

Frequently Asked Questions

Have any questions about the Empowerment Scholarship Account Program as a Prospective or Current Account Holder? We are here to help! Please review the topics below and contact the ESA Office if you still need assistance.

Most, if not all, of the information listed below can also be found in The [Parent Handbook](#).

About the Empowerment Scholarship Account Program

What is an ESA? An Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) is an account administered by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and funded by state tax dollars to provide options for the education of qualified students in this state. An ESA consists of 90% of the state funding that would have otherwise been allocated to the school district or charter school for the qualified student (does not include federal or local funding). The ESA is granted to the Account Holder of the qualified student to provide an education that must include at least the following subjects: reading, grammar, mathematics, social studies and science. By opting out of the public-school system and accepting an ESA, applicants can seek a range of alternative educational services such as private schools, home-based education, tutoring, and educational therapies (for students with disabilities only) using state funds. Funded by the state, tailored by the applicant, and individualized for the student—the ESA program provides a unique opportunity to prepare Arizona students to succeed in school and life. ESA contracts are between the applicant and the Arizona Department of Education Empowerment Scholarship Account Program. What applicants choose to share with their enrolled school is at their discretion. *ESA cannot provide any advice or guidance to families regarding schools, programs or service providers to use or where to send their child to school. The student must be withdrawn from public school upon signing an ESA contract and while remaining on ESA.

How can I contact the ESA Office? The ESA office is located at the Arizona Department of Education in Phoenix, Arizona. You can call: 602-364-1969 — E-mail: esa@azed.gov

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Applying for ESA

I am trying to submit my application but the online application is not accepting my signature. The signature must be entered the exact same way the name was entered at the beginning of the application, including any spaces. It may be best to copy and paste your first and last name into the signature field, or to double check there are no spaces at the beginning and end of your first or last name.

Are there application deadlines? ESA accepts applications year-round.

What's the status of my application? Applications take 45 days to process from the day submitted. On the 45th day, we will provide a final determination sent via your preferred method of contact as indicated on the application (e-mail or postal mail). During this process, ESA Staff are unable to provide any indications if an application is going to be approved or denied before the final decision is made. The best course of action while waiting is to regularly check for ESA correspondence sent the preferred method of contact (either by the e-mail address or postal address you provided on the application). This is how we will contact you with questions, and the final determination. Outgoing e-mails can often come from esa.communications@azed.gov Also be sure to regularly check the spam/junk folder.

Why was my application denied? When an application is denied, a denial letter is issued via the preferred method of contact as indicated on the application. If you still have questions following the letter, it may help to be aware of the following common denial reasons:

- **The student did not meet the first 100-day requirement.**
 - This is a lawful requirement set forth by the state legislature (A.R.S. § 15-2404) that students applying for ESA must have attended public school (or public charter) for the first 100 days of the **prior school year** before applying for funding. This means the first calendar day of school to the 100th school calendar day. The public school has this information available on their school calendar.

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- Students do have the option of meeting this requirement by attending an online public program and must meet a certain number of reported hours. These hours vary by grade level and you can view them [here](#).
- Exceptions to this requirement are: incoming kindergarten students, preschool students with a disability, and military applications. Previous ESA Recipients (students who previously received funding) also do not need to meet the 100 day requirement.
- Please note, this is a lawful requirement and **no exceptions can be made** by the ESA department.
- Your student needs to be 5 years of age by September 1st by the application year to qualify for Kindergarten level funding. If your student does not meet the age requirement, you must provide a letter from a public school to show a student has been evaluated and determined ready for Kindergarten.
- **The application was incomplete.**
 - The [Eligibility & Application page](#) provides details of all the documents we require, and accept, to fulfill eligibility requirements. If these documents are not provided, the application will be denied and you have the option to reapply.
- **The application had incorrect information.** If there is any incorrect information on the application (incorrect name, misspelled name, incorrect birth dates, as examples), that can lead to an application denial. Please be careful when filling out the application, make sure all the information is there, and double check before submitting. If you are ever unsure, you are welcome to call ESA 602-364-1969 to double check we received the correct information.

What are my options after my application is denied? Can I appeal? You cannot appeal an application denial, but you can always reapply.

Starting on the ESA Program

New to ESA? The [Parent Handbook](#) is a great place to start.

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Did you move recently? Have a new phone number? New e-mail address? Always make sure to update ESA *immediately* with an e-mail (esa@azed.gov) (or postal mail if unable to e-mail) with these changes. If ESA cannot contact you regarding the status of your account, that could lead to account suspension and termination. ESA also sends out critical information by your selected preferred method of contact, e-mail or postal mail. If these addresses are not kept up-to-date, that means you are missing out on reminders, notices of change, and attempts to contact. ESA Staff are here to help, but they can't help you if they can't get a hold of you.

I just received an Approval Letter from ESA. What's next? Upon approval of an ESA Application, ESA e-mails a request for Pupil Withdrawal documentation. This means that ESA must be able to verify that the student is not enrolled in public school before issuing a contract. If the student receiving ESA funds was enrolled in the current school year at any time, ESA requires a Pupil Withdrawal Form. This form is given to you by the Public School. If the student did not enroll for the current school year, there is an attachment on this e-mail. It is the Approval Letter and Pupil Withdrawal Exemption Form. Review this form and see if any reasons apply to your student. ESA cannot accept the Exemption Form if the student is showing as enrolled in public school.

In almost all situations, students on ESA cannot be enrolled in a public school (including charter and public online programs). However, the student can be enrolled in a public school ONLY if the public school IS NOT receiving state funds for the student. The Empowerment Scholarship Account Program reallocates 90% of the funds the public school would have received for the student, to the parent to spend on their education. If the student is enrolled in public school at the same time as receiving ESA funds, the state is distributing these funds twice — paying both the public school and the parent. This is a violation of the ESA contract.

- The student cannot re-enroll in public school for a special education evaluation (504, IEP, MET) as "Tuition Payer Code 1".*
- The student cannot re-enroll in public school while they are on a wait list for private school as "Tuition Payer Code 1".*

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- The student cannot re-enroll for an online public class, public school class or extra-curricular activity, or C-TED class as "Tuition Payer Code 1".*
- The student cannot re-enroll for special education services as "Tuition Payer Code 1".*

*These options can be paid for with ESA funds and Federal Funds (Proportionate or Equitable Share). Please contact ESA for more information 602-364-1969 or esa@azed.gov

What if I have financial support through the private school? Make sure to verify you are not receiving an STO. The student cannot receive a tax credit (an STO – School Tuition Organization scholarship) at the same time as receiving ESA as this is a contract violation and can result in termination. If you are receiving any kind of assistance, we encourage checking with ESA first to verify this would not result in account termination.

Funding and the ESA Prepaid Card

Where's my card (it's my first time receiving the card)? The sooner ESA receives the signed contract, the sooner ESA can request the bank card from Bank of America. It can take up to 30 days to arrive in the mail, and arrives in a plain white envelope. It is easy to confuse for junk mail. Always remember to keep your mailing address up to date with ESA so that the bank card is sent to the correct address. If it's your first time activating the card, ESA can request a new card for you, but you must wait the full 30 days to confirm you have not received it before we request a new one.

Where's my card (I have already activated my card and ordered a replacement)? You can call Bank of America to verify the mailing information and card status. Always remember to keep your mailing address up to date with ESA so that the bank card is sent to the correct address.

I tried using the ESA prepaid card and it was declined. Please call Bank of America (1-866-213-8564) to verify the following: the current balance, and reasons the card was declined. The issue may

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also be related to the vendor's MCC code. An MCC code is a Merchant Category Classification Code. It is a four-digit code that categorizes types of spending (book stores, doctors, schools). The ESA prepaid card is pre-loaded to accept certain codes, which helps prevent excessive misspending. If you are able to obtain this code and check bank information prior to calling ESA, we can best assist you to provide the fastest and most thorough resolution.

The funding date has passed, but the funds are not on the card. ESA funds will be processed between the 15th through the 30th of the first month of each Quarter (July, October, January, April). While the funds disburse on those dates, there can be a processing period before the funds appear on the cards and are available to use. Please also be aware, if your Quarterly Expense Report is showing as unsubmitted or rejected, your account will not be funded.

My card has, or is going to expire. Bank of America should issue you a new card. To verify a new card is on its way, call the number on the back of the card or call 1-866-213-8564

What happens to funds that aren't spent? Funds that aren't spent remain in the account so as long as the account remains open. If at any time the account is closed, that is when the funds are swept and returned to the state. Please be aware, Account Holders are required to spend a portion of funds for the contract year on the at least the subjects of reading, grammar, mathematics, social studies and science.

I spent my own money before starting on ESA. Can the ESA card refund me? ESA funds do not reimburse or back-fund. Funds only pay for expenses from the quarter you start funding, onward.

Logging into the ESA Expense Report Portal

I can't log in. Have you registered your account with ESA? Applying for ESA and registering are two different processes. Even if you aren't sure, or think you have, you can double check by clicking [this link](#) . The easiest way to check this is by entering your ESA Application number. This number can be found on the last page of the contract, it

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is on most correspondence from ESA, and also on the e-mail confirmation following application submission.

I am registered and I still can't log in. I click "forgot password" and nothing happens. The user ID is the e-mail address ESA has on file. If you changed this with ESA at any time, you must [re-register](#). ESA does not have access to your password and cannot reset your password for you. If you are locked out of your account, please wait 15 minutes and try again.

I can log in, but now I don't know where to go. ADE Connect is a web portal utilized by the Arizona Department of Education. ESA is a small portion of that tool. You log through ADE Connect in order to access the ESA Expense Report Portal (for expense reporting). After logging in, to get to the ESA Portal, you must click "ESA Expense Report Portal"

I can log in, but the system is "looping me". I click on "ESA Expense Report Portal" and it takes me back to the ESA web page. This means something isn't quite right and can be best resolved by calling ESA (602-364-1969). E-mail works as well, but it is not recommended for a prompt resolution of this issue.

I can log in, but I am getting a "server error". Is the website down? This can be fixed by clearing out the website cookies or "browsing privately". For example, with Google Chrome, if you right click on the browser icon and select "New Incognito Window", this should help.

I have tried everything and I still can't access the ESA Expense Report Portal. Please call ESA at 602-364-1969. If you are e-mailing, please provide as much detail as possible including screen captures or pictures of what you are experiencing so we can best assist you.

Submitting Your Expense Report

Detailed invoices are required and especially required for expenses such as tuition, tutoring and educational therapies. A Square, Pay Pal, or Point of Sale Receipt is not sufficient.

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Have you viewed our training videos? [Click here.](#)

The line item isn't balancing. There's a red box around the transaction total and I can't get it to work. If you click the expense category, it will expand the line item. The system is trying to balance the transaction total to all the numbers within the line item. Double check shipping and handling, taxes, and any additional entries. If they add up to equal each other, contact ESA for more assistance (602-364-1969 or esa@azed.gov). Please provide as much information as possible in the e-mail. Screen captures are very helpful.

I select my receipt/invoice to upload and I can't save it. This is likely because the system needs more information before a Save Button "appears". Scroll further down the page to see if there are additional sub-categories of information. For example, for Private School Expenses there are additional sub-categories of Tuition, Fees, Textbooks, Uniforms. You are required to enter information here before you can save. Additionally, if the charge is for tuition, click "New" next to tuition and add the additional information. Once this is complete, you will be able to save your upload.

I can't upload my documents. Make sure the file specifications are correct.

- File name cannot have any special characters. Only letters a-z, numbers 0-9, and a hyphen.
- Allowed file extensions (file types): .jpg .png .gif .doc .docx .pdf
- Individual file size should be less than 10 MB.
- It's helpful to give the file name the most simple name possible:
 - Private School Invoice
 - Therapy Invoice
 - Therapy Credential

There are fraudulent charges on my account. What do I do? If you suspect there have been fraudulent transactions made with the ESA Prepaid Card, first call Bank of America to report these charges.

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Then, call ESA so the account can be noted. When reporting these expenses, they can be categorized as "Other Goods and Services" and you are encouraged to provide as much supporting documentation as possible. Generally, Bank of America is able to resolve these issues and refund the card for these types of charges. However, if Bank of America does not do this, ESA will ask these funds be repaid by the Account Holder.

There is an accidental charge on my account. What do I do? If the card was accidentally used for something, it is first recommended you seek the card be refunded directly by the vendor. If that is not possible, funds can be repaid by personal check, cashier's check, or money order made out to the Arizona Department of Education. This can be handed in-person at the Arizona Department of Education building where the ESA office is located, or sent by postal mail. Certified mail (is not required) but does provide receipt that it was sent and received. You can categorize this as "Other Goods and Services".

How do I categorize a refund? If you have a full refund, you are welcome to categorize the full refund and charge as "Other Goods and Services" and provide as much documentation as possible. If it is a partial refund, the charge itself must be appropriately categorized and the partial refund can be categorized as "Other Goods and Services".

I logged into my expense report and there's nothing for me to do. My only options are "No Expenses" and "View Report". The ESA Expense Portal has been upgraded to reflect card transactions. First and foremost, you want to verify if the expense has posted to the Bank of America account. You can do this by calling the number on the back of the card, signing up for online banking, or checking your bank statement. Once the payment posts, it can take 24-48 hours for it to appear on the portal.

My expenses will not post to the bank by the deadline, or I know I will use the card after the 20th deadline. You are welcome to submit a Zero Expenses report if your expenses are not showing. If there are pending expenses, you can anticipate reporting these expenses in the following quarterly report. This is OK. The only exception to this is for Quarter 4. If there are additional expenses

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accrued after June 20th, ESA will reach out at a later date to notify your report has been opened to allow submission of the additional expenses. As Quarter 4 is the end of the contract year, all expenses must be included on that report and cannot “roll over”. We ask if at all possible to avoid using the card from the 20th to the end of the month for ease of reporting.

I didn't use the ESA card this quarter. Is it OK to submit a zero expenses report? Even if no funds are spent, you are required to submit a Zero Expenses report. Please be aware, Account Holders are required to spend a portion of funds for the contract year on the at least the subjects of reading, grammar, mathematics, social studies and science.

My payment has posted to the Bank of America Account and it still isn't appearing on the online portal after 48 hours. If you are able to verify with Bank of America that the payments you made have posted, it has been longer than 48 hours from the time it posted, and the expenses are still not showing on the portal, please contact ESA for more assistance (602-364-1969 or esa@azed.gov).

My expense report is going to be late. Can I have an extension? The Quarterly Expense Report is due on the 20th of the last month of every quarter (September, December, March, June). If the report is 10 days late, respective accounts will be suspended. If the report is still showing as unsubmitted while funding disburses (the following months on the 15th and 30th), the account does not, and will not, receive funding. If the report is 70 days late, the Account Holder will be terminated and all accounts under the Account Holder will be closed. The Account Holder cannot reapply. The only option is to appeal following a termination. Details of how to appeal are in the termination letter.

Expenses and Expense Review

I submitted my Quarterly Expense Report and it's still showing in "submitted" status. When will it be approved? ESA receives over 5,500 new expense reports quarterly and has a very small team

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to review the reports. It is highly unlikely that each report will be reviewed by the next deadline, or even within a few days of submission. Reports are reviewed both randomly, and higher risk reports are reviewed first. If your report is showing as “submitted” by the Expense Report deadline, you have fulfilled your contractual obligation at that time.

How do I know if what I want to purchase is allowed or disallowed? The Parent Handbook is an excellent resource to review prior to using the ESA card. If after you read the handbook and you have additional questions, you are welcome to call ESA 602-364-1969. If you have specific expense questions (for example, is a certain curriculum or service allowed?), you are welcome to e-mail ESA esa@azed.gov and we will provide a response in writing.

How can I request information if an item/service is considered an allowed or disallowed expense with ESA funds? For specific item requests, you must e-mail ESA and provide the following information:

- Your name and/or student name.
- Be as descriptive as possible.
- You must provide a link to the item or service.
- If you are asking if a credential is sufficient for a service, a copy of the credential must be provided or a description of the type of credential must be provided.

I have multiple students on the ESA program. Can I use funds on one card to pay for another student’s expenses? The cards and funding that are distributed are specific to the student associated with the card. Combination of funding or using cards for other students (on, or not on the program) is a violation of the Empowerment Scholarship contract and can result in account termination.

Disallowed Expense Reminders:

- Supplemental materials (anything that is *not* a curriculum [a complete course of study]) is disallowed unless specifically stated as “required” by the curriculum. The word required must be used (“Curriculum XY *requires* item AB”).
- School supplies (pens, paper, ink) are disallowed.

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- While the renting of instruments is allowed, the purchase or rent-to-own of instruments is disallowed.
- The purchase of food, travel, room/board with ESA funds is disallowed.
- Amazon Prime is a disallowed expense.
- ESA funds do not cover the purchase of laptops.
- Funds cannot be used to pay for Internet fees.
- ESA funds cannot be used for a copay or deductible.
- Cash withdrawal attempts are disallowed and can result in account termination.

Detailed invoices are required and especially required for services such as tutoring and educational therapies. A Square, Pay Pal, or Point of Sale Receipt is not sufficient.

ESA does not pre-approve vendors. If an Account Holder has providers or vendors in mind for educational therapies or services, ESA is unable to say if a certain vendor or provider is approved. The Parent Handbook lists services that are allowable to be paid with ESA funds. Depending on the service, a credential is required. So as long as a sufficient credential is provided for an allowable service, it is allowed. ESA Staff are happy to answer any questions about allowable services and credentials. Although it is not required by ESA to review a specific credential, it is strongly recommended that the parent obtains a copy of the credential prior to using the ESA card. ESA Account Holders will have to repay funds if they are unable to provide a credential for the service.

My Expense Report was Rejected. Now what? Please follow the link provided in the notification e-mail and review the reasons for rejection. Often items are rejected because not enough information was provided (a required credential or detailed invoice). If you have any questions, ESA Staff are here to help. 602-364-1969

I received a Disallowed Expense Letter. Now what? When expenses are disallowed, this means the ESA team has determined that funds must be repaid. This is either following an unresolved

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rejected report (ESA asked for required credentials by a specific deadline and did not receive them), or the expense is disallowed as stated in [Arizona State Statute](#) and the [Parent Handbook](#). Once disallowed spending is found, the account is suspended until resolution or funds are repaid.

How do I repay funds? You don't have to wait to receive a rejected report or disallowed letter in order to repay funds. At any time, we accept repayment in form of a personal check, cashier's check, or money order only, made out to the Arizona Department of Education. This can be handed in-person at the Arizona Department of Education building where the ESA office is located, or sent by postal mail. Certified mail (is not required) but does provide receipt that it was sent and received.

Account Closure, Account Termination, and Attestation and Exited Status

I would like to re-enroll my student in public school and close the ESA account. This requires a [Close Account Request Form](#) only. ESA cannot initiate the closure process with anything else, including an e-mail or phone call from the Account Holder that they would like to close their account. The form itself provides authorization for ESA Staff to do this. If the student is found in public school while the parent is in contract with ESA, ESA will notify the parent of these findings. If not resolved, ESA may ask the Account Holder to repay funds that were spent.

I would like to close my account. This requires a [Close Account Request Form](#) only. ESA cannot initiate the closure process with anything else, including an e-mail or phone call from the Account Holder that they would like to close their account. The form itself provides authorization for ESA Staff to do this.

My account was Terminated. What can I do? Following account termination, the only option for the parent is to appeal. The details of how to appeal are in the termination letter. The parent has 30 days from the date of termination to provide this appeal. An example of an

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Appeal Letter can be found [here](#). The Appeal Process can take up to 30 days to arrange a meeting.

My account was turned over to the Attorney General's Office.

What do I do? Once an ESA account is handed over to the Attorney General's Office, any resolution must be worked out with the Attorney General's Office and not ESA. ESA is no longer involved with the account at that time.

My student is turning 18, or is in 12th grade, this school year and is NOT ready to graduate. Does anything change?

ESA runs a system check for students that meet that criteria and issues an "Eligibility Attestation Form". This means the Account Holder is attesting the student still needs to receive support (additional disbursements) for one more year. This form is required by a specific deadline in order for ESA to issue a contract, or renewal contract. This can be signed each year until the year the student turns 22. Please be aware if it is found that the student has graduated and continues to receive ESA disbursements, ESA will ask those funds be repaid.

My student is ready to graduate. Does anything change?

Once an ESA recipient graduates, they become "Exited". This means that they no longer receive additional disbursements but can continue to have access to the remaining funds. If the Account Holder would like access to the remaining funds, this does require signing an "Exited Contract", providing the parent access to these funds for one year (the contract is renewed on an annual basis) and Quarterly Expense Reports are still required, even if there are no funds spent. Funds can be used toward additional allowable expenses, including Post Secondary Expenses (community college, university, trade school).

Vendors, Taxes, Other

Bank Of America phone number: 1-866-213-2564 or call the number on the back of your card.

Did you move recently? Have a new phone number? New e-mail address?

Always make sure to update ESA *immediately* with an e-mail (esa@azed.gov) (or postal mail if unable to e-mail) with these

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changes. If ESA cannot contact you regarding the status of your account, that could lead to account suspension and termination. ESA also sends out critical information by your selected preferred method of contact, e-mail or postal mail. If these addresses are not kept up-to-date, that means you are missing out on reminders, notices of change, and attempts to contact. ESA Staff are here to help, but they can't help you if they can't get a hold of you.

I'm a parent (Account Holder), how do I report ESA on my taxes? Please review the state statute on how to proceed: A.R.S. § 15-2402 J. Monies received pursuant to this article do not constitute taxable income to the parent of the qualified student.

I'm a vendor or provider, how do I report ESA on my taxes? ESA is unable to advise on how you can do this. Please seek advice from your personal Financial Advisor.

I'm a vendor or provider. How do I start a contract with ESA, or get on ESA's pre-approved vendor list? ESA does not contract with vendors or providers who will be paid by ESA funds. There is also not a pre-approved vendor list.

Links for Prospective Applicants

- To determine boundaries of tribal areas within Arizona: [AZ Land Maps](#)
- To determine assigned school, type address into textbox at: <http://www.greatschools.org/>
- To determine school letter-grade rating: <http://www.azed.gov/accountability/state-accountability/>

Information on 504

Plans: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

Links for New and Current Recipients

- [Enrollment for Bank of America Online Banking](#)
- [Board Meetings](#)

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- [Example of Appeal Letter from Applicant](#)