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## TJAAG APPLAUDS FAIRFAX COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT BRABRAND'S AND THE FCPS SCHOOL BOARD'S FRESH LOOK AT TJHSST ADMISSIONS

For Immediate Release

We, the TJ Alumni Action Group (TJAAG), commend the Fairfax County School Board on their forward-looking and equity-focused draft plan released on September 15th for reforming the admissions process to our alma mater. The superintendent's plan to change Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology (TJHSST) admissions to a merit lottery by region could allow the school to access previously untapped talent in Northern Virginia.

Following a 30 year trend, TJHSST's student body is a highly unrepresentative 1.7% Black, 2.6% Latinx, and 2.4% students eligible for free/reduced meals, compared to a county that is 9.8% Black, 25.9% Latinx, and 29% students on free/reduced meals. More than half of the students offered admission in TJHSST's class of 2022 came from just six middle schools.

With their release of a [new plan for a merit lottery system](#), the Fairfax County School Board has demonstrated a courageous willingness to make a change that will allow TJHSST to better serve its draw districts. As a group representing more than 1,000 alumni of the school, we applaud the Board's ambition in addressing the underlying culture of inequities, and we applaud putting the plan in motion this current school year, as the COVID crisis makes the current process untenable.

Despite unfounded arguments that any changes to TJ would reduce its prestige, applications to TJHSST have declined under the status quo, down 25.8% from peak in 2012, from 3,423 to 2,539 applicants amid persistent demographic problems. The new merit lottery suggested by the Superintendent actually raises the standard applicant requirement from a 3.0 GPA to a 3.5 GPA.

Changing the TJ admissions process takes a big step toward much-needed improvements to the climate at the school. Dozens of alumni over the years have shared stories of how they were made to feel that they didn't belong due to racism, classism, and ableism. At the same time, alumni historically in the majority at TJHSST have shared how a lack of a diverse student body left them unprepared for leadership and life after graduation. We also hear from underrepresented minorities that don't apply at all, because the word is that if they got in, they wouldn't fit in because of racism at TJHSST.

We celebrate this level of ambition and courage by the School Board to step up and enshrine the values of Fairfax County in TJ. We look forward to collaborating on the details of these reforms with the school board, the Virginia legislature, and the governor in renewed outreach efforts under a changed system. Through expansion of student opportunity, TJHSST can take its place at the forefront of public education in the United States. Meaningful reforms will create a climate of equity and opportunity for all children in TJHSST's draw districts without sacrificing the school's high standards of education.