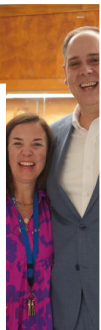


Baxa's first

Hitting landmark in role, principal reflects on his progress, goals



days

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Oct. 18, marks Andy Baxa's 100th day as principal. In the same way that a president is evaluated at the beginning of a term, Baxa reflected on his progress in the four main categories of principal performance: Instructional leadership, talent and development, communication and relationships and culture building.

Instructional Leadership: B-
The first category examines a principal's ability to innovate learning to the school with new methods. Examples of success include researching best practices for instruction and cultural responsiveness, looking at data sources to maximize student growth and providing relevant and professional learning.

According to Baxa, this area had to take a backseat until beginning-of-year needs were addressed.

"It's an important part of the job, but right now, we've been focused so much on the logistical aspects, the scheduling and trying to get everything running the way it should," Baxa said.

Baxa's focus for instructional leadership centers around not only raising the percentage of students passing their STAAR EOC tests but also raising students reaching the mastery level. "A lot of times in instruction, you see teachers

that teach to the middle," Baxa said. "I want to challenge them to teach to the edges — the low and the high. Switching the mindset will push them to achieve at the higher levels."

Talent and development: A-
The second category addresses the principal's ability to encourage student and staff progress. Examples of success include building a collaborative environment to develop school goals and vision, ongoing teacher development and promoting student growth.

"I think McCallum is in really good hands," Griffith said. "I felt a lot better about the decision for me to step down from McCallum when they did end up choosing Mr. Baxa. [Students and staff] know and love him and have always been so supported by Mr. Baxa."

Currently, improvement in this area has centered around training the APs, three of which are new to McCallum and two of which are new to AISD. This process includes weekly meetings to discuss their individual responsibilities and get them up to speed on school-specific procedures.

"[They] bring a fresh set of eyes to look at some things that maybe we were unaware of."

Communication and relationships: A
The third category

measures the principal's ability to connect with the school community. Examples of success include creating positive professional relationships with colleagues and families and making an environment where all staff feel welcome.

Communication comes naturally to Baxa. Throughout the day, he gets out of his office to interact with students and teachers. Every 30 minutes or so, he makes it a point to go around the school to walk into classrooms and observe different classes.

Student Body President Olivia Hexsel finds this aspect of Baxa's leadership most helpful in his transition to the new principal.

"He is very strict, but he is also always welcoming to our community," Hexsel said. "At McCallum, we are a very diverse community. [Mr. Baxa's] been so welcoming to new students and everyone."

Baxa has also incorporated a weekly newsletter that goes out to parents in an email on the weekend.

"My communication strategy is that you can't over-communicate," Baxa said. "There's going to be somebody in that chain who appreciates the fact that that information is coming and appreciates the fact that we're keeping them informed."

Culture building: A-
The final category considers the principal's ability to create and facilitate a school identity. Examples of success might include efforts for embracing all voices in the school community, promoting systems that encourage outreach with the

REPORT CARD

Instructional leadership **B-**

Talent & development **A-**

Communication & relationships **A**

Culture building **A-**

Overall performance **B**

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— principal Andy Baxa

community, having high expectations and empowering students and staff.

After 20 years working at the school, Baxa understands the importance of culture. For students, this has helped facilitate a smooth transition between principals.

"He really tries to encourage the student body to go to events, go to homecoming and go to games," Hexsel said. "It's really important to build that school spirit because I think that is what makes Mac whole."

Baxa agrees. He has no intention of making sweeping changes that would impact the culture of the school. This starts with a freshman seminar, led by current students, to discuss norms and explain how the school works.

"Our students are doing a good job on educating [the freshman]," Baxa said. "Hearing from us is one thing, but hearing from students is completely different."

Overall performance: B
The combination of these four categories makes up the criteria for overall performance, taking into account both timing and progress.

"I'm learning," Baxa said. "I can't give myself an A until I know everything about the job. And I think that's OK."

But a B for Baxa, earned after only 100 days, is alright by him because he's playing the long game and is committed to the success of the school.

"The school itself is a unique place," Baxa said. "It's someplace that I've been able to grow and learn and develop as an educator. It's taken care of me over the years, so I want to take care of it."



At the 2020 Back to Mac pep rally, Zach Napier, Colby Jones, Andrea Paredes and Janael Copeland wrap Baxa in streamers. Photo by Bella Russo.