

Coalition of Chinese American Parents Associations (CAPAs)

An Open Letter to Virginia Fairfax County Public School Superintendent and Board Members on Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology Admission Policy

Dear Board of Education Members,

Thank you for your dedicated services in public education to benefit the society and our future. No doubt public education policy is complicated, often with conflict needs and priorities. We share your concerns of diversity in Thomas Jefferson's admission Program. And we applaud your latest efforts to increase more seats for ever growing students and needs. We too wish the current TJ student body expands its diversity. We believe diversity benefits everyone and we too strive to find a solution. However, we are deeply concerned about the idea of using the lottery to solve the problem. **Is the lottery process the gold ingredient to solve this complicated, decades long, diversity problem in every segment of our society, especially in the nation's top academic high school? Could we work together to find a better and more meaningful alternative than this?**

As immigrants, minorities, parents (nowadays "educators" too), we urge you to consider our inputs in this process.

1. A change is always hard! But a fair process and treating all people with respect could make the change a lot more successful and meaningful. **Frankly, our greater Asian American communities, students, and parents, don't see the respect and being treated fairly so far. In fact, our communities feel we are being targeted and discriminated against in certain situations, similar to the suffering we have from the backlash of COVID-19 pandemic.** If the Superintendent and the Board considered Asian Americans disproportionately high in TJ, should we at least be included in the conversation from the beginning?

2. **Why Asian Americans, the minority in the nation, consist of majority students in many academic strong schools, despite many non-English speaking parents and immigration barriers? How can Asian American communities contribute to bring up other minority students?**

And we believe FCPS already has most of the answers - the "FCPS's Beliefs," especially:

- Dynamic and supportive **partnerships** among students, parents, educators, and the community are critical to meet student needs and provide enriching experiences.
- **Families** play a fundamental role in their children's education.
- **High expectations** inspire high performance.
- **Quality early childhood education** is crucial to school readiness and future success.
- **Literacy is an essential life skill, and reading proficiency by third grade** is critical for the academic success of all students.
 - A **well-rounded education** enables students to lead productive, fulfilling, creative, and culturally rich lives.
 - A successful education system develops students who are effective communicators; collaborators; creative critical thinkers; **global and ethical citizens; and goal-directed, resilient learners.**

Asian American communities avidly practice what FCPS's educational philosophies on a daily base and truly believe "education changes one's future and destiny". In fact, that's often the only belief for many disadvantaged and how low socioeconomic families in our communities change their life. This is in no way to discredit any other communities or families on their tireless efforts to sacrifice for their children's education. But we believe maybe we have the long tradition to practice these beliefs and have developed effective strategies and means (low or no cost peer tutoring program, regular study routines, and learning methods, etc.) since a child's young age, especially for families that believe in strong academic education as a foundation.

It would be wonderful if we could start the partnership with FCPS to share what we have learnt through our educational efforts. And if FCPS could help bridge Asian American communities with African and Latino communities to work together on addressing this challenge, we are confident that it will make a meaningful change to TJ's student demographics.

3. From past experiences of similar issues in Montgomery County, we have found those following strategies are also far better than a simple lottery process to make the student body more diverse so everyone can benefit. **For instance, in Montgomery county, a talent developing coach was assigned to high FARM schools for early child talent development. Elementary schools start to offer after school enrichment programs for minority students. Saturday schools for small classes for any level of students. Partnerships with outside vendors like AOPS to target minority talents since first grade. There are also some schools with high poverty concentration to offer summer academic camp and year-round schedules to ensure they are not left behind academically. And MCPS also uses universal screening for 3rd grade, 5th grade, and 8th grade, to continue to find the talents and interests of academically strong minority students.** Those efforts have increased MCPS's magnet program enrollment. These efforts might not change the TJ's demographic overnight like lottery results (which is still in question actually it could), but they are the true solution of lifting up everyone! They truly identify great minority talents and help enable them to be selected for whatever admission criteria. Those minority students don't need the Lottery process to help them, FCPS doesn't need to use the lottery process to achieve diversity in the nation's top academic STEM high school. It will happen organically and meaningfully. Simply because one particular school is not reflecting our demographic in current time doesn't mean it fails the mission. Look at the NBA today – should we change the top leagues and teams to reflect the demographic and make it more diverse? Will it still serve its goal to have the best basketball talents in the world? As much as we would love to see more Asian American faces in the NBA, we don't want any special colors just for the sake of diversity.

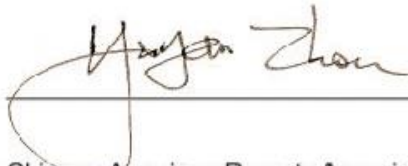
4. **We strongly urge FCPS in all means to exclude using the Lottery process as a change venue.** It does more damage to the diversity than any other means. In fact, it will negatively affect Blacks and Latinos, and benefit Asian Americans and Whites more, which we don't believe is good for our society. TJ is only one of the 30 high schools in FCPS, and only one of the 198 total schools. It is a school with a key focus on STEM for those students to have good peers to become the best STEM assets in our nation. **Lottery is not a voluntary and effort driven process.** Some students might not want to be in the program, some students might feel left out with its narrow focus, some students that want to be in the programs badly get left out. **Lottery process doesn't match the supply and demand properly, which results in wasting sacred educational resources.** Lottery is a passive solution for problems. If the lottery works, maybe the education system could use it for teachers' schools assignments, or even in elections.

To summarize, our communities are deeply committed to increase diversity in TJ, and any other special school programs. But we disagree with the current approaches and discussion on the Lottery process. We believe our communities should be included in the discussion, and contribute with our own experiences that have produced the majority of the nation's STEM top talent nowadays. Our ultimate goal is the same with you - very diverse future STEM talents in this nation to continue the lead in the world.

Thank you for your time and attention. We look forward to a meaningful partnership with FCPS.

Sincerely,

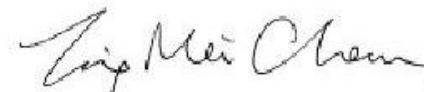
Chinese American Parents Association of Fairfax County (CAPA-FC)


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Chinese American Parents Association of Howard County (CAPA-HC)


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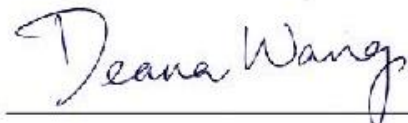
Chinese American Parents Association of Montgomery County (CAPA-MC)


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Ting Mei Chau (President)

Chinese American Parents Association of Baltimore County (CAPA-BC)


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Chinese American Parents Association of Tredyffrin-Easttown (CAPA-TE)


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Chinese American Parents Association of Rose Tree Media School District, PA (CAPA-RTMSD)


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