

PAC Meeting Highlights

September 28, 2021

ESA Program Updates

1. Discussion on ESA program changes coming on September 29, 2021
 - a. 45 days to process an application and send parent contract is now 30 days
 - b. The FIRST 100 days public school attendance requirement changes to ANY 45 days (can be current or prior school year, or a combination of both years)
 - c. Kindergarten online instruction requirement changes to 200 hours
 - d. No change in hourly requirement for 1st-12th grades
 - e. ESA funds can be used in combination with private health insurance to pay for educational therapies (only for applicants qualifying as a student with a disability)
 - f. Students who qualify for the Free and/or Reduced Lunch Program AND who are attending a school or district assigned a letter grade of D or F or who is eligible to attend Kindergarten and who resides within the attendance boundary of a school or district assigned a letter grade of D or F, do not need to meet the 45 days public attendance requirement.

NOTE:

ADE will be hosting a Town Hall on these program changes on October 7th. Registration information is available on our website and has been emailed to all families.

Implementation was required by state law to begin on September 29th. Depending on Arizona State Board of Education rule-making and the Board's vote in January 2022, there could possibly be adjustments to the way these program updates are implemented.

Risk-Based Account Auditing

1. Discussion about moving from approving every item to a risk-based system
 - a. ADE staff receives thousands of requests for preapproval/approval of individual items
 - b. Current staffing limitations mean that a parent can be left waiting weeks for a response
 - c. Moving to a risk-based approach has been a continued recommendation by the Auditor General
 - d. Would involve reviewing a percentage of account transactions based on risk

- e. The risk level of an account would increase based on transaction history.
Example: Account with history of attempted cash withdrawals could be given a higher risk rating and could possibly have transactions viewed more frequently.
- f. This new process would be phased-in, possibly looking at a January 2022 start date
- g. Parents could still request a preapproval, if desired

Opportunities:

Smother process

Can be easier with well-defined process

Less frustration because wait time is reduced

Challenges:

Concern when purchasing items without approval in advance

Need a well-defined audit process

ESA Parent Handbook – Page 19

1. Discussion on how we can better align handbook with statute and rule, as well as provide parents with flexibility and clarity when making purchases
 - a. Growing the list of “approved educational materials” found on page 19
 - b. Items listed under the “approved educational materials” section DO not require curriculum
 - c. Some of the non-approved materials on page 19 can be educational and could potentially be moved to the “approved educational materials” section.
 - d. Consider rewording of “non-approved materials” to provide more clarity
Example: Some items listed as “non-approved”, “might” be approved with curriculum

Suggestions:

“Toys” to “Educational Toys” (*Legos, board games, puzzles, etc.*)

“Workshops” to “Educational Workshops” (*science workshops, art workshops, etc.*)

“Kits, Boxes and Sticker Books” to “*Educational Kits, Boxes or Sticker Books*”

Art supplies or consumable materials as part of a curriculum

Educational rugs (ABCs, colors, etc.) as part of a curriculum

Expand manipulatives (*letters, science, social studies, history, reading, social skills*)

NOTE:

Any handbook suggestions will be compiled and shared with the ADE policy team, the Attorney General's office and finally given to the Arizona State Board of Education for approval.

Other questions and topics of discussion:

- Can ESA clearly explain who qualifies for associated goods/assistive technology and what documentation needs to be provided? *Will be a future topic for town hall and/or weekly bulletin*
- Can PAC members observe a Compliance meeting? *Will need to be virtual and will work on scheduling.*
- Can we have a mentorship program for new parents (emotional support and resources)? *We are starting ESA 101 town halls, the first one will be on 11-3-21.*
- Can we have videos of real families utilizing the program on the website? *We are working on adding additional content to website, will discuss video possibilities with leadership.*
- ADE is working with the State Board of Education and will continue to collaborate as the rule making process continues. *Look for communication from SBE on public comment period.*
- Can we expand the resources available for Spanish language speakers? *Many current staffers are bilingual, will continue this conversation.*