



www.fairfaxfederation.org | P.O. Box 3913, Merrifield, VA 22116-3913

February 10, 2025

Dr. Reid and Members of the School Board:

We thank you for taking action to change the leadership at the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJ). We are hopeful that Principal Michael Mukai will help return TJ to its #1 ranking nationally; as a TJ alumnus, he brings an intimate understanding of the unique students TJ is designed to serve.

As Mr. Mukai takes the helm, and as you bring on board a new Director of Admissions, we hope you will re-examine the TJ admissions process in order to ensure that TJ is selecting students who reflect its [mission as a Governor's School](#). In 2020 the School Board made four major changes to TJ's admissions policy, all of which we believe have hindered FCPS' ability to identify students with an advanced aptitude for STEM:

- (1) FCPS eliminated standardized testing in student applications. Other selective high schools which considered eliminating or which did eliminate standardized testing in 2020—including Lowell High School in San Francisco and New York's specialized high schools—have since reinstated those tests. Our country's most highly selective colleges have, similarly, reinstated the requirement that students submit standardized test scores. [Most research shows standardized test scores provide helpful information](#) in predicting college success.
- (2) FCPS eliminated teacher recommendations from applications. Those who advocated for this change indicated they suspected recommendations were biased against underrepresented students. We believe this insults the professionalism of our middle school educators. A similar suspicion with regard to 2nd grade teacher recommendations for the Advanced Academic Program (AAP) was debunked by an [external review](#) in 2020.
- (3) FCPS requires the top 1.5% of each FCPS middle school's 8th grade class to be offered admission to TJ. This system punishes and/or rewards students on the basis of where their parents choose to live, creating an artificial ceiling on admissions from our highest-performing AAP Centers. TJ sits atop FCPS' continuum of services for advanced learners and the school's admissions policy should honor the purpose of the AAP. Moreover, geographic preferences hinder FCPS' ability to identify our highest-ability students in STEM.
- (4) Applicants' Student Portrait Sheets are evaluated on the basis of FCPS' "Portrait of a Graduate". This framework provides valuable goals for all students. However, it does not help identify students with high STEM aptitude. It's ineffective to utilize this framework to evaluate applicants for a specialized school.

We urge you to reconsider each of these practices. While we do not have the expertise to craft an ideal admissions policy, we note that multiple criteria (including test scores and teacher recommendations) were removed in 2020 and were not replaced with substantive, relevant data. As the Federation has emphasized on various issues over the years, we believe more information is usually better than less.

Sincerely,

The President and Education Chairs of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens' Associations

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Thompson".

Tim Thompson
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annmarie Swope".

Annmarie Swope
Co-Chair, Education Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Trainer".

Nancy Trainer
Co-Chair, Education Committee