



TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

FAQ: HOW WILL ESAs HELP RURAL TEXAS?

KEY POINTS

- Rural families support and participate in ESAs.
- ESAs create opportunity for teachers.
- ESAs improve workforce readiness.
- ISD funding will not go down a single dollar.

POPULAR SUPPORT

In March 2022, Texas Republicans voted on this parent choice Proposition:

“Texas parents and guardians should have the right to select schools, whether public or private, for their children, and the funding should follow the student.”

1.6 million (88%) Texas Republicans voted “yes.”

In rural areas, support was equally strong: in all 200 Texas counties with less than 100,000 people, 88% of Republicans voted “yes.”

Rural voters are conservatives who support local schools and parent empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Rural communities offer safety, affordable housing, outdoor recreation, and a simpler life. However, over the last decade, 157 Texas counties had a declining number of school-age children. One cause is the lack of access to education and workforce opportunities, which can be significantly improved through parental choice and Education Savings Accounts (ESAs).

Parental choice means giving parents access to the learning environment that best serves their children. Thirty-one states have choice programs. A student’s ESA funds can be used to pay for tuition at any accredited school of a parent’s choosing, as well as for tutoring, books, transportation, or other approved educational expenses.

WORKFORCE READINESS

As the table below shows, there are substantial workforce gaps. Outside Texas’ major metros, there are 13,000 job openings each year in three top in-demand trades, but less than 2,000 students in those communities are ready for these jobs.

Workforce Opportunities Outside Major Metros

In-Demand Trade	Jobs Open Each Year	ISD Completers
Diesel & Auto	4,777	1,279
Electrical	5,920	250
Plumbing	2,396	241
Top 3 Total	13,093	1,770

Note: Data from Texas Workforce Commission.

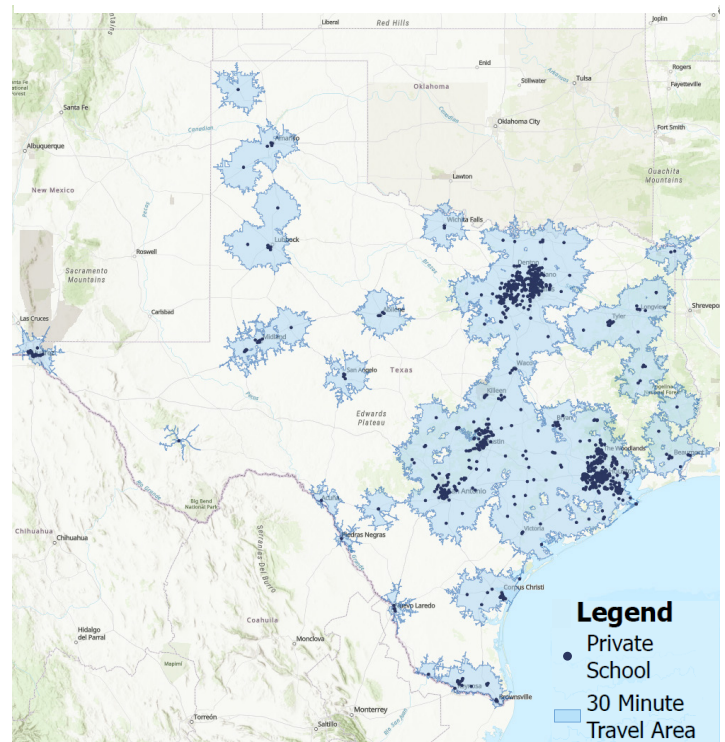
HOW ESAs HELP RURAL COMMUNITIES

1. Options increase: As the map at right shows, 60% of rural children, and 96% of all children, live within a 30-minute drive of a private school. ESAs will put rural children on competitive footing with city ones: over the last 20 years, the number of rural private schools in Florida has doubled.

2. Entrepreneurship flourishes: Teachers move to rural communities, as the videos linked in the QR codes below show. Their schools attract young parents and improve the community.

3. Workforce readiness increases: Students will also use ESAs at a technical school, college, or for on-the-job training. For example, high school students can accelerate their studies and then earn a certification at Texas State Technical College (TSTC).

Areas Within a 30-Minute Drive of a Private School (2022–23 School Year)



FLORIDA'S TEACHER ENTREPRENEURS



In Wauchula, a Florida town of less than 5,000, Julie Taylor founded Alane Academy. Most students at Alane attend through an ESA. Ms. Taylor

was a public school teacher of the year and explains that she founded Alane Academy because she wanted to adjust the curriculum, instruction, scheduling, and tests. ESAs empowered her: "I couldn't walk away from teaching. I decided to open my own school.... I can do what I know is best for kids."

SAVING THE TEXAS HEARTLAND



A 2-part video series shows how ESAs would benefit rural Texas. In part 1, Courtnie Bagley, a 20-year public school teacher from Salado, concludes: "Parents

need to be empowered and trusted to find opportunities for their kids." In part 2, rural Texans explain: "It's very important to keep these rural communities vibrant, investing in them. Programs that enable people to have opportunities to stay in their hometown would be amazing."