

Community-Led Recovery



ARPA Funds in Central Falls, RI

Congress passed the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) to support our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using community-led decision making to distribute ARPA funds will help ensure investments match real community needs. \$350 billion will be passed down to states, local governments, and tribal governments. Your community can participate and have a say in where this funding goes.

The American Rescue Plan Act is a historic opportunity to not only build back our communities and economy after the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, but also has the potential to address the deeply embedded inequities in access and voice in our democracy.

Practices like participatory budgeting (see diagram below) can increase equity, access, and accountability in spending decisions, transforming and deepening democracy as we build back better. That is why the Democracy

Beyond Elections coalition presented 11 awardee's across the country, including Voces Con Poder in the Central Falls School District, money to invest in developing, expanding and creating long term participatory processes to help equitably distribute not just ARPA funds but future funds as well!

Participatory democracy extends beyond community surveys, advisory committees and public forums by placing real decision-making power in communities. Participatory democracy includes many tools for community-led decision making, including participatory policy-making, deliberative assemblies and referendums, and participatory budgeting. For the purpose of ARPA, Awardee's like Voces Con Poder in the Central Falls School District focused on participatory budgeting as a central best practice for meaningfully engaging communities in budgetary decisions.



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2019 marked the first year of participatory budgeting (PB) in Central Falls. Through the initiative, students at Central Falls High School got to democratically allocate \$10,000 to improve their school through a semester-long elective class.

In summer 2021, the Central Falls School District expanded PB to engage all students and parents in the District to decide how to allocate \$100,000 in COVID-19 relief funds to prepare for a successful 2021-22 school year. A group of parent and student leaders decided to name their initiative **VOCES CON PODER** (Voices with Power).

The process began by reaching out to the entire community to collect ideas for spending priorities. Then, student and parent delegates shaped those ideas into viable proposals, based on what would most benefit the school community and the proposals were voted on by the parents and students in the District.

Since Voces Con Poder, Central Falls launched a city-wide PB process, and is now part of another, larger PB process with neighboring city, Pawtucket, to allocate \$385,000 to improve social determinants of health.

STUDENTS AND PARENTS VOTED TO DEDICATE \$100,000 TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Not only did the PB process give parents and students real power over real money, it also increased participants' desire to participate moving forward:

- **240 ideas** submitted by the community
- **33 delegates** - 17 parents and 16 students met twice a week for 6 weeks
- **146 voters** - the winning proposal will allocate \$100,000 to extracurricular activities
- **90% of Delegates** said they **felt listened to** by their committees
- **73% of Delegates** said they **made new relationships** with people in their committees
- **97% of Delegates** said **PB should continue** in the district

Participatory budgeting gives parents and students real power over real money to fund real projects for the Central Falls public schools!



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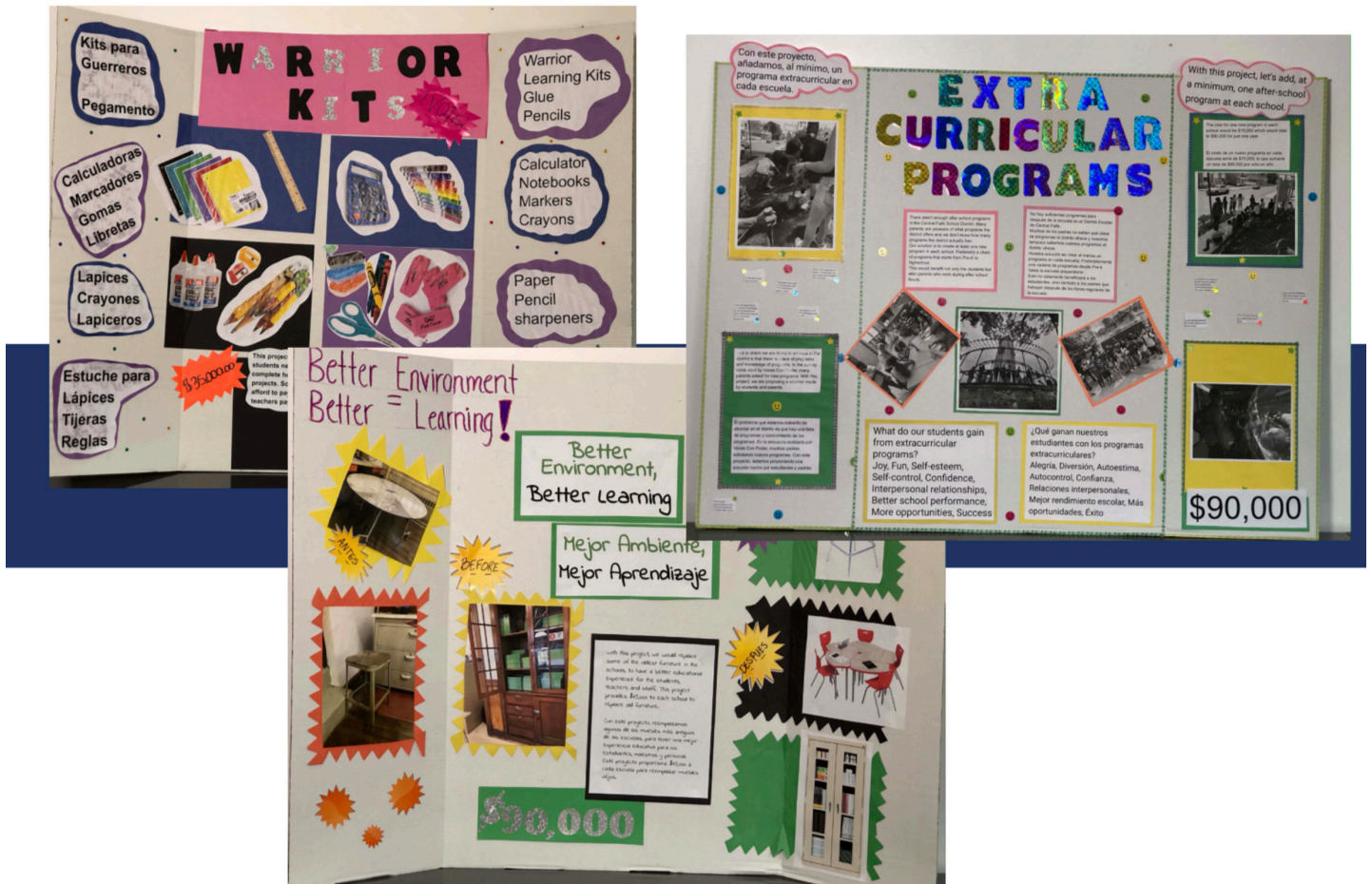


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Check out the [video](#) about the Central Falls PB process!

Les daremos a los alumnos y a los padres \$100,000 de dinero federal



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[Estudiantes y padres decidirán futuro de fondos escolares en Central Falls](#)

Telemundo Nueva Inglaterra 06/16/2021

“A través del programa ‘Voces Escolares’ la comunidad podrá decidir cómo distribuir \$100 mil dólares en fondos federales dentro del distrito de Central Falls.”



[Central Falls’ students, families to vote on how to spend COVID-19 relief money](#)

By Ashley Cullinane 06/15/2021

“As school districts determine where COVID-19 relief funding will go, the Central Falls School District is putting that decision in the hands of its students and their families.”



[The case for participatory democracy during educational crisis](#)

By Jonathan E. Collins and Julian Bessinger 03/24/2022

“Education politics has taken a front seat in the mainstream news for all the wrong reasons. Disagreements over COVID-19 precautions and the alleged use of curriculum featuring critical race theory have led to literal physical battles at school-board meetings. In this context, there’s reason to ask how districts can find ways to foster healthy public discourse around local education issues. Can school districts turn to civic engagement during a time when the loudest voices seem to lack civility? Indeed, they can.”



[Central Falls’ Voces Con Poder Sparks Civic Engagement](#)

By Nancy Kirsch 03/24/2022

Students and their parents in Central Falls, RI were empowered – through Voces Con Poder (Voices with Power) – to decide how certain Covid-relief funds could benefit their local schools. The Central Falls’ school district leadership recruited Jonathan Collins, assistant professor of Education and International and Public Affairs, and his team of research assistants to develop and administer surveys, to observe and engage with participants, and to create a longitudinal study for tracking long-term civic participation.”



In a way, my perspective has changed now that I was part of a process in which I knew what money was being invested into, knowledge that parents had no access to before. This makes me want more transparency about the funds and the way schools of CF are run.

- Parent Delegate

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PB has had a pretty big impact on my aspirations in life...[it's] helped me realize that what I want to do after college is go back to Central Falls and continue to help the community.

*- Karen, Youth Leader
from Central Falls*



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