



# TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

## FAQ: HOW WILL ESAs HELP LOW-INCOME STUDENTS?

### KEY POINTS

- Low-income families use choice programs at the highest rates: public charter schools educate 45% more of the lowest-income children than ISDs.
- Low-income families should have the ability to send their children to school with the children of other parents who are equally engaged, committed, or ambitious.
- Choice works. 20 years ago, Florida elementary students ranked 33rd in the nation in reading and 27th in math. Today, they are #1 nationwide in both.

### VOICE FOR CHOICE

“Hard work paired with a strong moral foundation makes education powerful. My family’s success wouldn’t have been possible without school choice, which gave us access to that environment. Each one of us received and benefited from the Florida scholarship.”

Hera Varmah,  
Florida choice student

### TRUE EDUCATION EQUITY

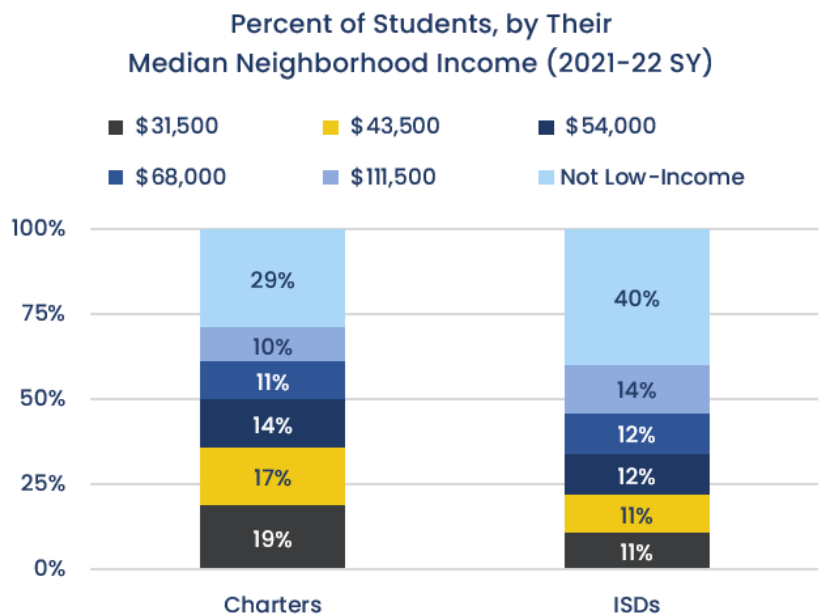
Education equity requires that schools serving low-income children mirror in number, variety, and quality the schools affluent parents expect for their children.

Low-income families use education choice programs at high rates. For example, Texas charter schools are tuition-free public schools that families can apply to, regardless of where they live. As the graph below shows, half of charter school students live in low-income neighborhoods where median income is less than \$54,000 a year. About one-third of ISD students live in such neighborhoods.

However, charter schools do not have enough seats: there are over 66,500 children on charter school waitlists. Low-income Texas families want, need, and deserve more great options.

### EMPOWERING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Parents and grandparents who are engaged, committed, or ambitious will benefit from ESAs. Parent empowerment opponents say this is unfair, but they need to answer: *why shouldn't* low-income families have the ability to send their children to school with the children of other families who are equally engaged,



committed, or ambitious? This is what wealthy parents do when they go to private schools and it's what striving middle-class families do when they move to the suburbs.

If someone demands that engaged and committed parents send their children to school with the children of disengaged and uncommitted parents, then they need to explain why this standard applies to low-income families—and *only to them*.

## CLOSING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

Texas students are struggling: according to the Nation's Report Card, 23% of Texas 8th graders—and 17% of low-income children—are proficient in reading. Compared to other states, Texas ranks 42nd in the nation.

Twenty years ago, Florida students ranked 33rd in the nation in reading and 27th in math. Today, they are #1 in the nation in both. ESAs are a key program that helped them achieve this rank. Florida's improvement can also be seen in graduation rates: as the top-right chart shows, there was a 20 percentage point gap between White & Black graduation rates 20 years ago. Today, the gap is less than 5 points.

## VOICE FOR CHOICE

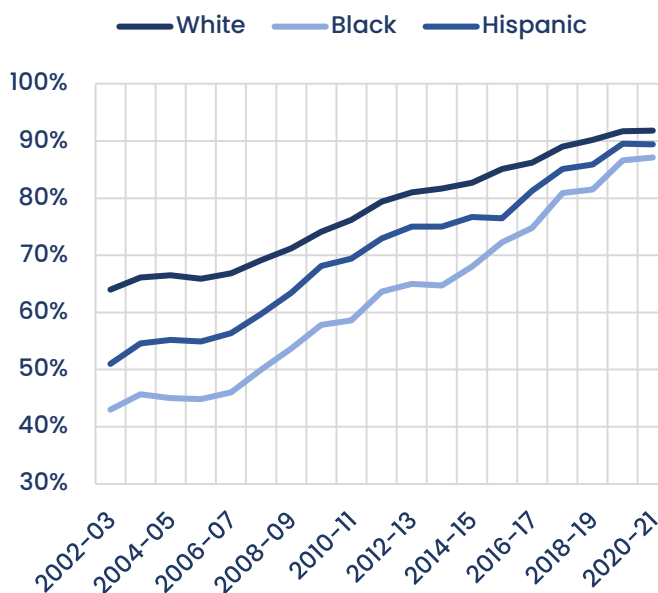
Hera Varmah, whose family participated in Florida's choice program, explains how choice helped them:

"Hard work paired with a strong moral foundation makes education powerful. My family's success wouldn't have been possible without school choice, which gave us access to that environment. Without my parents being blessed with the choice of which school to send us to we would not be where we are today... So, when people say that school choice doesn't work, I simply show them my family."

## WANT MORE DETAILS?

Research shows that choice improves outcomes for students in the program and children in local public schools. Scan the QR code at right for details.

Florida Graduation Rate, by Race (2003-21)



Hera Varmah, Courtesy American Federation for Children.



**VIDEO**  
Hera Varmah  
speaks to Texas  
lawmakers



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