

## Prop. 305: Empowerment Scholarship Accounts

### **Arguments Submitted “For” Prop. 305**

Arizona’s children are perhaps our most important natural resource. It is, therefore, appropriate that families and communities make tremendous sacrifices so that our children are able to achieve their maximum potential.

We all want our children to succeed and agree that providing a quality education is absolutely essential. Toward this end, it is important to recognize that kids are different and that what works best for one child may not work well for another.

Parents are charged with a tremendous responsibility as the primary educators of their children. This responsibility includes the tough decision of where to educate their children, including the possibility of homeschooling. Ultimately, it is parents who best understand their children’s needs and where they are most likely to succeed.

Historically, however, it has been the case that parents too often are not able to make the optimal choice for their child’s education because of a lack of quality choices.

It is for this reason that we support adequate funding of our entire school system so that parents sending their children to public schools can choose amongst quality district and charter schools. Similarly, our support goes to the parents who find that excellent religious or other private schools are the best options for their children, but who are in need of financial assistance to make this choice a reality.

Proposition 305 is a modest effort to expand the Empowerment Scholarship Account program to help parents, especially those with limited resources, make the best educational choices for their children. When parents have more quality choices, it makes our educational system better and we all win.

Accordingly, the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference are proud to support Proposition 305 so that more children will have the freedom of choice to attend the school that best fits their needs.

### **The Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference, Phoenix**

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For over two decades Arizona has led the nation in expanding popular school choice options for parents and students in our K-12 system. And the results speak for themselves—over 50% of parents in Arizona are opting to send their child to a school that is NOT their designated district public school!

These education decisions are made for countless reasons, but the important point is they are being made by parents--not lawmakers, district officials or bureaucrats. That is why Prop 305 is

a winner for Arizona. This measure offers one more option for parents to consider when choosing a school for their children.

Under Prop 305, students would be able to obtain an Empowerment Scholarship Account that can be used to attend a school of their choice. The program is structured to ensure that funding is not reduced from district schools and can only be used for direct education expenses such as books, tutoring and tuition. Clear oversight exists in the program to guarantee the money is not misspent or used for non-educational purposes.

Prop 305 continues to build on Arizona's school choice tradition by adding one more option for parents to consider. We encourage everyone to vote YES on 305.

**Scot Mussi, President, Arizona Free Enterprise Club, Gilbert**

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Please vote Yes Prop 305 and support universal school choice! My son is a participant in Arizona's Educational Saving Account program. I am excited about what prop 305 will mean for Arizona. It will make countless lives better. Every family deserves to know that they have a choice. If public schools and charters are the best fit for their children and are meeting their child's needs by providing a safe and academically rich environment, that is wonderful. If not, then they can find what they are looking for and will not be locked into a one size fits all approach to education if they desire something different. The fabric of our country and state is built on freedom to choose. Money is meant to follow quality, whether it is in services, business, production, health care and now at last, education. The funding belongs to the children because it's their future and with a plethora of great choices, we will be a stronger community. I am thrilled that Arizona's decision to make ESA universal will give all parents the ability to access the best education for their child like I did for my child.

**Holland Hines, Civil Rights & Education Advocate, Chandler**  
*Sponsored by Goldwater Institute*

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As parents of an autistic child, we witness firsthand the "spectrum" nature of the developmental disorder – no two are alike. Some even overcome the diagnosis to lead normal lives. Our daughter, however, will not be one of them. As heartbreaking as it is to admit, the best option for her education is to focus on developing valuable life skills to get her ready for the "real world" as best we can. Choosing the right school for her – and the different way she learns – is the key to achieving this goal. The ESA gives us the financial flexibility to place her in the best school to address her specific needs. Shortly after she was diagnosed, we began Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) as the main driver of her therapy. As the only behavioral intervention for autism supported by empirical evidence to be effective, it was a natural choice; however, upon entering the public school system we soon found out, at least in practice, they did not feel the same way. With the ESA, we receive the funds earmarked for her public school education. This gives us the power of the purse to shop in the marketplace for a private ABA-centric school more in line with her needs as we understand them to be. The discretion to educate our child – is ours. The innovative school she currently attends teaches skills under the ABA umbrella in a real-world

situation with a kitchen, living room, backyard and other elements consistent with the already familiar domestic look and feel of her current home, in addition to the home she will spend her adult life. She is doing quite well in this environment.

**Jeff Locke, Phoenix**

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As a former teacher, I know how important it is that ALL students have access to the best education that fits their individual needs. Prop 305 will make that a reality for ALL students in Arizona. Supporting Prop 305 will expand the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program to all Arizona students and will allow those students to access different schools and educational options decided by the parent. Prop 305 has strong accountability and transparency requirements to ensure that these dollars are being spent in accordance with the law and on the student. This is more transparency and accountability than exists for the traditional school system. In Arizona, we have a long history of putting students first and giving parents choices. Prop 305 will put parents in the driver seat of their children's education and create a system where no child is trapped in a failing school or a school that is not the best fit for them. Prop 305 will save taxpayers money while having the money go directly to the student rather than being wasted on bloated administrations. Let's give all Arizona students the chance to succeed! VOTE YES ON PROP 305!

**Matt Simon, Tucson**

*Sponsored by Goldwater Institute*

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Please support Prop 305! When my daughter was 3 she received a diagnosis that qualified her for Special Education services from the public school. We worked with wonderful teachers at her public school, however she kept falling behind. Determining that there had to be a better way to meet her educational needs, I relied upon my instincts and accepted an Empowerment Scholarship Account to provide an education for her independent of the public school. We were so impressed we eventually decided to try the ESA program for all three of our children. Her siblings have benefitted just as much as she has. The changes that the ESA has brought about in each of our children, and subsequently our home life, is the reason that I advocate for the Empowerment Scholarship Account program. I know that there are parents throughout Arizona who have children who are struggling or for whom the public school setting just isn't working for anymore. By expanding the ESA program, the changes and growth that our family has experienced can be realized by so many more families. The ESA program provides choices for parents. As a parent participating in the ESA program, I know that it requires hard work, diligence, and transparency, but the rewards to our children are worth it! Doesn't every child deserve that opportunity? Doesn't every parent deserve that choice?

**Sarah Greenbank, Phoenix**

*Sponsored Goldwater Institute*

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My husband and I are so blessed to live in a state where we have the opportunity to choose the school that best suits our five school-aged children. We believe that every child should have the opportunity to meet their full potential. Not all of our children thrive in the same educational environment and we are so thankful to have options available to us in making that individual decision for each of our children. Without school choice in Arizona, we may not be able to afford the kind of schooling that best suits the needs of some of our children. We believe strongly that each parent in our state knows his/her child better than anyone else. We know the best educational choices for each one of our children, whether that is public school, private, charter or homeschooling. We believe as parents we should be making that decision. The ESA program provides an opportunity to give that choice back to more parents just like us. We are so grateful and humbled to be part of a community that supports school choice and desires to continue to give school choice back into the hands of who it belongs...parents.

### **Courtney Gehl, Gilbert and Jason Gehl, Gilbert**

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The Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program has been an enormous help to our family. One of my sons was diagnosed with a learning disability, requiring an individualized educational plan (IEP). However, his IEP was not served well in the district school he was in at the time so we moved him to a charter school. However, the charter school was also unable to meet his educational needs.

Because of the ESA program, my son now attends a private school where his IEP is served well. He has been thriving for the past four years thanks to the ESA scholarship.

As a parent, I know what is best for my child. I am so grateful that I was able to try different educational models until I found the one that best met my child's needs. The district school nor the charter school were able to serve him, but the private school we found has been a great fit. I am grateful tax dollars followed my son, allowing him to use them in a private school that can serve his IEP.

It would be great if every parent had this same opportunity. That is why I would urge you to vote yes on Prop 305.

### **Christine Accurso, Gilbert Mom, Gilbert**

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Vote "Yes" on Prop 305

My 7-year-old son is a happy and healthy little boy, who loves legos, the beach, and most of all coloring and drawing. But, he was not always this way. He was often angry and distressed when it came to learning and schoolwork, especially letters and reading. He had already been seeing a speech therapist for three years, and had been in the Arizona Early Intervention program as well. I felt his struggles weren't normal, and decided to finally have him tested to see if there might be another learning disability that we didn't know about. After several evaluations through the district and some at our own expense, we finally received an official diagnosis of severe dyslexia and dysgraphia, along with his speech issues. To say we were relieved to finally know why our son was struggling is an understatement.

Unfortunately, in the process of doing a MET report and an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) with the Scottsdale School District, we learned that there are no dyslexia remediation programs available for children in the district. He could receive an hour of extra reading help each week, but nothing that would help him remediate and overcome his dyslexia and dysgraphia. After researching private tutoring programs for him, we realized that it would be too expensive for us to pay for on our own, especially because we have another child with dyslexia as well.

Thank goodness for the ESA program!

The ESA program will allow our son to get the therapy he needs; therapy the schools could not provide. Please vote “yes” on Prop 305, and consider all the children like my son, who would not get the help they need if not for the ESA program.

**Jenny Clark, Mom, Scottsdale**

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Please vote “yes” on Proposition 305 because every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

At Center for Arizona Policy we support parents having a broad range of school options for their children, whether it is district, charter, private, online, or homeschool. We supported Prop 123 to increase education funding, but we have also supported expanding school choice options, like the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program.

The expansion of the ESA program will help more Arizona children find the educational context that best meets their needs. Seven-year-old Savana is a great example. She struggled with ADHD in a public classroom of 30 children. Now she thrives, even reads in front of her class at a private school, thanks to the ESA program. Tim is a father of five adopted foster children, all of whom attend a local private school where they get the extra attention they need. They are thriving there. Tim could never afford to send five children to a private school without the ESA program.

Doesn't every family deserve the same opportunity?

In addition to giving parents more options, Prop 305 also increases accountability and transparency for the ESA program. The Arizona Department of Education would be required to post on its website each month the number of students receiving ESAs and the aggregated amounts on how the ESA funds are being used.

Since 2011, the ESA program has provided critical aid to children whose needs are best met in a nontraditional public school environment. Now with Prop 305, it is time to give all parents the choice to apply for this pioneering program that has benefited so many children.

**Michael Clark, VP, Policy and General Counsel, Center for Arizona Policy, Scottsdale**  
*Sponsored by Center for Arizona Policy*

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Sometimes one size does NOT fit all, especially when it comes to education. I was bullied in school and the ESA could've changed my life.

My own children have thrived with the ESA program. I have created an enriching education that emphasizes their strengths and supports them where they need it most. They enjoy learning and look forward to college. Instead of being saddled with student loans, they will be able to use leftover ESA funds for college to earn a degree, something my husband and I were never able to afford. ESA has provided opportunities for them we never could on our own or with public school.

In addition to giving all children the opportunity to benefit from ESAs, Prop 305 will make the program better for existing ESA families by clarifying intent, policy, implementation, and the addition of an important review counsel of government officials and ESA program parents. It also will add more transparency and accountability for public tax dollars by way of student testing and public reports on ESA spending.

Please vote "yes" on Prop 305

**Julie Batt, Scottsdale**  
*Sponsored by Center for Arizona Policy*

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ESA has changed our lives!

I am writing in support of Prop 305. I live in a very rural town in SE Arizona with a public school that has many budget problems. On my son's first day of Kinder, he was sent to the principal's office because he wouldn't stay in his seat or listen to the teacher. He has since been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD, but it was a fight with the school to even get him evaluated. My daughter was also struggling, and by the time my daughter was in the third grade I had to pull her out of her school, and we had to put her in an online public school.

Even though my son had an IEP, the services for my son were limited and often times his teacher said he was having a very hard time in class. I was told he was leaving class every day in tears. I was often never notified when my son was having issues. So, I did what I did with my daughter and enrolled him in an online public school.

While preparing for AZ Merits, I realized everything taught online was going right over his head. I was right there with him, but he retained nothing. This wasn't working either. We live paycheck to paycheck with only my husband working so I can care for my son, and curriculum and services for my ASD son are very expensive. ESA has changed our lives.

I am now able to purchase quality curriculum for my son and get services for him without having to worry about how I am going to pay for them. I feel hopeful for the first time in years. I thank God, every day for having the opportunity

**Leslie Contreras, Duncan**  
*Sponsored by Center for Arizona Policy*

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I support Prop 305 for the expansion of the ESA to make it available for all students.

Public school is not always a good fit for some children. Parents should have the financial resources to choose a different education path for their child. If the student is not attending public school, that money used in the public school system for that specific student should be allocated to the parents for a different education route and resources better fitted for that child.

However, as a one-income family, supported by a public school teacher's salary, it is a strain on our budget to pay for curriculums, supplies, and extracurricular activities. Passing Prop 305 would greatly help our family to fully educate our son and give him more opportunities for learning.

**Emily DaVault, Peoria**  
*Sponsored by Center for Arizona Policy*

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Please vote "yes" on Prop 305

As the mother of twins with special needs, public school has been a challenge. My twins have moderate to severe autism, and there is no autism program in the public school district where we live. Since there was no autism program available to us, our district chose to place the twins in a secluded environment designed for physically disabled students. The teacher and aides in the room were very busy helping the most physically disabled students, so the twins received no help with any type of education or with daily tasks like using the bathroom or opening their lunch boxes so they wouldn't go hungry all day.

Under the current rules, it is necessary for students to complete the first 100 days of the school year at a public or charter school to receive a scholarship, or to complete the required educational hours through online programs. We chose to have our twins complete the online program in order to obtain an ESA scholarship. During this time, they not only qualified for the ESA, but they went from getting straight D's in their former public school to straight A's through online special education.

Now that we have ESA funding, the twins are enrolled in a private school that specializes in teaching students with autism and other learning differences.

Because of the ESA, we now have hope that our special needs children will have the opportunity to make friends, enjoy activities, and most importantly have access to a successful and promising education. We used to be uncertain of their future, and now we have hope. That hope is entirely due to the ESA program.

Please vote "yes" on Prop 305 and give students of all abilities access to the education they need and deserve.

**Cherie Higgins, Phoenix**  
*Sponsored by Center for Arizona Policy*

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My name is Esmeralda Ellis. I am an Air Force Veteran and Arizona resident, having served in the Iraqi War. I am also a military spouse to an Active Duty Member of 19 years. We have 2 children, one was diagnosed with developmental delays and the another one in the Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Our journey to access therapeutic services has been challenging to say the least, even with good insurance and being an active military family. We have had so many barriers just to get our oldest diagnosed with Autism. In the fall of 2016, the military granted us Exceptional Family Member relocation orders to Las Vegas in order for our oldest to have access to better education and medical treatment.

To our surprise, the Las Vegas education system was at the bottom of the rankings when it came to schools. We did the best we could for our oldest child entering Kindergarten and enrolled her in a charter school. The school year was bumpy. The teacher quit within a week of school starting, and the class size and noise were too much for my daughter. I ended up being a volunteer all year inside of the classroom to stay with her to make sure she could get through the curriculum. At the end of the school year, we decided that she needed access to specialized education.

We weighed our options and decided that Arizona would be our retirement home from the military and this is why I'm so passionate about the ESA program.

Through the ESA program, military families and any special needs families do not have to go through so many hoops to get funding for their child to receive the education and services that they NEED and DESERVE.

The ESA program should be available for ALL children.

**Esmeralda Ellis, Yuma**  
*Sponsored by Center for Arizona Policy*

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This initiative has been called Save Our Schools; however a more accurate name is Save Our School Administrators. A "No" vote on 305 takes money away from students and puts in under the control of School Administrators. A "Yes" vote allows parent and students to choose the educational experience that provides the best outcome.

Publicly funded education should have one goal, "The Best Outcome for Each Student." A "Yes" vote on 305 does just that, by allowing parents and students more choices in selecting the educational method that will give that student the best outcome. Both ESAs and Charter school improve student outcome. For example, Arizona currently has more top 10 schools than any other state.

Additional funding and effective use of existing funding are also needed for publicly funded education. One method for additional funding is investigating how the public/private partnerships for commercial use, such as the Tempe Townlake Development, can be taxed to

make up the hundreds of millions of hundreds of million dollars of taxable assets removed from the school tax roles. As for improving the use of existing funds, the Governor should set up a task force to realign school districts to eliminate overlap, minimize administrative overhead and optimize student outcome, while still allowing local control.

Look at who is funding the “No on 305” initiative. You will find it is groups that want all public educational funding assigned to the current public school establishment. These groups also oppose the ability of parents and students to have other options besides the public school, such as ESAs and Charter Schools. Remember, bad charter schools shut down, but bad public schools go on forever.

Remember the goal is “Student Education, Not Public Education.” Vote “Yes” on 305 to support our students.

### **Ian Murray, Chairman, Republican Party of Mesa (LD-25), Mesa**

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As the mother of 3 children who has lived in Arizona for over 40 years, I strongly believe that every family has a responsibility to choose the best possible education for their children. I support every type of education; however, not every child fits the mold of district schools. My children have attended public, private and home school.

Prop 305, which expands the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program, provides every family with the ability to pick the school that is best for their children, regardless of zip code. That’s why I urge you to vote yes on Prop 305.

When parents choose to get an ESA scholarship, their child only gets 90% of what the state allocates for the child. That’s not only a direct cost saving for the state, but the district school is no longer burdened with providing teachers, administrators, buildings or buses for that child.

Those of us who choose private schools are a small minority of the population. Allowing us the opportunity to choose a private education for our children is a great benefit for our family, the state and the school district. As Arizona’s population continues to grow, the few of us who choose private schools provide a relief for growing school districts, not a drain.

Our Arizona Legislature passed SB1431 and the Governor stood up for families by signing it into law.

Please confirm their decision by voting yes on Prop 305.

### **Cathy Parisi, Tucson**

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To say that the ESA program “robs already starving schools of badly-needed funds” has been proven wrong by 42 studies on the fiscal effects of school choice programs. Three studies found the school choice programs as cost-neutral, but the other 39 studies found that the programs generated savings for taxpayers. The student using the ESA program receives 90% of the state money he would receive if he was in the public school. (5% goes to run the program and 5% remains in the pot for the other students.) The federal money that the ESA student would receive if he was in the public school remains in the pot for the other students. The local tax money that the ESA student would receive if he was in the public school remains in the pot for the other students. Charts of some of the savings for taxpayers can be found in the 2017 “Fiscal Effects of School Choice Programs” on edchoice.org. (See slides 23 to 29.)

School choice has worked well for Arizona. US News & World's list of the top high schools has 6 of Arizona's charter schools in the top 10. Many students are thriving in home schools. Arizona students have the choice of open enrollment in other districts. As a state Arizona has been a leader in school choice. This ESA program is just the latest in Arizona's educational choices. Research shows that parents who can make a choice are happier with their child's education than parents who do not have a choice of where to send their child.

**Florence Smith, Phoenix**

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All children should have access to a high-quality education that meets their individual learning needs. Prop 305 moves us toward this goal by expanding eligibility for an Empower Scholarship Account (ESA) to all families who opt their child out of his or her zoned district school. This is a fiscally responsible way to expand educational opportunity for our state's rapidly growing student population without depriving district schools of needed resources. By contrast, failure to enact Prop 305 would deprive students of these opportunities, thereby hurting our children, our communities, and our state.

The ESAs are funded with 90% of the state's portion of per-pupil funding. ESA students do not receive any local or federal funds, all of which remain with the district schools. Moreover, the state continues to fund the district schools for all the children they're still educating. The fiscal effect on the district schools is no different than when a child moves to another district or attends a private school or homeschools without an ESA. When a student leaves, the expenses associated with that student leave as well but the district school keeps most of the money.

Most importantly, our public education system should be designed to meet the needs of children, not the other way around. Students are not mere funding units, but individuals with varied aptitudes, interests, and preferences. Different children advance in different subjects at different paces, and some learn better in certain environments than others. ESAs empower families with greater access to a variety of learning options that best meet their child's unique needs. Voters who want to ensure that all children have access to educational opportunity should vote YES on Prop 305.

**Jason Bedrick, Phoenix**

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