

EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI



The mission of the Save Our ESA campaign is to keep Mississippi's Special Needs Education Scholarship Account (ESA) program from expiring in 2020. By law, the program will be repealed without legislative action to save it.

WHAT ARE ESAs?

ESAs are flexible spending accounts that parents can use to access education tax dollars allocated for their child's education. These dollars can be spent on private tuition, therapy, tutoring, and other qualified expenses. Mississippi was the third state in the nation to create ESAs and is still one of only six states with this innovative option for families.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?

Mississippi's program focuses on students with special needs, specifically those who have been in a public educational setting and have received an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in the past 5 years.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

ESAs were created in 2015, and demand quickly exceeded capacity. While state legislators originally authorized an increasing number of ESAs each year, they did not increase funding for the program until 2019.

Timeline:

- **2015** ESAs are created for students with IEPs.
- **2016** ESAs are expanded to include students with IEPs in the past 5 years.
- **2019** 300 new ESAs are created in response to the #Waitlisted campaign.
- **2020** ESAs expire automatically without legislative action.

WHY SAVE ESAs?

In Mississippi, graduation and proficiency rates for students with special needs remain far behind those of general education students. Many families are frustrated by a lack of financial freedom to look for the best educational setting and services for their children when they can't find what they need in their district school. ESAs give these families options so their children can thrive.

In December 2018, a legislative committee released a report showing

- Parents' educational satisfaction increased from 24% to 91% when they used the ESA.
- Parents reported progress on their child's special needs goals.
- Parents said they found much-needed one-on-one attention and services in their new setting.
- ESA students attended approximately 100 schools throughout the state, online, and in Tennessee.

Once created, the program filled up quickly, and a wait list of hundreds has existed for years. Even when the state legislature made more ESAs available in 2019 in response to the wait list, parents answered by creating a new, bigger wait list than before. Parent demand and satisfaction are high.

Today, there are 702 ESAs available, and hundreds waiting for one.

Partner With Us!

Empower Mississippi's mission is to remove barriers to opportunity so all Mississippians can flourish. If you benefit from the ESA program or want access to it, partner with us to Save Our ESA in 2019-2020.

"My family and I are grateful to Empower Mississippi for their hard work and dedication to helping children with learning disabilities and advocating for those who need school choice. Because of you, Empower Mississippi, my son now has a promising future."

- SHANNON GADDIS, ESA PARENT

"Empower helped make our voices heard so that our kids received an adequate education that fits their exceptional needs."

- STACY WARE, ESA PARENT

Take Action:

- ✓ Talk to your legislators and find out where they stand
- ✓ Tell your story and urge others to support ESAs
- ✓ Get connected with other ESA advocates
- ✓ Meet with your legislators during the upcoming session
- ✓ Spread the word about ESAs in your community
- ✓ Stay engaged with weekly updates and action items