New Tools for Policymakers

The Texas Smart Schools Approach to Identifying Effective and Efficient Schools

A presentation to the National Summit on Education Reform

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November 30, 2017
Texas Smart Schools

• This online resource empowers school districts to benchmark themselves against their peers and enables parents (and taxpayers) to assess the quality of education their children are receiving compared to its cost.

• The goal is to improve education by
  -- identifying Smart Schools that are both effective and efficient then
  -- highlighting their successful practices

TXSmartSchools.org
Searching for Success
TXSmartSchools uses academic, financial, and demographic data to identify school districts and campuses that produce high academic achievement while also maintaining cost-effective operations.

We hope that school districts and education policymakers will use this information to identify Texas schools worth emulating—those facing similar challenges and spending similar dollars but that are able to achieve great things.

Compare Schools Easily
The heart of the TXSmartSchools website is the Apples2Apples data exploration tool that enables you to interact with Texas public school and district data.

Just pick any Texas school or district—or several schools and districts—and Apples2Apples will retrieve the data and suggest fiscal peers for comparison.

TXSmartSchools News
Welcome to TXSmartSchools.org, a resource for Texans interested in school effectiveness and efficiency.

5/18/2017
The 2017 Smart Scores are here! See the Five-Star districts and campuses on the Latest Results page and explore the data using the Apples2Apples comparison tool.

5/11/2017
The 2017 data release is almost ready. For a sneak peek you can read our first Smart Steps article based on that data, “What’s Not to Love about Shared Service Arrangements?”
Origins and History

• In 2009 the Texas legislature directed the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts to “identify school districts and campuses that use resource allocation practices that contribute to high academic achievement and cost-effective operations”

• Former comptroller, Susan Combs, and her team developed the Financial Allocation Study for Texas (FAST) to meet that challenge

• The Texas Smart Schools Initiative was initially funded by Susan Combs to build on and improve the work started by FAST
The Core Philosophy: Apples-to-Apples Comparisons

• Differences in educational context have to be taken into consideration to make fair comparisons among schools and districts

• Two dimensions of comparison
  – Academic progress
  – Real expenditures
Measuring Academic Progress

• Value added measure of student gains on the Texas accountability instruments
  – STAAR exams
  – End of Course (EOC) exams

• Adjusted for differences in prior performance and key student characteristics
  – Grade level, sex, race/ethnicity
  – Free or reduced-price lunch status, LEP status, special education status, and gifted and talented status
Measuring Real Expenditures

• Each school or district has a unique set of fiscal peers that are its nearest-neighbor matches on key dimensions of educational cost
  – Size
  – Labor cost
  – Student need

• Spending at the school and district level measured relative to those fiscal peers
The Real Spending Index

• Based on operating expenditures per pupil in core educational functions
  – Instruction and related
  – Instructional leadership
  – School leadership
  – Student support services
  – Extracurricular activities
  – Central administration
  – Maintenance, security, and data processing
2017
San Antonio ISD
The Campus Spending Index

- Based on operating expenditures per pupil in a subset of core educational functions
  - Instruction and related
  - Instructional leadership
  - School leadership
  - Student support services
  - Extracurricular activities
  - Central administration
  - Maintenance, security and data processing
Choose Campuses to View in Apples2Apples

To see detailed data and visualizations for your campus, first select the school district or begin typing its name in the Districts box. Then, click the Filter Campuses button.

Select the campus or begin typing its name in the Campuses box. Choose only one campus to see how it compares to its closest peers.

To create a custom data table, select more than one campus. You can select multiple campuses one at a time in the Campuses box. You can also select all campuses matching one or more selection criteria. See Help for more details.

When you're ready to see the results, click the Show Me button.

1. Choose a District to filter the Campuses selection list (optional)

   Districts:
   - [ ] DALLAS ISD

   Filter Campuses

2. Choose a Campus and/or Other Selection Criteria

   Campuses:
   - [ ] ARCADIA PARK EL

   And show all school districts matching the following criteria.

   Show Only Charter Campuses

   Counties:
   - Select up to two Counties

   Smart Score:
   - [ ] Select a Smart Score, if desired

   School Type:
   - Select up to four School Grade Types

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ARCADIA PARK EL

- High Academic Progress (at or above 70% of districts)
- Low Spending compared to fiscal peers
- $6,255.33 cost-adjusted spending per pupil

This report shows ARCADIA PARK EL compared to its fiscal peers. You may choose your own group of campuses to compare against ARCADIA PARK EL.

Cost-adjusted Spending Per Pupil vs. Academic Progress

Cost-adjusted Spending Per Pupil

Want to learn more about how Smart Scores are assigned? Details can be found on our methodology page.
2017
Comal ISD
Canyon Lake
High School

Legend
○ Fiscal Peers
◆ CANYON LAKE H S

CANYON LAKE H S

959 students
COMAL ISD
TEA Rating: Met Standard
2017

Average Academic Progress
at or above 51% of all districts
High Spending compared to fiscal peers
$6,965.33 cost adjusted spending per pupil

This report shows CANYON LAKE H S compared to its Smart fiscal peers. You may choose your own group of campuses to compare against CANYON LAKE H S.

Cost-adjusted Spending Per Pupil vs. Academic Progress

Cost-adjusted Spending Per Pupil

Academic Progress
Conclusions

• The TSS Academic Progress measure augments the extensive Texas accountability system with value-added measures of student academic progress
• The TSS Real Spending Index allows comparisons among districts and schools facing the same sorts of challenges
• TSS shows schools that it is possible to accomplish more than they already do without any increase in resources