

The Charter School A Crucial Safety Net

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The Winfree Academy Charter Schools provides a valuable safety net for ***students left behind by traditional independent school districts***. This safety net deserves a more equitable level of funding and support by the State.

Prior to starting a new and rewarding career as a high school mathematics teacher, I had a successful career as a mathematical statistician/analyst/programmer. Throughout my career I remained in-touch with education as a teacher and as a learner. I was an adjunct assistant professor at a community college. I taught developmental mathematics, introduction to mathematics, statistics and technical mathematics. I also continued to broaden my education by completing degrees in addition to bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics. I added associate degrees in data processing, business management and business administration, masters degrees in information systems and management science/operations research and a doctorate in biblical studies.

Over the years, my primary goal was to have a second career in a position where I could help young people and have a positive impact in their lives. As I approached retirement, my co-workers and I agreed that a second career as a middle school or high school mathematics teacher would be a good fit for both me and the students. After retiring and taking a long vacation, I completed my teachers' certification. I have standard teaching certificates, mathematics (4-8) and mathematics (8-12). I am now in my second year of teaching at Winfree Academy Charter Schools.

Prior to the start of my second year of teaching at Winfree, I debated within myself, the much higher pay in an Independent School District or to continue as part of the Winfree Academy Charter Schools. I decided that the Winfree Academy Charter Schools provided a much better safety net for catching and nurturing some of the students who had been left behind by the better supported independent school districts while also enabling high achieving students to graduate early.

During my first year of teaching at Winfree, I experienced the effectiveness of the safety net.

- Recovering drug and alcohol users were able to leave their habit behind and continue their education.
- Expectant and young mothers were able to continue their education.
- Many students were able to receive some one-on-one and small group instruction.

One student helped me to better understand the critical need for Winfree Charter Schools. I will refer to this student as Jan. Jan came to Winfree from a very prestigious traditional high school. While at the traditional high school Jan had been left behind. Jan was told that she/he would never amount to anything, was isolated and practically forgotten. After working on a more individualized basis with Jan and helping to restore Jan's confidence, Jan became very productive and greatly exceeded expectations. Jan's nightmarish experience in the traditional high school has been left behind and Jan is now moving forward at Winfree Academy.

At Winfree Academy the structure is flexible like a net and it help prevent students from falling into the failure category. The courses are self-paced. One-on-one and small group instruction can be provided with great flexibility. Lessons can be repeated until a student masters the topic. No grade is assigned until the student masters the lesson. Therefore, failure is not an option.

The Winfree Academy Charter Schools provides a valuable safety net for some students who are left behind by traditional high schools. A safe landing is provided and they are supported and set free to move forward toward graduation. The State of Texas should strengthen their support of these students.