



Implementing School Participatory Budgeting:

REFLECTIONS FROM ARIZONA EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

This evaluation overview shares educator and school leader experiences implementing the School Participatory Budgeting (School PB) process during the 2023-24 school year. School PB is an innovative civic learning process that fosters student agency, collaboration, and critical thinking while providing inclusive opportunities for students to shape their school communities and participate in civic life. Through School PB, students engage in authentic, student-centered democratic decision-making about funding allocations for campus improvement projects. The experience of participating in School PB aims to empower students to lead as community problem-solvers and acquire the skills and attitudes needed for lifelong active civic engagement.



Teacher Sponsor works with her fifth-grade class on a school-based participatory budgeting process, where students get a certain amount of money and collectively decide how to spend it, at Ed and Verma Pastor Elementary School in Phoenix on Nov. 20, 2023. Courtesy of Rob Schumacher/The Republic

Through focus groups and interviews with partners across four school districts, Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA) and Arizona State University (ASU) examined the professional development training activities and implementation support provided to implement School PB, focusing on satisfaction, successes, and challenges. Findings indicate significant strides in student leadership, civic participation, and inclusive decision-making and highlight the importance of ongoing support and refinement in several key areas to strengthen long-term outcomes. **The findings and recommendations presented here come directly from educators and school leaders implementing School PB in Academic Year 2023-24.**

Key Findings:

- **Strengthening Student Leadership and Empowerment:** Training helped students assume leadership roles, improving their confidence and skills in advocacy, public speaking, and decision-making.
- **Enhancing Civic Engagement and Real-World Application:** School PB provided students with hands-on civic experiences, especially through shared decision-making and voter registration initiatives.
- **Promoting Inclusive Decision-Making and Dialogue:** Students collaborated across diverse groups, engaging in inclusive dialogues that enhanced the decision-making process.
- **Overcoming Logistical and Structural Challenges:** Schools faced challenges with project timelines and coordination across districts, even with adequate training support.

What I've enjoyed the most is seeing what students are able to do once we give them a platform and an opportunity to express their voices.

*—Academic Social Studies
Coach & School PB
District Coordinator*

Recommendations:

- **Strengthening Student Leadership and Autonomy:** Provide additional training to educators on fostering student-led activities and increasing agency, such as independent Vote Day planning and peer education.
- **Broadening Civic Engagement Learning:** Extend civic learning by incorporating guest speakers, school board meeting attendance, and field trips focused on public budgeting and governance.
- **Expanding Engagement:** Improve strategies for engaging a more diverse student body through town halls, open forums, and inclusive deliberation techniques.
- **Streamlining Logistics and Communication:** Develop tailored logistical support, including centralized access to materials, district-level coordination guides, and clear communication methods across all stakeholders.

The program has been stellar. This is a program that I feel should be in every school around Arizona!

—Junior High Teacher & School PB Site Sponsor



Staff and teachers from 2024 Student Voice Institute after receiving their certificate upon completion, equipping them with skills to lead School Participatory Budgeting.

A MODEL FOR INNOVATIVE CIVIC LEARNING AND EDUCATION

School PB has demonstrated its potential to empower students and transform school climates. Continued professional development, strategic training, and enhanced coordination will ensure the sustainability and scalability of this impactful initiative. With ongoing support from CFA and ASU, School PB will continue to foster a generation of young leaders equipped for civic responsibility.

Want to learn more about how you can bring School PB to your campus?

Contact us at civichealth@arizonafuture.org or visit arizonafuture.org/spb to learn more.