



# Education Savings Accounts and Available Seats in Private Schools

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*By: James V. Shuls*

Missouri has a lot of private schools—more than 600. Most of these schools, like their public school counterparts, are operating below capacity; that is, they have space to serve more students. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Private School Universe Survey, I calculated approximately how many available seats there are in these schools. To do this, I simply subtracted a school’s current enrollment from its highest enrollment over the past 10 years (In the coming months we’ll release a full report on this). Suffice it to say, there are a lot of available seats in existing private schools—more than 28,000. To put this into perspective, Missouri’s largest school district had fewer than 26,000 students in 2017.

While many of the existing private schools are located in St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and Jackson County, there are many throughout the state. Last year researchers at the [Brookings Institution](#) calculated that 73 percent of Missouri students have a private school within five miles of them, while just 65 percent have another public school within their district and 54 percent have a public school outside their district that is within five miles. The point here is that a private school choice program could expand educational options for students throughout the state, possibly more than any intra- or inter-district choice program could. This session, Missouri lawmakers will consider such a program.

Empowerment Scholarship Accounts, or education savings accounts (ESAs) as they are often called, enable students to receive support to attend the school of their choice. Unlike a voucher,

which sends state funds directly to a private school, an ESA is like a debit card. The student and her parents can use the card to purchase school supplies, pay for tutoring, or even to pay for private school tuition. An [ESA program currently under consideration](#) in Missouri would be funded by tax-deductible donations made by individuals or businesses. While the donor receives a credit towards his or her taxes, Missouri students receive much more—opportunity. In essays for the Show-Me Institute, I've written about how these [programs function](#) and how they could save the state a [significant amount](#) of money.

Currently, 18 states have [scholarship tax credit program](#)s and 6 have ESA programs. By passing an ESA program, lawmakers can tap into the wonderful resource we have throughout the state—private schools. They can equip parents to take ownership of their children's education and allow them to decide where their children will be educated. And, importantly, an ESA program can generate savings for the state.

## Tags:

- [ESAs](#)

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[3] <https://legiscan.com/MO/bill/SB612/2018>

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[6] <https://www.federationforchildren.org/school-choice-america/>

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