



A Choice for Timothy

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By: Brittany Wagner



Timothy Farr wasn't born deaf. As a baby, he contracted meningitis, and soon after he lost the ability to hear. His disability shouldn't have stopped him from receiving a quality education. Yet,

now in the fifth grade, Timothy has fallen devastatingly behind, and his mother is worried about his future.

Timothy attends a public elementary school in Jefferson City, Missouri.

“When he first went to school, they didn’t understand his (cochlear) implant,” Timothy’s mother Colleen Farr said. “They lost all of his equipment.”

“In first grade, the teacher told me he was misbehaving. She said, ‘You need to tell him that school isn’t for playing, it’s for learning.’ [My son] kept telling her, ‘I can’t hear! I can’t hear!’ He came home . . . the cochlear implant wasn’t in.”

Teachers and administrators in public schools may try their best to serve students with unique needs, but they often lack the ability to do so, which is one reason why Missouri needs to adopt programs that create educational options for students with disabilities.

Yesterday, the legislature held a hearing on Senate Bill 531, which would create an Education Savings Account (ESA) program for students like Timothy and countless others.

While Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires public school districts to provide students with disabilities a “free appropriate public education” (FAPE), this federal protection does not often provide the customization students with disabilities need to reach their full potential.

ESAs allow parents to customize their child’s education by choosing educational services that fit their child’s unique abilities. So far, Arizona, Florida, and Mississippi have adopted ESAs, and [yesterday](#), Tennessee’s ESA bill passed out of the state house.

Through Arizona’s ESA program, mother Kathy Viser receives \$27,000 a year [to educate her 10-year-old son](#) who has cerebral palsy. Viser directs the funds toward private reading tutoring, science classes at a local museum, and therapeutic horseback riding, among the core subjects.

SB 531 would allow children like Timothy to reach their full potential, breaking with the status quo of school success determined by zip code and bringing real social justice to people with disabilities.

You can view the testimony James Shuls submitted [here](#).

About the Author



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Brittany Wagner was an education policy research assistant at the Show-Me Institute.

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<https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/school-choice/choice-timothy>

Links

[1] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/school-choice/choice-timothy>

[2] https://showmeinstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2015/04/Infant_with_cochlear_implant2.jpg

[3] <http://www.beacontn.org/2015/04/beacon-state-on-passage-of-school-choice-bill-for-special-needs-students/>

[4] <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/02/state-education-savings-accounts-taxpayers-114966.html>

[5] <http://showmeinstitute.org/publications/testimony/education/1310-missouri-education-savings-account-customization-choice-competition-college.html>

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