



Information on Arizona Empowerment Accounts for Educating Students with Special Needs (ESA)

Overview

On April 12, 2011, Gov. Brewer signed into law a bill that will set aside state funds for parents of students with disabilities to educate their children outside of the public school system if they so choose.

SB 1553 will cover 90 percent of what the state would pay to educate a special needs child in a public school, estimated to be \$3,000-\$9,000 per year for students with "mild" disabilities such as LD, Autism, Intellectual Disability, and Emotional Disability.

The legislation replaces a 2006 state law that granted parents of students with disabilities vouchers to attend private programs. The Arizona Supreme Court struck down the voucher system, ruling that it violated the Constitution by distributing public funds to private schools.

SB 1553 passes constitutional muster because the state funds flow to the special account, then to parents to decide how to use the money, rather than going directly from the state to private schools.

How it Works

1) A parent/guardian requests an "Empowerment Scholarship Account" (ESA) for a special needs child and withdraws the child from public school. Application and Verification forms are found at:

www.ade.az.gov/ess/ESAs/

2) Arizona diverts 90% (minus 3% administrative costs) of the state money it would have given to the school district for that particular child and deposits it into an ESA to be administered by the parent.

3) The parent can then use the funds to pay for any "non-public" schooling: private school tuition, virtual education programs, homeschooling, private tutoring or saving for future college expenses in a 529 account.

Requirements

To receive the tuition reimbursement, students must receive reading, math, social studies, and science instruction. Students must NOT be enrolled in a public school, NOR can students accept scholarships from any legal tuition-tax-credit program.

Parents need to apply now! The next application will be on the ADE website in October with the next deadline occurring November 15, 2011. Then, the ADE will begin to send out letters to all applicants with the exact amount of money their child will receive. This letter becomes your acceptance/agreement letter. Parents can either sign or decline at this point.

Resources

To read the law itself, visit:

www.azleg.gov/legtext/50leg/1r/bills/sb1553p.pdf

A summary by one of the bill's sponsoring senators:

www.nancybarto.com/wordpress/?p=848

Fact Sheet provided by Arizona Dept. of Education, Exceptional Student

Services: www.ade.az.gov/ESS/ESAs/ESAsFAQs.pdf

Goldwater Institute, "Education Savings Accounts: Giving Parents Control of Their Children's Education" www.goldwaterinstitute.org/article/5643

For More Information

Exceptional Student Services

Arizona Department of Education

1535 West Jefferson Street, Bin 2

Phoenix, Arizona 85007

email: esainbox@azed.gov

ADE contact person: Courtney Jenkins – 602-542-4351.