



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE



holdem.ERStools.org



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HOW SCHOOL BUDGET HOLD'EM CAN HELP YOU!	2
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE	3
PLAYING THE GAME	
Pre-Game Preparations	5
Helpful Hints.....	7
Format #1: Learning the Basics (1 hour).....	8
Format #2: Exploring the Power of Trade-offs (1.5-2 hrs).....	10
Format #3: Transform Your District with <i>Hold'em</i> (3+ hrs).....	12
Suggested Next Steps	14
WORKSHEETS	
Format #1: Learning the Basics	16
Format #2: Exploring the Power of Trade-offs.....	18
and Format #3: Transform Your District with <i>Hold'em</i>	
ERS STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMATION	24



Everyone said it was one of the most interactive sessions they'd ever been to. I had nothing but positive feedback, and a lot of the participants were happy because, instead of having tunnel vision and being grilled by a committee, they were able to hear what everybody said and got to participate and have input"

—Pamela Anstey, CFO
Memphis City Schools

How School Budget Hold'em Can Help You!

School Budget Hold'em is a game designed to help school districts rethink their budgeting process. It evolved out of Education Resource Strategies' (ERS) experience working with large urban districts around the country.

We've seen firsthand how the budgeting process typically works in most districts. Each department reviews its budget from the previous year, making minor adjustments in the hopes of preserving existing positions and perhaps purchasing new materials. This process is often completely separate from the district's academic planning process, and tight deadlines throughout the budget season offer little time for district and school leaders to reflect on or rethink current practices to improve outcomes.

School Budget Hold'em offers a completely new approach—one that can turn the budgeting process into a long-term visioning exercise around how the district can best serve its students. The game format enables you and your colleagues to step outside of the constraints of day-to-day decision-making and review the district's resource use in a more integrated way. As you create “hands” of investments and savings options that extend beyond typical operational efficiencies, you'll see possible ways to improve district performance while still meeting budget reduction goals.

Much of the power of *School Budget Hold'em* comes from playing the game with others and engaging in a dialogue about what is possible even in these tough fiscal times. The important thing to remember is that there are no right or wrong answers. What matters is what is right for your district. *Hold'em* helps change the conversation from “Where do we cut?” to, “How can we best use each budget dollar to achieve our long-term vision for student success?”

★ **School Budget Hold'em can help:**

- build understanding of the relative impact of different choices
- determine the right set of trade-offs to align any required district budget cuts with a vision for improvement
- diverse groups of stakeholders explore and discuss the tough trade-offs together
- provide participants with a district-wide perspective on a process that is often fragmented and departmentalized

How to Use This Guide

School Budget Hold'em can be useful in many different contexts and in many different ways. We've seen it work successfully with:

- **district leaders** looking to find a way to address a looming budget reduction
- **school board members** looking for how to best support districts to make difficult choices that maximize student learning
- **state policymakers** and **education advocates** looking for how to best support districts to make difficult choices that maximize student outcomes
- **parents** and **community members** looking to get an introduction to district budgeting
- **education policy students** looking for a hands-on approach to complement their coursework
- and so much more!

This Guide Explains Three Ways to Play Hold'em as a Group:

FORMAT #1

Learning the Basics (1 hour)

- This exercise provides a fictional district context and utilizes a condensed “mini-deck” of options
- This format works well if you have limited time but want to provide **an introduction to district budgeting for stakeholders who have not typically been part of the process before** (i.e., state policymakers, education advocates, parents, community, teachers, etc.)

FORMAT #2

Exploring the Power of Trade-offs (1.5-2 hours)

- This exercise utilizes the full deck and focuses on developing “hands” of investments and savings for your particular district.
- This format works well if you have limited time but want to **gather input from a diverse group of stakeholders around high-level district budgeting priorities.**

FORMAT #3

Transform your District with Hold'em (3+ hours)

- This exercise utilizes the full deck, focuses on developing “hands” of investments and savings for your district, and invests a significant portion of time in comparing and evaluating those hands.
- This format works well as a way **to engage key district stakeholders to determine actual district resource use trade-offs for the upcoming budgeting process.**

★ You can even make Hold'em your own!

Memphis city schools created customized cards and used the *Hold'em* process to organize a two-day budgeting retreat. See the “Learning When to Hold'em and When to Fold'em” case study on the *Hold'em* website.

Playing the Game

Pre-Game Preparation

To get the most out of the game, players should familiarize themselves with the card choices as well as the district's strategic priorities. Remember, the goal of playing *Hold'em* is not to just make budget cuts. The goal is to create a “hand” of investment and savings options that will address the district's anticipated budget cuts while also helping the district continue to improve student achievement.

Here are three things you can ask participants to do in advance:

1. Review the District Priorities

In addition to reviewing the district's strategic plan and priorities, participants may also want to review ERS' Strategies for Transformation (See page 24). Through our work with some of the largest urban districts in the country, ERS has identified seven top priorities for restructuring resources for high performance and fiscal sustainability and suggests alternative ways to organize, spend, and maximize resources.

2. Review the Cards in Advance

If possible, you may want to distribute the *Hold'em* cards or the *Hold'em* online link to players prior to your session. Reading through the cards,

Card Categories

Budget options are presented by categories that align with ERS priorities for maximizing resources:

TEACHING	Restructure teaching job and compensation structure to attract and develop needed expertise, and link to contribution.
CLASS SIZE	Rethink standardized class size model to target individual attention.
TIME	Optimize existing time to meet student and teacher needs and extend where needed.
SPECIAL EDUCATION	Redirect special education spending to early intervention and targeted individual attention in general education settings.
BUILDINGS AND LAND	Maximize use of buildings and land.
LEADERSHIP	Redirect spending from compliance and monitoring to leadership development.
PARTNERS	Leverage outside partners and technology to maintain or improve quality at lower cost.
EFFICIENCY	Increase efficiency of operations, programs and administrations.

including the additional considerations and warnings, will help familiarize players with the types of options they must consider during the game.

3. Review Additional Resources

ERS has several articles and videos that can help players think differently about resource decisions:

- **“Transformation or Decline: Using Tough Times to Create Higher Performing Schools.”** October 2011, Kappan article by ERS Executive Director Karen Hawley Miles.
- **“Doing More with Less: Four Strategies for Improving Urban District Quality and Productivity.”** October 2010, a presentation by ERS Executive Director Karen Hawley Miles.
- The Hold'em *Intro Video* and *Model Hands Video* online

See these resources and more on the *Hold'em* website:
<http://holdem.erstools.org>

Helpful Hints

Here are some things that might be helpful to share with participants:

GAME OBJECTIVES

- The objective of the game is to reach your budget target by selecting a winning combination of investment and savings cards that move you toward improved performance at sustainable costs.
- But be careful. Some moves might reduce your budget but won't improve performance or lead to sustainable practice.
- Each card describes the rationale for the move. Some cards also include a FYI that may include a warning or other factors to consider before selecting the card.

PLAYING THE GAME

- **Select carefully:** There are no right answers but some combinations of cards will better move your district toward improvement than others.
- **Consider inter-relationships:** Some may work better when paired with other options. For instance, if you choose to increase class size, you should also consider investing in expert teachers for small group instruction.
- **Be bold:** Don't avoid a card for fear of its feasibility in the real world. A controversial choice may be difficult to implement but well worth the effort in the improvement it can create.
- **Find the most gain for the inevitable pain:** Most districts will not be able to reach budget targets without reducing staff. Try to choose the staff reduction options that move toward transformation.
- **Accept approximation:** The budget percentages in *Hold'em* are estimates built from averages, NCES national statistics, and ERS' work with urban districts over the past fifteen years. Actual district results may vary widely, but these numbers will give you a good starting point.
- **Use Wild Cards:** If you have a district priority not found in *Hold'em*, consider estimating its costs and benefits with a wild card.
- **Be rigorous about time:** Remind teams to review options in all eight categories.

FORMAT #1

Learning the Basics (1 hour)

This format works well if you have limited time but want to provide an introduction to district budgeting for stakeholders who have not typically been part of the process before (i.e., state policymakers, education advocates, parents, community members, teachers, etc.) This exercise provides a fictional district context and utilizes a condensed “mini-deck” of options.

Before beginning this exercise you will need to cull the decks down to just 25 cards (use the worksheet on page 16 to identify the cards needed). The full 60 cards take too long to play; however, the 25 cards that are part of the “mini-deck” give participants a taste of the options across all categories.

Materials: See worksheet on page 16.

Instructions:

STEP 1 Introduce Hold'em!

5 min The goal is to create a “hand” of investment and savings options that reduce the district’s budget by 5% and move it closer to becoming a district that can maximize resources.

STEP 2 Small Group: Assign Roles and Review Rules

5 min Divide players into teams of no more than five to six. Have teams assign roles of **score keeper**, who tracks the cards selected, **task master**, who keeps the team on time, and **spokesperson**, who summarizes team choices for the larger group.

STEP 3 Small Group: Review the Hold'em Cards

20 min The groups will now quickly review the District X context as well as the 25 cards. We suggest reviewing the cards by category (i.e., review all the class size cards together, then all the special education cards together) then determine whether each card falls into the “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” pile.

STEP 4 Small Group: Finalize your Hand

20 min The groups will now tally up the cards in the “yes” pile. After calculating what % in “new investments” they’ve made, they must now find savings to meet the target budget reduction.

STEP 5 Full Group: Debrief and Discuss

10 min Reconvene to give groups the opportunity to discuss their experience and share some of the difficult trade-offs they made and why. There is not enough time for groups to share their specific hands, but you should collect the final hands from each group.

Potential Discussion Questions:

- What were the biggest insights/surprises for you regarding the opportunities for district transformation during budget-cutting times?
- What particular card options and restructuring priorities appear to have the most leverage?
- What options were most controversial? Why?
- Which options might be worth pursuing in your district?

★ POST-SESSION

Tally up the hands from all the groups.

Common themes/choices can identify key resource trade-offs that can be made as part of your district’s budgeting process.

FORMAT #2

Exploring the Power of Trade-offs (1.5–2 hours)

This format works well if you have limited time but want to gather input from a diverse group of stakeholders around high-level district budgeting priorities. This exercise utilizes the full deck and focuses on developing “hands” of investments and savings for your particular district.

Materials: See worksheets on page 18.

Instructions:

STEP 1 Introduce *Hold'em!*

5 min The goal is to create a “hand” of investment and savings options that will reduce the district’s budget while still moving it closer to becoming a district that can maximize resources.

STEP 2 Full Group: Identify your Three to Five Most Important District Priorities

15 min Discuss your district’s performance, current use of resources, and budget climate. Identify areas of investment that would be critical to improving student achievement. Identify a target budget reduction that teams should focus on when developing hands.

STEP 3 Small Group: Assign Roles and Review Rules

5 min Divide players into teams of no more than five to six. Have teams assign roles of **score keeper**, who tracks the cards selected, **task master**, who keeps the team on time, and **spokesperson**, who summarizes team choices for the larger group.

STEP 4 Small Group: Read through the Decks

35 min The groups will now quickly review the deck cards. We suggest reviewing them by category (i.e., review all the class size cards together, then all the special education cards together) then determine whether each card falls into the “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” pile.

STEP 5 Small Group: Finalize your Hand

35 min The groups will now tally up the cards in the “yes” pile. After calculating how much in “new investments” they’ve made, they must now find savings to meet the target budget reduction.

STEP 6 Full Group: Debrief and Discuss

15 min Reconvene to give groups the opportunity to discuss their experience and share some of the difficult trade-offs they made and why. There is not enough time for groups to share their specific hands, but you should collect the final hands from each group.

Potential Discussion Questions:

- What were the biggest insights/surprises for you regarding the opportunities for district transformation during budget-cutting times?
- What particular card options and restructuring priorities appear to have the most leverage?
- What options were most controversial? Why?
- Which options might be worth pursuing in your district?



POST-SESSION

Tally up the hands from all the groups.

Common themes/choices can identify key resource trade-offs that can be made as part of your district’s budgeting process.

FORMAT #3

Transform your District with *Hold'em* (3+ hours)

This format works well if you have limited time but want to gather input from a diverse group of stakeholders around high-level district budgeting priorities. This exercise utilizes the full deck and focuses on developing “hands” of investments and savings for your particular district.

Materials: See worksheets on page 20.

Instructions: (Note that steps 1–5 are the same as in Format #2)

STEP 1 Introduce *Hold'em*!

5 min The goal is to create a “hand” of investment and savings options that will reduce the district’s budget while still moving it closer to becoming a district that can maximize resources.

STEP 2 Full Group: Identify your Three to Five Most Important District Priorities

15 min Discuss your district’s performance, current use of resources, and budget climate. Identify areas of investment that would be critical to improving student achievement. Identify a target budget reduction that teams should focus on when developing hands.

STEP 3 Small Group: Assign Roles and Review Rules

5 min Divide players into teams of no more than five to six. Have teams assign roles of **score keeper**, who tracks the cards selected, **task master**, who keeps the team on time, and **spokesperson**, who summarizes team choices for the larger group.

STEP 4 Small Group: Read through the Decks

35 min The groups will now quickly review the deck cards. We suggest reviewing them by category (i.e., review all the class size cards together, then all the special education cards together) then determine whether each card falls into the “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” pile.

STEP 5 Small Group: Finalize your Hand

35 min The groups will now tally up the cards in the “yes” pile. After calculating how much in “new investments” they’ve made, they must now find savings to meet the target budget reduction.

BREAK Give participants a 15-minute Break while you Tally Results

15 min During this time, you will collect all the “hands” from the various teams and tally them up either electronically or on poster paper so that they can be reviewed by the full group.

STEP 6 Full Group: Debrief on the Various Hands

30 min Reflect on the strengths/challenges posed by various hands. Have teams share some of the difficult trade-offs they made and why. Use this process to reaffirm the district’s budgeting priorities.

Potential Discussion Questions:

- What particular card options and restructuring priorities appear to have the most leverage?
- What card choices were common across groups? Are certain categories over/under-represented?
- What options were most controversial? Why?
- Are there places where your chosen options complement or contradict one another?
- Are there opportunities for Wild Cards?

STEP 7 Full Group: Build a New Hand as a Full Group Based on Feedback and Comments

30 min Build a revised hand that incorporates the collective input from all the teams. It may be helpful to use the Prioritization Matrix in the Suggested Next Steps section.

Suggested Next Steps

Finished playing *Hold'em*? Here are four ways you can continue the experience:

1. Play *Hold'em* Online

School Budget Hold'em is a great way to engage other stakeholders in the budgeting process. Our partner districts have used *Hold'em* to gather input from parents and the community, school board members, school leaders, teachers, and more. Check it out online at <http://holdem.erstrategies.org>.

2. Make *Hold'em* your Own

You can even make *Hold'em* your own! Memphis city schools created customized cards and used the *Hold'em* process to organize a two-day budgeting retreat. See the “Learning When to *Hold'em* and When to *Fold'em*” case study on the *Hold'em* website.

3. Prioritize the Actions from *Hold'em* Hands

Don't let those carefully developed hands go to waste! Now that you have a list of potential actions to address, you will want to identify short- and long-term priorities—taking advantage of potential quick wins while setting the stage for sustainable transformation.

It can be easy to focus on the quick wins but don't forget that to achieve sustainable district transformation, you must also leverage the current financial pressure to take on the difficult trade-offs

and challenges that may impede real change. Use this chart to plot all the actions you are considering according to the cost and ease of implementation. Short-term priorities will be in the upper right-hand

Ease of Implementation	EASY	MAYBE if you need a quick or political win	YES make the change NOW!
	HARD	NO the time and effort don't make sense	YES plan changes over the long term and prioritize based on achievement impact
		LOW	HIGH

Resources Freed

box, and longer-term priorities will be in the lower right-hand box. You can also change the dimensions to fit your needs (i.e., map the Resources Freed and Impact on Student Achievement).

4. Learn more Strategic Resource Use

ERS has developed self-assessment tools and guides to help you analyze how effectively your district is using its people, time, and dollars to achieve its key goals:

- **Seven Strategies for District Transformation** provides an overview of key resource strategies.
- **ResourceCheck** is a self-assessment tool that helps you gauge how well your district is managing resources relative to the Seven Strategies and best practices.
- **ERS' Practical Tools for District Transformation** provide frameworks, exercises and analyses that help districts better align resources with strategies for high-performing schools.
- **DREAM** is a web-based tool that allows district leaders to test a variety of scenarios for resource use and focus resources more strategically on their highest priority needs.

“The biggest “A ha” was the fact that everyone immediately moved from the exercise of cutting to discussing what cuts would have the least [negative] impact on the district’s priorities.”

—Dan Katzir, The Broad Foundation

WORKSHEET Mini-deck version for Format #1

1. TEACHING: Restructure teaching job and compensation structure to attract and develop needed expertise, and link to contribution			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Eliminate cost of living adjustments (COLA) and replace with market-based adjustments when revenues allow	-0.8%		(Y) (N) (?)
Give \$10K stipend to your top 15% contributing teachers or teacher teams for increased leadership and responsibility including serving as coaches		+1.0%	(Y) (N) (?)
Invest to implement and build capacity for a teacher evaluation and data system (one time investment)		+0.5%	(Y) (N) (?)
Pay teachers for 60 additional minutes per week to be spent in collaborative planning		+0.2%	(Y) (N) (?)
2. CLASS SIZE: Rethink standardized class size model to target individual attention			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Increase average Secondary School class size by 2	-1.4%		(Y) (N) (?)
Increase average Secondary class size in non-core/elective classes only by 4 ("non-core" subjects are subjects other than English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science and World Language)	-0.8%		(Y) (N) (?)
Reduce average English/Language Arts and Math class sizes for sixth grade by six to support transition to middle school		+0.6%	(Y) (N) (?)
Reduce average class size for grades K-2 from 21 to 17 by adding one additional classroom per grade in each school		+2.0%	(Y) (N) (?)
3. TIME: Optimize existing time to meet student and teacher needs and extend where needed			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Add 60 minutes of learning time to the school day in the 25% lowest performing schools		+1.0%	(Y) (N) (?)
Adjust teacher schedules so teachers who share course content or students have the same free periods		+0.0%	(Y) (N) (?)
4. SPECIAL EDUCATION: Redirect special education spending to early intervention and targeted individual attention for all students			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Bring special education class sizes from 70% to 75% of target size as mandated in staffing ratios and Individual Education Plans (IEP)	-0.6%		(Y) (N) (?)
Reduce special education placements by 5% by addressing over-identification	-0.3%		(Y) (N) (?)
Reduce special education aides by 20% by rewriting Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to more flexibly provide 1:1 and small group support	-0.2%		(Y) (N) (?)
Invest in a Response to Intervention (RTI) program		+0.1%	(Y) (N) (?)
Add Pre-K for 50% of Kindergarten students		+1.5%	(Y) (N) (?)
5. BUILDINGS AND LAND: Maximize use of buildings and land			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Reduce extra spending on very small schools by 25% by changing staffing models and funding formulas	-0.8%		(Y) (N) (?)
Close/consolidate under-enrolled schools to increase district utilization from 85% to 90%	-0.5%		(Y) (N) (?)
6. LEADERSHIP: Redirect spending from compliance and monitoring to leadership development			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Identify your strongest principals and encourage them to move to the 25% lowest performing schools		+0.0%	(Y) (N) (?)
Offer 20% higher principal salaries at the 25% lowest performing schools to attract top talent		+0.1%	(Y) (N) (?)
7. PARTNERS: Leverage outside partners and technology			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Partner with community groups to provide after school programs	-0.2%		(Y) (N) (?)
Replace the top 5% most expensive high school classes with comparable on-line offerings	-0.2%		(Y) (N) (?)
8. EFFICIENCY: Increase efficiency of operations, programs and administration			
	Saving	Investment	Decision
Reduce the cost of employee benefits by 10%	-2.0%		(Y) (N) (?)
Reduce central office and non-school management and overhead by 10%	-0.1%		(Y) (N) (?)
Reduce school-based administrative and clerical staff by 10%	-0.3%		(Y) (N) (?)
Eliminate after school sports	-0.7%		(Y) (N) (?)

WORKSHEET Full deck version for Formats #2 and #3

Freeze salary step increases for one year for all employee contracts	-1.0%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Eliminate cost of living adjustments (COLA) and replace with market based adjustments when revenues allow	-0.8%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Eliminate teacher coaches	-0.7%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Furlough teachers for three days	-0.7%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Make teacher layoff decisions based on performance instead of seniority	-0.4 %		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce teacher professional development days by two	-0.4 %		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Restructure the school day to provide 60 additional minutes of collaboration planning		+0.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Offer \$10K stipends to attract Master Teachers to the 25% lowest performing schools		+0.2%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Pay teachers for 60 additional minutes per week to be spent in collaborative planning		+0.2%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Invest to implement and build capacity for a teacher evaluation and data system (one time investment)		+0.5%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Provide a 2% across the board teacher salary increase		+0.8 %	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Provide one-time payment for course work to allow for cross-certification across multiple subjects and specialties for 10% of teachers		+ 0.8 %	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Give \$10K stipend to your top 15% contributing teachers or teacher teams for increased leadership and responsibility including serving as coaches		+1.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Increase teacher salary by \$10K for teachers in hard to staff subjects		+1.7%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?

Increase average Secondary School class size by 2	-1.4%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Remove one section of 4th and 5th grade in big schools and one section of either 4th or 5th grade in small schools, increasing 4th and 5th grade average class size by 4	-0.9%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Increase average Secondary class size in non-core/ elective classes only by 4 (“non-core” subjects are subjects other than English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science and World Language)	-0.8%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Increase average Elementary special subject (music, art, Phys. Ed.) class size by 5	-0.5%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce average English/Language Arts and Math class sizes for grade 6 by 6 to support transition to middle school		+0.6%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce average English/Language Arts and math class size for grade 9 by 6 to support transition to high school		+0.6%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce average class size for grades K-2 from 21 to 17 by adding one additional classroom per grade in each school		+2.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?

Adjust teacher schedules so that teachers who share course content or students have the same free periods		+0.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Provide double blocks of English/language arts and math for struggling students and students in transition grades		+0.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce the length of elective blocks or double core academic blocks to provide more instructional time in English/ language arts, reading and math		+0.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Add 60 min of learning time to the school day in the 25% lowest performing schools		+1.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?

Bring special education class sizes from 70% to 75% of target size as mandated in staffing ratios and Individual Education Plans (IEP)	-0.6%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce special education placements by 5% by addressing over-identification	-0.3%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce special education aides by 20% by rewriting Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to more flexibly provide 1:1 and small group support	-0.2%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce special education administration and compliance spending at the central office 10% by using technology and by redesigning processes	-0.2%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Invest in a Response to Intervention (RTI) program		+0.1%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Add Pre-K for 50% of Kindergarten students		+1.5%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?

Reduce extra spending on very small schools by 25% by changing staffing models and funding formulas	-0.8%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Close/Consolidate under-enrolled schools to increase district utilization from 85% to 90%	-0.5%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Lease unused and after school space to community groups and other users	-0.2%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Identify your strongest principals and encourage them to move to the 25% lowest performing schools		+0.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Provide a week of professional development for principals on teacher evaluation, using available summer time at no additional cost		+0.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Introduce principal residency program to build leadership capacity		+ 0.1 %	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Offer 20% higher principal salaries at the 25% lowest performing schools to attract top talent		+0.1%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Add school leader staff to double time available for teacher evaluation and support		+0.6%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Replace the top 5% most expensive high school classes with comparable on-line offerings	-0.2%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Partner with community groups to provide after school programs	-0.2%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Provide 10% of non-core/elective classes through community partnership resources	-0.1%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Partner with community groups to provide 50% of summer school programs	-0.1%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Add a social services coordinator in 25% lowest performing schools		+0.4%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce the cost of employee benefits by 10%	-2.0%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Eliminate Pre-Kindergarten	-1.5%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce funding to schools that are overfunded on a per pupil basis	-1.0%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Eliminate after school sports	-0.7%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce Facilities and Maintenance costs by 10%	-0.7%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce school based non-instructional staff (i.e. Librarian, guidance, social services staff) by 20%	-0.6%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce Transportation costs by 10%	-0.3%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce school-based administrative and clerical staff by 10%	-0.3%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Increase student activity fees by \$50/student in Secondary Schools	-0.3%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Eliminate summer school	-0.2%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Reduce central office and non-school management and overhead by 10%	-0.1%		<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?
Increase funding to schools that are underfunded on a per pupil basis		+1.0%	<input type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N <input type="radio"/> ?

Strategies for Transformation

ERS has developed a vision for how schools must strategically manage their resources to support students, and how school systems must organize to support schools in these efforts. We have defined seven strategies around resource allocation that enable school systems to overcome standard barriers and realize this transformation. The options in *School Budget Hold'em* are built from these ideals.

The Problem: Misalignments

1. School Funding: Schools and students with the same needs receive different levels and types of resources that don't match their needs.

2. Teaching: Job structure, salary, and support do not encourage teacher effectiveness and contribution.

3. School Design: Traditional school schedules and staffing practices do not match time and individual attention to priorities or foster professional working conditions for teachers.

4. Instructional Support: Spending on and organization of curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development are not aligned with school needs.

5. Leadership: Districts make limited investments to build and reward leadership effectiveness.

6. Central Services: Central school services and supervision are not designed to improve productivity and customize support to school needs.

7. Partnerships: Districts do not leverage more cost-effective community and expert resources to provide student support and non-core academic instruction.

“ *Hold'em* provides a concrete, interactive way to think through specific trade-offs and the implication of those budget choices. The game shows how different options do not exist in a vacuum, but are linked in the real world.”

—Kiera Dembowski
The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

The Solution: Transformational Strategies

Ensure equitable, transparent, and flexible funding across schools adjusted for student need.

Restructure teaching to foster individual and team effectiveness and professional growth.

Support schools in organizing talent, time, and money to maximize learning.

Ensure access to aligned curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.

Build school and district leader capacity.

Redesign central roles for empowerment, accountability, and efficiency.

Partner with families and communities.

Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a non-profit organization that works with large urban school systems to transform their resource use to dramatically improve student learning. Our mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by helping educational leaders rethink how they use system- and school-level resources—people, time, and money—to support strategies for improved instruction and performance. Visit our other resources online at erstrategies.org:

DREAM is an online tool that allows you to adjust key cost levers in your district (using your data!) to instantly see how these changes impact your budget and other critical measures.

ResourceCheck is an online self-assessment that takes you through a series of questions about your current resource use and helps you identify immediate priorities for improvement.

Resource Guides

Interested in learning more about ERS' Seven Transformational Strategies? Download our in-depth Resource Guides!

- **School Design:** This guide shows you how schedules, student grouping, teacher and student assignment, and Special Education placement can help you make the most of your school resources.
- **School Funding Systems:** This guide helps you identify unseen imbalances in spending and to look closely at variances caused by school sizes and personnel, special programs and student populations.
- **Teaching Job:** This guide provides hands-on exercises to measure and take action to improve effectiveness, hiring, individual teacher growth, school-based support, and compensation.
- **Turnaround Schools:** This guide helps you determine the best interventions for your schools, including ways to build leadership and teaching capacity, support at-risk students, and provide additional time and attention to accelerate learning.

Don't forget that you can also play *School Budget Hold'em* online at holdem.erstools.org.



So maybe 'fun' is a bit of an overstatement, but those smarty pants at Education Resource Strategies have certainly put together an engaging tool for gauging the relative costs and savings to districts when looking at effective ways to align school resources."

—Patte Barthe
National School Boards Association



Great game for people to understand the big picture and tradeoffs in resource allocations when you have a fixed pot of money. This could help build a level of understanding and maybe consensus around tough decisions a district has to make."

-Bill Andrekopoulos, retired Superintendent
Milwaukee Public Schools



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