





BEYOND CHOICE

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KATLYN'S PARENTS WERE EXHAUSTED.

Their bright, creative ten-year-old daughter has ADHD, and school had become a daily struggle. Homework routinely ended in tears. Long assignments felt overwhelming. Mornings were tense. Despite strong abilities, Katlyn increasingly believed she was simply “bad at school.”

So, when her parents learned about a scholarship program that could help pay for a nearby private school, they felt hopeful for the first time in a long while.

The school seemed warm and welcoming. Smaller classes. Calm classrooms. Individualized attention. Then, during a tour, Katlyn's father asked a simple question: “Will her 504 plan come with her?”

The answer was far more complicated than they expected.

Across the United States, educational options for families are changing rapidly. Voucher programs, education savings accounts, scholarship granting organizations, and other school choice initiatives are expanding in many states and increasingly becoming part of the educational decisions families face when considering what environment may best support their child.

For families of students with ADHD, however, these decisions involve far more than simply choosing between schools. They involve questions about legal protections, accommodations, access to services, disciplinary practices, school capacity, and whether a child's educational and emotional needs can realistically be met in a particular setting.

Recognizing the growing impact of these programs on families within the ADHD community, CHADD's advocacy and public policy committee (APPC) spent the past year engaged in an extensive review of the Educational Choice for Children Act of 2025 (ECCA), broader voucher and scholarship programs, and the implications these programs may have for students with ADHD.

***What Families
of Students
with ADHD
Need to Know
About Changing
Educational
Options***

One principle quickly emerged as central to the committee's work: "It is not enough for families to simply be offered choices. Families also need clear, accurate information about what those choices may mean for students with ADHD."

That understanding shaped the direction of the APPC's work and led to the development of a position statement, educational resources, family guides, appendices, coalition efforts, and advocacy strategies designed to help families navigate a rapidly changing educational landscape.

A rapidly changing educational environment

School voucher and scholarship programs have existed in various forms for decades, but recent legislative activity has accelerated their expansion nationwide. On July 4, 2025, Congress enacted the Educational Choice for Children Act of 2025 (ECCA) as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

The law created a federal tax-credit program supporting scholarship granting organizations (SGOs), which may provide scholarships for private school tuition and certain educational expenses. States must formally opt into the program, and many have already done so or are actively considering participation. As a result, increasing numbers of families of children with ADHD are likely to encounter voucher and scholarship opportunities in the coming years, whether or not they were previously considering private educational settings.

The policy debate surrounding these programs remains deeply divided nationally and includes a wide range of perspectives among educators, policymakers, disability advocates, and families. In order to represent the broad range of views within its constituency, CHADD adopted a posture that does not endorse or oppose voucher or scholarship programs as a matter of education policy.

Instead, the APPC focused on what CHADD uniquely brings to the discussion: protecting students with ADHD, advocating for meaningful safeguards, and helping families understand how educational settings may differ in terms of rights, supports, and practical realities.

What families often don't realize

One of the committee's strongest concerns was the widespread assumption that students with ADHD will continue receiving the same protections and supports regardless of where they attend school.

In reality, the legal landscape changes significantly when a student moves from a public school to a private educational setting. Public schools are subject to federal laws such as:

- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act,
- and portions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

These laws establish rights related to evaluations, accommodations, specialized instruction, procedural safeguards, and formal mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Private schools operate under different legal obligations depending on factors such as federal funding and religious affiliation. Some private schools are covered by portions of federal disability law. Others may have fewer legal obligations or significantly different enforcement structures.

As a result, students with ADHD who voluntarily enroll in private schools may not have access to the same enforceable protections available in public school settings, including rights related to accommodations, IEP services, disciplinary protections, and due process procedures.

For many families, this comes as a surprise.

And for students with ADHD, these distinctions can have very real implications involving:

- accommodations and classroom supports,
- evaluation services,
- disciplinary practices,
- due process protections,
- and access to specialized educational interventions.

The committee recognized that these are not abstract legal questions for families. They are practical realities that can directly affect a student's educational experience and long-term success. For many families already navigating ADHD-related school challenges, these decisions can feel both hopeful and overwhelming at the same time.

Why school supports matter

ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental conditions affecting children and adolescents. Approximately one in nine children in the United States has a current ADHD diagnosis, and many students also have coexisting learning disabilities, emotional challenges, or other educational needs requiring school-based supports.

What to Listen for Before You Choose

A good-fit school does not have to promise everything. In fact, honest limits can be a green flag. Listen for transparency, specific examples, and a willingness to collaborate.

Green flags sound like:

- "We use written accommodation plans."
- "Here is how we support long-term assignments."
- "Our teachers receive training on executive functioning."
- "We try support strategies before discipline."
- "Here is what we can provide, and here is what we cannot."



Red flags sound like:

- "We do not really do accommodations."
- "ADHD is mostly a motivation issue."
- "We will see how it goes."
- "If your child struggles, this may not be the right fit."
- "We cannot put anything in writing."



Appendix B of CHADD's ECCA position statement examines the broader social and economic costs of unmanaged ADHD and highlights the important role schools play in successful intervention.

Research consistently shows that students with ADHD face increased risks of:

- academic struggles,
- school failure,
- disciplinary exclusion,
- grade retention,
- school dropout,
- unemployment,
- and involvement with the justice system when support is absent or inadequate.

At the same time, evidence-based school interventions, accommodations, organizational supports, behavioral strategies, and specialized educational services can dramatically improve outcomes.

For students with ADHD, school supports are not “extras.” They are often central to effective treatment, skill-building, emotional regulation, and long-term success.

That is why the APPC's work focused not only on legal protections, but also on whether schools have the capacity and willingness to appropriately support students with ADHD.

Turning advocacy into real-world guidance for families

Recognizing that many families are being asked to make high-stakes educational decisions without fully understanding the implications, the APPC developed several companion resources intended to provide practical, accessible guidance.

A family guide for navigating school choice. One of the committee's major projects has been the development of a Family Guide and Quick Start resource designed to help parents understand:

- how voucher and scholarship programs work,
- what changes when moving from public to private schools,
- which laws may or may not apply,
- what questions families should ask schools before enrollment,

Questions to Ask Before You Enroll Your Child

Before using a voucher, scholarship, or SGO-funded option, consider asking:

- Which disability laws apply to this school?
- Will my child's current IEP or 504 plan be honored?
- Are accommodations written down?
- Who coordinates support for students with ADHD?
- How are teachers trained in ADHD and executive functioning?
- How does the school handle behavior

related to impulsivity, emotional regulation, or missed work?

- What happens if my child needs more support than expected?
- Is there a complaint or problem-solving process for families?

Bottom line: A school does not need to be perfect. But it should be honest, informed, transparent, and willing to work with you.



- and what steps families can take if problems arise.

The guide also includes practical evaluation tools, school checklists, and “green flags/red flags” families can use when evaluating whether a school has the experience, staffing, transparency, and willingness to support students with ADHD.

Importantly, the guide was intentionally designed to be broadly applicable across states rather than tied to any single state's laws or policies.

Understanding legal protections. The APPC also developed Appendix A, a detailed educational resource explaining how disability protections differ across public schools, private schools, and religious schools.

The appendix outlines how IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA apply in different settings and explains why those distinctions matter for evaluations, accommodations, services, disciplinary protections, and procedural safeguards.

The goal is not to discourage families from considering private schools. Many families may have compelling educational, personal, or religious reasons for exploring these settings.

Rather, the goal is to ensure families understand both opportunities and risks before making decisions that may significantly affect their child's rights and supports.

Developing student protection principles. In addition to developing educational resources for families, the APPC is developing The Student Protection Principles Statement to complement CHADD's broader ECCA initiative.

While legal protections may vary between public and private school settings, the educational needs of students with ADHD do not. The Student Protection Principles Statement is intended to articulate the educational practices and student protections CHADD supports so that families can make informed educational decisions and policymakers, scholarship programs, and schools have a clear understanding of the principles CHADD believes are important for protecting and supporting students with ADHD.

Advocacy through collaboration. Recognizing that many disability and special education organizations are addressing similar concerns, the APPC has also begun coalition-building efforts with like-minded agencies and advocacy groups where interests align. This collaborative approach allows CHADD to:

- amplify advocacy efforts,
- share information and resources,
- support state-level initiatives when appropriate,
- and center the needs of students with ADHD within broader disability-rights discussions.



Educational policy in the United States is continuing to evolve rapidly, and families of students with ADHD are increasingly being asked to navigate decisions carrying significant educational and legal implications.

At the same time, the committee is pursuing what it describes as a “light-touch” monitoring approach by focusing on resource development, member education, coalition work, and collection of member experiences rather than attempting comprehensive state-by-state oversight.

As part of this dissemination effort, the APPC will partner with CHADD’s *Attention* magazine to feature ongoing educational content and provide continuing updates on advocacy efforts, family resources, and emerging policy developments.

The committee also encourages members to engage through CHADD’s online ADHD Advocacy Action Center, which includes advocacy updates, educational materials, legislator lookup tools, opportunities to share experiences, and ways to make their voices heard.

Looking ahead

Educational policy in the United States is continuing to evolve rapidly, and families of students with ADHD are increasingly being asked to navigate decisions carrying significant educational and legal implications.

CHADD’s advocacy and public policy committee believes families deserve more than slogans, assumptions, or simplified policy debates. They deserve practical information, meaningful safeguards, and a clear understanding of how educational settings

may affect the rights, supports, and experiences of students with ADHD.

A new school may be a wonderful opportunity. It may also involve tradeoffs families do not fully anticipate. Before making those decisions, families deserve clarity.

Families like Katlyn’s deserve more than assumptions or slogans when making decisions that may shape a child’s educational future.

As these conversations continue nationally, CHADD remains committed to helping families navigate these changes through practical education, thoughtful advocacy, and a continued focus on protecting the rights and well-being of students with ADHD.

Through collaboration, education, and advocacy, CHADD will continue working to ensure that the voices and needs of individuals with ADHD remain part of these important national conversations. **A**



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clinical nursing and higher education. Her expertise includes behavioral health nursing, critical care and emergency trauma nursing, evidence-based practice, psychoeducation, and translating research into clinical and educational applications. A nationally and internationally recognized speaker, author, and media

contributor on ADHD, she has over twenty-two years of experience in education, advocacy, and outreach for individuals and families affected by ADHD. She is a past member of CHADD’s national board of directors. Currently, she serves on the editorial advisory board for *Attention* magazine and as co-chair of CHADD’s advocacy and public policy committee. Focusing on adult ADHD, women and hormonal influences across lifespan, ADHD and the aging brain, and family-centered psychoeducation, her work is informed by professional and lived experience as a parent of children with ADHD, and a woman diagnosed later in life with ADHD.



Jeremy Didier, LCSW, LMHC, ADHD-CCSP, is the immediate past president of CHADD’s board of directors. She provides assessment, diagnosis, and therapeutic services for adults with ADHD through her private practice, TreehouseADHD, in the Kansas City, Missouri, area. Grounded in CHADD’s mission of evidence-based information, support, and advocacy, she is the founder and co-coordinator of Kansas City’s CHADD chapter, ADHDKC, twice named CHADD Chapter of the Year. Didier currently serves as co-chair of CHADD’s advocacy and public policy committee. A nationally recognized speaker and contributor to the *Washington Post* and *NBC Nightly News*, her professional focus includes the underdiagnosis of ADHD in girls and women, the intersection of ADHD and addiction, and improving outcomes for justice-involved individuals. Diagnosed with ADHD as an adult, she holds a master’s degree in social work from Fordham University and a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Kansas. Didier is most proud to be the mother of five children, four of whom are also neurodivergent.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Educational Choice for Children Act of 2025 (ECCA) | congress.gov/bill/119th/congress/house-bill/833

CHADD resources mentioned in this article:

CHADD’s ADHD Advocacy Action Center | chadd.org/adhd-advocacy-action-center/

CHADD Position Statement/Strategy for Addressing the Educational Choice for Children Act of 2025 (ECCA) | chadd.org/advocacy-blog/chadd-position-statement-strategy-for-addressing-the-educational-choice-for-children-act-of-2025/

All the other resources mentioned in this article that were created by CHADD’s advocacy and public policy committee are available here: chadd.org/adhd-advocacy/student-protection-principles-for-school-choice-programs/