

Low-Income Families Find the Means To Enroll Their Children in Better Schools

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I recently re-discovered a [finding](#) that twelve percent of Oklahoma's private school users are from families with annual incomes below \$25,000. It reminded me of a key finding from my [2009 study](#) of Edgewood's (San Antonio) 1998-2008 privately-funded tuition voucher program: *low income families find the means to enroll their children in schools that will work better for them*. So, an expansion in the menu of schooling options facilitated by price decontrol – school choice including permission to top-off public funding with private funding – is not irrelevant or unfair to the poor. Such an expansion benefits all income classes, directly and indirectly; directly through immediate access to new, better-fit schooling innovations, and indirectly through increased competition in the private sector and because new schooling options are likely to fall in price with competition and experience producing the new instructional approaches. There is no question that finding the money to top-off – for example, use a \$4000 voucher and \$1000 of their own money, *or \$1000 from a third party* to pay a \$5000 tuition – is harder to manage with less income. But, that greater hardship is NOT grounds to deny low income families, alongside everyone else, that opportunity. It is a [challenge](#) to public and private entities to lower the affordability barrier. I highlighted '*or from a third party*' because the Edgewood experience, and other readings over the years, reminded me that the money to top off a voucher or tuition tax credit does not necessarily have to come from the great sacrifices that low income families have shown themselves willing to make. They can (and do) come from 'scholarship' funds such as the ones that helped some families top off their Edgewood vouchers.

The Oklahoma finding is even more remarkable than my Edgewood finding that, for example, some families topped off their approximately \$4700 voucher to attend Holy Cross High School; some with their own money and some from scholarship funds. The Oklahoma program is a tax credit scholarship program, and the per-pupil voucher generated by tax credit scholarship programs is typically much less than \$4700; Florida's Tax Credit scholarship has been an exception.