

Understanding Education Savings Accounts

Education Savings Accounts or ESAs, as they're commonly known, are an innovative initiative that has the potential to transform our educational landscape. ESAs put the PARENT at the forefront of parental choice in education by making it possible for parents to access and afford the educational setting that best meets their child's needs. Parents know their children's strengths and needs better than anyone, and ESAs put parents in the driver's seat when it comes to choice in education.

Under an ESA plan, the state would deposit money into an account, and parents would use those funds to cover educational expenses such as nonpublic school tuition, home instruction, virtual courses, cognitive skills training and tutoring. Under most ESA proposals, the money the state would be spending on your child's public education – or a portion of it – would be deposited in an ESA. Parents would then be free to choose from a variety of educational services based on what they feel would best meet their children's learning needs. Parents would be given a debit card that they would use to pay for educational expenses out of their ESA accounts. The card would only be honored at approved educational providers, protecting the program from fraud.

ESAs must be established by an act of the state legislature, who would decide all details of the plan, such as the amount of funding. Advocacy efforts are taking place in states all around our country as grassroots activists fight for the rights of all parents to be able to freely choose the education their children need to succeed. Five states currently have ESA programs in place for special needs students – Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee. Nevada passed an ESA program that would cover nearly all students in the state, and that program is currently awaiting funding by the legislature. ESAs

are a new way of thinking about education and change like this takes time; however, the push to establish ESAs is gaining steady momentum.

If you want to learn more and help advocate for ESAs and parental choice in education, here are a few things you can easily do that will have a great impact:

- Get the facts – There is a lot of misinformation out there about Education Savings Accounts. Arm yourself with accurate information. Visit www.edchoice.org, www.federationforchildren.org or www.NCEA.org for research and information on ESAs and other school choice initiatives.
- Find out what's going on in your state – There is an active school choice grassroots organization in every state. Find yours today and call or visit their website to find out about their advocacy efforts and how you can help in your own community. You also can contact your state Catholic Conference Office by searching the state directory, <http://www.nasccd.org/directory/index.html>.
- Talk to your legislators – Visit with your state senator and representative about parental choice in education. Let them know how these efforts change lives and expand options, especially for lower-income and working-class families. You can find a list of state legislators and contact information by going to https://ballotpedia.org/List_of_United_States_state_legislatures.

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