



Watch our webinar on COVID Relief Funding [here](#).



COVID Relief Funding in Schools: Promising Practices for Community Engagement



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Elementary & Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds are federal dollars that will be invested in public education over the next few years as part of the American Rescue Plan and other federal stimulus packages. Over \$189 billion have been specifically allocated for public education through ESSER, nearly \$600 million of which are for Rhode Island.

What observations did the panelists have about ESSER-related community engagement?

- Engagement to date has been largely in one direction, from districts to communities (e.g., surveys with predesignated outcomes, or in-person forums which did not include options for people to join online).
- Disparities existed across communities in how well they engaged families, with more two-way communication identified in wealthier districts.
- Promising practices in funding engagement are limited , but they do exist. Participatory budgeting in Central Falls, Rhode Island is a strong example.

What recommendations did the panelists have for future engagement?

District leaders are encouraged to:

- Engage communities in school finance discussions throughout the year, not just at the time of final budget approval.
- Model strong engagement practices by being curious, listening, and creating opportunities for authentic dialogue with students, families, and community groups.

Community members are encouraged to:

- Find your 5! Consider forming a small group of five or so like-minded community members to share the responsibilities of engaging with your district and staying updated on district decisions. Choose times to show up as a whole group in order to grab the attention of district leaders.

On June 9, 2022, we hosted a webinar to discuss the **engagement of community members in the school budgeting process** featuring the following speakers:

Erika Haynes
Director of Community Engagement, School & State Finance Project/Co-Director, EquityCT

Marina Marcou-O'Malley
Policy & Operations Director, Alliance for Quality Education

Stephanie Downey Toledo
Superintendent, Central Falls Public School District

For more information about this initiative, please consult the RI ESSER Engagement Toolkit [here](#).

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