



POLICY BRIEF

ALASKA
POLICY FORUM

Funding Students Instead of Institutions in Alaska

REMARKS ON THE REPORT

"We envision an education system where students are continually inspired, motivated, encouraged, and challenged. That will mean different things for different children. Creating that type of environment requires choice: choice in where to get educated, how and when to get educated, in who does the educating, and even choice in 'what' is taught."

Early in 2021, Alaska Policy Forum (APF) published a comprehensive study detailing the positive effects that implementing a state-level education savings account program (ESA) would have on Alaskans.¹ The author of the report, Corey DeAngelis, PhD, is a national expert on education policy. The report highlighted how an ESA program would benefit Alaskans in three major areas: the economic impact of academic achievement and educational attainment, social benefits, and state savings. In addition, the study does some myth-busting around ESAs and addresses their constitutionality.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

If an ESA were implemented for the 2021-2022 school year, each Alaskan student accessing the program would have an additional \$28,890 in lifetime earnings, with a cumulative economic benefit of about \$194 million, due to expected higher

academic achievement. The additional academic achievement experienced by the participating students is estimated to lead to an additional \$583 million in lifetime earnings for students by 2031. Furthermore, the opportunity to choose better-fitting education opportunities for students would result in more high school graduates, equating to around \$235 million in additional economic benefits over their lifetimes.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

The social benefits of an ESA program are less quantifiable than academic achievement and educational attainment, but no less important. The literature review in this report reveals that allowing education dollars to follow students improves civic outcomes, the satisfaction of parents and students, and equity. In particular, ESA programs are linked to increased civic outcomes such as political knowledge, political participation, voluntarism, civic engagement, charitable activity, and tolerance of others. Additionally, studies reveal that access to an ESA program in Alaska could reduce crime by 27 felonies in the first year, with a total 81 fewer felonies by 2031.

STATE SAVINGS

APF does not believe that “more is better” when it comes to education funding, and yet Alaska spends \$19,017 per student per year on K-12 public education, which is 28 percent higher than the national average of \$14,840.² DeAngelis points out that an ESA funded

at around \$9,500 per student per year—about half of what is currently spent per student—is still 30 percent higher than the average private school tuition (\$7,035) in Alaska.³ If 6,730 students used an ESA program the first year it was offered, Alaska would save over \$51 million while improving educational opportunities for all Alaskan families.

MYTH BUSTING

DeAngelis busts four major myths regarding ESAs. First, ESAs do not siphon money away from public schools. Rather, ESAs commit money to those to whom it belongs—students and their families. Education funding is meant for educating children, not for propping up and protecting public schools. Second, ESAs do not harm students still in the public school system. Instead, literature has found that public school outcomes improve after an ESA program has been implemented. Third, allowing the money to follow the student leads to more equity, not less, because it allows less-advantaged families to access alternatives. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, an ESA program does not violate the Establishment Clause of the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution or Alaska’s Blaine Amendment. The latest decision in *Espinoza v. Montana* (2020) weakened the power of discriminatory Blaine Amendments across the nation. Students themselves, not schools or educational programs, are the beneficiaries of ESA programs. In fact, Alaska already has several other state-funded programs that are used by students and families to pay for private educational services.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, every Alaska student deserves the chance to get the education that best meets their unique needs. Every child in every family in every community in the Great Land deserves an exceptional education.

There is no excuse for forcing a one-size-fits-all education on Alaska students. Alaskans have a duty to ensure the next generation and all generations following are given the opportunity to succeed and are equipped for the real world.

Contact Alaska Policy Forum to Learn More

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- ¹ Corey DeAngelis, "Funding Students Instead of Institutions in Alaska," Alaska Policy Forum, January 26, 2021, <https://alaskapolicyforum.org/2021/01/report-funding-students/>.
 - ² U.S. Department of Education, "National Public Education Financial Survey," National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2016-17. (This table was prepared August 2019.) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_236.75.asp?current=yes.
 - ³ "Alaska Private Schools by Tuition Cost," Private School Review, last accessed August 2, 2021, <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/tuition-stats/alaska>.