

Transcript

July 27, 2022

ESA+ for Summer 2023 Expenses: How to Plan Ahead

0:04

[Tiffany] Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our last training for the summer series, ESA Plus for summer 2023, How to Plan Ahead.

0:14

We're going to give it about a minute, and we'll let more attendees into the room, and then we'll come back.

1:05

Alright, so here we go, everyone.

1:07

Welcome again to the ESA Plus for Summer 2023, How to Plan Ahead training.

1:17

A little housekeeping. We have handouts for you, the slides and the PDF today. Please be sure to make a copy, download it to your computer, so you will have it for reference.

1:31

The Education Student Accounts for Children with Disabilities program was established North Carolina Law in 2021.

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We call this program ESA Plus. It helps families afford non public education, families that are planning to send their kids to private school, or home school.

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And in this session, it's probably going to be fairly short, but the meat of it is very important.

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This session will help you figure out how to use your money and plan ahead for next summer. And this will be particularly important for our home-school families that want to use their money for academic experiences next summer.

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So, these are the things we're going to talk about today.

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How do you use your remaining funds, the timing of when you get those funds for access, and how to use these funds. And, again, we are specifically talking about how to use your ESA money for expenses for next summer.

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This won't apply to this summer, we're making the transition now, we're asking you to hold tight as we get funds set up, so you can have access to them.

3:11

OK, so your remaining funds. It's important to note that you, as the parent, are responsible for understanding how much ESA Plus money you have in your ClassWallet account.

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So for the students that participate in non public schools, after tuition and fees are paid directly to the school, you may have money left to pay for expenses like summer camp, or therapy, technology. Home school students would have all their funds go directly to ClassWallet.

3:53

An important reminder for students attending a non public school. If ESA funds pay all of your tuition you will not have money left over to pay for some expenses, so you definitely want to keep that in mind.

4:07

And as I mentioned before, it is the parent's responsibility to know and understand how much, if any funds are remaining, that will go to ClassWallet.

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You need to log into MyPortal weekly to check for any updated information.

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And particularly for the students attending the non public schools, you have to endorse your funds before they are released to the school.

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At the point of endorsement, please take a minute to look at the amount of the award, and you can even do the math.

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So depending on which awards you have, \$9000 or \$17,000, take that amount, subtract the amount that's going to the school. If there's a difference left, that's the amount that will go to ClassWallet and allow you to pay for other qualified expenses.

5:04

OK, so a little bit about the timing of the award. It's important to note that each year, our accounting department has to reconcile year end expenses, so therefore, ClassWallet will be unavailable to you approximately the last week of June, and we've given some dates here.

5:25

So with that being said, it's important that you make your final purchases before June 28th, before the school year.

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And also, as well, just want to give you a note that ClassWallet is also closed down for a short time in December, as well.

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More on the timing and the award amount. You see the award amounts here.

6:05

Again, just to repeat, if your student has the \$9000 award, those funds have to be spent during the academic year.

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\$17,000 awardees, they do have the ability to roll up to \$4,500 of any unused funds over to the next academic year.

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So, for your \$9000 awardees, it'd be particularly important for you to kind of target, think about, if you have funds that are remaining, how you want to spend those funds during the summer.

6:47

Each fall year funding is available in ClassWallet. It will be available mid to late August for the home school students, then early to mid September for students at a participating non public school.

7:07

And Kathryn is going to talk to you about how to strategize and get the most out of the funds you have available in ClassWallet.

7:14

[Kathryn] Yeah, awesome. Thanks, Tiffany.

7:17

So I wanted to say, too, that the semesters funding is half.

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So if your student is a \$9000 awardee, that's \$4500 per semester.

7:31

But if your student is going to a non public school, and the tuition is not as much as \$4500, you'll have some money left that you could use that fall for other qualified expenses.

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But, equally, you could let that sit.

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You could use it in the spring for other qualified expenses.

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Or, you could let it sit and use it to prepare for summer and a couple of ways we're going to discuss now.

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So, the money has to be used, as Tiffany said, during the school year.

8:02

But if you have money left over in the fall and money left over in the spring, you don't have to spend that money in the fall and the spring per se.

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What I'm about to explain are a couple of ways to plan for what we know are typical summer expenses, whether that's for things like curriculum or technology or for services.

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And so we're going to talk a little bit about summer camps and therapies and curriculum.

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So with that, I'll move on.

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So it is acceptable to pay for summer camps in advance.

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So you could pay in March for a camp that starts on June 28th and goes through July something or starts in July, you know, and lasts for a week. So that would be one way to strategize for summer would be to calculate what funds you have available and if you're a home-school family budget accordingly, or if your student's going to a non public school, as Tiffany said, look at the tuition and then be ready to save your extra money as it were to pay for the summer camp.

9:20

While we talk about summer camps, we wanted to be sure you understood that camps must be therapeutic in nature, academic, or designed specifically for students with special needs. A traditional summer camp may not be a qualified expense.

9:36

So, that's important to understand that it's not just any summer camps, but if it's an academic camp to support a student's reading, or therapeutic to help a student with autism and his or her special needs, then the camp is likely going to be acceptable. The other thing that's important to know is that the camp has to be offered by an approved provider.

10:00

We have two icons here of camps that are already registered. So, for example, Camp Flakey Gap has already gone through the process.

10:11

You wouldn't have to do anything further if you wanted your student to attend a camp there. They are already an approved provider. You could count on being able to use your funds to pay for enrollment costs at Camp Flakey Gap.

10:26

If you look at the list and don't see the camp that you'd like to use, it would be to your advantage to start early, just to be sure, you can kind of plan ahead.

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And you could use the time that you have between now and late next spring to register that camp.

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Again, that registration process providers is not hard, and in fact, we're making it even easier.

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In the next couple of months, you're going to see some improvements to what is already not too bad of a process, but we know that your providers want to be able to register easily. So please talk to them. And, again, the camp has to be offered by someone who is qualified. The statute requires that services be offered by qualified providers.

11:17

So we're going to be looking at them to say, do they have qualifications that would enable them to offer therapeutic, academic or specially designed camps?

11:31

So many of your traditional recreational camps are not going to be qualified providers. If you have any questions, go ahead and have them seek to be registered.

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That's the purpose of the process, to vet the provider so that we know we're meeting the requirements of the statute.

11:52

So, curriculum is another purchase that you might want to make.

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You will want to examine your needs, and if you want to purchase curriculum in June for the next year, you could do that.

12:10

You may want to start front loading your curriculum if you're a home school family, and you need curriculum in August.

12:19

And, you know the timing issue, where the funds aren't going to be available til late August, you could go ahead and purchase in June.

12:27

I wanted to take a minute and say that the ESA Plus program is a school year program. By statute, by design from the legislature, it's designed as a fall, spring, academic year program.

12:39

So we don't have control over a lot of things that we might like to do or you might want to have happen if you're a home-school family, because you're year round, right? You don't stop home schooling or your student doesn't stop needing services in the summer, but we can't fix that entirely.

12:57

However, this webinar I think shows that you can strategize a little bit. There's nothing wrong with paying for a camp in May that your student is going to go to in July.

13:07

There's nothing wrong with purchasing curriculum in the late spring for the next fall. Now, we would not want you to purchase it a year in advance, or even six months in advance.

13:19

So, there are reasons for that, which we could talk about that, but we understand the timing challenges, and there's nothing wrong with paying for a curriculum that you might need in August in June.

13:35

Sorry, I've missed a slide here, and there it is. I went too quickly, because we did want to talk about tutoring and therapies, as well. So we kind of saw the three areas as summer camps, tutoring and therapies, and I'm going to refer to now, and curriculum.

13:54

So, typically, ESA Plus expects families to pay after a service is rendered..

14:02

We don't approve receipts paid in advance, typically.

14:06

Now, in some cases, it makes sense for a family to pay slightly in advance and the summer camp was an example of that.

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Paying for July services might be another example of that.

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We would not, however, expect you to pay in May for services through December.

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That would be too far in advance.

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That would be inappropriate, to use funds from one year for services, essentially, in the next year.

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We're making some accommodations for summer, but not suggesting that you pay for things a year in advance or for one school year in advance.

14:51

That's one option. If you don't have the funding, or you want to use your funding differently, you could speak to your provider about accepting payment in late August. Because you know you're going to have funding in late August if you're a home school family.

15:04

If your provider is able to wait, you're getting services, you know, several times in July, several times in August, and paying for them in August, that might not be that different from your provider accepting insurance.

15:18

Insurance is not instantaneous either, and a provider may be willing to do that for someone that they've been working with, particularly when they understand the state funded scholarship program that you have, which is, of course, a reliable source of funding.

15:35

So, either way, there are two different strategies for that.

15:38

If you are working with the provider, and we would see an invoice come through in early June for July and August services, barring any other problems with it, we would probably approve that.

15:54

And you'd be covered.

15:56

Again, keeping in mind that we don't expect that you would pay for months and months in advance, because you would expect to use next year's money for that.

16:08

And then, alternatively, thinking about using next year's money to pay slightly behind. Instead of paying in July, you'd be paying in August, and that would be another option.

16:18

One other thing I wanted to mention about the camp, about the tutoring, about the curriculum, any of those kinds of things.

16:26

If you pay in advance for something, the camp or the tutoring, and then for some reason your student does not go, you would be entitled to a refund. That refund must be returned to the program via ClassWallet.

16:42

So it's just a reminder that the refund can never go directly to the parents. And it might be that with our suggestions to you and our strategies for paying in advance, you may run into that a little bit more, where you pay in April for a summer camp in July.

17:00

For some reason, your student does not go, and you're entitled to money back, that money has to go back to the program. And there may be some tricky things with the timing.

17:13

But regardless, it's a bright line from the ESA parent agreement that parents cannot take refunds directly, not from the therapist, or the tutor, or the camps, or any of those things.

17:28

To accept a refund yourself would violate your parent agreement, in other words, and constitute misspent funds.

17:37

OK, so we talked about summer camps.

17:43

We talked about tutoring and therapies.

17:46

We talked about curriculum and we hope that provides you with some strategy for your students.

17:58

We've gone about 20 minutes and I'll leave it on this slide here and look a little bit.

18:05

There aren't a lot of questions.

18:06

I think we answered the few that are in there.

18:11

Now in terms of summer we wanted to give you time now to plan ahead both in terms of budgeting your funds and in terms of summer camps in particular, and getting them registered if they are not registered.

18:24

So you might want to look and see what's already on the provider list.

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And if not, then start working with your camp.

18:39

The ESA Plus program in North Carolina is growing and growing.

18:43

So we expect that most providers, like camps, will be interested in participating.

18:49

So the small hurdle they have, the little bit of hassle that they have to register should be amply rewarded because all kinds of students and families will have access to their services.

19:05

[Tiffany] I don't think we mentioned it in this training, as a reminder ESA Plus does not provide reimbursement.

19:13

[Kathryn] It's important to know.

19:17

So if you're listening to this, you need to be reminded that you should not be paying for anything out of pocket, because ESA Plus does not offer a parent reimbursement option.

19:32

[Tiffany] The other questions that are appearing, think they're more detailed.

19:38

So, we will reach out to the parent that's asking a particular question. I don't think that's relative to this training.

19:59

[Kathryn] OK. I know we have several home school families on the line.

20:07

Because this issue might be applicable to students who are attending a non public school, but by and large, the people who are looking for strategizing for summer, are families who home school.

20:21

So, if you are a home school family and your student does not attend a non public school, then we would expect you to have your funds in ClassWallet by the end of August.

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And that will be true pretty much every year.

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The money doesn't flow for the program before the school year starts.

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But we think with these strategies, you'll be able to plans for summers to come.

20:52

If your student is in a school, if you're out there in the audience and your student's in a school but your school is not as expensive, than you may have funds left over. Your funds are not going to be available in ClassWallet by the end of August, because we'll be paying your school. So, we'll pay your school and by early September, mid September, your remaining funds after your tuition and fees are paid will be in ClassWallet. Now it's incumbent on you and the school to do your steps timely. The school has to initiate payment processing by certifying their costs.

21:28

And then the school has to endorse the award and then you have to endorse the award and all of those things can happen quickly electronically, of course.

21:35

But if there's a hold up there, then my timeline I've just offered is not relevant.

21:44

And again, someone's asking about the rollover funds. Let me go back to the screen where Tiffany had discussed that. If you are receiving \$9000, then the funds that you have not spent by the end of June are no longer available to you.

22:13

So, if you're a \$9000 awardee, and you spend \$3000 in the fall and \$3000 in the spring on tuition, and you don't spend anything else, then you will have used \$6000 of your award. And you won't have any money to start the new year until the new year funds are disbursed.

22:36

Which is why it would be, as Tiffany said, particularly important for you parents, to strategize about your expenses.

22:42

If your student is a \$17,000 awardee, the statute, the North Carolina law that sets up this program, says that those students can keep some of their funds if they have it remaining. If they've spent it all then they won't have any.

22:56

But if they haven't spent all of their funds, they can continue to use \$4500, even if they have more than that left. That's the maximum that can keep after the end of June.

23:09

And, of course, then they could use them in July or throughout the next year.

23:13

Each year, that will be true for those students.

23:17

Either way, we hope you found some ways to use your funds in the summer.

23:28

OK, real quick, someone's asking if you have funds remaining from the previous year, if you're not a brand new student?

23:35

If you have ESA funds, Disabilities Grant never continued from one year to the next. So this comment is about the old ESA, where there were no limits on rolling over funds. Your funds will roll over, and you have access to them in July.

23:52

So if you had funds on last year's ESA, then you can use those funds now, in August. They are there for you to use.

24:03

Keeping in mind that no matter how much you brought with you from the old ESA program, next spring the cap will be \$4500.

24:13

And that is only true if your student's at the \$17,000 award level.

24:18

[Tiffany} Kathryn, can I put in a plug about using funds now that are available? You can use those funds now if you have them available. However, you cannot use them to pay tuition.

[Kathryn] Correct. Right, thank you.

24:34

Because the program will be paying your tuition.

24:48

I see someone has asked, again, like Tiffany said earlier, a specific question.

24:51

I don't think that's something general.

24:55

But I'll ask the team that is assisting us with the Q and A, if you will take note of those, that individual question that came in there at the end.

25:10

Do you have anything else, Tiffany, that we should address?

25:16

[Tiffany] I don't. I think we've covered everything. [Kathryn] OK. So on the screen now, are all of the sessions we have done. So we are at the end of our summer training for ESA Plus. These are all available to you.

25:30

So if you go to the Events page, you can go to the archive, hit the back arrow to see all previous recordings. And you can watch them. You can download a transcript.

25:43

You can download the PDF of the PowerPoint.

25:49

So you can watch any one of these.

25:51

And most of them were about 30 minutes, a couple were a little longer. A couple a little shorter.

25:57

So I would urge you to go check those out, if you haven't seen them all.

26:03

We look forward to doing more training this fall.

26:05

We don't have it scheduled yet, but we hope that these eight sessions get you started.

26:13

With that, I think we'll close and wish you well, and look forward to a busy August of money going to schools and to families, and everybody getting started. Thank you. [Tiffany] Thank you. [Kathryn] Bye, bye.