



# Summit Christian Academy

## Missouri's Empowerment Scholarship Program

### FAQ Sheet

*“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.” Matt. 9:14a*

Across our nation, states have recognized the need to create pathways to educational individualization in support of children. Missouri has now joined twenty-seven other states in support of parents' dreams for their children. The Missouri Empowerment Scholarships provide **parent choice**: an ability to choose the best public, charter, private, virtual, or homeschool education in order to fulfill their children's potential.

### 1. What was the win?

Governor Parson signed House Bill 349 (Missouri Empowerment Scholarships) on July 14, 2021. This bill and its companion, Senate Bill 86, allow students access to the school their parents feel is the best choice. It should be noted, family access will not begin until the 2022-2023 school year.

To learn more on HB349, visit:

<https://legiscan.com/MO/text/HB349/2021>

To learn more on SB86, visit:

[https://www.senate.mo.gov/21info/BTS\\_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=54105513](https://www.senate.mo.gov/21info/BTS_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=54105513)

### 2. Does SCA support this legislation and why?

Summit Christian Academy took a highly active leadership role in advocating for school choice in Missouri. This advocacy included school administration, staff, the school Legislative Impact Team, and students working in concert to testify before committee hearings, visit Jefferson City to engage with legislators, and to unify other school administrators in order to promote advocacy. SCA has been a part of this battle for three years and developed the state's School Choice Rally and Student Civic Engagement Day to encourage relationships and support of legislators that are working on behalf of Missouri's children. The legislation will help children across the state.

Our mission is “To inspire students to achieve their God-given potential through excellent academics and Christian training in a compassionate environment.” Although SCA has a robust tuition assistance program, many families still cannot financially access our school. Empowerment Scholarships will help offset the cost of SCA for those families who qualify for them.

### 3. How do Empowerment Savings Accounts (ESAs) work?

A qualifying family applies to the Educational Assistance Agency (EAO) and then if approved receives a restricted use debit card loaded with allotted funds for their child's education. Funds provided may be up to \$6,375 per child. The family then uses the card for approved educational expenses and submits the receipts to the EAO. Families may roll over funds, and any unused funds at the end of the year can be used in future years for K-12 education.

#### **4. Who qualifies?**

*A "qualified student" is any K-12 Missouri resident residing in any county with a charter form of government or any city with at least 30,000 inhabitants. Lee's Summit does qualify with a current population of over 100,000. This current program will fund only a) students with a documented disability or b) low-income students. These students must be entering either kindergarten or 1st grade for the first time OR have been in public school for at least one semester. Unfortunately, families already in private education do not qualify.*

#### **5. Is this a voucher program?**

*No. It is a scholarship program funded by tax credits. Money goes to the parents to use on approved educational expenses. Some states do have voucher programs, Missouri does not.*

*Voucher programs typically have money funded from the state's education budget and is paid directly to nonpublic schools by the state. Many private schools in the nation will not participate in voucher programs as the state may then have the ability to impact admission and hiring practices. Missouri's Empowerment Scholarship allows parents to direct funds to the best educational option for their child. School admissions and hiring policies are therefore not impacted. SCA would not accept monies from a school choice program where dollars were paid directly from the state to the school.*

#### **6. How are the Empowerment Scholarships funded?**

*Businesses or individuals may donate to the scholarship fund and receive a dollar for dollar tax credit for up to 50% of taxes owed to the state of Missouri. For example, if a business owes \$10,000 in Missouri taxes, it may choose to donate \$5,000 of what is owed to the Empowerment Scholarship Program. A 100% credit will be given toward what is owed so that business would then pay the remaining \$5,000 as normal. Individuals may not earmark funds to scholarship a particular students' tuition.*

#### **7. How much is a scholarship for qualifying students?**

*EAO's may provide each student a scholarship for up to \$6,375.00. So, for an SCA student this money would offset the total cost of tuition. Tuition assistance for up to 50% of the total cost of tuition may be added to the amount. There will always be some out-of-pocket cost to attend SCA.*

#### **8. How much total does the Empowerment Scholarship Program have available for families? Will the amount ever increase?**

*Missouri's new program is capped at \$25 million dollars the first year, but has the ability to increase to \$50 million as the current law is written.*

*As families express a desire to participate, there is precedent from other states of Empowerment Scholarships growing due to grass roots demands. For example, Florida went from a scholarship fund of \$40 Million to now over \$200 million. Arizona started at \$5 million and is now at \$120 million. These increases are due to the voices of parents demanding to be heard.*

#### **9. What will the scholarship pay for?**

*As a qualified school, SCA will accept ESA monies. These funds will pay for tuition or fees; required textbooks; educational therapies or services from a licensed or accredited practitioner; educational aides; tutoring services; curriculum; tuition or fees for a private virtual school (like SCA eCampus); fees for a nationally standardized norm-referenced achievement test, AP/IB examinations, or any examinations related to college admission; services provided by a public school including, but not limited to, individual classes and extracurricular programs; computer hardware or other technological devices that are used to help meet educational needs and that are approved by an EAO; and fees for summer education programs and specialized after-school education programs.*

*Funds may not be used for either consumable educational supplies.*

## 10. Will SCA have to change to accept these funds from parents?

*No. Written into the law is the following statement: "A qualified school shall not be required to alter its creed, practices, admissions policy, or curriculum in order to accept students whose parents pay tuition or fees from an empowerment scholarship account to participate as a qualified school."*

## 11. As schools accept students with ESAs, will it change the student/teacher ratio and small family feel of the school?

*No. SCA has board policy that dictates admissions standards and class sizes, capping the number of students allowed into a classroom. Missouri's new ESA program in no way changes these policies. For example, kindergarten is capped at 19 students p/classroom; 1st-6th grade is capped at 23 students per classroom, and 7th-12th grade core subject areas are capped at 25 students. These class sizes are dictated by the school board.*

## 12. SCA has a faith-based program, will this have to change?

**Absolutely not!** SCA's school board's policies dictate admission standards. SCA is a discipleship school, requiring all entrants to agree to our Statement of Faith, Lifestyle Statement, and Community Compact. Policy will stay as such. This law is written to empower parents to find the school that they believe best fits the educational needs of their child. Federal law prohibits states from discriminating against schools simply because they have a faith component. SCA will always remain Christ-centered; it is our number one core value!

## 13. Will the rigor of SCA academics change?

*Absolutely not. As always, SCA will see each child as an individual and admit only those whose needs meet our current admission standards. Students who transfer into SCA typically have some learning gaps. As such, SCA continues to build our employee and curriculum infrastructure to keep up with student population growth and all learning needs.*

## 14. How can I learn more?

*The Missouri treasurer's office is currently tasked with developing implementation policy. They will be determining things such as the process for donating to the tax credit scholarship program, the acceptable EAOs, and the process for applying. Continue to watch for publications concerning decisions.*

*To learn more watch the website created by the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri at: <https://www.showmeschooloptions.org/> and research HB349 and SB86 at: <https://legiscan.com/MO/bill/HB349/2021>. These bills worked in tandem to create the new scholarship opportunities for Missouri students.*

## 15. I think my family qualifies, how can I apply for the 22-23 school year?

*We do not know the answer to this question as of yet. The state treasurer's office is tasked with setting up a board that will work out all implementation procedures. Watch for announcements through SCA. Remember, families in existing private schools may not apply.*

## 16. As a parent what are my next action steps?

- *Be active in contacting your legislators and applauding school choice.*
- *Once the state opens the ability to donate ½ of your Missouri owed taxes, designate your money to the fund for a 100% tax credit. Individuals or corporations may donate. There are not yet details concerning the procedure for doing this donation.*
- *Write your legislator to increase access to school choice through*
  - *Raising the \$25 million dollar cap*
  - *Decreasing the city population required for student participation*
  - *Broadening the types of students who may qualify*