



How They Came to Be **Furr High School's XQ Super School Journey**

Furr High School was a school in need of significant academic improvement. After more than a decade of steady improvement, the school's graduation rate exceeds both district and state averages for the diverse, primarily Latinx population it serves. But that's not enough, according to Furr educators. Their goal? Transform the comprehensive urban high school into a student-centered learning experience where students are empowered to tackle environmental injustice and contribute to community revitalization, all while preparing for college and career. At Furr, students have opportunities to participate in projects, mentorships, internships, and partnerships with organizations that are aligned to academic goals and community needs.

Furr High School (Furr) shows students that they have the power to change their community and the world at large.



Discover Furr High School

Furr High School is built on the belief that every student can excel when presented with authentic opportunities to build 21st-century skills for global citizenship. Through an intentional focus on supporting students in building relationships with the environment and with the community, Furr graduates leave high school equipped to succeed in postsecondary education, design their own futures, and positively impact the world. Called “the first environmental justice high school in the country” by the Houston Chronicle, Furr High School is a place where students spend time collecting water samples throughout the city of Houston’s waterways, conducting trash audits in adjacent community parks, and planning a public protest about environmental concerns impacting the health and wellness of their community.

Furr High School is a public school built in 1961 that now serves over 1100 students in grades 9-12.

Furr High School Design Features

1. Partners that power real-world learning

Furr’s school model links hands-on learning with a strong academic core to encourage students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world experiences. The school’s leaders have accomplished this by establishing community and industry partnerships and by building opportunities in a variety of settings including individually, in small groups, through technology, and in the field. Today, the school’s partners include the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas A&M University, Houston’s Parks and Recreation Department, Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, the Student Conservation Association, as well as other environmental, cultural, and community organizations. Projects at Furr have included planting fruit trees to create an edible forest in one of the city’s food deserts and building a community garden on the site of the school and local park across the street, Herman Brown Park. Furr’s partnership coordinator works with partners to further mentor students and provide meaningful career exploration and internship opportunities.



Sarah Taylor

Science Department Chair

“Working at Furr High School has made me more aware of environmental justice versus environmental injustice. It’s made me want to be more involved in my own personal community and the school community because of where we are located and how we can help our students be more aware of their own environmental impact.”



Morgan Oseguda

11th Grader

“When I came to Furr, I remember talking to my teachers, telling them how much I wanted to become a writer. Through my three years here, I became more than a writer. I became a leader, a critical thinker, a collaborator, and, most of all, a better student. After graduating, I plan to go to college in New York City to major in English.”

2. “Ready for the world” graduates

Furr serves a high-need student population that comes from across the district. The school’s driving goal is to improve access to high-quality learning opportunities for students who are statistically unlikely to thrive in college and career. Furr features a new, three-story, \$56 million building supported by a district bond initiative that enhances the school’s STEAM focus and includes modern, flexible learning spaces. Using the district’s Global Graduate profile, Furr ensures graduates practice skills like leadership, critical thinking, skilled communicating, adaptability, and productivity alongside academic learning. Furr offers a dual credit program providing students an opportunity to earn an associates degree and all students choose an “endorsement” (similar to college “majors”) including STEM, business and industry, arts and humanities, public service, and multidisciplinary.

3. Supporting teachers in shifting practices

One strategy for instructional change that Furr’s leaders have deeply committed to is the establishment of peer-to-peer exchange and mentoring. A group of seven teachers at the school have become project based learning (PBL) trailblazers in their community and are in the process of becoming peer leaders. These teachers are learning through deep design study with a PBL veteran teacher specialist of Furr High School and Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, along with support from organizations such as Texas A&M University. Other teachers are exploring the tenets of field-based learning through weekly professional learning communities (PLC’s) that focus on the social-emotional side of field-based learning, helping teachers to develop connections and build relationships that lead to more engaging work in the classroom. The school’s “social and emotional ambassador team” designs and delivers professional learning for their colleagues, including sharing resources and strategies in PLCs, coaching and supporting teachers, and developing a webinar on social and emotional learning (SEL) for all teachers to access virtually. The Furr staff’s deep commitment to learning with, and from, each other has made a significant difference in students’ learning.

4. Pathways to community improvement

Furr’s home in East Houston is a community beset by environmental and economic challenges. The school’s leaders and educators have made it a central goal to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to address these challenges and improve their own community. In 9th grade, students select from three pathways that each address a different aspect of the community. The pathways include: Agriculture and Natural Resources—an immersive model that uses local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences as a foundation for the study of subjects across the curriculum; Global Medicine and Research—a pathway meant to connect students with innovation, research, and education in health and wellness; and Media and Technology, which focuses on conducting research to highlight social and environmental justice challenges and potential solutions in the context of the modern era.



Jazmyn Aguirre

12 Grader

“Touring the city of Houston through place-based education opened up my eyes to the inequities in disadvantaged communities. Devastated by what I saw, I asked myself, what can I do? How can I give back? After graduating, I plan to major in biology and education, with hopes of becoming a teacher in an area that needs me most.”

Theory Into Action

Student work: Learning to do and doing to learn

Juan (Johnny) Gallegos’ first years at Furr were years of personal growth. Having recently experienced family losses and changes, his work at Furr allowed him to begin to heal, learn, and grow by building connections with the people and nature around him. Johnny planted over 100 fruit trees on campus and established a community garden at Herman Brown Park. He has now graduated but continues to serve as a steward of these spaces. In his senior year, Johnny also re-chartered the Future Farmers of America on Furr’s campus, a career pathway program that had been absent for over 30 years that consists of over 500 affiliated members. The motto for their program is “Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.” Today, club members at the school undertake hundreds of hours of service and stewardship every year.

Competencies Met:

- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Responsible Decision Making

State Standards Met

- ✓ §112.37.C.9.E: Evaluate the effect of human activities, including habitat restoration projects, species preservation efforts, nature conservancy groups, hunting, fishing, ecotourism, all-terrain vehicles, and small personal watercraft, on the environment
- ✓ §130.2.C.5.A: Develop and demonstrate leadership skills and collaborate with others to accomplish organizational goals and objectives

A portrait of a graduate

Furr’s leaders have committed to infusing their Portrait of a Graduate into everything the school does by engaging students, teachers, support staff, families, and community in meaningful conversations to garner commitment and ownership for what it means to be a leader, a responsible decision-maker, an adaptable and productive citizen, a critical thinker, a skilled communicator, and a college-ready learner.

Student data

Furr serves 1114 students in grades 9-12 this school year.

35%	Black
56%	Latinx
23%	White
2%	Other
1%	Asian
>1%	American Indian or Alaska Native
0%	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
100%	Free Lunch
23%	Special Education
67%	Enrolled in Max number of Advanced courses*

*Enrolled in Pre-AP & AP Courses Max allowed dual credit enrollment for 2020-2021 School Year

Blogs and Media

- [8 Tips From School Leaders to School Leaders on Remote Learning](#)
- [At This Innovative Urban High School Project-Based Learning Addresses Environmental Justice](#)
- [Hope Thrives From This High School's Community Garden](#)
- [Students at Houston 'environmental justice' school among young people seeking climate action](#)
- [Furr High School becomes "green school of the community"](#)

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