



SOSAZ Education Report

Fifty-Fourth Legislature - Second General Session

January 12, 2020



Welcome back, Team SOSAZ!

The start of the 2020 legislative session is a great time to remember everything we've accomplished over the last three years. Together, we've stopped irresponsible and unnecessary ESA voucher expansion every single year. Just last session, thanks to your engagement, we blocked powerful national interests from passing six ESA voucher expansion bills in our legislature. That's a fantastic defensive win for our public schools.

This year we'll work through our fourth legislative session, and our network continues to grow. In 2020, we're asking lawmakers to step up for students. Incremental investments aren't enough when we are *still* 49th in teacher pay. We still have some of the most over-crowded classrooms in the nation, and we're still 46th for per-student investment. Numbers don't lie. It's time to #StepUpAZ. We need big, bold solutions to finally address Arizona's classroom crisis once and for all.

The 2020 session is already shaping up to be contentious. Partisan splits are razor-thin (31-29 in the House, 17-13 in the Senate) and lawmakers are eager to hit the campaign trail, so they are signaling they want to work fast and avoid high-profile wrangling. When it comes to our issues, that presents an opportunity for us to remind lawmakers 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.



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What's more, it's widely expected that, [spurred by Betsy DeVos](#) and other out-of-state special interests, the privatization lobby will push for ESA voucher expansion yet again. With your help, we're prepared to defeat:

- Bills that expand ESA vouchers across state lines into [New Mexico](#) and Utah
- More [“goods and services” expansions](#) that add to the list of items parents can buy for personal use
- More efforts to [remove oversight of the ESA voucher program from the Dept. of Education](#)
- Bills that expand ESA vouchers to [“bullied students”](#) which lobbyists have admitted is “our path to universal access” (a similar program in Florida makes 83% of students eligible)
- Bills that expand ESA vouchers for trade schools and apprenticeships, a national idea that's gained local traction despite a lack of local private trade schools

We're also reserving energy to advocate for a few positive proposals, including additional funding for the public schools that educate our most impoverished students, additional dollars for special education, additional investments into improving our worst-in-the-nation counselor-to-student ratio, limits on Student Tuition Organization fees, and expanding the state's teacher recruitment and debt-relief program.

This SOSAZ Legislative Weekly is designed to help our network track every bill that relates to our top issues of increasing public school funding, fighting irresponsible privatization, and increasing tax dollar accountability. We'll put bills on your radar as they come up, explain what they mean, advise you on a position to take, and keep you updated when it's time for action!

Calls to Action

None of the bills we're tracking have been assigned to a committee yet. You may notice an ESA repeal bill scheduled for the first Senate Education committee, but it appears to be a simple correction to a mistake in last year's language, and we are not taking a position on it. We will update you every step of the way as bills move through the process.

For now, our Call to Action is this: Forward this report to friends, family and neighbors so we can continue building our statewide team of volunteers. Post and talk about our classroom crisis, the value of strong public schools and how to get involved. We know it takes thousands of us emailing, showing up, and demanding that lawmakers #StepUpAZ.

Local to the Phoenix area? Sign up to attend a committee meeting at the Capitol. Protecting public schools from other parts of the state? [Join a webinar](#) about how to advocate.

Sample Bill

LEGEND

Bill Number

SOS Bill Position Indicated by colored markers:



Support



Neutral



Oppose

Bill Title and Primary Sponsor
Official Title in Grey
Descriptive Title in Black

Bill Description

SOS Recommended RTS Comments

HB 2022

SOS

Empowerment Scholarships, Financial Oversight, Treasurer Transfer Financial Oversight of ESA Voucher Program Solely to Treasurer
Rep. Mark Finchem

Reduces financial oversight in Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Account vouchers by giving the Treasurer the sole authority to execute contracts with payment processing vendors for the program.

This means the Treasurer alone could determine what information they want the payment processing vendor to track, potentially limiting the ability to effectively monitor the spending within the ESA voucher program for fraud or other mispending.

The Department of Education would be limited in their ability to identify what kind of information is necessary from the payment processing vendor to properly audit the program.

- It is fiscally irresponsible to decrease the potential oversight of a program where families are given public funds on debit cards and then expected to spend that money responsibly, even though the majority of ESA voucher families comply with the law making fraud harder to catch and prevent if simply had governance.
- This bill is simply partisan maneuvering.