

Christian Schools Support of Educational Savings Accounts

We are writing as ACSIPA (The Association of Christian Schools International PA network which is a part of the international association, ACSI) representing approximately 300 schools. ACSIPA strongly supports expanding educational opportunity to Pennsylvania's most vulnerable students through Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs). ESAs empower parents to make the best decision for their children's education. In combination with the current tools in place (especially EITC and OSTC), ESAs enable families to both afford and customize a high-quality education tailored to their child's individual needs. ESAs are a major step forward in ensuring all Pennsylvania children have access to a safe, secure, and mentally-stimulating educational environment. ACSIPA is committed to providing support and advancing education savings account legislation.

BACKGROUND:

Over the last couple of years, ESAs have been expanding their influence across the country. **Seven states currently have ESAs:** Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nevada and Tennessee. **Eleven states have introduced ESA legislation** that is currently pending: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and **Pennsylvania**.

Choice options **continue to expand** in our country which is one of only a few in the world that prohibit parents a right to have more financially available choices for their children. Pennsylvania has a history of being an innovator in tax credit choice. An enactment of an ESA program would once again position the state as an educational leader in advocating for the needs of children. We believe the timing is significant for this to happen now, rather than later.

STATUS:

Specifically, **Senate Bill 2** would create state-funded, flexible, spending accounts for individual students in failing schools. Parents could use the funds to pay for Department of Education-approved educational expenses such as non-public school tuition, higher education tuition, textbooks and curriculum, testing and industry certifications. Unused funds would roll over from one year to the next.

As it stands, the **Senate Education Committee is currently considering this bill**. We urge the committee to push this bill into full consideration and discussion in the Senate.

ACSIPA POSITION:

ACSIPA strongly supports ESAs in specific bills that allow parents more options in educational choice. Senate Bill 2 would help protect the most vulnerable children among us by focusing the savings accounts on the lowest-performing school districts in the state. Those families often find OSTC helpful but not enough to meet their children's needs. In addition, we find many parents seeking alternative educational choices for their children who have **special needs**. Many of those families sacrifice significantly to send their children to our schools, but others cannot make that sacrifice. Many of our religious and independent schools are able to meet not only students with identified IEPs, and Section 504 plans, but also students who would fit into a marginal category of special needs such as students with ADHD, depressive and anxiety disorders, other mental health challenges, and learning differences that may not meet the criteria for an identified learning disability. These needs make education difficult without the right match in support systems. We would support such a program that could rise above some of the current difficulties in identifying special needs students that currently exist in the public system.

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