

FAMILY ISSUE FACT SHEET

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SB 1657 Arizona Equal Opportunity Education Act

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Arizona Equal Opportunity Education Act increases educational opportunities for all children. Parents are the best ones to decide the educational setting best meeting their children's needs. SB 1657 ensures that parents and their children have access to the best possible education.

WHAT DOES THE BILL DO?

Extends Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) Eligibility

The ESA program allows parents to withdraw their children from a district or charter school and receive state funds allocated for their child for a variety of educational expenses, including therapy, tutors, textbooks, curriculum, tuition at private schools, and even fees for standardized tests. Federal and local funds stay with the school district.

As originally passed in 2011, the ESA program was only available to students with disabilities. Since then, Arizona has expanded those qualified for the program, and it now includes:

- Students in foster care
- Students living on an Indian reservation
- Students in failing or underperforming school districts
- Students with a parent who is on active military duty or was killed in the line of duty
- Students with a parent who is legally blind, deaf, or hard of hearing
- Students with a sibling who is a current or former ESA recipient

The scholarship tax credit program allows taxpayers to donate to a School Tuition Organization (STO), receiving an Arizona state tax credit for that donation up to certain limits. The STO then awards scholarship to students to attend a school chosen by their parents.

SB 1657 would:

- Extend ESA eligibility to children
 - of military veterans
 - of first responders and healthcare workers
 - who qualify for certain benefits like free/reduced price lunch
 - who attend certain Title 1 schools
 - who participated in the governor's school choice programs
 - living in certain overcrowded districts

- Establish a “student empowerment fund” to fund students in districts spending more per pupil than college tuition at an Arizona public university or spending in excess of the approved constitutional expenditure limit.
- Update the scholarship tax credit programs to
 - Combine the two individual tax credit programs into one program
 - Increase the tax credit program from \$6 million to \$10 million for displaced and disabled children
 - Remove the cap that a student may receive from the low-income corporate tax credit program without increasing the overall cap
- Makes other updates to improve the functioning of school choice programs.

TALKING POINTS

- **Education policy should put children first.** The Arizona Equal Opportunity Education Act puts children first by ensuring families are able to choose the educational setting that best meets their child’s unique needs. SB 1657 would open up this opportunity to more families as well as honor the families of veterans, first responders, and healthcare workers.
- **Arizonans support school choice.** A recent poll found more than 80% of Arizonans support expanding eligibility of ESAs to all low-income families.ⁱ Nearly 57% of Hispanic voters said they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports the ESA and STO programs.ⁱⁱ
- **Educational choice saves the state money.** The state would face significantly higher costs if the children receiving ESAs and scholarships were to be forced back into the public schools. Federal and local funding stay with the school district. It’s a win/win for families and the state.

CONCLUSION

Enactment of the Equal Opportunity Education Act will allow more parents to find the educational setting that best meets their child’s unique educational needs. Now it is time to give families the choice to apply for these pioneering programs that have benefited so many children for over two decades.

ⁱ Data Orbital, November 2021, 600 N

ⁱⁱ Data Orbital, January 2022, 600 N