



### What is Budget Hold'em for Districts?

- What's the "return on investment" in your school system budget?
- Explore options that balance investments and savings with a focus on the real bottom line – student performance.
- School Budget Hold'em for Districts is more than a game – it's an interactive exploration of how school system leaders can make the most of every dollar to accelerate student learning.
- Hold'em sparks conversation about budget tradeoffs, transformational instruction, and student impact.
- It helps envision a budget as a reflection of priorities.
- Based on ERS' decades of experience working with district leaders, Hold'em is an excellent way to build consensus and spark innovative thinking before developing your annual budget, writing a strategic plan, or communicating with stakeholders such as school boards, parents, unions, legislators, and more.

### Why play Hold'em?

- School systems can't afford to just cut – or to layer new money onto old strategies.
- If we want to improve student achievement, education leaders must think differently about how to balance reductions and investments.
- This means working across departmental "silos" to craft a budget that reflects the district's key priorities, takes into account the "return on investment" of new strategies ( in terms of student achievement), and thoughtfully pairs strategies to have the greatest impact.
- This tool uses real district data and scenarios based on ERS' work from over 15 years in districts nationwide.
- It has been played by over 10,000 people in person and online, and continues to be used by district leadership teams, board members, teachers, and more.

### How to Play?

- Follow this link: [https://www.erstrategies.org/hold-em/school\\_level\\_games/home](https://www.erstrategies.org/hold-em/school_level_games/home)
  - Click the "how to play" button
  - Watch the short video
  - Click the "keep playing" button
- Set your budget target
  - Relative to last year, how much will your overall budget increase or decrease?
  - If you're not sure, just pick a "close enough" number or a number you would like to hit.
- Keep in mind your school system's most important needs and priorities.
  - Choose to "play" cards that fit your priorities, increase student achievement, and help meet a budget target.
  - Be realistic, but also open-minded and bold.
- You can do anything, but you can't do everything!

### Behind The Numbers

- How ERS calculated the budget percentages:
  - The budget percentages are "educated estimates" based on ERS' work over the past 15 years with urban districts and on NCES national statistics.
  - They are meant to give you an idea of the relative impact that different decisions will have on a typical district budget. The real numbers for your district will vary.
  - But don't let that stop you!

- Suspend your disbelief for a moment, because the real value of the game is helping you and your colleagues think in new ways about the challenges and opportunities you face.