

Editor's Note

Volume 3 of *Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community* concludes what has been, in every sense, a civic design experiment that worked. When we launched the Texas HBCU Democracy Schools Conference in 2022, no one knew whether it would last beyond a single gathering. Three years later, the conference has become a statewide civic institution, and the journal that grew from it has become its record of design and reflection. Together they demonstrate that thoughtful civic design has legs – and that it speaks to the times.

The conference's first two years led directly into the first volume of *Freedom Schools*, and each subsequent year has given rise to its own volume. Together, the series traces an unfolding argument about how democracy is made from the ground up through institutions willing to commit.

Year 1 named the HBCU as a democracy school.

A democracy school is an institution that learns and teaches civic practice in the public-work tradition as part of its core mission. It is defined not by the subject matter of its work – whether it is a doctor's office, an accounting firm, or a school – but by how it works. For example, in a doctor's office that becomes a democracy school, patients would be encouraged to reflect on the broader civic dynamics involved in their health and then to participate in training and support provided by the doctor's office for working with others in the doctor's care and with community partners to strengthen the community's civic capacity. The goal is durable civic capacity (among patients, professionals, and the broader public) built through the civic agency that the doctor's office facilitates. Democracy schools would naturally change how medical providers and staff carry out their duties, but in the process they might discover that the democracy-school practice is more effective, actually improving operational performance as well as moral purpose.

Year 2 examined how institutions build civic capacity. Year 3, documented here, turns to the moral and institutional power of Black educational leadership.

Through this progression a new field has begun to take shape – civic architecture, the study and design of institutions that form citizens and distribute public leadership. What began as a conference has become a framework for rebuilding democratic infrastructure.

Volume 3 marks *Freedom Schools*' third year in grand fashion, bringing together two of the most important democratic thinkers of our time, Nicholas Onuf and Harry C. Boyte, whose ideas shape the intellectual foundation of the *Freedom Schools* project. Onuf's constructivist insight – that rules, norms, and institutions are made through language and relationship – and Boyte's public-work tradition, which understands democracy as collective agency embedded in everyday institutions, converge here in the concept of civic design that animates the Democracy Schools movement. We call Democracy Schools a movement because it has grown from a single conference into a shared framework for rebuilding democratic life, linking campuses, communities, and public institutions in the practice of civic design. In conversation, Onuf's and

Boyte’s work reminds us that democracy is made not only through words but through the institutions and relationships that give those words life.

What emerges here is more than a collection of essays; it lays the groundwork for what we call *civic architecture* – a field that extends the insights of civic studies toward the design of institutions capable of sustaining democratic capacity.

The evolution of the *Freedom Schools* project can be seen in the sequence below, which maps how each annual conference generated the next volume and how both have together produced a coherent framework of democratic design.

| Year | Conference Theme | Journal Volume | Core Question | Location, Context |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2022 | The HBCU as Democracy School | Vol. 1 (2024) | What is a democracy school? How do HBCUs embody and renew this democratic tradition? | Huston-Tillotson University, Austin. The inaugural gathering established the concept and named HBCUs as institutions of civic formation. |
| 2023 | Democracy Schools, Civic Capacity Building, and the HBCU | Vol. 1 (2024) | How do HBCUs cultivate civic capacity linking education to institutional power, community building, democracy and citizenship? | Huston-Tillotson University, Austin. Expanded the framework to institutional dimensions of capacity building. |
| 2024 | The Development of the Democratic Person | Vol. 2 (2025) | How does the HBCU legacy operate as civic power and moral reconstruction, forming democratic persons, institutions, and larger social contexts? | St. Philip’s College, San Antonio. Focused on leadership formation, moral development, and democratic character. |
| 2025 | The Civic Power and Legacy of the HBCU and Black Educational History and Practice | Vol. 3 (2026) | How do HBCUs design democracy’s next architecture, connecting Black educational history to possible futures? | Huston-Tillotson University, Austin. The 150th anniversary of HT and the culminating theme linking historical legacy to civic design. |

These conferences did more than generate volumes of scholarship; they produced a living infrastructure that now spans Texas’s HBCUs and their partners in public life. Across its first

three years, the Democracy Schools project has accomplished what few initiatives of its scale have done. It has built the Texas HBCU Democracy Schools Alliance, a standing partnership among the state's nine HBCUs; established the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus, the first of its kind in the nation; and secured official recognition of Texas HBCU Day at the State Capitol. Hundreds of students have been trained through the Public Leadership program at the James L. Farmer House, translating campus learning into legislative authorship. Each success confirms the same lesson: when institutions act as civic infrastructure, democracy gains durable form.

As this volume goes to press, the conversation is turning to possible futures and what stakeholders have started to call *Civic 2035*, a ten-year design agenda developed at the Farmer House that asks a simple question with far-reaching consequences: *Who authors democracy, and through what institutions does it endure?* Civic 2035 offers an affirmative answer. It envisions democracy not as a contest of elites or parties but as a public architecture authored by *the people* through their schools, universities, congregations, workplaces, and civic associations. It calls for rebuilding democracy from the inside out, through the very institutions where citizens learn to exercise judgment, share responsibility, and build the commons together.

This next phase widens the horizon of *Freedom Schools*. What began as a state initiative has become an emerging national framework for civic design, a movement that aligns democratic theory, institutional practice, and public leadership. In this sense, Volume 3 is both culmination and turning point. It captures the close of the founding cycle and signals the beginning of a larger field that will guide the work ahead.

The Democracy Schools network enters its fifth year with momentum and moral clarity. The 2025 conference, hosted again at Huston-Tillotson University during its 150th anniversary, stands as evidence that the HBCU tradition remains a living source of democratic imagination. The essays and documents collected here, spanning scholarship, civic authorship, and institutional record, show a movement maturing into method and a practice becoming a field.

Civic 2035 names a powerful possible horizon: a blueprint for the next generation of democratic institutions, designed not for crisis response but for civic durability. From Texas, we offer this work as proof that democracy can still be built, patiently, publicly, and together.



The *Democracy Schools* Alliance (Alliance)
of Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
Students, Faculty, Community Supporters and Others

The Alliance is the network of Texas HBCU students, faculty, staff, and their community partners and supporters across Texas who bring the Texas *Democracy Schools* Conference Series together each year in the spring.

The History

Student Leadership Development and Civic Engagement at Huston-Tillotson University (HT)

- The Alliance was formed in 2019 from a partnership between HT and Central Texas Interfaith (CTI) after HT faculty and staff reached out to CTI for help developing experiential learning opportunities for interested HT students, faculty, staff, and community partners. Faculty and staff sought to create experiential learning opportunities for students and others to connect their campus experience with politics in the tradition of strong meaningful citizenship. Strong meaningful citizenship is a distinct leadership practice in which *cultural* views and practices of democracy and citizenship hold. Democracy and citizenship represent egalitarian and inclusive ways of life, much more than government and voting. Strong meaningful citizens are leaders who learn to “let go” control and work with other citizens, rather than work “on” them or “for” them. They bring people together in and through community traditions and institutions (like colleges and universities) across differences that typically divide constituencies to build a world to live in that people believe in. Strong meaningful citizenship is locally embedded, directed, and resourced, inclusive and ideas oriented. People assemble great power working together this way. They become civic agents capable of contributing to solutions to public problems in meaningful ways. Strong meaningful citizenship helps to build a civic culture in which citizens learn to become public, powerful people, and democracy comes to be understood as the work of everyone.

CTI Partnership

- HT faculty and staff sought to recruit CTI to work with students and the campus community due to CTI’s unique methods of building community. CTI trains leaders of community institutions and organizations rather than individuals to engage the democratic process, working together to develop and address issues of common concern to communities and families. The methodology is known as “broad-based community organizing.”
- The citizen-centered “HT way” of working with people and communities, rooted in the Texas and American HBCU, shares in a remarkably similar vision of a democratic society as CTI, as a bold responsive inclusive community. HT & CTI both seek to expand democracy by expanding citizenship.

An Innovative Approach

- The HT-CTI partnership promises educational programming with positive impacts to be had all around, especially for students. The partnership offers possibilities for development of new methodologies which combine the hands-on practical organization-building skills of broad-based community organizing with the broad focus of the HBCU on the promise of democracy and democratic renewal rooted in cultural understandings of democracy and citizenship. Alliance stakeholders call the approach being pioneered “broad-based *cultural* and community organizing.”

Remarkable First 5 Years

- **Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series** and the **Alliance**. Building on the HT-CTI partnership, HT students and their supporters reached out to other HBCU students and advocates across Texas. Students and stakeholders sought to bring all Texas HBCU supporters together to speak as one on behalf of the values and interests of the community and to reflect on the civic traditions and practices of HBCUs. The annual Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series was born from their efforts. To date three *Democracy Schools* conferences have been held (2022, 2023, 2024) and the results have been remarkable. The “Alliance” is the network of Texas HBCU students, faculty, staff, and their community partners and supporters across Texas who bring the Texas *Democracy Schools* Conference Series together each year.
- **Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus**. At the year three conference (2024), state lawmakers announced the formal creation of a new legislative caucus, the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus (TX HBCU Caucus), devoted to addressing challenges Texas HBCUs face including disparities in higher education funding. Until now, no such legislative caucus has existed in any state anywhere in America. The TX HBCU Caucus is a direct result of Alliance efforts through the *Democracy Schools* conferences. After the Inaugural year one conference Alliance stakeholders established a caucus as a goal and began working with state lawmakers (Democrat and Republican) to create one. Alliance stakeholders saw a caucus as a way for stakeholders to partner with lawmakers to help bring attention to the deep, largely unknown democratic legacy of Black education in Texas’ and America’s HBCUs, and the institutions for which HBCUs serve as a hub.
- **Politics Lab of the James L. Farmer House (Farmer House)**. HT created the Farmer House as a new University institute in 2022 to support Alliance efforts and to work to renew traditions of strong meaningful citizenship across the broad spectrum for people to learn about, engage, and enjoy. The Farmer House honors the life and legacy of the American civil rights luminary, James L. Farmer, Jr. Farmer, Jr. founded the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE), a cornerstone organization of the American civil rights movement. CORE pioneered the use of nonviolent direct action, organizing the 1961 Freedom Rides that took an integrated group through the Deep South.
- Farmer traces his roots as a child to Austin, Texas, and Samuel Huston College, now Huston-Tillotson University, where his father, Dr. James L. Farmer, Sr., was a faculty member, serving from 1925-1930. A historical marker commemorating Farmer, Jr.’s life sits at his family home in East Austin, only blocks from HT.

- **New Peer Review Academic Journal.** University of Texas (UT) Press was an exhibitor at the *Democracy Schools* conference year one, and in the days and weeks afterwards conference stakeholders met with UT Press to explore ways of collaborating. An agreement was reached to create *Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community*. Published by UT Press, *Freedom Schools* is a new peer review academic journal dedicated to publishing proceedings of the Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series and to elevating the distinct voices of HBCUs, meaning research and writing in the tradition of “democracy schools.” Democracy schools is the framework for research and practice that Alliance stakeholders use to guide their work. The framework draws on cultural views and practices of democracy as not simply voting but as an egalitarian and inclusive way of life and on understandings of citizenship in Black educational history where the views and practices of aspirational, inclusive and dynamic citizenship have flourished. Democracy schools highlights the vital role of community traditions and institutions in bringing people from diverse backgrounds and orientations together to solve community problems and build a democratic society.
- The Farmer House provides editorial leadership of *Freedom Schools*.

Additional Relevant information

- Farmer House Website: <https://htu.edu/farmerhouse>
- Farmer House mission statement: The Politics Lab of the James L. Farmer House trains a new generation of leaders in the civil rights vision of American democracy as a bold responsive inclusive community, connecting the past, the present, and the future. Huston-Tillotson University nurtures a legacy of leadership and excellence in education, connecting knowledge, power, passion, and values.

History of the Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Legislative Caucus

The Caucus emerges from the efforts of students, faculty, and staff of Texas HBCUs and their community partners and supporters across Texas who came together, starting the spring of 2022, to bring attention to the deep, largely unknown democratic legacy of Black education in Texas' and America's HBCUs, and the institutions for which HBCUs serve as a hub, and to work with lawmakers and others to address disparities in Texas higher education funding that challenge Texas HBCUs. The network of stakeholders has come to be known as the *Democracy Schools* Alliance of Texas HBCUs (Alliance).

The roots of the Alliance (and the Caucus) reach back to the classroom, to experiences of leadership development in the tradition of strong meaningful citizenship that faculty and staff at Huston-Tillotson University (HT) sought to create for interested students and others to learn about, engage, and enjoy. HT faculty and staff wanted to create opportunities for students and others to connect their campus experience with the passion and energy that politics in the tradition of strong meaningful citizenship has to offer. Leadership defined as strong meaningful citizenship is non-partisan, public work that is possible when people come together through community traditions and institutions across differences (of race/ethnic, class, political party) that tend, to divide to build a world they believe in.

HT students and their supporters responded to the opportunity with enthusiasm. Building on their experiences they reached out beyond campus to other HBCU students and supporters across Texas to explore ways of coming together to speak as one on behalf of the values and interests of the community and the common good. The Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series was born from their efforts. The conference series is a way for students and stakeholders to share stories and get connected, to reflect on the ongoing work they are doing across the state to strengthen the civic traditions and practices of HBCUs, to plan new initiatives, and to gather material for the new *Freedom Schools* journal, which the University of Texas Press publishes in association with HT. *Freedom Schools*, like the Caucus, is another initiative that emerges from stakeholders' efforts.



Student Leaders Speak, Press Conference (Year Two)

To date three *Democracy Schools* conferences have been held (2022, 2023, 2024) and the results have been remarkable. At the year three conference (2024), state lawmakers announced the formal creation of a new legislative caucus, the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus, devoted specifically to addressing challenges Texas HBCUs face, including disparities in higher education funding of Texas HBCUs. No such legislative caucus exists in any state anywhere in America. Until now.

The Caucus is a direct result of the *Democracy Schools* conferences that stakeholders organize and host through the Alliance. Stakeholders see the caucus as a vehicle for working with lawmakers to help bring attention to the deep, largely unknown democratic legacy of Black education in Texas' and America's HBCUs, and the institutions for which HBCUs serve as a hub.



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Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus PROCLAIMED at Year Three Democracy Schools Conference of Texas HBCUs



Press Conference to Announce Support for Creation of a Texas HBCU Caucus Year Two of the Effort



Student Leaders Speak, Press Conference (Year Two)



Power Meeting at the Capitol (Year Two)



Lobbying at the Capitol (Year Two)



Statewide Training with Students (Year Three)



Student Networking at PVAMU (Year Two)



Year Two Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series



Year One with State Lawmakers at Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference



Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Legislative Caucus

Mission Statement

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus shall support the nine HBCUs in our state: Paul Quinn College, Wiley College, Huston-Tillotson University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas College, St. Philip's College, Jarvis Christian University, Texas Southern University and the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and Southwestern Christian College, and their affiliated fraternities, alumni networks, and graduate institutions/programs.

The Caucus will nurture leadership and excellence in higher education and celebrate the essential role that Texas HBCUs play in building a shared Texas future.

The Caucus acknowledges HBCUs as democracy schools, reflecting America's highest democratic aspirations, promoting practices of strong meaningful citizenship for Texans past, present, and future. Strong meaningful citizenship reaches back to the nation's founding. The model of citizenship is important as Texas diversity and prosperity grows. Expanding democracy defined as strong meaningful citizenship is the historic mission HBCUs serve, and arguably no set of institutions in Texas life has done more to serve this purpose than the HBCU, despite well documented disparities in higher education funding in Texas in beyond that HBCUs work to overcome.

Goals of the Caucus

Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus members are asked to:

1. Assemble a majority of lawmakers in the Texas Legislature who –
 - a. Represent an HBCU in their district, or who otherwise support HBCUs, including those lawmakers who are graduates of an HBCU in Texas;
 - b. Understand and appreciate the vital role of HBCUs in creating a healthy thriving democratic society, and;
 - c. Who will commit to funding all nine of Texas' HBCUs, public and private, commensurate with the role they have played in developing the shared prosperity of our state.
2. Build a network of supporters across Texas who understand and appreciate the vital role of Texas HBCUs, with the intention of raising awareness to issues at these institutions and commit to their improvement
 - a. Meet regularly with the Planning Committee of the *Texas HBCU Conference Series: Democracy Schools, Civic Capacity Building, and the HBCU*.
 - b. Participate in the annual Texas HBCU Conference wherever it may take place in the State of Texas;
 - c. Meet with students of HBCUs in their district at least twice per year;

- d. Establish a Texas HBCU Internship program within the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, which will serve to give students from across the state firsthand experience with the legislative process during and out of Session, from year to year.

Caucus Structure

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus (TLHC) will be organized as a regular legislative caucus with executive officers, staff, and budget.

- A. **Executive Officers.** The Caucus shall appoint from within its membership a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and, when feasible, a Treasurer to manage Caucus funds. The Chair and Vice Chair should represent an HBCU in their district, without respect to party affiliation. The Chair and Vice Chair may serve consecutive, two-year terms. As soon as possible after the formation of the Caucus, Bylaws should be approved by the membership of the Caucus. Whenever a new member joins the Caucus, they should sign a consent agreement to the bylaws, which should act as the confirmation of their membership to the Caucus.
 - a. The Chair of the Caucus will be responsible for directing legislative action for the Caucus during and out of Session, including filing flagship bills, making press statements, convening members for regular meetings during the Legislative Session, and taking other necessary actions to ensure the success of the Caucus;
 - b. The Vice Chair of the Caucus will assist the Chair in the above activities, and serve as Chair for regular meetings of the Caucus in the absence or removal of the Chair;
 - c. The Caucus Secretary will be responsible for timely and accurate communication with other members of the Caucus and the Texas HBCU Conference organization, in addition to keeping an accurate journal of Caucus proceedings during regular meetings;
 - d. The Treasurer shall be the financial point of contact and manager of caucus finance and fundraising efforts, including establishing a caucus bank account for the maintenance of funds.
 - e. The Caucus, through its leadership above described, shall establish additional officers as necessary to fulfill the mission of the Caucus in and out of Session.
- B. **Staff.** The Caucus' staff shall be composed, initially, of an Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Operations Manager. Caucus staff may be drawn from member offices and will be considered as full-time in and out of session. The Executive Director of the Caucus will work closely with the Chair of the Caucus to ensure Caucus operations are well managed, and legislative objectives of the Caucus are achieved. The Executive Director shall have the power to propose new staff positions as needed, and proposal bylaw amendments as necessary to maintain the good standing of the Caucus and fulfill its mission. Though not required, it is strongly encouraged that the Executive Director be a graduate of an HBCU and is familiar with the contours of HBCU issues in the Southern United States, as traditionally understood (states spanning Texas to North Carolina). The Deputy Director of the Caucus shall be responsible for supporting the ED in their regular business with the Caucus and may be delegated duties and powers to this end. The Operations Manager will be responsible for maintaining administrative needs of the Caucus, including for scheduling purposes, financial management, and other duties as assigned by the Executive Director to ensure the Caucus acts in compliance with Texas House and Senate rules.
- C. **Budget.** At the earliest opportunity the Caucus shall establish a budget, which will be maintained through ethical fundraising and regular appropriate channels available through the Legislature.

HBCU Facts

1. Texas HBCUs produce \$1.3b in economic impact^[1] for the state, and thousands of jobs.
2. HBCUs outperform their peer institutions (non-HBCUs) in outcomes of educational attainment for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students^[2].
3. HBCU tuitions have risen faster and more steeply than other institutions of higher education across the state^[3], meaning Pell Grant Awards (even at the new maximum amount for an academic year of \$7,395) are covering less and less of the cost for students.
4. Many HBCUs across the state are not located in urban areas, which means many students bear additional costs to achieve their education, including transportation and healthcare.^[4]
5. Public HBCU students receive Pell Grants at much higher rates than their non-HBCU public state counterparts, with PVAMU and TSU receiving 63% and 70% respectively in 2020.^[5]
6. For public HBCU graduates across the state, student debt will be 30% higher than their non-HBCU public counterparts.^[6]
7. Despite being the state's only land-grant HBCU, Prairie View doesn't receive the full balance of their federally funded dollars matched by the State^[7]
8. Despite the lack of institutional support for *all* HBCUs across the state, our institutions have remained resilient and been the primary producers of our Black professionals across the state and nation.^[8]

^[1] United Negro College Fund, "Economic Impact of Texas' HBCUs."

^[2] Wall Street Journal Editorial—November 27, 2021.

^[3] Washington Informer, "Record \$1.7T of student debt drowns HBCU borrowers" (WI Guest Author, Nov 4, 2021)

^[4] KUT 90.5, "In West Texas, Some Rural Students Struggle to Meet Demands of College Life" (Jonathan Baker, April 27, 2018)

^[5] *Ibid*

^[6] Houston Chronicle, "Texas HBCU [grads] may benefit the most from Biden's student loan forgiveness, data shows" (Anastasia Goodwin, Sep 19, 2022)

^[7] Houston Chronicle, "History shows Texas skimps on [PVAMU] land-grant funds" (Brittany Britto, June 24, 2021)

^[8] Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights, "The Significant Value of [HBCUs]" (Staff, Feb 16, 2022)

CONTACT

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Texas HBCU Resolutions Archive (2023 – 2025)

Prepared for *Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community*, Volume 3 (University of Texas Press, 2026).

The 89th Texas Legislature’s concurrent recognition of April 4, 2025, as Texas HBCU Day marked the first statewide proclamation of its kind. Through House Resolution 376 and Senate Resolution 361, lawmakers formally honored the fourth annual Texas HBCU Conference Series, Democracy Schools, held at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin. The resolutions acknowledged the historic and ongoing role of Texas’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in cultivating citizenship, leadership, and democratic renewal.

Adopted by both chambers, the proclamations represent the first time in state history that HBCUs were collectively recognized as civic institutions central to the moral and educational life of Texas. The texts also identify Huston-Tillotson University’s James L. Farmer House Politics Lab and the Democracy Schools initiative as vital contributors to this civic tradition, embedding their work in the legislative record.

These resolutions therefore stand as documentary evidence of institutional authorship – marking the entry of Texas’s HBCUs into the official democratic architecture of the state.

Two years earlier, the 88th Texas Legislature formally established the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus through House Resolution 2189, recognizing a statewide coalition of lawmakers committed to strengthening and sustaining HBCUs in Texas. Together, these resolutions document a growing movement to institutionalize HBCUs within the civic and democratic fabric of the state, and the following section preserves the official texts of these measures.

The following section provides the full and accurate text of each resolution as enrolled by the Texas Legislature. For transparency and verification, readers may consult the official records of the State of Texas at the links below, where each resolution is preserved in its authenticated legislative form:

- House Resolution 376 (89th Legislature, 2025):
<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/html/HR00376F.htm>
- Senate Resolution 361 (89th Legislature, 2025):
<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/html/SR00361F.htm>
- House Resolution 2189 (88th Legislature, 2023):
<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/html/HR02189I.htm>

Each resolution is reproduced here in its entirety, with formatting adjusted only for consistency with *Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community* style conventions.

House Resolution 376 (89th Legislature, 2025)

Adopted by the Texas House of Representatives on March 13, 2025.

WHEREAS, The fourth annual Texas HBCU Conference Series, Democracy Schools, is taking place at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin on April 4 and 5, 2025; and

WHEREAS, Established at Huston-Tillotson in 2022, the conference series emerged from the efforts of a campuswide leadership development and civic engagement initiative, Public Leadership in Faith and Social Justice Traditions; students in the program organized intentional small group discussions, drawing inspiration from a century of grassroots activism; the Freedom Schools of the civil rights era inform the concept of Democracy Schools as a framework to explore civic capacity building and community institutions over time; and

WHEREAS, The conference brings together students, faculty, and staff from the state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as well as interested community partners; scholars and professionals explore a cultural view of democracy and citizenship with perspectives from a broad range of disciplines and fields, including literature, science, media, humanities, and the arts; and

WHEREAS, In its fourth year, the conference's theme is the civic power and legacy of HBCUs and Black educational history and practice; presenters will examine the collective ability of civil society groups, organizations, and institutions to strengthen and renew democracy; and

WHEREAS, The conference series highlights the vital role HBCUs have long played in developing strong, meaningful citizenship that contributes to the advancement of democracy in our state and nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 89th Texas Legislature hereby recognize April 4, 2025, as Texas HBCU Day and extend to all those participating in the Texas HBCU Conference Series sincere best wishes for a meaningful and productive event.

Senate Resolution 361 (89th Legislature, 2025)

Adopted by the Texas Senate on April 3, 2025.

WHEREAS, The Senate of the State of Texas is pleased to recognize the fourth annual Texas HBCU Conference Series, Democracy Schools, which is taking place at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin on April 4 and 5, 2025; and

WHEREAS, Established at Huston-Tillotson University in 2022, the conference series emerged from the efforts of a campus-wide leadership development and civic engagement initiative, Public Leadership in Faith and Social Justice Traditions; students in the program organized intentional small group discussions, drawing inspiration from a century of grassroots activism; the Freedom Schools of the civil rights era inform the concept of Democracy Schools as a framework to explore civic capacity building and community institutions over time; and

WHEREAS, The conference brings together students, faculty, and staff from the state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as well as interested community partners; scholars and professionals explore a cultural view of democracy and citizenship

with perspectives from a broad range of disciplines and fields, including literature, science, media, humanities, and the arts; and

WHEREAS, In its fourth year, the conference will feature a theme focused on civic power and the legacy of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Black educational history and practice; presenters will examine the collective ability of civil society groups, organizations, and institutions to strengthen and renew democracy; and

WHEREAS, The conference series highlights the vital role Historically Black Colleges and Universities have long played in developing strong, meaningful citizenship that contributes to the advancement of democracy in our state and nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 89th Legislature, hereby recognize April 4, 2025, as Texas HBCU Day and extend to all participating in the Texas HBCU Conference Series sincere best wishes for a meaningful and productive event; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be prepared in honor of this special occasion.

House Resolution 2189 (88th Legislature, 2023)

Adopted by the Texas House of Representatives on April 12, 2023.

WHEREAS, The Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities Legislative Caucus was established on April 12, 2023; and

WHEREAS, The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus strives to nurture leadership and excellence in higher education and to celebrate the invaluable role that the state's HBCUs play in promoting practices of strong and meaningful citizenship; the caucus includes lawmakers of the Texas Legislature who have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to representing and supporting HBCUs through funding, public awareness efforts, and other initiatives; and

WHEREAS, The members of the caucus will regularly meet with the Planning Committee of the Texas HBCU Conference Series, participate in the annual Texas HBCU Conference, and hold biannual meetings with students at HBCU campuses in their districts; in addition, the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus is partnering with the Texas Legislative Black Caucus to establish an internship program that will help students gain firsthand experience with the legislative process; and

WHEREAS, The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus supports each of the state's nine HBCUs, which include Paul Quinn College, Wiley College, Huston-Tillotson University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas College, St. Philip's College, Jarvis Christian University, Texas Southern University and the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and Southwestern Christian College, as well as their affiliated fraternities, alumni networks, and graduate programs; and

WHEREAS, HBCUs are essential to the higher education system in the Lone Star State, and the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus is sure to serve as a valuable resource to these noteworthy institutions; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 88th Texas Legislature hereby recognize the creation of the Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities Legislative Caucus and extend to the group's members sincere best wishes for success in their endeavors; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be prepared for the Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus as an expression of high regard by the Texas House of Representatives.

Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Legislative Caucus

Mission Statement

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus nurtures a legacy of leadership and excellence in education celebrating the vital role Texas HBCUs play in building a shared Texas future. HBCUs are democracy schools promoting practices of strong meaningful citizenship for Texans to learn about, engage in, and enjoy. Democracy schools are vital to the functioning of a healthy thriving democratic society.

Texas HBCUs were born during Reconstruction when civic capacity rooted in community institutions (or strong meaningful citizenship) is how many Americans thought about the challenges of democracy. Civic capacity rooted in community institutions is the model for higher education practice that the HBCU represents. Today again institutions in American life are being called upon to play such a role. Expanding democracy defined as strong meaningful citizenship is the historic mission HBCUs serve, and arguably no set of institutions in Texas life has done more to serve this purpose than the HBCU, despite well documented disparities in higher education funding in Texas in beyond that HBCUs work to overcome.

Primary Goals

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus will:

Assemble a majority of lawmakers in the Texas Legislature who:

Represent an HBCU in their district, or who otherwise support HBCUs, including those lawmakers who are graduates of an HBCU in Texas;

Understand and appreciate the vital role of HBCUs in creating a healthy thriving democratic society, and;

Who fund Texas HBCU, public and private, commensurate with the role Texas HBCUs play in developing the prosperity of our state.

Build a network of supporters across Texas who understand and appreciate the vital role of Texas HBCUs

(The caucus will) Meet regularly with the Planning Committee of the Texas HBCU Conference Series: Democracy Schools, Civic Capacity Building, and the HBCU.

Participate in yearly/bi-yearly conference

Caucus Structure

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus will be organized as a regular legislative caucus with executive offices, staff, and budget.

HBCU Facts

Texas HBCUs produce \$1.3b in economic impact[1] for the state, and thousands of jobs.

HBCUs outperform their peer institutions (non-HBCUs) in outcomes of educational attainment for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students[2].

HBCU tuitions have risen faster and more steeply than other institutions of higher education across the state[3], meaning Pell Grant Awards (even at the new maximum amount for an academic year of \$7,395) are covering less and less of the cost for students.

Many HBCUs across the state are not located in urban areas, which means many students bear additional costs to achieve their education, including transportation and healthcare.[4]

Public HBCU students receive Pell Grants at much higher rates than their non-HBCU public state counterparts, with PVAMU and TSU receiving 63% and 70% respectively in 2020.[5]

For public HBCU graduates across the state, student debt will be 30% higher than their non-HBCU public counterparts.[6]

Despite being the state's only land-grant HBCU, Prairie View doesn't receive the full balance of their federally funded dollars matched by the State[7]

Despite the lack of institutional support for all HBCUs across the state, our institutions have remained resilient and been the primary producers of our Black professionals across the state and nation.[8]

[1] United Negro College Fund, "Economic Impact of Texas' HBCUs."

[2] Wall Street Journal Editorial—November 27, 2021.

[3] Washington Informer, "Record \$1.7T of student debt drowns HBCU borrowers" (WI Guest Author, Nov 4, 2021)

[4] KUT 90.5, "In West Texas, Some Rural Students Struggle to Meet Demands of College Life" (Jonathan Baker, April 27, 2018)

[5] Ibid

[6] Houston Chronicle, "Texas HBCU [grads] may benefit the most from Biden's student loan forgiveness, data shows" (Anastasia Goodwin, Sep 19, 2022)

[7] Houston Chronicle, "History shows Texas skimps on [PVAMU] land-grant funds" (Brittany Britto, June 24, 2021)

[8] Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights, "The Significant Value of [HBCUs]" (Staff, Feb 16, 2022)



Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Legislative Caucus **DRAFT**

CONTACT

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Mission Statement

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus shall support the nine HBCUs in our state: Paul Quinn College, Wiley College, Huston-Tillotson University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas College, St. Philip's College, Jarvis Christian University, Texas Southern University and the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and Southwestern Christian College, and their affiliated fraternities, alumni networks, and graduate institutions/programs.

The Caucus nurtures leadership and excellence in higher education and celebrates the essential role Texas HBCUs play in building a shared Texas future. The Caucus acknowledges HBCUs as democracy schools, reflecting America's highest democratic aspirations, promoting practices of strong meaningful citizenship for Texans past, present, and future. Strong meaningful citizenship reaches back to the nation's founding. The model of citizenship is important as Texas' diversity and prosperity grows. Expanding democracy, defined as strong meaningful citizenship, is the historic mission HBCUs serve. No set of institutions in Texas life has done more to serve this purpose than HBCUs, despite well documented disparities in funding these institutions work to overcome.

Goals of the Caucus

Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus members are asked to:

1. Assemble a majority of lawmakers in the Texas Legislature who –
 - a. Represent an HBCU in their district, or who otherwise support HBCUs, including those lawmakers who are graduates of an HBCU in Texas;
 - b. Understand and appreciate the vital role of HBCUs in creating a healthy thriving democratic society, and;
 - c. Who will commit to funding all nine of Texas' HBCUs, public and private, commensurate with the role they have played in developing the prosperity of our

state.

2. Build a network of supporters across Texas who understand and appreciate the vital role of Texas HBCUs, with the intention of raising awareness to issues at these institutions and commit to their improvement by –
 - a. Meeting regularly with the Planning Committee of the *Texas HBCU Conference Series: Democracy Schools, Civic Capacity Building, and the HBCU*.
 - b. Participating in the annual Texas HBCU Conference wherever it may take place in the State of Texas;
 - c. Meeting with students of HBCUs in their district at least twice per year;
 - d. Establishing a Texas HBCU Internship program within the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, which will serve to give students from across the state firsthand experience with the legislative process during and out of Session, from year to year.

Caucus Structure

The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus (TLHC) will be organized as a regular legislative caucus with executive officers, staff, and budget.

- A. **Executive Officers.** The Caucus shall appoint from its membership a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and, when feasible, a Treasurer. The Chair and Vice Chair should represent an HBCU in their district, without respect to party affiliation. The Chair and Vice Chair may serve consecutive, two-year terms. As soon as possible after the formation of the Caucus, Bylaws should be approved by the membership of the Caucus. Whenever a new member joins the Caucus, they should sign a consent agreement to the bylaws, which should act as the confirmation of their membership to the Caucus.
 - a. The Chair will be responsible for directing legislative action for the Caucus during and out of Session, including filing flagship bills, making press statements, convening members for regular meetings during the Legislative Session, and taking other necessary actions to ensure the success of the Caucus;
 - b. The Vice Chair will assist the Chair in the above activities, and serve as Chair for regular meetings of the Caucus in the absence or removal of the Chair;
 - c. The Caucus Secretary will be responsible for timely and accurate communication with other members of the Caucus and the Texas HBCU Conference organization, in addition to keeping an accurate journal of Caucus proceedings during regular meetings;
 - d. The Treasurer shall be the financial point of contact and manager of caucus finance and fundraising efforts, including establishing a caucus bank account for the maintenance of funds.
 - e. The Caucus, through its leadership described above, shall establish additional officers as necessary to fulfill the mission of the Caucus in and out of Session.
- B. **Staff.** The Caucus' staff shall be composed, initially, of an Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Operations Manager. Caucus staff may be drawn from member offices and will be considered as full-time in and out of session.
 - a. The Executive Director of the Caucus will work closely with the Chair of the Caucus to ensure Caucus operations are well managed, and legislative objectives of the Caucus are achieved. The Executive Director shall have the power to propose new staff positions as needed, and proposal bylaw amendments as necessary to maintain the good standing of the Caucus and fulfill its mission. Though not required, it is strongly encouraged that the Executive Director be a graduate of an HBCU and is familiar with

the contours of HBCU issues in the Southern United States, as traditionally understood (states spanning Texas to North Carolina)

- b. The Deputy Director of the Caucus shall be responsible for supporting the ED in their regular business with the Caucus and may be delegated duties and powers to this end.
- c. The Operations Manager will be responsible for maintaining administrative needs of the Caucus, including for scheduling purposes, financial management, and other duties as assigned by the Executive Director to ensure the Caucus acts in compliance with Texas House and Senate rules.

- C. **Budget.** At the earliest opportunity the Caucus shall establish a budget, which will be maintained through ethical fundraising and regular appropriative channels available through the Legislature. The Budget should be sufficient to maintain the above-described caucus staff at prevailing salary levels for similar leadership positions. The budget should also be set at such a level as to ensure consistent communications between member institutions, conduct normal caucus operations, and give funding to the Conference in whole or part based on historic Conference funding levels.

Facts & Talking Points

1. Texas HBCUs produce \$1.3b in economic impact^[1] for the state, and thousands of jobs.
2. HBCUs outperform their peer institutions (non-HBCUs) in outcomes of educational attainment for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students^[2].
3. HBCU tuitions have risen faster and more steeply than other institutions of higher education across the state^[3], meaning Pell Grant Awards (even at the new maximum amount for an academic year of \$7,395) are covering less and less of the cost for students.
4. Many HBCUs across the state are not located in urban areas, which means many students bear additional costs to achieve their education, including transportation and healthcare.^[4]
5. Public HBCU students receive Pell Grants at much higher rates than their non-HBCU public state counterparts, with PVAMU and TSU receiving 63% and 70% respectively in 2020.^[5]
6. For public HBCU graduates across the state, student debt will be 30% higher than their non-HBCU public counterparts.^[6]
7. Despite being the state's only land-grant HBCU, Prairie View doesn't receive the full balance of their federally funded dollars matched by the State^[7]
8. Despite the lack of institutional support for *all* HBCUs across the state, our institutions have remained resilient and been the primary producers of our Black professionals across the state and nation.^[8]

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^[8] Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights, "The Significant Value of [HBCUs]" (Staff, Feb 16, 2022).



The Texas Historically Black Colleges and University's (HBCUs) Legislative Caucus advances a sustained public conversation about higher education policy in Texas and support for Texas HBCUs in a Texas and American democratic renewal. The Caucus fosters collaboration among lawmakers, students, and community leaders.

Texas HBCUs and Locations

1. Huston-Tillotson University – Austin
2. Prairie View A&M University – Prairie View
3. Texas Southern University – Houston
4. Jarvis Christian University – Hawkins
5. Paul Quinn College – Dallas
6. Wiley College – Marshall
7. Southwestern Christian College – Terrell
8. St. Philip's College – San Antonio
9. Texas College – Tyler

Why fund Texas HBCUs?

Increased funding furthers citizenship

- America's HBCUs represent an institutional practice of personalist philosophy in higher education that is a powerful model of democratic life and practice. The practice reclaims and revives democracy and citizenship defined as "We the People," the uniquely American story, practice, and ideal of democracy as the work of everyone, not simply politicians and government. The words of long time Supreme Court judge Justice Felix Frankfurter capture the American citizen-centered tradition of democracy. Frankfurter said in democracy "the highest office is the office of citizen." Frankfurter's words echo President Lincoln's government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Democracy, defined as the work of everyone, brings back emphasis on citizens working across lines of difference on public problems and stresses education as the way that citizenship is developed. The tradition is crucial in our time of polarization and political dysfunction and needs reviving for higher education and for all of America. For more than a hundred years, HBCUs have been leaders in citizen education and centers of personalist philosophy expressing the citizen-centered tradition of democracy, and the worth and dignity of every child. Benjamin Mays, long time president of Morehouse College and seminal leader in HBCUs for decades, described HBCUs as "ongoing experiments in democratic education."

Increased funding is a prudent investment of tax-payer dollars

- HBCUs significantly outperform their cohort in key demographics.

Increased funding is fair

- HBCUs have been underfunded at the state level in particular across America from the beginning.

Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series

- The Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus emerges from the annual Texas HBCU *Democracy Schools* Conference Series. *Democracy Schools* conferences unite students, lawmakers, and leaders to discuss civic engagement, democracy, and leadership. The 2025 event will be held at Huston-Tillotson University on April 4-5.

Point of Contact

- Freeman Crawford, IV, President of Public Leadership – freeman.crawford04@gmail.com

Sources

- <https://uncf.org/hbcuimpactreport/2024/texas>
- <https://htu.edu/txhbcuconference/>
- <https://www.txhbcucaucus.com>

A piece of light-colored, textured paper is torn horizontally across the middle of the frame. The left side of the paper is folded into a rectangular shape, resembling a small envelope or a piece of paper being pulled apart. The right side of the paper is jagged and torn, revealing a bright white background behind it. The text "HBCUs as Democracy Schools" is written in a black, serif font across the white background.

HBCUs *as Democracy Schools*

April 2022

Robert Ceresa, member of the conference planning team, Inaugural Texas HBCU Conference at Huston-Tillotson University

Conference Readout: Civically Engaged Institutions Came Together

Conference goers attending the inaugural Texas HBCU Conference at Huston-Tillotson University, on the weekend of April 1-2, 2022, felt the affirming love and support of a community of people taking public action led by students grounded in a shared set of values. Strong meaningful citizenship; faith in the pursuit of justice; tolerance; and respect for diversity were on full display. A powerful identity that emerges from a broad tradition of political philosophy at the heart of American democracy (the citizen builder as the architect of democracy from communitarian philosophy, participatory variants thereof, specifically) provided the conference's animating force, I am convinced. The spirit unfolded in conference goers' embrace of the opportunity to come together, starting nearly eighteen months ago, in the campus student civic engagement project initiated by Huston-Tillotson University and Central Texas Interfaith (CTI). The idea for the conference emerged among students involved in the project. The spirit was apparent in events that took place over the two days.

The powerful sense of community among Texas HBCUs across different institutional contexts (HBCUs public and private; large and small; urban and rural; religiously affiliated and not) is what we hoped for on the conference planning team when we embarked on the journey to organize the event. The conference was the culmination of months of effort by students, faculty, administration, community leaders civic and lay. At the heart of our efforts was a belief in a definition of citizenship: the citizen builder as the architect of democracy from communitarian philosophy.

We sought to begin a meaningful public conversation about public policy, broadly speaking, at the state level, specifically, and beyond, for creating resources and support for Texas HBCUs, both private and public, commensurate with the contributions and the role that HBCUs play in building a shared Texas future. Keeping alive the powerful feeling of community that the conference tapped into and the commitment to work together in the weeks and months ahead will be important if we are to see our hope for adequate funding for Texas HBCUs become a reality. Making change takes time and we want to be part of the process working together and with others.

We are inspired by ideas, but we are not idealistic. Civically engaged institutions, the conference theme, is where I believe meaningful change in Texas higher education policy will come from. Civically engaged institutions provides a model for creating experiences of strong meaningful citizenship for students to engage in and learn from in the Public Leadership project that Huston-Tillotson University and CTI are developing.

At the conference stakeholders pledged to explore expanding the model to other Texas HBCUs and to other Texas Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate organizations. A network like this with students at the center is sure to make an impact.

Student engagement during the conference was apparent in the many wonderful photos of the conference available now on social media and in the photos that we are collecting to commemorate the historic event. Student engagement is also apparent the comments a student made to his professor during the conference, which was overheard by others. “Dr. Ceresa, I get what you’ve been trying to teach us now, the lights bulbs are going off in my head,” Dasyn Bracks-Henderson, a Huston-Tillotson University student said. The conference sought to center students in every aspect of the conference process, creating opportunities for development of students’ public leadership skills and abilities.

Among the conference’s accomplishments were the following. 150-plus people attended, including seven of nine Texas HBCUs. The campuses sent delegations of students, faculty/staffs, and community partners. Breakout sessions with faculty and displays of programmatic excellence took place during the two days. A student roundtable offered the chance to hear testimony of students from across Texas. A legislative panel gave participants the opportunity to engage lawmakers with a track record of support for Texas HBCUs, and, also, lawmakers with representing HBCUs. The following lawmakers participated. State Representatives – Sheryl Cole, (Huston-Tillotson University, Austin); Barbara Gervin-Hawkins (St. Philips College, San Antonio); Jarvis Johnson, District 139, Huston. State Senators – Sarah Eckhardt (Huston-Tillotson University, Austin); Boris Miles (Texas Southern University, Huston). The Day One Keynote speaker was notable Austin civil rights attorney David Henderson. The Day Two Keynote was State Representative Jasmine Crocket (District 100, Dallas). Robert F. Smith, Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Vista Equity Partners offered a video message of support. A discussion of statewide strategies with Doug Greco from CTI gave participants the chance to think ahead to next steps.

The conference was a remarkable glimpse into the future. Next steps are taking shape now with students and stakeholders as members of civically engaged institutions. Please look for opportunities to get involved and join us in building the network.







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HBCUs *as Democracy Schools*

April 2023

Conference Readout: HBCUs as Democracy Schools
Dr. Robert M. Ceresa, Director, Politics Lab of the James L. Farmer House

Students, faculty, administrators, and community partners from across Texas' Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) came together for a remarkable event on the campus of Huston-Tillotson University (HT) on Friday-Saturday, March 31-April 1, 2023: *Texas HBCU Conference Series, Year Two, Democracy Schools, Civic Capacity Building, and the HBCU*.

A brief description of some of the accomplishments of the conference, conference events and activities, as well planning involved in organizing the conference follows.

The conference was a remarkable success and a glimpse into the future. Next steps are taking shape now with students and stakeholders. Please look for opportunities to get involved and join the network building collaboration on our campuses.

Planning, Research, Accomplishments

- The conference was organized by a conference planning team with participation of stakeholders from all nine Texas HBCUs and community partners. Students were involved in every step of the process.
- Months of research, planning, and discussion took place, including trainings with students and outreach with lawmakers at the State Capital.
- Recalling the sacred democratic traditions that gave birth to the HBCU and that HBCUs still today represent was the purpose for the conference and guided the conference planning team's efforts. The traditions place the contributions that HBCUs make in powerful light. Bold responsive inclusive community as a vision for American democracy is how the traditions can be summed up. The traditions have been profoundly enriched and deepened by the contributions of black Americans.
- *Democracy schools and the HBCU*. The ideal of American democracy as a responsive inclusive community is a vision for a democratic society with deep roots in American history that go all the way back to the nation's founding. The ideal and the vision are the heart of significant movements for freedom in American history and beyond, including notably the American civil rights movement. The vision is also the heart of the American HBCU.

- *More about the traditions.* Lineaments of political thought that cohere as a broad tradition of political culture come together in the vision of American democracy as a bold responsive inclusive community. Civic republicanism, pluralist democratic theory from a realist perspective, communitarian political philosophy, progressive populism, all play a role. Adherents of the tradition are not sanguine about the challenges of race and class in American life, but they also are not cynical about them either. Central elements of the tradition include the practice of strong meaningful citizenship summed up in the idea of the citizen builder as the architect of democracy. Strong meaningful citizenship highlights the role of community life, traditions, and institutions in development of the democratic individual. Ways of knowing rooted in a sense of identity (oneself as a leader defined socially by traditions of family, faith, and community); faith in the pursuit of justice; tolerance; respect for diversity and more are all central. The tradition is marked by a belief in the dignity of work of many kinds that contributes to building the world.
- *The Politics Lab of the James L. Farmer House at Huston-Tillotson University.* After the success of the inaugural Texas HBCU conference a year ago, in the summer of 2022, the idea of American democracy as a bold responsive inclusive community became the basis of a new University institute at HT commemorating the life and legacy of James L. Farmer, Jr. Farmer is the American civil rights luminary who traces his roots as a child to Austin, Texas and Samuel Huston College, now Huston-Tillotson University, where Farmer's father, Dr. James L. Farmer, Sr., was a faculty member, serving from 1925-1930. Farmer, Jr. founded the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE), a cornerstone organization of the American civil rights movement. CORE pioneered the use of nonviolent direct action, organizing the 1961 Freedom Rides that took an integrated group through the Deep South. A historical marker commemorating Farmer, Jr.'s life sits at the home in East Austin where the Farmer family lived. The home is only blocks from HT.
- An important conference goal was to bring the Texas HBCU community together to speak as one with lawmakers at the State Capital about higher education policy in Texas, including funding for Texas HBCUs both public and private. The conference planning committee believes Texas HBCUs deserve greater attention and coordinated support from state institutions for the role they play in expanding democracy (defined as strong meaningful citizenship) and building a prosperous shared Texas future. "Democracy schools" was developed to help conference stakeholders accomplish this goal. Democracy schools draws attention to the challenges of a democratic society rooted in civic capacity and community institutions. The formation of a democratic people, or strong meaningful citizenship, is how the idea can be summed up. Expanding democracy defined as strong meaningful citizenship is the historic mission HBCUs serve, and arguably no set of institutions in American life has done more to serve this purpose than the HBCU, despite well documented disparities in higher education funding in Texas in beyond that HBCUs work to overcome.

Accomplishments

- 130-plus people attended the conference. Five of nine Texas HBCUs were represented. Four institutions sent campus delegations of students, faculty/staffs, and community partners (Prairie View A&M University, Jarvis Christian University, St. Philips College, Huston-Tillotson University).
- Breakout sessions with faculty and practitioners in the field took place during the two days: eight presentations of scholarly research by authors, two presentations of professional practice by field experts. Preeminent American democracy theorist Dr. Harry C. Boyte presented *Lessons from Rosenwald Schools Movement* with scholars Shawanda Stewart, Dr. Julie E. Hudson, and Dr. Robert M. Ceresa from HT, and David Porter, who is now active in Rosenwald restoration efforts in Central Texas.
- Institutions presented displays of programmatic excellence.
- University of Texas (UT) Press was a conference exhibitor. UT Press collaborates with the Politics Lab of the James L. Farmer House at HT to publish *Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community*. *Freedom Schools* is a new peer review academic journal developed by conference stakeholders after the Texas HBCU conference year one. *Freedom Schools* will public conference procedures as well as research and commentary in the tradition of democracy schools.
- A student roundtable offered the chance to hear testimony of HBCU students from across Texas. Conference goers heard about the role of the HBCU in students' lives. Democracy schools came alive in the stories students told. Democracy schools prepare people for leadership defined as strong meaningful citizenship in the tradition of the citizen builder.
- Students accompanied by faculty and staff, conference planning team members, and community partners visited the State Capital in Austin, TX to interact with lawmakers with a direct say in shaping Texas higher education policy. The request to legislators that the conference groups prepared was that lawmakers form a statewide Texas legislative HBCUs caucus that would be a vehicle for ongoing conversation and planning among lawmakers with HBCUs in their districts and others who support the historic mission and purpose HBCUs serve. The goal of the caucus would be the creation of resources and support through public policy for Texas HBCUs, both private and public, in a manner that is commensurate with the contributions and the role that HBCUs play in building a shared future in Texas.

- *Preparing for the visits.* To prepare students and others for the visits, conference goers learned about practical hands-on organizing skill of broad-based community organizing rooted in faith traditions in a training provided by leaders and organizers from the Public Leadership-Central Texas Interfaith Project. Strong meaningful citizenship from civic studies was a major focus of the training.
- *The visits.* Among the many visits the groups made included conversations with Republican Senator Bryan Hughes, Democratic Representative Ron Reynolds, and senior staff members from various Senate and House Offices.
- Students heard a legislators' discussion panel to learn about resources, strategies, and action steps to take to collaborate with lawmakers and HBCU leaders to address development and support for Texas HBCUs. Students heard from two lawmakers representing Huston-Tillotson University in the State Legislature – State Representative Sheryl Cole and State Senator Sarah Eckhardt. Both have a track record of support for Texas HBCUs.













Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Legislative Caucus **DRAFT**

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 - c. Who will commit to funding all nine of Texas' HBCUs, public and private, commensurate with the role they have played in developing the prosperity of our

SPC Hosts State HBCU Conference

April 12, 2024

SPC Marketing & Strategic Communications



On April 5 and 6, St. Philip's College hosted the Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Conference Series, Democracy Schools. The event brought together nearly 200 students, faculty, staff, administrators, and political figures from across Texas to discuss the vital role that HBCUs play in shaping the future of the state. The conference series, now in year three, emerged from campus-wide leadership development and civic engagement initiatives at Huston-Tillotson University (Austin, TX.). The series seeks to reclaim and renew visions of American democracy rooted in civic capacity, community traditions, and institutions.

The conference featured a variety of panel discussions, breakout sessions, and keynote addresses, ranging in topics from "HBCU Legacies: Empowering the Next Generation of Citizen Professionals" to "The Democratic Commitment to Change: Interrogating the Political Psychology of Race and Justice."

The conference had several notable speakers, including Mayor of San Antonio Ron Nirenberg, Bexar County Commissioner for Precinct 4 Tommy Calvert, 436th District Court Judge William H. "Cruz" Shaw III, and State Representatives Ron Reynolds (Dist. 27), Jolanda Jones (Dist. 147) and Barbara Gervin-Hawkins (Dist. 120).

Dr. Joelle Nanivazo, the lead organizer of the conference and an Assistant Professor of Economics and Interim Chair of Social & Behavioral Sciences at St. Philip's College, expressed her gratitude, stating, "The Texas HBCU conference was a year-long

planning effort from SPC faculty, staff, and students. The planning and volunteer teams worked tirelessly to ensure the conference agenda was engaging and interesting.” To conclude the conference, Vice President for Academic Success Randall Dawson delivered closing remarks, and Rep. Ron Reynolds presented St. Philip’s College President Dr. Adena Williams Loston with a proclamation from the State of Texas.





A piece of light-colored, textured paper is torn horizontally across the middle of the frame. The left side of the paper is folded into a rectangular shape, resembling a small envelope or a piece of paper being pulled apart. The right side of the paper is jagged and torn, revealing a bright white background behind it. The text "HBCUs as Democracy Schools" is written in a black, serif font across the white background.

HBCUs *as Democracy Schools*

June 2025

Conference Readout: Four Years of Remarkable Growth

The fourth annual *Democracy Schools* Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Conference took place Friday and Saturday, April 4-5, 2025, at Huston-Tillotson University (HT), the fourth in the conference series. The network of students, faculty, and administration of Texas HBCUs and their partners and supporters make up the Democracy Schools Alliance of Texas HBCUs (Alliance) that brings the conference together each year. This year's conference showed steady growth and accomplishment. Accomplishments are a testament to valuable contributions Texas's HBCUs make to building a prosperous, shared, inclusive (in short civic) future in Texas and beyond.

- Students in the Alliance testified at a public hearing of the Higher Education Committee of the Texas House of Representatives on behalf of a bill they themselves wrote in conjunction with State Representative Ron Reynold's office, House Bill (HB) 3296. The hearing took place April 15, 2025. The bill was left pending in committee but what is clear as a result of the conferences is how the nature of the public conversation in Texas about the role of HBCUs is changing. The question is becoming not whether to properly fund Texas' HBCUs, but how to properly fund them. HB 3296 called for establishing a consortium of Texas HBCUs to work with community partners to provide civic education to the people of Texas free of charge. The bill would have benefited all nine Texas HBCUs by building community partnerships, enhancing research capabilities, improving curriculum development, and upgrading infrastructure.
- On Day One of the conference (Friday, April 4, 2025), conference goers received training and then met with lawmakers at the State Capitol to discuss HB 3296, addressing the unique contributions of Texas HBCUs to democracy's flourishing and the need to adequately fund Texas HBCU in state higher education policy. To raise public awareness and support for the conference and HB 3296, and to honor of civil rights luminary James Farmer Jr, conference goers marched to the Capital to meet with lawmakers. Farmer founded the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE), a cornerstone organization of the American civil rights movement, which pioneered the use of nonviolent direct action, and organized the 1961 Freedom Rides that took an integrated group through the Deep South. Farmer traces his roots as a child to Samuel Huston College, now Huston-Tillotson University (HT), where his father, James Farmer, Sr., was a faculty member of 1925-1930. A historical marker commemorating the life of Farmer, Jr sits at the home in East Austin where the Farmer family lived, only blocks from Huston-Tillotson University.

- In the run up to the conference during the legislative session and for months before, student-led Alliance stakeholders met with lawmakers at the State Capitol to talk with lawmakers about the historic legacy of HBCUs and then to ask lawmakers to join the new bi-partisan Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus as a show of support. The caucus was formed in 2024 from previous efforts of Alliance student and stakeholder cohorts. The caucus is first of its kind anywhere in America! Student's and stakeholder's efforts paid off as the caucus added its first formal members as follows: Rep Ron Reynolds, Senator Royce West, Senator Sarah Eckhardt, Rep Alma Allen, Rep Toni Rose, Rep Terry Wilson, Rep Daniel Alders. Antron D. Johnson joined as the caucus Executive Director, Tytiana McWhorter as Legislative Director, and leading student in the Alliance, Freeman Crawford, IV as Student Director. Crawford, a Political Science major at HT, has been an integral part of the success of the conference and the Alliance over the last three years.
- The conference models rich and engaging conversation in an atmosphere of mutual respect with prominent keynote speakers and discussants from across the political spectrum. Year 4, Dr. Richard A. Johnson, a leading voice among Texas Black conservatives, was the Day 1 keynote and was joined by Travis County Commission Jeff Travillion as a discussant. Following, Austin City Council member Natasha Harper-Madison marched with the conference to the State Capitol. Day 2, prominent Black political theorist of American democracy Dr. Melvin Rogers headlined with TC Broadnax, City Manager of Austin, giving the mid-day keynote. The afternoon keynote was delivered by Dr. Bill Flores, former President of the University of Houston Downtown Campus. Additionally, leading engaged democracy theorists Harry C. Boyte and Marie Louise Strom, as Co-Founders of The Institute of Public Life and Work in Minneapolis, MN, offered presentations to the conference. In plenary sessions, Joe Rubio, National Co-Director of the Industrial Areas Foundation Network joined Harry C. Boyte and Dr. Melvin Rodgers, with leaders from Texas IAF organizations in Austin, Houston, and San Antonio participating as well.

- Seven of Nine Texas' HBCUs participated in the conference, with approximately 150-plus participants attending events over the two days.
- HBCU faculty, staff, community partners and supporters offered presentations during breakout sessions.
- University of Texas Press and Barbara Jordan Leadership Institute from Texas Southern University were conference exhibitors. UT Press publishes Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community, the peer review academic journal that has emerged from the conference, the second volume of Freedom Schools is forthcoming in August 2025.

See the following links below for some of the media coverage of the year 4 conference.

Austin American Statesman (shared by news outlets across the country)

<https://www.statesman.com/story/news/politics/2025/04/07/hbcu-students-march-to-texas-capitol-advocate-for-support-hustontillotson/82796679007/>

Social Media

Huston-Tillotson University Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/HustonTillotson/posts/pfbid0wPtjwBW8NZ6QKNRbo9kGA2h8pyi4yJbVKLb3q96xkgftgxdYYfApbJfenVn44jMCI>

Texas HBCU Legislative Caucus

Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61558010142084>

Instagram – <https://www.instagram.com/txhbcucaucus/>

State Rep Ron Reynold's

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1378166023288952>

<https://www.facebook.com/ronreynoldsesq/posts/pfbid0269B34aFGeZovj6nfW9LgZZ2pakqwin5XhpGb2kBL7QNjiRs8yQGzLTcfo5AD1LUjl>

LOCAL & STATE

HBCU students form Caucus, propose civic education bill



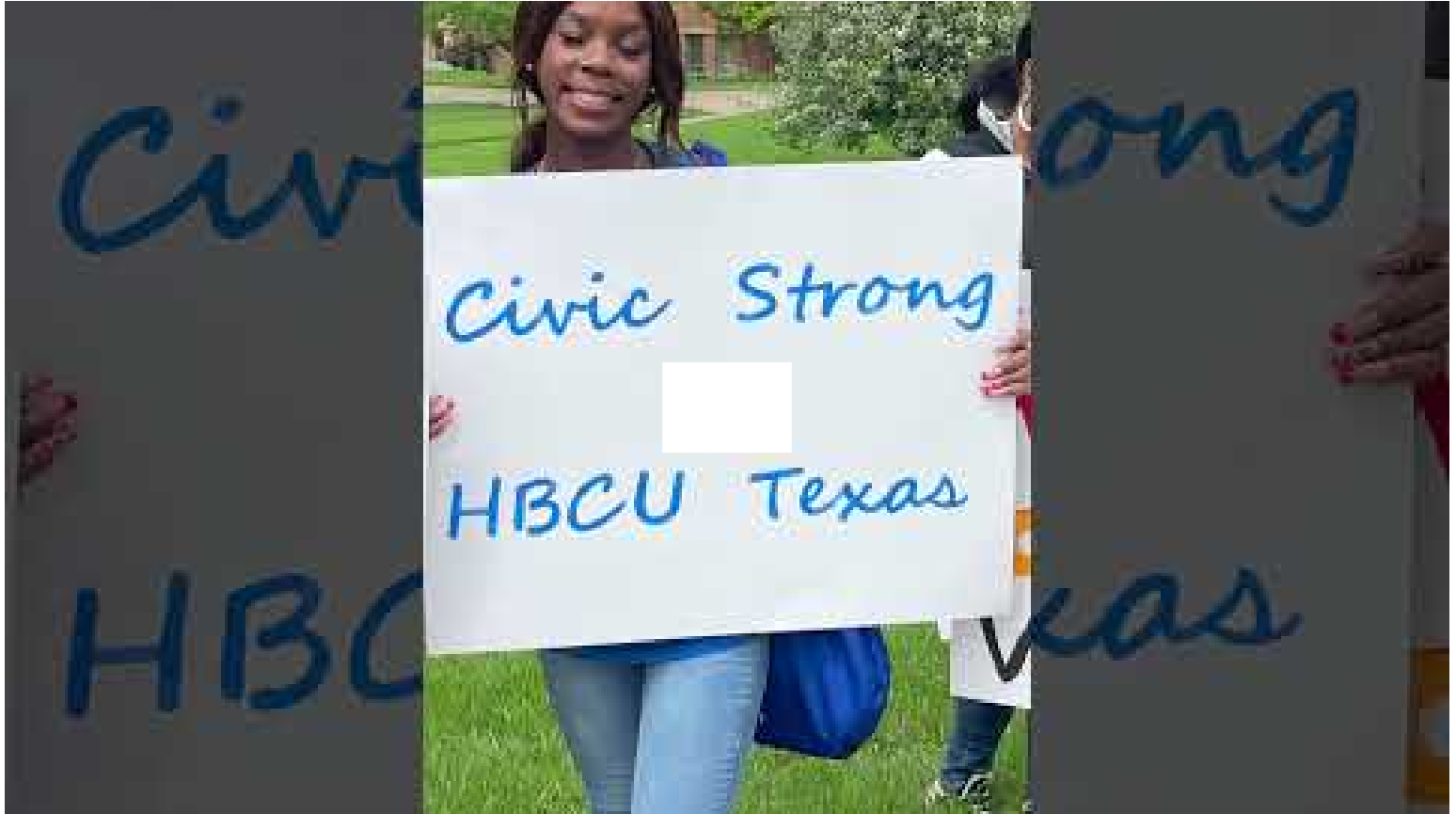
by Tannistha Sinha

APRIL 23, 2025



Students from Texas HBCUs are urging lawmakers at the Capitol to pass a new civic education bill, House Bill 3296, which could bring funding and resources to these institutions. Credit: Tannistha Sinha/Houston Defender

In a history-making move, students from Texas's nine Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) formed the state's first HBCU Legislative Caucus, taking an active role in the 89th legislative session.



The nine institutions include Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas College in Tyler, Texas Southern University in Houston and Wiley College in Marshall.

Led by **State Rep. Ron Reynolds** (D-Missouri City), Texas students launched the state's first **HBCU Legislative Caucus**, which they call a "bipartisan coalition" dedicated to advancing the nine HBCUs.

Reynolds said the caucus will help students land internships and experience at the Texas Capitol. It also aims to combat Trump's Executive Order 14151 he signed on Jan. 20, 2025, titled "Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And Preferencing."



Students formed Texas' first HBCU Legislative Caucus, led by State Rep. Ron Reynolds to recommend policies at the state level. Reynolds filed the student-led HB 3296. Credit: Tannistha Sinha/Houston Defender



The Caucus' website states, "The formation comes at a critical moment as the Department of Education shutdown threatens institutions already receiving disproportionately less funding, resources and support. These challenges directly impact Texas HBCUs, which generate an estimated \$1.5 billion in economic impact annually while achieving remarkable graduate retention rates exceeding 70%."

One of the Caucus's first actions was writing House Bill 3296, which establishes an education consortium to explain how the government and voting systems work for Texans and addresses funding and graduation rates in HBCUs.

Reynolds filed the bill on behalf of the students. He said it was the first time such a bill had been introduced in the House that would address historic disparities in HBCU funding as compared to primarily white institutions, opening doors to new funding sources.

"History books will remember this moment," Reynolds said to the students. "History books would talk about these students that were part of the inaugural HBCU Legislative Caucus, the 'good trouble' that everyone in

this room made to make our society better history.”

While equitable funding for historically Black colleges and universities aims to close longstanding gaps in higher education, some lawmakers and advocates say strengthening civic education is just as critical to learning about government structures.



According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center’s annual Constitution Day Civics Survey, fewer than half in a new survey could name all three branches of government. A 2018 Johns Hopkins survey also found that a

third of Americans could not name their governor and that 80% could not name their state legislator, among other information about state government.

The bill will allow Texas citizens access to civic education, **also known as** citizen or democracy education. Civic education **empowers citizens** to participate in democratic processes by providing information, promoting engagement and fostering a demand for good governance.



Tytiana McWhorter, a student of Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law and legislative aide for House Rep. Ron Reynolds, aims to garner support for House Bill 3296 through advocacy. Credit: Tannistha Sinha/Houston Defender

Students, accompanied by faculty and local leaders, also marched from Huston-Tillotson University to the Texas Capitol to garner lawmakers' support for the bill. They chanted, "Civic strong HBCU Texas" and "History moves when we move," while marching down the streets of Austin.

"We have a vast majority of the HBCUs in Texas that are here and supporting our efforts," said Tytiana McWhorter, a student of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University and legislative aide for Reynolds.

"The march brings all the HBCUs together and makes a public expression of showing our unity and our power," she said. "We want to make sure that the house members are aware of the bill and that we have their support in advance."

Key provisions of House Bill 3296



House Bill 3296 promotes voter engagement, digital access and faculty support at HBCUs, and requires grantees to collaborate with local entities to provide civic education. Credit: Tannistha Sinha/Houston Defender



The bill goes into effect in the 2025-26 academic year if passed.

Only accredited HBCUs in Texas are eligible. The funds will be used for faculty and staff recruitment, digital resources, research and curriculum upgrades, infrastructure improvements and hosting civic education events that include voter registration drives.

HBCUs will also collaborate with local entities such as municipalities, counties, community organizations, public libraries and institutions of higher education to provide civic education. A joint committee of these representatives will monitor and evaluate the program's implementation and impact on a triennial basis.

A long road ahead

Freeman Crawford IV, a third-year student at Huston-Tillotson University, said, "This is a bill that our brothers and sisters at HBCUs wrote for us and for y'all."

He added that the bill has to pass through several steps before becoming law.

The bill will go to the 11-member House Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Rep. Terry Wilson, a Republican, and must secure seven members' votes to proceed to the House floor. From the House's 88

Republican and 62 Democratic members, it needs a majority of the representatives to vote “yes” before it heads to the Senate. If the Senate passes the bill, then Gov. Greg Abbot gets to sign it into law.



Austin City Council District 1 Councilmember Natasha Harper-Madison extended her support for the bill. Credit: Tannistha Sinha/Houston Defender

Attending the march, Austin City Council District 1 Councilmember Natasha Harper-Madison said the bill, if passed, will allow Texans from myriad backgrounds to access civic education.

“We the people have the responsibility to bridge the gap by creating a statewide partnership between Historically Black Colleges and Universities and municipalities,” Harper-Madison said. “This [bill] could build a robust infrastructure and civic inclusion.”