

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS



TENNESSEE FEDERATION
for Children

MYTH VS. FACT

MYTH: ESAs are prone to fraud

FACT: Tennessee's ESA funds can only be used at schools and providers authorized by the Tennessee Department of Education. The Department of Education will have authority to reject or remove poor-performing providers and schools. Additionally, all program expenditures will be subject to audit by the Comptroller of the State Treasury.

MYTH: Studies show ESAs don't work in other states

FACT: Research overwhelmingly shows that school choice programs help students learn better. Of the 18 "gold standard" studies on school choice programs, 14 showed positive effects, 2 showed neutral effects, and 2 showed negative effects. Opponents of ESAs only cherry pick the two negative studies and ignore the large body of evidence showing school choice programs work.

Expanded ESA programs in Florida students are benefiting ALL students: Florida's public school students significantly outperform Tennessee students in reading and math despite nearly identical demographics and per pupil expenditure.

And a 2018 Beacon Center study details how ESAs would improve the state's economy while reducing crime.

MYTH: ESAs rob public schools of funding

FACT: The ESA program will actually increase per-pupil funding in the districts where students can use an ESA.

For the first three years of this program, the budget will fund a school improvement grant program that will send additional funds to school districts despite the district not bearing any cost of educating the child on an ESA. Grants will be calculated based on the allocation to students entering the ESA program.

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MYTH: There's no academic accountability for ESA students

FACT: Students using the ESA will take the Math and Language Arts sections of the state assessment. An annual report will be generated to the Governor and General Assembly on the impact of the program on schools and students.

MYTH: The income cap for eligibility is too high

FACT: Income eligibility is capped at 200% Free Lunch, or \$66,950 for a 4 person household. These are not wealthy individuals, they're hardworking families who are often unable to move to a different school zone. They shouldn't be trapped in a failing school because they can't afford to move.

MYTH: This doesn't improve the education system overall

WE SAY: School choice benefits more than the just the students who use an education savings account; It benefits all students by spurring innovation, driving competition, and reducing class sizes in public schools.

MYTH: Why not just give more funds to the public schools we already have?

FACT: Parents should be able to choose the school that best meets the individual needs of their children. For many Tennessee students, the public school they are zoned to does not meet their individual needs. These families have no other options -- they lack the economic means to move to a different school district or pay for independent school tuition. We should not force them to stay in the school that doesn't work for them.

Simply sending more funds to the school alone will not solve the problem. We've tried that for decades with little to no improvement. ESAs allow parents to seek a different education option for their children and are part of a holistic approach to ensure every Tennessee student has the chance for a great education.

Students currently enrolled in schools that do not meet their needs cannot wait for bureaucratic and often dysfunctional school boards to implement decade-long change – those kids need options NOW and ESAs show we are ready to move urgently.