

I am writing to inform you that my child's first grade teacher resigned yesterday, effective immediately. She was their teacher for all of 7 days. Today the children were introduced to their long term substitute teacher until a full time replacement can be found. So, not only are the 6 and 7 year old children having a very hard time adjusting to distance learning and the very long Google Meet sessions, they now have to adjust through 3 new teachers. My child was quite sad and felt hurt. She wanted to know why the teacher would choose to leave when school just started. I told her that this way of teaching is very hard on teachers and they are trying their best. My child replied, "Well this is very hard on me too. I wish that we could just go to regular school that way we can all be happy."

The mental health ramifications of the decisions being made, and not made for that matter, are taking their toll. The long term effects of these decisions and lack of decisions are becoming very apparent for teachers, children, and parents. We were told that the teacher resigned because she could not manage her home life and the workload. It seems that excellent teachers are being pushed to their brink, being forced to choose between their families and their livelihoods when the science is not there to keep the schools closed. I know that for our school, we were presented a very viable hybrid plan. Our school was able to accommodate every family in the school if they chose hybrid. I do not believe that ideas are being thought of outside the box to even attempt to get children back in the schools.

I ask that we, the parents, teachers, and students are given a plan for children to return to the schools. If half of the families in the district chose hybrid, it seems that the schools could hold them or maybe other buildings in the county be used for school purposes, like they are being used for childcare. Maybe county buses could be used to transport students if school buses do not provide enough room. If it is a staffing issue, then perhaps a larger scale search for teachers who would like to return to in-person school take place. Perhaps we re-evaluate the current teacher pool and see who would like to return because the burden they have been given of distance learning is too much to bear and they can see that for younger children especially, that distance learning is not working.

Between the technical issues, the attempts to keep the children engaged, to seeing firsthand how frustrated the children get, distance learning is not sustainable and there needs to be a plan in place now for how to return children to school as soon as possible. I am not sure when we as parents or adults, in the case of teachers and staff, lost the ability to make the best choices for ourselves and our children. We should be given a choice of whether or not we want to send our kids back to school and if it works for our personal lifestyle. We were pushed to make a choice and then it was taken away as quickly as it came about. Please, create a sustainable plan and stick to it.

I do not envy your job or the decisions that you have to make, but this floundering around, silence, and lack of answers is completely unacceptable at this point. We are well into the pandemic and there have been months to make a plan. Loudoun has done a fantastic job keeping cases down and hospitalizations are very, very low. I understand that is from us adhering to the protocols. Implement that in the schools. We are the richest county in the nation and there is money to be used for this exact purpose.

I hope that there will be a plan in place very soon. Please do not let our children fall behind due to fear. We must adapt and forge on for our kids and teachers. They are some of the most important people in our society and deserve our best.

Thank you for your time, Jennifer Spurrier

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To Whom It May Concern:

As I said in my initial missive to the King George County Schools Superintendent, Dr. Robert Benson, and further to the King George County School Board, my husband and I are very excited to be able to send our child to public school; we both grew up in public school systems and we both have family histories of parents in military service branches, childhoods spent in United States Scouting, and active youths dedicated to Christian service. We have been particularly impressed with KGCS's requirements, curricula, and statistics in this region.

However, as a concerned citizen of a country that is failing so many of its own and other country's citizens, watching my child attempting to learn and recite the Pledge of Allegiance, a text that expounds the United States' dedication to justice and liberty for all, has been disheartening.

Memorizing the Pledge has even been part of what I can only assume is the graded participation in class and the homework. Considering that forcing students to say the Pledge for any reason was deemed unconstitutional in 1943 in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, and has been upheld across the United States several times since then, I find it difficult to accept that my child is being graded on learning the Pledge adequately.

I have read the policy regarding the Pledge of Allegiance, both at the local KGCS Board level and at the state level. It is absurd to include a daily recitation of the United States Pledge of Allegiance as part of the policy of King George County Schools, yet insist that students do not have to recite it. What is the point of even having this as part of the KGCS policy?

I was concerned when I discovered that daily recitation of the Pledge is still an active part of our county's school system, but I was appalled when memorization and recitation of the Pledge was included as part of my kindergartener's required curriculum. How is it possible it is required of them for the Standards of Learning when forced recitation of it was ruled unconstitutional only a year after the Pledge was adopted?

Daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at the age of five is nothing more than an exercise in mindless obedience. These children do not truly understand the words they are being made to memorize, and they cannot be expected to make an informed, conscious decision regarding recitation. To make it part of the daily policy of the public school systems is to make it mandatory. To insist that just because no student is forced to recite it means it is optional is utterly absurd. What child wants to appear different, or to face the ire of a teacher, other authority figure, or even the disdain of their fellow students?

I have respectfully requested the KGCS Board remove the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance from school policy and I now request that the Virginia Department of Education do the same, as it has become apparent that KGCS is only following state mandate. Daily recitation, particularly at a young age, not only means nothing regarding building respect for one's country, it demeans the free will and growth of conscience that we all hope our children can achieve whilst attending public school in King George County. At best, you foster blind patriotism. At worst, you create anxiety in a young student and build on the principles of nationalism, America's golden calf. In other countries where a pledge is recited, monthly or even weekly pledges are considered appropriate. Even this would be a more

desirable solution than the current policy, which was no doubt born from the nationalistic fervor that swept the country immediately following September 11th, 2001.

My husband and I are raising our children to love the land in which they live and move. We are raising them to respect nature and all that dwells within. And we will not shy away from teaching them that injustice still exists and liberty has not reached everyone. I would simply hope that the public school system would not shy away from such inconvenient truths, either.

When there are children our government stole from their families, being kept away, abused, and allowed to die; when there are children being made orphans by those who have made similar pledges and vows to protect every citizen, when there are children who starve and freeze because my fellow countrymen are too concerned with a few extra cents on their taxes, well. You tell me why my son should pledge allegiance to this land when the Pledge is not teaching him anything except blind obedience.

I love my country. I love it despite its deep, deep flaws. I love that my parents were able to feed, clothe, and house me because of an active military. But I love the hope for my children's future, and the future of every child to cross these borders, more.

Please consider rescinding the daily Pledge of Allegiance as a requirement of every school board and district in the state of Virginia. True patriotism requires hard work, not a mindless pledge based on hypocrisy and fear, which becomes evident about the Pledge the more one learns of its history. Or, if you will insist on maintaining this policy, at least introduce it to children with a required unit on its full history, treating both recitation of it and objection to it equally. If a five year old child is considered old enough to memorize it and be expected to recite it every day, then they must be old enough to also understand why they are expected to recite it, what it means, and the ways in which the United States is failing the principles described therein.

Perhaps it is time that the Pledge is rewritten to reflect the truth of the state of our country and the hope for it. Perhaps each state should write its own pledge to this republic, in order to reflect the revelation of the United States' true role in so many atrocities and the uncertain future that spreads before it. Perhaps not only KGCS, but the Virginia Department of Education itself, could take up the true cause of justice.

Thank you for your consideration.

All the best,

Margaret Rice

Dear PWCS & VA Department of Education,

Please consider my feedback on the new virtual learning system put into place this fall. I believe there is a PWCS Board Meeting tonight and I ask that this feedback be taken into consideration prior to and during that meeting.

1. Reality

I participated in multiple online meetings hosted by PWCS over the summer to demo and discuss CANVAS, the new elearning platform our kids would be utilizing this school year. In all those meetings they walked us through the platform, explained the modules and really sold the site as the one-stop-shop for learning. Watching and learning over the summer, I felt I needed to be positive but I was very concerned about my children (7&8 years old) being expected to work "online" all day, to understand the new content being delivered to them in an unnatural way (virtually) and to be expected to navigate their computers and a new elearning platform. Up until this year, my girls participated in one technology course per week. I will remind you, they have been in school up until now for 1.5 & 2.5 years. At their ages and with the amount of instruction they have received so far, they can open & start a computer, use a mouse and barely type.

Week one, my 3rd grader was expected to open Microsoft PowerPoint in an assignment, complete a task, then save and close her work. When did they teach her how to use PowerPoint? Also, weren't we just supposed to be learning about CANVAS on week one? Wait, we are on week two, and I have a list of over 7 websites that my daughter is expected to use to complete assignments. SEVEN websites! That is 7 URLS, 7 LOGINS. I repeat; "At their ages and with the amount of instruction they have received by their school to this point, they can open and start a computer, use a mouse and barely type. Not only, are my children being asked to do too much, too fast, they are also expected to participate in ENCORE (PE, Music & Technology) and will be graded for that. As if they don't have enough to get done every day. Also, why do they need to do that? PE is supposed to be about physical health, which includes mental health. Nothing about what is in place right now is contributing to the health and wellness of my children.

Let's add to this equation, my home includes two people with professional jobs that require us to work 40+ hours a week each. That work includes, proposals, campaigns, meetings, calls, etc. How and when do I have time to sit with my 2nd and 3rd grader to complete the 5-10 assignments they are being tasked to complete daily? Watch the recorded ZOOM meetings? Sure, that is up to 2 hours' worth of content. Then, go to up to SEVEN websites to complete the assignments, but don't forget your logins. Who is doing the teaching? When is the teaching happening? All the while my 7&8 year olds are lost somewhere online.

Virtual learning for elementary aged students is not working. PWCS is tasked to deliver my children an education. PWCS is failing at that task. You aren't teaching, you are fire hosing us and leaving us to drown.

The options are; open schools OR be realistic about what can be done in the circumstances we are ALL in. All work should be in Canvas. If it isn't we should be able to complete it via a work packet (which alleviates the dependency on technology, see points above). The world got flipped upside down, it's more important than ever to be realistic and adjust your expectations.

2. Open Schools:

I understand that COVID-19 sprung on everyone without any notice. I empathize with the people that are afraid, as it is a very normal emotion to be afraid of something you are not familiar with and cannot control. That said, the state and the county had nearly 6 months to develop a plan and to create contingencies to those plans. Of all industries, the educational system was fortunate to get a break and assess. Unlike many other industries that were not given time, they had to either close indefinitely, or pivot, adapt and overcome quickly to survive.

I watched the 5+ hour board meeting when it was decided to make schools 100% virtual. I was incredibly disappointed in the hysteria of many parents and teachers who spoke at that meeting. Thousands of people (children, administrators, and teachers) in the PWCS system get sick, go to work/school every year. Teachers who have taught a long time have some of the best immune systems due to this fact. Suddenly, this coronavirus sweeps the nation and teachers are all afraid for their lives? Some parents can't stomach their child having a fever or being home sick? I blame misinformation online, the media, and human being's innate fear of the unknown.

The educational system has always held its ground as a leader in logic. Where is that logic now? PWCS is not educating, it's making teachers do busy work so they can keep their jobs, over complicating the learning process (see above) and letting emotion & fear overshadow duty and responsibility. Enough already, open the schools October 30th.

3. Our school. I can't say enough nice things about my children's teachers, their school and the Administration there. They are incredible. Go Tigers!

Thank you for your time and for considering my feedback.

Cheers,

April Youngblut

Dear School Board,

I have spent many hours writing to the school board and my elected officials. NOT ONE person has responded to me. I sit at home helpless and feeling forgot by my officials and community. As a taxpayer and parent of 3 LCPS students I feel that I deserve some sort of response. I have many questions and concerns regarding LCPS not returning to in person instruction. I have watched the school board meeting and see no answers there as well. All I see is the board discussing issues like remaining mascots and holidays. How does that help the eighty something thousand kids doing distance learning? While distance learning may work for some, it does not for our family. Loudoun County has remained in Phase 3 for over 2 months. Schools for lower grades may open under Phase 2. Why is there still no plan or metric for sending kids back to school? Where is this plan? When we will have answers?

As a LCPS parent of 3 elementary school children I feel that I deserve a response or a plan for getting out kids back to school. My husband, children and I have completely rearranged our lives and continue waiting to hear how LCPS will proceed. We have juggled staying home, jobs, kids being depressed and frustrated, financial strain and uncertainty. We still have no idea what to expect from the school system. WHEN will LCPS return to in person instruction? I have a first, third and fifth grader. The first grader cannot manage online schooling. She cannot read, type or tell time. She has IEP to receive speech services. For 10 mins of her speech time today the LCPS computer would not let us hear her teacher, so the time was wasted. She previous loved school and now hates it. The students cannot communicate to each other online. How is that going to help them feel part of a "community"? My fifth grader is suffering from panic attacks and anxiety. She frequently cries herself to sleep. She has written you a letter as well that I will mail. The letter begs you to let the kids back in school. My third grader has also suffered from depression due to lack of interaction with peers. His class has so many people in it most of the time he just plays in his room, as the teacher spends time with technical issues not able to be get to teaching. Kids are constantly getting kicked out the meets or unable to access teaching materials. Three kids who previous loved school now dread it. I am not sure how this continue all semester.

The first ten years of being a parent I spend actively limiting my children's screen time. Now, I am forced to have them in front of a computer all day. This much screen time is not good for young kids. There are many studies that reference how detrimental screen time is to young brains. Add to that social isolation, lack of peer to peer interaction and I the repercussions of this are yet to be see. Widespread distance learning is an experiment I don't want my kids to participate in.

I looked into private school, but it is very expensive and most are full. We are not able to afford it. I had hoped living in Loudoun my kids would get a quality education. I do not see that happening over distance learning. Will only the families who can afford private school get their children educated? Why are kids all over the county allowed to sit in day care centers and schools, but not return to school? If the buildings are unfit to be in why are students there for day care? If the building are unfit, why are we using cares money to fix the situation? My kid's classes have multiple teachers and aides just sitting on the calls. If all these people are on the payroll at LCPS, why cannot we figure a plan to use them and the space we have to give in person option to those who want it?

I urge you to present a clear plan to LCPS parents for return to school. Elementary kids should be given the option to do hybrid or in person learning. Return to school should be given the top priority by the school board. This is the most important and widespread issue affecting every student in LCPS.

Sincerely

Sarah Pankenier

Dear State Board of Education leaders,

The following message was sent to your Chief State School Officer. We wanted to make sure you received a copy as well. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Best,

Adam Honeysett
Managing Director,
State and Local Public Engagement

Dear Chief State School Officer:

On March 27, 2020, President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastation of our American families, schools, and communities.

The Department of Education responded immediately, strongly, and effectively. Moving with unprecedented speed, we pushed billions of CARES Act dollars to States and local school districts. We made available every Federal government resource at our disposal to help all children receive the educational and other special services they need, deserve, and are entitled to under law.

We started from a premise that I believe with every fiber of my being: all children are created equal, and all children matter. In the CARES Act, there is nothing suggesting Congress intended to deny some American students the help they need. In the real world, the pandemic harmed everyone. Sadly, that fact did not stop some from suing us, attempting to deny private-school children and teachers help they needed. Unfortunately for students, a U.S. District Court has vacated the Department's Interim Final Rule (IFR).

The Department strongly, but respectfully, disagrees with the ruling. However, we respect the rule of law and will enforce the law as the courts have opined. The Department will not appeal these rulings. As you likely know, the IFR has not been in effect since the court's decision on September 4, 2020, and we subsequently provided notice of the decision on our website.

The Department will not take any action against States or local districts that followed the guidance and/or the IFR prior to notice of the court's decision. Going forward, districts must calculate the minimal proportional share for CARES Act equitable services according to the formula provided in Section 1117(a)(4)(A) of the ESEA of 1965. Section 1117 requires robust consultation with private schools, among other things, and we will use our enforcement authority aggressively to ensure districts comply with this and other relevant equitable services requirements.

More broadly, the truth remains that all schools and all students have borne the pandemic's burden and need support. We hope, through meaningful consultation and honest assessment, education leaders will do right by all students they serve. You know as well as I do that many private schools serve disadvantaged, lower income families, and it is bad for these communities when those private schools close. Not only does it place a burden on families that chose a different school for their child, but it also places a burden on public schools as well.

To that end, I strongly encourage you to use the CARES Act dollars we provided to assist public schools and to provide equitable services to private schools as soon as possible.

Thank you for your continued efforts to serve every member of America's rising generation.

Sincerely,

Betsy DeVos

I wanted to contact the state regarding comments made at a recent Wise County, Virginia School Board meeting in regards to allowing students back in classrooms (and allowing students who choose to stay at home, to use virtual learning).

A member of the current board, Dr. Raymond, made a statement that was very troubling to me. He stated that the CDC, WHO, and Virginia Governor's guidelines about keeping people certain distances/masks/etc. were only "guidelines" that "the school board doesn't have to follow". He stated that the individual county school boards are being given discretion to choose any guidelines (or not use any guidelines at all if they see fit) to keep the students, teachers, and staff safe. In particular, he was directly challenging school bus social distancing, stating that they could simply "choose not follow the 6 feet guideline" that is established almost universally worldwide.

Another problem I have with the decisions the Wise County School Board chose to implement was the fact that virtual learning students will have to "choose" which class they want to participate live online, if they have multiple classes scheduled at the same time. My question is how can a student 10-12 years old be able to make an instructional decision on which class he/she gets to participate live in? The Wise County School Board is putting this decision in the hands of young students. Students who should NOT have to make such decisions. Can you remember back when you were 11 years old, could you make the correct decision on which class you want to participate live in? How are classes scheduled at the same time? An 11 year old student in the Virginia Public School system should not have to decide which class he/she gets to participate in while being graded the same for both. How is this fair? As I suspect, this was an intentional decision made by the Wise County School Board to "force" more children back into physical classrooms. Based on the statements by certain board members, particularly Dr. Raymond, it would not surprise me. However, I will set my tin foil hat aside as that is only what I suspect based on board statements.

What I know for a fact is that the Wise County School Board stated that they did not have to follow any guidelines for safety in any way shape or form. They stated the board has full discretion to make their own (or don't make any). I know for a fact that groups of students have been well within 6 feet of each other in group projects with no masks required to be worn. I know for a fact that students are being forced to decide which class to participate in, if they have multiple scheduled at the same time. I know for a fact that students who leave one of those classes early to try to jump into the other class (to try to get some participation in both classes due to the awful scheduling) they have been harshly chastised by the teacher for attempting to participate in both. This is our Wise County school system.

Anyway, I just wanted to report to the state how horribly things are going down here for students that are choosing to be safe and learn virtually.

Concerned citizen

Dear FCPS Decision-maker:

I write to fully endorse Superintendent Brabrand's proposal and the School Board's support to make substantive changes to the TJ admissions process. While I recognize it isn't a guaranteed solution, the time for courageous and bold change is long past due. The merit lottery plan is a significant step forward toward equity and inclusion at TJ. Based on long-standing research, I'm convinced of two things: Standardized tests do not predict "merit," but rather parental income. Any increase in a more representative student body will increase academic excellence for EVERYONE through exposure to and contributions of diverse perspectives.

As a 1997 graduate of TJHSST and 1st-12th grade FCPS student, I care deeply about the future of my alma mater. While my class was not fully representative of county demographics, it was among the most diverse in the school's history. As an African American student, I felt welcome and valued by most faculty and all my peers. We had a supportive critical mass. I benefited from and still draw upon the exposure and friendships I had among students from all kinds of racial, religious, national, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of my classmates are vocal in expressing the central importance of our class' diversity in their Jefferson experience. At a critical time in life, these experiences shaped my perspective and approach as a STEM professional and a global citizen.

The merit lottery proposal has many strengths and the potential to address several glaring problems at TJ:

- Hyper competitiveness, sentiments of superiority, and rampant cheating
- Prejudice, racism, and bigotry
- A restrictive pipeline that excludes many promising young minds
- Mental health
- Socio-economic inequities in test-prep and resume-stacking
- Weak academic foundations due to unnaturally accelerated coursework

I urge you to implement this plan, if not for all the reasons above, then just for the crucial considerations of the continuing pandemic.

This is not simply an issue of social justice, but one of providing the best academic and social development for all TJ students. I know from personal experience the value of diversity and inclusiveness in creating a stronger academic foundation for future success. When students can see that excellence can come in any package, they will move on to be better and more productive participants in whatever they pursue. The county and society at large will benefit. Addressing the many issues facing humanity in the 21st century requires a strong STEM workforce, and we can't do it when so many are excluded from the pipeline.

I look forward to helping make this new transition successful and welcome future conversation.

Sincerely,

Maria Murray, Ph.D.

Marine biology STEM professional, TJHSST Class of 1997

Virginia Board of Education Members:

I would like to thank you, Dr. Brabrand, and the FCPS School Board for your willingness to try and fix the problem of underrepresented groups at TJ. I agree that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. The proposed lottery/quota system is NOT the right way to do this. I believe this will result in the destruction of TJ as we know it.

In addition to serving on the board, and as an officer, of the National Minority Supplier Development Council, I've built and run supplier diversity initiatives for several Fortune 30 companies over the past two decades of my career in the private sector. Prior to that, I've built programs to assist disadvantaged groups during my time at The World Bank. My formal training is from Stanford University as a development economist, in addition to having an MBA from there as well. One thing that I have learned is that to increase participation by historically disadvantaged groups is that you need to both increase the scope of your recruitment effort (broaden the "net") AND to help develop members of those groups (grow the pool) so that they can be equal participants in the system. By doing both, I was able to increase by over 5x the number of high quality diverse suppliers that Capital One utilized. Lowering the bar (which will happen with the proposed lottery/quota system) is not equitable to those students who have demonstrated proficiency in the STEM field nor will it serve the original intentions behind the establishment of TJ.

As an alternative, I would propose revamping the current admissions process so that it takes a more holistic approach to who gets admitted to TJ, not unlike how many top universities run their admissions programs. The challenge we face is to find the diamonds in the rough that don't shine at first glance. This is doable and I believe could result in a stronger program that achieves the objective of increased ethnic diversity at TJ. I believe the proposed lottery/quota system is just lazy thinking.

As a parent of three TJ students (classes of 2016, 2019, & 2021) and a former member and executive committee member of the Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, I implore you to do what you can propose an alternative solution to this challenging problem and don't go with the politically expedient (and easy) solution that will result in the tearing down of this exceptional educational institution that is the pride of the region and Virginia overall.

Arnold Sowa

Dear FCPS Leadership,

As a parent of a TJ 2021 student, a Robinson grad and Robinson 9th grader, as well as having been educated in FCPS for K-12 myself, I support change for the TJ admissions process to make access to advanced educational opportunities for all students across the county. I know that this is not a perfect plan but I feel it is urgent do something to include more students from underrepresented groups at TJ, both for those students and for a better educational experience for all from including all groups in learning and discussion.

I would also like to encourage funding for a free summer bridge program for any interested incoming TJ student, as students come from many different schools/settings (public AAP or not, private, homeschool), and have had many different educational experiences before coming. This could help students feel "ready" and also form bonds before starting school, so that the transition would be easier. It could also help the school know more about the incoming students and their baseline ability to support them through TJ.

I do have concerns that FCPS does not appear to recognize the needs of the highest level learners as a type of special educational need. Our son would have been highly under challenged and under engaged at Robinson for high school, as even taking IB Chemistry in 8th grade was easy for him. He scored the highest of any student at Robinson SS on the AMC 10 math exam when he was in 8th grade, over 10th graders. (He was also taking Algebra 2/Trigonometry and Chinese II in 8th grade, and we are grateful that he had these opportunities and that the administration was flexible). He finds the classes at TJ just right (many of them even easy) and truly finds joy and excitement in learning such high level material. I'm not sure how identifying students with this type of special need could be included in an admissions plan to ensure those students so exceptionally gifted in STEM understanding are identified and offered admission, without it becoming a corrupted process that parents try to influence or being subject to other bias, but there are some students that teachers recognize as this exceptionally gifted in an area. At a school with just a handful of students of this level, there are real mental health and social issues for these students, while at TJ these students are among their peers and "fit in." We have had multiple teachers, and a middle school Math Club leader who we didn't know, approach us to tell us how far beyond the norm he is. (The middle school enrichment Math Club only had four students attend, and has since stopped existing. There are only a few opportunities for advanced STEM enrichment at Robinson outside of class.)

Thank you for working to expand opportunities for a broad range of students at TJ. I hope FCPS and the School Board can find a way to balance this enhanced access with the needs of highly gifted learners in STEM. Ideally I would like to expand access by also adding a second STEM magnet and two humanities magnet schools to Fairfax County (also with lotteries).

Sincerely,

Michelle Gilles

Fairfax, VA

Dear Virginia Board of Education Members,

I have been a longtime supporter of the Governor's, Superintendent's and the Board's efforts to improve diversity and equity in our public schools. However, I am deeply concerned about switching to a lottery system for TJ admissions. I would like to know what other alternatives were analyzed and why they were rejected. Has anyone looked at the successful Meyerhoff Scholars Program at University of Maryland Baltimore County? <https://meyerhoff.umbc.edu/scholar-experience/our-scholars/>. This appears to be a nationally hailed, extremely effective program for increasing minority representation at the highest levels of STEM, setting the gold standard for results. I hope the Superintendent and the Secretary of Education were aware of this model and have perhaps consulted with the program directors on how to find good candidates and, as important, support them after they get into TJ.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3155774/> and

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/07/vaunted-program-boosting-diversity-us-academic-scientists-starting-spread>

In lieu of a lottery system, I support FCPS adopting the Meyerhoff Scholars Program's nomination and holistic review process for underrepresented students and keeping the current admissions process for overrepresented students. If a two track admissions process is not administratively feasible or legal, then adopt the Meyerhoff model for all admissions, with consideration of race and ethnicity allowed. The Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative has devoted almost \$7 million to roll out this program at UC Berkeley and UC San Diego as well. <https://news.umbc.edu/meyerhoff-czi/>

USE NOMINATIONS: In particular, I note that the Meyerhoff Scholars Program has historically identified candidates through nomination. Although no longer required, it is still highly recommended. Nominations are most frequently submitted by high school administrators, guidance counselors, or teachers. Deserving students may also be nominated by other adults who are influential in their educational and personal lives, including community leaders, mentors, and family. I oppose FCPS' proposed elimination of teacher recommendations for the very reason that I think it is one of the best avenues to identify under-served and perhaps under-performing students who nevertheless exhibit true passion and potential for STEM. As the Meyerhoff Scholars Program has successfully used nominations as an appropriate recruitment mechanism, I think it serves a scientific data point that rebuts the assertion that teacher recommendations are somehow biased, an argument I have heard bandied about without definitive scientific basis cited (and also find offensive to our dedicated public school teachers). I also think a nomination process based on more than teacher recommendations, such as counselors or other trusted adults, as used in the Meyerhoff Scholars Program model, could be usefully considered.

KEEP TESTING BUT ONLY AS ONE FACTOR, NOT AS A CUT-OFF: The Meyerhoff selection committee considers academic performance, standardized test scores, recommendation letters, and proven commitment to community service in their holistic review process. I oppose abolishing standardized testing. However, a minimum standardized testing score should not be used as a cut-off for the semi-finalist or finalist stage for underrepresented students. Instead scores can be considered as one of many factors in the holistic review.

POSITIVE CONSIDERATION FOR RACE AND ETHNICITY INSTEAD OF LOTTERY: The consideration of race and ethnicity in college admissions is constitutional and has been affirmed as a compelling interest of the state. I believe that such consideration should factor into TJ's admissions decisions. That seems the most targeted way of moving toward a more representative school body, as opposed to a lottery system

that some modelers have said could simply result in more white student admissions. This has been used successfully by many universities, and I am not sure why FCPS is not willing to replicate that model. I am very leery of adopting a radical proposal such as a lottery system that poses the risk of backfiring terribly in terms of efficacy. Such a failure could result in a severe backlash and would seriously and potentially fatally undermine future efforts to improve diversity and inclusion in FCPS.

I also note that while the FCPS proposal lists several links to schools that use a lottery system, the proposal does not provide any information as to whether the lottery system at those schools resulted in a more representative diverse student population.

TWO TRACK ADMISSIONS PROCESS: There were two ways to get on to the law review at my school when I was a law student: you could "write on" based on a writing competition administered specifically for the law review, or you could be invited on based on your grades. I think different admissions processes to account for populations that show "achievement" differently under different circumstances can be an effective recruitment tool, and I encourage FCPS to consider the possibility of having different admissions processes, if that is administratively and legally feasible.

TJ TEACHER INPUT: I also hope FCPS consulted extensively with the real educators, our TJ teachers, for their insights on how to best recruit and support students of varying backgrounds. I also hope there has been some consultation with current underrepresented students and their families, who would seem to have great insight into what needs to be done. It would help the legitimacy of the proposal if you explained how it incorporated the advice of these groups.

LIP SERVICE TO THE HARD PART: The TJ Admission Proposal devotes one bullet point, at the very end, to "Ensuring a Caring Culture for All TJHSST Students." I have had three children at TJ. I am already worried about the mental health of our TJ students given the rigor of the program. When my children were at TJ, they knew significant numbers of students with depression and anxiety. We've already had 2 suicides in the last 4 years. My kids were up late every night themselves working harder than we ever did in high school. And these are kids who have had all the resources and preparation to succeed here. If the rigor of the program doesn't change - and I don't actually want it to - I would be very hesitant as a parent to send - and I think you should be very hesitant to recruit - my under-prepared student to TJ. There are studies showing that it is better for a student's long term involvement and success in STEM to be a big fish in a smaller pond, than a small fish in a bigger pond.

I think the worst result will be if students come to TJ only to drop out because they cannot handle the rigor. That means it is critical that TJ have special support systems targeted specifically and solely for historically underrepresented students, however they are admitted to TJ, akin to the Meyerhoff program. I would not support going to a lottery system or any diversity-enhancing proposal without seeing a detailed plan put forth for how to support these special populations at TJ, which is totally lacking in the current proposal.

TJ VISION - KEEP THE RIGOR, NOT THE STRESS: After talking to my three kids, they say they absolutely support the efforts to increase diversity at the school. But, they don't want TJ's rigorous curriculum to be watered down, because that is what makes TJ special. My kids say that TJ has more than prepared them for college. Freshman year was a breeze compared to TJ and often the same intro classes were taught at the same or less rigorous level, particularly in science, math and physics.

So, whatever you do to create a more "caring culture" at TJ - and there are a lot of ways to reduce stress (less homework, more targeted homework, more flexibility in terms of scheduling or making up tests, less crazy hard tests, etc.) - please ensure it doesn't result in a less rigorous TJ curriculum.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Nancy Kao

McLean, Virginia

Good afternoon Virginia Board of Education Members,

I hope this email finds you all well.

As I'm sure you're aware, citizens of Northern Virginia have been reacting to changes to the Governor's school admissions process proposed by the Fairfax County School Board. I appreciate the time you all have taken to field emails in order to understand all perspectives, as I'm sure it has been time-consuming. Furthermore, I would like to get on your calendars to discuss this very important topic.

Today, my team published our Position Statement (attached) in support of Superintendent Brabrand and the FCPS School Board and their courageous strides toward advancing opportunity and diversity at TJ. Not only do I support this proposal as President of the TJ Alumni Action Group (TJAAG), but I also support these changes as an African American TJ alumna (class of 2000), African American History Education Commissioner, and a charter member of Virginia's African American Superintendent's Advisory Council.

I recognize that these changes are not a guaranteed solution, but the merit lottery plan itself is a HUGE step forward towards equity and inclusion at TJ—not just for admissions, but for the culture as well.

As a student at TJ who came from Prince George's County, Maryland, I struggled with the constant feeling given off by peers, teachers, and administrators alike that I did not belong simply due to the color of my skin. Having to carry this sense of rejection while being expected to perform my best academically significantly tainted my high school experience. A merit lottery would level the playing field and grant all students equal access to Governor's school resources and experiences—which should all be positive.

My organization and I look forward to being part of the efforts to make this new transition successful. Today, we also re-published the TJAAG Recommendations Report | Admissions and School Culture which is hosted on our website, TJAAG.org.

I'd love the opportunity to connect with each of you to further discuss our recommendations and reasoning. If there is someone with whom I can coordinate time on your calendars, please advise and I would be happy to further detail our research and efforts.

Makya Renée Little

Prince William County Resident, Mother of Three

Letter to FCPS regarding TJ Admissions

Written by current TJHSST Students

[Original Proposal](#)

Dear FCPS School Board members and Virginia State Legislators,

We, as current students of TJHSST, write to you in response to the merit lottery proposal for TJ admissions. From the very first day, we were welcomed to an extraordinary community that allowed us to pursue our passions and connect with those who shared our interests. We care deeply about TJ and its future, and while we acknowledge that the lack of diversity at our school is an urgent issue, this proposal is not the answer. The board's proposition is rushed, unfair, and stands against the values of TJ.

The current application process is race-blind, upholds the values of meritocracy, and seeks to determine the individuals who are the most passionate about STEM. While we understand that the current admissions process has many shortcomings, the new proposal fails to solve these issues and creates a plethora of new problems.

TJHSST is a unique community built on its passion for learning. We agree that everyone in Northern Virginia should be given a fair chance towards TJ's educational opportunities. The disadvantages that lower-income and minority students face are created far before an applicant sits down to take the TJ test, and that is the problem we, as a school, as a community, and as a state, need to address. In this letter, we detail alternative solutions for both the pipeline and admissions process that we feel would effectively help TJ demographics better reflect those of Fairfax County in the long term.

Concerns with the current proposal

The proposed lottery process was first introduced to the public on September 15th, with a decision being made on October 8th. We would like the board to recognize the ramifications of rolling out such a sweeping policy on such a short timeline.

The proposal is rushed and largely fails to take into account the opinions of members of the TJ community.

The proposal was given three weeks in the public's eye, and we feel the timeline doesn't give an appropriate amount of time for the board to receive and process the much-needed community input that plays a crucial role in board proceedings. The board and state have both hosted a few "town halls" on virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom, which include minimal ways for community members to provide input on the proposal. These town halls have proven that the input provided during the meetings has been ignored, and hosts have often explicitly stated that they will not be addressing questions posted in the Q&A or chatbox. We ask that the board commits to providing a better platform for students, parents, and other community members to

provide their feedback and thoughts.

The proposal is extremely vague.

The information regarding this proposal provided to the public omits important details. We do not know the weight of the SIS essays in the proposed admissions system, what the proposed “questionnaires” actually are, whether there are different priority lottery pathways, or if the lottery pathways are solely regional. Because these are not defined, those who support the lottery have no clear idea of what they are supporting. Additionally, the lottery system is now subject to last-minute “clarifications” away from the public’s eye, which is very dangerous considering the wide-spread implications of the system.

The lottery systems examples are cherry-picked and largely inapplicable.

The proposal lists five schools as evidence of high functioning lottery admission schools. Among them, BASIS Arizona is a charter school, bound to different state and local regulations. However, the lottery system fails to reflect diversity in the area. For example, at BASIS Arizona Chandler, 68% of students are Asian, compared to 3% in the surrounding area. Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology in Georgia has a total of 706 applicants for the lottery pool, in which 590 were admitted⁹. They also require end of course math and SAT/PSAT cutoff scores to register. International Community School of Washington state does have a lottery admission system, but it occurs in 6th grade, not 9th grade where children's talents and abilities are much more defined. Loveless Academic Magnet Program High School has a total enrollment of only 514 students and in its admissions process, the school also considers academic records and personal interviews in addition to the lottery. Raisbeck Aviation High School only takes 105 students per year and is highly specialized in aeronautics. We find it disappointing that the current proposal cited schools simply for the fact that they have a lottery system without observing the specifics of the systems or the results those systems produced.

The proposed process removes aspects of the TJHSST application process which we believe are equitable measures of a student’s success, replacing them with a fundamentally unsound and unfair system.

Removing teacher recommendations removes a vital way to understand a student beyond their test scores.

Students cannot take a prep class to show their passion for STEM to their teachers; the passion will be apparent to the teachers through extensive participation in class and the pursuit of complex subjects beyond the classroom. Letters of recommendation are also an essential way for students to demonstrate their aspirations and personality. Without this representation, students who demonstrate a passion for STEM in class but score poorly on tests would be overlooked during the application process. It is evident that the current teacher recommendations have many flaws; however, we do believe that they play a crucial part in any admissions process, and we’d like the Board to move to work with teachers to improve the recommendations.

The proposed system’s measure of student merit is inadequate.

“You are more than just a GPA.” That is a fundamental paradigm for any education system. However, the first step of the proposed lottery system lacks indicators of student merit other than a 3.5 GPA. Statistically speaking, it will take from the middle of the applicants of the second stage, instead of selecting those who are the most qualified. The biggest problem with the lottery system is that it ignores the fact that education across FCPS is not consistently

rigorous, especially in core STEM classes such as Mathematics and Science. By instituting the lottery, the students who are accepted may not be the most qualified and may be gravely unprepared for the heavy coursework that is a part of TJ. This would create a toxic environment with students struggling with material that they were assumed to have mastered beforehand. The alternative is that TJ will reduce the rigor and difficulty of the school significantly, taking away more advanced courses and opportunities in favor of more basic ones.

The system runs the further risk of attracting half-hearted applications - without an extensive admissions process, there is no effort required into putting an application forward. Lastly, a merit lottery system is likely to stigmatize disadvantaged students, insinuating that they were accepted because of chance, not qualifications or effort. Accepted applicants may feel as if their hard work in middle school did not positively affect their admission, while rejected applicants may feel that their spot was "stolen" by someone less qualified.^[4]

The lottery system would take away many opportunities.

The new proposal would result in the termination of many high-level STEM courses. As the new proposal doesn't differentiate students based on advanced math level, the number of students who only took Algebra 1 will increase, and the number of students that took extremely advanced math classes will decrease significantly (these kids tend to come from a few feeder schools in high quantities). Currently, many high-level courses such as complex analysis, differential equations, probability theory, quantum physics, matrix algebra, concrete math, and machine learning already have few students. These classes are unlike those offered anywhere else in the county. Under the lottery system, fewer students would be able to take these classes, and they would likely be discontinued.

The lottery system would ignore many of the students that truly need TJ.

Many students genuinely need TJ for the opportunities and classes it provides. These are the kids that are taking Multivariable calculus in freshman year, going to international olympiads, and taking AP physics before their junior year. While these students do not make up the majority of the TJ population, they should not be ignored. Students who truly need to go to TJ because of its opportunities and rigor are not guaranteed to be accepted by the proposed system.

The merit lottery and regional quota system may not increase diversity/representation.

The current TJ demographic is extremely disproportionate to the surrounding population, but not only in terms of acceptance rate but also in terms of applications in general. Unfortunately, there is a lack of input around the county from historically underrepresented populations about their views on TJ. The current proposal fails to tackle the core issues that cause there to be fewer applicants from those populations in the first place: some schools lack advanced classes and STEM extracurriculars.

Quotas also fail to address the underlying issue of unequal education throughout the county, because they don't actually help students become more well-prepared. When academic readiness and diversity throughout the county overlap, diversity within TJ will happen naturally. Instead of enforcing artificial quotas, we should seek to improve educational equity throughout the entire county. Diversity is not a number, it is an environment.

Regional quotas give some applicants an unfair advantage based on where they live and may have unanticipated consequences.

The current proposal's lottery pathways have been organized in such a way that many schools with historically high TJ acceptance rates are grouped together (for example, Carson and Cooper in Region 1 and Longfellow and Kilmer in Region 2) while schools that traditionally do not produce as many TJ acceptances have far less competitive regional pathways. This leads to more qualified applicants being rejected from TJ while those who are less qualified would be accepted, simply because they live in a different region. Furthermore, this system is gameable as well, as parents can simply move out of more competitive regions. This would also have economic implications: as individuals move away from a certain area, many local businesses (even outside of those directly affected such as prep classes) within that area would subsequently suffer from the decrease in patronage.

Our proposals

The most effective solution to a lack of diversity at TJ would be to level the playing field for disadvantaged students far earlier. Yes, this proposal requires significant investment in schools that serve disadvantaged students. Yes, it is expensive. Yes, it will take more time than eliminating the admissions standards for TJ. Altering the TJ admissions process to a lottery is a band-aid solution that only intends to fix the visible issue, leaving the inherent problem of educational inequity maintained throughout the county. We believe that our proposals will help to increase TJ's diversity while maintaining its academic excellence.

Increase targeted recruitment for TJ applicants at all regional middle schools

While we applaud the board for discussing the need for this change, we would like to iterate more specific solutions. Many middle schools, particularly those in low-income areas, barely mention TJHSST applications, and schools that neglect to talk about TJ are doing a disservice to students there who truly have a passion for STEM and would benefit from a rigorous high-level education like TJ. To significantly increase awareness of the possibility of applying to TJ, the Fairfax County School Board should consider making admission outreach mandatory for all middle schools in the county. Our proposal for implementing this is to have TJ student ambassadors be part of the outreach process, visiting and helping to encourage middle schoolers, especially those at schools that do not send many students to TJ, to apply. Furthermore, information about admissions deadlines and content should be given directly to students through their FCPS emails.

Remove the Gen-Ed/AAP barrier.

We propose that the AAP program be entirely voluntary, where students and parents can choose whether to be in the AAP program or standard gen-ed classes. Under this model, standardized tests such as the CogAt and NNAT are there to inform, rather than restrict. As early as 1st and 2nd grades, students are divided into the Advanced Academics Program (AAP) and General Education (Gen-Ed). AAP is important because AAP students have the advantage of more rigorous and challenging classes. Additionally, AAP students are required to take the IOWA in 6th grade, but not the Gen-Ed students, many of whom are unaware of the importance of this test. The IOWA test determines placement into Algebra I in seventh grade - which greatly increases the chances of admission to TJ. Additionally, AAP enrollment does not reflect the demographics of FCPS: overall, 19% of the students are eligible for AAP, compared to 12% of Black students and 7% of Latinx students^[9]. Unlike the current proposal, this attacks the underlying problem of educational disparity. Doing this will make the TJ admissions process

more inclusive in the long term and will also help increase educational equity in FCPS as a whole.

Ensure resources to prepare for TJ are available for everyone.

Some students have parents who can teach them or who can afford tutoring that gives them an advantage in their experience with STEM. We propose beginning *long-lasting* work towards county-sponsored programs in underserved elementary and middle schools to help students develop their skills in STEM subjects. This would be helpful for economically disadvantaged students who cannot afford tutors. Potential programs include one-on-one tutoring (either by teachers or other qualified individuals) and a way for students to connect and ask help from other students who have experience in the subject. Additionally, there should be increased awareness about free websites and resources outside of school that can help students understand their course content and expand their knowledge. Thus, we can level the playing field by helping disadvantaged students gain the resources accessible by more privileged students and be able to immerse themselves in STEM and properly prepare for TJ.

Encourage exposure to extracurricular STEM classes and activities across all schools in FCPS.

Some students may not apply to TJ because they were not exposed to STEM extracurriculars in middle school. FCPS can host more STEM classes, workshops, and enrichment clubs at underserved elementary and middle schools. This can introduce students to STEM activities at a younger age and help them discover their passions. Additionally, while after-school clubs have traditionally been run by parents, that is precisely the source of the problem. At privileged schools, many parents have free time to volunteer, but that is not the case at schools where there might be more single parents and/or more parents working multiple jobs. Thus, it stands to reason that schools with less parent involvement will be underserved and disadvantaged. FCPS needs to take ownership of this issue and run some bare minimum level of clubs at schools when parents cannot. Whether run by paid instructors, teacher volunteers, student volunteers from other schools, community organizations, ACE, Global Plus, IFTE, or other qualified individuals and organizations, a solution needs to be found to provide students equal access to participate in STEM extracurriculars.

Encourage the development of more advanced STEM courses in other high schools besides TJ

We acknowledge that there are more students that can benefit from TJ than offers that can be sent. We'd like the county to start moving towards providing higher-level classes at base-schools, county-wide, including more lab-based and mentored courses to be added to the curriculum at these base schools to more high-level STEM opportunities. Additionally, students should be allowed to get 7th or 8th subject credit for university courses, which is a simple fix as FCPS simply needs to remove this restriction.

Collect meaningful input from the minorities around the county about their views on TJ.

The current proposal attributes the need for new proposals to the lack of representation of minorities at TJ. However, we suggest more widespread input from minority populations, particularly in middle schools, asking specific questions about middle schooler's current intentions for high school, whether they do or don't plan on applying, and why. During past work sessions, school board members have given a large amount of their rationale to anecdotal evidence from not only Fairfax alumni, but even current Fairfax students, and we'd like administrators to collect more general data from the incoming classes, to be able to better point out specific problem areas and target them directly.

While an admissions test is necessary, the current admissions test is flawed. It is not an accurate indicator of STEM passion or necessary skills for TJ, and it is far too preparable. We propose changes that would make the test more fair and effective.

Create a portion of the admissions test where students must learn a new concept and apply their knowledge to solve given problems.

The process would be as follows:

1. Students are given a concept to learn (i.e. A system with new arithmetic operators, an invented language, an imaginary society, etc)
2. Students are given problem(s) and must create solutions based on the new concepts.

Many prestigious math competitions (ex. ARML, PuMAC, CMIMC) use a version of this testing structure in a round known as power rounds, where competitors must solve--and usually show their work for-- problems regarding a scenario, often without being able to use conventional mathematical formulas, instead of having to largely rely on their problem-solving skills. The well-known national competition also Science Olympiad holds events of this nature, such as the Experimental Design event, where students are given materials and a previously unknown question/topic to address and must then design, conduct, and analyze the results of an experiment. Additionally, the Future Problem Solving Program International organizes a competition called Global Issues Problem Solving where students are informed of the question topic before but are not given the actual question until the day of the test, where they then apply their knowledge of the topic and creative problem-solving skills to present possible solutions to the given future problem scenario. TJ admissions testers can use these competitions, as well as many others, as models for crafting a more effective admissions test. This form of testing quantifiably measures a genuinely useful skill of prospective TJ students.

Give all teachers suggestions to write sufficiently informative recommendations for TJ applicants.

The current issue with teacher recommendations is that feeder school teachers are much more experienced at writing them. Some teachers often ask their students to fill out a questionnaire for the teacher to reference while writing the recommendation. To help ensure that all teachers have such a reference and are able to write a recommendation which wholly illustrates their student's abilities, teachers should be provided a guide with suggested questions for them to ask a student to fill out beforehand so if necessary, they are better able to write a holistic recommendation for the student.

Provide school profiles in each application to provide a more thorough understanding of the opportunities available to each applicant.

The opportunities available at middle schools across Fairfax County and surrounding counties differ considerably. Many schools do not have the same opportunities for STEM clubs, and it will take time to implement new STEM clubs at middle schools throughout the county. Some middle schools, such as Longfellow - a prominent feeder school - have well-established Science Olympiad programs and computer classes while others do not. This severely limits the opportunity each student has to demonstrate their interest in STEM. To ensure that as much context as possible is given for each applicant, we propose sending a "school profile" in each application. These school profiles would detail the extracurricular opportunities given at each school. For example, if a student lacked Science Olympiad experience at a school that did not

have a Science Olympiad, that should not be held against them. This would be used solely for context - we cannot ensure that if the program did exist, the student would participate in it.

Final Thoughts

We acknowledge that there is not an all-encompassing solution to foster a diverse learning environment at TJ. Superficial solutions may produce favorable results in the short-term, but they fail to properly address the root issue. The process will be long and difficult, but with action from every corner of the community, it can be achieved.

We believe that instead of hastily trying to manufacture more diversity at TJ, we should start from the fundamental level to make education an experience that allows everyone equal opportunity; only then will diversity within the TJ community flourish naturally.

We hope the board will reconsider accepting the proposed changes to the TJ Admissions process and seek solutions that will address the root of the diversity issue at our school. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Michael Fatemi (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Leon Jia (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Nitin Kanchinadam (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Elliott D. Lee (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Yeefay Li (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Rushil Umaretiya (TJHSST Class 2023)
Swesik Ramineni (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Saurav Banerjee (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Eshani Das (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Elaine Li (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Saideep Katragadda (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Joshua Park (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Armina Rahman (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Caroline Smiltneks (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Lauren Delwiche (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Gabriel Witkop (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Joshua Zhang (TJHSST Class of 2022)

Supported By:

Students & Alumni:

Raksha Pothapragada (TJHSST Class of 2016)
Julia Damron (TJHSST Class of 2018)
Rithvik Gundlapalli (TJHSST Class of 2019)
Amey Gupta (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Aumena Choudhry (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Jae Canetti (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Mikail Khan (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Prithvi Nathan (TJHSST Class of 2020)

Shambhavi Bhati (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Thomas Ryan (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Timmy Vu (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Vaibhav Sharma (TJHSST Class of 2020)
Alan Zhang (TJHSST Class of 2021)
Amber Garcha (TJHSST Class of 2021)
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Dan Healey (TJHSST Class of 2021)
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Justin Choi (TJHSST Class of 2021)
Marco Stine (TJHSST Class of 2021)
Marian Qian (TJHSST Class of 2021)
Rishi Lahoti (TJHSST Class of 2021)
Ritvik Annadi (TJHSST Class of 2021)
Sarah Bokae (TJHSST Class of 2021)
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Abi Sastry (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Aditya Kak (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Akash Pamal (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Allen Wang (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Amrita Sahu (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Andrew Zhao (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Andrew Zhou (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Anya Parekh (TJHSST Class of 2022)
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Ashley Chen (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Caroline Chen (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Darin Mao (TJHSST Class of 2022)
David Zhao (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Elizabeth Brown (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Helen Dunn (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Jay Abraham (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Jayson Carboo (TJHSST Class of 2022)
John Kim (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Joniel Jerome (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Kyra Li (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Maria Dubasov (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Michelle Ru (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Nikhil Kalidasu (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Onur Gunduz (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Owen Rollins (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Rishikant Mishra (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Sameeksha Garg (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Shyla Bisht (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Tarushii Goel (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Vandana Kalithkar (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Vik Medavarapu (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Will Hancock (TJHSST Class of 2022)

Yusuf Bham (TJHSST Class of 2022)
Aaron Thapa (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Achraf Azzaoui (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Aditya Vasantharao (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Alvan Arulandu (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Amruta Rajeev (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Anjali Pillai (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Arav Singh (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Archi Patel (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Arjun Gupta (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Brian Lai (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Christina Lu (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Ehlaina Mccaskill (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Emily Cui (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Grace Guan (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Harini Ramaswamy (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Jerry Mao (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Jerry Sheng (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Joshua Lyon (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Jun Hee Lee (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Luke Wang (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Megan Enochs (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Michael Liang (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Mina Aydin (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Nandini Shyamala (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Nathaniel Kenschaft (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Patrick Gaucher (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Rachael Sim (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Sara Elanchezhian (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Satvik Matta (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Shashwat Rao (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Shivank Bhimavarapu (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Simrith Ranjan (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Thrisha Sakamuri (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Utkarsh Goyal (TJHSST Class of 2023)
Alan Fan (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Brian Zhou (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Daniel (TJHSST Class of 2024)
David Cao (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Erin Chen (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Evelyn Li (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Jesse Choe (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Khoi Dinh (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Mannat Srivastava (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Nidhi Varada (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Omkar Kovvali (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Philip Margulies (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Pishoy Elias (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Ronit Kapur (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Siri Duddella (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Sritan Motati (TJHSST Class of 2024)

Vidhi Sharma (TJHSST Class of 2024)
Andrew Choi (TJHSST Class of 2025)
Callie Liao (Class of 2025)
Emily Hur (Class of 2025)
Michelle Lin (Class of 2028)

Parents/Adults/Staff:

Haresh Umaretiya
Vibha Jasani
Xingling Zhang
Jessica Fan
Jack Liu
Jun Wang
Yan Feng
Jean Chang
June Z.
Stacy Zhu
Sunny Sun
Vivian Zhang
Lin Cao
Yuyan Zhou
Minzhi Wang
Michael Lin
Jianhong Shen
Di Cao
Kaitlyn Chen
Jieyun Xi
Anita Tyrell
Yuelan Li
Larry Feng
Alan V.
Kai Zhang
Sherry Chen
Yan Wang
Cindy Liu
Vinson X. Palathingal
Jason
Ping Li
Yvonne
Justin Jua
Devi Sri
Subhash Sharma
Krishna Kotha
Vladimir Ivanov
Leigh Yu
Yiheng Shi
Xiaohui Shi
Lian Gould
Narender Gupta
Rebecca Arraya

Jessica Davis
Dhruv Jain
Prakash

To whom it may concern,

I am the parent of a 2nd grader at Nottingham ES here in Arlington County and my son is in the fourth week of distance learning. I want to say that this learning model does not seem to be a good fit for kids this age based on my daily observation. Most of the days, they sit listening to instructions from the teacher who is not able to get the kids to toggle through all the many apps that are being utilized for instruction. My son went from a happy, thriving child, to now feeling much anxiety and anger each day as he is forced to sit and "listen" to instructions, instead of being able to do hands-on work with his peers in person, and be a helper in the classroom. He thrived his first two years of school in APS schools. I have spoken with our Principal, Dr. Gardner 2-3 times recently and have expressed our concern, and she and her team seem defeated and frustrated. They planned a Safety assembly last Friday that was a bust because they weren't able to share pre-recorded videos to 200 K-2 students on MS Teams. Our teacher has tech issues nearly every day and the students patiently await next steps. Each day, most of the students are unable to toggle and log on to many of the apps, so the instruction becomes more and more minimized each week. The quality of learning has significantly declined even since the first week. As parents, we all have jobs and have to work each day but instead are having to spend time helping our kids log into so many apps, submit assignments, manage their time during the MANY breaks. This is not acceptable or sustainable for the students or for your teachers and administrators who are working longer hours than they did at school.

We decided to send our Kindergarten aged son to the preschool he attended for Kindergarten and thus unenrolled him from Nottingham, because the owner of the school was able to get a fully accredited class up and running by the start of this school year due to high demand from those of us wanting an in-person education for our young children. Since June 15th when my son returned for in-person instruction, we've had only one teacher and one child contract the virus, thankfully not in our class. They only had to shut down the one class and send the two teachers home for the two weeks because of their Covid protocols working. The Kindergarten class is 17 kids broken into two classrooms (due to their pre-school enrollment being down, they created more space for the Kinder classrooms). My Kindergartner is learning far more than my 2nd grader who attends Nottingham ES from home. He and his teachers wear masks every day all day and they have only 3 feet of space between them in classrooms that are half the size of your county classrooms. In Arlington, we are a tight community who knows what we need to do in order for our kids to safely attend school.

I share this story because I want to better understand why Special Ed, IEP's and K-2 cannot go back to school NOW. November is not an acceptable timeline, and you say everything is "contingent on this and that". At our local schools, the grounds are large, the classrooms are large, and if you split the classes into two groups, there are still more than enough classrooms at this juncture. Since the start of Covid, only 2% of children ages 0-9 have contracted the virus in Arlington. The percent of deaths is only 4%. Since labor day, cases have been on the decline and have become flat. The metrics that the Superintendent presented that will allegedly "allow" our children to even go back to school two days/week are likely going to be unattainable with flu season around the corner.

Lastly, why is it so that we can go to gyms to workout, eat out at restaurants, go to other people's homes, and our kids can play full-on sports and now have real scrimmages with several other kids close by. Many local camps are offering IN-Person sessions daily. Preschools, catholic schools and private schools are ALL opened and students are going. Every day.

Please explain why you propose November 1 as the earliest date our kids can even return to school only two days per week. The virus isn't just going to disappear. We need to get our kids back in school to avoid serious mental health, obesity, OCD, and other issues that we're building up to with having them sit at home with us 5 days/week. Our kids deserve so much better than this "education" they are being offered right now. Please consider devising a more progressive approach to getting our kids back in school ASAP, and allow those teachers and families who are scared to return to a building, your distance learning curriculum.

Caroline & Joseph Hoang

Parents to Kindergarten aged son and 2nd grade son

Dear FCPS Leadership,

My name is Sourav Mandal, TJ alum Class of 1996. I am writing to express concern about the recent proposal endorsed by FCPS Superintendent Brabrand to change the TJ admissions regime to a "merit lottery" with minimal screening criteria and geographic caps. While broadening access to TJ is a laudable goal, I worry that the proposed changes to admission will hurt TJ's value to students as a STEM magnet program and as a specialized gifted education program, and that the changes fight, rather than address, the demographic shifts in the region. I am engaging with the issue because I want future TJ alums to derive the same benefits from the program as I did.

First, as a STEM magnet program, TJ requires a basic foundation in algebra and trigonometry to support its science and engineering curriculum. A 2011 memo written by TJ Algebra II/Trigonometry teachers highlighted a deficiency in a **third** of students in this area. In response, the quantitative portion of the entrance exam was made more difficult, and a 2014 study found that this reduced the number of remedial math students. The merit lottery proposal removes this check; a useful modification would be to add an algebra-only math competency test for entering the lottery.

Second, as a gifted education program, TJ provides a unique, immersive experience for those precocious students who take post-AP classes, perform original research, and participate in international competitions. By creating a centralized student body, such students have peers they can interact with and learn from daily. Moreover, this centralization enables the county to provide these post-AP and research learning opportunities in a way that is economically viable. The merit lottery proposal has no screening mechanism to select for these students who would exhaust opportunities at their base schools and then have to rely on parental support to shuttle them to local universities or to arrange research internships. The merit lottery proposal should be changed to provide a pathway for identifying the exceptional students who would be best served at TJ.

Finally, the geographic caps central to the merit lottery proposal cluster together communities stretching the lengths of the Rt. 236/50 and Dulles Toll Road corridors into two regions that are not geographically compact. This grouping may achieve the diversity targets in the TJ student body via lottery, but masks a more fundamental problem: the western part of Fairfax County and Loudoun County have grown considerably since TJ was formed, attending the growth of the Northern Virginia tech industry. As a result, the program is more oversubscribed than was ever intended. Currently, TJ provides fewer than 30 slots per year per 1000 Fairfax County high schoolers, whereas the New York City competitive STEM programs (Bronx, Stuyvesant, Brooklyn) provide over 40, **in addition** to another dozen magnet programs under different models. The most effective measure to address the demographic change would be to create an additional TJ campus in the Rt 28 region, which would have the added benefit of creating more slots for which students from underrepresented groups could apply.

For me, TJ was an invaluable educational experience because it was an immersive gifted educational program and introduced avenues for engaging with STEM that I would not have known to access through my base school. Thanks to TJ I was able to take classes in thermodynamics, optics, and quantum physics, and follow my friends in interning at the Naval Research Laboratories and in participating in the TJ mentorship program, which exposed me to astrophysics and nanotechnology research, respectively. These experiences inspired me to become a research physicist with degrees from

MIT and UC Berkeley. I now serve as the AI expert on the leadership team at a rapidly growing local tech company developing solutions for the government, and use the lessons I learned at TJ daily in my work.

No doubt we would want to extend the benefits I enjoyed to as wide a community as possible. The merit lottery proposal's measure to eliminate the onerous \$100 application fee, for example, is long overdue. However, the rest of the proposal would harm the very resource that we desire to make more accessible. I support alternative measures to increase diversity, such as electronic application packages being sent automatically to all students who meet the eligibility criteria, targeted outreach in underrepresented minority communities with alumni role models, and screening tests that either protect against known risks (such as algebra competency) or which are less prone to "prepping" or advantage by families of high socioeconomic status. Finally, an additional TJ campus would reduce competition for slots and reduce commute times for many students, further lowering barriers.

Thank you for your time and attention -- I hope that the deliberations on how to broaden access to TJ are productive.

Best regards,

Sourav K. Mandal '96

Dear FCPS Leadership,

I am a former TJ student (class of 2011) writing both to express my gratitude for taking the initiative to reform the TJ admissions process and to suggest a modification that would retain elements of The proposal that improve racial and socioeconomic equity while retaining an important aspect of TJ that drives its excellence.

Based on overwhelming evidence, I fully support the notion that a merit lottery is an effective tool in removing biases of the current admissions process towards students with privilege and means. While I believe this process would improve equity and diversity without significantly changing the character of the student body, my experience as a student at TJ has led me to support a hybrid admissions process that reserves a certain number of slots for the most gifted and intellectually capable students, while using a merit lottery to fill the rest of each class.

The merit lottery proposal works well for the average TJ student. However, there are a handful of students in each class at TJ that are far beyond their average TJ peers in terms of intellectual ability and academic achievement. Many of these students would be left out by a merit lottery, but the students are an integral component of TJ and their presence is a benefit to the entire student body. I propose that a handful of students are selected for direct admission based on teacher recommendations, in a process that would be kept confidential to students who would not know whether they were admitted through this route or through the lottery. One possibility is that each Middle School is allowed a certain number of nominations for consideration for direct admission, selected from teacher nominations and recommendations.

It is essential to correct inequities in the TJ admissions process, but I believe this hybrid model would accomplish that goal without excluding the county's top performers who unequivocally belong at TJ.

Thank you for taking these bold steps and I look forward to seeing the final outcome.

Respectfully,

Eran Brown

Dear FCPS and Virginia Leadership,

Thank you to Superintendent Brabrand and the FCPS School Board for proposing changes to the TJ admissions process. I support this proposal. We recognize that this isn't a guaranteed solution, but the merit lottery plan is a huge step forward for equity and inclusion at TJ.

I think, in order to come together in this issue, it is important to recognize that 30 more years of the same is a non-starter. TJ admissions have been tinkered before at least 4 times, with no actually impactful results to demonstrate as evidenced by the continued under representation:

- 80%+ under representation of Black students
- 90%+ under representation of Latinx students
- 93%+ under representation of Students with Disabilities
- 91%+ under representation of low socioeconomic status students

I also share TJAAG FAQs which may help you see our perspective on commonly raised concerns.

- <https://www.tjaag.org/faqs>

- <https://www.tjaag.org/s/TJAAG-RecommendationsReport-2020September.pdf>

- <https://www.tjaag.org/s/TJAAG-PositionStatement-September2020.pdf>

The merit lottery is not perfect. But I want to be clear, we should not oppose the bold iterative process in pursuit of a perfect solution. We should not distract from the work that lies ahead in an effort to protect the status quo.

Supporting the merit lottery is not anti-Asian. Frankly, my kids are Asian. They would be more advantaged with the status quo. I can appreciate the hard work and dedication it takes to purposefully plan for the TJ test for years, but it should not be a pre-requisite.

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2020/10/01/making-a-governors-school-more-diverse-isnt-anti-asian/>

When a Latinx parent shared an impassioned speech to the School Board:

- <https://youtu.be/vj6QqaMxWvw?t=962>

It broke my heart to listen to the systemic racism her son had to overcome to get to TJ. It is also something that many children face as well, and it is a part of an intentioned system we are only now slowly changing. My family and I are willing to lose our "spot" if it means helping more have an opportunity. We are not advocating for ourselves but for all the kids in TJ's draw area.

Please listen to the testimonies of our underrepresented alumni and current students:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLO8gWvFsR0fTjk4Bo_FPdzLAhFYVkiGYI

<https://www.tjtoday.org/category/diversity-at-jefferson/>

I hope that the School Board can stand up to the tides of the status quo and can come together, so that my 3 sons in AAP IV aren't having this same conversation 30 years later.

Sincerely,

Jorge Torrico

571-243-9946

Burke, VA

TJ '98

October 4, 2020

RE: Testing, Technology, and Curriculum Items

There are a few more parts which I wanted to make sure to share in regards to testing, technology, and curriculum (math/reading).

From going to a public hearing in January 2017 about an old math software, it warms my heart that there has been a huge savings to Virginia's budget through 2022. It particularly warms my heart that this came right when COVID made its unwelcome entrance to Virginia.

There are some other concerns which do connect to this.

- 1) The person with SOLPass is charging schools for curriculum materials (which is fine) and OLD SOL online practices from 2014. The practice tests should be FREE. It is also noted that VA testing had to APPROVE this. I am concerned that this group, Maria C-Allen (SOL Pass), has done previous work tracking high school drop out rates. I am VERY concerned about both doing work on tracking high school drop out rates, receiving approval to charge \$1,000+ schools for old SOL online 2014 tests and curriculum materials, and this impact on SCHOOL GRADING/Accreditation.
- 2) Expedited Retakes – There has been several forms of legislation asking for money for Expedited Retakes. Based both on conversations with Pearson as well as a counselor video, the “retest” button is part of the software. The ONLY charges would be for paper costs in areas in Virginia without access to the internet. Has this expedited retake money (for paper) reached these areas?
- 3) Here are some key citations:

Please see page 7.

https://dpb.virginia.gov/budget/buddoc20/partb/OfficeOfEducation.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1dRjknUQhj5moXw_oqDlf28dn6-ilu5EBbwuXGlc4-2jxNAzKS1XQGDE

Expedited Retake Google Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=zVUOKL1p8z4&fbclid=IwAR25ZAhKWJPYBtRTabpoj9GKe3Yod91Tn6V6vPSJrDXmGhxDYqqLSQ8oDU>

SOL Pass (SOL practice tests SHOULD BE FREE, current, and in RIGHT FORMAT.

(1,000+ schools, charge \$245/yr)

<https://www.solpass.org/login/?redirect=/released-online/math3-2013/math3-2013/framepage.php>

CCSSO is now key leader in releasing practice tests, AND VA testing SHOULD be releasing through the \$35 million+ dollar contract with Pearson (pending-new higher # for 2020)

<https://resources.newmeridiancorp.org/>

<p>8 reasons VA does not Need TestNav8</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. VA has worked with Pearson supporting both the ARDT and various forms of TestNav, including TestNav8. Up until this year, both VA and Pearson sought to support two softwares while TestNav8 could handle the diagnostic work. ARDT contract no longer funded. The VA TestNAV8 is a \$95 million+ contract (need new update 2020-2021).2. TestNav8 also includes the G3-8 CAT math. There was incorrect information that CAT math testing for the G3-8 population REQUIRED removing the back button. It does NOT. Students can have back button within sections. CAT testing via Smarter Balanced has buttons within sections. DoDEA supports ALL online tools for students. (Key math supervisors informed if want the upgrade, which includes the \$26K tech grant from VPSA, the button needed to go away (VA Bond Market). There was not a formal grant application, so schools could see the tech info before signing.3. There has NOT been full use of TestNav8 in VA in terms of access for practice, teacher graded practice, and actual. The VA-SOL page does not have full link to all practice. Many counties are NOW running SOL practices, in December and early spring, via local county softwares (ie. Horizon-NG, Powertest). We do not need TWO softwares running SOL practices.4. The Grade 3 CAT math via Testnav8 was NOT field tested before removing the back button. This did not follow appropriate educational and technological policies on softwares. (Note: other versions before of TestNav) SOL Reform: The SOL Reform message to VA public shared that LESS Questions. The software format has changed a LOT incl answer choices: Select 1,2,3, or all that apply. These are hard and significant format changes.5. VA current practice tests on TestNav8 do not share the LATEST ones for 2019. Also, New Meridian is now a key business in charge of releasing new practice. (The Pearson/PARCC TestNav8 portal is no longer in use; states have their TestNav8 system.) https://resources.newmeridiancorp.org/released-items/6. Expedited Retakes: Certain people in VA have reported yearly that state needed more money for retakes. Pearson Access Next person shares that as long as RETAKE done in school year, there is no cost. There is a "RETEST" button in the software.7. On the VATestnav8 portal there have been incidents of reading stories copied from 2010 into later years. Students deserve quality not copied material. (ie. Cheetah story).8. There have been INCORRECT actions taken with back button; a few schools have turned ON the back button for students doing better in math. This is wrong. Also, in past some students told that SOL could ONLY be on certain tablets; tablets are for ALL work. Finally, Care for Community in this time of COVID; the VA TestNAV8 contract is TOO much money as a YEARLY CONTRACT. (picture, PARCC operational assessments (YR), full citations available/many on Public Record) – Ms. Carolyn M)
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(Tech/Tests)

Let's make Tech and Tests a win-win, one charge for SOL practice summatives, and Pearson tech person shares that retests are part of each student's license cost/year.

Pearson Access Next is VA's software for state testing via the TestNav8: <https://va8.testnav.com/client/index.html>

Many counties/school districts have own software (Horizon, Powertest, others) for teachers' tests (formatives, summatives), benchmarks, and diagnostics.

Fairfax: Horizon	Counties (School Districts: Power Test), VA8Testnav (Pearson Access Next) and DoDEA																	
<p>https://assessment.fcps.edu/DOCS/Help/Teacher/chapter_2_-_getting_started.htm</p> <p>Horizon: Tech Plan: https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/fy2016techplan_4.pdf</p>	<p>SOL Practice Tests (Summatives) and DoDEA model</p> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 5px auto;"> <p>Students in a PRACTICE test are NOT allowed to "Save & Exit" because the SOL practice tests are NOT ONLINE TOOLS. Students DESERVE ALL ONLINE TOOLS. (Other assessments do not.)</p> <p>Also, Virginia does NOT need to change the SOL practice tests. DoDEA model for their OTHER practice under "Contract".</p> </div> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="662 527 899 569">Power Test</th> <th data-bbox="904 527 1101 569">Virginia</th> <th data-bbox="1105 527 1333 569">DoDEA</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="662 575 899 617"> <p>Many schools get "bundle" which includes SOL practice tests. (School districts should not have to pay for SOL practice as SOL practice is available under VA8Testnav (needs updating and for certain grades new CAT format).)</p> </td> <td data-bbox="904 575 1101 617"> <p>Contract: Pearson Access Next Practice Tests Actual Tests</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1105 575 1333 617"> <p>Contract: Pearson Access Next Practice Tests Actual Tests</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="662 623 899 644"> <p>Similar to TestNav7</p> </td> <td data-bbox="904 623 1101 644"> <p>TestNav8</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1105 623 1333 644"> <p>TestNav8</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="662 651 899 693"> <p>https://www.powerschool.com/powerschool-assessment-analytics-login/</p> </td> <td data-bbox="904 651 1101 693"> <p>https://va8.testnav.com/client/index.html</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1105 651 1333 693"> <p>https://dodea.mypearsonsupport.com/int-practice-tests/math/</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="662 699 899 741"> <p>http://www.pcva.us/departments/cia/pacingguides/handbooks/PSA.pdf</p> </td> <td data-bbox="904 699 1101 741"> <p>https://va8.testnav.com/client/index.html</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1105 699 1333 741"> <p>The practice test platforms have a default login of "GuestL," however, users can choose to enter a name when they begin. This is for the teacher's reference when printing reports at the end of the scorable practice tests. This information is not captured or maintained in the system. Teachers can assign numerical values to each student as a log in, if it is preferred.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Power Test	Virginia	DoDEA	<p>Many schools get "bundle" which includes SOL practice tests. (School districts should not have to pay for SOL practice as SOL practice is available under VA8Testnav (needs updating and for certain grades new CAT format).)</p>	<p>Contract: Pearson Access Next Practice Tests Actual Tests</p>	<p>Contract: Pearson Access Next Practice Tests Actual Tests</p>	<p>Similar to TestNav7</p>	<p>TestNav8</p>	<p>TestNav8</p>	<p>https://www.powerschool.com/powerschool-assessment-analytics-login/</p>	<p>https://va8.testnav.com/client/index.html</p>	<p>https://dodea.mypearsonsupport.com/int-practice-tests/math/</p>	<p>http://www.pcva.us/departments/cia/pacingguides/handbooks/PSA.pdf</p>	<p>https://va8.testnav.com/client/index.html</p>	<p>The practice test platforms have a default login of "GuestL," however, users can choose to enter a name when they begin. This is for the teacher's reference when printing reports at the end of the scorable practice tests. This information is not captured or maintained in the system. Teachers can assign numerical values to each student as a log in, if it is preferred.</p>
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<p>http://www.pcva.us/departments/cia/pacingguides/handbooks/PSA.pdf</p>	<p>https://va8.testnav.com/client/index.html</p>	<p>The practice test platforms have a default login of "GuestL," however, users can choose to enter a name when they begin. This is for the teacher's reference when printing reports at the end of the scorable practice tests. This information is not captured or maintained in the system. Teachers can assign numerical values to each student as a log in, if it is preferred.</p>																

Pearson Access Next: practice tests, tests, retakes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVUOKL1p8z4>

I find this legislation VERY interesting. The only reasons that students can NOT go back on the G3-8 CAT math is because it is already graded by QUESTION One. I am well aware of the agenda, by a certain group, to "fast track math". (Computer adaptive testing, for this age group, CAN have all the online buttons within sections.)

<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?161+sum+HB833>

Sincerely,

Ms. Carolyn Murphy

571-327-6910

cmfuelforeducation@gmail.com

Dear FCPS Leadership,

Thank you to Superintendent Brabrand and the FCPS School Board for providing the opportunity for students to voice their opinions on the proposal to change the TJ admissions process.

I believe that racial inclusion is important, especially given the current circumstances. However, the current merit lottery proposal has several issues. First, the system is not holistic and does not look at the student as a whole, which is very important when determining the diversity of the incoming class. The lack of other factors (i.e. letters of recommendation from teachers, Assessment Percentile Ranking test, etc) would cause the profile of each student to become very similar (because it would be based on each one having a GPA greater than 3.5, being enrolled in Algebra 1, living in a county that feeds to TJ, and answering the revised SIS with questionnaire/essay) – thus severely diminishing the TJ admissions’ committee insight into each student’s unique abilities, talents, strengths, and patterns of thinking – all of which are also critical in determining admissions for students. Second, the system does not ensure that the students who are chosen will be able to thrive and flourish at TJ – whether a student is able to thrive academically and socially can be seen through teacher letter of recommendations, performance on a standardized test (i.e. Assessment Percentile Ranking test, and the problem-solving essay, which tests a student’s creativity and critical-thinking skills, which are critical to be able to determine during the admissions process, as I mentioned earlier). Therefore, those students who would otherwise be qualified to thrive in the rigor of TJ’s environment may not be admitted, thus limiting their opportunities to pursue higher education with like-minded peers.

Thus, I would like to propose an alternative method that would allow for the TJ admissions process to be more inclusive of different students – by identifying populations of students that are at a disadvantage, and providing resources to those students who wish to attend TJ (before the admissions process occurs). For example, elementary and middle schools in Fairfax County that are identified as having a significantly underprivileged population of students could be partnered with other schools with greater resources, in order to help spread the resources more evenly. This could be done through encouraging more well-off schools (such as nearby high schools or middle schools) to have a “Buddy Program” for partnering with elementary and middle school students to provide activities/workshops to increase the students’ knowledge about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and thus give them greater resources to learn about topics that fascinate them. Another method would be through revising the elementary and middle school curriculums to include more advanced class for STEM (not just at Advanced Academic Placement (AAP) schools), which would further help students interested in attending TJ to learn more about their passions and pursue activities. Along the same lines, offering different extracurricular activities, such as MathCounts, to elementary and middle schools (especially for elementary schools, in order to help students who are good at math to be further challenged to encourage them to grow academically and intellectually) with qualified teachers. Furthermore, the FCPS-created Adult and Community Education (ACE) Classes holds preparation classes for the TJ admissions process (i.e. the “Thomas Jefferson Admissions Test Preparation Fall Seminar”) – however, the courses are usually located at schools that are well-off (the Thomas Jefferson Admissions Test Preparation Fall Seminar is being held at Chantilly High School, and is currently the only class being offered for TJ preparation by ACE Classes). The mission of ACE Classes is to “provide lifelong literacy and educational opportunities for residents of all ages through implementation of best academic and business practices.” This could be further met by providing more classes for TJ preparation (for middle school children and elementary school children, in order to enrich their education at an early level, so

that they may find and pursue what fascinates them) at schools that serve underprivileged students, thus bridging the gap between those who have more access to resources due to race, wealth, et cetera, than those who are underprivileged due to their race, wealth, et cetera.

I strongly support maintaining the current TJ admissions process with my aforementioned proposal because it would provide a level playing field for all students prior to the admissions, so that each student has an equal opportunity to attend TJ and is not at a disadvantage during the admissions process. By identifying students who are disadvantaged before the admissions process, this would lead to greater overall racial inclusion over time, in contrast to doing a merit lottery, which would temporarily lead to more racial inclusion. For example, the schools that are identified as possible partners with schools with other resources would, over time, build up knowledge and resources within themselves, and thus allow future students to benefit from those resources, despite their socioeconomic status or background, et cetera. In turn, this would allow students who wish to attend TJ to be better prepared for the Assessment Percentile Ranking, as well as having teacher letter of recommendations (which I also support, as they provide unique insights and a different perspective on the student. I am grateful to my teachers who kindly wrote my letters of recommendation, as I believe it showed a different aspect of my academic abilities that otherwise would not have been brought to light in my application. This certainly played a role in my admissions, and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend and thrive at TJHSST). Overall, equipping schools that serve underprivileged populations in Fairfax County would have a much longer-lasting, positive impact on racial inclusion in the TJ admissions process, and continue building a strong and diverse community of learners.

Being able to attend TJ and thrive with support of resourceful teachers and with like-minded peers was a great decision for me, and thus I believe that the admissions decision of being able to attend a rigorous school should not be attributed to luck – rather, it should be based on a holistic process that views every student with their own abilities, and prepare schools with underprivileged students early on, so that each student has an equal opportunity to pursue their future at TJ.

Thank you, and I look forward to being a part of greater racial inclusion at TJ.

Best,

Aumena Choudhry

Connection to TJ/FxCo,

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Class of 2020

Dear school officials,

I am a parent of a senior at Thomas Jefferson, and I want to share my thoughts on the current state of the school and on the proposal to bring much needed change to the admissions process.

Our child, like a sub-population at TJ, is someone who has long devoured knowledge about science, technology, math, and generally, the world around him. From his pre-school recess time spent listening to the woodpeckers in the trees while his classmates were playing, through his elementary and middle school years, he was always a bit out of step with the vast majority of his peers; he has also been one who scored off-the-charts on tests and in his academic environment, and was never really in synch with the things that the majority were tuned into. For him, TJ offered an opportunity to immerse himself in rigorous study of the things that he found the most interesting.

High school can be a difficult place for science nerds. But at TJ, he has found kinship with others who are similarly bright and awkward, more into computer algorithm design than dating and social spheres. He finds the coursework demanding, but save for an overbearing workload his Sophomore year, has managed to stay afloat with great grades and still get healthy amounts of sleep.

This is not true for many at TJ. There are a significant number of TJ students who are not there for the math and science, in my experience. They are there because their parents have groomed them, forced them into test prep, in some cases for years, with the goal of attending "the nation's top high school." Whether it is a STEM school, and arts school, or a humanities school, I feel like these parents would not change their approach significantly. They misguidedly, subconsciously, act on behalf of prestige and their own image more than the health and wellness of their children. They are the vocal minority, rallying behind Asra Nomani under false accusations of racism and unfairness.

I have heard horror stories of the abuse that some FCPS kids from this world face when they fail to over-achieve: an 8th-grader, forced by her parents to write letters of apology to her elementary teachers after she was rejected by TJ; students at TJ who face verbal or physical abuse at home when they fail to get A's across 7 classes of college-level coursework. The intense stress of just being a young adult, combined with the sometimes unreasonable rigor of TJ teachers, long commutes, and a surrounding of overachievers can be profoundly harmful to those kids who are not there for the right reasons. And to what end?

What I want for TJ is an environment that offers amazing opportunities for our region's science and math stars. I couldn't care less about its image as the greatest school in America. In fact, I would prefer if its prestige diminished enough to reduce its cachet among some parents, the ones who will spend and do anything to achieve admission. The current admissions system is certainly failing certain racial and socioeconomic groups. But it's also, by virtue of its attraction of prestige-seekers, failing its core constituents, the STEM nerds.

I support anything but the status quo, at least temporarily. TJ needs a hard reboot. The proposal on the table is flawed and harsh for a year, but I think it's imperative that we move to a system that can (1) find the awkward science nerds throughout our region and (2) discourage those parents in it for the wrong reasons.

The parents whom I respect the least will be the most outraged this year, when their vast investments in gaming the system with test prep and non-stop enrichment fail to achieve their goals. But their kids,

who would have been doomed to sleep deprivation, long commutes, and material that is interesting but not their passion, will be better for the rejection. They will find their way in the handful of base schools where parents strategically move their families. And they will still have all the opportunities for enrichment that money can buy.

On the other side of the spectrum, many parents of the brightest STEM 8th graders this year will certainly suffer from a lottery. Their kids will face a struggle in their base schools, both socially and academically. For them, the experience of being challenged intellectually will have to wait four more years until college, if they can stick it out. There they will find their people, other bright American STEM nerds who were insufficiently challenged by base education. In a way, their non-admission will be the collateral damage for the cause of the future classes.

In time, though, thanks to radical action this year, I think we will be able to bring the science nerds, of all colors and backgrounds, back into the fold. They will find a new TJ, a few years hence, which offers for them a place to pursue their passions among the quirky. They will find a changed parent population, parents who appreciate their children for what they truly are rather than what we feel pressured for them to be. Hopefully the school will still be rigorous, but perhaps ranked comfortably below other schools in the biased rankings systems. And they will be able to look back at the hard choices that were made in the midst of a pandemic, and thank the science nerds who were left behind in the final throes of an unfair and biased system.

Thank you for considering my experience,

Jeff Gilles

gilles.jeff@gmail.com

Fairfax, Virginia

Robinson Secondary base middle/high school

703-727-3402

Dear FCPS and Virginia Leadership,

I strongly support the proposed changes to the TJ admissions process. At present admissions to TJ favor the affluent, who have the resources for test prep classes, outside activities, and coaches. There are brilliant children at every level of society in our county, and they deserve a fair chance.

Before moving to Fairfax County, I lived for many years in Arlington. There I served for several years on the Arlington School Board's Gifted Advisory Committee, including as its Chair. Arlington has chosen a different path from Fairfax for serving gifted children, primarily ensuring that teachers teach students at multiple levels within the same classroom, providing gifted services through differentiated instruction and a gifted resource teacher. It also, like Fairfax, has an IB program, starting in middle school, and sends a few students to TJ. I strongly support following both approaches, as the best way to allow all students to reach their highest potential.

Arlington also has a number of magnet schools, designed to accommodate students' different interests and styles of learning. My sons both attended one of those schools. After a successful lawsuit challenging taking diversity into account for those schools, Arlington implemented a system much like that now proposed for TJ, where admission slots are allocated based on a student's home school rather than system-wide. That system succeeded wonderfully, allowing my boys and their classmates the opportunity to attend a more diverse school than would have been created by a system-wide lottery where the odds favored the larger number of more affluent students who applied.

I also understand the cost of this system: my oldest son was not admitted to his school of choice under the lottery, but was admitted years later from the waiting list. Nevertheless, this system works, and is a terrific model for Fairfax to follow. Indeed, many state universities are now following a similar model for admissions from high schools throughout their states.

Thank you to Superintendent Brabrand and the FCPS School Board for proposing changes to the TJ admissions process to advance opportunity and diversity at TJ. A more equitable admissions policy for TJ — as well as gifted services for children in every school - will allow them to blossom. I speak from personal experience, having gone from government cheese to living here in Lake Barcroft as the direct result of an excellent education. I look forward to being a part of the efforts to make this new transition successful.

Best,

Hope O'Keeffe

6114 Beachway

Falls Church 22041

Dear FCPS and Virginia Leadership,

Thank you to Superintendent Brabrand and the FCPS School Board for proposing changes to the TJ admissions process. I support this proposal. In fact, the more I learn, the more I realize that the Merit Lottery is the ONLY way to go. For too long, we have let TJ admissions permit unequal access to a public magnet school. The lack of economic, racial, and gender diversity should not be allowed to stand.

As a parent of a 9th grader who chose not to apply to TJ, I'd like to share some personal information. My son has a 4.0 (+honors), scores in the 97th-99th percentile on all standardized tests, has won medals in state Science Olympiad for 2 years and medals in all other levels for the last 5 years, he participates in all afterschool STEM activities (SciOly, Flying Aces, TSA), and is beloved by all of his teachers and administrators. Sadly, I'm not bragging...if you met Ben, you'd fall in love too. So, he is exactly the type of student that TJ wants to attract and who would be successful.

Why did he not apply? There are a lot of reasons: opportunity costs, diversity, toxicity, time commitments, etc. The biggest was the opportunity costs. After hearing Mr. Mendes' TJ presentation at Frost, my son was raring to go to TJ because the opportunities were outstanding! But then I asked him about what he would miss by going to TJ. He realized that he would miss:

Family vacations b/c of summer school--did you know kids plan out summer school for 3 years as soon as they get into TJ so that they can meet prerequisites and have time for band and orchestra?

Boy Scouts, his Eagle Scout project, and other extracurricular like church and volunteer time due to overwhelming TJ commitments

Time with friends and family due to overwhelming TJ commitments

My son can make this choice because we are fortunate to have access to one of the best High Schools (Woodson) in FCPS, but other kids are not so fortunate and those are the kids who would most benefit from access to TJ, but they are barred from TJ due to lack of resources and knowledge about a critical (and unspoken) step in the TJ admissions process: paid TJ test prep. There are 4 middle schools that make up 2/3 of the TJ populations, which effectively makes them exclusive TJ mills and as you well know, most of the FCPS middle schools do not have the same resources, like SciOly, etc.

Beyond my son's choice about TJ, I also want to make it clear that I didn't want him to go to TJ, despite being a TJ Alumnus myself. I told him that it was his choice, and it was, but based on the stories that I have heard as a SciOly coach who is surrounded by TJ-bound students/parents, I did not want him to go there. The toxic atmosphere at TJ would have stifled his curiosity and threatened to his mental and physical health. The stories that I have heard would surprise you.

I have so many more stories to tell about why I love your plan, your messaging, and your positivity in the face of extremely horrific tactics by those who want the status quo. However, I've seen studies that say the only way to effect dynamic change is to either close the school or completely revamp the admissions strategy. You have chosen to do the latter, but either would be fine by me, after hearing the repulsive racist ramblings of the Coalition4TJ.

I look forward to being a part of the efforts to make this new transition successful. I would also like to volunteer time to help under-represented students create their applications to make sure that their accomplishments shine. Best, Vanessa W. Hall

Dear all,

I know that the opposition to reforming TJ and its admissions policy is loud, so I wanted to make sure you know that many more of us believe this is necessary and important, and that the merit lottery proposal is a huge step forward.

I am a TJ Class of 2001 alumna. I've always been an excellent test taker, and there is no question that that's how I made it into TJ. I benefited from the system, and I absolutely loved and appreciated my time at TJ. As an adult, however, I'm in my 15th year of being an elementary teacher in New York City, and I have seen firsthand how inequitable systems only serve to perpetuate these inequities.

I taught in an under-resourced and underserved school for a few years and saw huge inequities there. Then I moved to a truly diverse school, one of the rare ones in my city. I taught in an integrated general-and-special education (ICT) classroom right next door to a gifted classroom - and I watched the segregation firsthand. They were all wonderful kids - but many of them were there not because of deserving it more but because of circumstance, parent involvement, prep, etc.

I watched the TAG (as we called AAP) students also get admitted to the "better" middle schools, based on test scores and grades alone, and then the "better" high schools, 100% based on test scores. And I watched students I loved and valued, who had never tested into those programs at a young age and who didn't always thrive in standardized testing but were hard workers and bright creative thinkers, often Black and Latino students. Consistently have fewer opportunities.

A common argument in favor of the tests and the status quo is that all families could choose to prep their students or "put more effort" into their education, to value it more highly, and that these families have earned their spots. That ignores so many system inequalities, but more importantly: no one should need to spend that much money or that much time simply to deserve a high quality education.

The status quo doesn't serve all students who could benefit from a TJ education. I know a change could mean that a kid like me didn't get a spot at TJ, and I know that idea can cause discomfort for many alumni. But making a better system is worth this shift. As educators, we know that we serve every child - and we want it to be even better, more truly equitable, for future generations than it was for us.

Sincerely,

Tamara Kromholz

TJHSST Class of 2001

5th grade teacher, NYCDOE

Dear FCPS Leadership,

Thank you to Superintendent Brabrand and the FCPS School Board for providing the opportunity for students to voice their opinions on the proposal to change the TJ admissions process.

I believe that racial inclusion is important, especially given the current circumstances. However, the current merit lottery proposal has several issues. First, the system is not holistic and does not look at the student as a whole, which is very important when determining the diversity of the incoming class. The lack of other factors (i.e. letters of recommendation from teachers, Assessment Percentile Ranking test, etc) would cause the profile of each student to become very similar (because it would be based on each one having a GPA greater than 3.5, being enrolled in Algebra 1, living in a county that feeds to TJ, and answering the revised SIS with questionnaire/essay) – thus severely diminishing the TJ admissions’ committee insight into each student’s unique abilities, talents, strengths, and patterns of thinking – all of which are also critical in determining admissions for students. Second, the system does not ensure that the students who are chosen will be able to thrive and flourish at TJ – whether a student is able to thrive academically and socially can be seen through teacher letter of recommendations, performance on a standardized test (i.e. Assessment Percentile Ranking test, and the problem-solving essay, which tests a student’s creativity and critical-thinking skills, which are critical to be able to determine during the admissions process, as I mentioned earlier). Therefore, those students who would otherwise be qualified to thrive in the rigor of TJ’s environment may not be admitted, thus limiting their opportunities to pursue higher education with like-minded peers.

Thus, I would like to propose an alternative method that would allow for the TJ admissions process to be more inclusive of different students – by identifying populations of students that are at a disadvantage, and providing resources to those students who wish to attend TJ (before the admissions process occurs). For example, elementary and middle schools in Fairfax County that are identified as having a significantly underprivileged population of students could be partnered with other schools with greater resources, in order to help spread the resources more evenly. This could be done through encouraging more well-off schools (such as nearby high schools or middle schools) to have a “Buddy Program” for partnering with elementary and middle school students to provide activities/workshops to increase the students’ knowledge about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and thus give them greater resources to learn about topics that fascinate them. Another method would be through revising the elementary and middle school curriculums to include more advanced class for STEM (not just at Advanced Academic Placement (AAP) schools), which would further help students interested in attending TJ to learn more about their passions and pursue activities. Along the same lines, offering different extracurricular activities, such as MathCounts, to elementary and middle schools (especially for elementary schools, in order to help students who are good at math to be further challenged to encourage them to grow academically and intellectually) with qualified teachers. Furthermore, the FCPS-created Adult and Community Education (ACE) Classes holds preparation classes for the TJ admissions process (i.e. the “Thomas Jefferson Admissions Test Preparation Fall Seminar”) – however, the courses are usually located at schools that are well-off (the Thomas Jefferson Admissions Test Preparation Fall Seminar is being held at Chantilly High School, and is currently the only class being offered for TJ preparation by ACE Classes). The mission of ACE Classes is to “provide lifelong literacy and educational opportunities for residents of all ages through implementation of best academic and business practices.” This could be further met by providing more classes for TJ preparation (for middle school children and elementary school children, in order to enrich their education at an early level, so

that they may find and pursue what fascinates them) at schools that serve underprivileged students, thus bridging the gap between those who have more access to resources due to race, wealth, et cetera, than those who are underprivileged due to their race, wealth, et cetera.

I strongly support maintaining the current TJ admissions process with my aforementioned proposal because it would provide a level playing field for all students prior to the admissions, so that each student has an equal opportunity to attend TJ and is not at a disadvantage during the admissions process. By identifying students who are disadvantaged before the admissions process, this would lead to greater overall racial inclusion over time, in contrast to doing a merit lottery, which would temporarily lead to more racial inclusion. For example, the schools that are identified as possible partners with schools with other resources would, over time, build up knowledge and resources within themselves, and thus allow future students to benefit from those resources, despite their socioeconomic status or background, et cetera. In turn, this would allow students who wish to attend TJ to be better prepared for the Assessment Percentile Ranking, as well as having teacher letter of recommendations (which I also support, as they provide unique insights and a different perspective on the student. I am grateful to my teachers who kindly wrote my letters of recommendation, as I believe it showed a different aspect of my academic abilities that otherwise would not have been brought to light in my application. This certainly played a role in my admissions, and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend and thrive at TJHSST). Overall, equipping schools that serve underprivileged populations in Fairfax County would have a much longer-lasting, positive impact on racial inclusion in the TJ admissions process, and continue building a strong and diverse community of learners.

Being able to attend TJ and thrive with support of resourceful teachers and with like-minded peers was a great decision for me, and thus I believe that the admissions decision of being able to attend a rigorous school should not be attributed to luck – rather, it should be based on a holistic process that views every student with their own abilities, and prepare schools with underprivileged students early on, so that each student has an equal opportunity to pursue their future at TJ.

Thank you, and I look forward to being a part of greater racial inclusion at TJ.

Best,

Aumena Choudhry

Connection to TJ/FxCo,

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Class of 2020