Paula M. Hoover
Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Rick Strot
January 22, 2004
Waco, Texas

Strot
This is Rick Strot. I'm interviewing Paula Hoover at Hillcrest Professional Development School on January 22, 2004. We are in the Baylor classroom. Paula is currently the site-based coordinator and part-time music teacher at Hillcrest.

Hoover
Right.

Strot
Okay, so let's begin. Paula, first of all I would like to ask you, when did you first find out about Hillcrest Professional Development School or just professional development schools either way? When did you first become familiar with what was happening?

Hoover
I think it was probably early January '93 or so. I really didn't know anything about professional development schools. Rumor be—I worked with Waco schools over at Lake Waco Elementary.

Strot
Okay. And so you were a teacher with Waco schools?

Hoover
I was a teacher in the Waco schools.

Strot
And you were a music teacher.

Hoover
I was a music teacher, had been with them—I was in my fifth year at there.
Okay, thank you.

And then I had taught three years before that at a neighboring district.

And we began to hear rumor of this new idea that was being formed, and I guess in about—I’m thinking early February, maybe March, a form came out to all the campuses saying, We’re looking for twelve master teachers, and we’d like for them to have some expertise in some following areas. I remember technology specifically was mentioned, fine arts was mentioned, and then I think there was some mention about coaching in there. And I dismissed it really because of the word master teacher, because I did not have my masters. And master teacher translated in my mind to the word masters, so I dismissed it at that point.

And who did that come from? Do you remember?

I think I—I’m assuming it came through principals’ meetings and principals were told to hand it out to all their staff. Maybe they only put in the boxes of people—but from downtown.

(speaks at same time) But it came from the superintendent or something like that?

Yes, that would be my assumption.

And at that point, do you remember—you said you dismissed it, but do you remember, were there other people at your campus who went, “Oh, I’m going to apply for this.”?
No. I can’t remember anyone else around me. I can remember talking to one lady and asking her about it because she was someone in my mind who would be a good candidate, and she talked about, “No, I have no desire to do that. That’d be like teaching in a fish bowl with all those people in and out seeing you all day long and those kind of things.”

Okay. So, when you first heard about it in the memo—now you mentioned that there’d kind of been rumors that there was going to be a new school, and at that point, was it called a professional development school?

I would—my memory says yes, but I couldn’t swear to it.

And so when the memo came out, how much explanation was there in the memo of what they needed these teachers for?

There was—it’s a new school. At that point, there was at least something maybe referring it to lab schools to kind of get everybody to thinking that, because that was the genre we were—

The Baylor collaboration was there.

Yeah, it was very clear that this was going to be a school for Baylor education students to be practicing in the school, and that part of the responsibility you would take on as joining the staff would be to help in the training of them.

Right. Okay, so I’m sorry to interrupt your narrative, but—so, from
there, you kind of dismissed it at first.

**Hoover**
I did. And then I happened to be working with Georgia Green from the School of Music.

**Strot**
Georgia Green is Baylor faculty.

**Hoover**
She is.

**Strot**
At the time, she was in the music education program.

**Hoover**
Music ed, and she was just part of the music ed staff. She was not—

**Strot**
And you had been already in your position at North Waco.

**Hoover**
At Lake Waco.

**Strot**
Lake Waco. You had been receiving Baylor students from her?

**Hoover**
That’s correct. I’d already had student teachers for about two years. So we had that professional connection, and we also had a personal connection through church, actually. So one night, we were doing children’s choirs together at church, and the subject came up. And she had been on one of the planning committees someplace. I don’t know—I think she really was on the planning committee early on, not the one that actually went in and did the physical planning of this building and that sort of thing. But she said to me, “You really need to apply for that.” And I said, “Well, I don’t have my masters.” And she said, “Well, that’s not what they mean by master level of teachers. They’re looking more for people who have best practices and not so much the degree.” She herself had taught at the lab school at LSU, so
had had that experience of what it was like to work at a school where
you were training people and has very fond memories of that and
couraged me to do the same thing. So, I threw my name in the hat,
talked to some other elementary music people in the district and
couraged some of them to do the same thing, and then interviewed.

(laughs)

Strot
Okay, now, so when you went to interview, what was your sense of
how big the pool of music teachers was that they were interviewing?

Hoover
I had a pretty good sense that there were probably about three of us in
the pool. (laughs) I mean, somehow I really knew how many there
were.

Strot
And you had been approached personally by somebody involved. And
of the others that you know of that were in the pool to be hired, had
they also been approached personally?

Hoover
No, I don’t believe so.

Strot
Okay, so tell me about the interview process.

Hoover
There were, as I remember it, four people in the room.

Strot
And this was—took place where?

Hoover
It was over in the School of Ed, someplace in Baylor. I couldn’t tell
you in what room. I want to say a conference room—

Strot
(speaks at same time) So it was at Baylor?

Hoover
—but it was at Baylor, which immediately raised the levels of concern,
I think. It also was the first time I’d ever been interviewed by a group. I had never been interviewed by—it’d always been individual, one-on-one interviews. So it was that new style that was kind of beginning then. And there had been—again, there had been rumors floating around about how they were going to interview people. I’d heard rumor that they were going to pop popcorn without the lid on in front of you, and they wanted to see how many creative ways you could come up with to catch the popcorn kernels. (laughs) So I was highly disappointed when there was no popcorn. That turned out to be quite false. I also was about seven months pregnant. So maybe they did that for everyone else, but they felt sorry for me. I don’t know. But there were four or five people there in the room. I can remember Bianca was there. Mary Sappinfield, who was our first technology person here on campus.

**Strot**

Bianca was Bianca Ochoa.

**Hoover**

(speaks at same time) Ochoa. Dr. Eldenbarret(??) was in the room, and I believe Tom Proctor was there.

**Strot**

Okay, so that’s two Baylor faculty and two people who had already been hired—

**Hoover**

Right.

**Strot**

—for position staff at Hillcrest.

**Hoover**

For positions. Yes, that’s my understanding. And then Dr. Ron
McIntire was there in the room, too. I can remember him there.

**Strot**
So at that point, Dr. McIntire had been appointed principal.

**Hoover**
Right. He had been—yes. So—

**Strot**
And again, this was in March?

**Hoover**
Yes, I would guess about then. That would be my guess.

**Strot**
Of ’93.

**Hoover**
I don’t remember much about the interview other than it being pretty relaxing, encouraging, maybe some questions about how I would go about supporting the classroom teachers and their work, some interdisciplinary questions. Then some specific questions about my work with student teachers, how I liked that, didn’t like it, what I found motivating about it, that sort of thing. But I don’t remember any unique question that struck me as being very strange or anything like that.

**Strot**
During that interview, did they also explain to you some things about the school?

**Hoover**
I don’t recall that.

**Strot**
When you came out of the interview, what was your feeling about what was happening then, in terms of you’ve gone through the interview, you were somewhat committed to they might offer me a job, what am I going to do kind of—so what was your overall impression as you came out?
I was really—I mean, I was excited. I was hoping it would happen. Dr. Mac had been very explicit when I walked in and said, you know, We can’t—he just made the legal statement that obviously my condition cannot be considered on if I would be hired or not. And I felt very optimistic about that, that he had very openly done that. And not optimistic that he would hire me, but it just felt like, Gosh, I’m really working with a new level of professionals here. And so that was encouraging.

Now, of the people in the room in the interview, you knew Bianca Ochoa somewhat?

No, I did not know anyone.

So you didn’t know anybody in the room.

I knew who Dr. Eldenberret was, and that was it.

Okay. And, so let me just ask you this. As you came out of the interview, what was your impression of these people who you knew were going to be part of this new enterprise? What first impression did they make on you in the interview?

I think probably excitement. I think that was—it was just a real strong feeling of you know, here are people who are really excited about what they’re doing. And truthfully, I left that interview feeling like I could be part of that group. I could maintain, I could carry my load, I could do that. Later on, we had a meeting once we were all chosen, and we
had a couple of two days in-service together, and then after that first day, I went home and expressed to my husband that I was out of my league. There was no way I was going to be able to keep up with these people.

Strot

Well, let's go on to that, because that was kind of the next question. Once you went through the interview process, and then I assume what, four weeks or so later you found out that you had the position?

Hoover

Yeah, something like that.

Strot

(coughs) So, when did you then first become part of the Hillcrest group? What was your first meeting, those kinds of things?

Hoover

About mid-April, as I remember it, they invited us to what was then the—hm, what was it called? The Brazos Room. There was a club here in town, and somebody had a membership, so we met and had lunch at the Brazos Room to begin some vision planning and just discussion of curriculum and those sort of things. It was during the week, and so they had to release—ask our principals to release us to do that, and we had all staff present except for we had one spot that wasn’t filled at that point still. So it was my first meeting—

Strot

So, that was—let’s think about that first staff—so that was how many—minus one—that was how many people in the room? That would have been—

Hoover

We would’ve had Ann Deweese—well, now when I say that, it would
have been all master teachers. Because we have to remember that
our—within a learning environment, one was a master teacher and the
others would be new teachers named.

Strot (speaks at same time) So this was the group of master teachers. So
that—

Hoover (speaks at same time) So we’re talking about fourteen peop—
should’ve been about fourteen people.

Strot Okay, because that would be: one, two, three, four, five, six master
teachers.

Hoover Right. And at that time, we did not have any pre-k ________________
come on(??). That was not the plan.

Strot So, seven with kinder right? No, no. Six master teachers—

Hoover (speaks at same time) Six, and then a P.E. and music, and that’s it.

Strot The P.E. teacher.

Hoover Oh.

Strot Yourself, the music teacher.

Hoover And technology.

Strot The principal, technology. Okay, and from Baylor, was anybody at
that meeting that you first went to?

Hoover Yes, I believe Tom was there, Tom Proctor. No one else stands out in
my mind.

Strot And do you recall anybody at that first meeting you attended from the
central administration?

**Hoover**
Yes. In fact, it was led by Debra Bishop, who at that time was working in administration for WISD in downtown administration. She led the meeting on the—particularly on the visionary planning.

**Strot**
Well, now that we’ve set the context, so tell me a little bit about the meeting. Because you definitely had an impression when you left the meeting.

**Hoover**
(speaks at same time) I did. Um, (laughs) I can remember watching a video on paradigms, which was probably the first time I’d ever heard that word. It was—it’s the first meeting with educators I can ever remember going in and talking about vision, about who we want to be, how we what want to go about doing it, instead of talking about the day-to-dayness of school, of curriculum, or you must—mandates. There weren’t any mandates. There were, here are these ideas, what do we want to be, what do we want to do?

**Strot**
So it wasn’t the normal, how are we going to schedule music and P.E.?

**Hoover**
No. That eventually came, but not in this meeting. This meeting really was about, How are we going to define ourselves? What is it we can agree on to be our vision as a school?

**Strot**
Well, tell me about that. What was your impression then as ya’ll talked about that? Was there—did you feel like there was a common vision? Did people agree on a vision?
I think people agreed early on. I think we came to a common understanding that all children can be taught, that all children can learn, and that we can find a way to do that. I think we also came to an agreement that we would respect one another’s methods of doing that, that they wouldn’t—(noise on tape for about twenty-one seconds; unintelligible)—that it needed to be out of the box to be successful. I don’t know if that was an agreement we made, but there seemed to be this consensus in the room of it all had to be unique and cutting-edge. And I think that’s where the fear for me arrived was I wasn’t sure I was cutting-edge enough to keep up with that.

Okay, very interesting. Now, as people articulated and talked about their understanding of the vision, or what they wanted to see as part of the vision—let’s put it that way—was anybody recording this? Was it then referred to in a later meeting, Here’s what we said here, or at later meetings, was the issue sort of revisited anew each time? Or out of—well, I guess what I’m asking is, out of this, did there come some statement that was then revisited later? Or was it still in the talking stage?

Hm. I can remember clearly having—writing a vision statement together. But then it seems at some point during one of those two days, we deferred back to the flyer that had the application on it that had already gone to families throughout WISD. And it seems at some
point, someone said, “Why are we talking about rewriting a mission when here is the mission already?” And that mission reflected much of where we had come to. So, that must have been recorded in some way. I can remember someone taking notes on a computer about what we were doing. What became of those, I couldn’t say. And I don’t know if I can rem—I mean, I can distinctly remember the next time we got together, but I can’t remember saying, Now, you remember when we met before, let’s refer back to those notes. I don’t remember that moment.

Strot: Okay. Now what was your—now, you said you met for two days.

Hoover: Uh-huh.

Strot: And that you primarily—the primary focus of that was coming to a common understanding of the vision and hashing out related issues to the vision.

Hoover: Right.

Strot: Okay. And then, after that, when did you next meet? Because that was mid-March.

Hoover: Mid-April.

Strot: Mid-April. Was it after school let out, or did you meet again before the semester let out?

Hoover: No, I don’t recall meeting again. The next meeting, early June.

Strot: So you went back and finished up at the school, knowing you were
going to go to a new school.

**Hoover**

Right.

**Strot**

Now, okay. So, between the time of the first meeting when you first met the staff and the time you reported for the next staff, official staff meeting, which came I guess in June or at the end of May or something like that—we’ll get into that in a minute—and you had a chance to think over what you would be doing and what had been said about the vision, what was your understanding at that point, in your own mind, for yourself, what was the vision of what you wanted to see happen for you at Hillcrest?

**Hoover**

Hm. I suppose I had a real desire to get out and to function someplace where it wasn’t the norm. And so I think I began to anticipate a chance to basically create what would become the norm, or that there wouldn’t be norm, but—I just felt like it was a total clean slate. I didn’t feel like there were any expectations of here’s what a music program must be. And so I think I was anticipating that, how can I tie in more with other disciplines.

**Strot**

Now, during this time, did you have—as you were thinking about these things, how this would look in terms of music, did you have any contact with Georgia Green again from Baylor, and did she—did you and she have a chance to talk over any ideas?

**Hoover**

Hm. Perhaps, though I can’t recall any enough to know—to think
about what that would have been. I did—

Just to continue that theme, when do you remember—because she would have been your contact in the music ed department—when do you remember then—again, she met a contact to ask you to apply—when do you remember again working with Dr. Green on what the music program or what the training would be like here?

You know, it must have been like June or so, because by the time we opened in July, she had asked, invited, agreed upon, however it was, that she would begin immediately to field-base her elementary music ed course. And so she was—I mean, the moment that I was named the music specialist here, she began totally to rewrite her syllabus so that class would become field-based out here.

And I know the school received ample funds for equipment. Did she help you at all in choice of equipment that would help her with her syllabus, or did you already know pretty much what you wanted?

Actually, that was a real interesting thing. Back before I ever came on, someone had been asked to present to the planning group, how much money are we talking about for music equipment for this school and what would it be. So that list was created by then the fine arts district, which was David Crowder. And he had referred, interestingly enough, to another Baylor person who had worked together with some others, though it wasn’t Georgia. She had never seen the list. But there were
some other Baylor music ed people who had made recommendations about what should be on this list. So, that list was created; nothing had been ordered until I came on and we began to order. And I worked a lot from that list, though I did away with some things and brought on other things instead. But I can’t—I think I probably asked Georgia from time to time, “I’m thinking about ordering this, what do you think about it?”, and she’d give her opinion, but there wasn’t a time when we just sat down and went through the list about what do you need to do the field-base part of it.

Strot

Now you mentioned before that you were expecting a child when you were hired, and I seem to remember that there was a connection with Georgia in this regard. So tell us a little bit about that with—

Hoover

Well, I was due to deliver the week school opened. And, early in July or so, she was up here I guess walking through the building with us by the time we were able to get in.

Strot

And let’s just interject here that the school was opening in July because they were on a year-round schedule. And this was during Baylor’s summer session.

Hoover

Right. That’s correct. And there were other schools in the school district who were on year-round, but they chose to open this one as a year-round school, too. So, we were in the room, Dr. Fred Zachary, the superintendent of schools, happened to be walking through that
day when she was here, and we had been brainstorming about what we could do about the sub situation, and Georgia had said, “You know, I’m not teaching any classes during the summer. It would really be fun if I could be your substitute while you’re out.” And of course, we talked about the pay that—how do you pay someone of her caliber for their pay. And Dr. Zachary came in, and we ran that by him, and he said, “I think that’s a great idea. We may have to—let’s see what we can do about getting you paid for what you should be paid and do that.” So through that conversation and some follow-up, she did sub for me at least four of the six weeks. So she—the first day of school, both she and I were here and introduced both of ourselves to the students, and she taught and I watched. And then I was gone from then on. And she—someone else must have come in for about week five and six, but she taught for the first four weeks, which allowed her to get to know all the children in the school. They got to know her. And then when she reappeared again in September with her music education students from Baylor, there was this relationship with all these students. I mean, they saw her as teacher as much as they saw me as teacher, and it was a great relationship that really we got to live off of for about six years for those who were in kindergarten all the way until they left us at fifth grade. And it’s still strange to me when she comes that people—the kids don’t know who she is right away,
unless they’ve had that with her, because for awhile everybody knew who she was.

So, the meetings in June then, that began. Let’s go back to that time, and that was really the start of the faculty planning for—and this was what, about a month before school opened?

Yes. It was very close. In fact, I had—my understanding was we were supposed to meet here on the campus when we started meeting in June. So I drove over here that day, and the only thing here was construction trucks, (laughs) and two of the other faculty members who I had—at that other meeting were here, John Fessenden and Aixa Snell. They too thought we were supposed to meet here that day. So while we were here, we walked through the building, the three of us, and it didn’t look anywhere close to us, and I can remember the hallway outside the music room was still dirt, specifically, and walking through the dirt thinking, In less than six weeks, we’re suppose to be in that room having music. And it didn’t look ready at all.

Did they get it ready in time?

Yeah. We were ready—I mean, yes, we were ready. I mean, there was many—there were rooms without equipment. We started without full equipment in the music room. I didn’t have any chairs or risers then. And it seems like there were some table and chairs missing from some classrooms, but we were in the building, and they had passed
inspection enough to get us in to start on July the thirteenth. But, so
then—so we met over here—well, we didn’t meet. We weren’t
supposed to be here, but we went on and toured the building, and then
we were meeting over at the administration building. And we met
together at least for a full week every day.

Strot

Now, when this group started meeting in June, had there been some
who had been meeting prior to this?

Hoover

Not faculty members that I know of.

Strot

So, at this—at the point in June when the faculty came together to
start the planning, who had been working with Dr. McIntire? Because
he had come on board some time before.

Hoover

Right. When—he had come, I believe, about February. He had been
hired away from his school district about then and had moved up here
entirely. And, then when the school year was over, he had encouraged
us, and through his connection, we had hired John Fessenden and
Aixa Snell who both came—had previous relationships with him in
teaching for him as their principal.

Strot

So, but he had—at that time, he had an office down in central
administration.

Hoover

That’s right, on the sixth floor.

Strot

To take part in all of the planning between Baylor and all that?

Hoover

Right. That’s correct.
Okay. So he had been here prior, and part of the March meet—the April meeting and all the ____________(??)

(speaks at same time) Absolutely. Absolutely.

And you mentioned he was there when they interviewed you.

Right. And he had—I mean, like I had spoken with him on the phone from the administration office. I mean, that’s where he had called me from when he had offered the job and those kind of—and in fact he had asked me some very strong questions.

One last thing, before we go into those planning sessions. And that is, what was the reaction at the school you left towards you leaving to come to this new, exciting school?

I think it was mixed. I think publicly to me it was—I mean, I know it was—publicly to me it was supportive, good will.

Were you the only teacher that came from Lake Waco?

No. Actually, Ms. Dupree came also, and—

So, they lost both their music and P.E. teachers.

—and our first custodian came, too. Barbara Harris.

So they lost their head custodian.

That’s correct.

Okay. Now, so in that context, of course, overtly everybody was congratulatory and could see it as a good career move.
that’s where it was. I don’t think there was any—there was probably some dissatisfaction at that point with our principal, so I think probably some of them were like, Yeah, I don’t blame you, those kind of things. But I don’t think anyone—

Strot

It was the normal leaving kind of thing.

Hoover

I think so.

Strot

So, I guess what I’m getting at, did you perceive anybody, you know, sort of sour grapes, I wish I were going over there kind of thing?

Hoover

No, I did not at all, interestingly enough.

Strot

So people weren’t exactly clamoring at that point to be transferred.

Hoover

(speaks at same time) No, which has always been one of the mysteries for me. But no. I can also distinctly remember sitting in an elementary music teachers’ meeting, when we met monthly, when that flyer had first come out, and encouraging other music teachers to apply. And it was even before I was thinking of applying. But how many—I mean, I can go around and see faces in my head of people saying, There’s no way I would do that. And I can remember that very distinctly.

Strot

I’m going to turn the tape over at this point because we’re getting at the end.

Hoover

(speaks at same time) Okay.

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.
Okay, this is Rick Strot. This is side two of the oral history for Hillcrest PDS interview with Paula Hoover on January 24, 2004. And Paula, I’m sorry for the interruption. We were just talking about the feelings among other teachers about this new enterprise and—being opened up and so on. So, let’s focus in now on those first—that month of planning. Let’s focus in on that time before—right before the school opened. And if you wouldn’t mind, if you could tell me a little bit about what your role was in this planning, as the music teacher.

Right. Well, I mean, I guess I don’t think of it as me being the music teacher. I mean, it really—

Well, let’s back up just a minute, because I’m just assuming planning. Why don’t you describe what happened, first of all, in that time before the school opened?

I think it was just a week. We were called in basically for a week to come in and be paid for a week to do the planning. We were on the sixth floor. They had some empty office space. They had stuck Dr. McIntire in. And those of us who were hired at that point began to meet daily in this conference room there.

And at that point, were all the master teachers hired?

We still did not have the Snickers. We did not have the second and third grade person yet—who became Sandra Jennings.
Okay.

We also had hired Joanna McClennan as our secretary and Marlene—that’s the first time I can remember meeting Marlene Proctor—as our Partners in Education liaison. But we began to meet there in that room at that conference table and daily schedule-type things began.

And one of the things I know we had to do was to make sure that we had enough students to fill the school. So we began to—all the cum records for the children whose name had been chosen at that point were sitting down there in those offices. So we began to go through those cum records to look at how to organize them into which classrooms they would go into, to look for the special needs students so we could begin to identify those, and to fill spots at grade levels that we weren’t at capacity.

Now, let’s talk about that student body for just a minute. As you went through the cum folders, were you given any kind of summary data of ethnic breakdown, those kinds of things?

I can’t remember ever looking that. I know that that was a specific thing about how we were picked. Because at that time, we were trying—we did do the lottery based upon the ethnicity breakdown of the district.

Okay. So—

We were under that ruling still.
So describe a little bit how these students then were chosen. Because by the time you got there in June—

They had been through the lottery.

They had been through the lottery.

In fact, the lottery had been done about three times by the time we got there in June. Because they did the first lottery, then anybody who turned down their positions, then they went to the second drawing, and even a third drawing. And I know that because there were kids at my school I was at who came through in the third drawing, finally.

And at the time, Hillcrest was the third elementary magnet school to open. There were two others at that time, weren’t there? The two Montessori magnets?

Okay. You know, I don’t know, Rick.

(speaks at same time) I think so, because I think—

I don’t know who—which came first.

Okay. Anyway, there was this existing lottery system for the magnet schools when Hillcrest came along. And so, what was your understanding of the way the students were chosen in the lottery?

There was a number of spots per grade level, and the students were divided up by their ethnicity and their grade level. And then we would choose so many percentage of African-American—you know, it wasn’t by grade level. It was just ethnicity. And we pulled so many from the
African-American pile, so many from the Anglo pile, and so many from the Hispanic pile to meet those ethnicity requirements. So if someone was chosen and they turned down their spot, then we went back to that pile to fill it.

**Strot**
And they could come from any school, correct?

**Hoover**
That’s correct.

**Strot**
In Waco. And, what about families? Was there any provision for families being chosen?

**Hoover**
If siblings—

**Strot**
In other words, if you applied, did you apply as a family or by child or do you—?

**Hoover**
Each child applied, but then there was something on the application so if child C came out, and their application showed that they had two siblings that would need to be in the school also, then those were written down, too. Which was why by the time you got to filling certain spots, if you pulled a child, and they were one of four kids in that family, if we didn’t have spots for the other three, then we couldn’t take the one. So it got really, really tricky, those last few ones we were trying to fill those spots. Basically, we needed to look for single children without siblings.

**Strot**
So the first thing you did was you went through—you had all the folders of the children and you had a list, I would imagine.
Hoover (speaks at same time) Right. And we began to make sure we had everybody’s folder and then put them into the classes that they would be assigned. And of course, at that point, it was just totally random because we did not—I mean, everybody knew a few children because they had come from Waco schools. And so, oh, yeah, that kid was at South Waco, or that kid was at Lake Waco, or whatever. But, you knew just a handful of children if you knew anybody.

Strot And how was it communicated to the community that they should apply to this new school?

Hoover That was done—I think Parents for Public Schools was just getting started here in Waco, and so they were used. PTA, city PTA helped with that a lot.

Strot Were there newspaper articles do you remember?

Hoover Yes, there were several newspaper articles about this school getting started. I can specifically remember one about the day that Dr. McIntire was named to be the principal here, and even though this building was closed down at that time, they named it out in front of this building, actually. So there were—I can remember two, three different news articles at that time. And then, applications weren’t—we weren’t getting as many as we wanted to, and that was at some point in the spring somebody(??) —well, Dr. McIntire was _________(??) And, so he went to principals’ meeting, the story goes,
and told them, “Let’s help get—I need you all’s help. I need to have kids to fill this new school, and so please help—I’ll take whoever you all want to send my way.” And at that point, we were told principals began to call families of different kids in their school and say, You might consider this new school. And gave us some of the challenges that we had from that first day, supposedly.

Strot

Well, as you think back to that first student body and the characteristics then as you saw emerging after having made the classes and so on, it was ethnically balanced you mentioned, according to what the ethnic balance of the school district is. How else would you characterize that group as a whole? Was it skewed in any way, or was it a pretty normal population of students?

Hoover

I thought it was skewed to two ends. I thought it was skewed to children from very, very involved families who were really looking for something unique and exciting educationally for their children. They were looking for something that wasn’t traditional, and that when you walked in the building, that they knew they were someplace different. They were looking for active learning, engaged learning, non-worksheet type activities. And so parents who really were not unhappy where they were necessarily, but looking for something that was way out of the box and would excite their children. And many of those I think were children who were gifted or their parents perceived them as
being gifted. But a family—from families who really were looking for what’s the best way to educate my child.

And then what was the other side?

Then the other side, I think, were people who were very disgruntled with the school they were at, many times because their children had some problems, be it behavior, or learning, or social, and they didn’t feel like the school was dealing with the situation, whatever it be. And so they felt like this was a new place to get a clean slate, and I think made assumptions and hopes that you were dealing with educators who had some special training or just special patience to work with all kinds of children. And so, we had that, those two ends of the spectrum.

Okay, let’s go back to the meeting then. You formed class groups as best you could without knowing the children—random choice, as you said. And what were the issues you remember from that first week of planning?

Two stick out very strongly in my mind. One was scheduling, making a music/P.E. schedule to work around, and how I can remember John Fessenden and Aixa Snell saying, Well, I don’t need a conference every day. You know, Let’s have a long music/P.E. Monday through Thursday, but on Friday, let’s not even take them to music, you know, those sort of things. So I can remember doing that, and from that, I
remember Bianca color-coding everything. Well, let’s color-code it. Let’s see—and things like getting us into the lunchroom. Those were all things—I had never ever been on any kind of planning. And we set up a table, that thirteen or fourteen of us, and talked about all the possibilities and looked at and balanced which one we wanted to go with.

**Strot**

Well, let’s talk about that then in terms of the process you went through. Because you said you’d never been—now in your experience, who usually set those schedules?

**Hoover**

Oh, you were handed the schedules by the principal.

**Strot**

Okay, and so this was very different. And tell me about that.

**Hoover**

Right. Dr. Mac wasn’t even in the room. He usually would come in each morning, and we would be around this long table, and he would say, “I need you to accomplish these things today.” You know, “We need to decide what the schedule’s going to be today. We need to decide a lunch schedule. We need—” you know, whatever the charge was for the day. And then he’d walk out of the room. And we might not see him again until two ’o clock, three ’o clock, you know, whatever. And we just began to talk, take turns talking, listening to each other. Well, I’ve been in a place where it was done like this. Well, why do you have to do it that way? Who decided that was the best way to do things? And both John and Aixa were not traditionally
trained in school of education. They were both alternative certified.

And they had come with Dr. McIntire from his previous school.

And they had come with Dr. Mac. And John and Mac were in the process of writing a book about school leadership and about it being multi-leadership, and stakeholders in it, and you know, empowering people, so, you know, that was—now that I look back on it, I know that’s what they were doing. But at the time—

So at that time, there was no explicit talk about the process, about being self-directed.

(speaks at same time) No, there wasn’t—it really wasn’t. Other than this is going to be your school—or it’s going to be our school and what we make of it. And you get to make those decisions.

So, talk about then that process on the scheduling. Because here you are, you’re in this new way of making a decision. So tell me a little bit more about how you remember that process going.

Right. I remember, you know, laying out just a diagram of the day. Well, here’s when we can see these people. Here’s when we can—they could be doing this when, you know—Bianca color-coding it. I remember that very distinctly, that it all had to be—and then, again, I think the big piece I remember of that is John and Aixa both saying, Well, I’d rather they come to you four times a week for an hour, and they won’t get anywhere on Fridays. We’ll just keep them all day.
There was this time they called discovery time, where everybody was going to do this interdisciplinary time at the end of the day. So that’s why they couldn’t be at music and P.E. And I can remember saying to them, “But you guys have got to have a conference.” And them saying, “No, we don’t.” And—

Now, let’s explain what conference means here. In the state of Texas, you are legally entitled to forty-five minutes a day planning and conference time in any elementary school. And that time is traditionally the time that your children are at either music or physical education. And so this is the first time you’ve probably had ever heard a teacher say, “We don’t need a conference time.”

Absolutely, absolutely. I think in the back of my head, I’m thinking, Well, yes they do. But at the same time being excited about somebody who didn’t have to do it the traditional way just because that’s the way it’d always been done. It really was a spin on, Well, I think it would be better for the students if they didn’t go on that day because it would help the flow of what we’re trying to do in the classroom. And really listening and hearing professionals trying to say—and asking the question, But what’s best for the students? Not, What do I need?

So, did you finally end up with a schedule that was satisfactory?

We did. And we ended up with one—the funny story of that, I think, is that we ended up with one where they didn’t come to music for one
day a week, be it Friday, whatever it was. Of course, then I was on maternity leave when we had to kick that schedule in. By the time I returned six weeks later, the schedule was back to them having music or P.E. every day and them having a conference period every day. So they tried it, and it didn’t work. But that’s okay. They tried it. And that’s so much about what the school was about so early on. Well, let’s try it, if we don’t like it, we can do the other thing. But why—let’s not just do what’s been done at every other school for many years just because it’s what’s been done. Let’s try something new, and we can go back. And the safety net there that it was okay to say, That’s not working. Let’s try it the old way.

Strot
Are there any other issues that were dealt with as a group?

Hoover
Budget.

Strot
Oh, budget. Okay.

Hoover
And that was one of the scariest moments, I think, of the week was that, you know, we had so much mon—well, we had turned in a budget, and I guess Mac had done that.

Strot
Now again, you came from a school in which you had never had any experience with budget. Traditionally at that time in Waco, the budget was given to the principal—

Hoover
That’s correct.

Strot
—from the district, and the principal then interpreted it to the staff.
Right. And I never knew how much money we had as a campus. I never knew how much money was going to any other teachers, nothing. I knew how much money I had to spend, and that was it.

And now for the first time, you’re being given what to work with?

A budget had been turned in, and it was too much. (??) got to pull back. And of course, it was everything you could imagine. And so Mac brought it in—to me, I can see him throwing it down on the table and saying, “I hate messing with numbers. I don’t know what to cut. You all figure it out,” and walking out. (laughs) And I really think almost everyone in the room, except for John and Aixa and maybe Paul Foster, who was our special education specialist who also had come from an outside district, all went, Uh, we don’t know what we are doing. We can’t do it. He’s crazy. He has to do that. That’s not our job. And not so much, I don’t know want to do it as, We don’t know what we’re doing, and they won’t let that fly anyway. They’re expecting him to do it. He’s the principal. But John, particularly, I can remem—took the lead and worked us through that, helped us make decisions about what we needed, what we wanted, what the difference was. Eventually, we pulled it out some, but we still were over the budget that they were asking us to stick to. So, instead of either giving it back to Dr. Mac and saying, You figure it out, or going back ourselves and pulling
everything out, at that point, then John proposed to us, “Well, let’s go to the superintendent and just ask for it. We’ve got a case here why we need all these things. We don’t need to cut anything else. We’ll make our case and we’ll go before them.” So we did. And we went to—

Now, the whole group went to the superintendent?

The whole group met with the superintendent in the conference room, and the associate superintendent, and the director of budget at that time. And we said, Okay, here’s what we started with. Here’s what we’ve got it down to. It’s this much over, and this is why it’s this much over, and these are the things—this is what we have listed, and these are things we need to get going. I can remember a discussion specifically about filing cabinets, and Dr. Stripling, Rosanne Stripling, who was our associate superintendent, saying, “Well, this is a technology school. You don’t need filing cabinets. Everything is going to be paperless.” And all of us saying, I don’t think so. You are still going to need places to put things. But, I can remember her saying, “I don’t think you need filing cabinets at all.” I can remember that discussion—I can remember our discussion about flags, the Texas flag and the United States flag for the cafeteria of, Well, do we need to purchase those, or could we get those donated by a local veterans’ association or something? Just little spots like that I can remember having—just every little penny we were looking for. I can remember
instruments that I’d cut from the original wish list. But, we went through the process together. I know what—I knew at the time what each person had to give up to make that budget a one that we all felt strong about and that we agreed as a group, Yes, I think we’ve done everything we can. We have a legitimate case. Let’s go before the superintendent and ask him to do it for us.

Strot

In your recollection of that, when you went before the superintendent—and John Fessenden I should mention came from the legal profession to being a teacher—when you went before the superintendent to argue your case, do you remember the arguments being driven by particular priorities that had already been set for Hillcrest? Hillcrest is going to do this. We’ve been told we’re going to do this, and we need this to accomplish that. Is that what drove it?

Hoover

Yeah, I think a big umbrella one of just if we’re going to be a model school, then we need the equipment to be a model school.

Strot

So, it was not just budget. It was also an interpretation of what the superintendent wanted to see in this school. And his response to that was what?

Hoover

“Buy it.” (laughs) He said, “We’ll find the money.”

Strot

So, in your estimation—was that the first time you’d really met with the superintendent about something?

Hoover

Yes.
Strot: Okay. So, what impression did you come away of how he felt about the school?

Hoover: I felt very strong support. I mean, I didn’t feel like they were holding back the reins at all. I really felt like they had given us free run—and not crazy, but just free run, do what you can. Let’s do it. Let’s make a state-of-the-art place because we know you—but there was an expectation there of because we know you guys are going to use it in the correct way. But it was really a very strong feeling of being treated like a professional. We’re going to get you the things you need to do to do the work you want to do, and to do it the way you want to do it.

Strot: At this time, do you remember the word *empowered* being used at all in reference to the teachers?

Hoover: I can’t remember that word.

Strot: Okay. Just wondering when we started using that word.

Hoover: No.

Strot: Let me ask you this—and I know we need to end off at this point, so we’re going to stop at this point before the school actually opens. But when you think about the super—that meeting with the superintendent, and I imagine Ron McIntire was at that meeting as well—

Hoover: Right.

Strot: —did you—what was your feeling about how they felt you were
meeting what they expected this school to be like? Because you’re coming up and sort of arguing for money to do certain things, and so how did you feel about their—did they give you any feedback as to you’re going in the right direction?

Hoover

No. But it wasn’t opposite of that either. I really felt—I don’t want to say hands-off, because it wasn’t disengagement. But it really felt like they—once they hired us, it really became what we wanted to become.

Strot

Think of the word trust.

Hoover

Yeah.

Strot

Okay. Now compare—so in that context, how was this experience different from your previous school experience?

Hoover

Yeah, it was a very high level of trust. We trust you because we know we’ve picked the best of the best to do the work, and we trust you to do it. We trust what your judgment is. We trust what you’re asking for. You know, I just don’t—it didn’t feel that way at all on other campuses. Maybe individual—you know, I had one principal who I felt like trusted me a great deal once I developed that relationship with him. But, generally speaking, that wasn’t it at all. I felt like I came from a campus where it was all very mandated, and those mandates coming either from the principal and or through top administration. But, no, this was—I distinctly remember sitting in that meeting, and both the superintendent and the associate superintendent not looking
at any of the proposals we had written up or anything, but just sitting back and listening, and not wanting to see the details. But I felt like the bottom line was, We’ve hired you to do the job. Do the job. If that’s what you need, we’ll get it for you.

Strot

All right. Now, last question, I promise you. And that is, now in this initial discussion before the school opened, was there any talk then about what we now call _accountability_? Of, we trust you to do this, but this is what we expect to happen? And if so, what was it that you felt you were going to be held accountable for?

Hoover

That doesn’t come to mind. I can remember discussions of—more of empowerment, even though that word wasn’t used then of _accountability_. I can’t recall accountability discussions.

Strot

Okay. At that time, as far as you remember, the system for evaluating teachers and campuses, was that going to be any different at Hillcrest than it was at the other campuses at Waco?

Hoover

Not that I recall, no.

Strot

Okay. So Hillcrest would be held, as far as you remember, accountable to the normal procedures of all the schools in terms of tests and those kinds of things.

Hoover

Yes.

Strot

Test scores, I mean, and—

Hoover

Yeah, at that time—
Strot (speaks at same time)—teacher attendance and all those kinds of things that formed the evaluation of the principal and the campus and so on. Okay. And there was—to your recollection at that time, was there to be anything different done with the students in terms of how they were assessed?

Hoover There was that new—there was a new report card. But it was an electronic report card, interestingly enough.

Strot The Grade-E profile.

Hoover Yeah. Yeah. Gosh, I’d totally forgotten about that. And that was a different system.

Strot And at this time, at the first meetings, was that an issue? Or was that just something people were accepting as we’re going to do this?

Hoover No, I think we were just accepting that.

Strot Okay.

Hoover That seems to me—my recollection is that was kind of one of those pre-decisions. You will be using—because it tied it into the technology part.

Strot Exactly. And so that would be cutting-edge for technology.

Hoover Right. Right.

Strot But somehow, despite that, your impression was that the kids would still be held to the state-mandated scores and all those things.

Hoover Right.
Strot There was not going to be any difference there.

Hoover Right.

Strot Well, we’re going to stop at this time and continue this later.

Hoover Okay.

Strot Thank you.

Hoover Mm-hm.

*end of interview*