

FISCAL NOTES

A Review of the Texas Economy from the Office of Susan Combs, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts



Annual FAST results let you compare school performance and financial responsibility

By Michael Castellon

Information is powerful. Comptroller Susan Combs knew that when taking office in 2007, and since then she has led a number of statewide initiatives to help Texans see how and where their tax dollars are being spent.

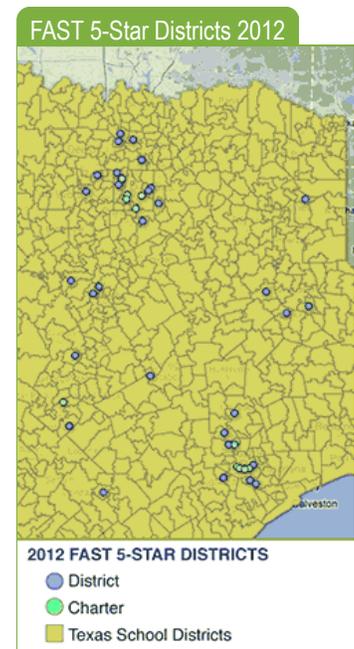
In 2010, Combs' office launched the [Financial Allocation Study for Texas \(FAST\)](#), a resource that helps Texans identify schools and school districts that successfully combine high academic achievement with cost-effective operations.

The project, originally requested by the 2009 Texas Legislature, combines data from the Texas Education Agency with a custom methodology developed by the Comptroller's office in consultation with educational experts.

"The FAST methodology essentially groups districts and campuses into sets of 'fiscal peers,'" says Combs. "It takes into account a number of factors including district size, geography and student characteristics that affect academic performance and spending. We want to provide as thorough a snapshot as we can."

Based on these data, school districts and campuses receive ratings from one to five stars, with half-star increments, with five stars representing the highest achievement.

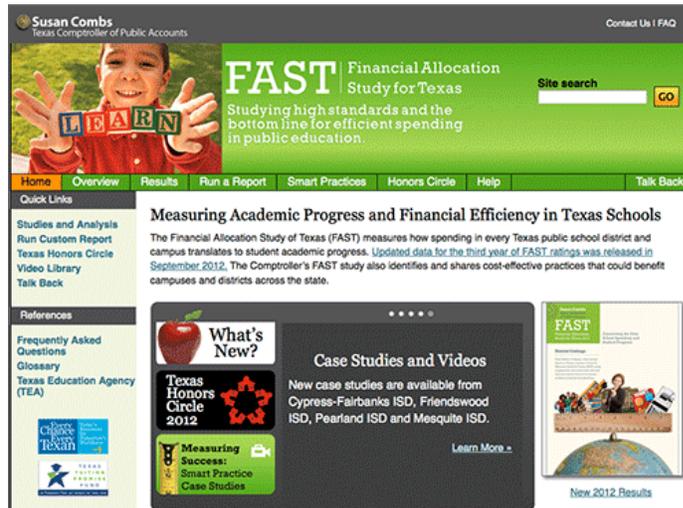
In addition to serving up data for parents, educators, civic leaders and researchers, FAST spotlights continuously updated [Smart](#)



[Go to the FAST District Map.](#)

[Practices](#) — plans and strategies adopted by schools that have improved operational efficiency or student performance.

“Our [FAST Honors Circle](#) recognizes districts and campuses that achieve academic growth while spending wisely and conservatively,” Combs says. “We want to make sure that these high-performing districts are recognized, and that we offer opportunities for other communities to learn from their progress. We want this to be a tool that serves, and not just reports.”



“The goal is to provide as much helpful information as possible to Texans, so that they can see precisely how their tax dollars are being applied to education, and how students are performing academically.”

— Olga Garza,
FAST project manager

FAST 2012

In September, the Comptroller’s office released new FAST ratings and updated additional data on more than 1,100 school districts and charter schools. The online [FAST reporting tool](#) provides 18 different reports for districts and 13 for campuses, providing more than 300 indicators. Visitors also can use the tool to run reports comparing districts and campuses based on enrollment, geography, academic achievement and demographics.

“This year, we’ve included data on each district’s outstanding debt and annual debt service, and the amount of debt per student and per district resident,” says Olga Garza, FAST project manager. “The goal is to provide as much helpful information as possible to Texans, so that they can see precisely how their tax dollars are being applied to education, and how students are performing academically.”

The 2012 FAST update arrived alongside the Comptroller’s reports on local government debt in Texas. The reports, [Your Money and Local Debt](#) and [Your Money and Education Debt](#), provide Texas taxpayers with a clearer view of the volume of debt issued by local governments throughout the state, while highlighting trends that contribute to the state’s debt load. [FN](#)

FASTexas.org At a Glance



STUDIES AND ANALYSIS:

The Comptroller's FAST site features a [variety of reports and related studies](#), including details about the data and methodology, as well as links to other valuable resources.



CUSTOM REPORTS:

The [FAST reporting tool](#) allows you to view and sort data on a variety of metrics, including characteristics, locations and demographics.



[Texas Honors Circle](#)

TEXAS HONORS CIRCLE:

The Comptroller's [Texas Honors Circle](#) recognizes school districts and campuses that achieve student academic growth while keeping spending relatively low.



VIDEO LIBRARY:

The [FAST video library](#) features a wide array of informative videos that spotlight Honors Circle winners and show you how to get the most from FAST.

Get the most from the Texas Comptroller's transparency initiatives by visiting TexasTransparency.org.

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