It can be a big shock when teens receive their first paychecks and realize that a large portion of their earnings is deducted for taxes. This lesson helps students understand how to make sense of all the line items on their paystubs. Students will also analyze earnings statements to determine how setting up automatic savings deposits and adjusting deductions can help them increase their savings.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

*Students will...*

- Explore different payroll deductions
- Learn about annual tax returns
- Analyze employer-sponsored savings programs

**STANDARDS:**

*Jump$tart Standards:*

- Income Standards 2 and 3

*National Economics Standards:*

- Standard 13: Income

*Common Core ELA Standards:*

- Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration
- Speaking and Listening: Knowledge and Ideas
- Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

*Common Core Math Standards:*

- Numbers and Quantity: Quantities
- Modeling
Investigate: Paychecks Please

[Time Required: 10 minutes]

1. Begin by telling students they’ve just received their first paychecks. Next, write the statements below on the board or read them aloud and challenge students to spot the false claim.

   A. My net income is the money I get to deposit in my bank account
   B. I don’t have to pay taxes because I’m not 18 years old yet
   C. I signed up for direct deposit, so I won’t get a physical check with my paystub

2. Encourage students to share their answers. Explain that B is the false statement because even minors have to pay taxes on money they earn.

3. Tell students that today’s lesson is about net earnings, taxes and other deductions they may encounter on their paystubs, as well as how they can make the most out of deductions to maximize savings.

Student Preparation: Paystub Puzzles

[Time Required: 15 minutes]

4. Ask students if they’ve ever seen a paystub before. Have they received one for a part-time job or has anyone in their family shown them one?

5. Next, hand out the student activity sheet Paystub Puzzles: Putting the Pieces Together and review the first example together as a class.

6. Explain to students what each part of the earnings statement means, and help them understand that gross income is what they earn before taxes and net income is what they actually get to take home.

7. Next, engage the class in a discussion about taxation. Why does the government require taxes to be taken out of every paycheck? Do students know what services federal and state taxes pay for? Invite students to share their ideas.
8. Using the activity sheet, discuss federal, state, Medicare and social security taxes, and help students understand why these taxes are deducted from paychecks. Explain that at the end of the year, employers send W-2 forms that outline money earned and deductions incurred each year. The W-2 is used to file an annual tax return—you will either get a refund on your taxes or owe more depending on how much was deducted from your pay throughout the year.

**Challenge: Hunt for Savings**

(Time Required: 25 minutes)

9. Explain to students that there are ways to claim tax deductions while maximizing their savings. For example, contributing to a 401(k) or automatic savings deposit increases deductions and also long-term savings. If money is deducted for a medical FSA but the account is unused, minimizing FSA contributions frees up money for long-term savings accounts like a 401(k).

10. Next, split the class into groups of 4–5 and ask each team to review the remaining paystubs on Paystub Puzzles: Putting the Pieces Together.

11. Invite volunteers to share their ideas and engage the class in a discussion about adjusting deductions to maximize savings based on individual needs.

**Reflection**

(Time Required: 5 minutes)

Ask students to write in their notebooks about the elements they will consider in the future when it comes to payroll deductions. Will they consider contributing to a 401(k), FSA or direct-deposit savings when they earn a paycheck? Why or why not?
Sample 1
Dan could increase his savings by not contributing to the medical FSA and health insurance offered by his employer because he is currently included on his parents’ health insurance plan. He could use the extra money to take home more net pay or add more money to his deposit savings.

Sample 2
Rachelle could contribute money to the employer-sponsored 401(k) to increase her savings for retirement. She could also increase her savings deposit if she continues to work overtime and has the extra money to put toward savings.

Sample 3
Since Taylor wants to save for a car, he could increase his automatic savings deposit so that he keeps on track to meet his financial goals and to begin saving for retirement.