

The Dallas ISD Research Review Board

Larry W. Featherston, Ph. D.

EA16-116-4

At-a-Glance

The Dallas ISD supports high quality research that address well-formed research questions of educational importance. At the same time, the district has moral and legal obligations that require oversight of research activities that make use of district resources such as data, facilities, employee time, or access to students.

In order to conduct research in the Dallas ISD, a proposal must be submitted to- and reviewed by- the district's Research Review Board (RRB). The RRB is housed within the Department of Evaluation & Assessment, and draws on the expertise of district researchers and program evaluators, as well as the professional knowledge of staff from the departments of Teaching and Learning, Student Services, School Leadership, and Legal Services, among others.

External research proposals must demonstrate clear and direct educational value to the district, be minimally disruptive to the educational process, manifest a sound research methodology, and comply with current privacy laws. The potential direct benefit to Dallas ISD must outweigh demands on district resources, particularly staff and student time.

Review Board Responsibilities

The Research Review Board was reorganized in December, 2010. In addition to continuing to review the methodology of submitted proposals, the RRB took on a larger role in protecting the privacy of students and staff and ensuring compliance with state and federal law, coordinating external research with internal research and evaluation, avoiding unnecessary or redundant data collection, and monitoring the progress of approved research projects.

The Department of Legal Services assisted with development of guidelines to ensure compliance with state and federal student privacy laws, and with the design of templates, e.g., parent consent forms for student participation in research activities, that have improved the quality of submitted proposals and consistency of compliance with district policy.

Current RRB responsibilities are handled by a seven-member team, comprised of a coordinator

and six evaluation researchers (including the chair) who review proposals submitted to the district. During the 2015-16 school year, board members made several changes to refine the RRB website, application forms, and proposal submission and review procedures which further improved the quality of submitted proposals and the speed with which researchers are informed about the board's decision.

Proposal Submission

Application materials must be submitted electronically. Research guidelines and application materials are available on the district's website at <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/868>. Applications or questions about the application process are submitted to research@dallasisd.org.

Researchers must submit an application:

- if the research project involves collecting individual-level data from or about Dallas ISD students, staff, or parents (e.g., surveys, tests, interviews, observations, focus groups, or other direct primary data-gathering methodologies), or
- if the research project involves requesting an extract of individual-level data maintained by Dallas ISD on district databases, including demographic, achievement, attendance, personnel, or other district records.

Research studies that require secondary data must complete a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) *after* the research proposal is approved by the Dallas ISD RRB. School or district staff cannot provide data to external researchers. Researchers need to request a DSA template after the RRB has approved their research proposal.

Proposal Review

For studies taking place during the 2015-16 school year, 48 proposals were submitted between May 2015 and April 2016 (Table 1).

Out of the 48 proposals submitted, the RRB approved (includes proposals approved with condition) 29 or 60.4% of proposed studies while rejecting 31.3% or 15 proposals. Researchers for

the remaining 4 (8.3%) proposals withdrew their submission for various reasons. Out of the 29 approved proposals, 12 or 41.4% submitted Data Sharing Agreements requesting secondary data.

Table 1: Proposals Submitted for SY 2015-2016

Status	N
Approved (Includes 6 resubmission)	29
Closed*	4
Rejected	15
Total	48

*Researchers withdrew their proposals

There are several reasons why proposals were rejected. Reasons listed below are some of the most common reasons.

- No clear and direct educational value to the district
- Did not comply with state and federal laws (e.g., FERPA and PPRA)
- Conflict between the study timeline and district testing window
- Too disruptive to campuses or central office.
- Too costly in terms of campus resources (e.g., time, personnel, supplies)
- Poor research design or lack of sufficient information about the study (program, population, research methods, etc.)
- No district sponsor (applicable to some proposals)

Approved proposals can be grouped under three broad categories. The *first* category consists of district-sponsored research projects which have the support of a department in the district because the department believes the findings from these studies will inform the work of the department. The *second* category includes external studies that are not sponsored by a district department and include major state and national research projects and studies conducted by university researchers. The *third* category include graduate research projects, including those of current district employees. Examples of approved research projects are listed below, including the research organization conducting the study.

District-sponsored studies

Texting to Promote Parent Engagement and Foster Child Development (Stanford University).

A Learning Agenda for Taking Personalized Learning to Scale (University of Washington Bothell).

Toward Improved Outcomes for Students Returning from Disciplinary Alternative Education Settings: A Program for Reentry (Dallas ISD).

Using Personalized Text Messages to Increase College Enrollment (Commit!).

External studies

A Study of the Impact of Apex Learning on Initial Credit Student Achievement in One Dallas High School (Apex Learning).

Evaluating After-School All-Stars (After-School All-Stars).

Personalized Learning, Personalized Place: A Comprehensive Research Project on How Design Can Enhance Learning, and Overall Wellbeing (CADRE).

Evaluation of CATCH UP & READ Program (Catch Up & Read).

Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of Text Messaging Interventions to Improve College Access (University of Virginia).

Graduate research projects

Characteristics of Effective Teachers in Closing the Achievement Gap (Walden University).

Holding Public Schools Accountable on Non-Testing Measures (The University of Texas at Austin).

Transforming Learning Spaces by Deconstructing Borders in Early Childhood and Elementary Classrooms (Texas A&M University).

RRB Expectations for 2017-18

The Dallas ISD RRB will continue to refine its processes and procedures during the 2017-18 school year. The RRB will also be reviewing the possibility of increasing the research application and data request fees to align with other large district's fees and fee schedules.

For more information, contact Dr. Larry Featherston at 972-925-6444.