

**St. Mary's Academy Charter School
Beeville, Texas**



TRANSCRIPT: "INNOVATIVE STAFFING"

ALICE WHITLEY, K – 3 READING COORDINATOR: I think what helps to create a Blue Ribbon School; there are a lot of things, but I would have to say like so many things, it's people. People make the difference. People who have come in with the right attitude, with the children's best interests and well-being at heart, knowing that many of them have emotional and social services issues. Jokingly I said the other day, I don't know that I can work anywhere else, because when you know it can be done and you know somebody else isn't trying to get there or work that way, it sure would be hard.

MALINDA COWEN, SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR COUNSELOR: That's what is so great about St. Mary's. We try not to ever say "That's not my job or that's not my area." It's everybody's area. We are very attuned to the children's needs and I think that's unusual and I want to include in that same thing, early intervention, and that's really what we're talking about is early intervention and I would say that we do more of that than most schools do.

STAN SIMONSEN, PRINCIPAL/SUPERINTENDENT: All of our teachers meet the definition of being high qualified. Our salaries are competitive through the first 10 years of experience, roughly competitive. Beyond 10 years we are not at all competitive. Things that have made us successful is, we will hire retired teachers half time so we can get a teacher who's for instance had 40 years teaching experience who does not want to work a full eight-hour day but is willing to come in and work four hours. When you have a teacher like that, normally, she or he is giving you eight hours worth of everything.

We're very lucky in the quality of our paraprofessionals that come here. Part of the reason we're lucky is because if we see somebody we really like who comes in as a sub, we offer to send them to the Treasuring Our Paraprofessionals training, which gives them the training that meets the highly qualified standard. So we will try and send a group, look around and say "We really like these three individuals; let's see if we can't get them together." We'll pay for the training; we'll pay to drive one car down and we'll pay them for their days. I've had people say to me "You're crazy. Why would you do that? They will walk out and leave you," and I say, "You know they never have." We've been loyal to them and they have been loyal to us.

SUSAN CHINCARINI, BUSINESS MANAGER: Traditional school districts pretty much don't like part-time staff. They want everybody to be on an annualized salary full-time. To be able to accommodate our needs and the needs of our staff, in particular instances we go the part-time route. If we need to hire someone for five hours a day and it suits their needs and ours both, [and]

they have a great deal of knowledge or expertise in a particular area, we will do that. It makes our payroll very difficult and time consuming, probably more so than a regular district, but we feel that it's worth it. We get the expertise. Maybe have a retired teacher who wants to come work a few hours a day but is very good in whatever area they teach in. We try really hard to accommodate that.

DAN PEARCE, UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR: It permeates from 7:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night and it is the family. It's the social and emotional as well as the academic. The thing that they have managed to do that I think makes this place unique is the administration. Not only children first, but an honest commitment to people, to individuals in a manner that I wish was more prevalent across education. He has managed to recruit people who do not need to work full time, but because of the commitment to the children and the school and their well-being, come and participate with skills that are well above the pay grade that they can offer here. It also ends up recognizing the strength of teachers and lets them proceed in doing what they do best. They know that they are valued and they know that they have an administration that will facilitate what they want to do.

NANCY CAVALLIN, SCIENCE TEACHER, BEFORE AND AFTER COORDINATOR:
Encouragement of getting teacher training throughout the year has helped tremendously also. I believe they're starting to require us to get a certain number of hours per year but we already do it. So I'm not even sure how many hours I'm supposed to get, but I already get 105 hours: I'm way above what they say that I'm supposed to. And many of our workshops are on Saturdays, so it's not that we're being pulled out of the classrooms, we're doing our workshops in the afternoons. We do some on campus and some in Corpus at the service center, and some at Texas A & M University.

VOICES OF STUDENTS:

What keeps me motivated, what the teachers do—Mrs. Brown, she pushes me to keep going so that I can be smarter. Ms. Ingram, she stays after school with me and helps me with all the math.

St. Mary's is a great school. They help us step by step and they always make sure we are doing our best. They won't let us fail.

The way the teachers teach you strategies and what you're supposed to do, if you just follow all of those strategies and do them, they you will get commended or pass.

OLIVIA DELEON, KINDERGARTEN TEACHER: The teachers here at St. Mary's Academy are very dedicated to the students. They provide morning programs, afternoon programs; they're providing a lot of extra interventions for their students. They're very proud of their school, they're very proud of their students and they project that in everything that they do.