

## Participatory Budgeting in Schools



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Young people are the most important resource for ensuring society's future is bright. Moreover, a democracy will only be robust if its citizens are well educated and willing to get involved. The key to social participation is therefore an educational system that is both effective and equitable, one that introduces youngsters to political processes as early as possible and encourages civic engagement.

The **Bertelsmann Stiftung** has long been committed to achieving this goal. Through our projects and studies, we **increase awareness** among policy-makers and the public of the need for reforms; in addition, we **recommend practical solutions** to the challenges society faces.

The following project has been developed in a German context, but is suitable for application in other policymaking environments and can be adapted for use by international partners. Created by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the project is now led by the **Servicestelle Jugendbeteiligung e.V.**

### Participatory Budgeting in Schools: Students' Budget effectively engages youth

Young people have a right to represent their own interests in the political arena, and to do so, they need to learn about democratic processes. Most opportunities for participation, however, are difficult for them to access, reach only those who are already involved and give them very little influence over their daily lives. Participatory budgeting can change that. **The Students' Budget provides young people with an opportunity to help shape their environment using a democratic process.**

**Creating a Students' Budget is easy:** Youngsters recommend ways to improve their school, vote on the proposals in a secret ballot and work with school administrators to implement the most popular suggestions. The students are given a baseline budget – from the local council, as part of the school's discretionary funds, or as third-party funding – which they then allocate using the process described above.

Unlike other approaches, **the budget makes the process both meaningful and effective** – motivating everyone to participate and encouraging them to get involved in other areas as well.

The **Students' Budget differs from other forms of youth participation in several ways:**

- It reaches **all the young people in a community** – not just those who are already involved.
- It offers them a voice in an area that matters to them, and an opportunity to make a meaningful difference.
- It gives students **direct responsibility** for making decisions; at the same time, it allows them to interact with government representatives and school administrators.
- It is largely **managed by the young people** themselves.
- Students are integrated into every step of the process, from initial suggestions to implementation of the winning proposals.
- Combining self-determination with cooperation, it facilitates learning by doing.
- The process itself costs little or nothing, so **even smaller towns or municipalities can benefit.**

As of December 2013, Students' Budgets have been created at five schools in two towns in northern Germany. Six additional communities have committed to the project as well. An evaluation of the first initiatives found that more than 90 percent of the students participated, measures were adopted that clearly **made a difference** in the young people's lives and an important learning process was set in motion.

Each city or town can implement the Students' Budget concept independently and require no support from third parties.



All the materials are available (in German) free of charge at [www.schuelerhaushalt.de](http://www.schuelerhaushalt.de).