

Evidence & Ideas: Participatory Budgeting in Schools



This resource looks at Participatory budgeting (PB) in schools from a Scottish and international perspective. It presents insights to the common school themes and points towards useful resources for practitioners.

Schools play a central role in developing the life-skills, citizenship and confidence of young people. PB is a proven deliberative process that can inspire, empower and engage young people in a cooperative, democratic and purposeful way.

Schools around the world are using PB to engage students, parents, communities, educators, and staff in deciding how to spend a part of the school budget.

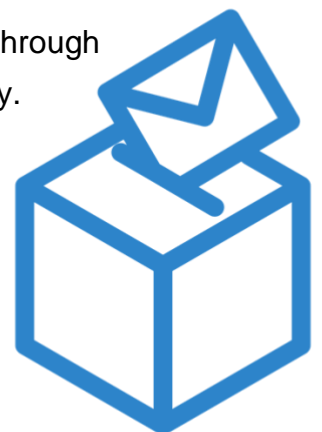
1. Deepening democracy and participation in schools

School PB develops student leadership, supports student and school success, amplifies student and parent voices, and involves the entire school in meaningful civic experiences. Participants learn democracy by doing it. It gives agency to young people by creating opportunities not only to voice their opinion but do real change in their community.

In the US (Boston Phoenix, Arizona, and Oakland) young people reported being more likely to engage in their community and more likely to vote in a local or national election, as a result of participating in participatory budgeting. In the UK schools are seeing a strong link between social action and curriculums which include democratic participation events.

Related case studies and resources:

- **[This video demonstrates how the 'PB in Schools Project' – US and Canada](#)** developed and ran a PB process in 5 Phoenix High Schools. 3,800 pupils voted in the PB process and students and administrators reflect on how the learning from the process and how civic engagement relates to voting in a democracy.
- **[This video "School of Active Citizens"](#)** was produced under the framework of the Erasmus + Education and Training project "School of Active Citizens" from Portugal, Slovakia, Poland and Romania about the implementation of school participatory budgeting. Teachers and students describe the process as democracy in practice and great for the school.
- **[This website contains multiple videos](#)** about the development of PB in Schools in the USA, and the learning in Scotland, as a result of the Community Choices programme which was led by the Scottish Government and has already seen millions of pounds spent through PB.
- **[This interview](#)** focusses on how US schools can deepen democracy through participatory budgeting and participatory decision making more broadly.



2. Addressing inequalities

PB directly involves people in budgeting decisions that will have a direct impact on improving their community. With the right support and communication it can engage people who would not normally participate with other forms of engagement. PB recognises that communities who experience disadvantage are often able to identify local solutions and strategies which can make their lives easier.

Related case studies and resources:

- **'Cost of the school day' Midlothian:** St Lukes Primary School aimed to reduce the disadvantage poorer families experience in meeting the cost of the school day. Local people had the opportunity to choose how the money was spent to reduce costs for families, some of the projects which were funded included; cheaper schools dinners, free after school clubs, free school trips and affordable school uniforms.
- **PB in Castlemilk - PB voting event to lower the cost of the school day:** The school's work on reducing the cost of the school day has led to all children having a school uniform, access to free parties, discos and school outings. The use of PB has allowed parents and pupils to decide on how to use additional funding.
- **The Cost of a School Day:** This report by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) presents qualitative data from eight Glasgow Primary and Secondary schools in areas of varying levels of deprivation. In total, 339 children and young people between Primary 5 and S6 and 111 staff members shared their views, experiences and ideas in workshop sessions and focus groups. Included in the full report are further details of methods, materials and some of the changes made by schools in response to their review.
- **NHS Health Scotland - The Cost of School:** This film explains why facing up to child poverty is important and how teachers, parent councils, parents/guardians, community planners can reduce the impact of the costs of a school day. Whilst on the face of it, education is free, there are often hidden or extra costs that act as a barrier to participation.
- **This report by The End Child Poverty Coalition** uses new analysis (May 2020) to highlighted that even before the devastating impact of Covid-19 on household incomes, child poverty has been rising rapidly in some of the poorest communities in Scotland and across Britain. The Coalition is calling on government at every level to

redouble efforts as a steady four-year rise in child poverty – predominantly in working families – has pushed families to breaking point.

- **Pupil Equity Fund Guidance** – Pupil Equity Funding is additional funding allocated directly to schools and targeted at closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The Pupil Equity Funding forms part of the £750m Attainment Scotland Fund which will be invested over the current Parliamentary term. Guidance makes clear that Participatory Budgeting is an effective mechanism to engage with parents and pupils, in particular those who face barriers to participation:



3. Strengthening school culture and increasing wider community involvement in the school.

PB Provides an opportunity centre the schools within the wider local community, building meaningful relationships with the community. Parental engagement is an important element of closing the attainment gap. Through PB students and families become more actively invested in the school community.

- **PB Scotland Schools Resource** – This site showcases videos and resources which demonstrate why PB is an effective way to build more confident and active young citizens, strengthen school culture and contribute to raising attainment across the whole school.
- **Cost of the School Day toolkit:** This toolkit, developed by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), provides a range of resources to support schools, local authorities and their partners to take action to identify and address financial barriers to participation and learning.
- **Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement. Do Parents Know They Matter?** Families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. When schools, families and community work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more. This University of Warwick research focused on the relationship between parental engagement and raising achievement:
- **PBP Blog: What happens when students lead PB?** This US case study highlights the impact of PB on students, teachers, school stakeholders and the wider community as five schools worked through six months of trainings, outreach efforts, idea collection events, and meetings with district staff to transform ideas about ways to improve their schools into project proposals. These student-led efforts culminated with an entire week of voting.



4. Developing student's life skills

Young people have been increasing critical career and life skills through their participation in PB. The PB process helps young people to recognise and articulate their skills and capacities. This includes those that can be more difficult to teach in the classroom – including confidence, resilience, and key life skills e.g. working in teams, problem solving, event organisation, presentation skills, understanding budgeting, project planning, effective collaboration and evaluation.

- **PB in Schools: Stories from the Field** - This webinar, hosted by the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), explores the impact, stories and experience of students and educators who are leading PB in schools in the USA.
- **YouthPB Accelerator** is using PB as a means of involving young people in co-deciding about spending public funds in their neighbourhood, school or municipality. The YouthPB Accelerator creates an ideal opportunity for students to experience democracy in action, especially at the local level. The website supports youth workers, teachers and educators by creating a set of useful tools:
 - Guidebook/toolkit – showing the model of using the tool such as a participatory budget, developed on the basis of materials and data collected in different countries;
 - the video material promoting the youth involvement in participatory budgeting;
 - the interactive map of good practices on how to engage young people in democratic processes in Europe and throughout the world.



5. Key factors for success and some of the results from PB worldwide

The learning from all the resources is that PB needs a supportive environment to flourish and that its impact can be far reaching in terms of developing skills and promoting local and national democratic participation. Some of the key factors for success to consider are:

- Senior management buy in to the process (cost of the school day)
- Policy/legislation which supports the approach – this supports a wider partnership e.g. the Fairer Scotland Action Plan promoted the idea of reducing the cost of a school day.
- Involve students in the planning, communication, delivery and evaluation of the PB process with appropriate support and resources.
- PB should be the spark to ignite young people's interest in our wider democracy. A good PB process will support young people to think about other democratic participation processes to effect change in their community.
- Including the wider community where appropriate and other school stakeholders.

The results from PB processes in schools worldwide are:

- Cheaper uniforms.
- Homework clubs and free breakfast clubs.
- Increase access to IT resources.
- Stigma free systems within the school – e.g. young people can get financial support to go on trips, take up free school meals
- Greater understanding among teacher to why a young person doesn't have a calculator, right uniform etc.
- Greater understanding of wider democratic processes.
- Increased student confidence. Resilience and key life skills.
- Bringing schools into the wider community.
- Involvement and selection of school and community infrastructure projects.
- Engaging young people in non-traditional learning approaches.

6. Additional Resources

- **The PB Charter for Scotland** sets out seven key features showing what a fair and high-quality participatory budgeting (PB) process should look like. It aims to ensure PB is inclusive, uses good quality methods and is truly participative. The Charter is a co-produced resource, developed by people with experience of PB processes in Scotland, including those from equality groups, community organisations and public bodies.
- **London School of Economics: Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes?**
An update: This research asks whether inequalities are due to the effects of low income itself or whether they are explained by other associated factors such as parental education. This report, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, reviews the causal evidence on whether or not money itself matters for children's development. The findings from this report provide further strong evidence that money itself is important for children's cognitive development, physical health and social and behavioural development. Money is also important for children's home environment and mothers' mental health, both of which are significant for child development.
- **PBP Blog: School engagement that's almost too good to be true:** A case study about how Participatory Budgeting (PB) was introduced at a local elementary school in Brooklyn where Miro (the son of our co-Executive Director Josh Lerner) goes to school. PB addressed a sincere need at P.S. 139: a need to connect with families at a school of nearly 1,000 students, and to engage the school community in deciding how to apply remaining Parent Association (PA) funds for the year towards projects that best reflected their school's needs.
- **Fraserburgh PEF mini public:** Fraserburgh Academy Pupil Equity leader, an Academy Teacher, and CLD school-based worker started a campaign to raise awareness of the Free School Meals offer to pupils and to try and increase the number of pupils making use of the breakfast allowance and lunch voucher:
- **The 7 Golden rules of participation** - A set of principles designed to help anyone working with, and for, children and young people to support them to understand, experience and exercise their participation rights. The Golden Rules inform adults what children and young people's participation should involve and feel like. The Golden Rules are directly informed by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 12 (2009) and

support the requirements necessary to achieve effective, meaningful and ethical implementation of participation rights.

- [How Good is our School](#) sets out a framework for improvement which PB can have a role including improving outcomes for all learners e.g.
 - Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion
 - Raising attainment and achievement
 - Increasing creativity and employability
- [The Fairer Scotland Action Plan](#) asserts that no child should have to grow up in poverty in a country as wealthy as Scotland. We have an ambition to eradicate child poverty which will mean reducing the number of people in poverty across all ages. This Plan sets out fifty actions to help tackle poverty, reduce inequality which has been used to initiate participatory budgeting in school.
- [HMIE inspection framework](#)



About PB Scotland

PB Scotland acts as a hub for sharing and learning about the great work being done by PB initiatives around Scotland. It provide updates on events, policy and resources relevant to PB in Scotland, and profile good examples of PB in action.