



Myths vs. Facts: The Two Anti-ESA Ballot Initiatives

Myths	Facts
The ESA program is riddled with fraud. Parents are allowed to buy diamond rings, trips to disney, cars and more! We only want to create more accountability.	Not a dollar of misspending is ever acceptable. But it's important to have the facts. According to a statistical study, about 2% of ESA purchases are unallowable expenses (including errors in documentation and good faith purchases assumed to be allowable) while only 0.3% represent fraud or egregious purchases. To put it in context, the rate of misuse at a variety of programs such as Medicaid is 7.4%, food stamps is 9.3%, and unemployment insurance is 14.4%. The ESA law has significant accountability measures already built in to prevent fraud and to recover dollars when it occurs. Parents are directly accountable for every dollar. Right now, parents are required by the ADE to submit receipts and curriculum every time they purchase an item to justify the purchase. The law, rules, and Empowerment Scholarship handbook already prohibit items that are not accompanied by curriculum or found to be educational.
These ballot initiatives exempt special needs children.	Actually, both ballot initiatives would be very disruptive for the education of ESA students with special needs. Nearly 20% of 102,300+ Arizona ESA students have special needs. The initiatives significantly restrict access to educational resources for children with special needs. The AEA / SOS initiative will seize unused ESA funds from parents every two years rather than allowing them to save for more expensive high school years or future special education therapy



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	costs as they can now.. This initiative also targets new SPED students and students who fall outside the arbitrary income cap, forcing them to return to public schools for 45 days. Both initiatives restrict the families from purchasing tools, tutors, therapists, and resources their SPED children need by limiting purchases to a marketplace. The AFC initiative will only allow reimbursements upon approved exceptions and no longer permit debit cards.
These ballot initiatives protect education and expand the ESA program in Arizona.	These initiatives hurt children, disrupt K-12 education in Arizona, and make Arizona's ESA program harder to use and access. There are over 102,500 students on Arizona's ESA program. Because of these initiatives, these 102,500+ students may lose their schools, resources, and tutors and be forced back into educational environments that do not meet their unique needs. Some may even be in jeopardy of being kicked off the ESA program for not falling below the arbitrary income cap that fails to account for cost of living or family size. These initiatives specifically target and hurt new special needs children. For instance, according to the AEA / SOS initiative, new special needs students will be forced into a public school for 45 days before they can get on an ESA. Under AFC's initiative, special needs students are limited to only the resources approved by the marketplace. According to the Nation's most recent report card, only 26% of 4th grade Arizona students are proficient in reading. Arizona families need more options for their children, not less.



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We shouldn't be helping millionaires and parents who make 500K+ to pay for their children's private school.	Like Arizona public schools, Arizona's ESA program has been open to all, regardless of income. While there is no income data gathered for the program, Common Sense Institute estimates the majority of families are middle income, based on available zip-code data. In fact, the "Protect Education Now Act" wants to limit the program to only families who make under 150K. 150K in Arizona is the equivalent of a salary of a nurse and a firefighter. This arbitrary income cap does not account for families who have more kids. Arizona taxpayers already pay for "wealthy" families to go to public schools, where the cost to educate is approaching \$16,000 per student according to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee of AZ. The average cost for an ESA student is \$7,500 – a tax-payer savings. The "Protect Education Now Act" would simply prohibit those dollars from following <i>some</i> students and not others.
There is not enough money for education in Arizona and the ESA program is taking away money from public schools.	Arizona has fully-funded education for decades. The LARGEST part of the Arizona budget is K-12 education (the ESA program falls into this bucket). We spend more on education in Arizona than any other category or department—over \$7.7 BILLION! The Arizona ESA program currently accounts for about 8% of K-12 funding – and it's going to the intended purpose of those education dollars: the public good of providing a quality education to every child.
Right now private schools do not require any background checks or fingerprinting and these people are alone with our kids all day.	Most private schools already require fingerprinting, clearance cards, and background checks.



Voters already did not want the ESA program, so we are giving voters their voice back.

66% of Arizonans (and 75% of K-12 parents) support the ESA program.

And voters overwhelmingly said they DID want ESAs. In 2022 after the state passed Universal ESAs, voters refused to sign the initiative attempt to STOP the program, and universal ESA became law.

Also, in 2018, Prop 305 was on the ballot to cap the ESA program at around 75,000 students. Voters rejected a capped ESA program because they wanted it to be universal, which we eventually got in 2022.