

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

Alexandria, United States



A Fairfax County magnet where every senior completes original research across fifteen specialized STEM labs.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	81/100
Academic outcomes	87/100
University placement	87/100
Prestige & heritage	77/100
Alumni network	74/100
Facilities	71/100
Transparency	83/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Every senior at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology completes original research, and that requirement tells you more about the school than any slogan could. This is a public magnet in Fairfax County, founded in 1985, for ages 14 to 18, with an American curriculum taught in English and a student-teacher ratio of ****10:1****. Average classes sit at ****18****, which matters in a school built around specialised work rather than mass delivery. The school’s identity is clear: rigorous STEM study, selective entry, and a culture that treats research as the centre of the sixth-form equivalent experience, not an add-on. Parents looking for a conventional high school with broad, easy-going academic expectations should look elsewhere; this is a ***high-pressure***, ***deliberately specialised*** environment.

What puts TJHSST on a shortlist is not mystique but structure. It sits inside Fairfax County Public Schools yet operates as a selective magnet, with roots in state and county cooperation and links to Virginia’s Governor’s School network. That public framework gives it a different market position from expensive US independents: the attraction is concentrated academic opportunity rather than campus luxury or boutique pastoral packaging. The NEASC and NAIS accreditations add institutional credibility, but the sharper point is the school’s academic design. A teenager who wants serious lab-based work, peers with the same appetite for maths and science, and teachers who can handle advanced questions will find a **rare concentration of intellectual firepower** here. A teenager who wants to keep several doors equally open across arts, sport and a lighter academic pace will find the model narrow.

The alumni record reinforces the point. Wikidata alone catalogues **51** notable alumni, including **13** scientists and scholars, **8** business and finance leaders, and **11** writers and journalists. That spread matters: it shows the school does not produce only future engineers. It produces students trained to think hard, write clearly and handle competitive environments. This is still **not for the faint-hearted**. The right applicant is academically ambitious, comfortable with selection, energised by research, and happy to be measured against other very able teenagers every day. For that child, TJHSST is a **serious contender** and one of the clearest specialist propositions in American secondary education.

STRENGTHS	TRADE-OFFS
• Ranked No. 5 nationally among U.S. public high schools by U.S. News & World Report in its 2025-2026 rankings, and No. 1 in Virginia. • Offers 15 specialized research labs spanning fields such as astronomy, astrophysics, oceanography and geophysical systems, alongside a senior technical lab project. • STEM curriculum includes distinctive courses such as DNA science, advanced marine biology, automation and robotics, and architectural drawing and design. • As a Fairfax County Public Schools Governor's School, it charges no tuition, unlike comparable private STEM-focused day schools. • Alumni network includes figures such as New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu and Robinhood co-founder Vlad Tenev, reflecting strong outcomes in tech, policy and business.	• Admission is highly selective and merit-based, drawing applicants from six Northern Virginia jurisdictions competing for only 550 freshman seats. • The school's ranking has fluctuated significantly in recent years, falling from No. 1 to as low as No. 14 before recovering to No. 5, reflecting ongoing debate over changes to the admissions process. • The 2020-21 overhaul of admissions criteria (removing the standardized entrance test) has been the subject of sustained litigation and political controversy, including a challenge from Virginia's Attorney General over alleged discrimination against Asian American applicants. • As a public magnet school drawing from a wide catchment across Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William and Arlington counties and Falls Church, many students face long daily commutes rather than a genuinely local campus experience.

ADMISSIONS

Entry is primarily at Grade 9 via a holistic, race-neutral application open to eighth graders from participating Northern Virginia jurisdictions; a minimum 3.5 GPA is required, alongside a STEM problem-solving essay, a 'student portrait' essay on life-experience factors, and coursework at the highest level available to the applicant. A small number of sophomore and junior places are also offered via transcript review. There is no application fee and no entrance exam since 2020-21; roughly 550 freshman seats are offered annually, with competitiveness described by the school as intense.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (5 1)

SPORT: Andrew Seliskar, Ildikó Tóth, SunLee Stechuk

MUSIC: Jose Llana, Thao Nguyen

DRAMA: Chris Avellone, Ehren Kruger, Ashley Miller, Jose Llana, Aparna Nancherla, Sophia Kianni

VISUAL_ARTS: Chris Avellone, Thao Nguyen, Darius Kazemi, Bob Bland

LETTERS: Ian Caldwell, Ashley Miller, Dustin Thomason, Ravi Shankar, Sandra Beasley, Amna Nawaz, Lisa Desjardins, Sophia Kianni

POLITICS: Robert Sarvis, Chris Sununu, Hung Cao

SCIENCE: Mark Embree, Greg Tseng, Emma Pierson, Paul Bracher, Kabir Yadav, Danial Hussain, Marc Lipman, Stephanie Pitts

BUSINESS: Q4768852, Dustin Thomason, Chris Sununu, Howard Lerman, Conor Russomanno, Bob Bland, Vlad Tenev, Q103287245

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_5614aa6062.