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The Front Porch Gathering as a Compassionate Classroom

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*Event Recap*

[Event recap commences on the next page.]



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February 28, 2019

# Front Porch Gathering Recap | December 4, 2018 | Disproportionate Disciplinary Action in Schools: A Guide for Parents



On December 4, 2018, UT's Center for Community Engagement hosted its second Front Porch Gathering (FPG) of the season. An epilogue to last spring's FPG entitled *Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Systemic Criminalization of Male Students of Color*, this month's gathering focused on brainstorming content to include in the development of a guide book that identifies tools to navigate disciplinary practices and assemble resources to support Black and Latinx students in Central Texas.

The event was held at the [Turner Roberts Recreation Center](#) and food provided by [Lucille's Catering](#). Guests in attendance included community residents, K-12 educators, school administrators, youth justice advocates, and parents/guardians. The event opened with a community testimony from Ms. Helen Miller. Following was a presentation by executive leaders from Measure Austin who shared data on the disproportionate disciplinary practices within Pflugerville Independent School District .

Virginia Cumberbatch, Director of UT's Center for Community Engagement, kicked off the evening highlighting key takeaways from [February's FPG discussion on the school-to-prison pipeline](#). Schools continue to take Black and Brown students out of class at disproportionate rates, disrupting their learning and mental development. This begs the question "are schools properly disciplining students?" Cumberbatch closed with a statement summing up the purpose of the evening's discussion "We have not done the due diligence to keep parents informed, teach them to be advocates for their children, and build positive relationships with their children's teachers."

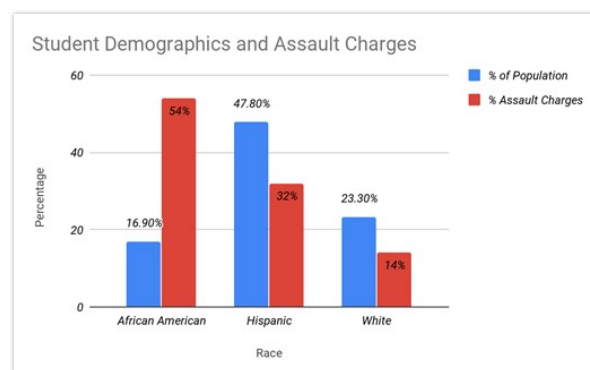


Ms. Helen Miller is a community advocate, the Vice President of [Colony Park Neighborhood Association](#), and an Advisory Board Member of [AISD's Alternative Learning Center](#) (ALC). As a grandmother, Miller spoke about her grandson being "beat down" by school disciplinary policies, as a result of the system not equipped to properly care for students with disabilities. Miller then explained that parents do not know how to advocate for their children; furthermore, parents of special education children do not know their special education rights. Examples of these rights include three day appeals, ARD meetings, and external assessments.

Miller transitioned her testimony share insight from her perspective as and ALC educator. ALC is AISD's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (D.A.E.P.) Per the AISD website, ALC is the "placement setting for students who are removed from the traditional school setting for disciplinary actions such as misbehavior or other infractions." Miller highlighted ALC's disproportionalities in punitive policies. According to Miller, despite poor mental health supports, approximately 40% of ALCs enrollment are considered special education students with social, emotional and/or mental differences. Furthermore, Black and Brown students are being punished more harshly for the same offenses of their White peers. White and Asian students stay at ALC for two to three days, whereas African American and Latinx students have to stay 20-30 days. Miller closed her testimony supporting the urgent need to retain good, empathetic educators and empower families with the tools to advocate for their children;

*"If you are truly an educator, all children can learn with the proper guidance. Educators need to take the extra mile with the parents/guardians to advocate and support [Black and Brown] kids."*

After, the community testimony, Eryc Byrd and Mercedes Perry from MEASURE Austin presented their findings from a recent [report on the disproportionate assault charges by race in PFISD](#). MEASURE's mission is to "to bridge divisions through data and public education in active partnership with local communities to address complex social problems." Some highlights of MEASURE's findings include;



- 54% of all assault charges were made against a Black student, despite Black students only making up 16.8% of PFSID's total enrollment
- Black students are being charged more harshly compared to peers of other racial groups when committing the same offense.

- Black and Brown students are receiving lengthier out-of-school suspensions compared to Asian and White students.

Through its C.A.R.E. Model, MEASURE is working in collaboration with PFISD administrators, parents, PFISD police, Black Pflugerville, and members of the community to form the PFISD Taskforce. This task force is working together to take action in closing the discipline disparity gaps. [Click here](#) to learn more about MEASURE's work in using data to shed light on the school-to-prison pipeline.

In the middle of MEASURE's presentation the facilitators opened the floor for dialogue and reflection on the key, yet, disturbing findings. Echoing youth criminal justice reform research, many attendees argued there is a need for more socio-emotional learning and restorative justice programming in schools. However, another attendee argued that having these programs is only half the battle. External constituents are unable to see the limitations of these programs. According to this community member, the personnel running these programs are not qualified to do so and/or simply do not want to deal with families that are in the greatest need of advocacy and support for their children. Hence, there is a need to analyze and measure the effectiveness of these programs.



After Measure Austin's presentation, the assembly dispersed into two small discussion groups to brainstorm various resources available to families and what information should be included in a guide for parents and guardians. Each group was facilitated by two of the following entrepreneurial community leaders:

1. Helen Miller, Advisory Board Member of [AISD's Alternative Learning Center](#) (ALC)

2. Mercedes Perry, Director of People Operations for [MEASURE Austin](#)
3. Eric Byrd, Chief of Staff for [MEASURE Austin](#)
4. Sarah Shaney, Cultural Proficiency Educator and Social Worker

Some of the key themes discussed in each group are as follows:

- The need for more resources in schools (fiscal and personell) to address these issues.
- Mandatory cultural competency training for teachers and school administrators.
- Leverage positive engagement between parents and teachers
- Intentional outreach and engagement with Black and Latinx parents – need their voices apart of the PTA.

To review the original notes from each group's discussion please [click here](#).

The Front Porch Gathering ended with closing remarks from Virginia Cumberbatch, encouraging the community to continue the conversation and thanking everyone for their contributions.

If you are interested in participating in future Front Porch Gatherings, please see our upcoming events below.

### **Future Front Porch Gatherings**

#### ***The Architecture of Food Deserts and Health Services***

Tuesday, February 19, 2019

Huston-Tillotson University | 900 Chicon Street Austin, TX 78702

#### ***Cultural Preservation and Place-Making in the Age of Growth and Gentrification***

Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Turner Roberts Recreation Center | 7201 Colony Loop Drive, Austin, TX 78724

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