



# Testimony

## Students Win With Education Savings Accounts

*Presented before the Senate Committee on Education*

by Stephanie Matthews, Senior Policy Advisor

### Key Points

- ESAs are an innovative option for parents seeking to customize their child's learning environment.
- ESAs allow for every parent to supplement their child's education—not simply those with the most means.
- School funding in Texas is such that if a student moves out of any school district, the district retains the facilities funds but will lose both state and local operating funds. Likewise, if a student opts for any form of choice program, the district will retain the facilities funds, but lose state and local funds.

Chairman Taylor and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Stephanie Matthews and I'm the senior policy advisor in the Center for Education Freedom at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a free-market research institute based in Austin, Texas. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about an issue of utmost importance: Education Savings Accounts.

For more than a century, a fundamental question regarding learning has been: who should decide what is best for my child: the government or me? Every child is a unique individual with a unique set of gifts, challenges and abilities. Collective decisions by government for all students are inefficient and ineffective. The answer to the question is simple and clear: me.

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are an innovative option for parents seeking to customize their child's learning environment. ESAs are managed by parents and used for the exclusive individual benefit of their child. These funds may only be used on approved education-related services and should be administered by the Comptroller of Public Accounts and/or approved financial institutions. ESAs are about providing fundamental options for parents and their children; they allow for the selection of virtually all education related services which parents determine will best serve their child. ESAs (in the form of a restricted debit card) can be used for distance learning courses, tutoring services, educational therapies and related aid from accredited and licensed therapists, limited transportation services, tests, books, curricula, tuition and fees for public schools or any accredited private school. Funds not used in one year will be rolled over and can even be used for higher education.

Education Savings Accounts allow for every parent to supplement their child's education—not simply those with the most means. Children with special needs, children who choose to attend a public school outside of their arbitrarily designated district, rural children who choose to take Mandarin yet the district is unable to provide a Mandarin teacher—the scenarios are infinite. Universal access to a broad spectrum of services will improve the lives of all Texas children: from pre-K to college age, rural or urban, lagging behind or AP bound.

Legislators have been in battle over school choice options for decades. While the focus should always remain on how to best serve each and every child, the contentious conversation inevitably devolves to one about money—who gets more and who gets less. The facts are actually quite simple: regardless of the choice structure—tax credits, grants, ESAs, or otherwise—under our current school funding system, if a student leaves a public school to attend any other type of school (move to new house/state, chooses a charter, private or homeschool) it is exactly the same as if that child had moved out of the district. The public school district retains all of the (I&S) money, but would lose both the state and local funds (M&O) for that child. That is exactly the same thing that happens if the child moves out of the district.

*continued*

Nevada put parents, instead of politicians and bureaucrats, in charge of their children's education when they passed Education Savings Accounts in 2015. The Nevada plan, unlike more restrictive plans in other states, allows every school-age child who attended a public school in the prior 100 days to participate in the program. These parents have the unparalleled opportunity to customize the ideal education for their children. Texas parents and Texas children deserve this same opportunity. ★

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