# We Want a Better Education

*By Dr. Fawzia Mai Tung*

Every January, a Quality Counts “report card” is published by Education Week regarding the status of education in our nation. This year, Arizona ranked 44th overall, which is actually an improvement over its ranking 10 years ago when it constantly hovered between 48th and 50th.

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| Category | Arizona Score | Arizona Rank | National Average |
| Chance for Success | C- | 48 | C+ |
| K-12 Achievement | D+ | 31 | C- |
| Standards, Assessments & Accountability | B+ | 25 | B |
| School Finance | D+ | 47 | C |
| Transitions & Alignment | C | 41 | C+ |
| The Teaching Profession | D- | 28 | C |

If we look closer at the breakdown of Arizona’s C-minus, we see that Arizona actually scored above average in one category, that of Standards, Assessments and Accountability. This means, in lay language, that we have been working very hard on the AIMS. Eventually, this hard work is supposed to translate into better achievement for our K-12 students. But wait a minute, we look at “K-12 Achievement” and we see here that we scored a D+!

We ranked 47th in the nation for School Finance. Yes, we should have expected that. Funding has been cut and re-cut until classrooms swelled to 30 students per class. Within school finance, we scored worst on “Spending”.

In this year’s report, a special focus was placed on comparing our nation to the rest of the world. When asked whether they looked to other countries’ education data as a policy resource while trying to reform their own state’s education, officials in 29 states answered yes, while those in 21 states (including Arizona) and the District of Columbia answered no.

In a world that is shrinking, where economy is becoming global, where the US ranks barely above international average in Math education, can we afford to stay enclosed in a cocoon and not look to international educational standards and achievement? Why not look for best practices in other countries? Why is Arizona not trying to rise above national and international average?

Our state authorities in education make up their own standards, meaning that they decide what should be taught at which grade level. Then they force it down the throat of all public schools in the state, including charter schools. Charter schools are supposed to have more flexibility and autonomy in such things as curriculum. But the reality is that charter schools are becoming more and more like mini-district schools without the resources. They must toe the line and accept all applicants, even if the applicants do not fit the profile of the student population the school is trying to build.

I believe I speak for most of us, first generation immigrants, especially Asian ones, when I say, we want our children to go to college. We want our children to become professionals. We usually think that our children are geniuses in the making. We are tiger moms.

Yet, the system does not support our needs. Special funding is available for “exceptional students”, but only those that fall below the norm, not those that achieve above the norm. Any good program that might enhance our children’s minds is expensive. Homeschooling is expensive because one of the family’s wage earners must stay home, yet not receive the per-student funding available to public schools.

Even worse, large families receive no state benefits whatsoever. In France, large families have state-subsidized discounts for almost any expense, from subway tickets to food. Here in Arizona, if a large family wishes to enroll its children in robotics, martial arts, piano, etc, how much will it cost the family? Even family memberships to museums and zoos have a limited number of adults and children! If a large family wants to send every child to medical school, it should plan to go bankrupt or take enough loans to float a bank. Are we promoting quality education? Are we promoting choice in education? Are we promoting higher education? Is a better education for the rich only?

Right now, presidential candidates are honing their platforms and garnering our attention. In our own backyard in Mesa, Republican candidates are debating. I ask them: “What are you going to do to improve this country? For a better economy, you need a better education. For a better education, you need better teachers and resources. What are you planning to do about that?