

**A Summary Report on the HORIZON Privately  
Funded Voucher Program in San Antonio, Texas  
Presented By  
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on the Behalf of the  
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Beginning in 1998, we offered a privately funded educational voucher to every student in the Edgewood School District (14,142 students). The voucher could be used at either a public or a private school and covered 100% of the tuition amount (or 100% of the local funding component in the case of a public school). The school district consisted of very low-income neighborhoods on San Antonio's westside with a very flat/depressed tax base with no new housing starts for at least the past three decades. The district had experienced a decline in student enrollment for many years, and academic performance was low. The district had an overall rating of "acceptable" by TEA, but had three failing campuses.

Residency was the only requirement for participation, and our program made a ten-year commitment so that parents would know that they could count on the voucher year after year.

The first year, 5.5% of Edgewood students requested and received a voucher. At its peak, the program enrolled 2,032 students (2003-04), or 15.8% of the district's students.

With eight program years under our belt, here is what we have learned:

1. The ability of a parent to choose the public or private school that is best for their child can cause dramatic improvements in public education (by the 1999-2000 school year Edgewood was out-performing most districts in Texas, had no failing campuses, and was ranked "Recognized" by the state).
2. The availability of vouchers does not create a mass exodus of children from public education.
3. The students who *most often* avail themselves of a voucher are the lowest academic performers and the most difficult disciplinary cases. (According to a Harvard/Mathematica study, the average voucher recipient was functioning two grades lower than the grade they were actually in.)
4. The only schools that refused admittance to children holding a voucher were public schools.
5. Participating students took a minimum of four years to begin to show any sign of academic improvement due to the fact that they came into the program so far behind academically.
6. School choice is an urban renewal and community economic generator that helps revive inner-city neighborhoods by increasing the tax base through new housing starts. (Since the school choice program, Edgewood's Taxable Property Value per Pupil increased from \$29,893 to \$50,550 - an increase of 62.9% - largely due to new housing developments that advertised educational vouchers as a benefit of a home purchase.)
7. Between 10 and 15 percent of the voucher recipients return them to their public school - usually for academic reasons.
8. Short of home schooling, "school choice" has proven to be the highest form of parental involvement - the single largest factor that determines student success.
9. Vouchers are an important mechanism for low-income children that "levels the playing field" of educational opportunity.

**Conclusion:** The lessons learned above reflect similar results found in other voucher programs around the country - both privately funded as well as publicly funded. The basic conclusion is this: School Choice empowers parents and children, leveling the playing field of educational opportunity. In so doing, school choice creates an environment that energizes children and families, improves public schools, and revitalizes neighborhoods.