



# Fairfax County Association for the Gifted

*Building a community of advocates for gifted children and connecting the people and programs that support them.*

## **TJHSST Class of 2025 Admissions: FCAG Analysis**

The Fairfax County Association for the Gifted (FCAG) is a community organization engaged in advocacy for gifted children and their families. The analysis provided here is based on data recently obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on TJ Admissions.

### **Executive Summary**

- Over 38% of Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) students admitted to TJ Class of 2025 were not participating in Level IV AAP coursework in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. These students constitute over 20% of admitted students to TJ Class of 2025.
- Students receiving Advanced Academic Program Level IV services were equally likely to be admitted to TJ as students overall, even though Level IV students take the most academically challenging courses in English, social studies and science offered by the county to eighth graders (18% for each).
- Compared to TJ Class of 2024, the proportion of students in Class of 2025 admitted with the minimal required math background of Algebra 1 in 8<sup>th</sup> grade increased sevenfold, from 4.5% to 31%, while the proportion of students admitted who had completed Algebra 2 or higher in 8<sup>th</sup> grade decreased by almost 50%, from 35% to 18%.
- Fairfax had the lowest admission rate to TJ Class of 2025 among all reporting counties. Approximately 16% of Fairfax County applicants were admitted, while over 27% of Arlington County applicants and over 30% of Prince William County applicants were admitted.

**Almost 40% of FCPS students admitted to TJ Class of 2025 were not participating in the most rigorous coursework available in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, constituting over 20% of all admitted students.**

Level IV coursework is considered the most demanding coursework offered by Fairfax County Public Schools, and more demanding than "honors" courses. There are a variety of ways that Level IV may have been calculated by FCPS. In the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request,

FCAG specified that FCPS report the numbers of students who are centrally selected into the Advanced Academic Program to receive Level IV services.<sup>1</sup>

Based on recent data, Level IV students centrally selected for the advanced academic program comprise approximately 18% of the students in FCPS in grade 8. These would generally be the most academically motivated, advanced, gifted, and capable students, as the coursework for AAP Level IV services is more demanding than the Honors coursework, which in turn is considered more demanding than the regular courses. In middle school, Level IV courses include only social studies, science and English.

There were 550 students admitted to TJ Class of 2025<sup>2</sup>, of which 316 acceptances went to Fairfax residents<sup>3</sup>. There were 15 acceptances from private schools this past year, of which about 10 are likely Fairfax residents. As a result, about 306 public school kids from Fairfax County were accepted. Among Fairfax residents, 189 students were "Level IV" Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) students<sup>4</sup>, resulting in an estimated 117 students<sup>5</sup> admitted who were not "Level IV" students, constituting about 38% of accepted FCPS students.<sup>6</sup>

This outcome is all but ensured by design, since qualified students who do not have access to Level IV services in their base school are offered spots in nearby schools, called "Centers," leaving spots reserved to the base school (1.5% of each school) to go to students who are not doing Level IV curriculum. An estimated 93 seats at TJHSST were reserved for FCPS students attending schools that do not offer Level IV Center curriculum. Students attending these schools either do not qualify, or decided not to pursue, Level IV curriculum.

TJ is intended to include the top 1.5% from each school but, by admitting many students who are not in the advanced programs, over 20% of the TJ class<sup>7</sup> was selected from the 80% of students who were not participating in the most advanced academic program offered in middle school.

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<sup>1</sup> . In the past, FCPS has also designated students who are taking 3 honors level courses outside of math "Level IV" in middle school. Thus, the "Level IV students" may include students who elected to take all or mostly honors classes, as well as those centrally selected, or they may just be centrally selected students. For purposes of this analysis, FCAG assumes FCPS followed instructions and included only centrally selected students; all of the conclusions would be far worse if the 189 kids who were designated as "Level IV" also included those applicants who took all honors courses.

<sup>2</sup> There may have been more than 550 students admitted to achieve a class of this size, however the records obtained from FCPS through FOIA requests indicate only 550 admissions.

<sup>3</sup> VFOIA\_6382\_1

<sup>4</sup> VFOIA\_6381

<sup>5</sup>  $306 - 189 = 117$

<sup>6</sup>  $117/306 = .382$

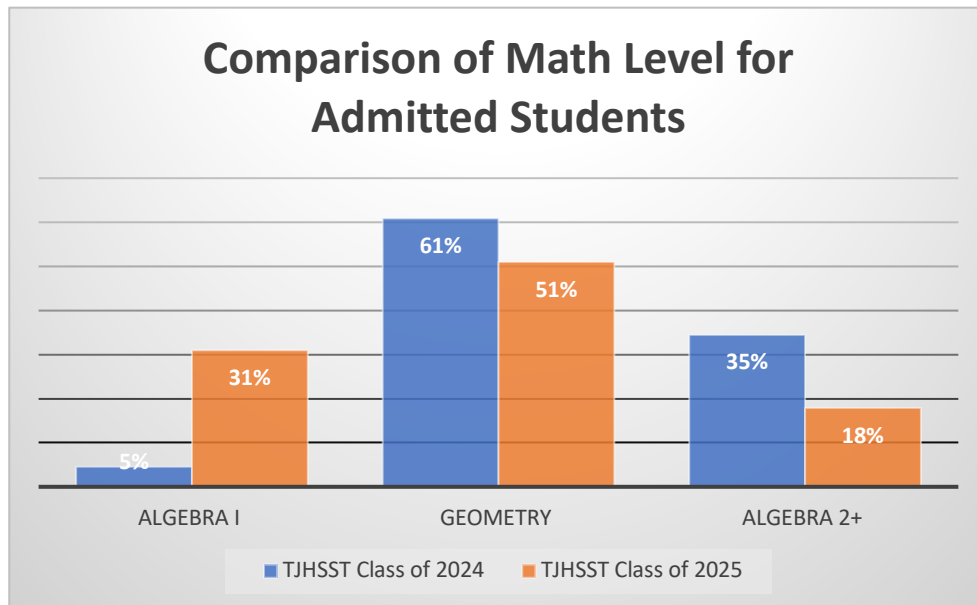
<sup>7</sup> 117 students out of 550

**Admission rate for academically advanced students in FCPS is the same as the admission rate for all students**

The admissions rate to TJ Class of 2025 for all students was 18.13%.<sup>8</sup> The admissions rate for Level IV students from Fairfax is almost identical, at 18.12%.<sup>9</sup> It is indeed highly unusual that the Level IV students would be admitted at the same rate as all students, considering there were so many non-AAP students who applied. If one compares Level IV students to non-Level IV students within Fairfax, however, there is a lower rate of admissions for non-Level IV students; one may conclude that other counties have a higher acceptance rate than Fairfax County.

**TJHSST Class of 2025 admitted seven times as many students with minimal math level required to apply, and almost halved the proportion of students with the highest math level.**

Compared to previous years, there is a huge leap in the number of students taking Algebra 1 rather than higher level math. There were 161 students admitted who only had taken Algebra 1.<sup>10</sup> In previous years, that number has been about 20 students; 22 admitted students in Class of 2024 and 21 admitted students in Class of 2023 had only had Algebra 1. The reported 161 students may be an underestimate, as there are 37 students admitted who are not accounted for in the reported data. The county only reported 513 students' math levels, leaving 37



students whose math level is unreported.<sup>11</sup> While the previous the percentage of TJ admits who had only taken Algebra 1 was 4.5%,<sup>12</sup> the percentage of admissions of such students for Class of 2025 was about 31%.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> VFOIA\_6382\_2, 550 admitted students out of 3034 applicants

<sup>9</sup> VFOIA\_6381, 189 offered divided by 1043 applicants

<sup>10</sup> VFOIA\_6380

<sup>11</sup> VFOIA\_6380: 161+265+87=513 reported. 550-513=37

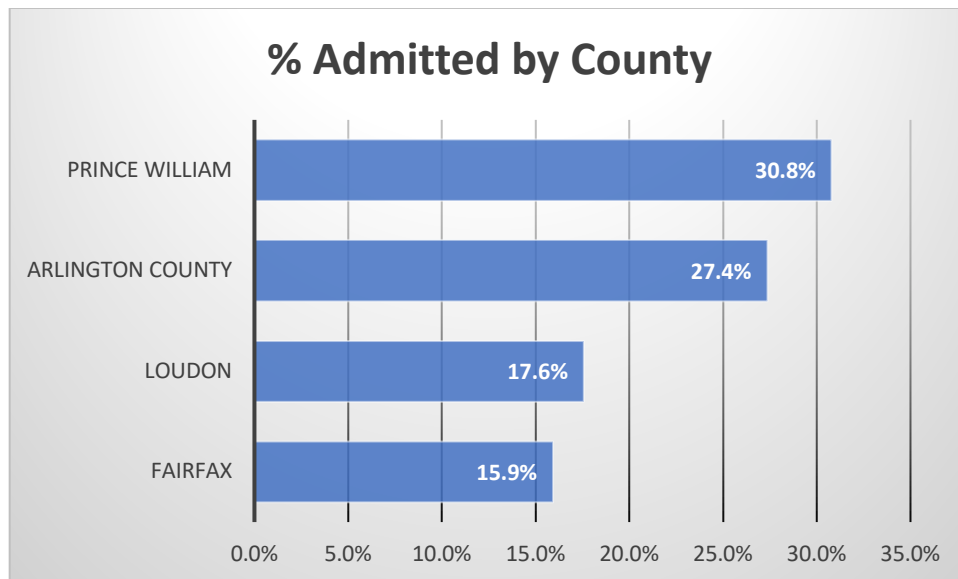
<sup>12</sup> 22/486 for Class of 2024

<sup>13</sup> 161/513 reported in FOIA\_6380

The proportion of admissions going to advanced students in math went down by about 50%. In the Class of 2024, 34.5% of admissions went to students taking Algebra 2 or above, while 17-18% of admitted students to TJ Class of 2025 had taken Algebra 2 or above. The imprecision is due to data withheld by Fairfax County.

**Fairfax County had the lowest reported admissions rates, and much lower admissions rates than Arlington and Prince William County**

Fairfax County students were admitted at a lower rate than any other county, with an admissions rate of just under 16%. In contrast, 31% of Prince William County applicants were admitted, 27% of Arlington County applicants were admitted, and just under 18% of Loudon County applicants were admitted.<sup>14</sup>



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<sup>14</sup> FOIA\_6382\_1