

Transcript - ESA Webinar with Odyssey

December 04, 2025

Anita Scott (00:03.383)

Welcome, welcome, welcome to the Texas Homeschool Coalition featuring Odyssey webinar. We are so excited that you are here. If you can, now listen, if you're driving, please do not put in the chat where you are listening from. You are free to keep driving, but if you are stationary,

Please drop in the chat where you are listening from. Are you listening from San Antonio, Harris County, Arlington, Fort Worth? And also, would you let us know how you heard about this webinar? Our teams, our Texas Homeschool Coalition teams did an incredible job of sharing this information with our supporters, our friends, our allies, our partners.

So we wanna know how you heard about this. And we're just so excited that you are here with us. So welcome, welcome. We're going to be having just an incredible time of sharing some more information with you. And we have Odyssey on the call with us today.

And bonus, we have Mary Katherine from the Comptroller's office with us here today. So we are just excited. So listen, after you drop in where you are listening from, and if you would share with us how you found out about this webinar, we just will also want you to know that if you have questions, we want you to drop those questions in the chat. In fact, we have live chat support.

Our amazing customer relations team is standing by to help answer your questions. So folks, this is the team that our members can contact for questions, coaching, and encouragement all year long. Additionally, our policy team is standing by and will join us during the live Q &A to serve up some questions. So.

Anita Scott (02:06.539)

What you also need to know is a copy of this webinar will be emailed to you immediately following the presentation and you will have access for one week. Now, members will enjoy this webinar all year long. So we are excited that you are here with us. And then after the presentation is over, so I'll be presenting today.

And then Odyssey will be presenting. Mary Katherine will also share, and then we're gonna serve up some questions for Odyssey as well as Mary Katherine. And then we wanna have a time of live Q and A. So I think it is time to begin.

Anita Scott (02:51.709)

All right, so I am going to share my screen here. All right, so this is part two of our roadmap to the education savings account. So let's just dive right in. but first let's have a few words from our VP of Policy, Jeremy Newman.

Jeremy Newman (03:17.589)

Thanks, Anita. I don't exhibit quite the same level of energy that Anita does, so forgive me for that. But my hair is a little bit longer, so I don't know. Maybe I get something for that. I don't know how many of you guys were on the last webinar that we did. Some of you have probably been following this issue for months. Some of you might be brand new. So I'll give some brief context here for kind of where we're at in the lifetime of this program.

And then I'll definitely not try and steal any thunder from Odyssey or from the comptroller's office because they are the ones administering it. So they can give you a lot of information on that obviously. But we just had this bill passed during the legislative session this spring. That's been decades in the making. And since that time, all of the conversations that you probably have heard from us and from other people have basically been about.

how to construct the program that was just passed into law, right? So then you have to pass the rules and actually design everything. so some, because it was in the construction phase, there was maybe less specificity on some things than we hopefully have now. And there will still be some ongoing questions, obviously, that get resolved as we go. But one thing that just happened this week is that final rules were announced for the program, administrative rules.

And so that gives more specificity on some things that have kind of been under construction up until now. And our role in this whole process from the beginning, from the legislative process to now and looking ahead to next legislative session is always to try and make sure that we're helping design a program that works as well as possible for homeschool families and meets the needs of homeschool families and doesn't impact homeschool freedom negatively in any way. And another thing to know about these programs is they

These are long haul programs, which means every legislative session, people are back tweaking it, right? So we're talking today about the program as it exists today and come spring of 2027, the legislature will be back making more changes. And when that happens, we'll be there as well, working on making sure that the homeschool issue is handled in the best possible way to give opportunities to homeschoolers and protect homeschool freedom. So that's where we're at in the whole process here.

Jeremy Newman (05:39.394)

I'll not monopolize any more time and we can continue on with the program, Anita. Thanks for being here, everyone.

Anita Scott (05:46.455)

Thank you, Jeremy. Thank you, thank you. All right. So as Jeremy shared, I'm glad you said that Jeremy. For those of you who have any appetite for policy or if you have ever stepped inside the doors of the Capitol and went to a hearing or watched floor activity and saw a bill come across the finish line and then saw it come up again during the next legislative session, that's because most of the time there are just incremental changes that take place.

see that happening with the bill that we were able to bring across the finish line this last legislative session. That being said, a little bit about me. I am Anita Scott. I am the policy director with the Texas Homeschool Coalition. I'm the daughter to James and Ruth Scott. I am the fourth of eight children. All of us were homeschooled in a three bedroom, one bathroom home.

And I have periodically been a foster parent to teenagers. And a little bit of my education is on the screen, receive my bachelor's and then later on a master's, so on and so forth. What's so exciting about being a part of the Texas Homeschool Coalition is it allows me to marry my homeschool upbringing along with my appetite for policy.

So beginning in the 80s, my mother and my father homeschooled all eight of us. And then eventually my parents turned our living room into a school. I think today the term is called co-op. So I remember our living room furniture being moved into the garage. I remember family photos coming down and the periodic table of elements went up. My dad used our SeaWorld pictures as like geography.

Like all of a sudden we were like world travelers because we saw Shamu on the picture. And then he took my brother to Atlanta to some different colleges. And then those pictures went up and there was more geography. So that was, so I feel like I did go to a co-op. If you can have eight children in a room, that's, I think that's a co-op. So joining THSC again has allowed me to just marry my homeschool upbringing. And then I went the route of like a K through 12 teacher and administrator for about 10 years.

Anita Scott (08:03.743)

And so I'm super grateful to now have joined THSC in November. It has been three years. So you didn't come to hear me though. You really came to hear Odyssey and you came to hear from the Comptroller. So I'm just going to spend about five to seven minutes going through some of the high level questions that you all brought to us from the last ESA webinar.

And even some of the emails that we receive and some of the phone calls that we receive, I took what has been trending, wanted to go ahead and address it. And then I'm going to just key up, key up Odyssey and the Comptroller's office. So what you need to know is that as of October 6th, the Education Savings Account has a new name. It's the Texas Education Freedom Account. And so if you hear me saying TEFA or if you hear me saying Texas Education Freedom Account,

I don't want you to think, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, I'm trying to sign up for the education savings account. It's the same, it's the same. But I just want you to know as of October the 6th, it took on a new name, Texas Education Freedom Account. All right, so Anita, is THSC advocating for the Texas Education Freedom Account? So very, very briefly, I just want you to understand is because Texas homeschool,

coalition, we're the same organization. In fact, next year we turn 40 years old. Everyone should be knowing a round of applause and confetti should be falling. All right, so we turn 40 years old next year. And I want you to know our mission has never changed. It's always been to create opportunities for homeschool families. It's always been to expand opportunities for homeschool families. And then it's always been to block legislation that would remove the freedoms for homeschool families.

I'll give you one example for create. We were the first state to create parent taught drivers ad that goes all the way back to 1995. That was Texas homeschool coalition. We create opportunities for homeschool freedoms. We expand. were Texas homeschool coalition created a pathway for homeschool high school graduates to have automatic admission into colleges and universities that had never been around. See, we expand opportunities and then we block legislation that would remove the freedoms.

Anita Scott (10:20.727)

In 2023, we removed the juvenile curfew law. So, and then it attempted to come back in 2025. We blocked it. So when it comes to Texas Education Freedom Account, we create opportunities to help families offset the cost of homeschooling. We expand opportunities for all families to have more control over their children's education. There it goes again. We're creating, we're expanding. And then with the Texas Education Freedom Account,

The reason the policy team lives in Austin during the legislative session is so that we can block the opportunity for there to be any government overreach when it comes to your opportunities and your choices and your freedoms, Texas homeschool families. So 1986, when Texas Homeschool Coalition started, we are that same organization with the same mission. So.

You've got questions. You are here today because you have questions around eligibility, cap funding. what if all the money is then used up? What happens after that? What is the priority order? Can we talk about that? We sure can. What about special needs funding, Anita? Pre-K and Kinder, what does that look like? Co-ops, what is the criteria? Vendors and service requirements, in-state and out-of-state programs. We're gonna be addressing all of that.

on this call. So first to be sure we're all on the same page, let's be sure we have the same understanding of school choice or parental choice. This law gives parents more control over their child's education by letting education funding follow the child. That basically means if your child is not in a public school, a portion of the money set aside for their education can be used for homeschooling, private school, tutors,

or other approved educational services. Now, we got that squared away. How does one become eligible to receive a portion of the state funding? Well, you need to be the child of a Texas resident. You need to be a US citizen, a legal resident, and you need to be in the eligibility criteria where you can attend a Texas school district or open enrollment charter school, okay?

Anita Scott (12:37.151)

And then, well, let's talk about how much is a parent approved for when they want to enroll in the Texas Education Freedom account. Approximately 10,800 per child if the student attends an approved private school. Up to 30,000 per year for students with disabilities who have an individualized education plan or you may know it as an IEP on file with their school district.

And then this bill also includes 2000 for all other educational expenses. So basically there are essentially two buckets. Okay, let's just keep it straight and narrow. You have one bucket where if you are attending an accredited private school, you are eligible for 10,800. All other educational expenses, you are eligible for 2000. So Anita, what does that mean?

for co-ops, I'm so glad you asked. So for co-ops, let's keep this in mind. The current version of the bill that was passed was not specifically designed for co-ops, okay? Now, there are ways that co-ops can benefit, but keep in mind that the main benefit of the Texas Education Freedom Account program was designed with individual students in mind.

and not necessarily co-ops as a vendor. So let me break that down for you even more. So Anita, can a co-op be a vendor? The co-op can be a vendor, but they must have the following. They must have an instructor who was or

what, who is or was employed by an accredited school, who holds a relevant license or accreditation, who is employed or retired from a teaching or tutoring or a college or a university.

and who has passed a background check. So if you're thinking, okay, my co-op, let's say we don't have any teacher who meets that criteria, or maybe we just have one teacher who meets that criteria. Does that mean that only that teacher then has to teach all the classes? No, no, no, no, no. You just need one teacher who meets this criteria. And then that ESA student,

Ross Pila (14:38.728)

you

Anita Scott (14:57.757)

needs to be in front of that credentialed teacher, that licensed teacher. So if there is a Scott family and I enroll my child in the ESA program, then my child needs to be in front of that credentialed teacher. Okay. So you do not have to have all of your teachers become credentialed or licensed or certified. You just need to have one that will be in front of your ESA student. So then let's talk about funding.

If applications exceed available funding, a lottery will decide placement. Okay? So this is the current lottery right now. So, and this is everyone should apply. Everyone should apply. This lottery is if, if there's a wait list. Okay? So everyone, you're welcome. If you're eligible, you're a Texas citizen, you're a US legal resident, you're of school age, but now we've hit our cap. There's a wait list. Here's the wait list.

siblings of children already in the program. Then after that, children with the disability, and then there's a federal poverty line. And then after that, children from households who are at another poverty line. So if you're thinking, that's a lot of words on that slide, Anita, I can't memorize all of that. And can I take a picture of it? Yes, you can. But here's what you also need to know. I'm going to ask our team to drop in the link, our school choice page.

because after this webinar, we will upload our ESA FAQs so that you will have visibility and you will have access to what I'm talking about right now. So if you're driving or if you're that homeschool mom and you got three kids in front of you and you're multitasking and you're warming up some macaroni and cheese and you're telling your kid to turn off the TV and then you're uploading a science test and it's a lot going on right now.

The ESA FAQs will be on our page, our school choice page. So you don't need to memorize all of this. Okay, so what educational expenses are

approved by the Texas Educational Freedom Account? Tuition and fees for a private school, universities and colleges, so dual credit, online educational courses or programs, programs that provide industry-based credentials, textbooks, uniforms.

Anita Scott (17:22.625)

Classes isn't that exciting I could go on and on and yep, there's more. Yep services provided by a private tutor transportation Educational therapies. I mean the list just goes on and on and on that's so exciting So many choices so many choices So when does the application window open? Okay, I did I did this last time there used to be this I think it was it think it was Macy's I don't remember

but there used to be a store that had a commercial. And there was a lady during the Christmas season, she would go up to the windows of the store and she would say, open, open, open. That's how I feel about our ESA program participants. You all are like, when are you going to open, open, open? Your application window opens early spring, possibly January or February. All right?

And then, families who opt not to enroll in the ESA program affected in any way? Nope, not at all. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to go buy new clothes unless you want to. You don't have to go buy new instructional materials unless you want to. There is nothing for you to do. Nothing changes for you. This program is amazing because it's voluntary. There are no mandates and requirements that...

coerce you or require you to join the program, which is why it's so great and which is why THSC advocated because it's about freedom and opportunities. So how will all of this work? How will a parent use the funds? Well, folks, that is not for me to talk about. That is for the team to talk about.

So I want to key up your Odyssey team. So if you could just give a round of applause for our Odyssey team, I feel like I can hear the Price is Right music. Dun dun dun da, dun dun dun da. And I see Lauren running down the stairs, and Daniel running down the stairs, and Ross running down the stairs. So I am going to turn it over to Odyssey. And I believe I'm supposed to give it to Lauren. And then you'll introduce the team. And then you all will take it away from there.

Lauren Bender - Odyssey (19:35.804)

Fantastic. Well, thank you so, so much for having us. And I will echo Jeremy in trying to relay a degree of the enthusiasm that Anita has for this program. Her energy is so infectious and it's great to see. We're thrilled to be here with all of you. We're really, really excited to have

the conversation and to work with you all in the state of Texas. So we're happy to introduce ourselves and we can tell you a little bit about what we do at Odyssey, how we're going

to help the TIPA program in the great state of Texas. And we can talk to you a little bit about the nuts and bolts of like, how does this thing actually work now that it's real and now that it's here?

So with that, my name is Lauren Bender. I am the head of strategy and growth at Odyssey. I do a bunch of different things at the company, but some things that I do are helping to get programs up and running and started when we get into net new states. In addition to that, I oversee our marketplace e-commerce function, which Ross runs. So I have Ross Pila here from my team. He is our marketplace operations manager, and he'll talk to you in a little bit about how and what you

can buy on our marketplace. And in addition to that, we're joined by Daniel Warner, who is our Texas State Director. Daniel has worked in and around the state of Texas for over, what is it, 10, 12 years in the capital, I believe. He is really plugged in to all things education, policy, and has been a great asset to our team as we scale our operations here.

So with that...

Lauren Bender - Odyssey (21:17.944)

I'm going give a little bit of background on just Odyssey as a company and what we actually do when we say we help to administer school choice programs. So we currently run six different ESAs across the country, including Texas. And in addition to that, we have run various other school choice programs across the country, including micro grant and voucher programs in over about 10

states now. So this is pretty much all we do is we work in and around school choice every single day and we make sure that we can really easily and efficiently bring choice mechanisms to parents across the country. And so when I say we run these programs, what does that actually mean and what are we actually bringing to the table?

Run programs.

in a one-stop shop fashion. So we take a comprehensive approach and our technology platform does everything, beginning with an application system. So we will be the company that opens up an application for you all. Anita mentioned that applications will open soon after the new year and a press release actually recently went out, which stated that applications will open on February 4th.

So we're happy to share that that is the official date with you all. When applications open.

Lauren Bender - Odyssey (22:55.826)

We intake information from all potential families in really quick and easy fashion. So the application is about three, four pages, super easy to fill out. You fill out one household application for all students within your household. So that's one username that you need for all things Odyssey going forward. Again, one stop shop. So.

When you fill out that application, we'll ask just basic information so that we can determine whether or not you are eligible to receive said funds. If we determine that you are in fact eligible, as Anita mentioned, there will be a lottery. And after the lottery, based on who is approved within that lottery, we will then fund you in your digital wallet. You can indicate

in the application that you are a homeschool student that will give you access to our e-commerce marketplace. And so once you have been funded in the digital wallet for everyone on the call, that would be \$2,000. Then you can access our e-commerce marketplace by which you can purchase a litany of products, goods, and services. Ross will talk about the marketplace a little bit more, but one thing that's really cornerstone to what we do at Odyssey is we create a state-specific

marketplace of eligible products, goods and services so that anything that you purchase in our marketplace you know is eligible and you don't have to pay out of pocket for any of it. So everything that you provide that you select via the digital wallet will go automatically to fulfillment. You'll assign a certain item to a student which Ross will show you in a little bit and then once you check out we'll manage the fulfillment on our end and then the material

We have a whole host of educational products, and services from technology to tutoring to in-person instruction to online instruction to curriculum and so on and so on. We open up an open vendor application so that any vendor in and outside the state of Texas can apply and we vet and approve those vendors provided that they meet state eligibility criteria.

Lauren Bender - Odyssey (25:21.044)

From there, if you do meet state eligibility criteria, we then ask you to onboard offerings that you would like to sell in the marketplace. Again, those go through a very rigorous vetting process to make sure that anything that you see on the marketplace is eligible for purchase.

So with that, I'll pause, happy to answer any top of mind questions based on what's been said so far. And if I'm hearing none for now, we can pass things over to Ross.

Anita Scott (25:54.813)

Awesome. Thank you, Lauren, for that introduction. And I will, if you're good, we can pass it over to Ross and then we will, I'm sure questions popped up, Lauren, in the chat. I'm seeing the number populate and we will save the questions for our live Q &A time. Awesome.

Ross Pila (26:15.282)

Sounds good. All right. Thanks, Lauren and Anita. Like Lauren mentioned, I manage the day-to-day of our marketplace. So what does that mean? Ultimately, it starts with making sure we have a robust catalog of all of those types of purchases Lauren mentioned. So that's working with local providers, working with national providers to make sure that you can log into our marketplace and find anything from electronics to curriculum to services. So today, I wanted to...

walk you guys through what does making a purchase look like. Now, this is a demonstrative slide deck with some screenshots taken from a demo of our marketplace, but it should help to provide a comprehensive understanding of what does the purchase experience look like. So in this scenario, this would be someone who's approved and funded. If you notice at the top, it shows an available balance, which indicates how many funds are available in your digital wallet. We have a...

fairly standard e-commerce platform, which as you see involves a few top line categories where you can sort. Maybe you're looking for electronics or services. You can indicate that at the top line to filter accordingly. In addition, you can filter by price, by a specific company and all things of that sort. Now, in this scenario, we see one of our providers we've worked with previously called the Good and the Beautiful, which is a homeschool curriculum provider.

So let's say you're browsing the marketplace and this geology science offering peaks your interest. If you go ahead and click on the product, you would see this next screen, which shares some more details about that specific product. And this is where the vendor is able to explain what it is they're selling in addition to providing some more images as well as a price. Now, to walk you through what the purchase process looks like as a whole,

Let's say you read the description and you're interested, you want this geology science kit. Once you go ahead and click add to cart, you would see this next screen pop up where you're actually able to indicate which student is this for. So you'll notice under the cart on the right hand

side, it shows assigned to student. You'd click that, indicate which student this is for. And once you hit checkout, after a few simple clicks, you reach the final screen, which is just going to show you,

Ross Pila (28:41.542)

What's the address you've registered with? Make sure everything looks good and you'd hit submit order. And like Lauren mentioned, everything's pre-approved. So this would go directly to that vendor or provider for fulfillment. And typically that would ship out within a few business days.

Anita Scott (28:59.543)

Thank you Ross. I see the questions went up from 63 to 77 so you must have been you must have hit a home run you did something great Ross thank you thank you so much all right yes

Lauren Bender - Odyssey (29:12.85)

The only thing I'll add that might be helpful, I can't see the questions on my side, but one thing that's really nice about our product is that it's accessible on any device and on any browser type. So about 85 % of families that we work with actually just fill out the application directly from their phones and can manage this purchasing process from their phones as well, which makes it super user-friendly and accessible.

Anita Scott (29:42.187)

Yes, thank you for saying that. I'm sure our on-the-go homeschool moms just applaud it from wherever they are right now. Thank you, Lauren. Okay, all right.

Next we are going to hear from the Comptroller's office Mary Katherine, I don't know if you hear the Price is Right music It's playing right now and I see you running down those steps So I would love for you to introduce yourself your role in this program and then we are going to Serve up some questions to you and then after we do a little bit of Q &A with you We're going to serve up some questions to Odyssey. So

MK Stout (30:07.352)

You

Anita Scott (30:24.811)

Why don't you introduce yourself and tell us your role in this?

MK Stout (30:28.396)

Thank you, Anita. I am delighted to be with you guys today. It is a great honor and pleasure to get to work for my boss, the acting comptroller, Kelly Hancock. He is a longtime champion of education freedom, served in the Texas Senate and the Texas House, and even once upon a time, I think

did time serving on his local school board as well. And so he, even as a school board member, has been a champion for education freedom.

He is the right person to be in this role to make sure that this achieves lift off. And it is my honor to get to spend my days and my nights and my weekends working on this and worrying about this to make sure that this is a huge success. I think this is the most exciting thing happening in state government in Texas right now. And Odyssey has been just a tremendous partner with us in so many ways. And of course, the homeschool coalition just is.

the best voice for homeschool families in the state of Texas. And so it's great to be here. The one thing I want to underscore here, Anita, is just the freedom aspect of this. And you mentioned it earlier. I've gotten some emails from moms who've said, am I going to have to show you my curriculum? Am I going to have to, are you going to have to come look in my house and see if it's okay the way I'm doing things? And the answer to all of those things is no. We really do believe in freedom in this.

You have absolute confidence that the things that you see on the marketplace are going to be approved educational expenses that you can use for the education of your children. And we are not interested or able to micromanage all of those things for everybody in the state of Texas.

And whether it's a homeschool family or whether it's a private school, we take the autonomy and decisions of parents in those schools very seriously. So that's the one thing I really want to just reinforce here is I'm not gonna be knocking on your door and doing the open, open, open and asking you to let me come in and see your curriculum. In fact, we want to make this as easy as possible for you to choose things that help you educate your children in the way that you would like to.

MK Stout (32:38.54)

So I look forward to questions. I'm keeping it short and sweet for you, Anita. Thank you so much for having me.

Anita Scott (32:43.371)

Thank you. Thank you for setting aside time. I suspect that when you became the director of this, email, your inbox just had to have just been overflowing and flooding out. So we thank you for taking the time to sit with us and introduce yourself and answer some questions. So I had the privilege of being able to let Mary Katherine know the trending questions that homeschoolers have been asking. And so she and I talked yesterday, we talked a little bit, I think it was Monday.

or Tuesday. so Mary Catherine, if you're all right with it, I'm just going to go one by one so our audience can hear exactly from you, the

Comptroller's Office, regarding these answers. So are pre-K and kinder children eligible for the 10K amount if they are attending an accredited program?

MK Stout (33:32.022)

Yes, that's correct, Anita. So there are two things here that I want to reinforce. The accredited private school is what is the sort of threshold for being able to receive that full amount that

roughly \$10,000 or so. And pre-K eligibility in the state of Texas is specified in statute. You have to meet some certain criteria, typically income-based. Perhaps it's not native-speaking English, military families. There's a handful of criteria there. But if you meet those criteria...

And if you are attending an accredited program, then yes, you are eligible to receive that money. The other thing I would say here is that the eligibility or I'm sorry, the prioritization criteria that you walked through earlier also applies here. So a pre-K eligible student has to meet the same prioritization criteria as any other student. So for that first tier, of course, we're talking about children with disabilities whose families make under 500 % of the poverty level. But if that...

is one of your kids and you want to take your child to an accredited private school or one of the private pre-k programs in the state, you could do that with your full \$10,000 amount. For a homeschool family, of course, the homeschool amount is \$2,000. So I really do want to emphasize that funding difference.

Anita Scott (34:56.631)

Yes, thank you for doing that. And that's why on one of the other slides, wanted to be so clear about the two buckets. If you're attending an accredited private school, this is the amount you're receiving, and then all the other educational expenses will receive \$2,000. So thank you for underscoring that again. Second question, if the child has never received an IEP from a school district, should they go ahead and request one now in order to receive the allotted amount for a child with special needs?

MK Stout (35:04.93)

That's right.

MK Stout (35:25.056)

Yes, you should hang up from this and go start that process right away. We know that this takes some time and we know that school districts can be backed up in this and we're hearing a lot of families reach out and express concerns or look for direction on this. So yes, you definitely want to start this right away.

I would say that we understand that for some families, they are going to provide us with a note that explains the diagnosis that would allow them to count as a child with a disability. And that will be sufficient for prioritization. But if you want the additional funding that matches to what the school would, a public school would receive for a child with an IEP, you need to have the IEP on file.

Anita Scott (36:12.769)

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Number three, should a parent keep their child in the public school and apply for Texas Education Freedom account and wait to see if they are approved before they withdraw their child from the school system?

MK Stout (36:28.32)

Anita, this one is so hard because I think this is a really super personal decision for families. And so I would not make I would not want to advise anybody on how to make this decision right now.

Anita Scott (36:33.793)

Mm-hmm.

Anita Scott (36:41.483)

Mm-hmm.

MK Stout (36:41.728)

We fully expect that there is gonna be a wait list for the program. And so from that standpoint, I think it's only fair to say these are really personal decisions and you wanna make the decision that's best for your child right now. For some of our higher income families, there are some expectations and prioritization that they...

have attended a public school or been enrolled in a public school for a portion of the previous year. And so for some families, it might be an easier decision to say we're going to go ahead and withdraw than it is for others. So I do think this is a very personal decision and not something I can give very much direction on.

Anita Scott (37:21.099)

That's good. like how I'm sure our families appreciate the discretion that you've used just regarding their own status and their own financial stability and if they're ready to make that kind of decision. So thank you for that. Number four, do families need to reapply every year? So assuming they're already in the program, they're already program participants, what does that look like to do it again for another year?

MK Stout (37:44.728)

So my friends at Odyssey can speak to this, but I think really what we're talking about is just you're gonna need to indicate that you plan to continue in the program. And as long as you have not put your child in a public school and drawn state funding for them in a public school, you're not gonna have to prove any of these same things. Once you're in, in, you don't do a full reapplication. We're not reprioritizing or anything like that. You don't have to reapply. You're just gonna have to indicate that you plan to continue to participate.

Anita Scott (38:15.743)

Awesome. Did our friends at Odyssey want to chime in?

Anita Scott (38:28.192)

Hahaha

Anita Scott (38:42.263)

Mm-hmm.

Anita Scott (38:49.153)

Gotcha. Well, I'm going to do what all the participants on the call are doing. They're like, whew, they are like wiping their brow. Thank you. All right, Mary Katherine, question number five, can funds be used for online or out of state programs?

MK Stout (39:04.674)

Sure, so I think Jeremy referenced the rules that were published last week. They are like 95 pages. So if you need help falling asleep or something like that, download the rules, read those.

Anita Scott (39:11.319)

you

MK Stout (39:17.014)

We do talk about this. We got a lot of questions about this. There will be online programs that are available. There may be some out of state programs, especially some different schools that might have an administrative office or something like that in Texas to be able to qualify. But I think the really just important thing to note here is that if you see this offering on the Odyssey Marketplace, it is an approved educational expense that you can make use of. And so you're not gonna have to wonder anything about whether this program is

is not allowable, the Odyssey Marketplace will give you the range of options you can choose from.

Anita Scott (39:53.451)

So good, so good. Thank you. So if they see it, they can use it.

Anita Scott (40:15.383)

Thank you. Thank you. And then last question for Ms. Mary Katherine. How are needs, meaning special needs evaluated to decide how much support or funding a family can receive?

MK Stout (40:30.104)

So that's a great question and really our partners at the Texas Education Agency are the ones who are going to give us this information. The IEP will indicate a level of funding that corresponds to the services or additional needs that a student might have. And so that will correlate to how much money is provided to them in their account. So that IEP in question two is really the important trigger for determining the funding.

then the families will have the money to decide how they want to use it.

Anita Scott (41:05.175)

Gotcha. Gotcha. And so I like how you said the triggering of question number two. So if you have a homeschool family who has never had a child receive an IEP, in fact, through the Texas Homeschool Coalition Agency, I'm sorry, Texas Homeschool Coalition, if they are a member in their portal, they can actually populate something very similar to an educational IEP. So would that be enough in order for them to submit for

to receive funding for, you know, up to 30,000.

MK Stout (41:40.408)

Well, so let me give you two different answers on this. The first one is this does have to be an IEP that the school district conducts. And there have been a lot of questions about this, a lot of folks hoping that we could kind of squint and read something as an IEP that's not officially an IEP. And unfortunately, this is in order to be compliant with the law, we do need to have the IEP on file to help us understand the amount of funding.

Anita Scott (41:43.51)

Okay.

MK Stout (42:08.002)

But the other thing I really do want to underscore here, and I hope I'm not just the bearer of bad news in this, but that additional amount up to \$30,000 is available for a student who's in an accredited private school. If you're a homeschool family, the \$2,000 amount is the amount that you can expect to get. So if you are not planning to enroll your student in an accredited private school and you are planning to homeschool,

then the IEP issue is not one you have to worry about because the amount of money will not change for you.

Anita Scott (42:42.807)
Let's get this, please.

Daniel Warner (42:43.703)
Mary Catherine, can I add something there? Yeah, and I was gonna say, some, and also there's, you know, a proper diagnostician for the purposes of identifying a child with a disability. If that is on file when the student applies, that will be used for purposes of prioritization in the model of which the kind of the, that first tier between zero and 500 % of the federal poverty limit and that either doctor's note or,

MK Stout (42:45.228)
Please.

Daniel Warner (43:10.059)
a diastetician from a dyslexia specialist or dysgraphia, something like that where that can only be used for prioritization purposes. So they can potentially be in that two to, so they can kind of get into that first bucket, but that won't change the funding amount just to be able to be in that first bucket, if that makes sense.

MK Stout (43:29.024)
Yeah, Daniel, that's a great call out. So I want to say that again too, because what I just said about if you're a family that is planning to continue homeschooling your student and you're not going to be enrolling them in an accredited private school, then you're not eligible for the 30,000 up to \$30,000. However, what Daniel talked about in terms of going and having a professional evaluation for purposes of prioritization is potentially important.

Anita Scott (43:31.223)
Mm-hmm.

MK Stout (43:56.96)
because that would put you in the first prioritization tier and allow you to get the \$2,000 for a homeschooling family. I hope that makes sense, Anita. If it doesn't, we can keep trying to muddle through that and explain it better if we need to.

Anita Scott (44:11.639)
you. Yes, no, I'm glad Daniel, thank you for chiming in in order for us to make it so clear to families that in order for them to even receive up to the 30,000, it's an IEP on file with the school district and it's going to

an accredited private school. So we need to make sure we have those markers in place. That's so good. Thank you.

Anita Scott (44:43.699)
awesome.

Anita Scott (44:48.619)
Yes. Yes, we can hear you.

Anita Scott (44:57.339)
Awesome. Okay. It is time to queue up questions for our Odyssey team. All right. So first question, and Lauren, you did so great. I heard you use the phrase multiple times, one stop shop, one stop shop, one stop shop. So I'm going to just ask this question again to underscore. So if a parent needs assistance, who should they reach out to? If they have questions about how to apply, what they can use bonds on, or how they can even access their funds once they're approved.

Anita Scott (45:46.839)
Yeah.

Anita Scott (46:11.029)
Awesome. And I feel like that kind of bleeds into question number two regarding will I have to, will a parent have to go through any other platform throughout this process? we have THSC on the call. We have Odyssey on the call. We have the Comptroller's office on the call. So I think our audience would love to just know.

Are they going to be visiting with each of us or is it, are they just going primarily to one source, one domain, one landing page?

Anita Scott (47:38.976)
It might sound too good to be true because so many of us have 18 passwords and 18 different usernames just to get on Facebook Marketplace. So this sounds like this sounds like it's. This is wonderful. This is wonderful. Thank you. So I'm going to keep underscoring what you said. The one stop shop. OK. So for question number three, what do our parents and.

our members need to do if they don't see an item on the marketplace that they would like to see on the marketplace or a vendor or a service provider. What's the next step?

Ross Pila (48:13.19)
Yeah, I'm happy to speak to this one, Anita. think, you know, Lauren mentioned it before, but one key is we do have an open vendor application that does not close. So if this is a local provider that maybe you have a

relationship with, you're always welcome to encourage them to apply. And, you know, they can do so at any point, even if the program has already launched. But other than that, if it might be a different company that you might not have that relationship with, you can always let the Texas Homeschool Coalition know they'll be in regular communication with us at Odyssey and

We're always looking to improve the marketplace. And, you know, one thing to note here as well is the marketplace will continue to grow because it's an open vendor application. It's consistent that there's more products, more services, more vendors being added throughout the program.

Anita Scott (48:59.031)

So great. Is that window already open for vendors to begin applying or is there a day that it begins to open?

Anita Scott (49:13.527)

Awesome, awesome, sounds good. And then last question is, how do payments work for my marketplace purchases and does a parent have access to the funds directly?

MK Stout (51:02.464)

Anita, can I chime in with something here also and say that the other side of this is that the program will not permit reimbursements. So if you do purchase something with your own money, you are not going to be able to reach out to Odyssey and say, here are all of my receipts for these pencils. Even if pencils are an allowable purchase that you could have made on the marketplace, you're not going to be able to get a reimbursement. So these transactions do have to happen through the marketplace.

Anita Scott (51:04.087)

Please.

Anita Scott (51:33.73)

Well said, thank you. Thank you for making that clear. So looks like we might be up for, let's see, we might be up for live Q &A, but right before I do that, I want to highlight one more time for our attendees who are on this webinar. First, if our policy team or our customer relations team, if you will drop in our link to our school choice page.

That way everyone will know, oh, this is where I can go in a few days to hear all of the answers to the questions that we've heard on this webinar. And then there are other questions that you haven't heard yet. In fact, to my right is my monitor, and I'm seeing both our customer relations team and our policy team drop in questions. I haven't opened the chat, but if I look at it, I see like 99 comments. But in case you're thinking,

Wait, there's only eight minutes left. How will I know the answer to my question? I can tell you now, one, because the rules have been finalized, we can take those rules and we can apply them to our ESA FAQ. You will not be left hanging. We want to make sure we serve you well. This is a new program. Everyone has questions. What we don't want you to do is feel like you're floundering or you have to chat GPT it out. You won't have to do that.

Okay, so even though chat GPT is the employee of the year for every organization, we want you to know that we want to serve you with the answers. Okay. So that being said, we will spend right now. I see my time is at 53. So we have about seven minutes left.

So between, I'm gonna ask Nathan Bryant. Nathan, would you serve us up maybe three, I saw you come on camera. All right. So would you serve us about three questions and we can triage between Texas Homeschool Coalition, the Comptroller's Office and then Odyssey. And then we're gonna hand it over, back over to Amanda and Heather from there. And then we'll be ready to close out knowing that we will have the ESA FAQs uploaded to our school choice page. All right, Nathan, take it away.

Anita Scott (53:51.66)
Gotcha.

Anita Scott (53:56.127)
I can, yes.

Anita Scott (54:24.575)
Yes, and would you restate the question, Lauren? Because I don't think our audience was able to hear Nathan. there's a question. Awesome.

Anita Scott (54:40.949)
Yes.

Anita Scott (55:55.063)
Thank you, Lauren.

Anita Scott (56:09.687)
All right, so the next question is, when will the list of approved vendors or schools be available to families? Is that one that Odyssey would like to take?

Anita Scott (56:46.465)
Thank you, Lauren. All right.

MK Stout (56:57.548)

So that's a great question, Anita. I can take it. The question is whether the amount of funding is allocated per child or per family. And it is per child. And something really important here is that when we go through this...

Anita Scott (57:00.236)

Yes.

MK Stout (57:13.912)

prioritization and lottery process that we will treat families as a unit. So if you have a child who is in that first tier, a child with a disability under 500 % of the poverty level and that child gets an award, any siblings, even if they're in the other prioritization tiers would receive an award also. And so each child's funding would be allocated per the child. And then as Lauren talked about, the Odyssey platform allows you to have sort of the one

family experience so you're not having to juggle the multiple usernames and all of those kinds of things to transact your business.

Anita Scott (57:54.38)

Did you see the thumbs up when you answered that question Mary Katherine? saw a thumbs up. Yes. Someone gave a thumbs up. We are at Mark 58 right now. someone, was Mary Katherine texted me as we were on this call and said, Anita, as you keep receiving these questions, the Comptroller's office is also happy to be ready to do the ESA FAQs as well.

MK Stout (57:57.43)

I didn't, but I love it. Thank you.

Anita Scott (58:23.017)

Again, because this is new program. And so again, we don't want people floundering. We don't want you to think Chad GPT has all the answers. Here's your team right here. Here's your team right here. So we want to be able to serve you well. So that being said, I want to thank Odyssey for.

setting aside time to come and show your face and let us ask you questions and let them see who is going to be serving them as these funds are being managed in a new way in Texas. Mary Katherine, thank you for setting aside time to come and answer questions.

Thank you for letting me give you all those texts and the phone calls that we've had this week. Odyssey, I must have just bombarded your inboxes saying, we doing this? Are we doing this? Are we doing this? We are so grateful. We are so grateful. So I'm going to kick it back over to Amanda and Heather as we wrap it up.

Anita Scott (59:30.123)

All right, are you there, Heather?

Heather Young (59:33.808)

am can you hear me? Awesome okay I was having a bit of technical trouble there. Alright so we're gonna talk about membership real quick. So how do you become a member with THSC? Did you know that the Texas Homeschool Coalition has a membership to help support you and advocate for you on your homeschool journey?

Anita Scott (59:34.88)

Yes we can.

Ross Pila (59:54.216)

you

Heather Young (59:58.422)

Today as a thank you for joining us on this webinar, we have a special membership deal for you for \$99 for the year for our premium membership, which is typically valued at 150 a year. With your membership, you get access to a variety of things, to name a few, access to legal advice and support for any issues that you may run into.

Homeschooling coaches are available to help answer questions as you go. That would be the team that I am with, our homeschool coaches. We have discounts to dozens of major curriculums and homeschool resources for your school year. And joining today, you get that limited time discount.

for webinar attendees to join THSC. That's that \$99 for our premium membership for the year. For our THSC members, these webinars are uploaded into your member portal for you to rewatch, to be available for you to catch what you might have missed or like I said, to just rewatch. But I want you to watch your email for the link to take advantage of the webinar special because it's our

webinar only special discount. And please, if you have any other questions, feel free to reach out to our team. You can do that at thsc.org backslash contact and ask us your questions and we will get back with you and we just want to serve your family. That is what we are here for. So thank you again for attending this webinar with us today.

Anita Scott (01:01:47.65)

Thank you, Heather. Thank you, Heather. I do want to emphasize right before I highlight the next webinar coming in January, I think we probably had 100 questions coming in, Odyssey. We probably had 100 questions, Mary Catherine. Our viewers are demanding to know how are we going to make this work. And so I want to again thank Odyssey. want to again thank the

Comptroller's Office, Mary Catherine. And I want to again emphasize that we will have the answers

to your questions uploaded on our website come next week because we want to make sure you have what you need so you can make an informed decision. These are decisions that we know you need to make. So we will have what you need early next week on our website. So team, if you could drop in the Comptroller's website so our families will know how to receive subscription updates. Excuse me.

And team, if you could drop in our school choice page.

And then I'm going to take a drink of water.

Okay, our next webinar is January the 15th. Speaker is Mandy Davis of Home Built Education. And she'll be presenting the great undoing, reclaiming childhood, calling and call. Put that on your calendar. We look forward to seeing you January 15th. Thank you all so much for being here.

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