

Hosack makes debut as Mac principal

May 28. The day the teachers and students had been waiting for since the moment principal [Mike Garrison announced on April 11](#) his plans [to retire at the end of the summer](#).

There was chatter among the group of about 25 or 30 parents catching up on their brief tastes of summer vacation, talking about future plans and whispering about the big new change. The speech began, and McCallum's new principal dove right in, addressing topics from the daunting challenge of filling Garrison's shoes to her main philosophies in leadership to her love and admiration for McCallum students even though she hasn't met them yet.

“

Please know that I am coming in respecting the work that [Mike Garrison] has done. I'm not here to rock your world and turn you on your ear.”

– interim principal Brandi Hosack

And then, without hesitation, she answered the huge, long-awaited, most anticipated question of the evening. The audience members leaned forward, on the edge of their seats.

“It's pronounced ho-zik. It's a good strong Czech name, which means you say it nothing like it's spelled. Just pretend it says 'z-i-k' at the end, and you'll get it right.”

With nine years of administrative experience and 10 years in public-school teaching, Brandi Hosack is joining the McCallum community with much prior experience. She holds a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M in kinesiology and biology and in educational administration from the University of Texas, marking her journey as an Aggie, a Longhorn and now, a proud

Knight.

For most of her professional life, 14 years, she worked at Akins High School, moving from student teacher, to softball coach, to full-time teacher for several years. She then taught briefly at Samuel Clemens High School in Schertz near San Antonio, and returned a year later to Akins as science department chairwoman, assistant principal, academy director, interim principal and eventually [principal](#).

Many Akins students and teachers recognized her positive impact on the school.



Dave Winter

Hosack joked that her three young sons, ages 5, 6 and 7, might on occasion be seen tearing through the Mac hallways and that they thought their mom's job was pretty lame. But then she added that her perspective as a parent who wants the best for her children made her a better principal.

"She created a campus community that was very open and communicative and productive and also career-oriented, and those were all very positive." said Akins Class of 2019

graduate Bethany Bissell, a news editor for the Akins newspaper, *The Eagle's Eye*, who will be attending LSU in the fall. Bissell added that Hosack stressed the positive aspects of the school and mirrored those qualities in her leadership at the school.

"She really valued transparency and compassion, and it was very refreshing," Bissell said. "I remember she shook hands with students a lot; she made it a priority. Whenever I would see her around campus, [she would] stop students and speak to them and interact with them positively. It was very nice."

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Something that was really great about Hosack was that she cared a lot about forms of student expression. And she really saw the value in student press and the vitality of our service and because of that we got to operate more or less freely. That was really great. "

– Bethany Bissell, *Eagle's Eye* editor, Akins Class of 2019

Bissell also addressed some of the positive changes that Hosack she made to the school during her time as Akins principal, including the Restorative Justice Program, a disciplinary system that Hosack installed. "That was something that Hosack cared a lot about," Bissell said.

According to Stephanie Valle's November 2015 story posted to the *Eagle's Eye Online*, the purpose of the restorative justice program was to deal with discipline issues in a way that helped the student solve the problems that caused the misbehavior to occur rather than focusing on the punishment for the misbehavior. A key strategy in the program was the listening circle where all affected parties would sit in a circle, and each person, including the student who committed the infraction, could propose ways to make right what had gone wrong.

The program's key purpose—to provide avenues to improve communications between stakeholders at the school—was a major theme that Hosick stressed in her initial conversations with the faculty and the community. Her success in doing just that led Bissell to offer this assessment.

“I don't want to sing too many praises, but I think that you [McCallum kids] really lucked out in terms of your new principal.”

The faculty at Akins also recognized her strong leadership of the school. Journalism teacher and newspaper adviser David Doerr agreed that Hosack was an excellent communicator.

“She's really good at listening to people,” Doerr said. “She makes decisions with how it will impact everyone in mind, not just, you know, immediate repercussions.”



Dave Winter

New interim principal Brandi Hosack, right, chats with retiring science teacher Richard Whisennand after Hosack met

with the faculty on the morning of May 28. Whisennand told the *Shield* on multiple occasions over the years that students need to know that their teachers care about them before they will work hard for them. It is a theme that Hosack stressed in both meetings on May 28 and in her interview with *The Shield's* Elisha Scott.

Doerr also said that she was approachable and available to her teachers.

"I never felt afraid to go to her with anything, like a question," he said. "It really was an open door policy. Sometimes you hear that, and it's just a saying, but in her office, her door was open and you could just go in and talk to her quickly. It wasn't like she was hiding behind a secretary or anything."

Doerr said that Hosack also valued pride in the school, both from herself and the students.

"She wasn't shy about her love for the campus and sharing that with the community, and making sure the students felt that way too," Doerr said, adding that the signature hashtag on [her Twitter account](#) during her days as Akins principal was [#besthigschoolontheplanet](#). "She really seemed to care and wanted students to be proud of their school. ... She was out there, she was always going to events, she had a really good presence, walking around campus she would be happy to interact with students. I remember being at an assembly, or a pep rally, and students just shouting "We love you Ms. Hosack!"

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– Akins journalism teacher David Doerr

Doerr also brought up another unique system put into action by Hosack called the “Academy Cup.” He described it as a sort of competition between different faculty members in different academies within the school. It would occur on a holiday where the students had off, but the teachers still attended the school day.

“It was kind of late in the year to do a lot of professional development, so instead of having us cooped up in classrooms we were out doing like American Ninja Warrior type physical challenges, or other types of fun competitions like karaoke or something else.”

But Doerr said that Hosack’s time at Akins was not all fun and games. She dealt with several school security concerns during her time at principal, experience that might serve her well at McCallum given the social media-driven school security concerns that Garrison had to deal with in 2018.

“She had to deal with a lot of [safety concerns] around our campus in those three years,” Doerr said. “You know, we had [a lockdown last year](#) and she had to deal with that, she had a way of making people feel safe in those kinds of turbulent situations.”

According to the *Eagle’s Eye Online*, Akins was put on lockdown on Feb. 22, 2018, after a former student made a terroristic threat on the campus. Students stayed in their classrooms for about three hours until the suspect was apprehended and arrested at a shopping center near the Akins campus.



Dave Winter

Hosack is interviewed by rising sophomore people editor Elisha Scott. While Hosack has a track record of supporting student expression and using her Twitter account to promote the school's image, she also said that parents and faculty must work together to teach students how to be responsible about using social media.

Prior to that incident, according to the *Eagle's Eye*, in October 2016, Hosack dealt with a social media-fueled threat to the Akins campus when [an Akins student was arrested after posing as a clown](#) and posting messages that threatened violence against Akins students.

"I will always go to the side of caution," Hosack told Brenda Amaya-Rangel and Stephanie Valle of the *Eagle's Eye Online*. "I don't think we could have possibly taken it more seriously and if anything continues to occur we will take that seriously, too."

"

She was always willing to talk, like if you didn't want to talk to a counselor, she'd be fine with talking to you. She would put down whatever she was doing so y'all could have a conversation."

– Tillery Larson, North Forney Class of 2019

Hosack final comment in the interview suggests the governing philosophy she will bring to a similiar situation should it occur at McCallum in the future.

“My No. 1 job is to keep kids safe before we can do anything else,” Hosack told the *Eagle’s Eye Online*. “Kids have to be safe on campus. Very close behind that is to make sure that they are receiving the best education possible, but I can’t do one without the other. As much as social media is ruling the world I need parents to know that I am going to do whatever it takes to make sure the kids are safe on this campus 100 percent of the time so if that means I have to send out a letter and be really honest and say this is what’s going on then that is what I will do. If that means that I have to lock us down to make sure we are in a safe place that’s what I am going to do. If I have a decision that I have to make, I’m going to go with what is the best thing to keep kids safe. I’m going to take whatever precautions are necessary to make sure (the kids) are safe so that (parents) don’t have to worry about anything when (their kids) come to school.”

[Hosack left Akins after the 2017-2018 school year](#) and moved to suburban Dallas in order to deal with some family matters. [During the 2018-2019 school year, she served as the principal at North Forney High School](#), about 30 miles east of Dallas. One North Forney student, Class of 2019 graduate [Tiffany Larson posted to her Twitter account](#) that despite only being principal for one year, Hosack had been “by far ... the best principal North Forney has ever had.”

Larson said that Hosack immediately improved the climate at North Forney by making it a friendly environment. Larson said that Hosack tried to create an open campus, to eliminate school uniforms and she starting putting up posters all over the school to promote respect of individual students. Two of

the posters, Larson remembered read “No doesn’t mean convince me” and “It’s OK to not be OK.”

“She was very mental health aware of her students,” Larson said.

Hosack’s greatest asset, Larson said, was her own character and personality.

“She’s very fun to be around,” Larson said. “She makes every place that you’re with her fun, whether she’s ... at a football game and [trying to] make sure everybody’s OK, or she’s just in the cafeteria. ... She was always willing to talk, like if you didn’t want to talk to a counselor, she’d be fine with talking to you. She would put down whatever she was doing so y’all could have a conversation.”

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When asked how long she intends to stay at McCallum, Hosack answered simply ‘forever.’”

According to Doerr, Hosack was the same way at Akins.

“She would make herself available,” he said. “She had an open-door policy, I never felt afraid to go to her with anything, like a question, it really was an open door policy, like sometimes you hear that and it’s just a saying but in her office her door was open and you could just go in and talk to her quickly.”

The respect that Hosack showed to individual students and teachers, Larson said, Hosack also extended to each school organization.

“The band [at North Forney] doesn’t usually get recognized,” Larson said, “and she actually did. She would recognize the band, she would talk up about them. It wasn’t so football-team driven. It was like, ‘We have other extracurricular things like theater; we have band; we have dance, and she’d keep us

all updated on what those groups are doing. It wasn't just about the sports teams."

While Hosack made an impact at North Forney, she made it clear that she longed to be back in Austin.

"Once you're in Austin, you can't really go to Dallas. You can go Dallas to Austin, but you can't really go the other way around," she said jokingly during her speech to the community. "They referred to me as the Austin hippie the entire year there, and they are absolutely right. I am, and I'm proud to be so. ... I'm glad to be back home."



Madelynn Niles

When asked about specific concerns at the community meeting, Hosack mentioned that the faculty needed to work with parents to protect students from social media and substance abuse and that she wanted to make sure that all classroom activities were focused on teaching core objectives not just encouraging class participation.

When asked how long she intends to stay at McCallum, she answered simply "forever."

She continued by saying, “I plan to stay forever. I don’t take on the job of interim to be a short-term event. My intention is to become the principal of McCallum and to keep pushing forward for a long time. For a long time do I plan to be a McCallum Knight.”

Perhaps in part because hopes to be McCallum principal for the long haul, she made it very clear in both sessions that her first priority is to observe the school as it is.

“

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– Parent Lisa Alverson

“I think that for me to be a good leader, I first need to listen,” she told *The Shield*. “There is a lot to learn from Mr. Garrison. I am good friends with him, and I’m telling you what, I think he’s top notch. Please know that I am coming in respecting [the work that he has done](#). I’m not here to rock your world and turn you on your ear – I am here to make sure that I take the time to get to know you, to build a relationship with you... and to make sure that the success continues.”

“I certainly can’t fill his shoes, but I will try to do my best to do his work justice and make sure that I do him proud.”

Hosack also made it clear that relationships with the students and faculty are a priority of hers.

“My goal is to have a relationship with every person in this building,” she told *The Shield*. “There’s a lot of people in this building; that doesn’t necessarily mean we’re going to know each other by name right off the bat. But to have the

relationship, for students to know that they can come to me for any reason that they need to, my door is literally open to them, and for the staff to know what I'm about. I have no surprises, I have no hidden agenda, I have very positive intentions for this place."

Larson predicted that those intentions will become clear to the McCallum community soon enough.

"[Hosack] will come in with a very driven attitude," Larson said. "She will start to change things as soon as she can, but they're never bad changes. She will just try to make everything to the best of her ability, and she always tries to get student input. She'll send out little surveys like, 'What would you guys think about this?' or 'Was this OK what I did?' She would do stuff like that."

For their part, the parents who attended Hosack's initial meeting seemed to appreciate her warm welcome. "She is high energy, she seems enthusiastic, she seems very aware of the fact that she's got some big shoes to fill at McCallum, and she seems up to the job," MAC mother Bergan Casey stated. "In many ways, she is [the] opposite [of] Garrison, not just in gender but in philosophy."

"

I don't have to know you yet to love and care about you. I don't have to know you on a personal level. I love who you are and I love what you're about and I love that we're going to get to go on this journey together."

– Interim principal Brandi Hosack's message to Mac students

Another parent, Lisa Alverson, agreed with these positive initial reactions. "I was surprised that her language was as social and warm regarding the students, and I thought that was really delightful," she said. "I love Mr. Garrison, and it

will be hard, but fortunately, like they were careful to say, she will be respecting the leadership that he used at the school, and not try to not overstep what he did, but polish it in her own special way.”

At the conclusion of her interview, she was asked what she wants the McCallum kids to know.

“I’m going to say something to them that’s probably going to be a little strange,” she said smiling. “ I’m going to tell them that I love them, because I don’t have to know you yet to love and care about you. I don’t have to know you on a personal level. I love who you are and I love what you’re about and I love that we’re going to get to go on this journey together.”

She spoke in extreme detail of how much she admires McCallum and how honored she feels to begin this new adventure. Her speech to the community had an emphasis on this gratitude: “I know how special this place is. I absolutely do know that, and I am blessed beyond measuring to be a part of it. I had quite a few phone calls the other day when the news came out that it was going to be me, and everyone single person said, ‘you are lucky,’ and I said “yes, I know.”

In some ways that assessment makes her challenge even an even greater one. How do you improve upon something that is already pretty great? It’s a challenge she seems ready to embrace.

“You are all already rock stars. Now – how do we possibly put polish on that?”

*–with reporting by Anna McClellan and Elisha Scott,
transcription by Ellen Fox and Anna McClellan*

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[In Episode 8 of 'The S Word,' Mike Garrison talks Mac](#)

past, present and future



Thank you, Mr. Garrison, for everything