



THE FUTURE IS US

The Future Is US (TFIU) is a community-based collaborative formed in 2019 to raise awareness about unfair school disciplinary policies and advocate for opportunities for Black and Brown youth to reach their full potential. TFIU builds on the [ACCES \(Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences\) to Assets Collaborative](#) platform by understanding the different social factors that impact the mental health and well-being of Black and Brown youth in Galveston, including quality of and access to public education, cultural and artistic expression, and community trust and relationships.

GALVESTON, TX is a small island off the Gulf Coast of Texas Southeast of Houston. As the birthplace of the Juneteenth holiday in 1865, Galveston has deep ties to the history and impact of racism on Black and Brown communities that continues to be felt today. Now a vibrant hub for tourism, recreation, and historical preservation, residents of Galveston hope to amplify the voices and histories of those born on the Island while also ensuring the next generation of Galveston youth have opportunities to thrive.

THE FUTURE IS US was founded with the goal of becoming parent- and youth-led to better address the needs and opportunities of residents in Galveston. From the beginning, TFIU has been committed to lifting up the

lived experiences and dreams of Black and Brown youth and their parents through their Youth and Parent Advisory Council (YPAC). The YPAC was formed to provide a seat at decision-making tables for youth and residents, giving power to their voices in spaces that are typically closed off. In addition to elevating youth and parent voices, the collaborative is strongly supported by local organizations like Nia Cultural Center, Galveston's Own Farmers Market, Noche Berry's Salon, Fanfare! Lutheran Music Academy, and other small businesses who have dedicated their missions and visions to lift up underrepresented youth on the Island. With a strong foundational mission of fighting for Galveston youth and addressing historical and current barriers to success, The Future Is US aims to bring community members and organizations together to create lasting change.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT GALVESTONIANS NEED

The Future Is US conducted preliminary research and a series of listening sessions with community members to assess what Galveston residents wanted the collaborative to prioritize. The collaborative's assessment phase took



place over the Summer of 2020 alongside Black Lives Matter protests and periods of increasing COVID-19 infection rates, which presented an opportunity for the collaborative to deeply look at disparities in the health and social wellbeing of Black and Brown families tracing back to historical institutions and practices like slavery, redlining, and discrimination. The collaborative recruited youth, parents, and graduate students from the University of Texas Medical Branch to collectively analyze and interpret the results of the assessment process, providing experience and leadership in community-based research.

RESIDENT LEADER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NIA CULTURAL CENTER SUE JOHNSON

shares reflections on the assessment process: "Listening to diverse voices and exploring established and new data from every sector of the community led to an assessment that helped our collaborative to better understand the factors that led to disparate outcomes in exclusionary discipline. It set a direction that put us on the path to a community determined action plan that engaged the community to help to alleviate the problem."

As part of their assessment process, TFIU used the [THRIVE model](#) to organize quantitative and qualitative data and prioritize the most important factors for the collaborative to address. As a result of their assessment process, TFIU found that the community factors that residents felt should be prioritized were equitable educational opportunities, norms and culture, arts and expression, and social networks and trust. Because of the collaborative's focus on just and

fair systems for youth, TFIU also assessed poetry and art from students impacted by the juvenile justice system and found common themes around the desire for Black and Brown youth to achieve self-actualization and reach their full potential despite barriers. Recognizing how important these concepts are for youth development, the collaborative conceptualized an additional THRIVE factor of Being and Belonging to track progress in improving access to opportunities like leadership training, civic engagement, and workforce development.

DISRUPTING THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

Following the synthesis of TFIU's assessment results, there was a clear task in prioritizing and addressing the quality of education in Galveston. During listening sessions and interviews conducted by collaborative members, parents and students commonly reported stark differences in how Black and Brown students were treated in schools in terms of disciplinary rates, including classroom removal and in-school suspension. These differences impact the ability for students to engage with their peers and attend courses, with consistent class removal resulting in low morale and decreased academic performance.

This pattern of criminalizing and removing youth in predominantly Black and Brown schools reflects the phenomenon of the School-to-Prison Pipeline. This trend is marked by the enforcement of disciplinary policies that result in unfair

discrimination against Black and Brown youth, resulting in punishments that funnel them into the juvenile and criminal justice systems and thus contributing to the large disparities in incarceration rates. The School-to-Prison Pipeline reflects the main issues reported by Galveston youth and their families, where mistreatment and criminalization of youth threatens opportunities for education, impacts cultural norms and pathways, and harms social networks and community trust.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

In response to their assessment process and research, TFIU has focused their efforts on collecting data and stories that raise awareness of the School-to-Prison Pipeline, providing a platform for collective policy change and community advocacy. In 2020, TFIU's Policy Lead partnered with Third Coast Research and Development to develop a policy brief that described how Black and Brown students, on average, receive harsher discipline and negative labels within the school system. In releasing and sharing the policy brief, TFIU raised awareness of the different ways the School-to-Prison Pipeline impacts students and how it shows up in their own community.

TFIU mobilized residents and stakeholders around addressing inequitable school policies and engaged in efforts to perform an equity audit of the school district. The results of this equity audit have been used as a platform for further advocacy at the school district, local, and state levels. TFIU continues to disseminate the results of the equity audit to influence policymakers and educators of the need to revise Galveston ISD's school policies around disciplinary action.

PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH WHAT THEY NEED TO SUCCEED

The Future Is US mobilizes their multi-sectoral partnerships to provide services and opportunities for underserved youth and their families to support



RESIDENT LEADER JUNE PULLIAM SHARES,

"[We] looked for the LOVE, and made caring connections that united us. [We] allowed time for personal reflection and sharing. [We] did not preach but created a space for people to contribute. [We] practiced compassion. [We] respected that people were in different places around their own journey and analysis of race, class, power and privilege."

them in receiving education and connecting with resources. TFIU began organizing their annual "It Takes a Village" back-to-school event, which brings students and their families together in August to receive free haircuts, school supplies, food, and other resources and prizes that students need to feel prepared for a successful school year. TFIU partners with Nia Cultural Center and Honey Brown Hope Foundation to host learning sessions for students, parents, and caregivers to better understand their rights and protect youth in the school system regarding disciplinary actions. During these sessions, TFIU not only shares the research findings and data they have collected, they also seek to understand where barriers still exist for Black and Brown students and their caregivers to feel protected in schools and identify additional resources and partners that would benefit the community.

Along the way, TFIU offers opportunities for youth and adults to work together on raising awareness of discriminatory disciplinary practices through social media, online webinars, and conferences. By mobilizing a trusting village of caregivers and champions for underserved youth, TFIU hopes these resource-sharing events can act as an additional pathway to move young Galvestonians away from the School to Prison Pipeline.

"We know that we should be working toward changing policies in our school districts that would help all students get a quality education. Along with that we have learned that there are other issues that affect the quality education of black and unrepresented students. And so we also work to alleviate or remedy those issues as well, whether it be nutrition, or pre-kindergarten reading readiness." - **JONATHAN WARREN,**
CO-COORDINATOR OF THE FUTURE IS US.

USING ARTS TO MOBILIZE YOUTH AND PARENTS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUITY

Arts and cultural expression has been a powerful medium to facilitate healing and connection for vulnerable communities. The Future Is US partners with local artists and leaders in Galveston to bring residents together to discuss uncomfortable, but important, issues like mental health, racism, and healing. Within these spaces for building connection and trust through hard conversations, TFIU provides residents with platforms to connect on their policy and advocacy priorities that will positively impact the physical and mental wellbeing for Black and Brown communities.

TFIU organizes regular Soul Food Sessions, which are designed as authentic, safe spaces for residents to engage with each other in mindfulness activities and conversations centered around Black mental health. In TFIU's Black History Month Talent Shows, youth and community members are invited to showcase their talents, enjoy cultural foods and activities, and spend dedicated time to reflect on the history and impact of art as a tool for advocacy in underserved communities. To deeply engage youth in Galveston, TFIU also launched their Art in Activism project, which leads youth through a series of workshops around using art like photography, writing, and storytelling for activism, giving them space to learn new skills and lift up their voices among their peers and in community at events like the Galveston ArtWalk. By integrating arts, culture, and history into all of their advocacy activities, TFIU hopes that their approach to advocacy can make community members feel more comfortable contributing without the need for public health or social justice experience.

As a collaborative, The Future Is US has also worked to track state-level education policies in the Texas Legislature. With the recent emphasis on banning books related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and whitewashing history from social studies courses and textbooks, TFIU has worked with parents, youth, and local community-based organizations to better understand what these policies mean and how they can prevent the harms they cause for student learning and growth. In addition to providing education on policy, TFIU works with students and parents to develop and present written testimony sharing their concerns about the importance of mental healthcare, equitable disciplinary policies, and teaching history of racism and discrimination in schools at the State Board of Education and Texas Legislature.

CREATING A CONSCIOUS GALVESTON

Recognizing young people as the bright future of Galveston, TFIU hopes to continue activating youth and resident leaders to express themselves and advocate for changes that create better conditions for community members. With a strong vision of youth reaching their full potential and achieving their dreams despite the challenges faced in the past, TFIU will continue to raise awareness about the issues faced in schools and provide opportunities for residents to use their power and voice. As the collaborative grows and spreads their message nationally, their core mission remains in improving and transforming Galveston for the better.

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Co-Coordination | The Future is Us



**SCAN TO VIEW
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