



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.