

## **Guidelines for Reading Student Information Sheets and/or Teacher Recommendations**

TJHSST is a unique Fairfax County public school that was established “to provide an environment that will allow those [students] with the requisite skills and interest in mathematics, science, or technology to pursue higher levels of academic achievement in those areas in preparation for the pursuit of a mathematics, science, or technology focused profession.” Fairfax County Public Schools Policy 3355.2 Please keep this policy in mind as you evaluate the applicant for purposes of admission to this specialized high school:

It shall be the policy of the Fairfax County School Board to operate a high school for science and technology for qualified [ ] students in order to provide increased educational opportunities for those who have demonstrated high achievement, aptitude, commitment, intellectual curiosity, and creativity in mathematics, science, and technology.

The School Board recognizes the importance of preparing future leaders in mathematics, science, and technology to address future complex societal and ethical issues. Diversity of the student body enhances the robust exchange of ideas and is an important factor in developing leaders who will be prepared to address future scientific and technological challenges. Diversity is broadly defined to include a wide variety of factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), geography, poverty, prior school and cultural experiences, and other unique skills and experiences

As you begin the review process, also keep in mind the TJHSST *Mission Statement*:

The mission of Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology is to provide students a challenging learning environment focused on math, science, and technology, to inspire joy at the prospect of discovery, and to foster a culture of innovation based on ethical behavior and the shared interests of humanity.

In support of the TJHSST *Mission Statement*, the primary criterion for admission to TJHSST is academic excellence.

TJHSST is looking for eager, motivated, and highly engaged students, who demonstrate a strong and genuine interest in, and passion for, science, mathematics, or technology and who will bring a high degree of intellectual stimulation, commitment, initiative, and personal ethics to TJHSST. Your evaluation of the Student Information Sheet or teacher recommendations will be used to help identify those students.

An extremely thorough review of these materials must be undertaken. You are being provided with rubrics and guidelines designed specifically for the individual review that you will undertake. As you begin your review, please keep in mind that TJHSST is looking for highly motivated students who have an aptitude and genuine interest in the biological, physical, mathematical, and computer sciences and related fields. Consideration also should be given to how well an applicant has taken advantage of a variety of available resources, whether he or she has faced and withstood unusual adversity, whether the applicant can adapt well to new situations, and

whether he or she shows potential to be a contributing member to the TJHSST community as well the community outside of TJHSST.

You should guard against making assumptions as you provide your ratings. When categorizing students in the requested areas on the teacher narrative or Student Information Sheet, you should focus solely on the specific text provided and should not make assumptions or draw inferences that go beyond that specific text.

These *Guidelines* provide the rubrics to be used in scoring the SIS and the teacher recommendation forms and additional information (including specific points to keep in mind when reviewing materials) to assist SIS and Teacher Rec team members in their review.

Please review all materials carefully.

## **Student Information Sheet (SIS) Review Process**

## Student Information Sheet Guidelines

TJHSST is looking for students who not only have demonstrated high academic achievement but who also have a strong and genuine interest in science, mathematics, and/or technology and have made contributions to their schools and/or their communities. The student-authored Student Information Sheet (Appendix D) provides details to assist in identifying these students.

The Student Information Sheet (new this year) is a two-page document that includes four short-answer questions, three short sections requiring students to identify their one most important accomplishment, academic activity/interest, and after-school/out-of-school activity/interest, and a personal statement.

SIS Team Members will review the Student Information Sheets of a randomly-assigned group of semifinalists and score each SIS using the rubric shown on the previous page. The two Team Members on each team will share a set of student forms, but will work and score independently. SIS Team Members will be provided with individual Rubric forms for each student to complete. Once this scoring form is completed for each student, each team member will calculate the total points to be given that student's SIS and enter the "Total Points" score in the designated box on each individual form.

For this review, raters will categorize the extent to which the student provides evidence of high quality functioning in six areas considered critical to TJs mission and/or student success at TJ. The first three areas (STEM school goodness of fit, STEM commitment, STEM creativity) are rated specifically in relation to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) while the latter three areas (intellectual curiosity, extending TJs community of learners, self-reflection) are more inclusive, extending beyond a sole focus on STEM.

Ratings should be based solely on the student's individually composed responses to the requested information on the Student Information Sheet. The general rule in rating the SIS is that you go with what is written by the student in response to the questions posed -- nothing more and nothing less.

Raters should guard against making assumptions. When categorizing students in the requested areas of functioning, raters should rely on the student's own descriptions and explanations to avoid making assumptions about experiences beyond what is written. Remember that participation in an activity is not the same as involvement or interest. This is particularly important when students include general or broad responses that do not provide sufficient detail, when students provide "laundry list" responses, or when students rely on "résumé padding" rather than descriptions of themselves. For example, if the student describes his/her most important accomplishment as "consistently scored highly in math team competitions in both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade," raters should not assume that the student enjoys math, is willing to invest in learning, works effectively with others, or anything else other than that the student participated in math team for two years. Rather this student would need to describe his/her enjoyment of math, investment in learning, effective collaboration, etc. on the SIS form for raters to credit the student with these additional things.

In addition, in assigning ratings, raters should not consider extra information beyond what is requested or information that is not responsive to the question. For example, in Part 2 of the SIS, if a student provides more than one accomplishment, activity, or interest, only the first

accomplishment, activity, or interest and its related description should be considered when rating the student; the remainder of the response should be ignored by raters.

As you review the Student Information Sheet, please keep in mind the following additional general information and observations regarding the forms:

### General Information

- Read through the entire SIS before attempting to assign ratings under the rubric. While some questions on the SIS may be more likely to prompt evidence for certain areas on the rubric, raters need to consider the entire form when rating all areas.
- All semifinalists are required to complete their Student Information Sheet online. Students were instructed to go to the “Resources” page on the admissions website ([www.TJAdmissions.org](http://www.TJAdmissions.org)) for the instructions to fill out the form and for access to the fillable PDF form that they were required to complete. (A copy of the Instructions for the Student Information Sheet also is included as part of Appendix D. Please be aware that this was a separate document that students had to access online before completing their Information Sheet.) Once students completed the form, they were instructed to print it out, sign it, and submit the form. Students could not submit the form electronically.
- Information sheets are to be written solely by the student. Each student, in fact, must affirm that “all responses are truthful and that I have composed and completed this sheet by myself.” Sometimes the Information Sheet is written in such a way that parental (or other adult) involvement is very suspect. Remember the students completing this Information Sheet are 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- Students had approximately three weeks to complete this form. This year, students had access to *The Semifinalist Round in a Nutshell*, a resource that provides information and suggestions on navigating the semifinalist stage of the admissions process. This document is available on the Admissions website or from the TJHSST liaison counselor at their school) for guidance in completing the Information Sheet. Copies are available if you wish to review this new resource.

### Format of Information Sheet

- Students were required to complete the Information Sheet electronically online, then to print out the completed form, sign it, and submit it. A completed form may have been faxed, which might alter the general appearance of the form. This is permissible.
- The format of the information sheets may vary slightly for some students because of the computer they used to complete the form. For example, forms completed on a Mac may not, when printed, show all of the borders on the form or completely show the signature line at the bottom of the page. This is permissible.
- Students were instructed that: “**Everything you write must fit into the boxes provided. DO NOT continue onto the back of the page and DO NOT provide any attachments.**” You are not provided with any additional material from any students. If a student wrote outside of the boxes provided or included attachments to a submission, these materials were redacted or were not included.

As you review the SIS for each student and apply the rubric to each form, please keep in mind the following guidelines to assist in your consideration of the individual areas of the rubric :