

Hello,

I am writing with regards to the admissions criteria and process changes at TJHSS&T. I appreciate the changes and I support them. In particular, I did see that there was a recent change to admit 100 applicants before moving to the merit lottery. I believe this change would be better considered if the order were reversed, with holding the merit lottery first for 400 seats, then offering a "second look" to fill the remaining 100 seats. To avoid stigma and a toxic culture, I cannot emphasize how important it is for students not to be able to know which route they got acceptance through. There is a drawback that having some spots reserved will cause further stigmatization of the underrepresented minorities and economically disadvantaged students who are accepted.

I have seen a lot of misunderstandings and assumptions with the changes from a variety of sources, so I am going to address those in the rest of my email, and why the changes are important. As background, I am a Chinese-American who graduated from TJ in the early 90s and I have noticed that some of the people are saying that the proposed process would be discriminatory towards Asians, because models have shown fewer Asians being admitted. The projections cannot tell the entire story because there is no sub-group data on the large group that "Asian" encompasses. Asians are not a monolith, but without better data, we cannot demonstrate how sub-groups fare. There are wide education and wealth gaps among Asian groups, and the proposed admissions changes would allow for much greater economic diversity. Therefore, not all Asians would be adversely affected by the admissions changes.

As an aside for those who don't know, there are Asian groups among the underrepresented. Asians are frequently portrayed as model minority stereotype, which is harmful and fails to acknowledge the true diversity of Asian groups, objectively unfair to all Asians. I know that growing up in Fairfax, I was never taught these things, so I would like to propose including a required Ethnic Studies class be taught at TJ and all FCPS high schools. A basic Ethnic Studies class would help students be aware of the historical background and evolution of how different races, ethnicities, and civil rights policies have shaped our lives in the US. This is important because minority groups are not adequately taken into account in standard humanities classes. The Ethnic Studies class would enhance the capacity of TJ to prepare a diverse student body for leadership positions at companies which will increasingly demand a diverse group of leaders.

[-https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/22/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/22/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/)

[-https://ncrc.org/racial-wealth-snapshot-asian-americans-and-the-racial-wealth-divide/](https://ncrc.org/racial-wealth-snapshot-asian-americans-and-the-racial-wealth-divide/)

[-https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/05/15/why-students-should-be-required-take-ethnic-studies-opinion](https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/05/15/why-students-should-be-required-take-ethnic-studies-opinion)

Diversity can be defined in many ways, by race, ethnicity, economics, region; they are all important and relevant. TJ is failing in diversity in every one of these aspects I named, but should better reflect the demographics it pulls from as a tax-payer funded public school. The value of diversity has also been much examined and there are many educational benefits, we know that TJ can be improved with a more diverse student population. Various early outreach efforts have been tried over the years to create more diversity, but they have not been enough to make a significant impact.

[-https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/)

[-https://www.forbes.com/sites/rsmdiscovery/2018/08/22/why-workplace-diversity-is-so-important-and-why-its-so-hard-to-achieve/#7ea4a39b3096](https://www.forbes.com/sites/rsmdiscovery/2018/08/22/why-workplace-diversity-is-so-important-and-why-its-so-hard-to-achieve/#7ea4a39b3096)

[-https://www.teachinci.com/the-importance-of-diversity-in-the-classroom/](https://www.teachinci.com/the-importance-of-diversity-in-the-classroom/)

The TJ admissions test does not test for love of learning STEM subjects, there is no essay portion on it, and it does not measure merit with the way that it is used. These are some common misconceptions I'm told the test can do, usually by people who have never taken the test. The test measures how well you do against your peers in order to rank you and figure out the semifinalists; there is no cut off score, which is another big misunderstanding. I must admit that it is difficult to be against the test when I am pretty good at taking standardized tests. I suspect this is why some past and present TJ students have trouble seeing that it is better to remove the test, as they all excel at taking standardized tests too. Most other people who want to keep the test don't understand how much weight it gets with GPA and that the other factors are not even considered until after this first cutoff. For admissions to a STEM-focused magnet school, it is an inherently flawed process when you weed people out with a gameable test before looking at their passion for STEM. If more people understood how the current 2-phased process really works, I believe you would get a lot more support for the proposed changes.

The new admissions proposal will raise the GPA minimum requirement significantly, from a mere 3.0 to 3.5 and use the Student Information Sheet (SIS) and essay before getting to the merit lottery. In the current process, by gaming the test, a student with a lower GPA can rank higher than a student who did not prep for the test but who has a higher GPA. Test prep isn't just about studying for one specific test, it is also about how to take timed, standardized tests and how to figure out the best answer when you don't know what it is. There is also nothing new in any commonly accepted aptitude test that you can use to surprise people who are intent on preparing for the exam. Test prep is a huge advantage when some people taking the test have not seen questions like it before. Clinging to a test as some kind of definitive measurement of merit when we know how much money (\$2,000 - \$10,000) and work is being put into gaming it by most of the students accepted is extremely illogical. What is the point of putting so much weight on a test when it can be gamed to such an extent? As such, the test is not a true measure of the talent pool any longer and keeping the test the way it is should be unacceptable to those who want to keep TJ "the best". When studying research analysis and evaluation methods, you learn that not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. In place of the test, a higher GPA threshold and SIS/essay review will better ensure the pool of applicants who are entered into the merit based lottery have enough talent and ability to succeed at TJ. Regardless of what you may think about the test it should not be weighed so heavily, and it should not be administered this year due to covid safety precautions. The SIS/essay review should have been used in the first round of admissions all along, it is an excellent decision to move it there.

[-http://fairtest.org/sites/default/files/optrept.pdf](http://fairtest.org/sites/default/files/optrept.pdf)

[-https://www.tjtestprep.com](https://www.tjtestprep.com)

The merit lottery proposed is not a full lottery and I support it after using a 3.5 GPA minimum and SIS/essay review for the semifinalists. When selecting from a pool of merit eligible applicants by random, the end results will be roughly representative of the pool it selects from. Merit lotteries are being used to select scientific research grants with success, and many people believe they will become more common in the future. From modeling, we know that the merit lottery is expected to increase representation of underrepresented minority students at TJ by a minimum of 170% and economically

disadvantaged students by 770%. These large increases demonstrate how much of a discrepancy there currently is. Regional differences are also significant, there are 26 middle schools in Fairfax County with 14 being AAP centers, but more than half of students accepted to TJ in 2018 were from only 4 middle schools: Carson, Longfellow, Kilmer, and Rocky Run. I'm attaching a couple screenshots, one showing the middle school breakdown of applicants from 2018 (TS means too small to count) and one that shows TJ having the lowest percent population of students on free or reduced lunch of FCPS high schools, including Langley HS. This data on the 4 middle schools is so well known, property values in those school districts are much higher than the rest of the county, so there is a real economic incentive for those residents to keep the status quo. Removal of the admissions test and \$100 application fee, while raising the GPA and having the SIS/essay review in the first round, and use of a merit lottery, will together help in addressing diversity gaps more significantly than early outreach efforts have. I should mention here that the recent change to the admissions proposal to admit 100 applicants before moving to the merit lottery would have some impact on the numbers I stated above. While the change to reserve some spots for extremely qualified students who ostensibly deserve admission to TJ is an interesting addition, I would reverse the order by holding the merit lottery first for 400 seats, then offering a second look to fill the remaining 100 seats. Doing so could reduce the need for the number of held seats to 50-75. To avoid stigma and a toxic culture, I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for students not to be able to know which route they gained acceptance through. There is also a drawback that having some spots reserved will cause further stigmatization of the underrepresented minorities and economically disadvantaged students who are accepted.-

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f4289cac951f24569ad9488/t/5f74fa07543b4848ab84df86/1601501712383/TJAAG-RecommendationsReport-2020September.pdf>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03572-7>

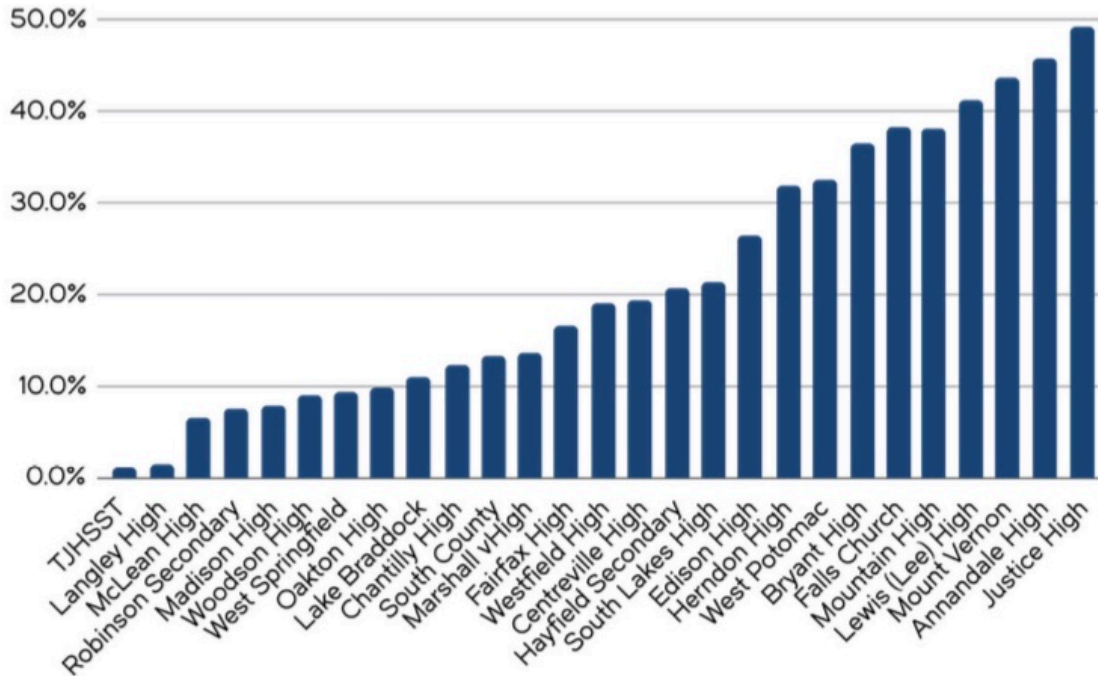
<https://physicstoday.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/pt.5.8042/full/>

Regarding the concerns I've heard that students may be discouraged from doing better or participating in STEM extracurricular activities because of a lottery, I'll be quite frank in saying that those hypothetical students probably aren't the best fit for TJ because of their lack of self-motivation and desire for self-improvement shown in this thought process. It also stands to reason that students would have more time to do the STEM extracurricular activities if they aren't taking test prep classes and that the extracurricular will become a much more important factor in admission criteria. I recently heard an example of a student who won multiple Science Olympiad medals in middle school, yet did not get into TJ because of his performance on the reading comprehension portion of the test. The person stated that the student would not have been able to understand the math and science classes at TJ without college-level reading comprehension, therefore he supported the test. In actuality, with the current system, the TJ admissions office made their cuts based on GPA and test ranking alone; they didn't even know they had rejected a Science Olympiad medalist in the first round, which is quite unfortunate. Also, I do not agree that you need college-level reading comprehension in the 8th grade to succeed at TJ, because I knew people who did really well in math and sciences at TJ, getting 4s and 5s (5 being the highest) on those AP tests, but who did not pass the AP English test their senior year. As you can see, this real life example demonstrates the fallacy of relying so much on the test and not including the SIS/essay in the first round.

The TJ admissions process has frequently been tweaked throughout the years, and will continue to be tweaked in future years. When people have figured out how to game the system so significantly, we need to make big changes, not little ones. I understand that big changes can be scary to some people, but you cannot progress when you are being held back by doing the same thing you've always done. To think you can get dramatically different results in doing the same thing is illogical. Keeping an open mind to all possibilities, thinking outside the box, and being innovative is the way TJ teaches students to solve difficult problems; combined with critical thinking, this is the true spirit of TJ and why it's always going to be one of the best schools in the nation. In fact, TJ began as an experiment and there was much controversy and opposition to it at the time. While there will never be a perfect system for admissions when there are not enough spaces for all of the worthy students, as TJ is a public school, it should try to more fairly represent the population of promising, bright students interested in STEM, including those with fewer resources, and seek to create a better educational environment for all students at TJ.

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

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



Thank you,
Jennifer Chang

Dear all,

I graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in 2010. I am a member of the TJ Alumni Action Group, or TJAAG, a group of over 1,000 alumni advocating for greater inclusion and equity at our alma mater.

If I could go back in time and decide whether to attend TJ, I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. I met my husband there and made lifelong friends. I benefited from top quality instruction that served me well in college, graduate school, and my career. I participated in groundbreaking research that I wouldn't have had access to anywhere else. I'm so grateful for that opportunity, and I worked really hard for it. I went to the library every week of my childhood, missed out on a lot of parties to study, joined a lot of clubs, and even attended TJ prep classes.

But that wasn't just my hard work, was it? That was also luck. I was lucky to go to a school that had clubs like math counts where I could participate. I was lucky to attend a pre-IB program that gave me access to more advanced classes than other public school students. I was lucky my parents had the time and resources to drive me to the library every weekend and enroll me in TJ prep classes and make sure I applied. I was lucky I was born in the United States and spoke English as a first language.

I'm so glad I went to TJ. But there are students who are just as hard-working as I was and just as smart as I was but they're being overlooked because they're less lucky than I was. I want them to have just as good of a shot at TJ as I did. We've tried outreach to elementary and middle schools. We've tried incremental change. Those efforts have failed year after year. Why shouldn't the #1 high school in the country be a true innovator when it comes to inclusion? Let's be on the cutting edge and commit to reform that makes an impact.

I was heartbroken in a Fairfax NAACP webinar a few months ago to learn that FCPS resisted integration even after desegregation became law. I learned about how at many historical turning points my beloved home state of Virginia prioritized political expediency and the preferences of its most privileged residents over doing the right thing. My heartfelt hope is that future generations will not be learning about how, in 2020, we chose exclusion instead of equity yet again. Rather, I want them to know that we grew from our mistakes and chose a different way. A better way, not just for under-represented minorities but for everyone.

I am a proud 2nd-generation Asian American immigrant married to another 2nd-generation immigrant and TJ alum, and I've been disappointed to hear some try to use our communities as a talking point. Asian Americans are not a monolith, and there is room for many different backgrounds, perspectives, and viewpoints under the extremely broad umbrella term of "Asian".

Please take the time to read this joint opinion piece by TJAAG and the National Korean American Service & Education Consortium Virginia: <http://m.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2020/oct/04/opinion-commentary-reform-americas-1-high-school-g/>. We've tried incremental change for 30 years. It's time for a fundamental shake-up. This is the best chance we'll have to make a meaningful change for a long time. Let's make it count instead of settling for superficial tweaks.

Regards, Nicole Sbitani, TJHSST Class of 2019

Dear FCPS and Virginia Leadership,

I want to provide an illustration at how the current system can be heavily influenced by parental intention vs. really identifying the representative talent in our draw region.

The supporters of the status quo will often say, yes the underrepresentation is an issue, but changing TJHSST admissions is not the solution, first fix the pipeline.

I ask that you please watch an illustration of a strategy that can be employed wholly or partially, and no, I'm not claiming it is done by all. It illustrates the pipeline is broken.

And I don't vilify the hard work of parents, I encourage it. My wife and I pour ourselves into our kids because we love them and want them to have knowledge and love of it. We do not do it for an edge to a public school. Our child's acceptance to TJ should be independent of who his parents are.

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=941103366415338&id=106746724522729

Or

https://youtu.be/aIRFqAR_8ZQ

I ask that you watch the speech I made, detailing and adding up the receipts of how very targeted approaches and strategies can provide an "edge" to a final test for entry. This doesn't even account for the double cost one pays if due to having a single parent or dual working parents, there is an additional \$5K year for School Aged Child Care.

And as far as the child who didn't go to prep and their chance which seemed more certain due to a test and worries due to a lottery they are doomed, I say.

You gained knowledge, you are better for it. Take your equal shot, but whether you get in or not, you will do well. Your hard work and dedication is not for naught, you developed intellectually and will continue in your path.

The merit lottery is a way to provide an equal opportunity to all eligible children, independent of the luck they had that determined to whom they were born and in which area. Help us improve the mental health of all kids in our NoVA draw areas.

This though is just the beginning, I will keep on advocating for more. We must also change the culture of TJ that relies on private education once in for success, but that is for another email.

Sincerely,
Jorge A Torrico

TJ '98

Text from video:

I was a low income, Latinx immigrant, graduate of TJ 1998. I do not support what has been going on for 30 years.

The current status quo does a great job of recognizing and identifying parental effort in guiding their child into a very singular skill, that of test taking. It also measures the social capital that said parent has to be able to navigate the bureaucratic hurdles set up to their child's education:

- starting with knowing which middle schools are the best feeders to TJ
- knowing about the NNAT in 1st, and prepping for it, knowing its typical cutoff
- knowing about the CogAT in 2nd, and its typical cutoff
- knowing about the AAP placement timeframe by January of 2nd grade
- if the child doesn't have specific cutoff scores, then already have accessed private retesting that can range from \$160 group GMU, \$390 individual GMU, or \$3K for private psychologist plan. You can retest once every 6 months per type of tests, here are 5 types WISC V, CAS, Stanford Binet, Kaufman, with just that you can retest 10 times from 1st thru 2nd grade.
- The scores aren't submitted automatically, you only need one to meet the threshold, so you can see how it becomes a \$3,900 plan.
- Studies have shown all children test better in a private more individual environment, and also as they are exposed to more tests
- Potentially - buying/renting so as to have an address there for placement. Then maybe move back, but for the child's educational continuity, be willing to drive them, not having bus is not an issue. Key point is to live in a neighborhood to the right feeder school (Longfellow, Kilmer, Carson, Rocky Run account for over 45% of TJ admits)
- once in AAP Level IV, continue to provide private enrichment, pay \$300/year for school robotics, \$300/year for coding, \$360/year for orchestra/band instrument rental, pay \$1500/year for 3 week summer science camp, you now just spent , 2 hours private tutoring per week \$60 for the year = \$1,800 for 30 weeks. Total spent = 4,260/year
- do the above from 3rd to 8th (\$25K)
- Fifth and Sixth grade ramp it up.
- In 5th grade take 6th grade SOL.
- In 6th grade take 7th grade SOL, score 500+
- In 6th grade take Iowa test, score 92+
- 7th grade algebra
- Summer between 7th and 8th, take geometry \$660 fee
- 8th grade algebra 2 trig test
- Apply to TJ and say it is all about merit.

You don't have to be rich to do this, just intentional. But the fact that TJ has less than 2.5% low SES and the county has 29% or that the whole region (Loudoun, PW, Fairfax and Arlington) has 33%+, that tells you.

The current admissions process and any process that heavily focuses on any testing will continue to be more indicative of parental intention, support and resource allocation.

This is the truth and why the status quo is supported, there has been a substantial investment in time, effort and resources, hence why the number one thing they oppose is their odds changing.

Sadly underscoring the biggest lottery being tacitly accepted, the lottery of to whom the child was born.

I believe in America, the idea that thru education you can improve your lot in life is a key purpose of public schools. TJHSST is a public school, all should have an equal opportunity to access it. That is what the merit lottery hopes to do. Is it perfect in its current implementation, no. Do I support it, yes.

It is the first of many coordinated steps I'm advocating for as part of TJAAG and our 1,000+ group of TJ Alumni Action Group.

Dear Dr. Brabrand and members of the School Board:

I understand that you have a legal obligation to comply with Virginia State Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students (the "Regulations"). I fail to see how you can comply with such regulations and implement legally required "best practices in the field of gifted education" without involving the AAP Office or Instructional Services in the development of your proposal. Experts in gifted education are noticeably absent from your town hall presentations.

I question whether your proposal will be a misappropriation of government funds intended by the Virginia General Assembly for the education of "students whose learning levels are remarkably different from their age-level peers." (See Virginia Department of Education website).

It appears that to the extent you and the School Board intend to use the TJ Admissions process to deny admission to that small group of extraordinary students who require special programs to meet their needs, in order to favor admission of students with less aptitude or ability, you may be violating applicable state law.

I also question whether your proposal would violate the School Board's budget, which identifies TJ as a school serving students with special interests and aptitude in math and science. Under your proposal, a student with a C or D in math or science could still have a 3.5 GPA and be admitted to TJ.

I urge you to maintain admission to TJ based on merit and not luck. There is no merit in a lottery (despite your mantra of a "Merit Lottery") and hard work and devotion should be rewarded, not dismissed.

Thomas Jefferson is a Governor's School that is intended to serve the needs of gifted children and per the Virginia Department of Education's website: "Governor's Schools give gifted students academic and visual and performing arts opportunities beyond those normally available in the students' home schools. ... The Virginia Governor's School Program has been designed to assist divisions as they meet the needs of a small population of students whose learning levels are remarkably different from their age-level peers. The foundation of the Virginia Governor's School Program centers on best practices in the field of gifted education and the presentation of advanced content to able learners."

The Regulations define gifted students as those whose "aptitudes and potential for accomplishment are so outstanding that they require special programs to meet their educational needs."

The Regulations also require identification of such students through a process that "shall include the review of information or data from multiple sources to determine whether a student's aptitudes and learning needs are most appropriately served through the school division's gifted education program." I fail to see how your use of the 3.5 GPA cutoff and lottery would satisfy this legally required process.

This site also provides that "A variety of revenue finances the operation of the Governor's School programs. The Virginia General Assembly, through VDOE and the participating school divisions, fund these programs. Academic-Year Governor's Schools are funded through the Virginia General Assembly with a funding addition, "the Governor's School add on." This funding to Academic-Year Governor's Schools is provided in addition to an appropriate share of participating divisions' basic student allocation for their Academic-Year Governor's Schools students."

There are legal and more constructive ways of accomplishing your stated goals:

If you believe that the admissions test is unfair, you could eradicate the admissions test and keep the remaining admissions process intact.

If your goal is to increase admission of gifted and talented students from various regions throughout the school district, then you could accomplish that goal by providing each underrepresented middle school a number of seats in proportion to their applicants and let that school's administration select from its body of gifted and talented students, those it feels would most benefit from a TJ education and contribute positively to the TJ community.

By admitting students who are not gifted and talented or do not work hard—your average student with a 3.5 GPA—you will be doing all students a great disservice. You could at the very least make the admissions cut-off a 3.8 or 3.9 GPA-- I understand from TJ parents that most students at TJ had at least a 3.9 GPA.

Arguably, students who work hard to obtain a 3.9 or 4.0 GPA may not be sufficiently challenged at their base schools and are going to work harder at TJ and benefit more from the resources the school has to offer while students with 3.5 GPAs are already sufficiently challenged at their base schools and may not be able to perform at the pace required for the advanced curricula that I hope TJ will still offer.

I find it absolutely shocking that you do not think every genius in the school district should have a seat at TJ and are willing to deny admission to those exceptional children whose educational needs cannot be met at a base school in order to accommodate less than stellar students, on the basis of a lottery, whose academic needs could very well be met at their base schools.

Not only are you legally bound to ensure that TJ's mission is met, but I would think you felt a moral responsibility to society to promote and not suppress those people who through hard work combined with their natural abilities could make valuable contributions to the advancement of science and technology if given the opportunity to do so. I wonder what Albert Einstein would have accomplished with a TJ education.

I would hope that our community would seek to encourage hard workers to make significant advancements in science and technology such as finding the cure for cancer or other ailments that we face, making discoveries in space, or programming our computers to fend off attacks from hackers, etc. Personally, as a taxpayer, I would prefer my dollars go to the hard-working genius than the average Joe and I really don't care whether that hard-working American genius is of Asian, African, Indian, Caucasian or Spanish descent.

I am deeply saddened by your proposal to suppress rather than promote hard work and genius. Your proposal will dismantle and destroy one of the best educational programs in this country, leave many gifted children with particular social emotional needs unattended, and as I understand, will only result in reducing admissions of Asian Americans and increasing admission of Caucasian Americans, with very little benefit, if any, to African Americans or Hispanic Americans. On the contrary, instead of admitting the brightest and hardest working African Americans and Hispanic Americans to the program, who are most likely to benefit from such a program, you are sure to leave many of them out by virtue of the lottery. What is the point of that?

I attended a town hall meeting re your plans for Thomas Jefferson Admissions and wish to express my disappointment. When Jeremy was asked what to say to people who claim that some gifted students “need” TJ, his response was essentially that other people also need TJ. Your proposal and Jeremy’s response make a mockery of the needs of gifted children and ignore applicable State law.

Regards,

Ana Cruz-Backman

Dear FCPS Superintendent and SB members:

As a US citizen, I saw your TJ admission proposal yesterday and was really concerned about the fate of this country. Seriously, it will destroy TJ and this country without our notice. What's the mission of TJ? It's NOT for public general education but for SPECIAL education for those who has extraordinary talent in STEM ("STEM nerd"). [Please find out what TJ students have done and what they have accomplished in STEM, you will be amazed]. They are the future top scientists and engineers of this country. They will be pillars of this country for all of us including you and me. The US needs them very badly in this increasingly competitive world. Please forget about the politics around us but open our eyes to see what's going on in today's world. Please be a visionary but not short-sighted about TJ admission. Will the US win in this extremely fierce technology competition with the rest of the world? Good luck!

Special students need special attention. TJ is such a special place for those talented STEM nerds. However, you proposed a lottery system and to increase the enrollment of TJ. Both of these are against the purpose of TJ. How can we distinguish those students who need TJ from those who want to enter TJ in a lottery selection? By definition, those "nerds" are few but not many. Increasing enrollment will dilute resources and negatively impact the quality of TJ too.

If TJ is for training elite future scientists, we should do just opposite by raising the admission bar (rigorous courses, hard entrance exams, teacher recommendations and STEM activities are a must) but not lowering the bar (as you know 3.5 GPA is very easy for a lot of ordinary students), and to reduce the enrollment but not to increase it. An analogy: if the purpose of NBA team is to win games, we need to select the most skillful players and forget about what skin color or race they are. If TJ or NBA is a welfare and for general practice, then I will support your proposal. We need to understand the purpose of TJ first before we move forward. Good schools are not uncommon in Virginia but TJ is only one. We can keep it or destroy it, it's our decision. We will be judged by history.

TJ's diversity issue is rooted from the pipeline issue. FCPS and VA education department need to invest money to improve elementary schools and help under representative groups. Bringing down the admission standard and randomly selecting students (who has 3.5 or higher GPA) is completely wrong and short-sighted. Lowering admission standard will surely force TJ to become one of the many VA high schools. Should we all say "Good bye, TJ"?

Jun
A Fairfax resident

Dear FCPS and Virginia Leadership, Various Respected Elected Leaders,

I am a TJ '98 grad and FCPS parent to 3 children in AAP, 8th, 6th and 4th. The following is why I support a merit lottery both as a private citizen and as a member of the TJ Alumni Action Group.

<https://www.tjaag.org/news> <https://twitter.com/TJAlumniAG>,
https://instagram.com/tj_alumni_action_group.

Sincerely, Jorge A Torrico

I want to provide some of the resources I found once I first heard about the "powerball revolution" from another TJ alumn.

The following provides a good baseline understanding to the role that lotteries can play in inclusion, removing bias, fostering participation, collaboration, non-partisanship and trust in civil society.

I encourage all to read/listen through the following:

<http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/44-the-powerball-revolution>

https://youtu.be/FQ-IgEAEV_Q

To read unofficial transcript:

<https://thisten.co/qin2v/RTtCOyG7pQwl2IfQYQtR7flU3nZm2t45aihNHOsk>

Here is a write up from WSJ:

<https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/ferric-fang-and-arturo-casadevall-taking-the-powerball-approach-to-funding-medical-research-1397508251>

"And NIH's peer review has been criticized. The latest critique is a landmark study just published in January online and in the Feb. 14 issue of Circulation Research by Michael Lauer and colleagues at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. It analyzed nearly 1,500 successful grants and found no correlation between the productivity of a project, as measured by the citation of grant-supported publications, and its score. "

Here it is from NIH:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4959526/>

"The time-honored mechanism of allocating funds based on ranking of proposals by scientific peer review is no longer effective, because review panels cannot accurately stratify proposals to identify the most meritorious ones. Bias has a major influence on funding decisions, and the impact of reviewer bias is magnified by low funding paylines."

The podcast I listened portrayed it was already implemented at NIH. TJ alumni who actually received grants have not seen it in use. I've reached out to NIH to confirm.

I have found implementation of this in New Zealand:

<https://researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41073-019-0089-z>

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/14/science/research-funding-lotteries.html>

- <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/lottery-research-grants-backed-new-zealand-academics>

I corresponded with Dr. Ferric C. Fang, he said, "...the Volkswagen Foundation has also experimented with a lottery process to award funding..."

- <https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/funding/our-funding-portfolio-at-a-glance/experiment/partially-randomized-procedure>

I still stand by my recommendation. A "merit lottery" is a successful strategy.

New Zealand is using it for research grants, other school districts are using lotteries, and VW seem to be to some extent too.

School Systems with Lottery:

- Georgia: <https://www.gcpsk12.org/domain/17>

- Ann Arbor, MI: <https://www.a2schools.org//site/Default.aspx?PageID=5353>

- Tennessee: https://mnps.squarespace.com/s/School-Choice-application-FINAL_opt.pdf

- Michigan: <https://www.a2schools.org/domain/2454>

- Boston: <https://www.bostonschoolfinder.org/metco>

Dear FCPS, Fairfax County, and State leaders:

Thank you for your unanimous consent last night regarding the elimination of the standardized test and elimination of the application fee! A huge step forward! Congratulations!

The final step is the implementation of a Merit Pool Lottery, with high enough standards to get talented kids to succeed at TJ (3.5 GPA/Algebra 1) without eliminating the critical diversity TJ desperately needs on so many fronts. We cannot keep seeking a representative pool at TJ, and then eliminating any kid who isn't perfect. This is a well-proven fair solution to distributing a limited resource.

Finally, please read the attached study of the TJHSST admissions revision from 2001. I think you will find it almost laughably familiar.

"At the October 11, 2001, meeting of the School Board in Fairfax County Virginia, School Superintendent Daniel A. Domenech took the podium to propose a new admissions procedure for the county's popular and prestigious magnet high school, the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. He was reasonably confident of a positive reception from the board. For one thing, he had drafted the proposal aimed at diversifying the Jefferson student body at the board's own request. His administrative team had done its homework, carefully crafting a policy that met several divergent goals, and providing a model to show how the new system would work. Before the meeting, the superintendent, himself, had informally consulted with sympathetic members of the School Board in this case, his traditional Democratic allies, who held an eight to four majority over their Republican counterparts.

They had been well disposed toward the proposal. But that evening, as he made his formal presentation, 200 parents watched from the gallery in barely contained anger and some interrupted Domenech's presentation with boos and jeers. Over the next two weeks, the School Board members received hundreds of emails from parents protesting the new admissions proposal. The protesters represented a relatively small constituency, given the size of the Fairfax County Public Schools system, but they were politically well connected, and some had close ties to Democrats on the board. ... In addition, most of the Jefferson students came from just a small group of middle-class-to-affluent neighborhoods in what was a large, growing, and increasingly diverse county."

Please, have the courage that your constituents elected you to have. Ignore the election-year trolling and focus on the children this school system has promised to educate - children with enormous potential and talent waiting to be unlocked.

Best,

Susan Danewitz

TJ 1992, Fairfax County Homeowner and mother to a 2nd, 4th and 6th grader

Hello,

I am an alumna of TJ's Class of 2015. I graduated from Cornell in 2019 and am currently applying to MD/PhD Programs. While I do see a need for increased diversity in TJ's admitted classes, as I benefited immensely from learning alongside highly intelligent minority peers at Cornell, I fail to see how a lottery will significantly boost diversity to truly equal numbers--e.g., 1/4 White, 1/4 Asian, 1/4 Black, 1/4 Hispanic, or in other stratifications of income, refugee status, etc.

I am on my current path due to the incredible opportunities available at TJ--I took advantage of everything I could, winning national prizes in creative, fiction, and non-fiction writing and STEM contests (e.g. NCTE, Scholastic, Intel [now Regeneron, formerly Westinghouse] STS, etc.). Thriving at TJ meant I was able to thrive as a Tanner Dean's Scholar at Cornell University, ultimately earning \$6500 in grant money in my research, and was able to join a prestigious lab at the NIH (also work at the NIH for the 3rd time since high school--yes, high school, thanks to TJ) upon graduation and cement my decision to pursue a career as a physician-scientist and dedicate myself to pediatric patients of rare diseases.

This is what TJ was meant to do. To provide an enriched learning environment and create opportunities not available at base schools for students like me, so we can use our love of science to create a difference in the world.

These accomplishments would have been much harder at my base school, and equivalent accomplishments of graduates of my base school required more luck and hard work than they demanded of TJ alumni. What does that mean? It means we must erect more schools such as TJ to provide more amazing opportunities--not create a lottery and prevent students such as myself from reaching the same goals, or making our paths more difficult.

I did not even have Japanese language classes available at my base school--this, and my pursuit of an East-Asian studies minor at Cornell, resulted in almost 10 years of study of Japanese language and culture that has immensely benefited my world view and MD/PhD applications. For a STEM school's benefits to extend towards language and culture and for those benefits to compound over time is, again, an opportunity highly unique to TJ that should remain available to ANYONE who wants it. Not through a lottery.

You do not expand opportunity by taking it away from others. Please do not support a lottery.

Rather, a college-like admissions process incorporating affirmative action, as TJ did many years ago, would be strongly preferred to preserve the eliteness and opportunity a TJ education ensures while providing much-needed diversity into future classes.

Please do not support the lottery. Think of alternative solutions, such as affirmative action, that do not prevent students who truly want to engage in the TJ culture and environment from benefiting as they deserve. Please consider making a second Thomas Jefferson to increase the wonderful opportunities available.

Please do not support the lottery--it is not a true expansion of opportunity.

Shreya Nandi

TJ Class of 2015, Cornell Class of 2019



Rivanna Ridge Professional Building
200 Hansen Road, Suite 2
Charlottesville, VA 22911

October 8, 2020

Virginia Board of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Honorable Members of the Virginia Board of Education,

On behalf of the Virginia School Boards Association, we write to express our concerns over proposed modifications to the Process to Certify a list of Qualified Persons for the Office of Division Superintendents of Schools, which will be considered for Final Review at the October 15, 2020 meeting of the Virginia Board of Education. These modifications are a departure from the current procedure adopted by previous Boards dating back to at least the last thirty years. The current certification process has proven effective, allowing local school boards the ability to recruit talented individuals to serve as school division superintendents. VSBA is concerned the proposed modifications in the certification process will have unintended consequences that will jeopardize the ability of local school boards to recruit candidates with the unique qualifications needed to effectively administer school divisions in the Commonwealth.

When a superintendent vacancy occurs in a local school division, it is the responsibility of the local school board to recruit and hire a qualified individual. The posting of a vacancy attracts multiple applicants of diverse backgrounds, allowing local school board members an opportunity to choose finalists for the position they feel are suited to address the vision of the local school board and tackle the challenges faced within the division. The process to hire a superintendent must be conducted within 180 days of the vacancy posting by the local school board.

If the Board of Education approves modifications to the Process to Certify a list of Qualified Persons for the Office of Division Superintendents of Schools, VSBA is concerned the search process will become cumbersome and could potentially dissuade qualified individuals from applying for the vacant superintendent position. The proposed modifications will allow the Board of Education to approve certifications at regularly scheduled meetings. However, hiring decisions by local school boards cannot wait on the Board of Education to approve an individual's certification, which could potentially prevent a local school board from negotiating a contract with their chosen candidate. Under the present certification process, this situation is avoided as local school boards work with the Virginia Department of Education staff if the chosen candidate is not presently certified for the position of superintendent.



Honorable Members of the Virginia Board of Education
Page Two

Additionally, the proposed modifications will make the process of certifying individuals for superintendent a public matter. VSBA worries potential qualified individuals in Virginia, other states, and career fields outside of education may decide to forego applying for superintendent vacancies due to the lack of confidentiality to pursue career paths outside of their present employer.

The Virginia School Boards Association appreciates the long-standing working relationship with the Virginia Board of Education. We thank you for considering our concerns to the proposed modifications to the Process to Certify a list of Qualified Persons for the Office of Division Superintendents of Schools. The current procedure in place for certification allows for flexibility and provides local school boards the ability to recruit and hire the most qualified superintendent for their local school division. We respectfully request the Virginia Board of Education continue the current certification process.

If there is any additional information we can provide, or questions VSBA can answer, please contact VSBA Executive Director, Gina G. Patterson, gina@vsba.org or (434) 295-8722.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rodney Jordan", written in a cursive style.

Rodney Jordan
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gina G. Patterson", written in a cursive style.

Gina Patterson
Executive Director

I am forwarding outreach representing the views of your Fairfax County constituents that has gone unanswered by Superintendent Braband and the Fairfax County School Board.

Fairfax County families are questioning the priorities and actions of the Superintendent and FCPS Board. We are losing confidence in their ability and desire to lead our community through the County's Safe Return to School (SRS) program.

Our community has seen your plan to direct more than \$29 million in CARES Act Funding to Virginia's K-12 School. Why are you funding FCPS when they lack any type of comprehensive Return to School plan? Our children are being left behind while private schools in our county are in-person and hybrid NOW and adjacent school systems have SRS plans in place. This week our Board met to debate the TJ Admissions process and hold hearings on renaming public schools. We need your leadership to demand a re-prioritization of their efforts. Why aren't they spending their time on ensuring a safe return to school for all children? This is no small task and they should not be spending their time on lower priority issues.

Please help us advocate for the educational rights and well-being of our children. We are hopeful that someone will hear us and not disregard us.

Sincerely,

Beth Casey

Subject: Where is the Equity?

Dr Braband and FCPS Board Members,

In Dr. Braband's FCPS Back-to-School Night Welcome Statement, he "assured families that (the Board) will always keep EQUITY at the center of all we do."

While this proclamation sounds altruistic and noble, it could not be further from the truth. Never has there been a time there has been such an absence of equity and inclusion in the decisions being made by FCPS leadership. I ask you to truly reflect upon your claim and consider an alternate perspective on the actions, policies and status of education in our County under your leadership.

Where is the equity when only 3.5% of FCPS students are slotted to return to school for in-person education, while there is NO PLAN for the 96% of our children who don't fit into "cohorts"?

Where is the equity when our children have peers in our community attending in-person classes in both hybrid and full-time models, while our children are in distant and remote settings?

Where is the equity when neighboring counties including Arlington, Prince William and Loudoun County, are moving judiciously toward in-person education for all students K-12 THIS FALL, while Fairfax County has NO PLAN for K-12 to return to school this fall?

Where is the equity when 52% of families surveyed by FCPS chose in-person education for their children, and through an absolutely astounding reversal in your own course of action, you mandated that they have no option but to follow the virtual model selected by the minority? Furthermore, have you considered that it is very likely that the 25,000 children of FCPS families that did not complete this online survey are not thriving in an online environment?

Where is the equity when children are actively engaging in extra-curricular activities and club sports programs in our community, yet Fairfax County public schools are falling short of providing adequate field time and resources to maintain a low level of “out-of-season” conditioning for a handful of sports?

Where is the equity when teachers associations control how education will be delivered for our children, deeming that educating children is a “remote” job? Why is it acceptable for our teachers to be remote, while we watch and praise our doctors, nurses, first responders, grocery store workers, retail employees, small business owners, restaurant workers, hospitality employees and countless other professions get back to in-person work?

Where is the equity when Fairfax County families sit back and watch other communities nationwide return to in-person education models and develop creative solutions to get kid back in school, when FCPS leads with inaction, tolerates more of the status-quo for our kids, and dedicates time to addressing the admissions process for TJ High School which serves a small fraction of FCPS students?

Where is the equity when Loudoun County’s Superintendent and his staff are working with a “strong sense of urgency” adding special meetings to get hybrid learning up and running, while the FCPS Board meets in remote and closed sessions and has failed to put in plan in place for 96% of its children?

Unfortunately, although you claim “equity” leads all decisions being made by FCPS, it is quite the contrary. The educational, social, emotional and physical well-being of our children is suffering under the Fairfax County remote distance-learning model. The children in our county are being left behind.

You are failing our children. You are failing our families. You are failing our community.

We need our kids back in school.

Respectfully asking for change,

Beth Casey

South Lakes High School Parent – Class of 2024 (Class of 2018, Class of 2020)

September 29, 2020

Dr. James F Lane
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Virginia Department of Education
P O Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Dr. Lane:

For the past several years, there has been an ongoing effort by a select group of individuals in our community the past several years to pursue consolidation of our two local school systems, Alleghany County Public Schools and Covington City Public Schools. The most recent move to consolidate schools (not governments) began publicly in December 2018 when Alleghany School Board (ACSB) member Jacob Wright, now chairman of the ACSB, appeared before the four local governing bodies on behalf of the ACSB to request each sign a letter of intent to pursue school consolidation. I have included a list of links as a separate attachment for you to review on current consolidation talks, videos of various parties presenting to the local boards, and news coverage of public hearings. In addition, there is the JLARC document from 2014 on school and government consolidation and the study conducted by Davis and Associates from 2009.

The origins of consolidation of either governments or school systems in this county go back to the 1960s. It is important to note that consolidation of Alleghany County and the City of Covington governments was on the ballot for registered voters in 1987 and again in 2011. Both times, consolidation was rejected by a majority of the voters. It is also important to note that this time area officials are not considering consolidating governments before consolidating schools, and no citizen has had the opportunity to vote on the issue. The Committee on Joint School Services has not met its responsibility to show evidence of community support as required by Virginia 22.1-25. There has been no request for a referendum to place the issue on the ballot, nor has the committee polled a majority of citizens to seek their opinions.

ASCB Chairman Jacob Wright stated in December, 2018, that he needed the Covington City School Board to appoint two members to the newly formed Joint Services Committee to pursue consolidation. The purpose of his request became apparent during his presentation: Since 1983, Alleghany had been allowed to use a lower CI that Clifton Forge City Schools had used, and the period to use the lower CI was expiring. According to Wright, ACPS was set to lose over \$700,000 in funding due to the higher CI that would be established when the lower CI expired. He had already met with Terry Austin and Susan Hogue in Richmond to discuss the shortfall in funding. Wright further stated that Virginia is exploring the issue of school consolidation across the state and

that if the two districts would participate in his proposal that “they [Virginia] would use us an example and would do everything they could to make ours go smoothly so other people would join in.”

Wright further implied that just opening the discussion on consolidation would sway the General Assembly to allow ACPS to keep their lower CI, even if nothing came from the talks. He stated that Susan Hogue explained if ACPS could “show” that the districts were “working together or talking about working together” to consolidate schools, that Delegate Terry Austin could introduce a budget amendment to request an extension of the lower CI for ACPS, and/or fund the request, which would total “about \$700,000 for the next school year.” It was clear from the video of Wright’s presentation that no member of the CCPS board wanted to deny a neighboring county the opportunity to gain funding, so all agreed to sign the document and place two people on the committee. He stated that funds to investigate consolidation would be placed in an account to support the committee’s exploration of consolidation and that any “balance would be used to equalize salaries” because Covington employees have a higher rate of pay than most Alleghany school employees. The goal was for Delegate Terry Austin to submit the budget amendment on January 8, 2019. The link to the budget amendment is included on the attachment to this letter. The committee was given \$400,000 to explore consolidation. No funding was granted for the anticipated ACPS shortfall.

The Joint Services Committee is composed of members of the two school systems, two governing bodies, along with the County Administrator and Covington City Manager. The Joint Services Committee first met in August of 2019 and established a calendar for future meetings, the goal of which was to seek support for legislation to fund a consolidated school system by the end of December 2019. Committee members indicated that the state was committed to providing funds in the amount of 1.5 million dollars to be used to equalize salaries, benefits, etc. The Committee, however, received notification this summer from the state that the funds were no longer appropriated due to Covid-19. When asked about the loss of funding, Wright commented that the money was not needed anyway and that it was just money that had been proposed as a placeholder by State Senator Creigh Deeds.

Over the course of 2019, the joint committee met regularly. The public could attend these meetings; however, they were not allowed to participate during a public comment period or make any presentation by getting on the agenda and speaking as a delegation. Citizens were told the way to share ideas and concerns was to contact their board or council representative because the committee was using the democratic process of representation. During 2019, many community members from both Alleghany County and Covington made statements at meetings held by the four governing bodies. Few comments were ever positive or showed support for the merger. The degree of opposition to consolidation rose among city residents as the year progressed. The one public forum at which citizens could speak was well attended and remarks clearly indicated that parents, students, employees, and taxpayers opposed consolidation. Citizens requested more information in the form of a website or regular

articles in local papers to stay abreast of the committee's proceedings. Their reply was that all meetings were broadcast on the Allegheny Journal, but that they would consider creating a webpage where the citizens could submit their questions and concerns. The webpage never materialized; however, they did finally publish some notes on school websites from their meetings.

Most importantly, citizens asked repeatedly for a referendum to allow all taxpayers the opportunity to vote. No legislation was ever introduced to put the vote on a ballot. Instead, committee members turned to social media to engage with their constituents who were for the merger and refute those who opposed it. Often committee members were rude and condescending in their replies to the opposition. One member even stated, "It's people like this that make our job hard" in response to a post from a Covington teacher stating her opposition. Social media was used to frighten citizens into believing that Virginia was ready to force consolidation upon Allegheny County, and that the area had better do it now while they had a voice. The consolidation process is outlined in Virginia State Code Section 22.1-25, which clearly states that school boards and governing bodies have the only authority to consolidate schools. The Code of Virginia would require a complete change in this section for consolidation to be forced upon us and would then allow the state to force any districts to consolidate. In short, there is no truth to this threat.

In March of this year, when Virginia shut down due to Covid-19, the Joint Services Committee continued holding meetings electronically by Zoom, despite Attorney General Mark Herring's opinion posted March 20, 2020, which states Virginia law allows public bodies to hold meetings electronically if the purpose of the meeting is to address the existing emergency, including meetings "to make decisions that must be made immediately and where failure to do so could result in irrevocable public harm." A news release from the attorney general's office continues: "The opinion also outlines important limitations, saying that 'the General Assembly did not intend to permit public bodies to handle all business through electronic communication means, even during a declared emergency,' and that 'public bodies should carefully consider whether taking a given action during a meeting held by electronic communication means is truly essential and should defer any and all decisions that can be deferred until it is once again possible to meet in person.'" It is also important to note that discussions to consolidate local elementary schools in Nelson County and schools in Richmond, VA were put on hold in April due to COVID-19. But the Joint Services Committee here would not listen to requests to put the merger on hold for our local school divisions. As a result, the meetings were basically closed for administrators, staff, and citizens for input/comments.

The Joint Services Committee has explicitly stated that public support is required for the merger to go through, as stated in Virginia 22.1-5d "(vi) evidence of local support for the proposed consolidation"; however, there has been no means of seeking evidence of that support or opposition. The committee proposed a telephone survey of 300 random citizens to garner that evidence, but 300 calls do not even represent one percent of the total population of the area, including cities and towns. The phone survey was

supposed to have been conducted by an outside agency, however, it was not completed prior to the votes by the Alleghany County Public Schools and Alleghany County Board of Supervisors on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, and the votes by the Covington City Schools and Covington City Council on Thursday, September 10, 2020. Henceforth, the committee has since stated at their meeting held 09/24/2020 that the phone survey will still be made, however, it will be conducted by the Joint Services Committee's legal advisors located in Richmond, VA. It is extremely difficult to believe that a phone survey taken now, after the votes, can be used as evidence of community support.

The committee published their plan to consolidate our local school divisions for review approximately one week prior to the public hearings. The public hearings were held jointly in each locality, with each school board and governing body meeting together on different nights. The joint hearings denied citizens two more opportunities to speak. If a person was unable to attend the one meeting for his other locality, then the chance to speak before the vote was gone.

At this point it is important to note to you that many citizens have spoken in opposition to the consolidation. Many videos recorded by the Alleghany Journal are on YouTube for you to review. There is currently a movement to start a local petition in Covington to show evidence of the opposition. William Nicely, a county resident, created a Change.org petition to show support for a referendum. He has collected over 300 signatures since September 14. Other citizens have written Senator Creigh Deeds and Delegate Terry Austin; however, their rote responses indicate they seem disinterested. The community feels their collective voice has been ignored.

A second issue is a conflict of interest for one of the Covington City School Board members, Tonya Jones. Jones is a full-time employee of the Alleghany County Public Schools. In addition, another of the Covington City School Board members, Tamala Preston, is a substitute for the Alleghany County Public Schools. Neither of these two board members chose to abstain due a conflict of interest, although it was pointed out publicly at school board meetings months ago that their votes were questionable. Ms. Jones read a statement prior to her vote that publicly disclosed the potential for a conflict of interest because of an increase in salary once the merger occurs. Based on the information received from the Alleghany County Public School Schools (copy enclosed) Ms. Jones will receive a pay increase of approximately \$6,000.00, with additional VRS benefits, and improved health insurance coverage with a lower premium as a direct result of the merger of our local school divisions. Since Ms. Jones did vote in favor of the proposed consolidation of schools, we feel her vote should be nullified. In addition, should the proposed pay scale for substitute teachers increase following the merger, we feel the vote made by Mrs. Preston should be nullified. We feel each of these votes call into question the board decision to accept consolidation by a vote of 3-2. In addition, the VSBA Code of Conduct specifically states: 9. I will refrain from using the board position for personal or partisan gain and avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety. FYI, another concern regarding a potential conflict is the

fact that Mrs. Preston and her husband operate an after-school program locally, which is in a building that is owned by Tonya Jones father.

The public comments at the hearings on Thursday, September 10, 2020 by City of Covington teachers, students, parents, and citizens overwhelmingly support that Covington City Schools remain independent, and strongly oppose consolidation of the joint divisions. One of the City of Covington's former school board members, Cindy Bennett, explicitly stated:

"You may be asking why are we discussing consolidation now after the Covington citizens have been to the polls on two separate occasions and said no? Why are we, the voters, being left out of this plan and allowing this decision to be made by our appointed board members and our elected representatives. The reason is clear. Listen while I read from page 1, paragraph 3, of the executive summary of the Feasibility Study:

"Primarily due to its loss of pupils, Allegheny has been losing state aid. Allegheny County lost roughly \$1.4 million in total state aid from Fiscal year 2013 to 2020. A total loss of \$769,000 was due to the Fiscal Year 2020 expiration of the 15-year state consolidation incentive that reduced its Local Composite Index for its merger with Clifton Forge."

Finally, the question of health and safety must be addressed. Jonathan Arritt, CCPS school board member and vice-chair of the joint committee has stated that the facilities study conducted on behalf of the committee did not evaluate Allegheny High School for mold. The building was severely flooded in 1985. While that year, the flood was historic, the building flooded again during the mid-1990's and has been threatened with flooding several times. In 2007, the "School Efficiency Review in Allegheny County Public Schools, Virginia FINAL REPORT, 2007" clearly stated that Allegheny High School sits in the flood plain and "because the building is located in a flood plain and has been subject to several devastating water intrusions, a decision must be made whether to install flood mitigation devices on the site, or to build a new school in a less flood-prone location either as an ACPS-only facility or in cooperation with the Covington City Public Schools" (6-1). In spite of this study and their knowledge of past mold problems, the committee did not determine if the building is safe to be used as the high school in the proposed new system.

The Allegheny Highlands is a wonderful place to live and we are fortunate to have two school divisions to which parents can send their children to be educated. The community of Covington has been devastated following these votes, and we feel our School Board and City Council refused to listen to the will of the Covington electorate. Education is an investment, and an important part of economic development, however, we do not believe that our two independent school systems hinder economic development in our area, as has been stated by members of the Joint Services Committee. It is quite the opposite as those looking to relocate have a choice in what they feel is best for their children's future.

In closing, we feel that the article, "Closing Costs" (copy enclosed), about school consolidation of rural schools in our neighboring state, West Virginia, provides the facts needed to show that there will not be a cost savings to the taxpayers in Covington and Alleghany County, student bus rides will be considerably longer, students will be stressed and exhausted, students will participate in fewer after-school activities, and the promised advanced placement courses will not materialize.

The efforts of this committee have been met with considerable opposition by citizens, parents, students, and teachers. We deeply appreciate your time and effort to carefully review this matter prior to any official action on a merger of our local school systems.

Sincerely,

Concerned Citizens Opposing Consolidation in Covington, Virginia

(Point of Contact for said citizens is Robert Bennett, Covington resident, Principal of Jeter Watson Intermediate School in the Covington City School Division, and former Mayor of Covington) rbennett@lumos.net Home #540-962-0816

Enc

Cc: Daniel A Gecker, President, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)
Dr. Jamelle S Wilson, Vice President, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)
Pamela Davis-Vaught, Member, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)
Dr. Francisco Duran, Member, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)
Anne B Holton, Member, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)
Dr. Tammy Mann, Member, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)
Dr. Keisha Pexton, Member, VA Board of Education (boe@doe.virginia.gov)

Links:

Wright presenting to CCPS, December 2018

Part 1- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYgfVRsvVc0>

Part 2- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DstRR07VUXE>

http://www.alleghanyjournal.com/aj_article.php?ndx=19621

Budget amendment sponsored by Terry Austin

<https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/amendment/2019/1/HB1700/Introduced/MR/136/2h/>

Wright presenting to the Alleghany board of Supervisors

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyX1THF9PvQ>

Wright presenting to ACSB

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EUp5R-SpoY>

Wright explains \$400,000 funding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px36vwn65v4>

Questions/Answers in local newspaper

<https://thevirginianreview.com/Content/Free-Articles/Free-Articles/Article/Committee-on-Joint-School-Services-School-Consolidation-FAQs/71/1478/50822>

ACPS school board and board of supervisors public hearing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1LCh0NG5cA>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acP4am_Ptu8

Vote by ACPS and ABOS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdzAqwi1Y4Q>

Full meeting on Covington City's vote to consolidate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgkawBQqBQ0>

Meeting of Joint Services Committee held September 24, 2020

(FB - The Alleghany Journal – 3 videos

<https://www.facebook.com/alleghanyjournal/videos/1295688350764977> (Part 3)

<https://www.facebook.com/alleghanyjournal/videos/2639486962979027> (Part 2)

<https://www.facebook.com/alleghanyjournal/videos/817411985727653> (Part 1)

JLARC Report on School and Government Consolidation

<http://jlarc.virginia.gov/consolidation.asp>

School Efficiency Review in Alleghany County Public Schools, Virginia FINAL REPORT, 2007

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/school_finance/efficiency_reviews/alleghany.pdf

Attorney General Mark Herring Opinion (March 20, 2020)

<https://www.wavy.com/news/politics/virginia-politics/ag-herring-releases-opinion-on-holding-public-meetings-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>



Bess, Lorie

To 'Steven Dressler' & 1 more

Today at 11:22 AM



Mr. Dressler,

In response to your FOIA request, I provide the following information:

RE: Tonya Jones, teacher

Salary \$54,015.00

Master's Degree +\$ 3,000.00

\$57,015.00

Longevity with ACPS - 20.089 years

Additional years from other school divisions: 7.5 years

There is no charge for this information.

Closing Costs: A Summary of an Award Winning Look at School Consolidation in West Virginia, a State Where It Has Been Tried Aggressively



Last Updated: November 01, 2002

Compiled by the Rural School and Community Trust

Few states have pursued consolidation of rural schools more aggressively than West Virginia. With the promise of broader curriculum and huge tax savings, the state has closed more than 300 schools, one in every five, since 1990. In 2002, the Charleston Gazette investigated the outcomes of the state's consolidation efforts in the series, "Closing Costs." Its authors, reporters Eric Eyre and Scott Finn, won the 2002 Education Writers Award for best series for a newspaper with circulation under 100,000 and the Fred M. Hechinger Grand Prize for Education Reporting. "Closing Costs" can be found at <http://wvgazette.com/News/ClosingCosts/200208300003>

Since 1990, West Virginia has closed well over 300 schools. Among the results, "Closing Costs" reports the following:

COSTS

- The state has spent more than \$1 billion on school consolidation.
- School Building Authority Executive Director, Clacy Williams, acknowledged in September 2002 that school closings did not save taxpayers money.
- West Virginia counties statewide spend a higher percentage of their budgets on maintenance and utilities now than they did five years ago, despite consolidation.
- The number of local administrators has increased by 16% in the last 10 years despite a 13% decrease in student enrollment (41,000 fewer students) and closing of over 300 schools.
- The number of state-level administrators increased, and their salaries nearly doubled between 1990 and 2002.
- West Virginia spends more of its education dollar on transportation than any other state; rising transportation costs have forced counties to slash funding from classrooms, offices, and cafeterias.

BUSES

- Elementary bus ride times are longest in counties with only one high school.
- The number of children who ride buses more than two hours a day doubled between 1992 (3908 students) and 1996 (7938 students), even though 25,000 fewer children rode buses. Seventy more schools have been closed since 1996.

- 20,000 elementary students, 11,000 middle school students and 5000 high school students take one-way bus rides longer than state guidelines of 30 minutes for elementary, 45 minutes for middle, and 60 minutes for high school. By comparison, the average American adult commute is 26 minutes.
- Referring to state guidelines for student bus rides, State Transportation Director Wayne Clutter said, "The times are too idealistic. It gives people false hope."
- To save costs, West Virginia now retires buses after 12 years instead of 10.

STUDENT WELL-BEING

- Students (and adults) interviewed for the series report that students are stressed and exhausted. Their grades slump. They participate in fewer after school activities. They have less time to spend with their parents.
- A Yale University study found that diesel bus fumes may be to blame for the dramatic rise in childhood asthma in the U.S. Students who ride buses breathe five to 15 times more particulate soot than children playing outside.

ACADEMICS

- School officials promised advanced courses, but many courses never materialized or were soon eliminated. In several counties, consolidated high schools offer fewer courses than the small schools offered prior to consolidation.
- The reporters studied documents in 10 sample rural counties and found that 100 advanced classes promised through consolidation had not been offered in the previous two years.
- Many counties dropped Advanced Placement and foreign language classes several years after consolidation.
- The statewide increase in students taking Advanced Placement classes rose only 0.5% in the last six years, and fewer than half of students who took AP exams last year passed them compared with 56% who took them in 1997.

OTHER FINDINGS

- The state has shredded most of its documents pertaining to the 300 school closures since 1990.
- In Pendleton County, a total of \$10 million in renovations and new construction was spent to close Circleville School. Students were bused over a 4,000-foot mountain to school in Franklin, the county seat. Meanwhile, Circleville residents renovated the old Circleville School as a community center for just \$200,000.
- Twenty-five new courses were promised for the consolidated high school in Franklin, but only one, drama, has been offered. No Advanced Placement courses are offered, despite promises to offer five.
- Several Circleville students riding to school in Franklin were seriously injured in January 2002, when a tractor-trailer truck forced the bus off a mountain road.

We are the parents of three African-American kids. The oldest two attended Arlington schools and then TJ. Both have done well. One has graduated and is at Duke University. The other is currently a junior at TJ.

Simply put, TESTING MAY BE THE ONLY WAY SOME KIDS PRIMARILY MINORITY TO PROVE THEIR SMARTS.

Arlington, unlike FCPS, has no testing for gifted programs or even admissions to HB Woodlawn, the magnet school. We as African-American parents have supported testing because the method of subjective evaluation has been biased every step of the way from elementary to middle school. (See the statistics from the BLACK PARENTS OF ARLINGTON on minorities and the gifted programs in Arlington to see what lack of a test has done for minority students in APS - FRANKLY ABYSMAL)

A personal anecdote (one of many I can provide) will emphasize the challenges of gifted programs for minority kids when there is no test:

In middle school, we were initially unaware that one of our son's classmates was selected for 6th grade Algebra and our son was placed in 6th grade math. Our son had been a star at math in elementary school. We were unaware of the opportunity for Algebra I because our gifted counselor NEVER EVEN MENTIONED THE OPPORTUNITY. No test, just a quiet selection by gifted counselors was all it took.

We became aware of the placement by a sheer CHANCE CONVERSATION. Our son, in 6th grade math, was bored but we (1) told him to press for additional challenge work every day (which he did) and (2) Our son TESTED into the Johns Hopkins Gifted and Talented Program and began Algebra I online during his free time. He completed ALGEBRA I during HIS SUMMER! And was placed in Geometry after conversations with APS Math Chair. (But could not get HS credit for JHU Algebra I) BTW our son also competed on and led the Mathcounts team at school. THANK GOODNESS FOR JOHNS HOPKINS CTY WHICH HAD A FAIR EVALUATION, A TEST!!!!

This is but one example. I could write pages on how our children have had to fight every step of the way to be labeled as Gifted in Arlington. Our daughter was initially not placed in Gifted Math - she now takes Multivariable Calculus. They have consistently tested with HIGH HONORS IN THE JOHNS HOPKINS PROGRAM. WE HAVE USED THOSE TESTS TO FIGHT FOR THEIR ACCEPTANCE IN GIFTED PROGRAMS. Reliance on subjective measures alone will do nothing to engage more minority students and probably will set them back.

A lot of people disparage tests, but honestly, they are ONE OF THE WAYS that my kids have proven they belong even when the SYSTEM HAS OVERLOOKED THEM; I am not naturally a person who looks for bias but CLEARLY SUBJECTIVE MEASURES OF INTELLIGENCE ARE JUST THAT - BIASED! They know they belong at a high performing place like TJ because their test scores show they are qualified. Every day my kids hear comments disparaging Affirmative Action but they can just ignore them knowing their scores are as strong as anyone in the school.

The most recent test is ineffective because it is based on tests (I forget the names) that are definitely only accessible to a few affluent families. My suggestion would be to create a test that more closely tests the skills required at TJ. It is okay if many students master the test but at least a ground floor will be set for admissions - a baseline based on skills any kid can access. The test will provide proof to each

child and their classmates that they belong at TJ. Spend time on what an appropriate test would look like.

It is quite popular to disparage testing these days - SAT, ACT, etc. There are definitely limits to its usefulness. BUT FOR MANY MINORITIES, IT IS THE ONLY OBJECTIVE METHOD TO PROVE YOUR INTELLIGENCE.

Thanks and forgive the hastily written nature,

Peter Phelps

Dear all our esteemed representatives on the FCPS School Board, Superintendent Brabrand, and members of state leadership,

I am writing to voice my support for real change to the admissions at TJHSST. While we do want to, if possible, identify and ensure the most intellectually gifted students with STEM passion are able to attend, we also want to see this opportunity fairly expanded to all those in Fairfax County and the region who have the interest and ability in an equal manner. I support eliminating the standardized test as it is known to be problematic and biased, dropping the test fee, and expanding the class size at TJ to fit capacity and provide more students with opportunity.

As for the data requested by the school board on the different plans, much of it is unknowable as to who will apply so what the real effect of a plan will be. FCPS used actual applicant data to see what the effect of different admissions standards would be. The goal would of course to increase applications by underrepresented groups, and of course some of the already larger groups would have an increase of applicants. Yes, outreach and recruitment are essential among underrepresented groups. And this is part of a whole need to improve the availability of challenging and high quality academic opportunity for all students, especially at schools with less robust offerings at present, or that face more challenges based on socioeconomic barriers.

I also believe the analysis presented by the Coalition for TJ is extremely flawed for several reasons:

- 1) The Coalition analysis assumes that only 50% of Black and Hispanic students, and yet 100% of White and Asian students, would qualify into the lottery pool based on the Student Portrait.
- 2) The Coalition analysis uses GPA at college graduation to estimate middle school GPA in core academic subjects, without evidence of if and how they are correlated. 3) The Coalition analysis does not look at income status.
- 4) The Coalition Analysis assumes 100% of eligible students will apply for TJ admission.

So while it will be helpful to get a general idea by middle school of the number of 8th graders taking at least Algebra 1 in 8th grade, and if possible also gender, race and income breakdown, it will be hard to predict how many will be accepted by merit/lottery hybrid or just lottery, as we don't know how many will apply. However, modest reforms and holistic approaches of the past have not resulted in significant change. So it is time to try something different and see if it can bring an improvement in diversity. The admissions plan can be revisited and adjusted as needed going forward. We will be able to see and make adjustments to the recruitment strategy/acceptance numbers each year, but though it would take 4-5 years for a cohort to go through TJ to see real results about the student body.

Students with real need and passion can apply to TJ for sophomore year if they were not selected freshman year. This can help capture some of the most gifted students who may not have been identified through the initial process or drawn off the waitlist.

I support examining AAP as a separate but equally urgent issue, as I know a much larger part of the community will have an interest in that discussion, and this reform should not be conditional on that. They are related, but also separate issues, both with a lot of strong community opinions.

Thank you for all your work to support our students and educational staff and to expand access to advanced opportunities for all students.

Sincerely,

Michelle Gilles

4952 Gainsborough Dr

Fairfax, VA 22032

Parent of a TJHSST 2021 student, a 2019 FCPS Robinson HS graduate, and FCPS Robinson HS 9th grader, and myself a 1990 graduate of FCPS schools (K-12)

Dear all,

I was struck by this note from a dear friend and fellow TJHSST alum. It demonstrates the exact problem with all of us dragging our feet on meaningful TJ reform year after year and decade after decade. With only minor details changed to match today, this is an excerpt from a Harvard case study about TJ admissions reforms proposed back in 2001. Please read:

"At the September 15, 2020, meeting of the School Board in Fairfax County Virginia, School Superintendent Scott Brabrand took the screen to propose a new admissions procedure for the county's popular and prestigious magnet high school, the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. He was reasonably confident of a positive reception from the board. For one thing, he had drafted the proposal aimed at diversifying the Jefferson student body at the State's own request. His administrative team had done its homework, carefully crafting a policy that met several divergent goals, and providing a model to show how the new system would work. Before the meeting, the superintendent, himself, had informally consulted with sympathetic members of the School Board in this case, his traditional Democratic allies, who held a 12 to zero majority over their Republican counterparts.

But that evening, as he made his formal presentation, 200 parents watched from their screens in barely contained anger and some tweeted angrily during Brabrand's presentation. Over the next three weeks, the School Board members received hundreds of emails from parents protesting the new admissions proposal. The protesters represented a relatively small constituency, given the size of the Fairfax County Public Schools system, but they were politically well connected, and some had close ties to powerful influencers of the board. It soon became clear that the board had little stomach for a full-out political brawl over the issue. Almost immediately, Brabrand's proposal was dead in the water.

At the heart of the controversy was the question of how to choose the students who would make up Thomas Jefferson's freshman class each year. Altogether, the school had space for only 1800 students, which meant 480-or-so freshmen, about one in six applicants. Since 1985, when the school opened, admissions had been based largely on a standardized entrance exam. In 1990, concerned about the low number of African American and Hispanic students at Jefferson, the FCPS had initiated an affirmative action program but, in 1998, the School Board had eliminated the program, worried about the possibility of a reverse discrimination lawsuit. In the next two years, African American and Hispanic admissions dropped precipitously; at that rate, the School Board could see that the student body would be almost entirely white and Asian in another two years. In addition, most of the Jefferson students came from just a small group of middle-class-to-affluent neighborhoods in what was a large, growing, and increasingly diverse county. In 2020, therefore, the State had asked Supt. Brabrand to revisit the admissions question. Could he find a way to diversify the student body without sacrificing Jefferson's strong academic reputation or making the Fairfax school system vulnerable to lawsuit?

It was a tall order, but Brabrand had been happy to take up the gauntlet. The School Board was leery of any policy that included racial preferences, per se, so Brabrand had tried another tack: geographic diversity and a lottery. It was this proposal that had met the stormy reception in September 2020, from families in currently over-represented neighborhoods. It would be unfair to hundreds of high-achieving children, they argued, and would weaken the school academically.

A community debate of several weeks followed the School Board meeting and it was quite polarized; the chasm dividing the two sides appeared unbreachable. The conflict was temporarily put to rest with a stopgap measure, but a bitter residue lingered, and it took little to re-ignite the passions of people on both sides of the divide.

Brabrand was not sanguine about changing the hearts and minds of the parents who opposed him. But he did feel honor-bound to re-engage the issue. The Thomas Jefferson School should not be the private preserve of well-educated, well-off families, he believed; it should be open to promising students from all parts of the county, including those who were not middle class and who struggled against an array of disadvantages as they navigated the education system. TJ had a hypocritical system that, on the one side, says, "Leave no child behind," and on the other hand, we're willing to establish blocks and barriers to having that happen. [We] say to kids, I'm sorry but we are going to leave you behind as far as Jefferson is concerned. But how to broaden the range of students at Jefferson in a way that was fair, effective, legally safe and also politically palatable? That was Fairfax County's challenge."

Meaningful change to TJ admissions hasn't come in the past 20 years even though problems were well-known. The vocal minority is making the same arguments our representatives have heard and pandered to for decades. I am taking the time to write you and express my passionate support for the merit lottery proposal because I believe in you. I think you know the status quo isn't working. And if you've been listening, you know that we've tried incremental change over and over again with no success.

This is the time to say "no more". No more settling for a broken system, no more kicking the can down the road, and no more throwing our hands up and saying systemic problems are just too hard and too complicated for us even to try. I hope you do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Nicole Sbitani

TJHSST Class of 2010



Teaching. Learning. Leading.

Good morning, I am Dr. James J. Fedderman, a choral music teacher in Accomack County and President of the Virginia Education Association, the largest union for educators in the Commonwealth. With over 40,000 members—including teachers, school support professionals, and aspiring educators—VEA works to realize our vision of a great public school for every child in the Commonwealth.

A few words to introduce myself to you. I am a native of Nassawadox in Northampton County, and I now reside in Painter, which is in Accomack County. I have two children. My daughter Jordan Alexandria Fedderman, who recently graduated from Nansemond River High School in Suffolk, is now attending Clark Atlanta University in Georgia to study early childhood education. And my son, Jaylen Alexander Fedderman, is a senior at Nansemond River High School. He plans to go to college to study kinesiology to become a Chiropractor.

I have a Bachelor's degree in music education (choral music) from Longwood College; a master's degree in education in administration and supervision from the University of Virginia; a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore; and post-graduate studies at Harvard University.

The VEA is here to ensure that working educators have a voice about decisions that impact our educators' working conditions and learning conditions of the students we teach. The VEA is the pre-eminent union leading teaching and learning across the Commonwealth, ensuring educators have a seat at the table.

Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged educators, students, and school communities over the past eight months. COVID-19 has magnified many of the inequities that exists in our schools and in our communities—access to technology, for example, or to before- and after-school care. Across the state, VEA's local leaders have stepped up to ensure our members, our students, and our communities have a voice, and that their concerns are being addressed. I believe we have a great opportunity in Virginia to redefine the direction of public education for our students and employees who have been the most vulnerable.

When Virginia schools return to the new version of “normal” in the future, its education system will be facing a bevy of challenges. With the coronavirus's effects forcing cuts in state education spending, localities have turned to reductions in expected pay raises, salary freezes, and layoffs that will produce struggles for teachers, staff, parents, students, and others.

In closing, the VEA looks forward to continuing and strengthening our working relationship with the Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education. We have recently brought on board a new policy analyst, Shane Riddle, to bridge the gap between our Union and the state Board of Education. I know Shane is excited about the opportunity to build relationships and foster dialogue with the VBOE and VDOE on essential education matters. We join the VBOE in making good on the promise of a high-quality education for every child by eliminating racial and socioeconomic inequities in Virginia's

public education system. You can expect communication from Mr. Riddle in the coming days, as he navigates and settles into this new policy position.

Thank you for your time, and, as always, I, along with everyone at the VEA, looks forward to working with you to provide for great public schools for every child.

Sincerely,

Dr. James J. Fedderman, President
Virginia Education Association

Dear FCPS Superintendent and SB members:

As a US citizen, I saw your TJ admission proposal yesterday and was really concerned about the fate of this country. Seriously, it will destroy TJ and this country without our notice. What's the mission of TJ? It's NOT for public general education but for SPECIAL education for those who has extraordinary talent in STEM ("STEM nerd"). [Please find out what TJ students have done and what they have accomplished in STEM, you will be amazed]. They are the future top scientists and engineers of this country. They will be pillars of this country for all of us including you and me. The US needs them very badly in this increasingly competitive world. Please forget about the politics around us but open our eyes to see what's going on in today's world. Please be a visionary but not short-sighted about TJ admission. Will the US win in this extremely fierce technology competition with the rest of the world? Good luck!

Special students need special attention. TJ is such a special place for those talented STEM nerds. However, you proposed a lottery system and to increase the enrollment of TJ. Both of these are against the purpose of TJ. How can we distinguish those students who need TJ from those who want to enter TJ in a lottery selection? By definition, those "nerds" are few but not many. Increasing enrollment will dilute resources and negatively impact the quality of TJ too.

If TJ is for training elite future scientists, we should do just opposite by raising the admission bar (rigorous courses, hard entrance exams, teacher recommendations and STEM activities are a must) but not lowering the bar (as you know 3.5 GPA is very easy for a lot of ordinary students), and to reduce the enrollment but not to increase it. An analogy: if the purpose of NBA team is to win games, we need to select the most skillful players and forget about what skin color or race they are. If TJ or NBA is a welfare and for general practice, then I will support your proposal. We need to understand the purpose of TJ first before we move forward. Good schools are not uncommon in Virginia but TJ is only one. We can keep it or destroy it, it's our decision. We will be judged by history.

TJ's diversity issue is rooted from the pipeline issue. FCPS and VA education department need to invest money to improve elementary schools and help under representative groups. Bringing down the admission standard and randomly selecting students (who has 3.5 or higher GPA) is completely wrong and short-sighted. Lowering admission standard will surely force TJ to become one of the many VA high schools. Should we all say "Good bye, TJ"?

Jun

A Fairfax resident

Dear FCPS Decision-maker:

I write to fully support a representative-diversity admissions reform for Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJHSST). I also write to implore you to take courage and do not kick the can yet another time. This is not a hasty endeavor. Indeed, guidelines for this reform have been offered for nearly 20 years and should come as no surprise. Secretary Brabrand's original proposal is a bold and equitable move based on prior and current sound research. We have needed this kind of admissions process since TJ's inception, yet no school board or superintendent has had the courage to do the right thing.

Some may scare you by claiming the proposed merit lottery is anti-Asian, but what of the 30+ year anti-Black and anti-Latinx history of TJ admissions? Please take note that the analysis of the proposal shows Asians will still be represented 187%, relative to the FCPS student population. Since when is seeking representative diversity across any axis biased against any group? I have news for you: the arguments we see now for status quo are the same age-old dog whistles opposing integration. They'll be there regardless of what admissions reform strategies are proposed.

I am a class of 1997 graduate of TJ. I am Black; I am female; I grew up in Springfield; and I was in GT center for 3rd through 8th grade. Sadly, only the latter of these attributes fits the profile of a TJ applicant that the current system selects. I was once proud to be a TJ alum, and am now ashamed of what the school has become. While I had the fortune of being in one of the most diverse classes in the school's history, the true racial trauma I experienced has come more recently as an alumna--and this is purely attributable to the current admissions game, the character of students and families it selects, and the biased demographic it produces. I speak from experience when I say representation matters. Even small increases in Black and Latinx demographics at TJ would provide those students with a community, and better yet would benefit the whole student body to learn from more diverse perspectives and see excellence in all its forms. I would love to share my TJ experiences of racial hatred, bigotry, and discrimination as a student and an alumna.

I ask you to please support these key elements:

No test - This is and should be a deal-breaker. Any change to TJ's admissions MUST eliminate the use of standardized test scores. The evidence is overwhelming that standardized tests do not equal merit. They do not serve as a valuable indicator or predictor of student quality, performance, or graduation. The only factor they correlate with is family income. GPA is a proven, powerful indicator and predictor of student quality, performance, and graduation. Currently, the test has been given an enormous gate-keeping weight in the admissions pathway. Slide 10 of the superintendent's 9/15/20 proposal provides clear evidence the test effectively eliminates Black and Latinx students with superior GPAs from consideration. (See <https://www.fairtest.org/test-scores-do-not-equal-merit-executive-summary>)

A holistic review of the Student Information Sheet - The characteristics Dr. Brabrand laid out in his proposal and its revision are not only the portrait of a graduate FCPS aims to see, but ones I wholeheartedly wish I could see as common in current TJ culture, but have only seen in a select few. This element of the proposal ensures all students moving on to the lottery WILL be qualified to succeed at TJ.

Merit-based lottery - This piece is critical. It's the only fair and equitable solution possible in a PUBLIC school. It's truly race-, gender-, income-, ability-blind. Ensuring regional distribution of admittees is necessary to create a level playing field where those who already have access to excellent base schools do not take the lion's share of opportunities TJ should be offering the entire county. Lotteries are used widely at high-ranking public schools around the country, including all BASIS schools and some that often outrank TJ in U.S. News and World Reports. Any argument that a lottery would diminish the rigor and enthusiasm of the TJ experience, let alone a lottery based on a pre-identified pool of highly qualified applicants, should be dismissed outright.

If the revised proposal for allotting 100 seats to the highest scoring applications is to move forward, it should only do so if the following are ensured. I will not stand for a process that weighs parental resources and rewards opportunity hoarding and resume bloating.

All admittees MUST be notified of the offer at the same time and without distinction from the lottery admittees.

The lottery seats must be selected FIRST, with the remaining seats used for a "second-look" at applicants who rank highly on the Portrait of a Graduate characteristics and especially the "Experience Factors" noted on slide 9 of the revised proposal.

The earlier in your term you take action, the greater opportunity we have to analyze data and tweak the program toward perfection. Do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good right now. Do not make me wait another 20 years for the shame of TJ's culture to be lifted from my diploma.

Doing the right thing can be unpopular and daunting. It should never be something that anyone regrets. Early this summer, the Board set its legacy by 1) renaming a high school from a slave-breaking traitor to a statesman and civil rights hero, 2) declaring Indigenous Peoples' Day, and 3) charting the course for anti-racist curriculum. You must continue your legacy and set right something that has been wrong for far too long. You must be bold and courageous--I and all the future students like me are counting on you.

Yours in hope,

Maria Murray, Ph.D.

Marine biology STEM professional

TJHSST Class of 1997

Dear Mr. Mahedavi,

I hope you and your family are well. I believe you are my LCPS Board representative, since I live in Ashburn.

I am writing to you because I understand that you have a School Board meeting this evening and I want you hear how distance learning has NOT been working for my high school-aged dyslexic son, and why the School Board needs to think about having older kids return to school sooner than later.

First, the way the on-line schooling has been structured is unsustainable and not effective. My son is on the computer from 9 AM - 3:30 or 4 PM, Tuesday thru Friday. This is too much time to expect kids to sit and listen to teachers. Although some teachers may be trying their best to make their classes interesting so kids pay attention, they are not. Some teachers just don't. My son, who has an IEP, does not do well learning on the computer ALL THE TIME. He is a kinesthetic, social learner who benefits from being in a classroom with group projects and experiential learning. He needs to move, not sit. He needs social interaction with peers to maintain his mental health. My son needs the opportunity to develop his other strengths and skillset beside reading and writing (which most of the assignments are with distance learning), which are what is required with distance learning. By the end of the day, my son is exhausted, his eyes bloodshot and he just needs a break, even though he uses blue light blocking screens and glasses. By the end of the day, my son has no mental bandwidth to do his homework. He usually has to wait until the weekends just to be able to do the homework, and by then he is late turning it in, which lowers his grade. The school district and teachers need to understand that distance learning is not the same as in person learning and must not give so much work, or need to be more reasonable about deadlines in turning in the work.

Also, who at LCPS thought it was a good idea to teach from Tuesday thru Friday with no break?? Most other (smarter) school districts have classes on Monday and Tuesday, with a break on Wednesday. Then resume classes on Thursday and Friday. This mid-week break from virtual learning give the kids a chance to regroup, and gives them a mental and physical break from being on the computer 4 days straight. By Thursday afternoon, my son is so burned out he barely gets through Friday. After class on Friday he screams out loud how much he hates school and runs outside.

My son, who is a sophomore, asked me last week if he can quit school. He hates it so much. He says its torture! And his performance is the WORST it's ever been. According to ParentVue he is getting 3 Fs, 2 Cs and an A-. The A- is in his first class on Tues and Wed. when he is fresh.

Also, it's not like my husband and I have just left my son alone to flounder and fail. We have been helping him with his executive functioning skills by working with him to set up a schedule and routine. We check in with him at beginning and end of every school day. My husband has sat with my son making sure he gets his homework done. My son is NOT learning via distance learning. He is just trying to get through the lectures, get the homework done and not fall behind. He's more worried about not getting work done than actually learning anything.

Many school districts throughout the country have returned to in-person learning. Granted there may have been reports or some Covid cases, but people quarantine and then it's gone and the kids and teachers can continue and have a relatively normal school year. But, the longer LCPS prolongs returning to school, the longer they are just prolonging the inevitable. No matter when LCPS returns to school

there will be a spike in COVID cases. You can't wait two years before a vaccine is created. Viruses just don't disappear.

Also, the CDC came out in September 2020 with their statistics about how benign COVID actually is. Unfortunately, the media which has hijacked the COVID narrative and exaggerated the situation with its anecdotal reporting, does not want people to know that COVID is NOT that dangerous. Below is a blurb from the CDC website stating the FACTS about the dangers of COVID:

The CDC has updated the Covid-19 survival stats. If you are middle-aged or younger, no need to be afraid. If you are over 70, or have co-morbidities, your risk is higher, but still not scary, take whatever precautions you feel necessary to protect yourself. The fastest path to herd immunity is letting the virus spread amount those of us who are least likely to experience any symptoms, let alone actual illness. (Sweden appears to have herd immunity already) Once a virus runs its course through the healthy, it burns out and then the vulnerable are protected.

CDC's "Best Estimate" Infection Fatality Ratio by age group:

Ages 0-19: 0.00003 (99.997% survive)

Ages 20-49: 0.0002 (99.98% survive)

Ages 50-69: 0.005 (99.5% survive)

Over 70: 0.054 (95.6% survive)

In addition, 40% of "positive" cases have no symptoms (as I'm sure you've noticed by now in most folks you know who have tested positive).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/planning-scenarios.html?fbclid=IwAR2OvwNVaDWkHHzD4PP0ITzVNFhxmySYgrEva3X3pS4IXYP4jQGK8YyMr9ZI>

Unfortunately, the media does not really write about how kids are being affected during this distance learning experience. No one seems to care about them. It's all about teachers and how parents are being stressed out by having to work and oversee their kids schooling. But, the kids are being affected. Doesn't their health (mental and physical) matter at all to anyone? Your job is to serve the kids, not politicians, political parties or teachers unions.

Thank you for your time,

Ann Meredith

Cell: 480-330-0387