

2017-18 Dallas ISD Research Review Board

Larry W. Featherston, Ph. D.

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At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) supports high quality research that addresses 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 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 six-member team, comprised of a coordinator and five evaluation researchers (including the chair) who review proposals submitted to the district.

During the 2017-18 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. Board members also implemented two new research ethics training requirements. Regardless of the type of research study, all researchers and their research staff are now required to complete an online, free FERPA¹ Awareness training course (FERPA 101: For Local Education Agencies) developed and offered through the United States Department of Education. Additionally, research studies involving the sharing of individual-level district data, researchers and their research staff are now required to complete an online, free FERPA Data Sharing training course (FERPA 201: Data Sharing under FERPA) also developed and offered through the United States Department of Education. In addition, board members were able to collaborate with the Dallas ISD Legal department, Procurement department, and Volunteer and Partnership Services department to update language in the vendor and research data sharing agreements to better align with federal, state and district regulations. Furthermore, board members have cooperated with multiple internal Dallas ISD departments as well as Westat, Inc. and Southern Methodist University (SMU) to assist in the successful completion of the Verizon Innovative Learning Systems (VILS) grant and the Texas Instrument Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) grant.

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,

¹ FERPA = Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

achievement, attendance, personnel, or other district records.

Proposal Review

For studies taking place during the 2017-18 school year, 46 proposals were submitted between May 2017 and April 2018 (Table 1).

Out of the 46 proposals submitted, the RRB approved (includes proposals approved with condition) 35 or 76.0 percent of proposed studies while rejecting 6.5 percent or 3 proposals. Researchers for the remaining 8 (17.4%) proposals withdrew their submission for various reasons. Out of the 35 approved proposals, 16 or 45.7 percent submitted Data Sharing Agreements requesting secondary data.

Table 1: 2017-18 Proposals Submissions

Status	N
Approved	35
Closed*	8
Rejected	3
Total	46

Source: District Research Review Board database (April 2018).

Note: *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 PPRA²)
- 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 includes graduate research projects, including those of current district employees.

A list of current research studies taking place within Dallas ISD can be found on the RRB website (<https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/37481>).

Data Request

Research studies that require secondary data must have a completed 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.

During 2017-18, 16 new data sharing agreements were submitted by researchers with approved research studies and approved by Dallas ISD Legal Department. In addition, 21 data sharing agreements were submitted for renewal by researchers with approved, ongoing research studies and approved by Dallas ISD Legal Department. Data fulfillment associated with these data sharing agreements totaled 205 hours of staff time.

RRB Expectations for 2018-19

The Dallas ISD RRB will continue to refine its processes and procedures during the 2018-19 school year. The RRB will also be investigating the use of automated, online research application submissions to improve the overall submission process. The RRB also plans to collaborate with the Volunteer and Partnership Services department and Dallas ISD Legal department to streamline the review of third party Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and partnership agreements that request access to student-level data.

An electronic version of this report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Research Review Board at research@dallisd.org.

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Dallas ISD
Department of Evaluation and Assessment
H. B. Bell School Support Service Center
2909 N. Buckner Blvd.
Box 10
Dallas, TX 75228

² PPRA = Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment