



Facilitators' Guide for School Budget Hold'em-California

School Budget Hold'em-California is more than a game. It's an interactive exploration of the thoughtful trade-offs school administrators must make. Balancing the goals of improved student achievement with a specific budget target, participants consider various options for how to organize and invest their resources. The goal is to select a "hand" of cards that meets the district objectives.

California districts can use School Budget Hold'em-California when creating their LCAP reports as a way to foster discussion of Goals (Section 2) and associated Actions (Section 3). While it's true a district can do *anything*—particularly with increased budgets from LCFF—they still cannot do *everything*, so thoughtful choices must be made. Hold'em helps guide the conversation so district stakeholders can identify their true priorities.

Hold'em is tried and true. It evolved out of Education Resource Strategies' (ERS) experience over the past decade working with urban districts across the country on strategic resource allocation. Hold'em has been played by nearly 10,000 district leaders, state policy makers, reform organizations and others.

Object of the game

Use the cards to create a "hand" of investment and savings options that enable the district to meet its LCAP goals while most effectively incorporating an increase in budget.

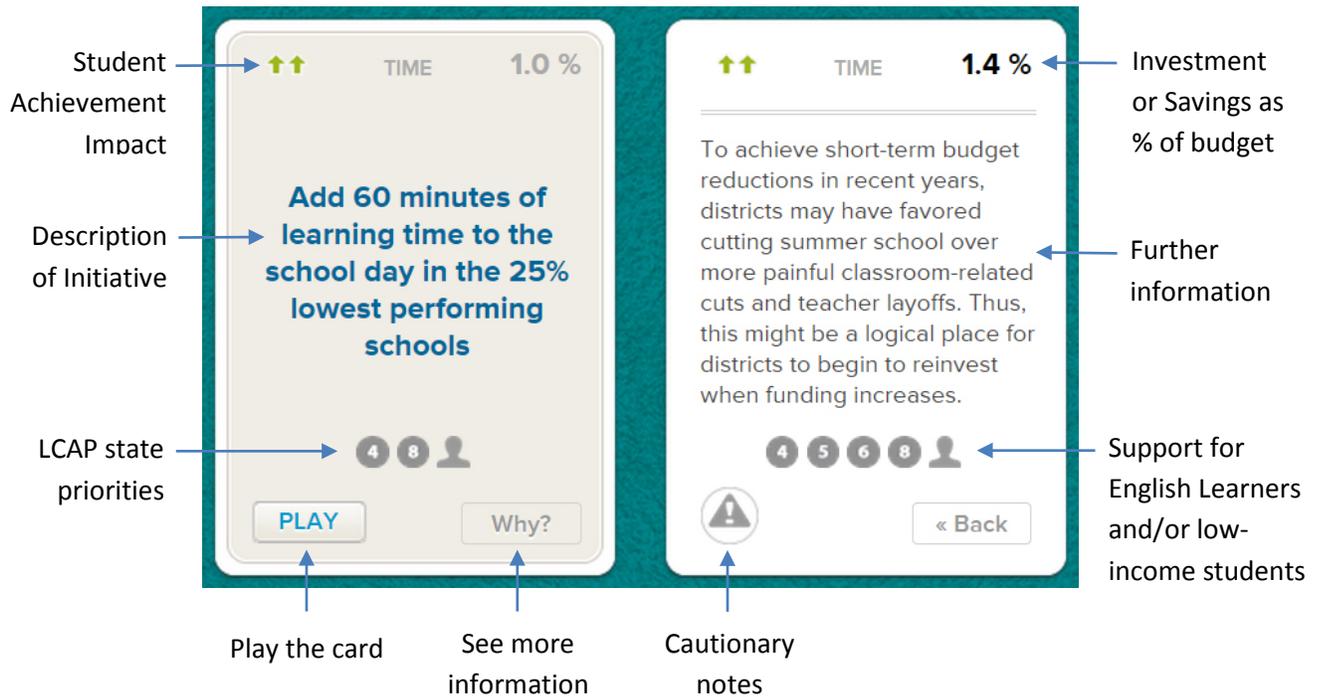
You can play on behalf of your own district or use one of the three scenarios we provide (a suburban district, a small rural district, or a high-poverty district). If you choose to use your own district, you should first identify some basic facts and district goals so all players have the same starting understanding—see one of the scenarios as an example. (You can find links to these three scenarios on the [California Hold'em home page](#).)

Time Required

To get the most out of Hold'em we recommend groups spend 1.5-3 hours so you can explore all trade-off options. tips

What's a Hold'em card?

Each card contains a description of an initiative, a percentage of the budget (+ for investments, - for savings), impact on student achievement (indicated by arrows in upper left), which State Priorities are satisfied and, where appropriate, an icon indicating the initiative provides support for English Language (EL) and/or Low Income (LI) students.



Instructions to play

Hold'em online can be played individually, but it's best when played with others so you can share ideas and discuss possible trade-offs. Each online hand can be shared with others, or you can [play with a group](#) (best with 4-6 people)!

STEP 1: Choose a district: If you choose to use your own district, compile the basic facts and district priorities. You will also need to identify the budget target (the percent increase or decrease your district will face compared to the current budget). Alternatively you can choose one of the three district scenarios provided. (You can find links to these three scenarios on the [California Hold'em home page](#).)

STEP 2: Read the "Basic Facts" about your district, and each group should agree on the priorities.

STEP 3: Review cards and select investments: Each group reviews the investment cards and determines which are "yes," "no," or "maybe." Note it's important to select investments before considering savings.

STEP 4: Finalize your hand! The total budget % change will automatically calculate based on the cards selected. If the total is over the target investment (or savings) %, then additional savings cards will need to be selected so that the final sum of all cards chosen is no more than the target. Also consider whether you have addressed all the state priorities and provided the appropriate level of support for EL/LI students (for those districts receiving Supplemental funding and Concentration funding).

Things to Consider

- **Select carefully:** Some cards are more strategic and will have greater impact on student performance than other cards.
- **Consider inter-relationships:** Not all choices are completely independent. Some may work better when paired with other options. For instance, if you select to add time to the school day, you should also consider investing in teacher professional development to make sure time is used well.
- **Accept approximation:** The budget percentages are estimates built from averages and high-level assumptions based on typical districts. Actual district results could vary. For the purposes of this game, most groups work with the estimates provided. If you find something that is clearly different in your district, feel free to substitute a more appropriate percentage and calculate your total budget change on paper. Similarly, the student impact arrows on cards are informed by ERS' work with urban districts. These are meant to be directionally accurate, but the actual magnitude of the impact will vary based on the quality of implementation and the unique context of your district.
- **Wildcards:** If you have a suggestion for an investment or savings that is not included in the deck, feel free to use a wildcard. Use your best guess to estimate the percent investment or savings. (You can find Wildcards under the Hold'em drop-down menu.)

Questions for Discussion

One of the most important parts of Hold'em is the discussion that naturally occurs as participants engage in the exercise. Here are some questions to consider:

- What were the biggest insights and/or surprises in your choices? For example, were you surprised to learn:

These things are high cost....
Reducing class size across the board
Providing or expanding summer school
Restoring art, music, and other enrichment classes previously cut

These things are lower cost...
Providing double blocks of ELA and math for struggling students
Invest in a Response to Intervention (RTI) program
Invest to implement a teacher evaluation system
Providing principal professional development
Adding school leader staff to increase time for teacher evaluations and other support

- Were you able to make some transformative changes, or did you feel compelled to add back items cut in recent years? If the latter, what impact will this have on student performance over the long run?

Feedback Welcome

Please let us know about your experience playing Hold'em, like whether it was useful for your district, especially in preparing your LCAP report. We are also very receptive to suggestions for improvement. You can contact us at contact@erstrategies.org.

“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