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IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING:  
**Reflections from Arizona  
Educators and School Leaders**

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*In partnership with Center for the Future of Arizona, Arizona State University's (ASU) Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation and the Participatory Governance Initiative*

**Academic Year 2023-24**

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# Executive Summary

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This report provides an overview of educator and school leader experiences implementing the School Participatory Budgeting (School PB) process in Arizona during the 2023-24 academic year. School PB is a civic education model of democratic decision-making that centers student voice and choice in school-based budget allocations. The School PB process entails students crowd-sourcing ideas for campus improvement projects, researching and presenting feasible ideas into project proposals, deliberating and campaigning for preferred project proposals, and organizing and hosting a school-wide vote to decide which project proposals to fund. School PB aims to promote best practices of civic education, nurture students' critical thinking, empathy, and leadership capacities, and equip school communities with the tools and resources to implement democratic innovations that focus on student voice and a positive school climate.

## OVERVIEW

In the 2023-24 academic year, the Civic Health team at Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA) and the team at Arizona State University's (ASU) Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation and the Participatory Governance Initiative provided expanded educator professional development training and implementation support for schools implementing School PB across seven districts. The expanded professional development training and implementation support included process overview and design, curricular resources, networking opportunities, and technical assistance.

Through interviews and focus groups with school partners from four of these districts, ASU and CFA examined the professional development training activities and implementation support provided to school partners to implement the School PB process and the experiences of educators and school leaders implementing the process, focusing on satisfaction, successes, challenges, recommendations, and continuing support.

The report begins with an overview of the civic learning gap and teacher professional development in civic education. The second section describes the School PB process, including procedural details, the historical background, and existing research. The following section then focuses on School PB in Arizona, specifically detailing partnerships, expansion, and support. The next sections focus on the evaluation framework, methods and participants. This is followed by a description of the findings of the interviews and focus groups, outlined in accordance with the CIPP (context, input, process, product) framework, and a summary of emergent themes with supporting recommendations. The report concludes with a brief recap and next steps.

ASU and CFA wrote this report to provide lessons learned from educators and school leaders who participated in School PB professional development training and implemented the process during the 2023-24 school year. CFA and ASU encourage sharing the evaluation's findings and recommendations with any key stakeholders to inform guidance and improvements to implementing School PB processes.

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# Civic Learning and Professional Development Gaps

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Unequal access to high-quality K12 civic education is a well-researched paradigm. Disparate opportunities in civic learning are often linked to student-level factors such as race, geography, socioeconomic background, gender, and ability (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008) and have recently been framed as a civic debt owed to the populations of historically minoritized students (Lo, 2019). Overall, civically underserved students frequently encounter fewer opportunities to engage in participatory civic learning that fosters critical thinking and leadership skills, offers experiences in civil discourse and democratic processes, and prioritizes research of current event topics or ideas derived from student-led interest (Blevins, 2022). Concerningly, inequitable access to civic learning and engagement can widen over time (the ‘Mathew effect’) and lend itself to uneven political agency, power, and civic participation and capacity among adult populations (Gaby, 2017). These trends pose an important context for current democratic backsliding and future implications for democracies.

Similarly, educators have unequal access to professional development in civic education, further perpetuating systemic disparities in educational quality and resources. Educators in underfunded schools or underserved communities frequently lack access to robust training programs that equip them to effectively teach civic education. This inequity can result from limited funding, geographic isolation, or institutional priorities that marginalize civic education in favor of other subjects (Burgess, 2015; Kaufman, 2020, 2021). Further, elementary-level educators have been shown to receive markedly less exposure to civic education professional development and, in turn, dedicate inadequate instructional time to civics and social studies (Diliberti et al., 2023; Hawkman et al., 2015). Consequently, students in settings devoid of these learning opportunities are less likely to benefit from well-prepared teachers who can foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and democratic participation, thereby fostering apathy and frustration (Bauml et al., 2022). Addressing these disparities requires intentional investment and dedication of resources in providing K12 educators with equitable professional development opportunities, ensuring all educators have the curricular and pedagogical tools and knowledge to empower students as active, informed citizens.

As noted above, inequities in civic participation are often associated with social and economic inequalities. While Arizona has been a pioneer in civic education programs and policies (Tate et al., 2024), Arizona faces significant civic engagement opportunity gaps that can be traced along the lines of education, age, ethnicity, and income. Data from the Center for the Future of Arizona’s (CFA) Civic Participation progress meter shows that nearly one in four Arizonans did not vote in 2022 because they believe their vote does not matter (Center for the Future of Arizona, 2024). This is up from 2020, when 15% of Arizona’s non-voters said they didn’t participate in the election for the same reason. Additionally, Arizona is behind the national average in voter turnout, discussing politics, contacting public officials, and volunteering and working with neighbors (Center for the Future of Arizona, 2024). However, CFA has also reported that 76% of Arizonans support making K12 civic education a priority, and 75% want to work together across differences to solve problems (Center for the Future of Arizona, 2021).

# School Participatory Budgeting

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One civic education model that promotes inclusivity, deliberative capacities, responsibility, and student voice is School Participatory Budgeting (School PB). 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. Since the first process in the United States was implemented in an Arizona high school in 2013, School PB has been adopted by hundreds of school settings throughout the country. Internationally, over two dozen countries are implementing School PB processes in K12 and higher education.

The School PB process begins with students gathering solution-driven ideas to address issues or shortcomings on their campus. Next, students prepare and refine comprehensive project proposals using pre-determined design parameters and school and district guidelines. Then, students will deliberate and share information to promote the competing project proposals. The process culminates in a vote to fund the selected campus improvement project(s). High schools implementing School PB can also partner with voter registration groups to register students eligible to vote in the following local, state, and federal elections.

## ORIGINS OF THE PB MODEL

As a school-based civic education model, School PB stems from Participatory Budgeting (PB), a democratic innovation at the municipal level that empowers community members to decide how to spend a portion of the public budget. PB began in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989 and has since expanded to more than 11,000 processes in various levels of government, nonprofits, and community organizations worldwide (Dias et al., 2019). Research on PB has proven the process to empower local voices, highlight community needs, and promote equitable and transparent use of public funds (Baiochi, 2001; Cabannes, 2004; Lerner & Schugurensky, 2007; Touchton & Wampler, 2014).

## IMPACT ON STUDENTS & SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Similarly, participation in School PB increases students' knowledge of the history and tenets of democracy and public budgets, heightened skills in project management, research, and leadership, improved deliberative and decision-making competencies, and strengthened political efficacy (Abrantes et al., 2017; Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2023; Brennan, 2016; Cohen et al., 2015; Crum & Faydash, 2018; Duncikaite, 2019; Gibbs et al., 2021; Johnson, 2023; Todd, 2022). The effects of School PB on school climate have been observed in increased levels of trust, peaceful resolution of conflicts, demonstrations of empathy and a common good mindset, and stronger relationships between members of the school community (Albornoz-Manyoma et al., 2020; Brown, 2018; Kupriyanov, 2023). The School PB process also produces changes in educators' perceptions of young people, enhanced leadership competencies among teachers, and tangible improvements to a school's campus (Bartlett et al., 2020; Cheerakathil, 2023; Parrish, 2023). Overall, School PB creates a space for students to advocate for a school community project through a democratic process while increasing civic and leadership skills, developing positive relationships, and building more connected, resilient school communities.

# School Participatory Budgeting in Arizona

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The first School PB process in North America was implemented in 2013 in Bioscience High School in the Phoenix Union High School District (PXU), one of the state's largest and most diverse school districts. The process was coordinated in partnership with the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA), and Arizona State University. This initiative aimed to directly involve student voice and choice in allocating a portion of the school budget. The success of this initial School PB process led to increased interest and the gradual adoption of School PB in other schools within the PXU district. By 2016, every school within the district was implementing a School PB process, with students leading decisions on budget allocations for projects they deemed important, such as bathroom remodels, improved campus lighting, art supplies, school gardens and other green spaces, and solar-powered charging stations for personal devices.

## GROWTH ACROSS ARIZONA AND BEYOND

In the last decade and a half, through long-standing partnerships between CFA, ASU, and Arizona K12 schools, School PB has been adopted and implemented in over 70 schools statewide. School PB has also expanded throughout the country, with Arizona at the forefront of School PB experimentation, innovation, and expansion (Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2021, 2023, 2024; Brown, 2018; Cohen et al. 2015; Gibbs, 2021; Johnson, 2023). During the same period, School PB processes have been implemented in thousands of schools in the United States and other countries, from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Canada to Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Scotland, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Georgia, and Romania, and Zambia and Kenya among others (Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2024).

CFA and ASU partner with schools and districts across Arizona to assist in designing, executing, and evaluating their School PB process(es). Schools team and districts provide the funding for the project(s), and students lead each phase of the School PB process with supportive adult partnerships and with resources and support from the CFA and ASU team. Unique to this partnership is the provision of professional development resources, training, and support to educators and school leaders interested in implementing the School PB process. This included in academic year 2023-24, information sessions, strategic conference presentations, four institutes (two-cross-district and two within districts), monthly technical support sessions, and the development of toolkits and curriculum-aligned lessons to guide schools through the implementation of School PB. Further, the expansion emphasizes sharing best practices of student voice and youth-adult partnerships (Y-AP) and integrating the School PB process into the curriculum as a sustainable experiential civic learning model.

# Evaluation Methodology

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## CIPP FRAMEWORK

The Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) framework (Stufflebeam, 2003) was used to explore the successes, challenges, and recommendations of the School PB professional development offerings. The CIPP framework is a decision-oriented evaluation model designed to guide the assessment of programs and projects. With a long history of use in education, this framework can be used for formative and summative evaluations. The CIPP framework is also helpful for settings with multiple stakeholders and cases, providing information on the program's effectiveness and ideas for continued improvement.

The CIPP framework was utilized to focus on the following four areas to assess our approach and delivery of School PB professional development offerings and school partner implementation support:

- *Context Evaluation:*
  - Focuses on the environment of the School PB process and the stakeholders involved.
- *Input Evaluation:*
  - Examines the professional development resources, strategies, and support provided to educators and school leaders to implement the School PB process.
- *Process Evaluation:*
  - Assesses the implementation and experience of stakeholders involved in the School PB process.
- *Product Evaluation:*
  - Explores the outcomes and impact of the SPB process.

Through the CIPP framework, CFA and ASU explored the effectiveness of support in implementing School PB across various schools and districts during the 2023-24 academic year.

## METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

CFA and ASU drew from various data sources, including observations, interviews, and focus groups, to support our multi-case study approach (Stake, 2005). Observations were conducted throughout the academic year onsite with educators and students implementing the SPB process. During these visits, informal interviews were conducted with educators and school leaders to gauge the ongoing process's perceived success and support needs. Different team members would collect this data and share key findings and points of interest during biweekly meetings.

The culminating data was derived from nine interviews and two focus groups with educators and district leaders (n=21) from four different school districts, including urban, suburban, and rural, that implemented the SPB process on their campuses during the 2023-24 school year. While some of the school district partners had previous experience with implementing the School PB process, they did participate in the different training and implementation support opportunities provided by CFA and ASU during this school year.

<i>Site</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Number of Years Implementing School PB</i>
Urban K-8 District	8 educators, each from a different school site	2
Suburban K-12 District	2 district-level leaders 4 educators, each from a different school site	4
Rural K-12 District	4 district-level leaders 2 educators, each from a different school site	1
Rural K-12 District	1 educator	1

The interviews took place during April and May 2024 both in-person and online via Zoom, with each one lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The focus groups took place throughout May 2024 via Zoom, and each one lasted approximately 75 minutes. Members of the CFA and ASU teams took turns conducting the interviews, while at least one member of CFA and one member of ASU were present during the focus groups and took turns asking the evaluation questions. The evaluation questions, aligned with the CIPP framework (the order of the parts of the CIPP model were rearranged to support the cadence of questions), are as follows:

- *Context*
  - What has been your role in the School PB process this year, and what have you enjoyed the most about this role?
- *Process*
  - In your view, what were the main accomplishments of the School PB process?
  - In your view, what were the main challenges of the School PB process?
- *Input*
  - What recommendations do you have for future School PB processes?
  - What additional support do you need for future School PB processes?
- *Product*
  - How satisfied are you with the School PB process?

The audio of the interviews and focus groups was recorded and transcribed via Zoom. The transcriptions were thematically coded using both inductive and deductive coding methods, which expanded and contracted findings during the analysis of the participant responses.



# Findings

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## CONTEXT

### ***What has been your role in the School PB process this year, and what have you enjoyed the most about this role?***

When asked this question, most participants (n=15) cited having led the School PB process at their school campus as a School PB Site Sponsor. The other participants (n=6) cited fulfilling a district-level School PB Coordinator role and guiding the overall design of the process, providing school-site Sponsors and students with feedback, and overseeing the results of the process.

Regardless of role, all participants shared several student-driven outcomes that spurred their enjoyment of School PB process. For one, participants noted how participation in the School PB process positively affected student leadership development, with one participant saying they felt like they were witnessing firsthand *“leaders in the making”* and another noting that *“it was cool to see [the students] get more confident.”* One example of witnessing this leadership growth entailed one participant watching the students present at a governing board study session:

*“It was standing room only with all the parents and community members that came. They did an excellent job, [and] we got lots of wonderful feedback from everybody that was there, [...] the parents, and the connection with the community.”*

In another example of students growing as leaders during the School PB process, a participant mentioned that the School PB process *“helped students to understand the education system and all the workings behind it,”* and explained that the experience allowed them *“to think about how the school runs, where our money comes from, and why we have to go to certain people to do certain things.”*

Another point of enjoyment shared by participants was witnessing how the School PB process fostered student empowerment, innovation, and voice. The sentiments of joy were the result of *“seeing what students are able to do once we give them a platform and an opportunity to express their voices.”* Educators and school leaders agreed that students gained *“experience talk[ing] to adults, learning to advocate for themselves, and learning to advocate for their needs.”* Moreover, another participant shared that because *“[the students] are so innovative, [...] I feel like I have to learn so many things from them.”*

Finally, participants made comments about cooperation, teamwork and relationships through inclusive decision-making. One participant shared that they enjoyed *“hearing the students collaborate and make decisions on what they want to do and how to move forward.”* Another participant noted, *“I had fun listening to all of their ideas that they had come up with and being able to watch them work together as small groups and then as a whole group throughout the entire process.”* Several participants agreed that within each of their sites, *“there were students that didn't necessarily know each other, and seeing them come together and work together and form those connections was really rewarding.”*

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**Each year, I've grown to learn a little bit more about this process and continue to make changes. I can see the changes from the beginning to the end to the present. The extra experience has given me a great opportunity so that I can engage with the students.**

*–Site Sponsor, Roosevelt Elementary School District*

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## PROCESS

### ***In your view, what were the main accomplishments of the School PB process?***

Some of the main accomplishments cited by participants focused on student empowerment, leadership, and civic engagement. Several participants shared how students embraced leadership roles, including “com[ing] up with the plan for the vote day solely by themselves.” Another participant spoke about how the steering committee students took on the role of educating other students within the school on the different projects and overall process:

*“When we got to the point of educating the rest of the school, the students really got into that and visited every class in person. They would go in, and one pair would say, ‘Okay, we think you should vote for this.’ Then the other pair would say, ‘Well, we think you should vote with this, and these are the different reasons why.’ So, they did this discussion live for every single class of the school. Which I thought was really good, and they were just very engaged and very excited about the process.”*

Other participants pointed to the real-life applicability of the process, especially voting. Vote days were mentioned as an accomplishment stemming from the School PB process, and high school partners shared appreciation for “having the county recorder’s office there to register student voters.” One participant was proud to share that “several people have mentioned that [our school] was the highest turnout they’ve had, you know, with senior 17- and 18-year-olds registering to vote, which is a byproduct of the whole process. It was just really cool to see all those kids lined up to register to vote.”

Additionally, participants mentioned several other accomplishments related to the implementation of the School PB process. The level of responsibility and autonomy students had throughout the process showed that “giv[ing] [the students] more freedom allow[ed] them to have more buy-in,” which resulted in quality project ideas and positive shifts in engagement and learning. Participants expressed pride in the students’ ability to adapt, remain engaged, and continue moving the process forward. One participant expressed feelings of pride about how hard the students worked: “it’s really incredible to see how efficient and how well planned they are.” Several participants expressed enthusiasm over the use of technology throughout the School PB process to make it more engaging, with one participant mentioning that students made] the announcement video themselves: “they came up with their script and their little play of how they wanted to portray the information.”

Participants also cited positive shifts in school climate from the School PB process. For example, several participants noted that even students who were initially uninterested became engaged when they saw the tangible results of the different phases of the School PB process and the importance of their participation. One participant shared how students who would not usually interact with others “actually talking with each other about what they want for our school.” Participants emphasized how impressed they were with the level of engagement among students throughout the process, with one participant stating that “expanding engagement beyond student council to the entire student

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**In thinking about the School PB process, I admire the degree to which the students get involved in the school’s and district-level decision-making processes. The more that we can make the students aware of their civic duty and how the school system works, so they’re not just floating through their school years, it makes them more interested and invested in their own high school career and more tied into the school. I think it is all exciting and positive.**

*–District Level Coordinator,  
Flagstaff Unified School District*

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body resulted in broader participation and a sense of shared ownership.” Along the same lines, another participant shared how they were “impressed that we could all get our heads and hearts around something and participate in it together.”

### ***In your view, what were the main challenges of the School PB process?***

Participants cited several challenges they encountered while implementing the School PB process. An overarching theme was time availability. Most participants were coordinating the School PB process implementation through an extracurricular club, with a few participants utilizing a specific class or subject area in class for the process coordination. Participants shared that scheduling School PB as an extracurricular club after school hours was difficult when factoring in competing clubs and sports and a transportation plan, with one stating that “it was just [difficult] getting it started. [We ended up] having to use a class rather than a club because I could not get a timeframe to meet with 5 or 6 kids.” Additionally, extracurricular clubs often go through layers of approval and require internal organization, with one participant describing, “Definitely getting started was a big challenge for us this year, like just finding that time to kind of get the wheels rolling.” Participants who used class time to coordinate School PB shared similar challenges, i.e., competition with other subject areas and learning standards, since “there’s already so much going on in the school year and [it’s tough] trying to squeeze one more thing in.” Another participant shared challenges with fitting School PB into the day-to-day curriculum of the class, in that “We had, like, a class period to potentially be working on it. But it was still difficult to get the kids to switch gears for a day, even to get some of this work done, and that did make it a little bit more challenging.”

Another challenge in implementing the School PB process revolved around the navigation of project logistics (i.e., budget, project feasibility) and alignment of schedules to meet with various stakeholders. During the project proposal development phase, students create a proposal plan that often requires research into whether a project is feasible and fits the cost parameters, including project material costs, labor costs, and (if applicable) sustaining costs. Some schools have the students share their initial plan with key decision-makers, like the governing board, and several participants shared how integral this experience is in garnering feedback to move the process forward and align with the desired timeline. These participants shared that scheduling time with key stakeholders can be a challenge, especially in alignment with the School PB process timeline, with one participant sharing that for “a month or so, we were just waiting to present to the board.” Additionally, depending on the project, students may need to follow procurement law and contact multiple vendors to compare quotes. As participants pointed out, this requires knowledge of school and district policies and communication with various departments, such as Facilities, Finance, and Legal. Navigating schedules to talk with vendors and meet with these departments was a challenge, with one participant pointedly reporting that “it was challenging just to find actual times when the director of Operations and Finance could actually meet.” Another participant recounted difficulties in “finding a way to still align the companies and the vendors with the club meetings [...] you know, like have that person be on campus during a club meeting so that they could have the students ask questions and they could see the process, and they could be involved in the process a little bit more.”

Other challenges included a need for heightened efforts of broader, more inclusive student engagement throughout the School PB process -and conveying this need to students as well. One participant described this challenge with the sentiment of “everybody’s voice should be heard, and everybody should not feel like, okay, I’m left out” when discussing the idea collection phase and having to redirect students’ efforts to collect ideas from the entire student body. Another participant, whose school coordinated the School PB process through the extracurricular club of Student Council, suggested going beyond student council in the future: “I think that moving forward, it would be cool

*if we could expand it to not just student council. I think that there are different ways that I would structure it within our class.”* A few participants added that adjusting the timeline of the School PB process so that all or part of the winning project would be implemented before the end of the school year has also been a challenge. This was particularly important for the participants who worked at sites that might be Kindergarten through 3rd grade or only have a 7th or 8th grade since the older students invested in the process are unable to see the results of their hard work. One participant shared that because *“[The project] doesn't get done until like the next year or so, [the students] do not get to see the end product. And so that's a frustration that they have, and I see it because they work so hard to be a part of the whole process from beginning to end, and they don't really get to see the end of it.”*

## INPUT

### **What recommendations do you have for future School PB processes?**

The recommendations provided by participants for future School PB processes centered on timeline, training, and participation. A recurring recommendation was to start the School PB process earlier in the school year to address rushed timelines and other important factors. One rationale participants cited was to build in time for more training (which is the next recommendation) at the start of the school year to have a “little more time to understand the process” and plan and implement the program more effectively. Another reason was to carve out more time for the winning project implementation or installation on the back end by *“Start[ing] that initial meeting a little bit sooner in the year, and maybe that'll help with the kids being able to see the fruits of their labor before they leave.”*

Many participants recommended having CFA, ASU, and their school or district offer more training and resources to support School PB implementation. While the resources and the online materials provided by CFA were praised for being user-friendly, some participants noted that finding specific materials felt like *“a scavenger hunt on the website to try to go in and find the different things.”* One specific recommendation to support training and resources included a shared Google Drive with resources organized into step-by-step folders or guides (e.g., by stage of the process) to make them easier to access and implement. A related recommendation for CFA was to offer more training on navigating the project proposal phase, namely, support for outlining the research that students will be conducting to create their proposal.

Additional recommendations included more resources and support from district personnel and site administrators, especially for the procurement and vendor process. One participant said, *“I would have liked to also have gotten in touch with district resources faster, like, here's the vendor lists, or like, here are those other things.”* Another agreed, stating, *“It'd be nice to have, like a vendor list that the district uses, and that way we can kind of make sure that we're getting the best quotes.”* However, one district handles the procurement vendor process for the students once they submit their project proposal, which has been *“very helpful and allowed for [the students] to really focus on the project [...] and securing PowerPoints for the governing board presentations quicker.”*

A final recommendation highlighted the importance of more student support in the School PB process across the school community. A specific recommendation shared by several participants focused on creating a mentor-like structure within the student steering committee by involving returning students from previous years to lead and mentor new participants on how to implement School PB, with one participant sharing, *“We didn't have to do as much of that this year, a lot of the background on it we did last year.”* This would address some of the learning curves of implementing the process and ensure continuity from year to year. One participant expressed support for this by

saying, “I think that having a few members of the group from the previous year can help kind of catch-up new members because while I had a few new members since it mostly was an established group, they were able to lead a lot of the process on their own.”

### **What additional support do you need for future School PB processes?**

Overall, participants' sentiment about existing support was overwhelmingly positive, expressing gratitude and admiration for the resources provided and the impact the School PB process has on students and their school community. Additional ideas of support that were mentioned included expanding resource offerings and partnerships and more on-site engagement from the CFA and ASU team. Several participants noted the opportunity for students to apply their experience with the School PB process to Arizona's Seal of Civic Literacy. One of the participants shared, “I'm in the process of creating opportunities for students to earn district seals or state seals for finance and civics [since] a lot of what a student can start doing when they're ninth grade is available through School PB.” Several participants said that they would like to continue to expand opportunities for real-world connections through the School PB process. One participant advanced an idea for expanded partnership support by connecting School PB to ballot initiatives:

*“I thought it would be really cool if I could have some kind of involvement with actual politicians or people who've been involved with ballot initiatives around the state because I think that there's maybe this missing piece. I like that we had the voter registration, but I think, like in the earlier stages, it would have been cool if I could have given the kids a little bit more fire and passion through, like, ‘Hey, Arizona is one of the only states where the citizens can pass a ballot initiative, and this is a version of that in a way. And so, we're giving you guys the power,’ that kind of thing. So having some kind of contact list and help getting people to come and talk about that would be great.”*

Another participant suggested to deepen the partnership with the local county recorder's office:

*“I think one of the things that I'd love to explore further is a deeper partnership with Maricopa County. I know one of the things they're offering now is junior deputy registrar and just really getting opportunities to get that information out to students and teachers as best as we can, [...] maybe opportunities for people to come out and speak on the behalf of those programs.”*

Participants also voiced a desire for the CFA and ASU teams to visit school sites more to observe the School PB process and discuss with participants their experiences in implementing the process.

## **PRODUCT**

### **How satisfied are you with the School PB process?**

Responses concerning the level of satisfaction with the School PB process centered on three themes: participant guidance and support provided by CFA and ASU, tangible outcomes and observations of the process that participants witnessed, and a desire to continue implementing School PB. Common feedback on the guidance and support provided by CFA and ASU entailed participants feeling supported through ongoing coaching and a high level of responsiveness. Several participants noted that they were provided “a very solid timeline that was very clear” and that because they were provided with ample materials, the School PB process “went really smoothly.”

Participant satisfaction with the School PB process was linked to perceived outcomes and observations, mainly focused on the experience of students engaged in the process. One participant

noted that when district leadership visited, *“the [students] did the Powerpoint presentation, and they did pretty good with answering the questions asked, [...] giving back and forth the answers to the questions.”* Several participants gave examples related to student increases in self-confidence. One mentioned that educators *“liked to be able to see the [students] grow into being so proud and confident,”* and added that *“students from our elementary schools all the way to high schools, effortlessly and flawlessly, [were] just so confident to speak in front of adults, in front of our board.”* Other participants cited satisfaction in observing students lead specific parts of the School PB process, with one participant stating, *“[the students] did a really good job when it came to collecting the ideas, and what things they wanted to vote on,”* and another sharing, *“The [students] were good at coming up with the ideas and discussing them. When we got to the point of having to educate the rest of the school, they visited every single class in person.”* A final point of satisfaction was the tangible transfer of the School PB voting experience to *“17- and 18-year-olds registering to vote as kind of a byproduct of the whole process; it was just really cool to see all those kids lined up to register to vote.”*

In line with high satisfaction, all participants noted the potential for School PB to become a well-established and impactful initiative in their school and district over the coming years, with the goal to continue implementing the School PB process. Several participants pointed out that the tenets of the School PB process (i.e., student voice and empowerment, democratic decision-making, inclusive design, etc.) aligned with their school or district mission, with one participant sharing that *“Making this process a part of who we are as a school, and listening to everyone's voice, I think it really fits well with our mission, and what we want to be as a school.”* Another participant who had implemented the process for the first time expressed, *“I definitely think that this is a sustainable process. After having done it once now, it's definitely something that can be integrated continually, so I feel really excited about future projects.”* Overall, participants shared a future-focused outlook about School PB process implementation becoming *“better as we continue with this work.”* Perhaps one participant's comment best captures the desire to continue and expand School PB: *“The program has been stellar. This is a program that I feel should be in every school around Arizona!”*

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**Making this process a part of who we are as a school, and listening to everyone's voice, I think it really fits well with our mission, and what we want to be as a school.**

*—Site Sponsor,  
Flagstaff Unified School District*

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## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

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Training and pedagogical interventions played a critical role in enabling educators and school leaders to implement School PB effectively, leading to significant student empowerment, civic engagement, and collaborative decision-making. However, ongoing refinement, such as expanded training on logistics of key phases of the process, more inclusive engagement strategies, and organized planning alongside key district decision-makers, could further enhance the implementation of the School PB process and its long-term impact. We highlight the following themes alongside recommendations for future support:

### **1. Strengthening Student Leadership and Empowerment**

Findings revealed that training and support for School PB implementation directly contribute to enhanced student leadership and empowerment. Educators and school leaders observed

students stepping into leadership roles, presenting at governing board meetings, and demonstrating increased confidence in public speaking and advocacy. Participants noted that witnessing students' transformation into decision-makers was one of the most rewarding aspects of the process.

**Recommendation:** Provide additional training to equip educators and school leaders with strategies to foster more opportunities for student autonomy throughout the School PB process, as seen in instances where students independently planned Vote Day and educated peers about the process. This student-led dynamic was particularly effective in making civic engagement more tangible and relevant.

## 2. **Enhancing Civic Engagement and Real-World Application**

Through School PB, students gained hands-on experience in civic participation, particularly with shared decision-making throughout the process and during campus vote days. Training interventions and community partnerships prepared school facilitators to integrate voter registration into the process, leading to a notable increase in student registrations. One site even achieved record-high senior voter registration rates.

**Recommendation:** Consider additional opportunities beyond voting for students to learn about public budgeting, governance, and institutional processes -possibly through guest speakers and field trips, including to school board meetings like some school sites cited. Training on guiding students through these real-world applications was cited as instrumental in ensuring meaningful engagement.

## 3. **Promoting Inclusive Decision-Making and Dialogue**

One of the most substantial impacts of School PB was the fostering of student collaboration and teamwork. Educators noted how students worked in diverse groups, navigating decision-making processes together. Training resources and coaching provided by CFA and ASU supported facilitators in structuring inclusive discussions, allowing students from different backgrounds to contribute ideas and engage meaningfully in deliberations.

**Recommendation:** Because challenges in ensuring full inclusivity were noted, particularly in broadening engagement beyond student councils, training could be expanded to better support facilitators in engaging a more representative cross-section of the student body in deliberative dialogue, such as town halls or other open forums. Additional training experiences and lesson plans on the organization and facilitation of deliberative experiences may be helpful.

## 4. **Overcoming Logistical and Structural Challenges**

Participants acknowledged that while training provided valuable guidance, logistical challenges within their school or district persisted, particularly in navigating the overall timeline and project feasibility during the proposal development phase. The varied experiences in schools and across districts pose an opportunity to streamline some of the logistical processes and mitigate some structural challenges by providing flexibility within the process timeline and communication methods. Additionally, educators sought clearer, more centralized access to training materials to streamline implementation.

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**When I think of this process, I think about being on campuses during vote day and seeing the students' excitement when they put the "I Voted" stickers on. It's their badge of honor that they're wearing, students of all ages, all the way from our kindergartners to our high schools, and it's so cool to see how much this "I Voted" sticker means to them.**

*-District Level Coordinator,  
Queen Creek Unified School District*

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**Recommendation:** More training to help educators navigate bureaucratic hurdles such as procurement processes and stakeholder alignment was recommended by educators for future School PB cycles. This might include more partnership development from the CFA and ASU teams during the training process to provide tailored guidance on communications between the district and sites. The creation of supporting materials unique to each partner school or district, like vendor lists or district-level coordination flow charts and maps, would help with these challenges, as well as additional planning documents on the timeline and communication methods among students, educators, and school and district leaders.

## CONCLUSION

The history and reported successes of School PB processes in Arizona reflect a growing recognition of the value of student participation in governance and the potential of such initiatives to enhance civic education and engagement among young people. Indeed, School PB in Arizona has empowered thousands of students to actively and responsibly participate in their school communities, providing them with practical experience in leadership, deliberation and decision-making processes, and public budgeting.

The expansion of educator professional development, technical assistance, and program implementation support by CFA and ASU during the 2023-24 academic year demonstrated high satisfaction among educators and school leaders implementing the School PB process. Participants in this evaluation cited positive outcomes regarding student increases in civic knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices, as well as healthier school climates and the development of young community leaders. Discussions about the future expansion of the process within their districts and hopes for broader participation indicate a long-term commitment to implementing School PB.

Looking forward, CFA, ASU, and other supporting organizations aim to equip more schools with the tools and resources to adopt School PB and integrate the process more deeply into existing educational standards and curricula. The recommendations raised by the educators who participated in this study will be considered in order to improve the process. Additionally, CFA and ASU plan to continue supporting the expansion and sustainability of School PB in Arizona schools by offering various modalities of training and professional development, emphasizing its role as a promising model in promoting student-led decision-making processes and fostering a culture of school democracy and civic responsibility.

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**I definitely think that School PB is a sustainable process to make as a part of who we are as a school. Listening to everyone's voice, I think it really fits well with our mission and what we want to be as a school.**

*—Site Sponsor,  
Flagstaff Unified School District*

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