



**For Immediate Release**

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**Statement on Federal Judge Blocking Efforts by Fairfax County School District to Remove Unfair Barriers to Educational Opportunities**

Today, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia enjoined revisions to the admissions process for Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJ) that created more equal access for Black, Latinx, and underserved Asian American students, who had long been unfairly excluded from the elite public high school.

Before remedial action was taken, the student body at TJ was only 1.7% Black and 2.7% Latinx (as of the 2019-20 school year), and the percentage of the admitted class barely cleared 2% for Black students and 3% for Latinx students. Within the Asian American community, there is an additional dearth of diversity as English Language Learners and economically disadvantaged students have historically been severely under-represented at TJ. The new admissions process not only provides greater access to qualified Black and Latinx students, but also significantly increased the percentage of students receiving free or reduced meals (from 2% to 25%) and English Language Learners (from less than 1% to more than 5%). Asian American students benefitted more than any other racial group from the increased attention to English Language Learners and free or reduced meal status.

In response to today's decision, civil rights groups the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, the Virginia NAACP, Hamkae Center, Asian American LEAD (AALEAD), CASA Virginia, Hispanic Federation, and the TJ Alumni for Racial Justice, a multi-generational and diverse group of Thomas Jefferson High School graduates, issued the following joint statement:

“For well over a decade, the admission process at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology continuously failed to identify all Black, Latinx, and underserved Asian American students with the aptitude to excel at TJ. All students deserve a fair shot at receiving an excellent education, regardless of their income, where they grew up, or their racial and ethnic background.

“To be clear, students of color in the United States continue to experience systemic and interpersonal racism that detrimentally affects their educational opportunities, making it

important for school districts to recognize and remove undisputed barriers to equal opportunity. It is in everyone's interest to see that talented and qualified students from all backgrounds get the opportunity to succeed in life.

“Contrary to binding precedent, today's erroneous decision by the Court uses the Equal Protection clause to cement pre-existing inequalities and hinder school districts from removing unfair barriers to opportunity for many Black, Latinx, and underserved Asian American students in direct conflict with the very purpose of the Equal Protection Clause. Such measures are not anti-Asian, and, in fact benefit Asian American students. Indeed, all students benefit from a system that promotes fair opportunities for all. The court's decision will harm underprivileged students of color. It also essentially stymies school districts from addressing known problems of equal educational access with race neutral efforts. As racial justice advocates, we will continue to support race neutral policies that better ensure equal educational opportunities consistent with the Equal Protection Clause.”

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*

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*LatinoJustice PRLDEF works to create a more just society by using and challenging the rule of law to secure transformative, equitable and accessible justice, by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education. For nearly 50 years, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has acted as an advocate against injustices throughout the country. To learn more about LatinoJustice, visit [www.LatinoJustice.org](http://www.LatinoJustice.org).*

*Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC has a mission to advance the civil and human rights of Asian Americans and to build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. Visit our website at [advancingjustice-aaajc.org](http://advancingjustice-aaajc.org).*