



EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS

Policy Overview

ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit - 2018

Each student has unique needs and learns in different ways. By allowing parents to plan for their children's individual needs, education scholarship accounts (ESAs) create a personal approach to education, where the ultimate goal is maximizing natural learning abilities.

WHAT ARE EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS?

ESAs are state-supervised spending accounts containing a child's education funds that can be used to pay for a variety of educational services. With an ESA, parents direct their children's education funding to the state-approved schools, courses, programs and services of their choice—plus unused funds can be saved for future K-12 and college expenses.

ESAs empower parents to evaluate the quality and costs of services to make the best educational choices for their child.

HOW CAN PARENTS USE ESA FUNDS?

Parents can use ESAs to pay for a variety of educational services, including, but not limited to:

- Tuition and fees at participating private schools
- Private tutoring
- Special education services and therapies
- Online learning courses and programs
- Fees for specialized or advanced courses, annual testing, certifications and college entrance exams
- Savings for future K-12 or higher education expenses
- Other state-approved expenditures

WHICH STATES HAVE EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNTS?

To date, there are five operational ESA programs.

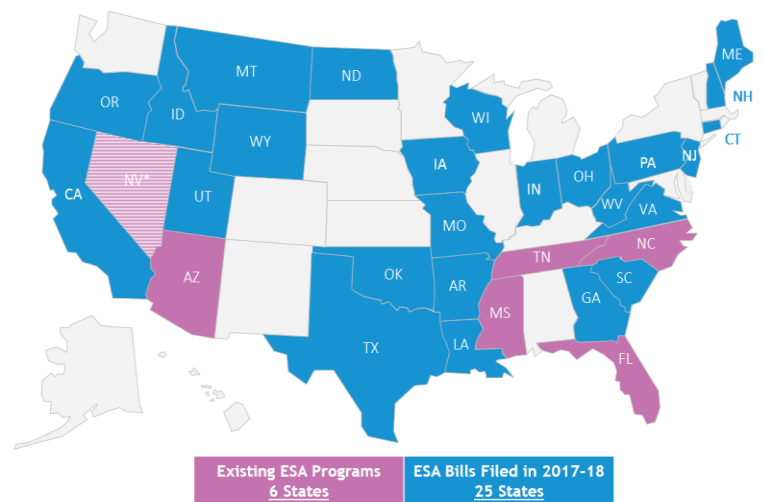
Arizona's program (2011) started for students with special needs but has gradually expanded eligibility to include students in low-performing public schools, foster children, military families and siblings of participating students.

Florida (2014), Mississippi (2015), Tennessee (2015) and North Carolina (2017) have programs for students with special needs.

Nevada (2015) passed a universal ESA in 2015, but the program is yet to be funded by the state legislature.

Since 2017, 25 states have filed an ESA proposal in their state legislature.

ESA Activity in 2018





HOW ARE ESAS DIFFERENT THAN VOUCHERS OR TAX-CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS?

Vouchers and tax-credit scholarship programs award tuition scholarships that can only be used at a participating private school. ESAs, on the other hand, are flexible spending accounts controlled by parents and supervised by the state. Public funds are allocated to families and deposited into ESAs that parents/guardians can save or use as they see fit. Rather than restricting funds for one specific purpose, ESA families are empowered to fully customize and design an educational experience for their children. Importantly, unused ESA dollars can roll over from one year to the next—which is not possible with a voucher or tax-credit scholarship.

WHY CHOOSE ESAS?

ESAs Embrace Customization

Instead of being relegated to “School A” or “School B,” parents have a full menu of options to choose from. A child can attend private school and receive speech therapy on the side. Another child can learn math and science online, English and history at home, see a tutor twice a week and save leftover money for future education expenses. With an ESA, education is no longer “use it or lose it.” Parents decide where the best values are and can direct their child’s funds in the most efficient way.

Choice Improves Public Schools

ESAs not only provide important options for families, but they also have the capacity to strengthen public schools. Consider Florida, where lawmakers passed a statewide choice program for students with special needs in 1999 that currently enrolls more than 30,000 students. Research has also shown that the program resulted in academic improvement for [students who remain in public schools](#), and since the program’s inception, Florida’s public school students with special needs have led the nation in academic gains. Having the option in place not only led to children being better served, it became the necessary push for many public schools to deliver better services.

ESAs Satisfy Parents

A growing body of [evidence](#) suggests parents are [more satisfied](#) when they have an active role in choosing their children’s education environment. This trend is likely to continue, with millennials [demonstrating](#) the [highest rates](#) of favorability to choice in education. Early evidence of ESA program participants reflects this trend, with [one survey](#) finding unanimous satisfaction for ESAs among participants. Why? Education choice breaks down the barriers that keep families from the schools and services that best fit their needs—without forcing those preferences on others.

Parents and Children Say It Best

- Watch the remarkable stories of [Jordan Visser](#) and [Max Ashton](#), children currently benefiting from ESAs.
- In *The Orlando Sentinel*, Julie Kleffel, parent of a student with special needs, writes, “[Special-needs kids will soar with new scholarship money.](#)”
- Amanda Howard, parent of a student with special needs, writes “[How a scholarship helped my son learn to talk](#)” in *The Arizona Republic*.
- Florida State Senator Andy Gardiner, sponsor of ESA legislation in Florida and parent of a student with special needs, writes how the state’s program is “[Transforming Education for Students with Unique Abilities.](#)”

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

For more information on ESAs, see additional resources on the [ExcelinEd website](#). Contact Adam Peshek (Adam@ExcelinEd.org), James Paul (JamesP@ExcelinEd.org) or Tori Bell (Victoria@ExcelinEd.org) with questions.