



## The Debit Card For Public Education

(NAPSA)—A one-of-a-kind, first-in-the-nation student funding model is growing in Arizona’s public education system, where eligible families get debit cards to shop for the schools and services that work best for them. Participating parents couldn’t be happier with the program.

### How It Works

Education savings accounts (ESAs) provide Arizona parents a portion of their children’s state public education funds to purchase—using debit cards—educational services outside of public schools, including private school tuition, therapies, tutors, curriculum and online courses. Unused funds can be rolled over to the next school year and even saved for college.

Originally created for students with special needs, the program has been expanded to include students in underperforming public schools, youths in foster care, dependents of military personnel and incoming kindergartners. Two new reports from a national organization that studies and supports school choice programs, the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, shows just how effective ESAs can be in transforming students’ learning opportunities.

### Parents’ Opinions

In a survey of ESA parents conducted by researchers Jonathan Butcher and Jason Bedrick, 71 percent of participants were “very satisfied,” 19 percent “satisfied” and 10 percent “somewhat satisfied” with the program. By comparison, just 43 percent of those parents reported similar satisfaction levels with their previous public schools.

“This has allowed us to do what is best for our son,” one parent told Butcher and Bedrick, “and

**Among surveyed Arizona parents with education savings accounts**

  
4/10 were satisfied with their previous public school

  
10/10 are satisfied with education savings accounts



**Studies show that most parents are satisfied with education savings accounts.**

that has made a huge difference in all our lives.”

To find what’s best for their children, ESA parents can use a number of educational options.

Analyzing Arizona Department of Education data from the ESA program’s first year, researcher Lindsey Burke found parents spent 34.5 percent of ESA funds on multiple educational services while 65.5 percent used just one educational plan. If parents had more of their children’s public funding in the ESAs, their most sought-after service would be additional education therapy, according to Butcher and Bedrick.

### What’s Next

As for the future of ESAs, the Arizona program had been mired in litigation after the Arizona School Boards Association and the Arizona Education Association challenged its constitutionality until the Arizona Court of Appeals unanimously upheld the program. With that decision, supporters anticipate the program, and families’ school shopping lists and satisfaction levels, will continue to grow.

### Learn More

The reports are available at [www.edchoice.org/EdDebitCard](http://www.edchoice.org/EdDebitCard) and [www.edchoice.org/SchoolingSatisfaction](http://www.edchoice.org/SchoolingSatisfaction) for downloading.