

Legislature Poised to Push Through Out-of-State ESA Voucher Expansion

The massive out-of-state ESA voucher expansion bill [SB1224](#) was scheduled for a full vote of the Senate on Monday, but was removed over the weekend. The bill would expand ESA vouchers for use across state lines, sending Arizona tax dollars to other states with little to no accountability or oversight. The Arizona Indigenous People's Caucus, as well as District 7's elected legislators, remain [staunchly opposed](#) to ESA voucher expansion, saying they "won't let this effort, led by a D.C. special interest group, use our Native children as pawns in their anti-public education agenda."



But out-of-state dark money interests keep pushing, desperate for a voucher win in Arizona at any cost. The bill was scheduled for debate and vote by the full Senate on Monday, but quietly disappeared from the calendar over the weekend, a clear sign that pressure from voters is working. *(Keep calling and posting!)*

Meanwhile, in the House, lawmakers separately advanced another ESA voucher expansion bill, [HB2898](#), which would also send Arizona tax dollars across multiple state lines and is even more broadly written than SB1224. Pending a routine review in House Rules, HB2898 awaits a vote of the entire House. For more on this bill, [watch an interview](#) with our communications director, Dawn Penich-Thacker, and the bill's sponsor.

This week, lawmakers will also consider SB1059 and SCR1003, which would allow Arizonans to voter-protect Prop. 301 revenues at the ballot box and modestly increase the sales tax for schools to a full penny. Arizona ranks at the bottom nationwide for teacher pay (49th), per-student investment (46th), teacher retention (50th) and classroom overcrowding (49th). These bills won't solve our classroom crisis on their own, but they'll help — and if they pass [together](#) with the Invest in Ed initiative, we may actually have a shot at solving the chronic underfunding of Arizona's public schools. However, we must remind lawmakers that more ESA vouchers cannot be a part of this picture. It makes no sense to drill new holes in the bottom of the funding bucket as we put new money in.



This week is “Crossover Week.” Lawmakers will pause all committee hearings except Appropriations and Rules to focus on voting on bills and sending them to the other chamber for consideration. Because they’re eager to wrap up early and head home to campaign for their reelections, we’re also expecting early budget action. Lawmakers continue to say they want to work fast and avoid making negative headlines. That presents an opportunity for our network to remind them that the best way to keep the peace is to listen to voters: No new vouchers. Fund public education. Increase transparency and accountability of taxpayer dollars.

So, what is the ESA voucher program anyway?

The ESA voucher program currently costs the state of Arizona **\$110 million per year** to pay for the private, often religious, school tuition and personal educational expenses of approximately 7,000 students.

ESA vouchers are state tax dollars cut from public schools and given directly to recipients via debit card or wire transfer. The average ESA voucher per student per year is \$15,000, though some students get closer to \$6,000 and others \$40,000 per student per year. The average state spending for Arizona public district and charter school students is \$5,550 per student per year.



While expansionists claim the program serves students with disabilities, the ESA voucher program does not give priority for students with special needs, who make up approximately 60% of the ESA voucher population. The other 40% of the ESA voucher program is first-come-first-served for students with a military parent, students who would otherwise attend a D- or F-rated school, students who are or ever were in foster care, students who live on tribal reservations, and all siblings of any qualified students.

The ESA voucher program allows recipients to “roll over” all unspent state funds year after year, with some recipients maintaining balances of over \$100,000. Arizona law allows recipients to continue using the state’s K-12 education funds to pay for personal college expenses even after the ESA voucher student has graduated from high school and until the age of 22. Unbelievably, the law says ESA voucher recipients can transfer state funds to their children’s personal college savings accounts, such as Coverdell or 529 accounts.

It is unknown whether and how the state retrieves the funds ESA voucher recipients don’t use on appropriate expenses during or after their K12 education.

Calls to Action!

- **Contact legislative leadership** and ask them to kill these bills because Arizona taxpayers shouldn't be forced to subsidize private schools in other states:
 - Senate President Karen Fann (602-926-5874 / KFann@azleg.gov)
- **Contact your own senator.** Ask them to oppose SB1224 and HB2898 because it's not what their constituents want done with our tax dollars. No amount of pseudo "reforms" justify sending our tax dollars out of state.
- **Stay prepared** to come to the Capitol and sit in the gallery as lawmakers debate SB1224. [Here's how to get there and where to park.](#) Follow Facebook closely for date and time.
- **Share our [fact sheet](#)** with your friends and family via email and social media so they can call and email too.

Stop out-of-state
ESA voucher expansion

 **Oppose SB1224** 
AND HB2898

AZ tax \$\$ for AZ schools!!

☎ Call Speaker Rusty Bowers (602)926-3128 ☎ Call Pres. Karen Fann (602)926-5874
✉ RBowers@AZLeg.gov ✉ KFann@AZLeg.gov

   

Bills in motion:

SB 1224



Oppose

**empowerment scholarships;
qualified schools; reservations**
**Expands ESA vouchers across
state lines**

Sen. Sylvia Allen

Would expand ESA vouchers outside of state lines to New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and California. Arizona is the only state in the nation using taxpayer funds to pay for private religious vouchers in other states. The costs of this expansion are not known. The existing ESA voucher program already drains more than [\\$110 million per year](#) in state funding directly from Arizona's public schools, and is rife with [accountability](#) and [misspending](#) issues. No Arizona student should have to leave the state to get a great education, and Arizona tax dollars should remain in Arizona. Scheduled for a full Senate vote on Monday 2/24, but pulled from the calendar.

HB 2898



Oppose

**empowerment scholarships;
qualified schools; parent**
**Expands ESA vouchers across
state lines**

Rep. Regina Cobb

Like SB1224 in the Senate, this bill expands the definition of "qualified schools" to 2 miles across state lines for students living on a Native American reservation, but also to anyone living in small towns along the Arizona border, specifically students in the polygamous town of Colorado City, AZ for use in Hildale, UT, which is within two miles of the border. Passed appropriations, awaiting House Rules.

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SB 1059



Support

TPT; use tax; education
Sets up new revenue distributions for education, conditional on ballot passage of SCR1002 in November

Sen. Sylvia Allen

Together with SCR1002, this bill makes legislative changes to give schools more flexibility in how they spend revenues from the Classroom Site Fund. Scheduled for a Senate floor vote, Monday.

SB 1357



Oppose

schools; access; instructional materials; review
Limit individualized support and responsive teaching in district and charter schools

Sen. Sylvia Allen

This bill would add significant bureaucracy by requiring all district and charter books, instructional aides, mandatory and optional reading materials to be pre-approved the year before school starts, even before teachers meet their students. It would eliminate teachers' ability to work with parents and specialists to assist struggling students, making it illegal for district and charter teachers to give students individually tailored support, including gifted students and special needs students. With responsive, individualized instruction often cited as a reason parents support "school choice," this bill suggests the 95% of Arizona students in district and charter schools don't warrant the same responsive teaching as their private school peers. Passed the Senate Education Committee with the sponsor promising to amend the bill to address educator concerns, but the changes made have not done so. Awaiting a first read in the House.

NEW

SB 1177



Support

appropriation; Ganado School Loop Road
Allots \$900,000 for repairs to Ganado School Loop Road in northeastern AZ

Sponsor: Sen. Jamescita Peshlakai

The Ganado School Loop Road, built in 1991, hasn't been maintained or upgraded for 27 years. It is the only point of access both to the K-12 schools for 1,388 students and 93 teachers and for the community hospital, as well as for the school buses, parents and community members. The road is hazardous in winter snow and turns to mud in the spring, and the poor drainage is eating away at neighboring farmlands. The requested funding would also add a sidewalk and other safety mechanisms, as the vast majority of Ganado students walk to school. The county will fund \$400,000 toward the road's repair; this type of matching funding is rare. Scheduled for Senate Appropriations, Tuesday. See mirror bill **HB2198** (sponsor: Rep. Arlando Teller).

**CLICK
HERE**

to read the
SB1224/
HB2898
Fact Sheet



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@arizona_sos

RTS

SB 1491

**Support**

literacy; dyslexia; screening; appropriations

Funds dyslexia support and teacher training

Sen. Paul Boyer

This bill would implement the recommendations of the interim committee which studied this issue, give schools an extra year to implement the requirements for dyslexia support and teacher training passed last year, and appropriate \$1 million in FY 2021 to fund those efforts. Passed Senate Education Committee unanimously; scheduled for Senate Appropriations, Tuesday.

SCR 1002

**Support**

Education; TPT; Use Tax Increases sales tax funding for education by 0.4¢

Sen. Kate Brophy McGee

This bill would [ask voters to increase the Prop 301 sales tax](#) permanently from its current 0.6¢ to a full penny. Such a move would voter-protect the funding and add [\\$400 million a year in new money](#) for education. The dollar amount is nowhere near enough to address our school funding crisis, even though lawmakers have the power to solve our classroom crisis with the stroke of a pen. But, with Invest in Ed also headed to the ballot, education advocates would get what they asked for last year — \$1.5 billion in new funding from multiple revenue sources — and together, the two measures would give Arizona a shot at resolving our classroom crisis. Scheduled for Senate Rules, Monday.

Keep AZ
\$\$ in AZ
schools!

Keep AZ
\$\$ in AZ
schools!

Keep AZ
\$\$ in AZ
schools!

SCR 1003

**Oppose**

personal property tax; exemption Exempts first \$1 million of personal property used for business purposes from taxation

Sen. JD Mesnard

This bill would increase the state's exemption for personal property used for agriculture purposes or in trade or business from \$185,811 to \$1 million. The bill's [fiscal note](#) estimates a direct General Fund cost of \$1.5 million starting in FY 2023, and a corresponding increase of the state's K-12 education formula cost. This means the state would have to come up with \$1.5 million more every year from the general fund in order to maintain current funding levels for K-12 education. Cutting revenue for public schools when our state is at the bottom of national rankings sends our state in the wrong direction. Scheduled for a full Senate vote, Monday.

**NEW
RTS**

HB 2367

**Oppose**

schools; residency documentation; policies

Requires parents to provide proof of legal status

Rep. Tim Dunn

This bill would require parents to provide proof of legal custody when enrolling their children in school. Last year, the Yuma Union High School District came under fire for illegally requiring state-issued ID to enroll, shutting out children of migrant agricultural workers, homeless youth and those without lawful immigration status. The Department of Education stepped in and reiterated that all students have a right to a free public education per a 1982 US Supreme Court decision. This bill would not only infringe on all students' right to public education, but could run afoul of federal law. Scheduled for House Rules Committee, Monday.

2020 Session Timeline

Monday, 1/13	<i>2020 Legislative Session begins</i>
Thursday, 1/16	<i>Last day to introduce House bills before the seven-bill limit begins</i>
Monday, 2/3	<i>Senate bill introduction deadline</i>
Monday, 2/10	<i>House bill introduction deadline (extended; subject to change)</i>
Friday, 2/21	<i>Last day for a bill to get out of committees in its originating house</i>
Monday, 2/24	Crossover Week begins; the expected start of this year's budget bill work
Friday, 3/27	Last day for a bill to get out of committees in its crossover house
Friday, 4/17	Last day for conference committees, which iron out differences in bill versions passed by separate houses (date set by legislative rule; can be changed)
Saturday, 4/25	100th Day of Session (the magic ending point we hope for; can be changed)

Who We Are

Save Our Schools Arizona® is made up of everyday people who believe in our state and want it to succeed. We are parents, grandparents, teachers, retirees, and concerned voters from every corner of this state. We hold a wide variety of political party registrations and backgrounds. Our kids attend all kinds of schools, public, private and charter. We're as different from each other as Flagstaff is from Sierra Vista, or Winslow is from Tempe.

What do we have in common? We all understand that building strong schools for all our kids also means we're building a stronger, more prosperous state. Save Our Schools is so much bigger than politics. It's about doing right by Arizona's children, Arizona's families and Arizona's future.

Local to the Phoenix area?

Sign up to attend a [House Education](#) or [Senate Education](#) committee hearing at the Capitol.



Protecting schools from another part of the state?

Make sure you are on our [email list!](#)