

# JUST THE FACTS:

## GOVERNMENT DEBT IN TEXAS' MOST POPULOUS CITIES, COUNTIES, AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

### 2ND EDITION



by James Quintero and John Bonura

Updated November 2023



**Texas Public Policy**  
Foundation

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# Just the Facts:

## Government Debt in Texas' Most Populous Cities, Counties, and School Districts, 2nd Edition

James Quintero and John Bonura

### Introduction

Local governments in Texas have accumulated a substantial amount of public debt.

In fiscal year (FY) 2022, the amount of unpaid principal on debts held by cities, counties, school districts, and special districts stood at \$284.2 billion, with approximately two thirds of that total taking the form of general obligation debt paid through property taxes. From FY 2018 to FY 2022, local debt outstanding increased by \$53.5 billion or 23.2% ([Bond Review Board, 2023, p. iii](#)).

Of the FY 2022 total, school district debt comprises the greatest share at 36.7% or \$104.2 billion. Municipal government debt was the next largest, at 31.9% of the total or \$90.7 billion. Special district debt—led by water districts (\$43.7 billion)—totaled \$73.5 billion representing 25.9% of total debt. County government debt was \$15.8 billion or 5.5% of the whole ([Bond Review Board, 2023, p. 5](#)).

This level of indebtedness is relatively high compared to Texas' peer states. Consider that the Lone Star State's local debt per capita (\$9,019/resident) ranked as the third highest among the top 10 most populous states. Only the governments of California (\$9,570/resident) and New York (\$10,701/resident) had accumulated a greater level of debt ([Bond Review Board, 2023, p. 4](#)).

These data suggest a heightened level of consumption and, to some degree, overindulgence. However, that is not to say that all local governments share equally in the intemperance. Indeed, some specific government entities are more responsible than others.

To better understand the local debt landscape and the contribution of certain governmental entities, this paper examines borrowing in Texas' 10 largest cities, counties, and school districts. These 30 separate jurisdictions represent large portions of Texas and, in many cases, overlap with one another. The data for these governments are largely presented without commentary so that you—the reader—can see *just the facts!*

### Key Points

- Local government debt in Texas has reached concerning proportions.
- The 10 largest cities have borrowed more than \$70.3 billion, or \$7,853 per resident.
- The 10 largest counties owe a combined \$14 billion, or \$793 per resident.
- The 10 largest school districts' debts total \$31.5 billion, or \$31,215 per student.

## City Government Debt

Texas' 10 largest municipal governments owed a combined \$70.3 billion in FY 2022. Of those, the most deeply indebted on an aggregate basis was the city of Houston, whose debts totaled \$19.5 billion. That was followed by the cities of San Antonio (\$18.5 billion), Austin (\$11 billion), and Dallas (\$6.7 billion). On a per capita basis, the city of San Antonio's debt was the highest amount at \$12,557 owed for every resident. That was followed by the cities of Austin (\$11,252/resident), Houston (\$8,456/resident), and Arlington (\$7,373).

In 9 of the 10 largest cities, municipal debt exceeded the \$1 billion mark.

**Table 1**

*Local Debt in Texas' Most Populous Cities*

CITY GOVERNMENT DEBT: FY 2022					
Political Subdivision	Principal	Interest	Total Owed	2022 Population	Debt Per Capita
Houston	\$13,554,123,777	\$5,918,998,496	\$19,473,122,273	2,302,878	\$8,456
San Antonio	\$11,762,085,000	\$6,733,154,877	\$18,495,239,877	1,472,909	\$12,557
Dallas	\$4,619,785,416	\$2,054,865,003	\$6,674,650,419	1,299,544	\$5,136
Austin	\$7,245,445,000	\$3,719,427,238	\$10,964,872,238	974,447	\$11,252
Fort Worth	\$2,332,805,000	\$808,522,305	\$3,141,327,305	956,709	\$3,283
El Paso	\$2,728,555,000	\$1,255,235,456	\$3,983,790,456	677,456	\$5,881
Arlington	\$1,980,079,000	\$929,246,621	\$2,909,325,621	394,602	\$7,373
Corpus Christi	\$1,406,846,000	\$597,243,136	\$2,004,089,136	316,239	\$6,337
Plano	\$689,108,000	\$247,710,382	\$936,818,382	289,547	\$3,235
Lubbock	\$1,256,587,000	\$427,823,902	\$1,684,410,902	263,930	\$6,382
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$47,575,419,193</b>	<b>\$22,692,227,416</b>	<b>\$70,267,646,609</b>	<b>8,948,261</b>	<b>\$7,853</b>

## DID YOU KNOW?

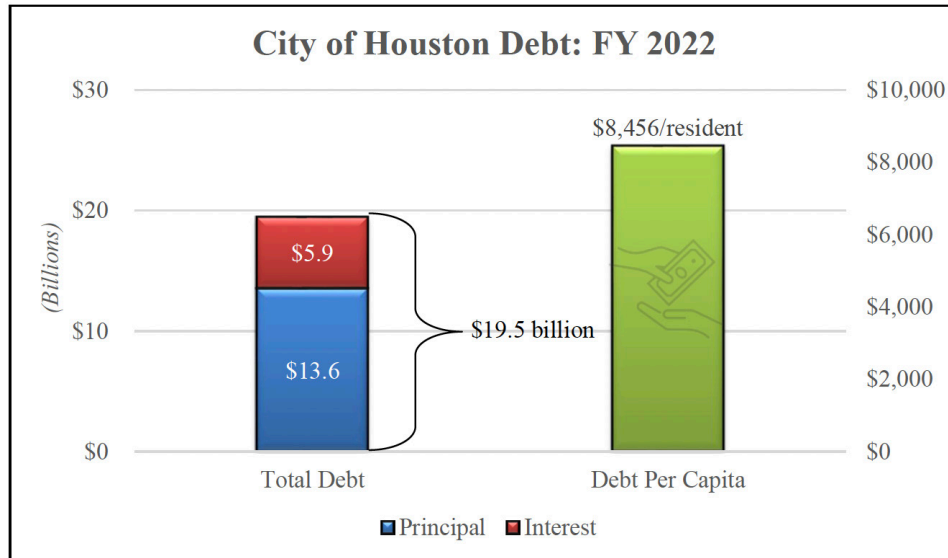
Increasingly, municipalities in Texas are utilizing non-voter approved debt instruments, like certificates of obligation (COs), to go into debt without public permission. In fact, "Since fiscal year 2013, CO debt outstanding has increased by 48.2 percent (\$6.24 billion) from \$12.96 billion outstanding in fiscal year 2013 to \$19.21 billion outstanding in fiscal year 2022. Cities accounted for 80.1 percent of the total CO debt outstanding at fiscal year-end 2022" ([Bond Review Board, 2023, p. 33](#)).

### City of Houston

In FY 2022, the city of Houston's debt totaled \$19.5 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$13.6 billion and \$5.9 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$20.5 billion. ([Bond Review Board, n.d.](#))

In 2022, the number of people residing within Houston proper was 2,302,878 ([Census Bureau, n.d.-a](#)).

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$8,456 per resident.



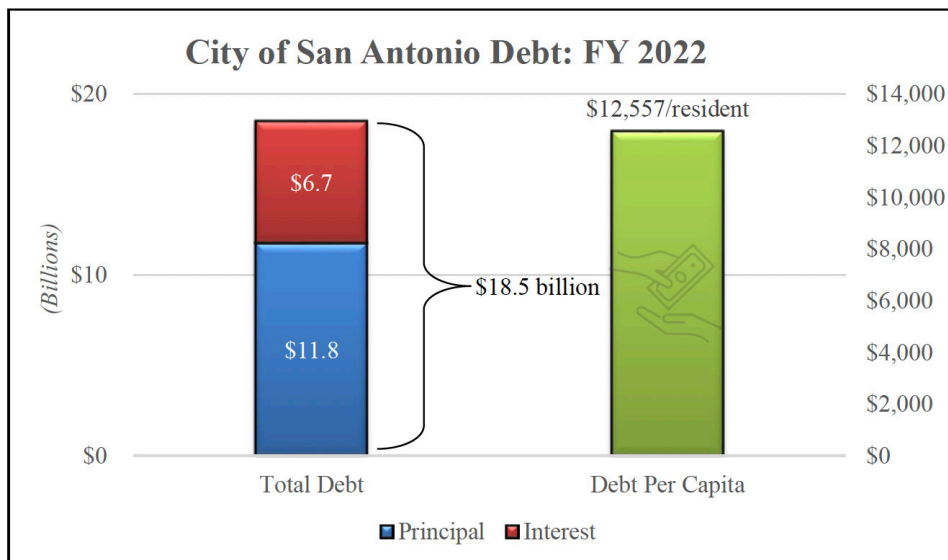
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### City of San Antonio

In FY 2022, the city of San Antonio's debt totaled \$18.5 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$11.8 billion and \$6.7 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$17.9 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within San Antonio proper was 1,472,909.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$12,557 per resident.



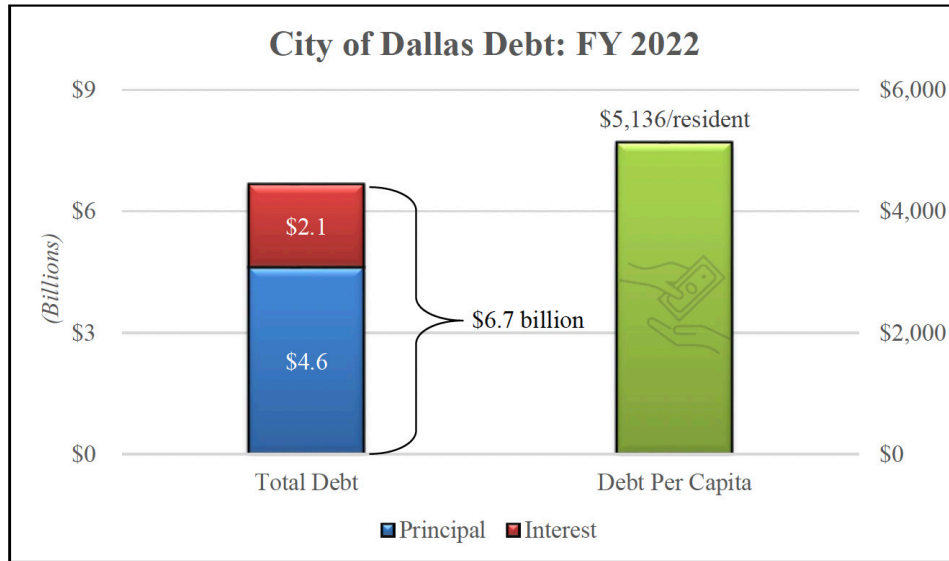
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### City of Dallas

In FY 2022, the city of Dallas' debt totaled \$6.7 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$4.6 billion and \$2.1 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$6.7 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Dallas proper was 1,299,544.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$5,136 per resident.



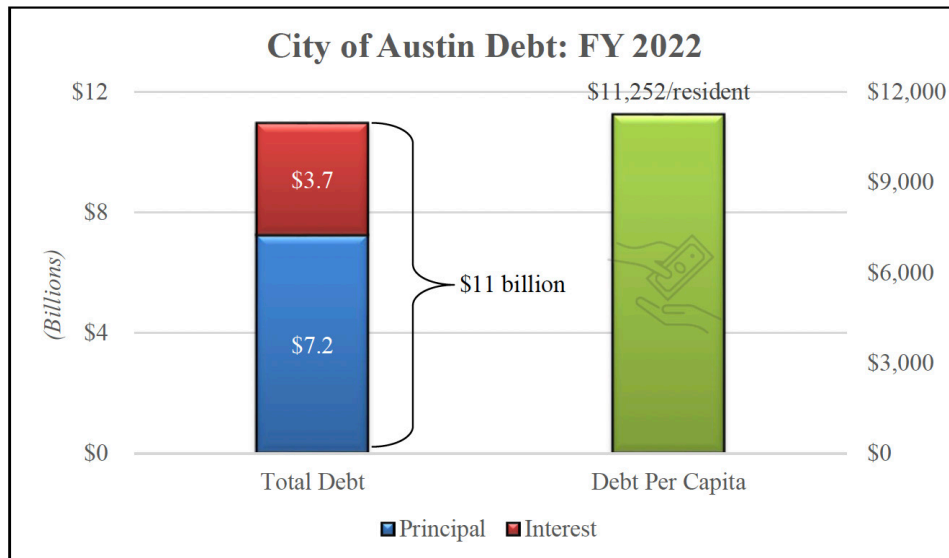
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### City of Austin

In FY 2022, the city of Austin's debt totaled \$11 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$7.2 billion and \$3.7 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$10.4 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Austin proper was 974,447.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$11,252 per resident.



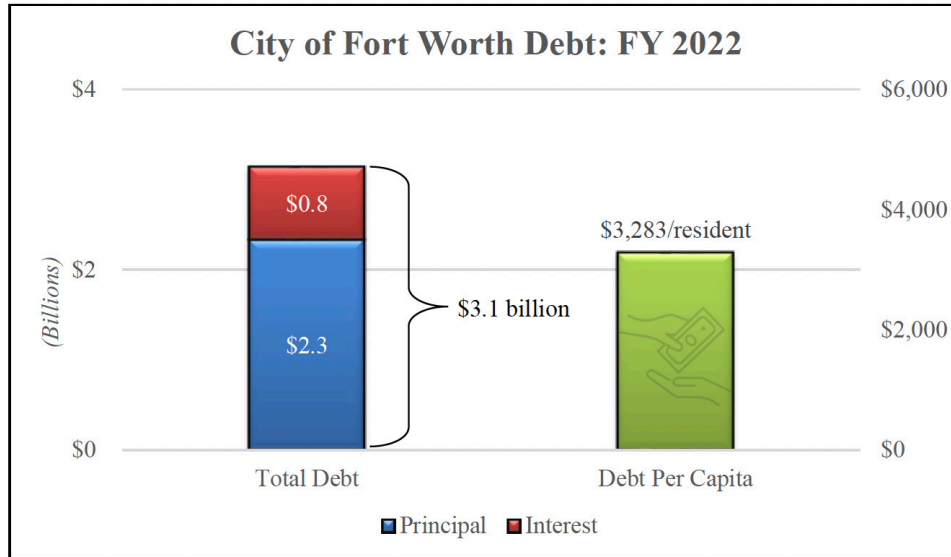
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### City of Fort Worth

In FY 2022, the city of Fort Worth's debt totaled \$3.1 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.3 billion and \$808.5 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$3 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Fort Worth proper was 956,709.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$3,283 per resident.



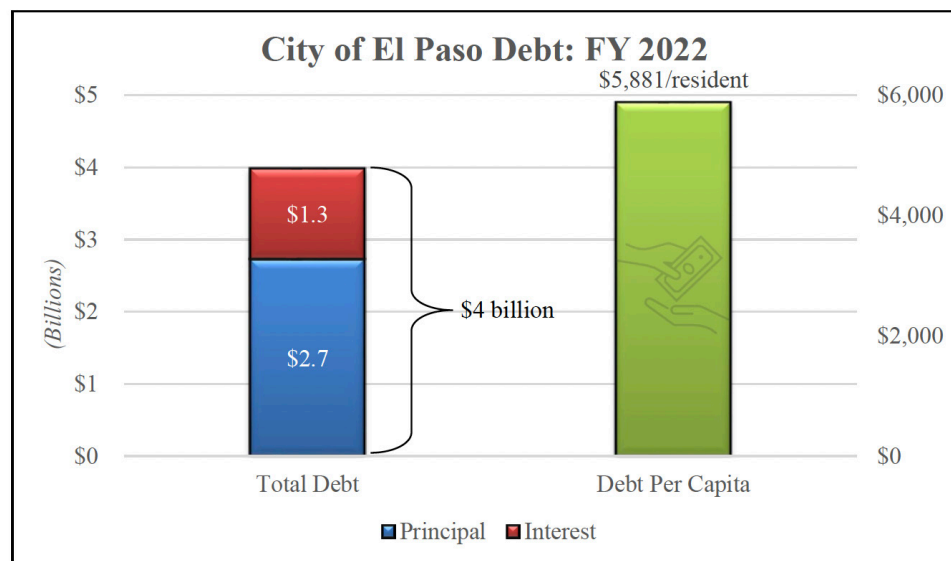
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### City of El Paso

In FY 2022, the city of El Paso's debt totaled \$4 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.7 billion and \$1.3 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$3.3 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within El Paso proper was 677,456.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$5,881 per resident.



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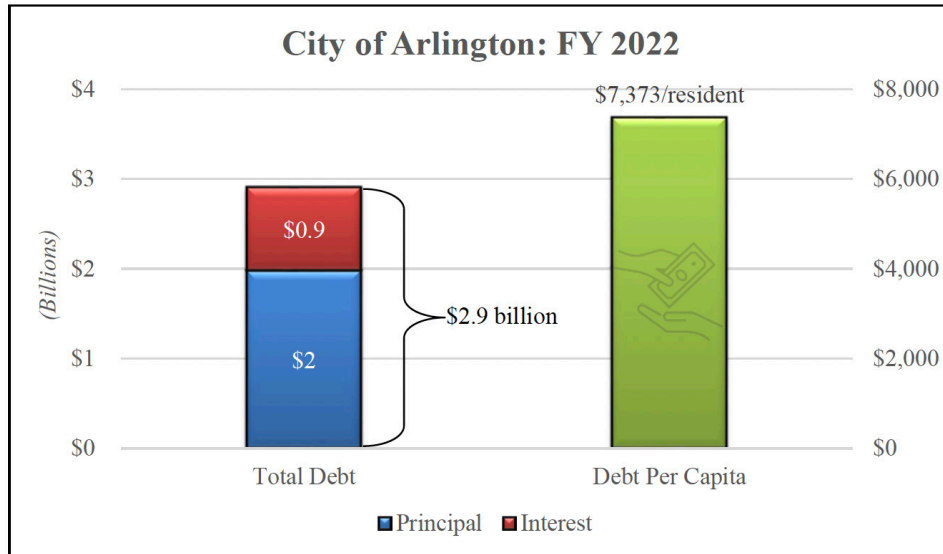


### City of Arlington

In FY 2022, the city of Arlington’s debt totaled \$2.9 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2 billion and \$929.2 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city’s debt totaled \$2.9 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Arlington proper was 394,602.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$7,373 per resident.



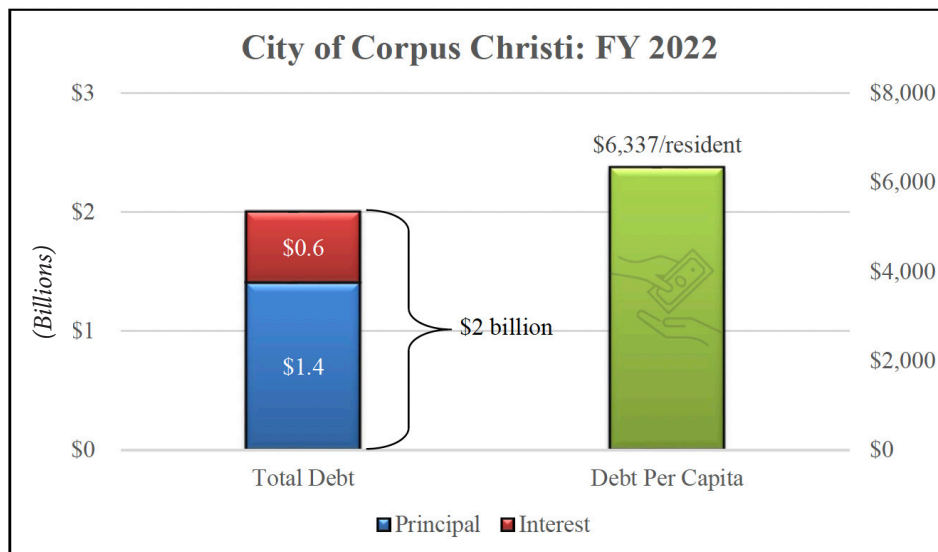
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### City of Corpus Christi

In FY 2022, the city of Corpus Christi’s debt totaled \$2 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$1.4 billion and \$597.2 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city’s debt totaled \$1.8 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Corpus Christi proper was 316,239.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$6,337 per resident.



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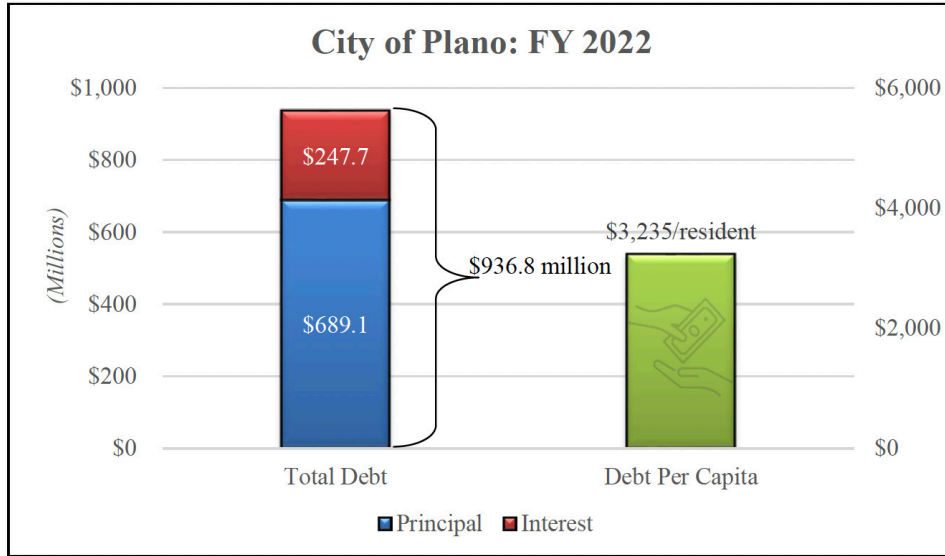


### City of Plano

In FY 2022, the city of Plano's debt totaled \$936.8 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$689.1 million and \$247.7 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$795.4 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Plano proper was 289,547.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$3,235 per resident.



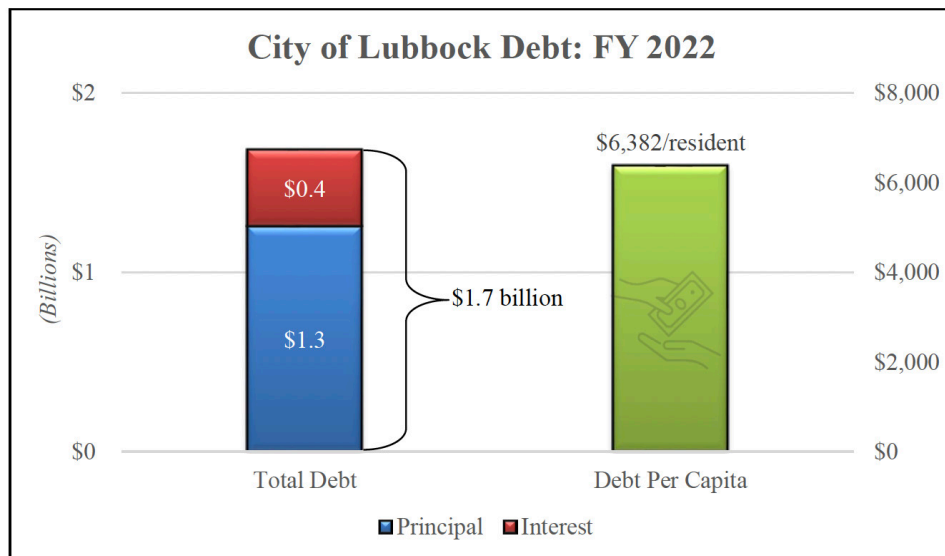
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### City of Lubbock

In FY 2022, the city of Lubbock's debt totaled \$1.7 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$1.3 billion and \$427.8 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the city's debt totaled \$1.4 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing within Lubbock proper was 263,930.

On a per capita basis, the city has borrowed \$6,382 per resident.



Figures may not add due to rounding.

## County Government Debt

In FY 2022, the 10 most populous counties in the Lone Star State had accumulated more than \$14 billion in debt. Of those, Harris County owed the greatest amount overall, at \$5.4 billion. That was followed by Bexar County (\$3.4 billion), Travis County (\$1.3 billion), and Fort Bend County (\$909.4 million). On a per capita basis, Bexar County's debt was the highest at \$1,651 owed per resident followed by Harris County (\$1,135/resident) and Fort Bend County (\$1,023/resident). Debt in 3 of the 10 largest counties exceeded the \$1 billion mark.

**Table 2**

*Local Debt in Texas' Most Populous Counties*

COUNTY GOVERNMENT DEBT: FY 2022					
Political Subdivision	Principal	Interest	Total Owed	2022 Population	Debt Per Capita
Harris County	\$3,628,772,125	\$1,795,998,381	\$5,424,770,506	4,780,913	\$1,135
Dallas County	\$236,605,000	\$91,776,904	\$328,381,904	2,600,840	\$126
Tarrant County	\$404,360,000	\$167,259,051	\$571,619,051	2,154,595	\$265
Bexar County	\$2,359,655,000	\$1,040,757,820	\$3,400,412,820	2,059,530	\$1,651
Travis County	\$978,465,000	\$301,574,839	\$1,280,039,839	1,326,436	\$965
Collin County	\$543,645,000	\$158,141,014	\$701,786,014	1,158,696	\$606
Denton County	\$559,930,000	\$139,701,880	\$699,631,880	977,281	\$716
Fort Bend County	\$667,046,270	\$242,402,474	\$909,448,744	889,146	\$1,023
Hidalgo County	\$367,135,000	\$167,133,084	\$534,268,084	888,367	\$601
El Paso County	\$164,780,830	\$30,913,961	\$195,694,791	868,763	\$225
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,910,394,225</b>	<b>\$4,135,659,408</b>	<b>\$14,046,053,633</b>	<b>17,704,567</b>	<b>\$793</b>

### DID YOU KNOW?

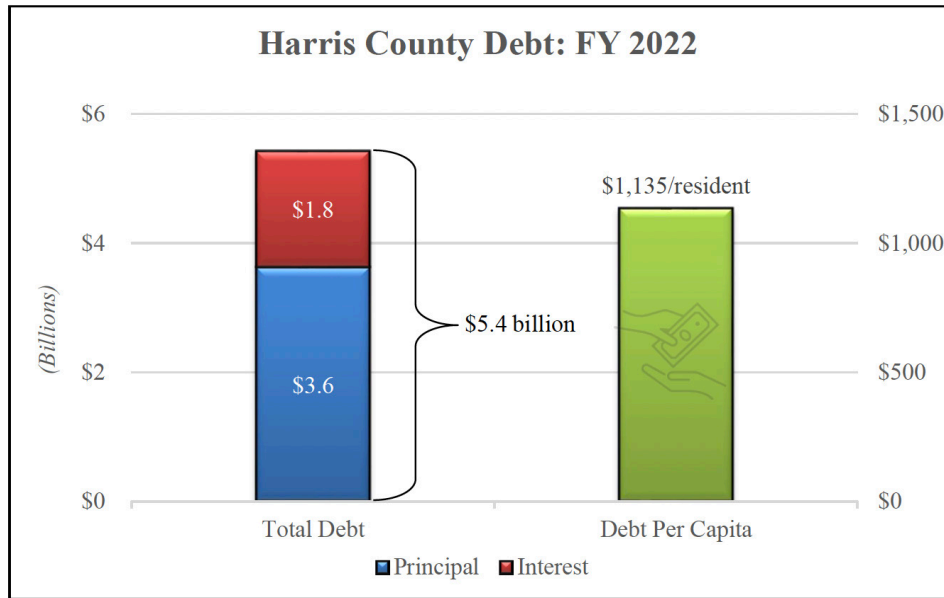
Over the past decade, local debt has grown substantially. One way to measure the growth is to track debt outstanding per capita over time. To that effect, "local government total debt outstanding per capita increased by 31.8 percent, or \$2,320 per person, from \$7,303 per capita in fiscal year 2013 to \$9,623 per capita in fiscal year 2022" ([Bond Review Board, 2023, p. 4](#)).

### Harris County

In FY 2022, Harris County’s debt totaled \$5.4 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$3.6 billion and \$1.8 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county’s debt totaled \$5.3 billion ([Bond Review Board, n.d.](#)).

In 2022, the number of people residing in Harris County was 4,780,913 ([Census Bureau, n.d.-b.](#)).

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$1,135 per resident.



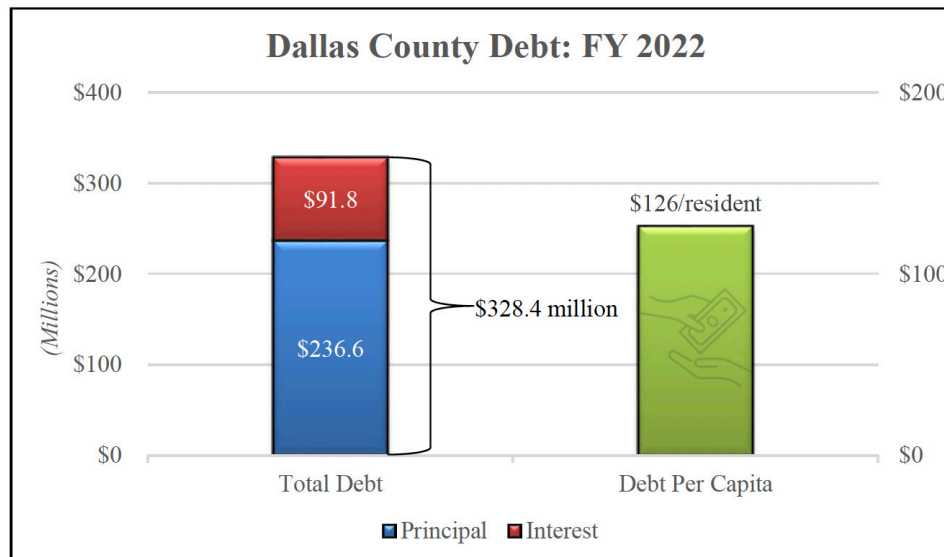
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### Dallas County

In FY 2022, Dallas County’s debt totaled \$328.4 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$236.6 million and \$91.8 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county’s debt totaled \$144.8 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Dallas County was 2,600,840.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$126 per resident.



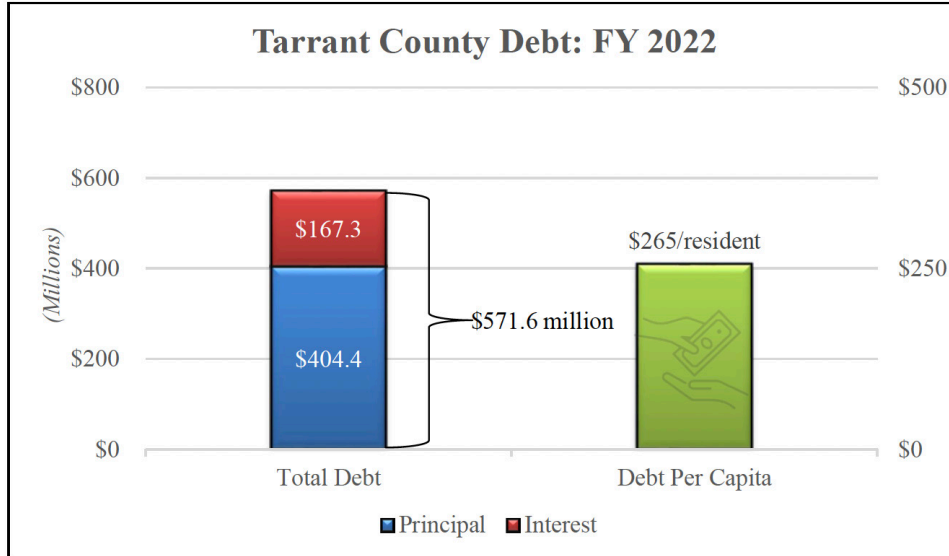
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### Tarrant County

In FY 2022, Tarrant County's debt totaled \$571.6 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$404.4 million and \$167.3 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county's debt totaled \$252.6 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Tarrant County was 2,154,595.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$265 per resident.



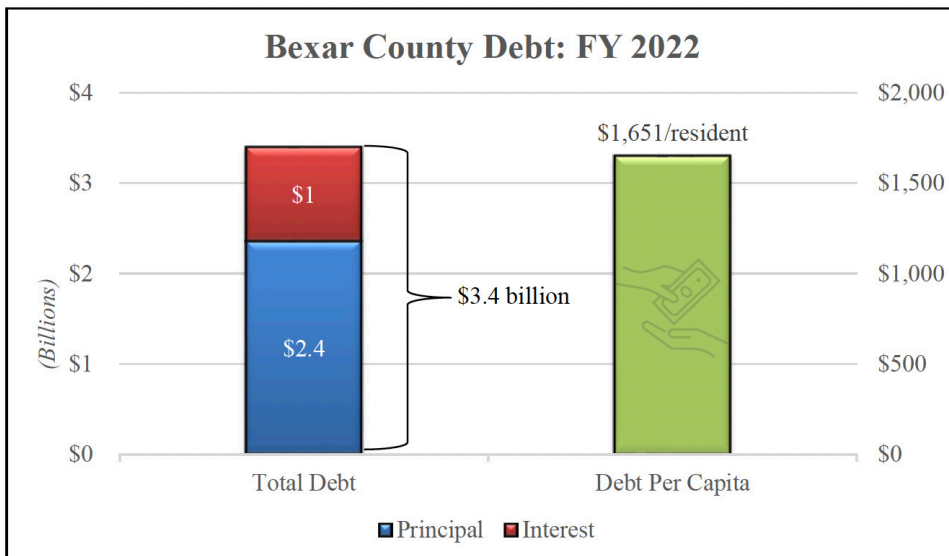
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### Bexar County

In FY 2022, Bexar County's debt totaled \$3.4 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.4 billion and \$1 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county's debt totaled \$3.5 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Bexar County was 2,059,530.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$1,651 per resident.



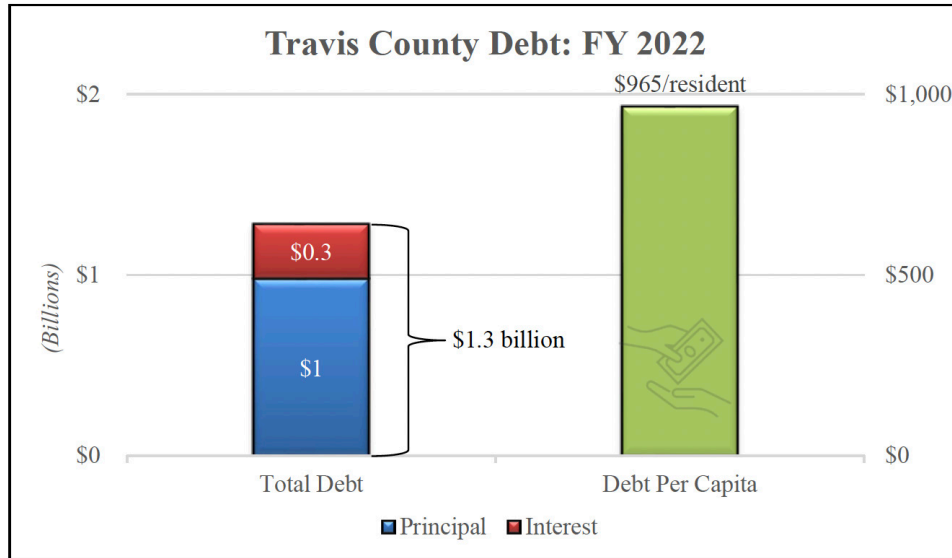
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### Travis County

In FY 2022, Travis County's debt totaled \$1.3 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$978.5 million and \$301.6 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county's debt totaled \$1.4 billion.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Travis County was 1,326,436.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$965 per resident.



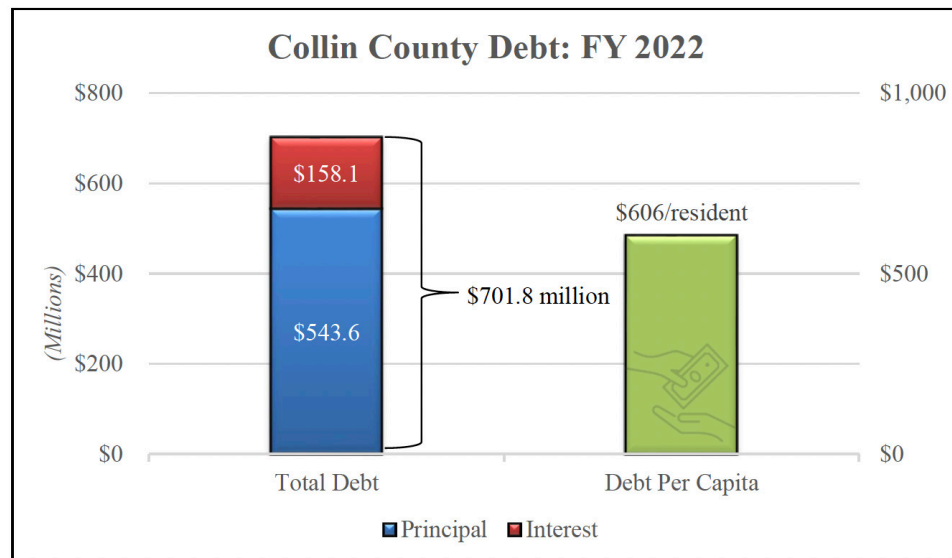
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### Collin County

In FY 2022, Collin County's debt totaled \$701.8 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$543.6 million and \$158.1 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county's debt totaled \$675.9 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Collin County was 1,158,696.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$606 per resident.



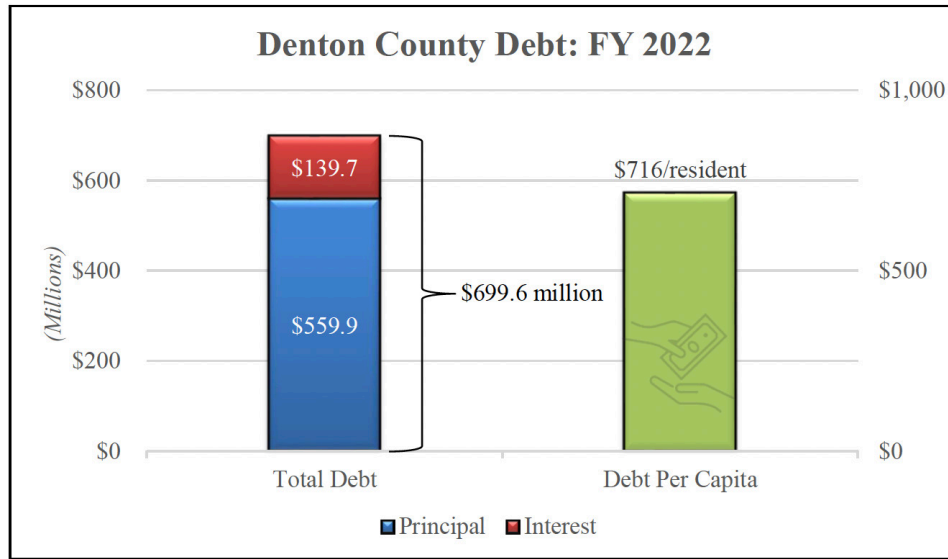
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### Denton County

In FY 2022, Denton County’s debt totaled \$699.6 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$559.9 million and \$139.7 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county’s debt totaled \$730.9 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Denton County was 977,281.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$716 per resident.



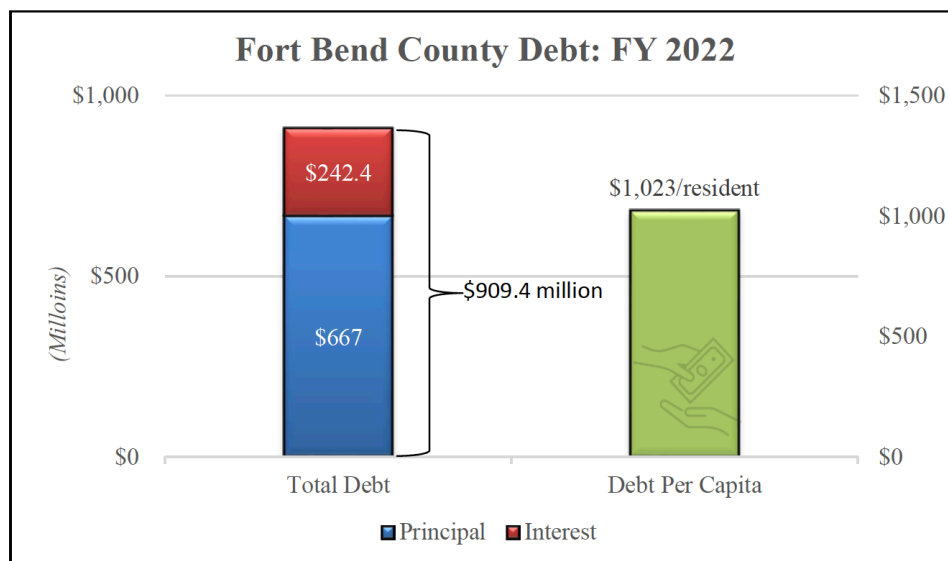
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### Fort Bend County

In FY 2022, Fort Bend County’s debt totaled \$909.4 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$667 million and \$242.4 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county’s debt totaled \$851.1 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Fort Bend County was 889,146.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$1,023 per resident.



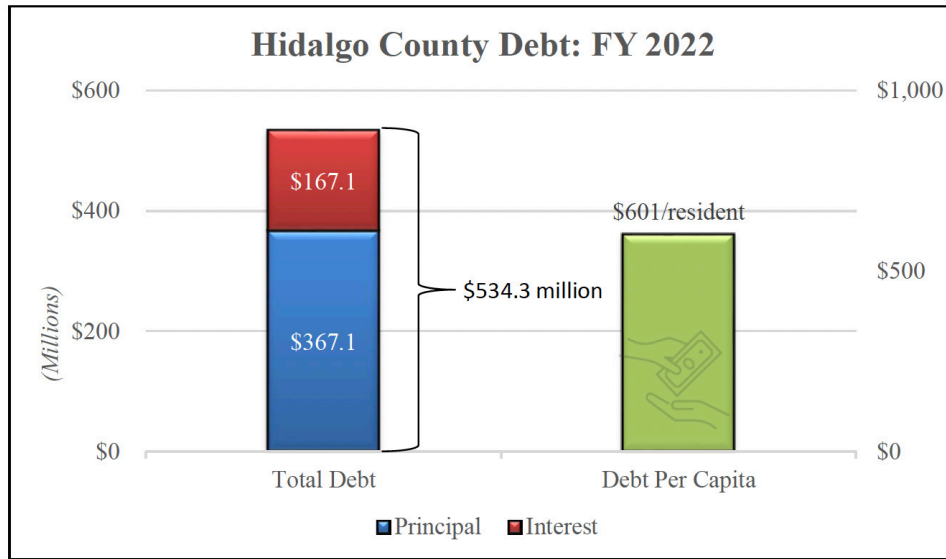
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### Hidalgo County

In FY 2022, Hidalgo County's debt totaled \$534.3 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$367.1 million and \$167.1 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county's debt totaled \$528 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in Hidalgo County was 888,367.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$601 per resident.



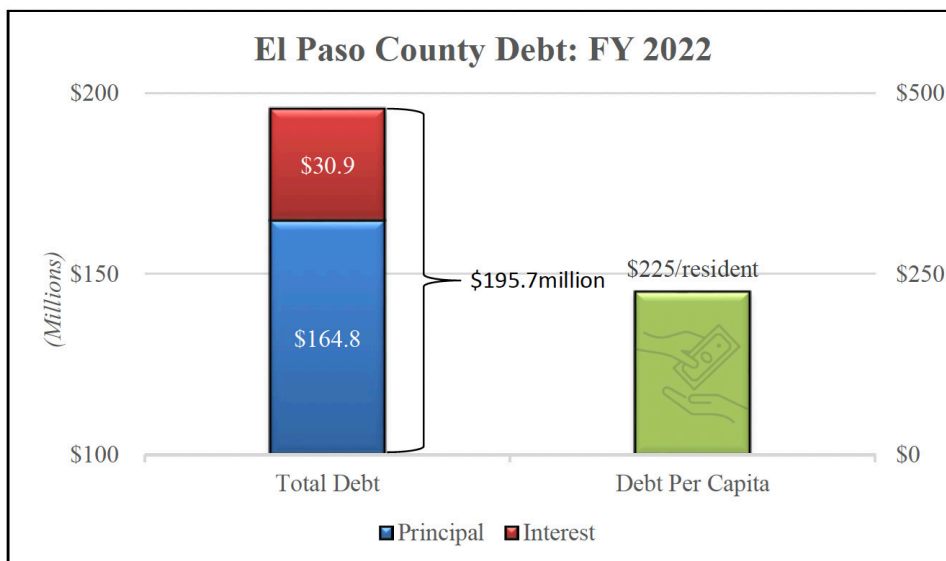
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### El Paso County

In FY 2022, El Paso County's debt totaled \$195.7 million. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$164.8 million and \$30.9 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the county's debt totaled \$173.8 million.

In 2022, the number of people residing in El Paso County was 868,763.

On a per capita basis, the county has borrowed \$225 per resident.



Figures may not add due to rounding.



## School District Debt

In FY 2022, Texas' 10 largest school districts owed more than \$31.4 billion or approximately \$31,200 for every student enrolled. The district having accumulated the most amount of debt in aggregate terms was Dallas ISD (\$4.8 billion). They were followed by Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (\$4.3 billion), Northside ISD (\$3.8 billion), and Frisco ISD (\$3.5 billion). On a per capita basis, Frisco ISD's debt was the highest, at \$51,890 owed per student. That was followed by Northside ISD (\$37,204), Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (\$36,797), and Katy ISD (\$36,923). Every district analyzed owed more than \$1 billion in debt and 8 of the 10 districts owed more than \$2 billion in debt.

**Table 3**

*Local Debt in Texas' Largest School Districts*

SCHOOL DISTRICT DEBT: FY 2022					
Political Subdivision	Principal	Interest	Total Owed	2022 Enrollment	Debt Per Capita
Houston ISD	\$2,384,285,000	\$907,213,426	\$3,291,498,426	189,934	\$17,330
Dallas ISD	\$3,467,730,000	\$1,304,545,845	\$4,772,275,845	141,169	\$33,805
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	\$3,081,345,000	\$1,261,037,114	\$4,342,382,114	118,010	\$36,797
Northside ISD	\$2,327,690,000	\$1,493,821,609	\$3,821,511,609	102,719	\$37,204
Katy ISD	\$2,140,211,367	\$1,222,980,329	\$3,363,191,696	92,667	\$36,293
Fort Bend ISD	\$1,536,300,000	\$943,705,476	\$2,480,005,476	79,660	\$31,132
Austin ISD	\$1,480,018,266	\$497,297,574	\$1,977,315,840	73,384	\$26,945
Fort Worth ISD	\$1,179,925,000	\$443,821,139	\$1,623,746,139	72,783	\$22,309
Conroe ISD	\$1,616,515,000	\$710,795,116	\$2,327,310,116	70,783	\$32,880
Frisco ISD	\$2,260,840,228	\$1,211,448,658	\$3,472,288,885	66,916	\$51,890
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$21,475,849,861</b>	<b>\$9,996,884,541</b>	<b>\$31,472,734,401</b>	<b>1,008,268</b>	<b>\$31,215</b>

## DID YOU KNOW?

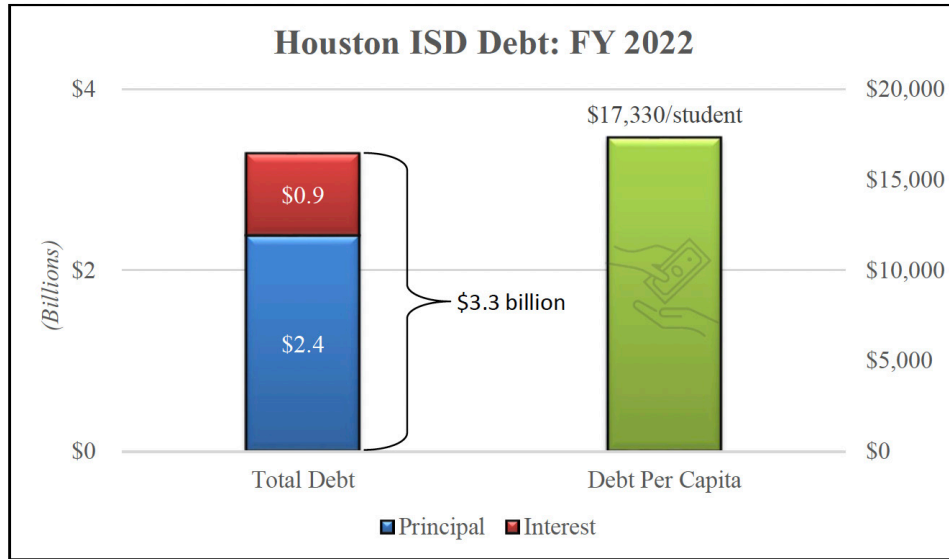
In FY 2022, the total debt (i.e., principal and interest) owed by all local governmental entities rose to \$417 billion or approximately \$14,000 borrowed for every man, woman, and child in Texas. Of that amount, "School districts account for the largest share of the total debt, eclipsing \$150 billion, followed by municipalities with just shy of \$130 billion" (Johnson, 2022, para. 4).

### Houston ISD

In FY 2022, Houston ISD's debt totaled \$3.3 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.4 billion and \$907.2 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$3.7 billion ([Bond Review Board, n.d.](#)).

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Houston ISD was 189,934 ([Texas Education Agency, 2022](#)).

The district has borrowed approximately \$17,330 per student.



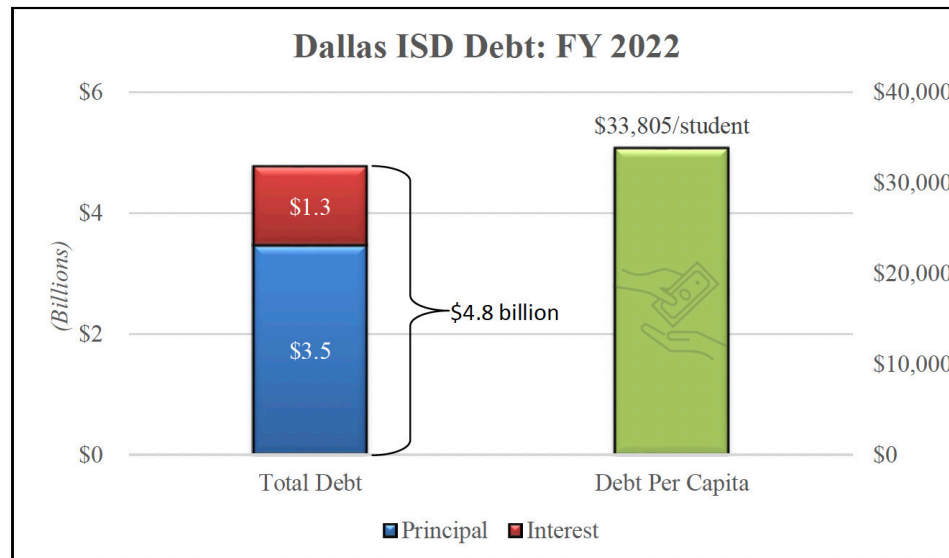
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### Dallas ISD

In FY 2022, Dallas ISD's debt totaled \$4.8 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$3.5 billion and \$1.3 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$4.6 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Dallas ISD was 141,169.

The district has borrowed approximately \$33,805 per student.



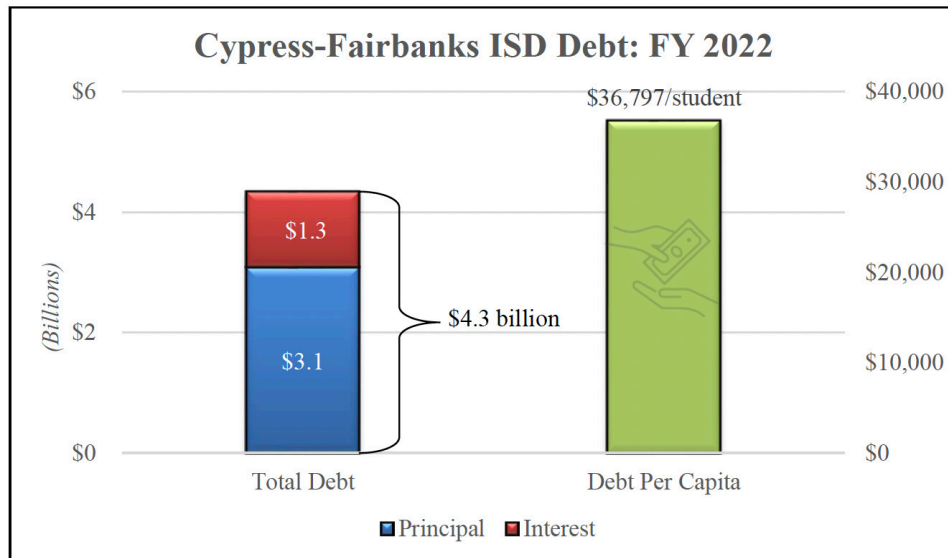
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### Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

In FY 2022, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD's debt totaled \$4.3 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$3.1 billion and \$1.3 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$4.5 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Cypress-Fairbanks ISD was 118,010.

The district has borrowed approximately \$36,797 per student.



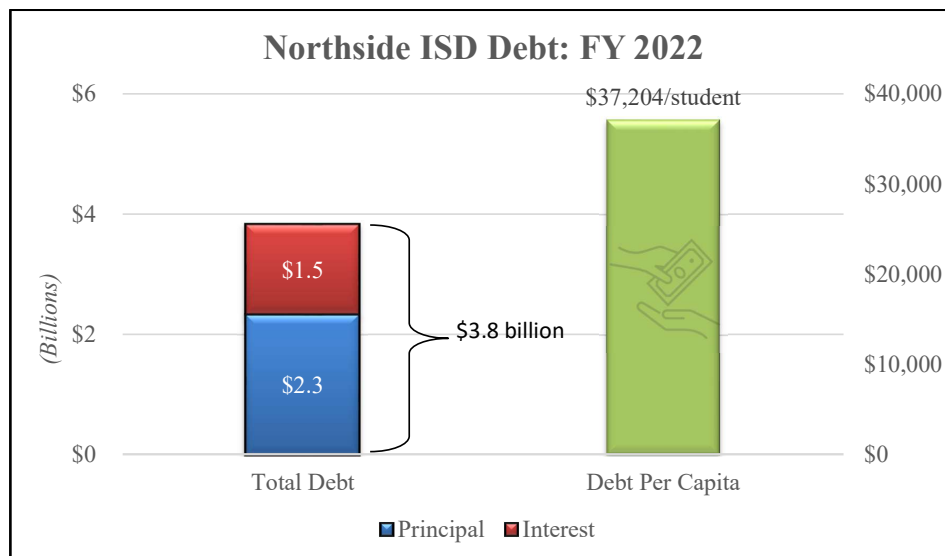
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### Northside ISD

In FY 2022, Northside ISD's debt totaled \$3.8 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.3 billion and \$1.5 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$3.7 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Northside ISD was 102,719.

The district has borrowed approximately \$37,204 per student.



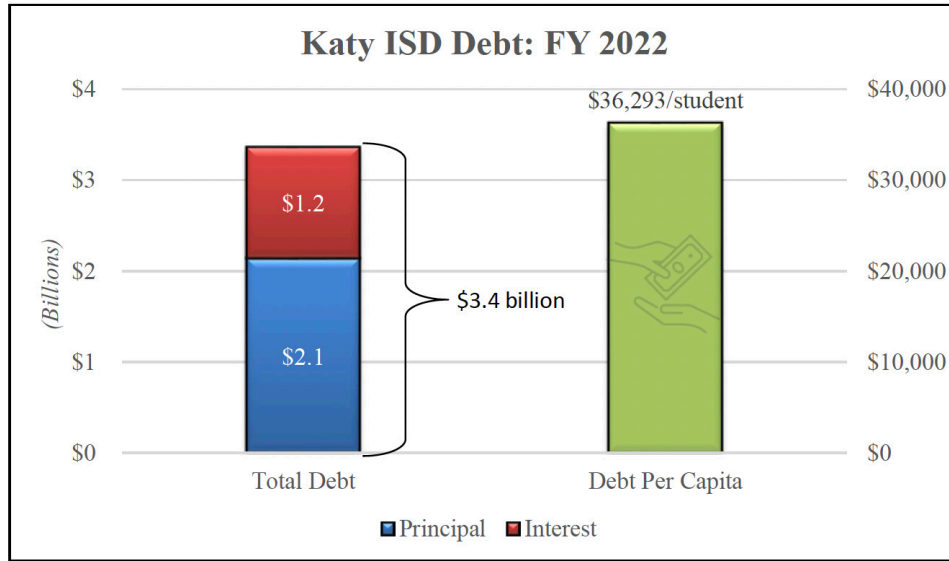
Figures may not add due to rounding.

### Katy ISD

In FY 2022, Katy ISD's debt totaled \$3.4 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.1 billion and \$1.2 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$2.8 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Katy ISD was 92,667.

The district has borrowed approximately \$36,293 per student.



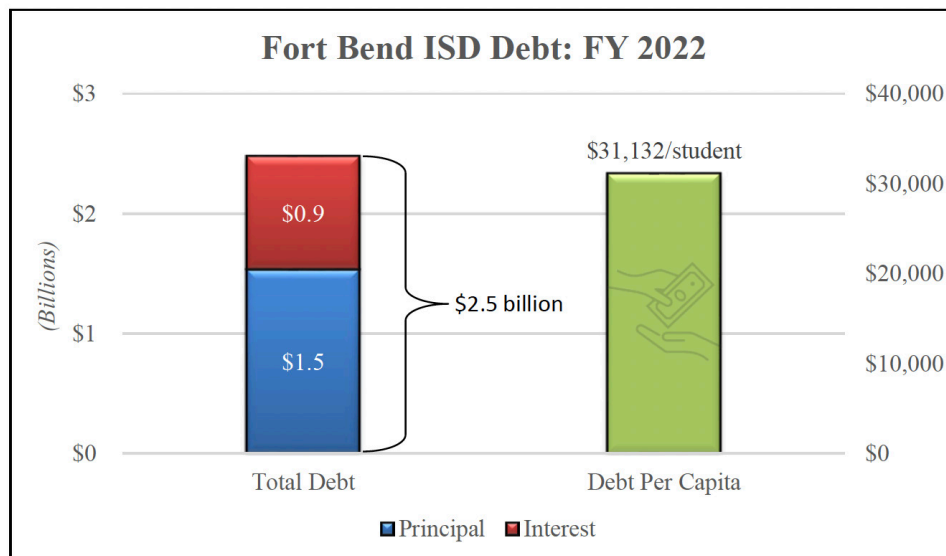
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### Fort Bend ISD

In FY 2022, Fort Bend ISD's debt totaled \$2.5 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$1.5 billion and \$943.7 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$2.2 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Fort Bend ISD was 79,660.

The district has borrowed approximately \$31,132 per student.



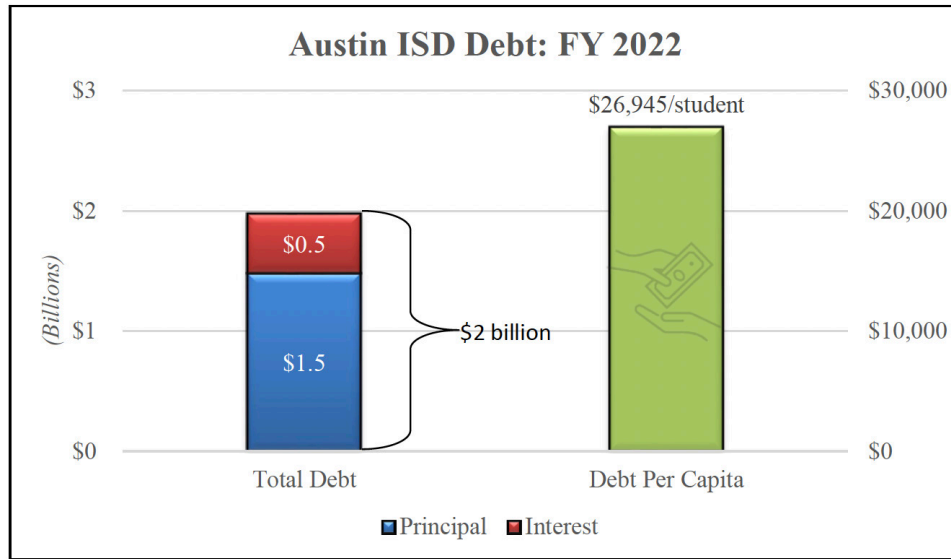
Figures may not add due to rounding.

### Austin ISD

In FY 2022, Austin ISD’s debt totaled \$2 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$1.5 billion and \$497.3 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district’s debt totaled \$2.1 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Austin ISD was 73,384.

The district has borrowed approximately \$26,945 per student.



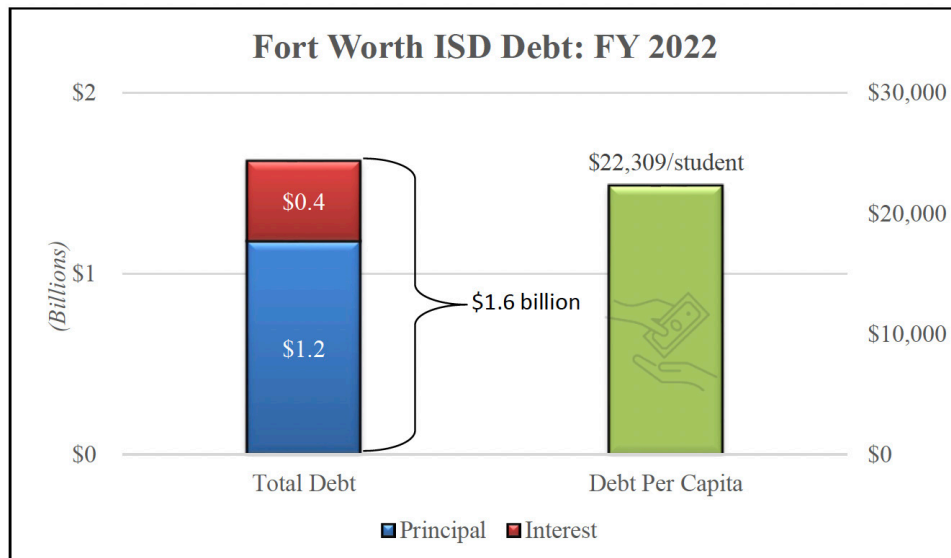
Figures may not add due to rounding.

### Fort Worth ISD

In FY 2022, Fort Worth ISD’s debt totaled \$1.6 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$1.2 billion and \$443.8 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district’s debt totaled \$1.7 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Fort Worth ISD was 72,783.

The district has borrowed approximately \$22,309 per student.



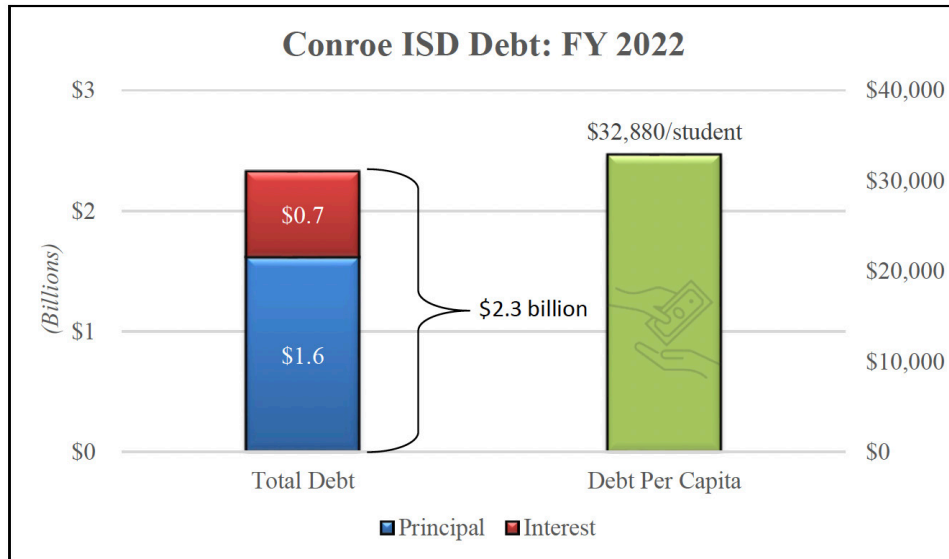
Figures may not add due to rounding.

### Conroe ISD

In FY 2022, Conroe ISD's debt totaled \$2.3 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$1.6 billion and \$710.8 million in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$2 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Conroe ISD was 70,783.

The district has borrowed approximately \$32,880 per student.



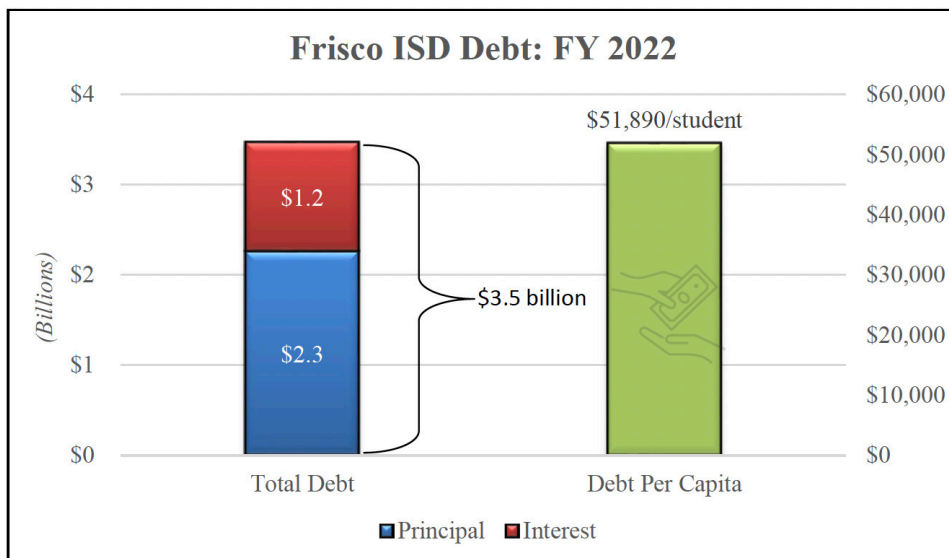
Figures may not add due to rounding.

### Frisco ISD

In FY 2022, Frisco ISD's debt totaled \$3.5 billion. This total includes an outstanding principal of \$2.3 billion and \$1.2 billion in interest owed. One year prior, in FY 2021, the school district's debt totaled \$3.3 billion.

In the 2022-23 school year, the number of students attending Frisco ISD was 66,916.

The district has borrowed approximately \$51,890 per student.



Figures may not add due to rounding.

## Recommendations

For the most part, local debt in Texas' most populous cities, counties, and school districts has reached concerning levels and, if left unchecked, its heightened state could pose a significant threat to the Texas Model of low taxes and limited government.

While there is no silver bullet solution, there are legislative reforms that can propel localities in a better, more fiscally responsible direction. The next Legislature should give serious consideration to making the following changes.

- **Greater Government Disclosure.** A provision in HB 3 (2019, p. 13) requires school districts to include the following disclosure on every bond proposition: “THIS IS A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.” The intent of this provision is to help voters make the connection between new debt and new taxes. Policymakers should build upon this concept by applying it to all other bond proposition types, that is, those put forward by cities, counties, and special districts. Extending this requirement to all taxing unit types is a simple way to improve debt transparency and encourage more informed decision-making.
- **Require Bond Elections to Be Held in November.** Bond elections should be held on the uniform election date in November to solicit the maximum number of voters and ensure that a small minority of special interests is not unduly influencing bond elections' outcome.
- **Establish Minimum Voter Turnout Requirements.** Establish a minimum voter turnout threshold for the approval of new bond propositions and tax ratification elections. This, too, will help prevent the process from being dominated by a relatively small percentage of voters.
- **Reform the Use of Certificates of Obligation.** Certificates of Obligation (COs), or non-voter-approved debt instruments, have been abused and need reform aimed at:
  - *Achieving Greater Government Transparency.* Require a lengthier notification period and make sure that the issuer has a website and that details related to the issuance are posted online in a timely manner.
  - *Making it Easier for Voters to Appeal.* Reform the petition process so that 5% of the total number of voters who voted in the most recent gubernatorial election can compel a public vote.
  - *Using Tighter Restrictions.* Because these debt issuances are not approved by voters, the kind of capital improvement projects eligible to be funded with COs should be more tightly defined.
- **Strengthen the Voter Information Document.** The 86th Legislature passed another good government measure, HB 477 (2019), which requires political subdivisions with more than 250 registered voters to create a Voter Information Document (VID) for each bond proposition that contains the following information ([HB 477 Bill Analysis, 2019](#)):
  - a. The language that would appear on the ballot;
  - b. A table with the principal, estimated interest, and estimated combined principal and interest required for full payment of the proposed bonds and the principal, estimated interest, and estimated combined principal and interest required for full payment of all outstanding bonds as of the date the political subdivision adopted the debt obligation order;
  - c. The estimated maximum annual increase in taxes that would be imposed on a residence homestead with an appraised value of \$100,000, based on certain assumptions made by the governing body of the political subdivision detailed in the bill; and
  - d. Any other information considered relevant or necessary to explain the other information in the document. (p. 2)



However, in spite of the Legislature's attempt to improve debt transparency, some problems have emerged with the information relayed on the VID related to statistical manipulation, the use of rosy assumptions, and the nondisclosure of certain details. To remedy these issues and improve the VID's effectiveness, the Legislature should amend state law to eliminate the arbitrary \$100,000 appraised value estimate ([HB 477, 2019, p. 6](#)) and replace it with the current year's average taxable value for a residence homestead in the jurisdiction; force political subdivisions to disclose all underlying data; and require the VID to be prominently posted online, either on the political subdivision's home page or its bond election website, if it has one.

These reforms, as well as others, promise to make important process changes that will bring about greater government transparency and accountability with the goal of reducing the burden of increased local government debt across Texas. ★

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Quintero and his wife, Tricia, are blessed with five beautiful children, a Great Dane, a Boston Terrier, and an exceptionally large grocery bill.



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As a proud Eagle Scout John is an avid camper and enjoys spending time in the outdoors as well as at home with his wife.

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