



AZ Loves ESAs

How the Anti-ESA Initiatives Hurt Disability Students

Elevator Pitch

The anti-school choice ballot initiatives claim they protect special needs children but they actually target them, putting some in jeopardy of being kicked off the program, forcing new disabled students back into the public school for 45 days, severely disrupting their progress, and limiting the resources, teachers, therapists and tools they need to thrive. Decline to sign *any* ESA-related ballot initiative.

Top Facts

- **Nearly 20%** of 102,500+ Arizona ESA students have special needs. (*Source: AZ Department of Education*)

The AEA / SOS “Protect Education Act”

- **The proposed AEA / SOS ballot initiative puts SPED families in jeopardy of being kicked off the program – then makes them jump through hoops to get back on. It targets new SPED families entering the program.**
 - To avoid being kicked off the program by the arbitrary income cap, special needs students may be forced to re-apply under the pre-universal category, which could subject them to leaving their current school, re-enrolling in a public school for the requisite 45 days, and then switching back again, causing significant disruption.
- **The proposed AEA / SOS ballot initiative confiscates the dollars of SPED families who spend wisely and save.**
 - SPED students have only two years to use every last dollar of their funds or face having their remaining dollars snatched away. These families intentionally saved these funds to help their special needs students as they got older.
- **The AEA / SOS proposed ballot initiative discourages private schools from integrating SPED students.**
 - Private schools that serve *both* SPED and non-SPED students are singled out and penalized with burdensome mandates. These burdensome mandates include, being “accredited by a regionally or nationally recognized accrediting organization” OR pay for and give all non-SPED students an approved exam & disclose the aggregate scores.
 - All employees in private schools will now be under the disciplinary actions of the Board of Education. It is a takeover of the special needs sector of private schools, limiting talent and resources to serve special needs children.



- **The proposed AEA / SOS ballot initiative makes it harder for families to purchase needed resources for special needs children.**
 - The measure limits families to only purchasing books and other educational materials if they can prove they were explicitly called for in an approved curriculum.
- **The AEA / SOS proposed ballot initiative limits SPED families' options.**
 - Qualified schools and tutors must be included on the platform used by the department. It is ambiguous if SPED families will be able to submit reimbursements for their tutors, therapists, etc. that might not be on the platform.
 - Private schools that decide they can't operate under the burdensome accreditation and testing mandates will stop accepting SPED students with ESA, limiting the number and types of school options available to special needs families.
- **The AEA / SOS proposed ballot initiative plans to close a students account if it is not renewed after 1 year rather than the current three years.**
 - This means that SPED students who receive more dollars from an STO for a couple of years will no longer have the option to go back to an ESA if needed. As a result, they might be forced to get new documentation for their diagnosis from the public school and be required to attend that public school for 45 days. This is a threat to student progress.
- **The AEA / SOS proposed ballot initiative gives the political action committee supporting this measure unprecedented authority and standing *in the measure* to intervene in any measure-related action or proceeding.** This means that special needs families are at the whim of the PAC supporting this measure. More of their freedoms may be taken from them as time goes on.

The AFC "Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Reform and Accountability Act"

- **The AFC proposed ballot initiative requires a list of allowable curricula to be developed. Parents may request curricula to be added within 90 days.**
 - This means that families with special needs children must get their curricula approved in advance, potentially resulting in long wait times before students can access the resources they need.
- **The AFC proposed ballot initiative limits education options for special needs students by adding additional requirements for tutors and private schools.**
 - This means special needs students may lose the education providers that they trust and need to start over with a new tutor or school. This change may result in regression of student progress.



- **The AFC proposed ballot initiative requires ALL expenditures and invoicing to go through the marketplace, with certain exemptions. A qualifying marketplace must have 1) "fraud prevention and detection mechanisms," 2) have a process for vendors to apply, and 3) maintain transaction level data.**
 - This means SPED students may not access the tools, therapists, tutors, etc. that serve them best because these options may not be available on the marketplace. Additionally, parents of special needs students may need to pay more for their resources since the closed marketplace is more expensive.
- **The AFC proposed ballot initiative requires SPED families to request reimbursements on a case-by-case basis to have items added to list of approved expenditures; the need for reimbursements (rather than alternative payment method) must be justified in future years and debit cards are explicitly prohibited.**
 - This means SPED students are not going to have access to the tools, therapists, tutors, and resources they need. They may lose access to tutors or therapists who refuse to be on the marketplace and who won't wait on the reimbursement approval. Right now, debit cards are specifically for special needs students because these students need the most flexibility for their education to truly grow and thrive.
- **The AFC proposed ballot initiative plans to close a students account if it is not renewed after 1 year rather than the current three years.**
 - This means that SPED students who receive more dollars from an STO for a couple of years will no longer have the option to go back to an ESA if needed. As a result, they might be forced to get new documentation for their diagnosis from the public school or a private evaluator.