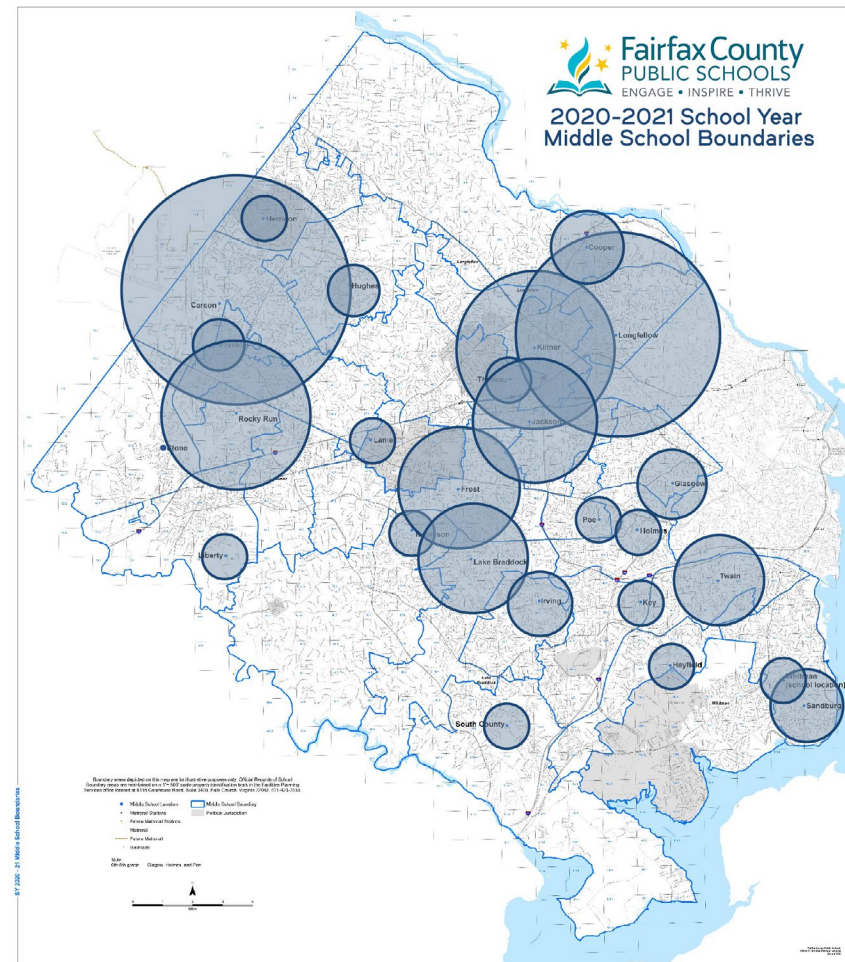
³ [Advanced Academic Level IV Program Locations](#)

Figures 6 a,b,c: Admitted students by feeder middle school and region

Only 8 out of 26 FCPS middle schools send 10 or more of their students to TJ. The other 18 enroll 2/3rds of the county's middle schoolers, but account for as few as 1/20th of TJ's admitted students.



School	Region	Total Tested	Total Semi Finalists	Total Admitted
Carson	1	292	161	78
Cooper	1	51	20	8
Franklin	5	38	TS	TS
Frost	5	124	52	22
Glasgow	2	87	9	TS
Hayfield	3	24	TS	TS
Herndon	1	24	TS	TS
Holmes	2	37	TS	TS
Hughes	1	60	24	7
Irving	4	69	15	TS
Jackson	2	109	49	23
Key	3	27	TS	TS
Kilmer	2	126	66	37
Lake Braddock	4	149	61	18
Lanier	5	34	TS	TS
Liberty	4	28	TS	TS
Longfellow	2	185	126	62
Poe	2	27	TS	TS
Robinson	4	26	6	TS
Rocky Run	5	175	91	33
Sandburg	3	84	24	8
South County	4	27	9	TS
Stone	5	23	TS	0
Thoreau	1	32	11	TS
Twain	3	98	24	12
Whitman	3	29	TS	TS



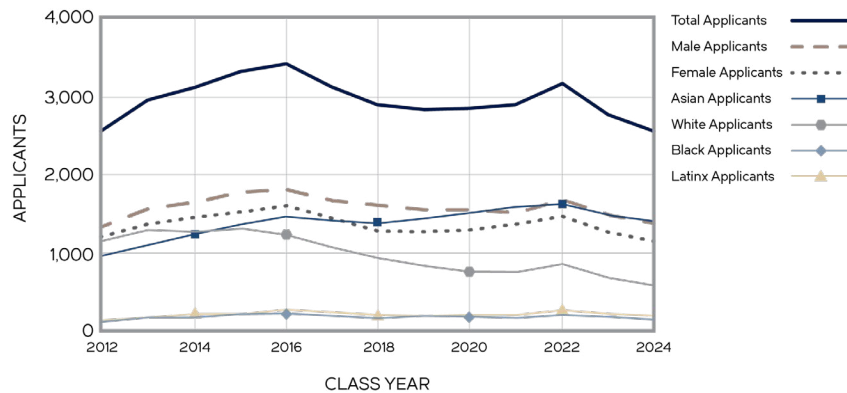
Disabilities and Special Needs Students

TJ is not welcoming to special needs children, despite the large number of twice exceptional (“2E”) students in Fairfax County. Only 0.94% of students at TJ access special services at TJ, compared to 14.7% in FCPS.

TJ Application Trends

Total numbers of students applying to TJ have steadily declined in recent years after climbing for decades, indicating lower overall interest in TJ as well as selectivity in admissions. Applications are down **25.8%** from peak in 2012 (Class of 2016), from 3,423 to 2,539.

Figure 7: Number of applicants by entering class



This new process will raise TJHSST's standards. A merit lottery will bring in talent that will thrive at Jefferson but can't afford years of test prep.

– Dr. Andrew Hayes,
TJAAG Vice President



Recommendations: Admissions

The following suggestions on improving TJ Admissions have emerged from the Admissions Process committee of the TJ Alumni Action Group. This committee is a group of 10–20 alumni who have met regularly since June 2020 to discuss improvements to the TJ admissions process itself, including the test and how it is administered, associated fees, and other factors. Their goal is to ensure the admissions process for TJ measures potential, interest in, and enthusiasm for STEM—not privilege or wealth. The proposals in this section include regulatory, structural, and logistical changes to the admissions process.

Remove the admissions exam requirement and transition to a more equitable application process.

The TJ admissions exam is not a direct measure of potential or intelligence for young students. It has been historically noted that family background, more specifically: parental income, education, and generational wealth prove to be a stronger influence on student standardized test scores than school based factors.^{4,5}

As noted even in TJ’s own student magazine, “Income has already been correlated with test scores in two popular standardized tests, the SAT and ACT. The College Board’s

“Total Group Profile Report” in [2013](#) and [2016](#) showed that each income bracket increase represented an average score increase of 10–30 points per section on the SAT (College Board doesn’t release SAT income data for the new SAT). In 2016, ACT scores were [approximately 4 points higher](#) for test-takers whose family income exceeds \$80,000 a year.”⁶ (Four points on the ACT could be the difference between 74th percentile and 89th.)

Additionally, according to recent research dedicated to increasing diversity in the biomedical sciences, standardized testing should not be emphasized during the candidate review process as the data does not predict success in scientific careers. Rather, a critical first step involves drawing from a broad pool of qualified individuals, improving candidate outreach and expanding the definition of excellence.⁷

The TJ test is “preppable.” In fact, the majority of students currently accepted to TJ have taken some form of test prep prior to TJ. In 2020, 96 students were accepted into TJ from one test prep center alone (see Figure 8). These test prep courses can cost several hundreds to thousands of dollars (\$4,200 according to [current estimates](#) at Curie Leadership Academy). Low income families are less likely or unable to participate and, as a result, many extraordinary students without access to elite test prep are excluded by applying a strict cutoff to test scores in the multi-round application process.


⁴ Hill, H. C. (2017). The Coleman Report, 50 years on: What do we know about the role of schools in academic inequality? *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 674, 9–26.

⁵ [Why Standardized Tests Don’t Measure Educational Quality](#), W. James Popham, March 1999

⁶ [The children left behind: TJ Admissions process disadvantages disadvantaged students](#), Christine Zhao, February 9, 2018

⁷ Swartz, T., Palermo, A., Masur, S., & Aberg, J. (2019). The science and value of diversity: closing the gaps in our understanding of inclusion and diversity. *Journal of Infect. Diseases*, 220 (Suppl 2) 33–41.

Figure 8: 2020 List of Students from Curie Academy who took a their test prep courses (96 of which were admitted to TJ)



2020 LIST OF CURIE STUDENTS WHO GOT ACCEPTED IN AOS/AET/TJ

1. [Name]	AET,TJ	42.A. [Name]	82.M. [Name]
2. [Name]	TJ	43.A. [Name]	83.M. [Name]
3. [Name]	(TJ)	44.A. [Name]	84.N. [Name]
4. [Name]	(TJ)	45.A. [Name]	85.N. [Name]
5. [Name]		46.B. [Name]	86.N. [Name]
6. [Name]		47.C. [Name]	87.N. [Name]
7. [Name]		48.D. [Name]	88.N. [Name]
8. [Name]	T, TJ	49.D. [Name]	89.N. [Name]
9. [Name]		50.D. [Name]	90.N. [Name]
10. [Name]	(AOS, AET)	51.E. [Name]	91.N. [Name]
11. [Name]	(AET)	52.E. [Name]	92.N. [Name]
12. [Name]		53.E. [Name]	93.N. [Name]
13. [Name]		54.E. [Name]	94.N. [Name]
14. [Name]	(S, AET, TJ)	55.G. [Name]	95.O. [Name]
15. [Name]	J	56.H. [Name]	96.O. [Name]
16. [Name]	y (TJ)	57.H. [Name]	97.O. [Name]
17. [Name]	ET	58.H. [Name]	98.P. [Name]
18. [Name]		59.H. [Name]	99.P. [Name]
19. [Name]		60.I. [Name]	100.F. [Name]
20. [Name]	(AOS, AET, TJ)	61.J. [Name]	101.F. [Name]
21. [Name]	(AET, TJ)	62.J. [Name]	102.F. [Name]
22. [Name]	(TJ)	63.J. [Name]	103.F. [Name]
23. [Name]	(ET, TJ)	64.J. [Name]	104.F. [Name]
24. [Name]	(ET, TJ)	65.J. [Name]	105.F. [Name]
25. [Name]		66.J. [Name]	106.F. [Name]
26. [Name]		67.K. [Name]	107.F. [Name]
27. [Name]		68.K. [Name]	108.F. [Name]
28. [Name]		69.K. [Name]	109.F. [Name]
29. [Name]	TJ	70.K. [Name]	110.F. [Name]
30. [Name]		71.K. [Name]	111.F. [Name]
31. [Name]	S, AET	72.K. [Name]	112.F. [Name]
32. [Name]	(AOS, AET, TJ)	73.L. [Name]	113.F. [Name]
33. [Name]		74.L. [Name]	114.F. [Name]
34. [Name]		75.L. [Name]	115.F. [Name]
35. [Name]		76.M. [Name]	116.F. [Name]
36. [Name]	TJ	77.M. [Name]	117.F. [Name]
37. [Name]		78.M. [Name]	118.S. [Name]
38. [Name]		79.M. [Name]	119.S. [Name]
39. [Name]		80.M. [Name]	120.S. [Name]
40. [Name]	S, AET, TJ	81.M. [Name]	121.S. [Name]
41. [Name]			

This year, 2020, is the year to remove the test. Having an exam during a global pandemic may exacerbate racial and socioeconomic inequities that already exist among eligible applicants, causing students from underrepresented groups to not perform as well.⁸ With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting standardized testing, at least half of the nation’s four-year colleges will be test-optional in the upcoming admissions cycle. With these test-optional policies, colleges note research indicating test scores do relatively little beyond grades to predict success and the consistent correlation between test scores and white racial and higher socioeconomic status (SES).⁹ Additionally, in March of 2020, researchers across the world predicted a drop in performance for secondary students on STEM assessments due to the untimely closure of schools.¹⁰

Since students have been learning at home during the last six months, applicants have experienced an even wider discrepancy in terms of accessible resources in order to prepare for the test. Moreover, systemic health and social inequities have put communities of color and low income families at increased risk for COVID-19.¹¹ An in-person exam would jeopardize the health of these vulnerable groups which may cause them not to apply.¹² Administering an online exam would add another barrier of entry for families with limited computer/internet access or limited privacy and quiet, and ensuring academic integrity during an online exam would be very challenging. During a pandemic, the health of the administrators of the test should also be considered.¹³

⁸ [University of California System can’t use SAT and ACT tests for admissions, judge rules](#), Jenn Selva and Leah Asmelash, CNN, September 2, 2020
⁹ Rosinger, K., Ford, K., & Choi, J. (2020). The role of selective college admissions criteria in interrupting or reproducing racial and economic inequities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2020.1795504
¹⁰ Sintima, E. (2020). Effect of COVID-19 on the performance of grade 12 students: implications for STEM education. *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 16(7), 1-6.
¹¹ [Covid-19 death rate among African Americans and Latinos rising sharply](#), Ed Pilkington, The Guardian, September 8, 2020
¹² [Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), July 24, 2020
¹³ [Colleges consider the unthinkable: Dropping SAT and ACT requirements for next year’s applicants](#), Alicia Lee, CNN, April 15, 2020

If the exam is still administered, it should be recognized that this would be a key contributing factor to inequities in admissions. Some intermediate logistical changes that could produce some improvement in outcomes could include the following:

If an exam is still administered, offer it on an opt-in basis during school hours.

Only offering the exam outside of school hours puts several groups at a disadvantage, including students who have inadequate access to transportation to/from the test site without bus service. Holding the exam during school hours makes access to admissions more equitable. The AMC Math Competitions and PSAT are examples of successful administration of standardized exams during school hours.¹⁴

Expand fee waivers for the exam, announce them widely, and automatically offer them to all who are eligible.

Automatic waivers for TJ's \$100.00 admissions fee are only available currently to free and reduced price lunch students. Providing a more expansive fee waiver program to avoid putting the onus on families in difficult situations would be an important step toward removing barriers to entry.

Fee waivers are not currently well advertised to free/reduced lunch students and their families as a "free" process; greatly

expanding knowledge of this information would increase accessibility and participation of lower socioeconomic class families in the admissions process.

Dr. Angel B. Pérez, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Success at Trinity College in Connecticut, implemented a process of going test-optional as part of a series of steps to attract more diverse applicants. Additionally, he has seen gains in applications from first-generation students after adopting a policy to waive application fees for this group of underrepresented students.¹⁵

Build the TJ student body with an intentional focus on diversity and inclusion, similar to the process used by universities.

Top universities and companies have established admissions, recruiting, and hiring processes that promote diversity without lowering their high standards and rankings. They hold the belief that exposure to diversity enhances critical thinking and problem-solving ability, and even has impacts at increasing student and employee satisfaction, motivation, general knowledge, and intellectual self-confidence.¹⁶ For example, nearly half of Fortune 100 companies submitted a brief in Fisher vs Texas noting that "it would be crucial" that all of their university-trained employees enter the workforce with experience in sharing perspectives and approaches with diverse groups.¹⁷

¹⁴ [Elite or elitist? Lessons for colleges from selective high schools](#), Reeves and Schobert, July 31, 2019

¹⁵ [Are Admissions Gatekeepers Diverse Enough?](#), Scott Jaschik, Inside Higher Ed, February 5, 2018

¹⁶ Charles H. Baron, and Baron Charles H. 2017 ["Supreme Court of the United States."](#)

¹⁷ Enner, J, and B Lock Llp. n.d. "Supreme Court of the United States ON WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE FORTUNE-100 AND OTHER LEADING AMERICAN" 20001



There has never been a better chance to remedy the diversity issues at TJHSST. This is the moment—this is the time. Let's move our community forward, no longer fighting in a competition for resources, but hand in hand in cooperation.

– Jorge Torrico, TJAAG Leader



TJ can take the following steps to create a more equitable admissions process:

Revise the Student Information Sheet to give students a chance to demonstrate character traits necessary for success at TJ (e.g. grit, determination, curiosity, and integrity).

Similar to the admissions exam, the Student Information Sheet has become a “preppable” exercise that frequently reflects parents’ abilities to invest in elite extracurriculars more than each student’s aptitude or interest in STEM. For example, students may enroll in extracurricular math and science gifted courses such as summer robotics camps or those offered by the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth from Grades 2–8. These classes may cost families upwards of \$1,000 per course.¹⁸

TJAAG suggests that admissions officials work with experts (e.g. MIT & Trinity College university admissions offices) to develop a format that better measures each applicant’s ability to grow and thrive in a challenging STEM environment, instead of maintaining a form that serves as a checklist of activities that are not accessible to all community members.

Raise decision-making standards for those involved in the Admissions process.

Require that the admissions review committee members reflect the racial and socioeconomic demographics of TJ’s draw districts. A 2017 university study found that during admissions scoring, admissions officers from historically underrepresented groups and diverse backgrounds were more likely to admit

¹⁸ [Johns Hopkins Tuition & Fees](#)

low-SES applicants and students from underrepresented minority (URM) groups, whereas admission committee members with more experience, similar backgrounds, and employed by their own alma mater provided less equitable recommendations.¹⁹

Require all Admissions Office members to complete yearly diversity, equity, and inclusion training hosted by professionals with proven success in training employees and growing both diversity and excellence within institutions. For example, currently in the top ten of Diversity Inc's Top 50 Companies for Diversity, global consulting firm Accenture is championing the process of training and establishing a dynamic workforce highly inclusive of various racial, ethnic backgrounds as well as persons with disabilities.²⁰

Increase transparency of the admissions process for all middle school families and faculty.

Currently, different middle schools provide different levels of information and advice on TJ admissions in and outside of the classroom, leading to an additional layer of inequity in the overall process.

Fairfax County should offer consistent training for teachers across all middle schools in the county so that they all can serve as equally effective mentors and recommendation writers for student applicants.

Increase specificity and accountability for building a diverse student body by revising the regulations governing TJ admissions.

TJ should ensure that the key regulation governing admissions ([Regulation 3355.13](#)) promotes diversity and inclusion in an explicit and measurable manner. For example, the regulation currently includes “commitment” and “passion” for STEM as criteria for admissions. In practice, this means commitment and passion may be measured by extracurricular activities more reflective of a parent's priorities and ability to pay as opposed to a student's own commitment or passion for STEM. This may create an unreasonable barrier for low-income students and students from historically underrepresented groups in STEM. Not every student has equal access to STEM programs; therefore this should not be used as an indicator of commitment or passion.

As it exists, the regulatory language that emphasizes diversity in [Regulation 3355.13](#) is too generic and has not been actively implemented for recent admitted classes at TJ, as evidenced by past and [current admissions numbers](#). Adding more specific qualifiers for what kind of diversity TJ Admissions must account for in their selection of a class ensures that this aspect of the regulation is incorporated into the process. Specifying racial/ethnic diversity, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity is very important as all three of these qualifiers are key components of the lack of diversity at TJ and the inequities prospective students and families face as they engage with the admissions process from different school pyramids, income levels, and backgrounds.

Examples of proposed amendments include but are not limited to edits to:

- *Section V, Clause 2, Subclause c that currently reads “Commitment, intellectual curiosity, passion, and creativity,*

¹⁹ Bowman, N.A. & Bastedo, M.N. (2018). What Role May Admissions Office Diversity and Practices Play in Equitable Decisions?. *Res High Educ* (59), 430–447.

²⁰ [Accenture Inclusion & Diversity](#)

*in the study of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.” - Change to “Commitment, Intellectual curiosity, **potential, passion, and creativity**, in the study of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.” and;*

- *Section V.2.d., Clause 2, Subclause d that currently reads “Background, skills, or experiences that promote the School Board’s goal of providing diversity in the student body to enhance a unique learning experience and to develop future leaders.” - Change to “Background, skills, or experiences that promote the School Board’s goal of providing **racial, socioeconomic, and geographic** diversity in the student body to enhance a unique learning experience and to develop future leaders.”*

These are just a couple of examples of changing the spirit of the regulation to reflect a more equitable and inclusive TJ admissions process, but a comprehensive review of the regulation is needed in this same spirit.

Consider additional strategic Admission shifts.

As TJ’s diversity, equity, and inclusion is being considered, it is important to address which children benefit from TJ and which students would fare equally as well attending their base school (or better, as a number of universities currently cap the number of TJ alumni they admit).

“A number of studies have compared long-run outcomes for students who scored just below and just above the passing score (i.e. with a regression discontinuity design). Reviewing evidence from studies of the New York and Boston schools, ... there is a

‘precisely zero effect of the exam schools on college attendance, college selectivity, and college graduation.’”²¹ To serve a meaningful role in FCPS, TJ must focus on admissions processes that are a value-add for those selected and which most benefit Fairfax county as a whole.

Lottery

Due to the extraordinary academic talent of the TJ applicant pool, there are far more qualified students than slots available at the school. For instance, in 2018, TJ **turned down 149 semifinalists who had a perfect 4.0 GPA.**²² Opening a portion of the slots at TJ to a lottery would increase diversity on many fronts. It would also soften the feeling of rejection that many extraordinary, talented students (and their parents) sense when not accepted to TJ. The first principal of TJ (G. Jones) noted **“he would rather students think they are unlucky than believe they are undeserving.”**

It is important to note, a critical portion of lottery admissions is important to make a difference in outcomes—schools that use less than 50% lottery seats encounter problems later with inclusion once on campus, particularly if it is known which students are admitted by lottery and which are not. If TJ uses lottery-based admissions, they must form a majority of the population. This could be done by ensuring that there is a minimum cutoff of acceptable essays, testing, interviews, recommendation letters, etc., and then from among the semifinalist applicants at least 244 are selected by the lottery.

Socioeconomic Status Tiers

Socioeconomic status at a granular (census tract) level can be used to compete applicants against similarly challenged peers.

²¹ [Evidence on New York City and Boston exam schools](#), R. Shep Melnick 2018

²² [TJ Class of 2022 Detailed Admissions Data](#)

Chicago Public Schools, defines SES tiers for every census tract, based on median family income, adult educational attainment, the percentage of single-family households, home-ownership percentage, percentage of population that speaks a language other than English, and a school performance variable. After a composite SES score is determined for each tract, CPS will designate an SES tier (one through four) for each census tract in the city. Students applying to competitive magnet programs compete as a whole for 30% of the slots, then the remaining students in each tier compete for 70% of the slots divided by the four tiers, with 17.5% slots allocated to each SES tier. This program has been effective at keeping Chicago's magnet schools representative.²³

Utilizing a similar method for TJ would require this to be adapted to Fairfax County's unique profile as a large, highly multilingual suburban school district.

Draw Districts

Drawing TJ students from all base elementary school districts in the final admissions phase could increase diversity and ensure TJ serves all of our community more proportionally. TJ should consider a system to accept 2 students from each of the 142 base elementary school districts (based on their address) and reserve the remainder of FCPS slots (approximately 100) for general pool admissions.

²³ [Chicago Public Schools: Ensuring Diversity in Selective Enrollment and Magnet Schools](#)





In top academic institutions and leading tech companies, **representation matters**. The proposed admissions process can create access to life-changing opportunities for underrepresented groups who have traditionally been excluded from TJ's amazing educational offerings.

– Malaika Addae, TJAAG Leader



Recommendations: School Pedagogy and Culture

Alumni have the perspective and wisdom of their experiences post-TJ to reflect on their high school experience, the unnecessary challenges it may have placed on students from underrepresented groups, and the ways in which diversity could have contributed to an enhanced education for all students. The following suggestions for improving TJ's School Culture have emerged from the Culture of Inclusivity committee of the TJ Alumni Action Group, a group of 10-20 alumni, including many recent graduates, who have met regularly since June 2020. Their goal is to promote a culture of inclusivity and accountability at TJHSST that creates a better experience and education for all students.

Expand racial discussions to all aspects of the curriculum including STEM subjects.

If TJ is truly committed to being anti-racist, we must acknowledge the role that race and racism have played in science, history, art, and the social sciences in our curriculum and critically engage with race across disciplines. TJ claims to value interdisciplinary learning in its core curriculum: one need look no further than block classes like IBET, CHUM, HUM, and senior seminars in English/Government to see this. Incorporating racial discussions is both a natural and necessary extension of such interdisciplinary learning. Students in science classes should examine the way race intersects with the subjects they are studying.

Topics can include: the history of scientific racism, the exploitation of people of color in the name of science, and scientific ethics (e.g. who historically and currently bears the risks and receives the benefits of scientific advancement).

Students in history classes should learn about the role of racism, slavery, immigration, and colonization in world and American history. Students in English classes should read literature, poetry, plays, and nonfiction from a diverse, global, and intersectional canon.

Train teachers to implement anti-racist curricula and inclusive teaching methods.

Anti-racism needs to be a part of the TJ (and FCPS) education so that future leaders can develop the self-awareness and critical-thinking skills needed to promote inclusivity and cross-cultural collaboration desperately needed in STEM today. Because racism is a deeply embedded social construct inherent in our culture and institutions, to teach anti-racism is not only to teach students how to avoid explicitly discriminatory behavior, but also to guide them in understanding the presence of systemic racism and unconscious racial bias in their day-to-day lives, across all disciplines. Currently, TJ faculty do not have the right tools or training to foster anti-racism discussions with students. TJ's administration should ensure that faculty are equipped with anti-racist educational resources, including training, and TJ's faculty should commit to incorporate anti-racism into their curriculum.

[Brown University's Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning](#) applies Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's definition of anti-racism to define anti-racist teaching as "intentional syllabus design, class content, or pedagogy that creates or develops racial equity, with applications for face-to-face and remote/hybrid teaching environments." This may include, but is not limited to:

- Educational trainers or diversity consultants dedicated to supporting equity and cultural responsiveness in schools
- Group sessions for TJ faculty dedicated to discussing how to be an antiracist educator
- Classroom activities and teaching practices that foster productive discourse about race

Of course, we recognize that the requirements of typical TJ curricula—AP courses in particular—can make it difficult to incorporate new activities and practices into class time. However, TJ has many spaces dedicated to enhancing students' engagement with complex subjects beyond the standardized curriculum, such as in honors courses, advanced post-AP courses, and even within AP courses after AP exams are completed.

At TJ, inclusive teaching practices are important for all students, but especially so in courses that are entry points to STEM careers, such as physics and chemistry, which have low minority representation. Active learning is a classroom approach which encourages multiple modes of absorbing/ applying content and provides students with alternatives to the traditional lecture teaching style. Teaching strategies that emphasize structured active learning can create more inclusive and equitable classrooms, improving learning for all students. Active learning strategies promote communication between students, problem solving, collaborative group activities, and multiple modes of engagement to reach all learners, including historically underrepresented groups.²⁴

Reserve extracurricular sessions, 8th period sessions, assemblies, readings, and elective classes for intersectional and diverse curriculum, education, and discussion.

Anti-racist education and reflection outside of core subjects could take many forms, e.g.:

- Strengthen and support existing clubs such as the Black Student Union, the Student Diversity Initiative, and the Hispanic Alliance that are already doing some of this work, and encouraging these clubs to host events for discussion and education open to the entire school.
- Promote faculty and administration-led anti-racist initiatives. Absence of these programs places the burden of creating an anti-racist environment at TJ largely on student. Faculty-led initiatives could include elective classes, assemblies, summer reading, or year-long reflection on a "One Question," as TJ previously did every year until 2014. This commitment to anti-racism should also be reflected in field trips and contextualizing any visits to historical monuments or locations.

There are many approaches to be taken here that are not mutually exclusive. However, it is very important that some of these initiatives, such as field trips, assemblies, and One Questions, be part of every student's experience. Others, such as 8th periods and classes, could be encouraged by the administration, faculty and broader community. All club

²⁴ Eddy, S & Hogan, K. (2014). Getting under the hood: how and for whom does increasing course structure work? CBE Life Sciences Education (13), 453-468.

officers should attend 8th periods set aside for reflection on anti-racist and inclusionary work in their organization.

Whatever form these initiatives take, the goal should be to relate anti-racism to the daily lives, actions, and behaviors of students inside and outside of school. A specific emphasis should be placed on the history of Northern Virginia and Fairfax County, beginning with slavery and continuing past the anti-desegregation movement in the very schools these students sit in today. There should also be a focus on the area's rich history of immigration, and how inequalities exist within and between different immigrant groups. These initiatives should not be treated as a sort of "liability insurance" against appearing racist. They should actively seek to equip students with the tools to identify and act in the face of privilege and discrimination.

Make the TJ faculty more diverse.

FCPS Human Resources needs to improve their screening process for hiring, ensure posts reach a diverse audience and, once teachers are hired, actively support BIPOC faculty/staff/administrators to ensure that they feel welcome and supported in schools.²⁵ In a county where students of color make up 60% of enrollment, but 81.5% of teachers are white, FCPS has been working to make strides on this issue more broadly.²⁶ The importance of a diverse teaching force is incredibly important at TJ, given that there are so few students from underrepresented groups at the school who end up matriculating to STEM careers.

A growing body of literature demonstrates student achievement outcomes are affected by the demographic match between teachers and students from underrepresented groups. Students are able to experience representation in the classroom and teachers can serve as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators.²⁷ Conversations between alumni of underrepresented groups confirm the importance of a diverse staff at TJ. "For me, the only African American teachers were Humanities teachers (each stayed one year) until Mr. [X] joined the science department. I only took Acoustics because he looked like me." Additionally, "The Visions program was also championed by Black teachers and counselors at TJ, Mrs. Bryant, Mrs. Johnson, etc. That helped in getting classroom space for the program, also in recruiting other TJ teachers to volunteer, etc."

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.

When faculty members and administrators are ill-equipped to adequately respond to incidents of discrimination and racial tensions within the student body, this burden falls on individual student groups. The alumni have heard of numerous reports of this happening at TJ.

In just one example, in the 2016–2017 school year, a student repeatedly used a slur offensive to the Black community

²⁵ [The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers](#)

²⁶ [Diverse Virginia school district makes push for more teachers of color](#), Debbie Truong, Washington Post, January 7, 2018

²⁷ Egalite, A., Kisda, B., & Winters, M. (2015). Representation in the classroom: the effect of own-race teachers on student achievement. *Economics of Education Review*, (45), 44–52.

on Facebook, despite Black students openly voicing their discomfort on social media. Instead of a productive schoolwide conversation, the administration remained silent. And the Black Student Union had to take responsibility for educating our community on the harmful effects and history of the word as they have continued to do so time and time again.

As a first step toward improving the school climate of inclusivity and diversity, we ask that the School Board regularly survey faculty, administration, and students to better understand their preparedness and perspectives on encouraging a diverse, equitable and inclusive learning environment. This annual or bi-annual survey should pay special attention to the responses of students, faculty, and administrators from underrepresented and/or marginalized backgrounds. The survey responses will help TJ and the School Board identify problems and create appropriate plans of action to create a welcome and representative atmosphere. This survey can be segued to also address mental and physical health in order to gauge student wellbeing and satisfaction. As concerns about mental health and wellness increase in Fairfax County, this survey can be applied on a county level.

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.

The alumni community has engaged in extensive conversations about racism, the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion

education at TJ, and how it impacts the lives of students during and after their experience.²⁸ All members of the community should be held responsible for racist or prejudiced language and behavior, and there should also be opportunities for the community to learn and heal following incidents. We call on the School Board to develop an anonymous reporting method for racist actions/language by faculty and students, and to develop a restorative justice-oriented process for holding students accountable for racist behavior and educating for future prevention. TJ already employs restorative justice through its Honor Council practices.

Faculty who break community guidelines regarding racist/discriminatory language should be required to meet with an equity officer (or other professionally trained FCPS employee focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion) to discuss and correct their behavior.

Ensure that the administration and faculty take a public stance on the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion at TJ.

The TJ administration needs to reevaluate TJ's mission and how it relates to uplifting marginalized minority groups. They also need to emphasize how important it is to listen to those marginalized voices—especially in STEM fields—and hold students accountable for their actions. These statements show the institution's commitment to upholding inclusion in their learning spaces and remind underrepresented students that they are a priority rather than an afterthought.

²⁸ For one recent testimonial from a current TJ student on racism there, see the video "[Hey TJ](#)" by a TJ '21 student

Many high schools such as Phillips Exeter Academy have released statements related to diversity, equity, and inclusion while TJ continues to remain silent. TJ Principal, Dr. Bonitatibus, put out a Call to Action in June 2020, and while we recognize this is a step in the right direction, there is no permanent statement on the TJHSST website that emphasizes the role diversity plays in the school's mission and vision. Currently, TJHSST's mission statement claims, "The mission of Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology is to provide students with a challenging learning environment focused on math, science, and technology, to inspire joy at the prospect of discovery, and to foster a culture of innovation based on ethical behavior and the shared interests of humanity."²⁹

Address disparities that low-income students face and provide a concrete support system for these students.

TJ students face significant differences in opportunities, resources, and experiences that can create income-based disparities in outcomes within the student body. Throughout the TJ experience, there are many outside academic resources that are extremely inaccessible to low-income or free/reduced lunch students. Summer prep enrichment centers that cost hundreds of dollars allow students to preview courses like Honors Chemistry or TJ Math 4 tailored specifically to TJ's curriculum. Expensive external TJ-specific tutors with access to previous versions of course materials and exams can lead to vast income-based disparities in educational outcomes among TJ students.

Under-resourced students who take these TJ courses without prior preparation may receive worse grades compared to those who have prior experience with the material if the course is graded on a curve. This could also result in income-based disparities in who chooses to take higher level STEM courses. If a student already feels discouraged by the unequal playing field in honors chemistry or TJ Math 3, there is likely a significantly lower chance that they will take Organic Chemistry or Linear Algebra. In addition, certain field trips for courses like AP Biology or competition trips for extracurriculars like Model United Nations may not be as accessible to everyone due to their cost. TJ needs to address these academic and extracurricular income-based disparities and provide financial/academic resources to level the playing field.

One way to implement change on this issue would be to establish a critical needs fund for low-income students for academic and extracurricular opportunities. This could be used for a variety of purposes such as unpaid summer internships, purchasing books to study for the Biology Olympiad, paying for competition trips, extracurricular, and college application fees, etc. Clubs or support groups for low-income or first generation colleges students could help foster community and facilitate mentorship within these student communities. First-Generation Low Income centers, orientation programs, and general resources exist at Stanford, Yale, and other leading colleges and universities.

Teachers also need to be more aware of who has taken a preparation course and recommend that students take courses that are appropriate for their level. For example, if the student took a summer course that covered all of the AP AB Calculus material, perhaps the teacher could recommend

²⁹ [TJHSST Mission Statement](#)

that the student try enrolling in AP BC Calc instead during the first quarter. Teachers tend to be better equipped at recognizing if a student is taking a lower-level course for a GPA increase while having previous knowledge of the course material. Also, they can make appropriate recommendations for a student who is pushing themselves too hard to take a difficult course. Teachers need adequate training to make these recommendations as bias could arise in regards to underrepresented students being disproportionately asked to take lower level courses despite their level of preparation.

Dedicate college and career resources specifically for Black, Latinx, low-income, first-generation, and other underrepresented students.

Top universities around the country provide extensive administrative support for students from Black, Latinx, and low-income backgrounds. This comes in the form of cultural affinity centers with administrative leaders, first generation low-income networks, and mailing lists for students of underrepresented backgrounds. Many colleges have an eclectic student body to support these administrative efforts through their own organizations, but TJ as it exists now does not have such a community to rely upon. Therefore, TJ's administration must take a more active role in promoting inclusion at the school. A simple start to this would be to create a mailing list of Black, Latinx, and low-income students at TJ to disseminate information about programs that pertain to these communities (scholarships/fellowships, special programs, college opportunities, etc.). Other inclusion-promoting activities could include bringing in speakers and having specialized meetings or seminars for students of marginalized identities. These responsibilities should be shared amongst one or more members of the Administration, Student Services, and/or the College and Career Center.

Mandate that all clubs discuss how their mission statement relates to diversity and inclusion.

TJ's eighth periods are an important place for finding community and should be a welcoming place for all. The administration can take more action in encouraging and providing tools to create inclusive environments, with the inclusion of marginalized minorities specifically in mind. They should also take an active stance in discouraging exclusive environments. Club leadership should be required to participate in diversity training so they can be better prepared at creating inclusive spaces. Administration can make J-Day booths contingent on clubs discussing their relationship with diversity, equity, and inclusion. This effort can involve the SGA, who can receive and verify proposals.





Appendices

Appendix A:
About the TJ Alumni Action Group

Appendix B:
Common Questions & Answers about Change at TJ

Appendix C:
**Requests related to TJ Faculty, Curriculum and the
TJ Administration**

Appendix D: Press Coverage of TJ Over the Years

Appendix A: About the TJ Alumni Action Group

What is the TJAAG?

- TJAAG is a group of more than 1,000 TJ alumni that seeks an admissions policy at TJHSST that promotes student representation, reflecting its draw districts, and creates an improved antiracist student experience that provides the quality educational experience needed to grow future STEM leaders.
- More than 50 members regularly meet for committee work tackling core aspects of TJ's diversity gaps. Committees range from mentoring young scholars, to encouraging underrepresented groups to apply, to changing the culture at TJ to one of celebrating and supporting all diversity, to researching and analyzing the data for best results, to shifting the vision of TJ to better match the needs of Fairfax County and our shared future.
- TJAAG has fielded 4-7 speakers at each school board since our membership explosion starting in late May. Our membership includes a broad array of experts in data analysis, teaching, social justice, and STEM. All of them share the goal of fixing TJ's problematic admission of disproportionately few Black, Latinx, Native American Indian, and low income students.
- Diversity and inclusion issues at TJ have been discussed for several decades, but without sustained improvement. The year two thousand twenty is the year for permanent change.

What is the TJAAG asking for?

- **Re-design the admissions process** to be more equitable and result in representation of the makeup of Fairfax County, including underrepresented minority and low income demographics
- Mandate **an antiracist and inclusive curriculum** for use starting this upcoming school year, including more resources and support at TJ for underrepresented minority and low income groups, so that it provides a healthy learning environment for all students
- Increase and provide **consistent, effective access in all communities** that are in TJ's geographic draw districts to resources and messaging that recruits and prepares kids for the TJ application (not just AAP centers)
- TJAAG is **requesting data sets** from 2012 to the present in order to further analyze the loss of Black, Latinx, Native American Indian, and low income students in the admissions process

What is the TJAAG's vision for TJ?

- The TJAAG would like to see an antiracist admissions process and student experience at TJ, so that the school represents the populations in its draw districts and provides a healthy learning environment for all students.

How is the group organizing to achieve its goals and objectives?

- The TJAAG has organized into seven committees designed to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion prior, during, and after admissions to the school. Committees include:
 - » Admissions Process
 - » Applicant Engagement
 - » Mentorship and Outreach
 - » Culture of Inclusivity
 - » Pressure for Change
 - » Research and Analysis
 - » Reimagining STEM Education

- Key areas of focus across TJAAG committees include:
 - » Increasing engagement, outreach, and admission prep opportunities for underrepresented minorities and low-income students
 - » Advocating for a more inclusive and antiracist admission process
 - » Promoting a culture of inclusivity and responsibility among students, faculty, and administration at TJ

Appendix B: Common Questions & Answers about Change at TJ

Is the problem so bad? What are the actual numbers?

- TJ does not reflect the demographics of Fairfax County. The Class of 2019 was 1.6% Black and 2.4% Hispanic. In TJ's most recently admitted class, the number of Black students was "too small for reporting."
- Across Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), 10% of students are Black, 25.9% are Hispanic, 38.5% are White, 19.6% are Asian, 5.5% are two or more races, 0.2% are American Indian and 0.1% are Native Hawaiian.
- Economically disadvantaged students are also underrepresented. The percentage of students on free and reduced price lunches is routinely around 1-2%. Across FCPS, more than 31% of the total student population is economically disadvantaged.
- Every year admissions statistics at TJ are scrutinized, but there have been few effective changes that have helped to remedy this issue.
- As a result, we must critically examine TJ's exclusion of Black, Latinx, and low-income students, and then commit ourselves to fixing it.

Well, at least TJ has a great reputation for being the top school in the nation, right?

- A growing part of the issue with TJ admissions is the negative reputation TJ is gaining among underrepresented minority groups as an inhospitable place for their children. Alumni and students alike have spoken to the school board

recently about their experiences of racism at TJ, and have been speaking out against the same issues for decades. Even the Washington Post editorial staff recently called out Jefferson for its abysmal diversity numbers.

- In line with FCPS' mission to inspire and empower students to be responsible and innovative global citizens, TJ must create a more inclusive environment for underrepresented groups and improve educational resources around topics such as systemic racism.
- We can begin to address this serious problem with simple solutions. Prepare students to be successful leaders in STEM and the world by incorporating anti-racism into the core curriculum at TJ (e.g. incorporating discussions of systemic racism in course material, and teaching students about privilege, imposter syndrome, and the meritocracy myth).

Wouldn't changing the admissions process lower the standards of the school, or lead to admission of students who are underprepared to manage the challenges?

- We completely reject the assertion that admission of more underrepresented minorities including Black, Latinx, and low-income students would lower the standards of the school. On the contrary, we argue that the current process is excluding qualified, deserving students from those underrepresented populations.
- Admitting students from underrepresented groups, including Black, Latinx, and low-income students, will raise the standards of TJ. The opportunities of TJ need to be available to those who can gain the most advantage from the incredible peer effect, enriched environment, and committed teachers at Jefferson.

- The current selection process is excluding talented students from underrepresented populations. All FCPS high schools are excellent; therefore TJ admissions needs to enroll more diverse students who will produce the most benefit to Fairfax County and to society.
- There are plenty of ways to reform the admissions process without lowering the standards of the school or setting students up to fail. This is the reason we are asking FCPS and the TJ administration to establish a committee with all stakeholders to recommend actionable solutions publicly by a specific date.
- The research is clear: the lack of Black, Latinx, Native American Indian, and low income (in childhood) leaders across STEM is resulting in harm to minority populations and poor outcomes for our increasingly global world. This is evident through inadequate health care, unacceptable environment and climate impacts, and other negative policy—and governance—based consequences that disproportionately affect these populations. TJ must help prepare the Black, Latinx, Native American Indian, and low-income leaders our society desperately needs to ensure that policy, governance, medicine, and technology serve everyone.
- Additionally, all TJ Students should have the opportunity to get the antiracist education and diversity, equality, and inclusion tools they need to set them up for success and effective leadership in a globalized, diverse world.
- Top-tier universities and companies recognize the value that diversity adds and seek to recruit diverse candidates. As a top-tier high school, TJ should do the same.
- TJAAG supports actions taken to increase accessibility to AAP courses and, ultimately, to TJ starting at a much younger age. However, only focusing on this issue ignores the system racism that is inherent in the current TJ admissions process (including standardized test biases and the weighting of after school activities that not all students can afford). **Structural changes are needed at every level of the process.**
- The #1 high school in the country should be on the leading edge of innovation in every aspect, from pedagogy to inclusivity. We see no reason why TJ cannot be the leader and a model for other top schools in transforming admissions processes and student experiences for the better.

I thought the school had already put a lot of effort into making things better, like more test prep and outreach programs. Why are we still harping on this issue?

- FCPS has tried various small projects over the decades to address diversity, but each failed to produce substantial, large-scale improvement in diversity outcomes. The most historically successful program, Visions, was canceled unnecessarily.
- Free tutoring, trying to make the test less preppable, diversity open houses, attempting to focus on “STEM-interested” candidates, and projects of the like are insufficient on their own because the problem is a systemic one requiring a systemic solution.
- Countless students have been harmed and are being harmed now by the status quo at TJ. There are qualified, deserving students who should have the opportunity to attend TJ but do not. There are students who should feel safe and welcome at TJ but do not. And there are students who should have the opportunity to get the antiracist

This sounds like an issue larger than TJ, why should TJ be held responsible for this? Why not just solve the problem at the elementary/middle school level?

education they need to set them up for success and effective leadership in a globalized, diverse world—and do not. We are advocating so passionately for change because we do not want any more students to be harmed in these ways.

What potential solutions has the TJAAG researched?

FCPS and the TJ administration must build a permanent committee charged with assessing—at least annually—diversity-seeking changes to confirm they are effective and able to make course corrections quickly. The TJ diversity struggle is littered with decades of “quick hits” or one-offs to remedy the problem without circling back to assess whether changes were effective.

Unintended consequences are common.

Top-tier universities and companies recognize the value that diversity adds. Universities build their student body as a unit, recruiting diverse, successful candidates who can positively contribute to the university as a critical part of the community experiences and education they offer and the alumni they want to create. As a top-tier high school, TJ must do the same and build its student body thoughtfully.

- As a result of COVID-19, 2020 is an ideal year to remove the standardized test requirement or make it optional for TJ applicants. Many colleges now make standardized tests optional with a range of standardized tests accepted. Privilege biases every step of the TJ admissions process. Families are preparing their kids from 2nd grade after AAP testing and spending time and money to make their students top scorers, pushing them into STEM activities

whether the student enjoys them or not. Test prep courses for both the semifinal and final admission rounds result in dramatic underrepresentation of Black, Latinx, Native American Indian, and low SES students.

- Drawing TJ students from all elementary school districts in the final admissions phase could increase diversity and ensure TJ serves all of our community more proportionally. TJ should consider a system to accept the best N (where N is at least 1) students from each base elementary school.
- Lottery based acceptances can also increase diversity. It would also defang the feeling of rejection that many extraordinary, talented students (and their parents) sense when not accepted to TJ. However, the specific critical mass of lottery admissions is important to make a difference in outcomes—schools that use less than 50% lottery seats encounter problems later with inclusion once on campus, particularly if it is known which students are admitted by lottery and which are not. If TJ uses lottery-based admissions they must form a large portion—such as 75% or more—of the population. This could be done by ensuring that there is a minimum cutoff of acceptable essays, testing, interviews, recommendation letters, etc., and then from among the remaining applicants (such as 1,000 or 1,500) the 450 are selected by the lottery.
- TJ must transform school culture to create a culture of inclusion. TJAAG has a **detailed plan** for ensuring TJ’s curriculum provides a comprehensive education to STEM leaders of the future.

Aren’t changes to the TJ process anti-immigrant or anti-Asian?

- 89% of parents in the U.S. support a public-school system that emphasizes socioeconomic and racial integration.³⁰

³⁰ A. S. Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo 2016, “How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students.” The Education Digest 82 (1): 17–24.

TJ Alumni Action Group Recommendations Report

- TJAAG is advocating for equitable educational opportunities for all communities across its draw districts, which does NOT equate to asking for a reduction in the number of Asians/immigrants who attend TJ.
- Our group includes many Asian-American alumni who support structural changes to admissions that will lead to a more diverse and inclusive culture for all races at TJ. Increasing diversity amongst the student body and promoting inclusion will benefit all members of the TJ community.
- The immigrant community across Fairfax County is incredibly diverse, and we would like to see all of the many ethnicities included be appropriately represented at TJ.
- Also, there is a substantial population of immigrants who belong to the underrepresented minority groups for which TJAAG is advocating.
- For more information on Fairfax County demographics, refer to: [Equitable Growth Profile of Fairfax County](#)

Appendix C: Requests related to the TJ Faculty, Curriculum, and Administration

Detail on suggestions for an antiracist curriculum:

Classes should examine the way race intersects with their subject matter and acknowledge the racist history of those subjects. Some examples:

1. **Biology** classes should discuss how [scientific racism](#) was used to reinforce white supremacy as a “biological fact” through philosophies and approaches such as Social Darwinism and phrenology. They should also learn about medical ethics and the history of the medical field exploiting black and brown bodies, such as the [Tuskegee syphilis experiments](#), and the nonconsensual harvesting of cells from [Henrietta Lacks](#). Students should learn about racial disparities in health care, and the so-called objective science backing the disparities in treatment that often stem from the fact that the basis of a “normal body” is a white man (see for example, the race coefficient in the [eGFR equation](#)).
 2. **Computer science** classes should learn about how racism and bias can be deep-rooted in “objective” data-driven and artificial intelligence algorithms: such biased algorithms are used in [health care](#), [search engines](#), [policing](#), [criminal sentencing](#), and [facial recognition](#).
 3. **Geosystems** classes should discuss [racial environmental justice](#) and how environmental damage disproportionately hurts [indigenous communities](#) and communities of color.
 4. **History** classes should discuss the role of racism, slavery, immigration, and colonization in World and American history.
- **World History** should learn about the history and lasting impact of colonization around the world as well as historical events, genocides, and tragedies from a global perspective. In most TJ 10th grade World History II classes, we spent a month learning about the Holocaust and one day learning about every other genocide in Africa, Asia, and South America.
 - **American History:** We recognize that the Governor of the Commonwealth is already taking steps toward addressing the way Black voices are portrayed in U.S. history through its [Commission on African American History Education](#) and we encourage you to incorporate these recommendations into Governor’s school curricula. We add to these voices with additional recommendations:
 - ▶ Be explicit about the role of slavery in American history, starting from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.
 - ▶ Accurately portray the Civil Rights Movement and resistance movements. Romanticizing the civil rights movement is a particular concern when it comes to what students have already learned. Typical historical narratives about Black resistance often pit leader against leader and movement against movement, praising “respectable,” nonviolent Black leaders while condemning other more militant tactics, and discounting the ways in which Black people have always resisted. Students need to know what links these movements, rather than what divides them, and to see civil rights struggles as continuous efforts against systemic racism, rather than one historical moment.
 - ▶ Help high schoolers connect past and present through identifying how dominant historical narratives silence stories of resistance, and encouraging them to act in their own lives.

- ▶ Discuss the nuances of the American immigrant experience, including exclusion, refugee movements, European immigrants and evolving perceptions of whiteness, and Latinx immigration.
- ▶ Better explore and engage students on the racist history of the U.S. and their local area during and after the Civil Rights Movement. In Northern Virginia, this can be done by discussion of its [history of segregation](#), the origin of Virginian school names, and the [movement to change](#) them.
- English classes should read literature, poetry, plays, and nonfiction from a diverse, global, and intersectional cannon. [Frederick County](#) has put forward some excellent suggestions as a starting point.
- Offer more [classes on race and ethnicity](#), and the benefits of diversity in STEM.

Resources and tools for antiracist teaching:

- [Unlearning Racism: Resources for Teaching Anti-Racism](#)
- [Effective Teaching is Antiracist Teaching](#)
- [Training and Popular Education Strategies for Understanding Racial Equity](#)
- [How to Be an Antiracist Educator](#)
- Garnett, BR, et al. 2019. "The Emancipatory Potential of Transformative Mixed Methods Designs: Informing Youth Participatory Action Research and Restorative Practices within a District-Wide School Transformation Project." *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 42 (3): 305–16. doi:10.1080/1743727X.2019.1598355.

Appendix D: Press Coverage of TJ: Diversity Issues Over the Years

TJ's struggle with equity and inclusion has received much attention over the years. Please see the below articles for a selection of press on TJ:

[What will it take for Thomas Jefferson High School to Change](#)
August 2020 | Washington Post

[At a top magnet school with few black or Latino students, a push for change meets resistance](#) | July 2020 | Washington Post

[Call to Action by the TJ Principal](#) | June 2020 | The Connector

[Playing hide & seek with diversity, a series of student stories](#)
June 2020 | TJ Today

[My not so Black-and-White look at diversity at Jefferson](#)
June 2020 | TJ Today

[Virginia 2020 Budget Language Requires Governor's Schools to Submit Diversity Goals Plan to Gov. Northam by Oct. 1](#)
June 2020 | Blue Virginia

[Diversity Goals are a Great Start](#) | February 2020 | Inside NoVA

[The Diversity Dilemma in Selective Public Schools](#)
2019 | Future Ed

[Why Are Black and Hispanic Students Underrepresented in this Northern Virginia Gifted Program?](#) | 2018 | Washington Post

[A Stubborn Excellence Gap: Despite efforts, diversity stalls at an elite public high school](#) | 2018 | Education Next

[Panel Rejects Bid to Alter Elite Va High School's Admissions](#)
2018 | NBC4

[Commentary: An Opportunity to Improve TJ](#)
2018 | The Connector

[Does the No. 1 High School in America Practice Discrimination? Fairfax's Thomas Jefferson High School is still less than 5 percent African-American and Latino. Improving that number has proved complicated](#) | 2017 | Washingtonian

[Being a Minority at America's Best High School](#)
2012 | Washington Post

[Fairfax Releases TJ Admissions Data](#) | 2012 | Washington Post

[The new Thomas Jefferson? It includes remedial math](#)
2012 | Washington Post

[As Thomas Jefferson adds help for poor English skills, some Va. parents fume](#) | 2011 | Washington Post

[The Quest](#) | 2005 | Washington Post

[Middle schools which feed TJ](#)

[Admissions 2020](#)





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