



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Maria Drennen is ready for her first year as principal at Oakdale Elementary School.

# Laying the bricks of education

New principal at Oakdale Elementary ready to help students soar

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Maria Drennen has a brick in her office at Oakdale Heights Elementary School.

The heavy red brick reminds Drennen, the school's new principal, how important the grades Oakdale teaches — kindergarten through third — are to a child's educational future.

Drennen, whose former job was as a middle school counselor in the McMin-nville School District, said the early elementary grades are the foundation.

"This is the age when you begin patterns. When I worked in the middle school, and you had a student who had missed 30, 40 days, you could pull their file and say, this started in kindergarten," she said. "We really think of these as the

**Maria Drennen's first-year goals**



- \* Improve attendance.
- \* Get to know each family and child by name.
- \* Begin "service days" for all students as a chance to contribute to the community.
- \* Provide leadership opportunities for Oakdale staff members.

foundational years. So I've given each staff member a brick to symbolize that this is the foundation."

Her assignment to her staff was to find three words that describe why they are educators and paint them on the brick. She already knows hers: "Uplift the heart."

"It's very important to me that people feel loved and competent, because when they feel those two things, their confidence soars and

good things happen," Drennen said.

She wasn't long beyond those "foundational years" when she discovered education would be her career.

"I've known I wanted to be a teacher since I was in sixth grade," she said. "I was a teacher's aide."

She spent the remainder of her middle and high school years gaining as much experience in the field as she could. Drennen didn't have any second thoughts

going into college — nor has she since.

"Watching a child learn something that you've helped them with, I think that is the greatest feeling for a teacher — to be a part of that, like you're sharing in their journey," Drennen said. "That is a gift to us."

For her, moving from teacher or counselor to principal means she can influence the education of more students.

"At some point in my counseling career I wanted to have that greater impact," she said. "I felt I had the right beliefs and values to do this role with care."

A native of the small Washington coast town of Grayland, Drennen saw Dallas not only as a place to jump into administration, but as a place make a future with her son Brody.

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# New principal, familiar face

Brazeau works double duty as Central's leader, superintendent

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — Buzz Brazeau is settling in for the school year in a new office.

The superintendent of Central School District will work double duty as Central High's principal.

"I'm having a good time," he said. "It's fun to be back in the high school environment. What I'd forgotten is, the pace of a school principal and the pace of a superintendent are dynamically different."

Brazeau said principals make dozens of decisions each day, whereas superintendents take dozens of things into consideration.

"But you're not making those decisions every day because you don't have to," he explained. "You're looking at more big-picture items, so you're gathering information and working things together."

At the high school, decisions on period or section changes have to be made immediately.

Brazeau is taking the principal position after Greg Mitchell left the district in June.

Steve Love, chairman of the school board, said the decision for Brazeau to fill both roles came after much discussion in executive sessions — which are closed to the public.

"The decision was largely based on Buzz's experience, and surrounding him with additional support staff, and everybody stepping up," Love said at the August board meeting. "It wasn't putting all the burden on Buzz, but leveraging his experience and using Jann Jobe to do evaluations and stuff like that."

Brazeau's contract was modified to allow him to fill both roles, and he will receive an additional \$25,000 for the school year. Love said that was far below what was in the budget for the high school principal's salary.

Brazeau said he has made a few changes at CHS, but doesn't have plans for anything dramatic.

"We're just making an effort to create some processes, some systems and some consistency," he said.

For starters, a Panther Success has been created. It will serve as a 30-minute intervention period built into the schedule between second and third period where students can get extra help with subjects that are academically challenging to them.

Brazeau said this period also could be used to show essential skills, which are required for graduation.

"In the past, we built classes into the schedule (for essential skills), which was really difficult," Brazeau said. "Some students are able to complete their work requirements faster than others, so it's kind of an in-and-out."

Essential skills help was available during the summer, and will also be offered during lunch breaks, before and after school.

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