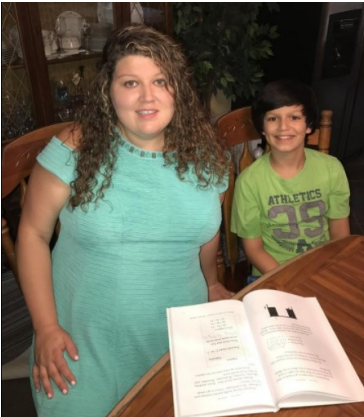


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Parents should decide best school for their kids

By Elaina Thomas Hansen



Elaina Thomas Hansen and her son, Adrian

When I hear people say they don't like school choice, I think they either don't understand how the Florida scholarship works and who's benefiting from it or there is something wrong in their heart and maybe they just don't care about our kids.

I couldn't believe some of the things written by Sue Legg, the president of the Alachua County League of Women Voters, in a May 14 column. I felt like she was not just attacking private

schools and charter schools, but moms like me who enroll their children in them.

Plenty of kids do great in public schools. When my friends whose kids are in public schools post their children's report cards on Facebook, I am happy for them. But not every kid gets what they need to succeed in public schools.

My son Adrian struggled in public school for two years before they were able to test him for an Individualized Education Program, then once he qualified they were unable to provide for all of his needs until even more testing was done. It seemed like I was spinning my wheels so I briefly put him in a good charter school for students with learning disabilities, but Adrian was already too far behind. He felt he was dumb and his confidence was shot.

So when I learned about the Gardiner Scholarship, I knew this was the help I've been praying for. My husband and I would be able to homeschool him, get him caught up and get him the tutors, therapists and technology he needed.

Adrian is 10 now and although he's still not reading at grade level, he is reading and he understands what he's reading! He has come so far in a short time and he's proud and motivated to keep going.

Because of the experience with Adrian, I applied for the tax credit scholarship for my youngest, Auriana. I did not want to take the same chance with her that I did with Adrian and I'm glad I did.

Her school, Countryside Christian, is like one big family. It has students of all races and backgrounds, and I can reach the teachers any time I have a question or concerns.

Auriana loves it! She is doing well academically. She's also learning things like respect for others and taking responsibility. I love when I go to the school and hear the kids singing, and saying "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am" to the adults.

I really don't understand when the League of Women Voters claims kids like mine aren't learning and that other kids are being harmed. The exact opposite is true. It's my kids who would have been harmed if the League had succeeded with its lawsuit to kill the tax credit scholarship.

Luckily, a few months ago, they lost. One of the reasons why was because they didn't have any proof for their claims about money being drained from public schools. Yet they keep saying the same things.

They also keep saying private schools and charter schools are cherry picking students. They even said those schools "can destroy neighborhoods." But all the studies show the kids who get the scholarships are the ones who are having the most trouble in public school. That's why parents like me are getting the scholarships. We want our kids to succeed!

You know what really destroys neighborhoods? Kids who fall through the cracks, don't believe in themselves and don't grow up to be productive adults. If a school can keep that from happening, it doesn't matter whether it's a public school, or private school or a charter school.

Legg is right about one thing when she stated, "We must recognize that not all choices are good choices." That's definitely true. It was surely true in my case. But when it comes to other people's children, it's not up to the League to say what's a good choice or not. When it comes to our children, we the parents should have that choice.