

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

In order to conduct research or evaluations 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 and 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. The Office of Legal Services continues to assist with development of guidelines to ensure compliance with state and federal student privacy laws.

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. Proposals submitted to evaluate district initiatives or partner services must also have a district sponsor.

Research Board Responsibilities

In addition to continuing to review the methodology of submitted proposals, the RRB has taken 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. Current RRB responsibilities are carried out 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 2019-20 school year, board members made several changes to refine the RRB website and online proposal process as well as published an updated *Guidelines for Conducting Research within the Dallas Independent School District*. The online research proposal application and modification request form were also updated to ensure that researchers comply with

Senate Bill 22. To ensure that the district is only receiving high quality research applications that are more broadly generalizable and applicable to the entire district, the RRB stopped accepting non-employee graduate research requests beginning June 1, 2019.

Board members have also teamed up with the IT department and Office of Legal Services to create a district wide data sharing policy. In addition, board members continue to collaborate with the Office of Legal Services, Procurement Services department, and Volunteer and Partnership Services department to streamline the review of third-party Memorandums of Understanding and partnership agreements that request access to student-level data. Furthermore, board members have cooperated with multiple internal Dallas ISD departments and external partners such as RAND Corporation, Westat Corporation, Southern Methodist University, and the University of Pittsburgh to assist in the successful completion of the Wallace Foundation Social Emotional Learning grant, Building Assets and Reducing Risks (BARR) Scale-Up grant, the Network School Improvement project, and the Dallas ISD West Dallas STEM school project.

Proposal Submission

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

Researchers and evaluators 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, assessments, interviews, observations, focus groups, or other direct primary data-gathering methodologies), or
- If the project involves requesting an extract of individual-level data maintained by Dallas ISD on district databases, including student educational records or other district records.

Proposal Review

For studies taking place during the 2019-20 school year, between June 2019 and May 2020, 32 proposals and 37 modification requests were submitted (Table 1). During 2018-19, there were 55 proposals submitted.

Out of the 32 proposals submitted, the RRB approved 24 or 75.0 percent of proposed studies while rejecting 6.3 percent or two proposals. Researchers for the remaining six (18.8%) proposals withdrew their submission for various reasons. Out of the 24 approved proposals, nine or 37.5 percent were employee graduate research projects. Of the 37 modifications submitted, 34 or 91.9 percent were approved while three or 8.1 percent were rejected.

Table 1: 2019-20 Proposals and Modification Submissions

Status	N	%
Proposals		
Approved	24	75.0
Closed*	6	18.8
Rejected	2	6.3
Total	32	
Modifications		
Approved	34	91.9
Rejected	3	8.1
Total	37	

Source: Research Review Board database dated 06/01/2020.

Note: * = Proposals were withdrawn or closed due to various reasons. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

There are several reasons why proposals were rejected. The list below includes some of the most common reasons.

- No clear and direct educational value to the district;
- Lack of compliance with state and federal laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA);
- Conflict between the study timeline and district testing windows;
- 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 (e.g., program, population, research methods, etc.); and/or
- 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 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 employee graduate research projects.

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). Researchers need to request a DSA template after the RRB has approved their research proposal. Schools or district staff cannot provide data to external researchers without prior approval from the RRB and Dallas ISD Legal department.

During 2019-20, nine new data sharing agreements were submitted by researchers with approved research studies. In addition, four data sharing agreements were submitted for renewal by researchers with approved, ongoing research studies. Data fulfillment associated with all active data sharing agreements decreased from 247 hours of staff time in 2018-19 to 206 hours of staff time in 2019-20.

RRB Expectations for 2020-21

The Dallas ISD RRB will continue to refine its processes and procedures during the 2020-21 school year. The RRB will also collaborate with the Teaching and Learning department, Volunteer and Partnership Services department, and Office of Legal Services to finalize and implement new district wide data sharing policies as well as facilitate the transition to virtual services and data collection with external researchers and partners.

REFERENCES

Featherston, L. (2019). *2018-19 Dallas ISD Research Review Board At-a-Glance*. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

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