



**COALITION OF THE SILENCE AND NAACP FAIRFAX COUNTY BRANCH
APPLAUD US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS' DECISION TO
INVESTIGATE ALLEGED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AFRICAN AMERICAN AND
HISPANIC STUDENTS BY THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM BUT
REGRETS THAT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES CLAIMS WERE LEFT OUT**

***Investigation is a potential game changer for access to gifted education across the nation but
sadly leaves out a key group of forgotten students***

Falls Church, VA [September 26, 2012] –Today, the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education opened a formal investigation of the discrimination claims raised by the Coalition of The Silence and the Fairfax County Branch of the NAACP in their July 23 Complaint. That Complaint alleged that current policies for admission to the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology and identification for eligibility for “gifted and talented” services within FCPS discriminate against African American and Latino students and students with disabilities.

“Our hope is that this investigation, will shine a bright enough spotlight on these issues to solve it not just for students in Fairfax County but for students across the nation,” stated former Fairfax County School Board member Tina Hone, Founder of the Coalition of The Silence. “While we are enormously grateful that the Office of Civil Rights has taken our claims regarding discrimination against African American and Latino students seriously, we do regret that our claim of discrimination against students with disabilities was left out.”

“School systems -- and history -- are replete with examples of geniuses who have overcome disabilities to contribute enormously to society. Some of those geniuses are in Fairfax County schools today,” added Sheree Brown Kaplan, Chair of the Students with Disabilities Committee of the Coalition of The Science. “Unfortunately, because this school system refuses to collect or reported clear data on twice exceptional students, it was able to escape the spotlight of this investigation. But we are not giving up.” Brown Kaplan added.

The Complaint alleges that Fairfax County Public Schools essentially operates a segregated sub school system comprised of level 4 advanced academic centers at the elementary and middle school level. Black and Latino students are underrepresented in these centers. Because nearly every student admitted to TJ attended a Middle School with a level 4 Advanced Academic Center, underrepresentation of Blacks and Latinos in these centers results in disparities in TJ admissions.

“Since the filing of the Complaint, many parents have come forward with woeful tales of how their children have been harmed by FCPS’s advanced academic identification practices. Many of these parents have children with disabilities,” stated Charisse Espy-Glassman, Education Committee Chair for the Fairfax NAACP and a former member of the School Board’s Advanced Academic Advisory Committee. “Challenges facing Black and Latino children in Fairfax County are difficult enough on their own. Imagine if your child also has a disability? How many gifted Black boys are ignored

because their ADHD symptoms are deemed discipline problems instead of disabilities? We need to look at this.”

As part of the OCR investigation, FCPS will be given the opportunity to respond to the claims raised in the complaint and will be required to cooperate with OCR in its investigation or risk losing millions in federal education dollars.

“Many people have asked why we chose this route,” stated Hone “FCPS is a powerful institution and TJ has deep support from empowered Fairfax County stakeholders. Without the heft of the Department of Education behind us, there was no evidence presented at recent work sessions that indicate FCPS was prepared to do anything meaningful to ensure that advanced academic services, including access to TJ, was going to become more equitably available to *ALL* students at *ALL* levels in Fairfax County. If anything, there was substantial evidence to the contrary.”

About the Coalition of The Silence:

Launched in January 2012, the Coalition of The Silence seeks to empower communities, whose children are underrepresented at the highest level of academic achievement and overrepresented in discipline procedures within Fairfax County Public Schools. Economically disadvantaged students, African American and Latino students, and students with disabilities are at the heart of the Coalition’s work. Learn more about our work at www.coalitionofthesilence.org.

About the Fairfax County NAACP:

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. In 1915, a few brave African American citizens founded the Fairfax County Branch of the NAACP. It was the NAACP’s first rural branch. Then and now -- from the ballot box to the classroom -- the thousands of dedicated workers, organizers, leaders and members who make up the NAACP continue to fight for social justice for all Americans. For more information about the Fairfax County branch of the NAACP, visit www.fairfaxnaacp.org.