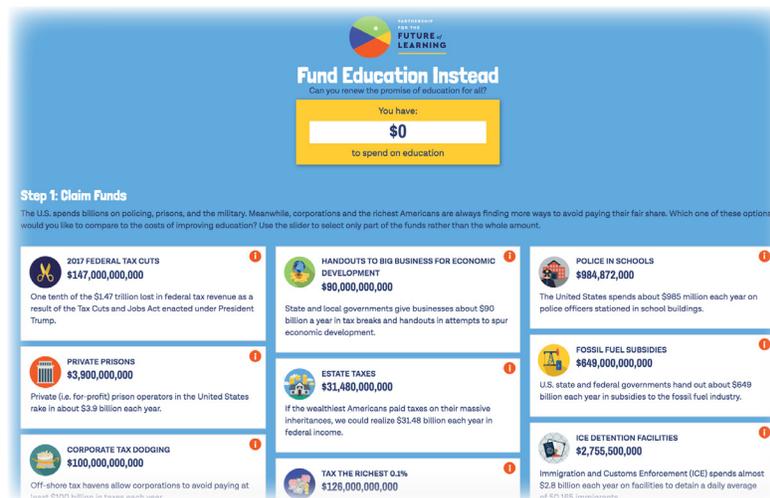




NEW ONLINE GAME ASKS: WHAT IF WE FUNDED EDUCATION INSTEAD?



\$90 billion.

According to the [Brookings Institution](#) and the *New York Times*, that's a solid estimate of how much state and local governments gave businesses in economic development incentives in 2015.

But what does that really *mean*? Even just \$1 billion is way outside the realm of most people's day-to-day experience. In fact, human beings are notoriously bad at understanding numbers in the million to trillion range. In [one study](#), about half the participants perceived that the difference between one thousand and 1 million was the same as the difference between 1 million and 1 billion.

Yet voters and politicians alike are routinely asked to offer opinions or make decisions about dollar amounts involving seven figures or more.

A new game by The Partnership for the Future of Learning, along with the National Education Policy Center, Root + All, and Voqal, aims to help make sense of these incomprehensible amounts by translating them into a metric that is comprehensible and that is crucial for the maintenance and future of our democracy and our civil society: public K12 education.

Fund Education Instead offers players a chance to translate large dollar amounts into educational expenditures.

For example, take the \$90 billion in 2015 economic development handouts.

That money alone could have made preschool free for all 3,952,592 four-year-olds in the U.S., AND hired full-time counselors for all 97,586 schools that need them, AND hired

school psychologists for all 63,135 schools that need them, AND completely closed the digital divide, providing high-speed home internet access to every American household, AND provided ethnic studies courses in all 23,882 high schools in the U.S., AND provided one-year paid residencies for all 100,045 newly certified and hired teachers. With \$5.2 billion left over.

Or what about the \$985 million spent annually on police patrolling schools?

That's enough to place restorative justice coordinators in more than 10,000 U.S. schools that need them.

The game is played in three stages. First, users are presented with a dozen real world examples of incomprehensibly large dollar amounts, such as those above or, e.g., \$31.5 billion (the amount an estate tax would raise annually if the wealthiest Americans paid taxes on their inheritances); \$740 billion (the nation's national security budget); or \$100 billion (corporations dodge at least this much in taxes by stashing their money offshore). Players can put some or all of one or more of these items into their account. Alternatively, they can create their own expense and dollar amount. For instance, a policymaker could determine how much education could be funded with a new tax break requested by corporations. A teacher could ask students to explore what the incomes of favorite celebrities could buy. A youth organizer could arrive at a budget hearing armed with information on alternatives for redirecting a portion of police funding to public schools.

In stage 2, players have the opportunity to #FundEdInstead by electing to spend all or some of their reserves on such expenses as those listed above, or repairing and updating dilapidated school buildings and reducing the average class size to 18 in elementary schools.

Once they've finished spending their resources, players receive a "receipt" they can save or share.

The dollar amounts included in the game are carefully sourced. By clicking on an "i" icon, players can find resources and citations for each expenditure and expense. In addition, a group of young activists were hired to provide feedback on which educational expenses should be offered in the second stage of the game.

"The idea for the game arose out of our belief that we need to surface the reality of choices," said NEPC Director Kevin Welner of the University of Colorado Boulder:

Right now, our leaders and our society choose to underfund education. Our leaders are choosing to starve our children of the resources and opportunities that they need. The game points to other possible choices – ones that will help close the vast opportunity gaps in the U.S.

NEPC Resources on School Finance and Funding

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