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October 5, 2020

Dr. Brabrand and Members of the School Board:

We write to **urge you to refrain from enacting significant changes to the admissions process for the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology (TJ) until you have participated in fully collaborative public engagement.** While we believe more diversity is an important goal, we have substantive concerns about using a lottery process to select students for admission. A deeper community conversation is essential to evaluating any proposal this consequential to both individual students and the school's success as a valuable community asset.

Dr. Brabrand released his proposal to change TJ's admissions process on September 15, and is asking the School Board to approve a final proposal on October 8. This time frame provides inadequate opportunities for stakeholders to engage in transparent public comment and discussion. Major changes such as those suggested in Dr. Brabrand's proposal must require more thorough evaluation and discussion among administrators, parents, teachers, educational experts, and the community. These could include, for example, public hearings, panel discussions, individual testimony, and perhaps a task force. Such mechanisms are designed to result in substantively better policy while also improving community support. There may be ways to improve diversity at TJ that are less divisive and disruptive of TJ's central mission.

Careful analysis of Dr. Brabrand's proposal is crucial because the stakes for our community are high. TJ is a central element of FCPS' strong reputation for excellence in education. In turn, that reputation is a foundational component of Fairfax County's economic growth, as our schools help the County retain and attract business investment.

TJ provides a uniquely supportive environment for gifted students, students (in the words of the Virginia Department of Education) "whose learning levels are remarkably different from their age-level peers." From its beginning in 1985, TJ has represented a commitment to providing a nurturing environment for students who need a more challenging program than available at their base high schools. This commitment is important not just for the students themselves, but because the development of exceptional talent is aimed at the improvement of society at large. At TJ we might foster the next Katherine Johnson or Anthony Fauci. We urge you to prioritize the identification of such talent in any future TJ admissions process, and advise you to deliberate more fully before changing the existing one.

Sincerely,

The President and Education Committee of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
FedPres2020@fairfaxfederation.org, FedEducationChr2020@fairfaxfederation.org

Handwritten signature of Ed Saperstein in black ink.

Ed Saperstein
Co-Chair

Handwritten signature of Nancy Trainer in black ink.

Nancy Trainer
Co-Chair

Handwritten signature of William S. Barfield in black ink.

William Barfield
President