



No portion of this article may be reproduced without
express written permission of Style Publishing Group, LLC.

©2007 • All rights reserved.



Style Publishing Group

P.O. Box 1676

Frisco, Texas 75034

Phone: 972.335.1181

Toll Free: 877.781.7067

Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com

Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306

F.I.S.D. A TEXAS-SIZED DISTRICT WITH A SMALL TOWN HEART

by jane whitledge

FRISCO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (FISD) IN 2004 HAS COME A LONG WAY since the days during World War II when Wilma Fisher sent broken typewriters out to be repaired and they came back only to stop working within minutes. She discovered they had been put together with toothpicks.

"I found a man who was a traveling repair man and he got them fixed," Mrs. Fisher said of the person she later got to fix the typewriters correctly. "He ended up being the owner of McKinney Office and School Supply." Even then Frisco's teachers and administrators worked to bring the best to Frisco children. Today with a \$92.2 million operating budget, the district has computer labs in each school, computers in each classroom and specialized repair technicians armed with tools much more sophisticated than toothpicks.

FISD continues to be the fastest growing district in the state. The school district must keep pace with the large number of students moving into the district each year. The boundaries of FISD begin in North Plano and extend into parts of McKinney and Little Elm – so growth in those cities also affects the number of teachers, buildings and supplies that are needed. Currently the district has 14 elementary schools, four middle schools, two high schools, two special programs schools (Acker and the Student Opportunity Center), the Administration building, the district Service Center, the original Transportation Facility, Memorial Stadium and the Natatorium. When the Hunt Sports Group completes construction of the new major league soccer stadium, it will be a joint use facility for FISD, the city and Major League Soccer.

The district will serve more than 13,400 students during the 2003-2004 school year. The majority, approximately 8,000 students, is in grades K-5, reflecting the age of the families that are moving here. The demographics of Frisco dictate that this trend will not change for some time, as a large percentage of the city's population is under the age of five. The district also has approximately 2,750 middle school students and approximately 2,650 high school students. The district has repeatedly found that kindergarten enrollment is the most difficult to predict. Although the district holds a kindergarten roundup in the spring, it is not unusual for enough children to have moved into a neighborhood by the following fall to require an additional class.



*Bennett & Alma Griffin Middle School
photo by John Scott Glass*



“FISD students come from varied backgrounds, we have 35 languages represented in FISD,” according to Shana McKay-Wortham, director of communications. Other facts she provided are that the district has 8% of its students qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program. FISD is 71% white, 13% Hispanic, 8% African American, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander and 1% Native American or Alaskan Native.

McKay-Wortham provides a graph illustrating the phenomenal growth of Frisco schools from the early 90’s projected through 2008. The district’s figures show enrollment rising from 1,849 in 1993 to a projected 27,950 by October 2008. With this sort of growth, the need for new school construction continues. In the upcoming school year, 2004-2005, the district will open Isbell Elementary School. The school is being named for Bert and Eloise Isbell of Frisco, a former elementary school principal and teacher respectively. The district will also open Griffin Middle School, named for the pioneering Griffin family. At the January meeting of the Board of Trustees, it was estimated that Griffin Middle School would open with 470 students.

Griffin Middle School’s opening and enrollment has been a source of concern for parents in the Fisher and Boals Elementary zones. In January, the board voted to open the middle school as a fifth and sixth grade campus. This was done to relieve crowding at Fisher Elementary School and Pioneer Middle School. Griffin is projected to open with less than 300 students. It will serve all fifth and sixth grade students who live in the West portion of Frisco, but north of Main Street. Also of interest to parents and students on the west side of Frisco are plans to open the third high school named for former superintendent, Justin Wakeland, in the fall of 2006.

In 2005, the district plans to open three schools: Irwin and Elisabeth Pink Elementary School, Calvin Bledsoe Elementary School, and Sam and Ann Roach Middle School. In August, the school board will look at the possibility of building the as-yet unnamed Elementary School #18 in the Northeast part of the district based on demographic projections.

**FISD Fast Facts
2003-2004
Facility
Information**

- 14 Elementary Schools
- Four Middle Schools
- Two High Schools
- Two Special Programs Schools
- Administration Complex
- Service Center
- Transportation Facility
- Memorial Stadium
- Natorium
- Joint-Use Facility - Frisco Soccer and Entertainment Center

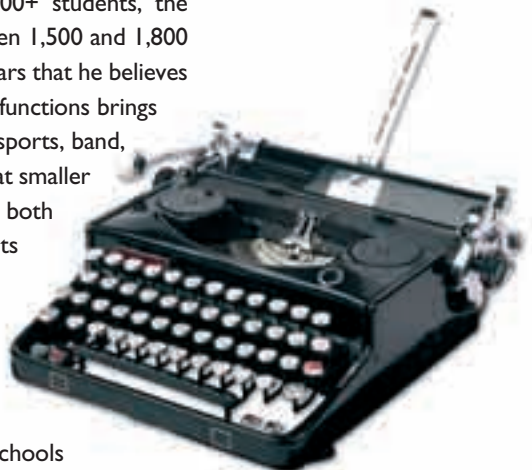




STAYING SMALL WHILE GROWING

What sets FISD apart from some other fast-growing Texas districts? “The Board and Administration are currently committed to building facilities that maintain a small, personal learning environment,” McKay-Wortham explained. Elementary schools are built to accommodate 700+ students, the middle schools for 800-1000, and the high schools are being built to serve between 1,500 and 1,800 students. Dr. Rick Reedy, FISD superintendent, has stated many times over the years that he believes smaller schools lead to more successful students. His attendance at many school functions brings home to parents and students how important he and the school board consider sports, band, orchestra, choir and art to making a well-rounded student. Studies have shown that smaller schools allow more students to be involved in activities that help them develop both academically and socially. At the two Frisco high schools, two out of three students are involved in a school-related activity outside the classroom. The leadership of FISD firmly believes that children who are involved in activities outside the classroom tend to perform better academically and are less prone to finding themselves in trouble.

Frisco ISD will be able to keep its plans for smaller schools for the upcoming years. They have money through available bond funds to eventually open 17 more elementary schools, two more middle schools, a fourth high school, design for a fifth, a career and technology center, maintenance and renovations of the existing buildings, buses, administrative offices, and additional expansions and purchases of land.



FISD Fast Facts 2003-2004

Student Information

13,400-plus students
8,000 Elementary
2,750 Middle School
2,650 High School

Staff Information

1,774 employees
935 teachers
53 first-year teachers

TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER NECESSITIES

Building a school in Frisco is, of course, more than just the walls and the desks. Each school features a computer lab and each classroom has a projector that allows the teacher to show video or use the Internet for enhancing lessons. Each school has its own well-stocked library with nooks for reading in comfort, along with designated music rooms, art rooms and a gymnasium. Middle schools and high schools have even more high-tech features and



photo by John Scott Glass

students can take classes in robotics, video production, and eventually technology preparatory classes.

In the old days it was a challenge to some Frisco students such as Sonny McSpedden (father-in-law of school board trustee Buddy Minett)

to break into the principal's office and steal the paddle. Today, principals no longer roam halls with paddles but security, nevertheless, is tight in this era of terrorism and snipers. This year Frisco is installing a video surveillance system to deter vandalism. About 60 cameras will be set up in commons areas, halls, and the parking lots of the high schools. The middle schools will have about 45 cameras in the public areas. Elementary schools will have cameras at each point of entry, in the cafeteria and in the gym.

"I believe that having cameras installed on all of our campuses we will be able to pro-actively combat violence, theft and bullying on the school grounds," Kevin Haller, director of security says.

But Fisd is not just about the number of students, buildings or expensive computers. The district's motto – "Where we look at education in a different way...through the eyes of children" is an idea that is taken seriously from the board of trustees down to the crossing guards. When Fisd was a small farm school, teachers demanded excellence but it was understood that only a few students would go on to college and that most would go to work on the family farm or in businesses and factories in the area. Today, 90% of high school seniors take one or more college entrance exams and more than 90% state their intention to continue on to college. With the convenience of Collin County Community College, many students opt to attend there first. Community colleges in Texas do not require entrance exam scores for admission.

EARLY PREPARATION LEADS TO SUCCESS

Preparing a child for the future begins early in Frisco. Qualifying students with needs may attend Head Start programs. Children above the age of three who qualify may receive speech education through the special education program. Children who do not speak English can benefit from the district's ESL (English as a second language)/Bilingual programs when they enroll to attend school in the district.

The core subjects of reading, math, social studies, writing and science are taught along with physical education, music, art, and computer science. Leadership training can begin as early as elementary school with programs such as: student council, peer mediation and other student organizations that are in place to encourage



SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

for Places 1, 2, and 3 will be held Saturday, May 15, jointly with the Cities of Frisco and Plano, Plano ISD and Collin County Community College District. Early voting will be held from 8 am to 5 pm beginning Wednesday, April 28 and continuing through Tuesday, May 11. Extended hours will be held from 8 am to 5 pm on May 1 and from 8 am to 7 pm on Thursday, May 6 at the sub courthouse at 2020 Redbud Blvd., Suite 102, McKinney, and at the Preston Ridge Campus of Collin County Community College in Frisco. Election day voting will be held at three Fisd schools and three Pisd schools from 7 am to 7 pm.

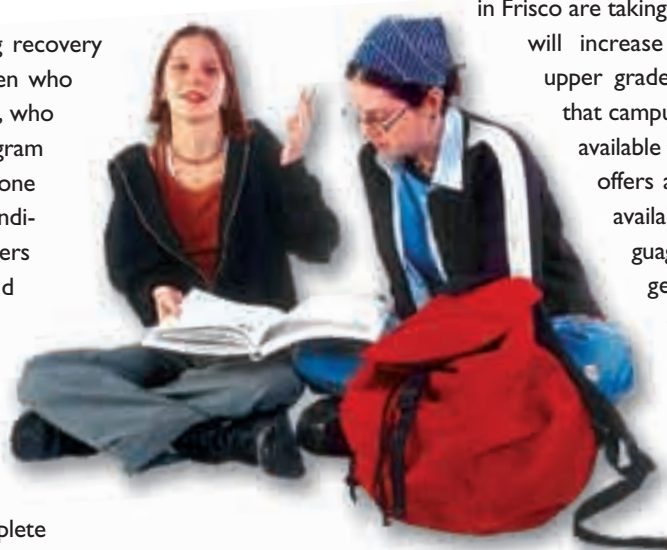
Place 1 is held by incumbent Laura Ellison. Ellison has filed to seek reelection to her third three-year term. Also filing as a candidate for Place 1 is Michael Osuna, a former city council member.

Place 2 is being vacated by Richard Scoggins who leaves the board of trustees after having reared four daughters in Fisd. Filing for this place are Brenda Jane Polk of Frisco and Renee Marie Ehmke of Frisco.

Place 3 is being vacated by Dan Presley who has served as board president for the last several years. Filing for election to Place 3 are Daniel William Mossakowski of Frisco and Andrew Wayne Stewart of Frisco.

students' talents. Students who test accordingly are given gifted/ talented instruction and parents and students are encouraged to take part in gifted/talented events.

FISD has long had a strong reading recovery and dyslexia program to assist children who struggle to read. In January, Stacy Mills, who supervises the Reading Recovery program for the district, reported that one-on-one program for at-risk first graders data indicates that last year 11% of all first-graders participated in reading recovery and that at the end of the year 34% of the students were graduated from the program back to the regular classroom, 30% were recommended for further action, four percent were recommended for special education, and the remainder either had incomplete status or moved. In looking at the second through fifth graders that completed reading recovery in Frisco schools and still attend Frisco schools (465 students who are still in the district) 55% are reading on or above grade level and 95% passed the TAKS test. These percentages appear to uphold the idea that early intervention can make a difference in students' lives.



are up to the academic challenge. Barbara McEwen, Frisco High School counselor, says that 28% of high school students in Frisco are taking AP courses. Those numbers will increase as Centennial High adds upper grades and more AP courses at that campus. Most AP courses are only available to juniors and seniors. Frisco offers almost all of the AP courses available accept the foreign language literature classes, human geography, psychology and one economics class.

There was a time when there were more students enrolled in vocational classes and agriculture science class than academic programs such as AP classes, competing in academic decathlon or taking an independent study mentorship class, but as McEwen observed "the clientele that Frisco serves has changed. Most Frisco parents plan for their children to attend college." Frisco reports that 89% of the graduating seniors attend college – 55% of those go to four-year colleges and 34% attend two-year programs such as Collin County Community College or vocational-technical college, she said.

Frisco has used the Advanced Placement program because it is the more common program used in the United States. International Baccalaureate, another advanced program used in some Metroplex schools, has a more worldwide reputation but serves fewer students, according to McEwen.

FISD is committed to aiming for excellence. The district repeatedly scores well in state tests and many of its campuses are rated exemplary or recognized. Kindergarten roundup is scheduled for April 19-23 and when those five and six-year-olds report for class in August they will be the future of FISD. During the next 13 years they will learn to read, write, perform computer skills that may not even exist today, study history, study the plans for travel to Mars in their science classes, and be prepared to live in a world much different than it is in 2004. And they will learn those skills in Frisco schools that have been prepared for the future by the parents, teachers and administrators of today.

Jane Whitley is a freelance writer based in Frisco.

**FISD Fast Facts
2003-2004
Financial Information**

\$92.2 Million operating budget

Taxable value, \$6.6 Billion

Tax rate, \$1.5175 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Chapter 41 school district; sending \$16.5 million out of district this year through "Robin Hood," which is the equivalent of 25 cents on the tax rate

Operating Expenditure per student - \$6,583

