



Plano ISD Staff Newsletter • Volume 37, number 3 • October 8, 2009



## Plano East theatre director takes center stage as peers statewide applaud her teaching career

Story by Mary Gorden; Photos by John Pippard

Lisa Hale was in the first grade when she got the bug for acting...and teaching. It was then that she saw "The Sound of Music" on film. After memorizing each of the character's lines, she acted out all parts of the musical, enlisting her brother as co-star and her dolls as the audience. "I even taught the dolls and graded them in a gradebook," she confessed. It was then that the young director realized her lifelong passions for acting and teaching. Now, after a successful 27-year career in education, Lisa has been "graded" by her peers in the Texas Educational Theatre Association who have awarded her 2009 High School Educator of the Year. [Read more](#)

## noteable Notes

### upcoming Events

- 10/12 School Lunch Week
- 10/16 Parent Conference Day
- 10/19 School Bus Safety Week
- 10/20 Board Work Session
- 10/23 Red Ribbon Week

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## employee Spotlight



## World geography teacher earns national accolades

Story by Mary Gorden

The best lessons "put students in control," says Nicole Vickerman, Clark High School World Geography team leader and winner of the 2009 Distinguished Teaching Award from the National Council for Geographic Education. Her favorite lessons require both creative and critical analysis and provide a means for self-evaluation. "When this combination is managed, I can sit back and enjoy a classroom filled with discussion, creativity and



## HR team captures 2009 high performance award

The Plano ISD human resources division, specifically the risk management team, received a high



## District earns 7th annual 'superior' financial rating

For the seventh consecutive year, Plano ISD has earned a "superior" ranking through the Schools FIRST

performance ranking for the second year from the Texas Department of Insurance and the Division of Workers' Compensation. [Read more](#)

(Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas) program. The state graded the district on 24 financial accountability indicators. [Read more](#)

motivation," she said.

Nicole teaches students in Pre-Advanced Placement World Geography and serves as founder/sponsor of Clark World Affairs Council. Since 2002, she has served on Plano ISD's World Geography Curriculum Initiative Committee responsible for overhauling the curriculum with a focus on Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and long term comprehension. As a forerunner in geography education, Nicole was selected as one of seven teachers to revise the state standards for World Geography education. She also created Plano ISD's eSchool online geography course "from scratch."

## Around the district



"Seasonal Harmony" is the theme for Plano ISD's 2009 Holiday Greeting Card Art Contest sponsored by Webb&Webb attorneys and the Plano ISD Education Foundation. All students are invited to [enter the contest](#).



A presentation video filmed at the October 5 public hearing of the Feeder School Alignment Committee is now available for viewing on the [committee website](#), along with links to related information.



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**Nicole Vickerman started the Clark High School Junior World Affairs Council, whose members met the ambassador of South Africa and attended a Save Darfur event last year.**

**Digest:** Where did you nurture your love of teaching?

**Nicole:** As a product of Plano schools, I am one of many teachers in the district that returned to teach where we learned. The one thing that all my favorite teachers had in common was their enthusiasm. They were fascinated by their subject and found joy in sharing it

## Master's degree program meetings

Teachers who have completed, or will have completed, two current and consecutive years of teaching in the district and do not already hold a Master's Degree, may elect to apply for the Plano ISD Master's Degree Program.

Informational meetings will be held from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 21, and Wednesday, November 18, in the first floor board room of the Plano ISD Administration Building, 2700 W. 15th Street. Discussion will include an overview of options, procedures for taking the GRE and time lines for applying to a university.

Attendance at one of the meetings is required prior to program participation.

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## Board briefs

School trustees conducted the following business on October 6:

- Recognized the human resources department ([read article](#)) for a second high performance rating from the Texas Department of Insurance and the Division of Workers' Compensation;
- Announced the appointment of **Jennifer Methvin**, Hedgcoxe Elementary School third grade team leader, to the position of Weatherford Elementary School assistant principal;
- Approved the Consent Agenda, which includes several bids and routine business items;
- Denied a parent grievance heard in an earlier closed session, upholding the level three decision;
- Nominated Dr. Leo Fitzgerald to serve on the Central Appraisal District Board of Directors for Collin County for another two-year term;
- [Heard a report](#) from **Linda Madon**, executive director for financial services, about the district's "superior" rating regarding Schools FIRST (Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas). Trustees also held an accompanying public hearing;
- Adopted the parameters order authorizing the issuance of Unlimited Tax School Building Bonds, Series 2009A, as introduced by **Richard Matkin**, associate superintendent for business services. Representatives of First Southwest Company and Fulbright & Jaworski, L.L.P., were present to support the presentation.
- The board adopted the parameters order authorizing the issuance of Unlimited Tax Qualified School Construction Bonds, Series 2009B (Tax Credit Bonds), as introduced by Mr. Matkin.
- Heard a report on campus enrollment data, as presented by Mr. Matkin, for both current and projected enrollment for 2009-2010 as well as year-end enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year. Currently, the total enrollment for the district exceeds the enrollment projected for 2009-10. East and west clusters have continued to show increased growth.

Discussions and public meetings will be held this school year to accommodate this growth along with the design of a realigned feeder school system to incorporate Otto Middle School in 2010 and McMillen High School in 2011.

- Adopted four district policies as presented by **Karla Oliver**, executive director for government and community relations.

The agenda, including supporting documents, is posted on [BoardBook](#) .

The [meeting video](#)  (1:08:22) can be viewed on the district website.

Read [Notable Notes](#) here, or select the button at the top right of this page.

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Geography Curriculum Initiative Committee responsible for overhauling the curriculum with a focus on Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and long term comprehension. As a forerunner in geography education, Nicole was selected as one of seven teachers to revise the state standards for World Geography education. She also created Plano ISD's eSchool online geography course "from scratch."



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**Digest:** Where did you nurture your love of teaching?

**Nicole:** As a product of Plano schools, I am one of many teachers in the district that returned to teach where we learned. The one thing that all my favorite teachers had in common was their enthusiasm. They were fascinated by their subject and found joy in sharing it with their students, and this is something that cannot be faked.

Teaching is not a job; it is a personality trait, and I hope I am to my students what my best teachers were to me.



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## Lisa Hale, Texas theatre educator of the year

(Continued from [District Digest](#))

In "The Sound of Music," a few of Maria's favorite things were raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens. On Lisa's stage; however, social injustice, moral dilemmas and gender differences are a few of the topics that her student actors have tackled.

An example is this weekend's production of "EAT, It's Not About Food." In a highly relevant, informational and at times lighthearted way, the Plano East Theatre cast uncovers the dangerous and baffling world of eating disorders affecting both boys and girls. Performances will be free and to the public and will include audience talk back with local medical experts on eating disorders. ([Read about EAT](#)).



**Lisa is pictured rehearsing this week with "EAT" cast members.**

"It's important to me that we look at the world through other people's eyes," explained the 27-year veteran educator, who has spent the past 24 years as theatre teacher and director at Plano East. "My goal is to instill a love and respect for the art and craft of theatre. I hope to inspire students to explore their creativity, discover their talents and realize the boundless possibilities of

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individual and group expression."

Lisa also wants to train students to be the audiences of tomorrow by giving them a passion and enthusiasm for live theatre. "There is an immediacy in live theatre that you cannot capture on film," she explained. "Although it's become hard to compete with the film industry and its special computer effects, theatre has the 'live' moment, a 'You had to be there,' quality that can never be replicated on film. You can see the same play every night and it might feel different because of actor/audience chemistry,"

Effervescent and sentimental all at once, Lisa beams when recollecting former students. Among the hundreds of students she has taught, her former students who are now theatre teachers hold a special place in Lisa's heart. Two of her former students teach theatre in Frisco ISD, one in Greenville and another in San Antonio. "My greatest reward would be to meet one of them at contest and they'd beat us. I'd be SO happy!"



### **More about Lisa Hale**

#### Education

M.S. in Theatre, University of North Texas (1990)

B.F.A. in Drama Education, University of Texas Austin (1981)

#### Employment

1984-present - Theatre Director and Fine Arts Department Chair, Plano East Sr. High School

2007 - Director "Camp On The Coast" - Texas A&M Corpus Christi

2003 - Theatre instructor for Jump Start for Arts, City of Plano

Theatre Teacher for Plano ISD Summer Institute for Talented and Gifted

1981-1984 - English and Theatre Teacher, Newman Smith HS, Carrollton

1980 - Counselor for High School Theatre Workshop, UT Austin

1980-81 - Assistant contest manager for UIL One Act Play State Meet

#### Professional Associations

Texas Educational Theatre Association Single Member & Institutional Member

Educational Theatre Association & International Thespian Society

Theatre Communications Group

## Professional Development

### International Baccalaureate Teacher Training in Theatre Arts:

Summer 1998 - St. Petersburg, Florida  
Spring

1999 - Vancouver B.C., Canada

Spring 2000 - Albuquerque, New Mexico  
*Maestro Theatre - Austin, Texas:*

1990, 1991 - Summer Repertory Theatre

2002, 2004 - Teacher Training Instructor for Summer Workshop

## Accomplishments

2009 - TETA Secondary Educator of the Year

1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 - District UIL One Act  
Play Champs

2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 - Area UIL One Act Play Champs

2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 - Regional UIL One Act Play

2004 - First Runner Up at UIL State Meet (*Big Love*)

2006 - State Champion (*The Marriage of Bette and Boo*)

1992, 1998, 1999, 2001, and 2003 - Coach for State Recipient of the Texas  
Educational Theatre Association Founders Award for Acting and/or Technical  
Theatre

2000 - "Backstage Award" for Outstanding Contribution to the Quad C  
Theatre

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## Nicole Vickerman, World Geography team leader

(Continued from [District Digest](#))



**Digest:** What is one of your key motivators in teaching world geography?

**Nicole:** Innovation, especially in a course where it is so important to stay current. In 2003, I was invited to be one of two geography teachers in my district to co-write an online world geography course for Plano ISD's eSchool program. The goal was to maintain the rigor and content from the classroom in a course to be taught totally online. We were one the first courses in

the state to offer a geography course without a text book. Creating an online course challenged me as I have rarely been, and some of the ideas I developed for the online course have made their way into my classroom.

Because of the success of the online geography course, I have been asked to be one of three instructors to write another new course for our district, this time to train online teachers. The OTCC (Online Teacher Certification Course) will be used to train effective online instructors. We are in the early stages, but we hope to find innovative ways to put the teacher in the students' shoes - something all teachers need to experience again from time to time.

**Digest:** In what ways do you expose students to current events?

**Nicole:** The World Affairs Council, one of the single best resources for geography teachers, has taken me to tour a mosque on a program about Islam, hear and talk with Thomas Friedman and participate with my students in a genocide and Darfur forum last spring. Because of their extraordinary

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programs, I started a Junior World Affairs Council chapter in 2007. Pulling together students to discuss current events and global issues has far exceeded my expectations. In preparation for the World Quest contest, the students created presentations on topics as diverse as water issues, globalization and the EU at 50. We have planned visits to see the Crow Collection of Asian Art in Dallas and attend talks by Fareed Zakaria and the Ambassador of Pakistan. Students return from events energized and informed. As a sponsor, helping my students take ownership of global issues and develop practical leadership skills in the process is my proudest accomplishment.



**Turkey is on the list of Nicole's magnificent teacher study travels.**

**Digest:** How do you teach your students about the many people in the world?

**Nicole:** One of the ongoing themes we discuss is the impact of physical geography on people and people on the environment. Students create population distribution maps to look for trends and exceptions. People tend not to live in deserts, and so why was Las Vegas one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. until recently? Asking geographic questions and applying the concepts around the world is a key skill and central to my course.

One of the most exciting ways to see the earth and interrelationships that impact the planet is Google Earth. I have developed a series of scavenger hunts for students to complete using this amazing tool. They are engaged and often take ownership of this resource to help them in other assignments. Another example of a lesson related to physical geography consists of case studies describing the climate and culture of specific places but without the names. The students must draw conclusions about how a certain climate such as mountains, deserts, coasts, plains would impact culture. They match the physical description with a cultural description, and in the second part of the

lesson they attempt to match this with the correct location. Some examples include the concept that small, scattered islands create diversity as in Indonesia or that harsh climates lead to limited population as in the Outback of Australia.

**Digest:** Why is geography a critical component of high school study?

**Nicole:** I tell my students that this is the most important course they will take in high school. Nationally one in five jobs is tied to international trade, and in the Dallas area it is one in four. I love this subject, and I hope my enthusiasm is contagious to my students. I think good citizens know what is happening in the world, and so in addition to including current issues in each unit of study, we discuss specific current events several times a week.

As team leader for geography, I work hard with our teaching team to ensure that our coursework is continually updated and improving, and each summer I analyze the overall framework based on key concepts and effective strategies for improving students' skills.

Read Nicole's [letter of recommendation](#) from the Dallas World Affairs Council.

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## HR division high performance rating

(Continued from [District Digest](#))

The Plano ISD Board of Trustees recognized the human resources division on October 6 with a resolution and by honoring members of the benefits and risk management team for receiving a high performance ranking for the second year from the Texas Department of Insurance and the Division of Workers' Compensation.



**Human resources division/benefits and risk management teammates honored at the October 6 school board meeting included (l-r) Linda Pecot, adjuster; Tamira Griffin, executive director for human resources; Becky Garrett, director of benefits and risk management; Janie Minghella, Adjuster; Janet McChesney, RN, adjuster; Jan Yeary, workers' compensation manager; and Linda Federle, RN, adjuster.**

Tamira Griffin, executive director of the human resources division, told trustees that, as workers' compensation premiums for employers began to escalate in the 1990's, Plano ISD made a bold move and began to not only self-fund, but also self-administer the district's workers' comp program. "Our team was poised to make this business decision, already having skilled adjusters and occupational health nurses on staff handling day-to-day claims," she noted.

Ms. Griffin continued, "It was soon evident that managing claims in-house was productive and cost effective. As you have seen in previous years, we have been able to transfer funds from the workers' comp internal account back to the

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district to help offset other general expenses. While our care of employees has increased, expenses have continually decreased.

"We have a diligent staff that pays attention to detail, has knowledge of this complicated law and continually demonstrates an overarching concern for employees. Because of this, we know that the district's claims are managed better in-house. After all, Plano ISD employees are our only business."

Read the [School Board Resolution](#)

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## Schools FIRST 'superior' financial rating

(Continued from [District Digest](#))

Richard Matkin, associate superintendent for business services, and Linda Madon, executive director for financial service, presented the report to the Plano ISD Board of Trustees on October 6.

Ms. Madon explained that, "The Schools FIRST report is based upon a set of 24 uniform indicators that all school districts in the state are measured against. "For several years now, financial accountability has been as important as academic accountability. This system provides a tool to manage financial resources in the district and provides a rating against those indicators."



**Financial  
Integrity  
Rating  
System  
of Texas**

School trustees heard the report, based on the 2007-08 school year - staff, student and budget data that the financial services team submitted to the Texas Education Agency in the fall 2007 PIEMS report and is based on the district's annual audit report for

the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2008.

The rating is a numeric score, with four ratings on standards that can be given on the numeric score. Six of the 24 indicators are considered "critical" indicators. Plano ISD scored 84 out of a possible 85 maximum score. The one point subtraction was based upon the ratio of students to teachers. Our ratio is 13.35, and the required minimum for the standard is 13.5.

Mr. Matkin weighed in on the presentation, emphasizing to the board that over 80 percent of our budget is for payroll cost. "We work hard to meet staffing ratios that are among the best in the state," he reported. "We require certified teachers in areas that other districts might not fill positions with certified teachers. So, although we lose a point on this rating, I think that we gain a lot."

Ms. Madon addressed the critical indicators in which Plano ISD passed with the highest number of points possible.

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- General fund balance - positive \$131 million
- Unrestricted net asset balance - \$158 million
- Never defaulted on bonded indebtedness
- Annual financial report consistently filed on time and ahead of schedule with an unqualified opinion and no material weaknesses

"For the seventh consecutive year, since the inception of the Schools FIRST reporting program, Plano ISD has received a superior achievement rating," reported Ms. Madon.



Ms. Madon explained to trustees that, the state legislature made changes this year to the Schools FIRST reporting for the future. House Bill 3 (also known as the accountability bill) included a section on financial accountability. The 65 percent rule (staff budgeting) has been eliminated and will not be part of the new system moving forward.

In future reports (likely to be put in place for the 2011-12 school year), the state comptroller will combine the school district's financial and academic data and evaluate and assign rankings rate the district and schools based on that data. Operating costs and staffing costs for each student will be rated.

The report will continue to evaluate financial stability, staffing ratio trends, fund balance trends and independent audit trends. However, TEA will analyze revenues for the preceding year, the current year and projections for two years going forward. "The state is developing a new electronic reporting system to gather this information from school districts," Ms. Madon said.

View the presentation and related documents on [BoardBook](#) 

View the [meeting video](#)  (beginning at the 11:40 mark).

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## Notable Notes...

### Best wishes to the following newlyweds:

**Kristi Miculka**, Hughston Elementary School kindergarten teacher, who became the bride of **Bobby Radfar** on August 1.

Dooley Elementary School Speech-Language Pathologist **Jennifer Pate** who wed **Jamie Colvin** on August 8.

### Congratulations to the following parents and grandparents:

**Molly Schulte**, Pearson Early Childhood School speech-language pathologist, and her husband **David** who became the proud parents of a daughter **Mary "McLain"** pm April 23.

**Jillian Mundy**, Rice Middle School English teacher, and her husband **Darrell Mundy, Jr.** welcomed daughter **Madilyn Grace** (7 lbs. 9 ozs.) on May 11. Proud first-time grandmother is **Jeanie Mundy**, Boggess Elementary School music specialist.

**Myra Snipes**, Murphy Middle School special education teacher, and her husband **Jack** welcomed grandson **David Jonathan** (8 lbs. 7 ozs.) on May 28. Proud parents are **Elizabeth and Michael Reese**.

**Alyson Zembower**, Skaggs Elementary School second grade teacher, and her husband **Ryan** became the proud parents of baby girl **Laney Alice** (7 lbs. 15 ozs.) on May 28.

**Jamy Allen**, assistant principal at Barksdale and Brinker elementary schools, and her husband **Randy** welcomed son **Zane Robert** on August 3.

**Greg Sheilds**, Plano Senior High School Spanish instructor, and his wife **Carla** welcomed son **Trevor Michael** (7 lbs. 12 ozs.) on August 19.

### Sympathy is extended to the following employees:

**Cynthia Mitchell**, Jasper High School English teacher, whose father **Frederick**

## noteable Notes

## Achievements

## upcoming Events

- 10/1 End of 1st Six Weeks
- 10/5 Fire Prevention Week
- 10/6 School Board Meeting
- 10/12 School Lunch Week
- 10/16 Parent Conference Day

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**Simmonds** passed away in May.

**Marjean Nielson**, Plano East Senior High School physics teacher, whose husband **Gary** passed away in June.

**Patricia Hempstead**, Jackson Elementary School assistant principal, whose mother **JoAnn Holmes Stevenson** died on August 10.

Wyatt Elementary School's **Debbie Schmittou**, librarian, whose father **Lewis Perry** of Clarksville, Tennessee, died on July 9;

**Theresa Nozykowski**, Bird Center middle school assistant, and the **Wyatt Elementary School Staff**, whose father and colleague, respectively, Wyatt FANS Manager **Frank Nozykowski "Mr. Frank"** died on August 7.

**Sharon Schmieg**, Wyatt special education teacher, whose grandmother **Rosella Schmidt** of Minnesota died on August 17 at 102 years old.

**Rita Hughes**, financial services accounting clerk, whose father **Edward Hrizo, Sr.**, passed away on August 21.

**Merrilyn Eder**, Gullede Elementary School music specialist; **Dr. Terry Eder**, Plano Senior High music theory teacher; and **Kimberly Ahrens**, Robinson Middle School choir director, whose mother, mother-in-law and grandmother, respectively, **Connie Hines** died on August 22.

**Nadine Gauthier**, Gullede Elementary teaching assistant, whose brother-in-law **Marcel Tremblay** died on August 27.

Guinn special programs center's **Martha Will**, special education teacher, whose mother passed away in July and to **Sheila Contreras**, English teacher, whose father died on September 6.

**Mary Gorden**, communications department, whose uncle **Anthony "Boots" Little** of Erie, Pennsylvania, died on September 24.

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