



Arizona Empowerment Scholarship Account Fast Facts

“I grew up in a working class family, this was well before any of this public assistance for private school existed...we sacrificed a lot. There were times in my family that we were on food stamps. So it was a choice that they made, and they struggled to make that choice.”ⁱ --Gov. Katie Hobbs, on her attending private school

ENROLLMENT

- ESAs serve over 75,000 students, including more than 24,000 children who had been trapped in an unsatisfactory public school until they became eligible for financial support through an ESA and switched.ⁱⁱ
- 1 out of every 2 students now joining the ESA program comes from public school (48% as of 2024).ⁱⁱⁱ
- ESAs serve a far higher percentage of students with disabilities (18%) than public schools do (14%).^{iv}
- ESAs serve over 1,000 children whose parents are on active military duty or were killed in the line of duty.
- ESAs serve families from all across the economic spectrum. Roughly half of Arizona private school students come from families with incomes below \$100,000, including 22% who make less than \$50,000 a year.^v

FINANCE & FUNDING

- The typical universal ESA award (\$7,400) costs taxpayers thousands of dollars less than Arizona’s public school system, which averages \$14,500 per pupil as of 2023-2024.^{vi}
 - Even including the disproportionate share of special education kids, the *average* ESA cost (\$9,800) is still thousands of dollars less than Arizona’s public schools, which receive over \$12,000 per student from state and local taxpayers alone (even excluding all federal funds).^{vii}
 - The typical ESA award costs the state less money than public schools (even excluding federal *and* local taxes). While ESAs are funded entirely from the state General Fund (instead of from a mix of state, local, and federal sources like public schools), ESA students receive \$0 from the state’s “Classroom Site Fund,” for example, which gives nearly \$1,000 of extra state funding to every public school child.
- In the two years since Arizona’s universal ESA expansion took effect, the state budget enjoyed a \$2 billion surplus the first year, and an overall \$4 million net savings in its education funding formula (including the cost of ESAs) compared to the enacted budget the second.^{viii}
- Adding up the total award value of every child who’s joined the ESA program under the universal expansion amounts to a sliver (3%) of the total spent on Arizona’s *public* K-12 schools from state and local taxes alone, despite these students making up over 5% of the state’s K-12 population.^{ix}
- The entire cumulative increase in spending on ESAs under universal expansion (approximately \$420 million) is smaller than the \$600 million increase in state spending on public schools in 2022 alone.^x
- Arizona public school funding has continued to *increase* even in the wake of ESA expansion, rising roughly \$2 billion since FY 2022.^{xi}

AFFORDABILITY

- The typical ESA award covers nearly 100% of tuition at the majority of private K-8 schools in Arizona. The baseline ESA award level of \$7,000+ per child compares to the median elementary and middle school tuition rate of \$7,400 as of 2023-2024.^{xii}

- Private schools in Arizona did not significantly increase their tuition rates in response to the universal ESA expansion. After accounting for the U.S. inflation rate over the same period, median private school tuition rates rose yearly between 0.25% and 1.25% (depending on grade level) in the two years after expansion.^{xiii}
- Tuition rates at Arizona private schools rose less than per-pupil spending at Arizona public schools in response to universal ESA expansion.^{xiv}

ACCOUNTABILITY

- ESA purchases are subjected to far higher scrutiny than public school expenditures. Currently, receipts for every single item purchased by an ESA family must be submitted for review & approval by the Arizona Department of Education.
- ESA “misspending” makes up an extremely small portion of ESA award dollars, with estimates suggesting less than 1%.^{xv}
- ESA opponents object to families purchasing items like “Legos,” yet these exact same items are routinely purchased by public schools in even larger classroom packs ranging from \$3,000-\$8,000 apiece.^{xvi}
- Arizona’s *public school* system is failing students academically, with just 40% of children proficient in reading and just 34% proficient in math, despite three quarters of public schools receiving an A or B grade from the state.^{xvii}
- Opponents of ESAs ignore the rampant fraud and misspending in Arizona public schools. Since summer 2024 alone, reports have surfaced of Arizona public school districts spending taxpayer funds on^{xviii}:
 - A 5-star Napa Valley resort & spa, with wine tastings, soirées, and DEI training for school officials.
 - A \$4,000 per attendee out-of-state bootcamp for board members launching leftwing political careers.
 - \$342,000 for school board members to attend a single 2-day out of state conference while exceeding all lodging / travel expense controls.
 - Tens of thousands of dollars on board and staff resort stays in the red rocks of Sedona.

LIVES CHANGED: PARENT TESTIMONIALS

- *“I am a parent of three children on ESA, but I also have a master’s degree in elementary education, and ESA has saved the educational lives of my three children. ... We have tried public, private, and charter schools ... [and] my child was able to meet some of her IEP (Individualized Education Program) goals in four months that no school had helped her to achieve in four years.”^{xix}*
- *“I want all to know that this ESA option to educate my children truly saved my family; my oldest has significant disabilities and she attended our public school through her ninth grade year. ... So many years were spent advocating and begging and pleading for her to be educated, and more importantly, even wanted ... ESA has opened up our world to educational opportunities never to be found in the public school setting.*
- *“In my community ... school district students have an average math proficiency score of 8%. In reading, it’s 14%. I’m thrilled my daughter has chosen to homeschool her five children, all of whom were adopted out of the foster care system. There’s no one-size-fits-all, and she works very hard to choose multisensory learning methods and tools and activities that enable her children to thrive. Where needed, she secures specialized tutoring, such as in the case of one granddaughter who’s dyslexic. She spent her first four years in public school where she did not learn to read and was promoted year after year. After two years of homeschooling, she can now read at second grade level, and I’m so proud of her work.”^{xx}*
- Gloria’s Story: <https://vimeo.com/889219759/abd5a0a4c7>

- Aaron’s Story: <https://vimeo.com/889222902/aced14d445>
- Adriana’s Story: <https://vimeo.com/889238409/1b42b353e1>

ⁱ <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2023/03/03/anti-esa-governor-is-living-endorsement-of-school-choice/>

ⁱⁱ https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/08/ESA_FY24_Q4_Executive_Legislative_Report.pdf#page=22. This count includes only those students who attended an Arizona public school immediately prior to enrolling in the ESA program. Any student who had already left the public school system (e.g. due to COVID lockdowns), or who moved from a public school from another state, or who was an incoming kindergartener is not captured in this number.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/08/ESA_FY24_Q4_Executive_Legislative_Report.pdf#page=7

^{iv} https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/08/ESA_FY24_Q4_Executive_Legislative_Report.pdf#page=4

^v <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/the-anti-esa-double-standard/>

^{vi} https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/08/Q3_FY2024_ESA_Report_SBE.pdf#page=21;
<https://www.azjlb.gov/units/allfunding.pdf>

^{vii} https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/08/Q3_FY2024_ESA_Report_SBE.pdf#page=21;
<https://www.azjlb.gov/units/allfunding.pdf>

^{viii} https://www.azed.gov/communications/state-education-funding-comes-under-budget-demolishes-esa-budget-myth;
<https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/arizonas-universal-esa-program-a-history-of-surplus-savings-media-misinformation/>

^{ix} <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/arizonas-universal-esa-program-a-history-of-surplus-savings-media-misinformation/>

^x <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/arizonas-universal-esa-program-a-history-of-surplus-savings-media-misinformation/>

^{xi} <https://www.azjlb.gov/units/allfunding.pdf>

^{xii} <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/universal-opportunity/>

^{xiii} <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/universal-opportunity/>

^{xiv} <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/universal-opportunity/>

^{xv} <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/esa-families-vindicated-in-new-auditor-general-report/>

^{xvi} <https://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/2024/07/01/lego-arizona-school-learning-education/74242413007/>

^{xvii} https://www.abc15.com/news/local-news/state-assessment-data-shows-improvement-in-math;
<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2023/10/31/arizona-school-letter-grades-released-for-the-2022-23-school-year/71382728007/>

^{xviii} <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/az-school-district-treats-officials-to-luxury-vacations-begs-voters-for-more-money/>

^{xix} https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GWI-DECADE-OF-SUCCESS.FINAL_.pdf#page=8

^{xx} https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/policy-report/universal-opportunity/#_edn23