Let’s Protect School Choice

Years ago, in Taiwan, I attended junior high school (Grade 9) where all of us crammed daily for the national high school entrance exams. It was common knowledge that in order to get into the best high schools, one had to get into one of the best cramming schools (after school tutoring centers) or get a top private tutor. Few of us got enough sleep or had a life outside of our studies.

Being the eternal rebel, I wondered: “Since only tutors and tutoring centers can get us through exams, then why do we need schools? Why can’t schools turn into exam centers and let the tutoring centers become daytime schools since they do a better job?” So we can sleep. But there was no other choice. The law made all children attend public schools and the national exams forced everyone into competitive cramming.

Today, in Arizona, we are blessed to live in one of the top states for school choice. We can opt out of our district public school if we wish. We can homeschool. We can go to a charter school wherever it may be located. We can go to a private school, and pay only whatever we can afford using tax tuition scholarships. We can use a combination of any of the above. With the growth of technology, we can attend school online, or download material and homework. All this without much hassle at all. How we want our children to be educated is now taken for granted.

We have forgotten the fight of those who got us there: the early homeschoolers who were dragged through court, and the lawmakers who got us our tax credits. Today, we might have to wake up again.

In Alabama, a legal drama is being played out where school choice is made to be a monster. Charter schools were proposed to be downscaled to not exceed 20 in the entire state (from the present 50). In Kansas, state Rep. Bill Otto argued against tax credit scholarships because he was worried about the expansion of Islamic schools, “What kind of schools might we develop?” Otto said, according to the [*Topeka Capital-Journal*](http://cjonline.com/news/2012-03-26/house-bill-regarding-school-vouchers-fails). “Schools that may or may not [agree](http://www.redefinedonline.org/2012/04/anti-muslim-bigotry-has-no-place-in-school-voucher-debates/) with your values or my values.” In Tennessee, a conservative group, the Tennessee Eagle Forum, pushed for passing the “Shariah bill” which would limit the number of foreign workers that can be hired by a charter school. Senate Bill 3345 would not only cap the number of legal immigrants at 3.5%, it would also require these schools to disclose the source of all overseas donations.

Although none of these bills has yet been passed, although CAIR has not yet taken up this issue, and although Muslims have often been rolled together with gays, lesbians, democrats and abortions, all parents who wish to protect their right to stay in control of their children’s education should keep updated on these sparks of Islamophobia. Let us not be lulled in the comfort of our children’s great educational strides and achievements. Let us watch out and if need be, become active.