



# Education Savings Accounts

## Discussion Guide

### Let's review

*At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.*

*And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.*

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

**The "Table-it" Rule:** If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

### Let's begin

*Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief.*

- Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
- What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

### Let's discuss

*Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.*

- In your opinion, what is the priority in regards to a child's education?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- Has there been recent legislation in your state regarding ESAs?
- Is the role of ESAs different in distressed communities?
- Do ESAs introduce competition to the public education system?

# Let's act

## Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- As of 2020, [over 20,000 K-12 students](#) in the U.S. were recipients of ESAs.
- Five states have [active ESA programs](#): Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Nevada's program is inactive.
- The [U.S. Department of Education](#) contributes less than 10% of the elementary and secondary education budget, with state and local governments funding the remaining 90% or more.
- For fiscal year 2020, [Arizona's budget](#) includes "an explicit subsidy for the public school system using ESA program savings," with approximately \$3 million going to updating the Department of Education's IT system.
- An [audit in Arizona](#) found over \$100,000 in misused ESA program funds and [an audit in Florida](#) found over \$280,000 in misused ESA program funds.

## Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
  - **Research your elected representatives' positions** and their visions for how to tackle the challenges regarding school choice and education facing Americans at large and your community specifically.
    - Your legislators, state comptroller, attorney general and other local elected officials want to know their constituents. Write to them about your interest in education in your community.
    - You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
  - **Explore government programs in education in your state or community.**
    - Identify the education programs in your state by searching for the following terms: "[yourstate].gov education"
    - Look on your state government website for state agencies, or look for an "education" drop down menu.
      - Your state may also have a separate General Assembly website where you can find out about state House and Senate committees that focus on education
      - Look into education governance, such as school boards that set goals and visions for school districts. [Ballotpedia.org](#) is a good source to look for policies of K-12 Education, agencies, and school board elections.
- *Reach out:*
  - Explore what organizations, legislators, and journalists you could contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged.
  - If you have trouble finding the information you are looking for on your municipality's or state's website, consider contacting agency or department heads.
  - The Policy Circle offers a number of resources for engaging on the local level. Learn how to write a letter to the editor on [The Policy Circle website](#).

- It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).

#### Post A Recap / Dive Deeper:

- Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present. Designate who will post a meeting recap.
- Decide your next meeting topic. Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting?
  - [Higher Education Reform](#)
  - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
  - [Civic Engagement](#)
- Dive Deeper into this area. If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness.