

Transcript

ESA+ and Opportunity Scholarship: Choosing or Changing Your School

June 29, 2022

0:04

Good afternoon, everyone, thank you so much for joining us for today's webinar. We are going to give everyone just a couple more minutes to get signed in and get situated. We're still waiting on a few more people. So just bear with us for a couple more moments and we will begin the presentation.

1:41

All right everyone. Thank you so much for your patience. We're going to go ahead and get started. So again, good afternoon. Welcome to our ESA Plus Choosing or Changing Your school webinar. My name is Lauren Bader. I'm one of our K 12 program managers on the webinar. With me today I also have two of our wonderful ESA Plus team members, Michele and Mykayla, and they are going to be assisting me in answering questions throughout the course of the webinar. Just a few housekeeping items before we get started. I want to direct your attention to the handouts section of our webinar platform. We have provided you with copies of today's PowerPoint, both in PDF and PowerPoint format.

2:27

I would encourage you to download and save a copy of one of those two handouts, as they will include all of the notes from today's presentation, as well as links to all of the webpages that we're going to be referencing throughout the presentation. I'd also like to draw your attention to the questions section. If you have any questions over the course of the webinar, please feel free to drop the question in that questions feature, and somebody from the team will try to assist you. We are also going to do a Q and A portion after the presentation has concluded.

3:03

I do want to note, though, that this presentation is meant to be a general overview of the School Choice and Transfer process. So we're going to try to answer as many questions as we can, but if you have questions that are specific to your student's record, or your particular situation, or content that may not be related to school choice, we're not going to be able to answer those questions during this webinar.

3:30

So any general questions you have about choosing or changing your school we'll definitely be able to cover. But if you have specific questions about your particular record, please e-mail ESA at esa.ncseaa.edu and we'll be able to better assist you after the webinar has concluded.

3:53

That being said, we will go ahead and get started. So again, this is the choosing or changing your school webinar.

4:01

We are going to be talking mostly about the ESA Plus program today, so if your student has an Opportunity Scholarship award offer some of the information that we're going to be covering may not be pertinent. Just kind of a general overview, if this is the first one of these webinars you're joining us for, The Education Student Accounts for Children with Disabilities Program was established by North Carolina Law in 2021.

4:26

And the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority, or SEAA, us, administers the program. We call this program ESA Plus, and the primary purpose of ESA Plus is to help families afford non public schools in North Carolina. So when we talk about a non public school, we mean mostly private and home schools.

4:48

Full-time, public school enrollment is not an option for students with an ESA Plus award.

4:56

The purpose of today's training is to share resources for choosing a school, as well as to explain processes related to choosing or changing your school choice.

5:12

So just a couple of key points to keep in mind throughout the course of the entire presentation.

5:17

There are two main enrollment options with the ESA Plus program. So, either the student enrolls in a private school, and this will be most students. So if your student enrolls in a private school, there's going to be two different options with regards to payment. The vast majority of schools will accept a direct disbursement from SEAA.

5:40

So we will pay the school directly on your behalf, or there are some cases where the school does not accept a direct disbursement. And in these cases, a parent can be reimbursed. We'll talk about that process a little bit later. The other main option is that the student enrolls in a home-school.

6:00

There is, again, no option for ESA Plus students to be enrolled full-time in a public school. But there are some part-time enrollment options, and we'll cover those at the end of the webinar.

6:15

So, this webinar is intended to mainly discuss the private school enrollment process in terms of how to choose your school initially, and how to transfer your student during the course of the school year.

6:26

But if you are a parent who plans to home-school your student, please be advised that you do need to register your home-school with the Division of Non Public Education, if you have not already done so.

6:39

You will need to notify the ESA Plus program through e-mail, the name of your home-school, and your DNPE registration number. And that's going to be important, to make sure that we are able to reimburse you. Some more information about the DNPE registration process can be found on their website. And if you download those handouts that I mentioned earlier, we've got a link directly to their webpage in the handouts.

7:10

It's also important to note that the ESA Plus scholarship process does not automatically enroll your student at a school. If you apply for the ESA Plus program and are awarded ESA Plus program funds, you still have to work with your school directly to make sure you secure

enrollment. A lot of schools have different application and enrollment processes, and we encourage families to start as early as possible, because we know some of those schools end up with a waitlist over the summer.

7:41

It's also important to note that, if your student has an ESA Plus award, it's connected to your student and not the school. Your student can transfer schools and take their ESA Plus funding with them to a new eligible school. We'll talk a little bit later in the presentation about the overall transfer process and what that looks like.

8:10

So here's our agenda for the rest of the presentation. We're going to be covering your initial school choice. So by initial, we mean the school choice that will be listed in your student's record at the beginning of the 22, 23 school year.

8:25

We're going to cover deadlines for school choice, and how to notify the ESA Plus program of your school choice.

8:31

We're going to provide you with some resources if you're not sure on how to choose a school just yet.

8:38

We're also going to talk about transfers from one school to another.

8:43

We'll cover SEAA's list of non public schools that we provide on our website.

8:50

And we'll also discuss some unique circumstances.

8:58

So, talking about initial school choice, I know that this can often be a little bit confusing, because we have two different dates on this slide, but again, initial school choice. What we mean by that is the school that your student is going to start, the 2022-2023 school year.

9:15

So the first schools that we have listed on file in your My Portal account.

9:22

So let's talk about these two dates a little bit.

9:25

The August first deadline. So this is not really a deadline in the sense that you know something major is going to happen on your record, this is more a recommended guideline. We advise all parents to have their student's school choice updated in MyPortal by August first because disbursement begins in August.

9:48

We want to make sure that the correct school is listed because if it's not on file by August first, you risk delays in payment for the fall term.

9:58

If your school choice is incorrect or unknown by August first, that does not mean that your award offer is canceled.

10:08

Our official deadline for school choice for the 22, 23 school year is October first.

10:15

If your student is not enrolled and attending a participating school by the state, you do risk cancelation of your ESA Plus program funding. So please make sure your MyPortal account shows the correct school.

10:29

After October first, it's possible that your student may forfeit their fall term funding. Or the award offer may be canceled if your student is not enrolled in an eligible school or if the school choice is incorrect.

10:45

Your student can transfer from one eligible school to another after October first, and we'll cover that process a little bit later.

10:57

And if you know that you're going to be changing schools after the conclusion of a school year, the best time to update your school is when you renew in the spring. That'll be the first opportunity you have to be able to update next year's school choice in MyPortal.

11:16

So, how do you update school choice?

11:20

So, until that August first date, parents are able to update their school choice on their own in MyPortal. We've provided you with a link to our list of non public schools, which you can access from the handouts. And I believe that we have also placed that link down in the chat functionality if you want to kind of take a look at it now.

11:44

But, up until August first, you can use that non public schools list to kind of check and see what schools in your area accept funding from the programs.

11:55

And then in MyPortal you'll go to the School Choice section, and then you'll use the drop-down for your students to choose or update your previous school choice.

12:07

Again, if your school choice is listed as unknown, or if it is not correct, come August first, you do risk delays in fall payment to the school.

12:20

After August first, up until October first, you can still change your school choice, but to do so, you'll need to e-mail the ESEA Plus program. After August first, we close the functionality for you to be able to update the school choice yourself in MyPortal, so between August first and October first, you'll need to e-mail us to make that change.

12:43

When you e-mail us, please include the full name of your students, the full name of your new school, the city of the new school, and the date that the students were enrolled in the new school. And I want to draw particular attention to spelling out the full name of the school and providing the city, because we have approximately 550 schools that participate in the K 12 programs. And a lot of them have similar or identical names.

13:14

So, it's really difficult when parents e-mail us acronyms to know which school they're talking about. So, please, avoid using any acronyms, abbreviations, or nicknames that the school might have. And please be sure to specify the city, so that we know exactly which campus needs to get your funding.

13:37

And, again, after that October first deadline, if your school is still listed as unknown, or if it is incorrect, or if your student has not enrolled entirely, your student is at risk of forfeiting or losing their ESA Plus funding entirely.

13:57

So a couple of resources for school choice. And before we talk about these, I do want to note that these resources are for websites that are not affiliated with SEAA. So we do not have control over the content, or the availability of these pages, and we do not endorse any of the information or opinions appearing in them.

14:18

But we did want to provide these because we know that it can be difficult sometimes to find the right fit for your student. So the first resource that I want to draw your attention to is Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina or PEFNC. This is a school choice advocacy group. to help families find schools.

14:40

And, they offer this online resource, NC Schools Around Me that will allow you to get a customized list of the schools that are closest to you.

14:49

They also offer a parent resource guide for choosing a private school.

14:54

There's also the North Carolina Division of Non Public Education, which is responsible for registering and monitoring non public schools in the state. This may be particularly helpful to the families that will be homeschooling their students. Again, you have to register your home-school with the DNPE.

15:14

So again, you know, please download the handouts. You'll be able to access the links to these sites from the handouts. But, you know, Parents for Educational Freedom in particular is a really good resource for families that may not be certain what schools in their area accept funding, or how to connect with a school. They're typically pretty good about assisting parents with connecting with those resources.

15:41

So let's talk about school transfers. The ESA Plus program is a semester based program. So we disburse scholarship funds to the school on behalf of the student at the beginning of each semester. And we have that broken up between fall and spring.

16:00

We highly recommend if you want to transfer your student, transferring between semesters is going to be the best time to change schools because it's going to minimize any disruptions in payment from one semester to the next, but we recognize that that's not feasible for all families. Sometimes things just don't work out at a school, and you need to transfer mid semester.

16:24

If that does happen, we permit award funds from the ESA Plus program to be sent to a maximum of two schools per semester.

16:35

And now the amount of funds that can be paid to a second school in a semester will ultimately depend on how long your student attended the first school.

16:43

Our policies allow a school to maintain a prorated portion of the student's scholarship funding if they withdraw mid semester. So please keep that in mind if you were thinking about transferring your student midyear.

17:00

We try to take into consideration the expenses incurred during the period of time that the child was enrolled at the first school, and this policy is intended to both benefit you and the school. So, you know, hopefully, make it easier for you to transfer without leaving behind a big bill at the first school. So, to calculate the amount of ESA Plus funding your student can take to a second school, we offer a How to Transfer Schools resource on our website. Again, the link is available in the handouts.

17:34

And this resource will include the chart that shows you the percentage of funding that will transfer with your student based on their number of weeks of attendance during a semester.

17:47

If you decide to transfer your student, you need to update with the ESA Plus program your school choice. So to do that, please send us an e-mail and let us know your student will be transferring.

18:00

Again, we ask that you include the full name of your student, the full name of the new school, the city of the new school, and your student's enrollment date in the new school.

18:11

Once we receive that e-mail, program staff will request a withdrawal form from your first school, and once we've received that, will determine if a refund of program funding is needed.

18:24

Once we have received both the withdrawal form and any applicable refund, we will then update your school choice in MyPortal.

18:34

Please also keep in mind that if you transfer between semesters, the new school is now going to have to certify the tuition and fees information. Again, this would have been done by your first school at the beginning of the school year. So, it may result in you needing to endorse your award information twice during that semester.

18:59

Please also note that the ESA Plus program withdrawal process is separate from your school's withdrawal policies. A lot of schools have their own policies with regards to students withdrawing in the middle of a school year, and we encourage families to communicate with the school and make sure they've read all the resources provided by their school to be familiar with that withdrawal process, if any.

19:28

So now we're gonna talk about SEAA's list of non public schools. Again, the link is accessible from the handouts.

19:38

But this is a really great resource if you are not sure what schools in your area accept program funding. Like I said earlier, we've got almost 550 schools that are registered to participate with the programs right now. So it is a pretty extensive list. We have organized the schools by county.

20:00

Then if you use the control key plus the F key on your keyboard, it'll bring up a search bar in your browser screen. And you'll be able to start typing the name of a school, if you have an idea of the school that you want to send your students to but you're not sure if they're on our list. You can use this control feature to search for that school, and it will let you know if there are any matches.

20:29

Couple of things to keep in mind. We do have some schools that the name starts with V So the school may not appear alphabetically as you might expect. We are required to list the schools in our system as they appear with DNPE. So, if the school is registered with DNPE as the Master's Academy, or the O'Neill School, for example, that is how they will appear in my portal and on our non public schools list, as well.

21:02

Please also note that schools have a number of different campuses sometimes, and each of those campuses is required to register separately with the K 12 programs. So, when you are updating your school choice in MyPortal, you do need to make sure that you have chosen the correct campus your student will attend.

21:23

We're just required to make sure that each of those are registered independently. And we want to make sure that we're sending the money to the correct place.

21:37

We do occasionally get questions about schools not being listed on the list of participating schools, and there are a couple of different scenarios that may cause a school to not be listed. In a

lot of cases, a school may not be listed because they choose to not accept funds directly from SEAA.

21:58

If the school is registered with the Division of Non Public Education, then it is still possible for parents of ESA Plus students to pay tuition and be reimbursed by SEAA.

22:11

If you are interested in a school that is registered with DNPE but does not participate directly with us, it may be best for you to ask about this arrangement with your school first and then contact ESA Plus program staff to let us know of your intention to enroll at the school.

22:30

Alternatively, some schools may not be registered with DNPE at all, which automatically means that they cannot accept funds from SEAA. Nor can a student benefit from ESA Plus funding if they are enrolled with a school that is not registered with DNPE. To be registered with DNPE means to be legally operating in the state of North Carolina. And by law, we are not permitted to disburse program funding to a school that is not registered with DNPE.

23:05

So, please also note if your student has an Opportunity Scholarship award offer. The Opportunity Scholarship does not reimburse parents for tuition and fees. If your student has an Opportunity Scholarship, you must enroll in a school which accepts funding directly from SEAA, so one of the schools on our non public schools list. But ultimately, if your student has an ESA Plus award offer, an ESA Plus only. You have a few additional options.

23:34

So, either a school that is registered with DNPE and participates in our programs, a school that is registered with DNPE and does not directly participate with us, or a home-school that has registered with DNPE, but the bottom line is your school must be registered with DNPE.

23:55

We did offer a previous webinar on DNPE only schools and how the reimbursement for tuition and fees works. If you missed this webinar, you can always go to our events page on the ESA Plus website and access a copy of that recording.

24:15

We mentioned at the beginning of the presentation, some unique circumstances and situations where there may be some part-time enrollment. So ESA Plus students do have the option to co enroll at more than one school. It's not many families that take advantage of this situation, but there are instances where it works best for the students to enroll part-time into different schools. We have a number of schools that participate that offer half day programs, specifically catering to students with disabilities.

24:51

But there are some other options out there, as well. So if this is something you are interested in, students who co enroll in two private schools will receive the full value of their award amount, as indicated in their award offer notification.

25:09

If your student enrolls in a private school, and a home-school, they're eligible for the full amount in their award offer notification.

25:18

And then if your student co enrolls in a private school and a public school, they're eligible for 50% of the award amount listed in their award offer notification. Again, this gets back to: what is an eligible school with the programs? Private schools and home schools are eligible, so you get the full amount of the award, But a public school is not eligible.

25:42

There is that carve out allowing them to co enroll part-time in a private school and a public school and still get some funding, but they cannot be eligible for the full value of their award offer.

25:55

And, again, there is no option to enroll full-time in a public school. And this does include public charters and benefit from ESA Plus funding.

26:10

So that brings us to the end of our presentation. I'm gonna leave this slide up for the remainder of the time we have left. This has our e-mail address and our phone number, if you need to get in touch with us for any additional assistance. And then I do want to direct everyone to our website, www.ncseaa.edu. For more information on the program and how to use MyPortal and the Class Wallet website.

26:39

We also have our remaining schedule of our ESA Plus webinars for this summer and a link to our events page as well. So, we have these every Wednesday at noon and you're able to either attend live or watch the recordings. I strongly encourage you to register for our upcoming webinars, even if you don't think you'll be able to attend. If you register for the webinar, after the webinar's conclusion, you'll automatically be e-mailed a link to the recording.

27:11

So, if there's some information that you see that you're interested in looking over, but you're not sure you'd be able to attend the session, just go ahead and complete that registration form, and you will automatically be e-mailed the recording once it is available.

27:27

If you missed some of our previous webinars, just go to that events page and pull up those old webinars that we did previously. You'll be able to view the recording of those past webinars.

27:45

So, I think that was all of the information I had to share with you today. At this time, we will take a look at the questions section, and if there's anything that we didn't address, we will try to answer that for you as well.

28:22

OK, so somebody asked, what is the website to watch all of the webinars? So that website is up there at the top of the contact information slide that we have on the left hand side. So it's www.ncseaa.edu/events.

28:43

And then, again, if you download the handouts, you'll have access to a direct hyperlink to go straight to this page.

29:18

And while we're waiting to see if there are any other questions, I will point out that the events page is a really great resource if you ever want to review this information a second time. So even after these webinars have concluded, these will be available for months afterwards on our website. So, if you go to that events page and go to previous events, if we get to January or February, and you're thinking you may want to transfer schools but you don't remember exactly what the steps were or what the process looks like, you can always go back and pull up this webinar and re watch it for more information.

30:27

Any other questions about the school choice or transfer process? Michele, anything you think I've missed that we should cover?

30:38

[Michele] Lauren, I can't think of anything at all.

30:45

[Lauren] All right.

30:46

Well, very good. If no one else has any questions, we will go ahead and end the recording. Again, if you have questions specific to your student's account, please e-mail ESA at esa@ncseaa.edu for specific information.

31:06

We're not able to look at your students' records during these webinars, so it's best to e-mail us and give us the opportunity to look back at your specific record and make sure we understand your situation entirely before responding. We do know that it's taken us a little bit longer than usual to get back to people. We are experiencing high e-mail and phone volumes right now, so we do apologize for that. But if you'll just stay patient with us we are trying to turn around those e-mails as soon as we can.

31:41

That being said, I hope everybody has a great rest of their Wednesday and we hope to see you at next week's webinar.