

Submitter: Rachel Freed
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB749

I am writing to express my opposition to SB 749, which directs the Department of Education to establish and administer a pilot program for participatory budgeting by students in the preparation of school district budgets. While I appreciate the intention behind this proposal to engage students in the budgeting process, I believe it presents several concerns that merit careful consideration.

Firstly, participatory budgeting requires a level of financial literacy that many students may not possess. The complexities involved in budget preparation, including understanding funding sources, expenditures, and the long-term implications of financial decisions, are typically beyond the educational scope of most K-12 students. Without proper guidance and education, there is a risk that students may make uninformed decisions that could adversely affect their educational environment.

Secondly, involving students in budgeting decisions might lead to conflicts of interest and divisive priorities. Younger individuals may prioritize projects that appeal to their immediate interests, such as sports equipment or social events, rather than addressing broader, long-term needs such as infrastructure maintenance or academic resources. This could result in an imbalanced allocation of funds that does not serve the wider student body or the educational mission of the school district.

Moreover, the implementation of such a program could strain already limited administrative resources. School districts are often operating under tight budgets, and adding another layer of complexity to the budgeting process could divert valuable time and resources away from essential educational activities and services.

Lastly, while student engagement is crucial, there are more effective ways to involve students in the decision-making process without the complexities of participatory budgeting. Programs that focus on financial literacy, civic engagement, and leadership skills could provide students with meaningful opportunities to learn about budgeting and governance without the risks associated with direct budgetary influence.

In conclusion, while I commend the initiative to empower students, I believe that SB 749 is not the right approach. I urge you to reconsider the potential implications of this legislation and explore alternative methods for fostering student engagement in a manner that is both educational and beneficial to the entire school community.