

May 24, 2017

Chairman Eichelberger
Senate Education Committee
173 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Chairman Dinniman
Senate Education Committee
182 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

400 North Third Street
P.O. Box 1724
Harrisburg, PA 17105-1724

(717) 255-7000 • (800) 944-PSEA (7732)
Fax: (717) 255-7128 • (717) 255-7124
www.psea.org

W. Gerard Oleksiak, *President*
Dolores M. McCracken, *Vice President*
Richard W. Askey, *Treasurer*
James G. Vaughan, *Executive Director*

Re: Education Savings Accounts

Dear Chairman Eichelberger and Chairman Dinniman:

On behalf of PSEA and our 180,000 members, I'm writing to urge you to oppose Education Savings Accounts or any other school-voucher scheme.

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are the latest trend in publicly subsidized private school education. ESAs are restricted accounts – funded by taxpayer dollars - for parents to use to buy educational services from private or religious providers. In exchange, the child forfeits his or her due process and other statutory protections guaranteed in public schools.

ESAs, just like all voucher systems, do nothing to improve the education system. Indeed, they threaten irreparable harm. They divert taxpayer funds to subsidize private and religious education providers. In the five states that have adopted ESAs since 2011, these programs offer taxpayers virtually no oversight for how that money is spent nor any real accountability about whether it has helped the child academically.

The costs of ESAs are significant. Some states take anywhere from 90-100% of state funds designated for the child's education at her local school and deposit those funds into the parent's "account". The private education providers have the real control, though. They may reject applicants based on disability, gender, language proficiency, academic record, and more. They can also decline to provide services taken for granted in public schools, such as compensatory programs for disadvantaged students, bilingual education, free and reduced price lunch, and counseling.

Although as part of the ESA program, parents must make some commitment to provide their children an education in certain minimum subjects as a condition of receiving funds, the program imposes no standards to ensure the quality of that education. Private schools and other providers are held to none of the curriculum, licensure, or accreditation standards that public schools are required to meet. The textbooks, curriculum, tutoring, or supplemental materials parents can

purchase with taxpayer funds are subject to no state oversight. Nor are ESA-funded students required to participate in state assessments.

And whether the intention of proponents or not, the reality is that with ESAs public funds are driven to more affluent parents to subsidize the choice they had already made for their child which was to attend private or parochial school. This results in ESAs stripping away resources from the very students who likely need the most support in their school learning environment.

Rather than fund costly, wasteful, and ineffective experiments designed to favor the most advantaged at the expense of the least, policymakers should instead invest in proven reform strategies and effective programs, and provide all students with the supports they need to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jerry Oleksiak". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jerry Oleksiak
President, PSEA