

An estimated \$6,500 EVP-caused rise in the value of an average EISD single family dwelling, alone, netted EISD an extra \$10.6 million in additional local property tax revenue. Accelerated EISD graduation rate increase relative to control districts netted the EISD at least an additional \$4.7 million in state per pupil payments. Consistent with the throttling back of the EVP after 2003–2004, and the temporary nature of the program, most of the effects were stronger earlier in the program.

The selective student recruiting claim persists among EVP critics despite long-standing general and EISD-specific data directly refuting that claim. This study provides additional strong indirect refutation. The EISD's rapid rates of academic improvement from 1998–1999 to 2003–2004 would not have been possible if it had lost its best and brightest students to private schools. The EISD findings and general data from numerous other studies are consistent with the theory that says parents seek vouchers for struggling students.

The effects of the EVP add to our understanding of school choice programs that level the playing field mostly among the existing choices. The key characteristics of the EVP place it between the narrowly targeted and restriction-laden programs that have been widely studied and the large, unrestricted programs that are still largely untested. Universality and lack of price control probably caused the EVP effects to be generally stronger than the effects of targeted programs, and the EVP yielded significant economic development effects that were absent or unnoticed for the more restriction-laden programs.

Probably the biggest news out of this report for general consumption is the strong economic development effect of a universal school choice program. States, cities, counties, or school districts can use a no-price-control, universal voucher program to attract families and businesses at no net fiscal cost—with probably some savings—and also improve their school system.

A Chronology of School Choice in the U.S.*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School choice predates American nationhood. Until the mid-19th century, families chose from among a variety of autonomous schools and homeschooling. Tax-funded public schools gradually displaced tuition-charging independent schools, considerably raising the price of choice. To exercise choice, a family needed to buy a home in a neighborhood with a good school or pay independent school

tuition in addition to taxation that supported public schools. For more than a century, few opportunities existed for middle- and low-income families.

After a slow start at the beginning of the 20th century, new options have become available in recent years. The U.S. Supreme Court held in the landmark *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) decision that a “child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.” In other words, families have a right to guide their children’s education—the core value of school choice. Thirty years later, renowned economist Milton Friedman debuted the concept of an education “voucher” as a means of providing choice to families.

Public school choice grew in the late 1960s when the first magnet school opened its doors. About the same time there were setbacks for school choice. In 1971 the U.S. Supreme Court set a new legal precedent for determining the constitutionality of state aid to faith-based institutions called the Lemon Test. Two years later, the Court overturned several New York independent school aid programs, including tax and tuition reimbursements.

The following decade began with the momentous *Mueller v. Allen* decision, which upheld the Minnesota education tax deduction as meeting the three-part Lemon Test. The decade also saw the first interdistrict school choice law, the first dual-enrollment program, the first tax credit for education expenses, and the legalization of homeschooling in most states. During the 1990s, states across the country enacted public charter school laws, tax credits, and voucher programs. Most were upheld in state and federal court. In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), the U.S. Supreme Court declared vouchers constitutional. The following year, Colorado enacted a scholarship program for low-income students. The state supreme court, however, overturned the program in a 4–3 decision.

As of 2009, eligible students in seven states can receive state-funded scholarships. Parents in four states can take tax deductions or credits for independent school tuition. In eight states, individuals or corporations can receive a tax credit when they give to scholarship organizations. Forty states and the District of Columbia have public charter school laws. Some states have interdistrict and intradistrict public school choice laws, magnet schools, or postsecondary options. Home schooling is legal in all 50 states.

Research on these programs shows parental choice in education benefits the individual, the community, and the school system. Students reap academic benefits while choice acts as an incentive for systemwide improvement. The chronology of choice is the struggle to give every child the chance to attend a good school.

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