

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS FOR SPECIAL NEED STUDENTS

Education savings accounts (ESAs) allow parents to withdraw their children from the public school system and receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple uses. Those funds -often distributed to families via a debit card- can cover private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, therapies, and other approved customized learning services and materials.

39,464 students age 6-21 receive special education services in WV (Disability Statistic Compendium, 2017), ranking our state as 3rd highest in the percentage of children receiving special education services under **IDEA** – Part B. Disability advocates have the following concerns about ESAs:

- Due to the higher number than average of students with disabilities, there will be less funding for students with disabilities in the public school system.
- Based on the funding levels for Education Savings Accounts for Special Need Students (ESA) in the few states that have these accounts, the funding in these accounts would be minimal and would not come close to meeting a student's needs.
- A student with disabilities would waive their civil rights, including their right to due process, if they accessed an ESA.
- There is very little, if any accountability for students who receive their education by accessing a ESA.
- ESAs would inadvertently reinforce the lack of high expectations for students with severe disabilities that already exists.
- A student who accesses an ESA would not graduate with a diploma unless they found a way to meet graduation requirements, or pass an equivalency test.
- States that currently have ESAs for special needs students report that the students who utilize ESAs often re-enter the public school system and have regressed.
- ESAs would cause further segregation. Studies show that students with disabilities who are educated alongside their peers without disabilities gain more academically and so do students without disabilities.

There is a breakdown in WV public schools. To “fix” the WV public school system we must hold schools accountable and make sure that **ALL** students get a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to which **EVERY** student is entitled.

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