

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.

On March 13, 2020, in alignment with federal recommendations, the Governor of Texas issued a disaster proclamation certifying that the novel coronavirus COVID-19 posed an imminent threat of disaster for all counties in the state of Texas. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD transitioned students to at-home learning on March 23 following spring break (March 16 – 20) until the end of the 2019-20 school year. To help district students and families access the internet during at-home

learning, the Dallas ISD launched "Operation Connectivity" in May 2020, which provided 23,000 hotspots to families by October 2020. In 2020-21, Dallas ISD delayed the start of the 2020-21 school year until September 8, 2020 and implemented at-home learning districtwide for the first four weeks. The district also modified the school calendar from a six-week schedule to a nine-week schedule. On October 22, 2020, the district announced that campuses would provide in-person and virtual learning throughout the rest of the school year, and parents could choose whether their children participated in in-person or virtual instruction. In-person and virtual instruction included both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. The district also continued to implement the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as well as state and local COVID safety protocols. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, board members suspended all on-campus data collection activities during 2020-21.

In August 2020, board members teamed up with School Leadership and the IT Department to develop and publish the *Dallas ISD Online Interactions Guidelines*. Additionally, board members worked with external researchers to change in-person data collection activities to virtual data collection activities that adhered to the new guidelines. Virtual data collection activities employed by external researchers included participant recruitment via email, web-based administration and collection of participant consent and surveys, and virtual interviews and focus groups via web-based platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams.

During the 2020-21 school year, board members made several changes to refine the RRB website and online proposal process as well as published a research application and data sharing process flow chart. In addition, board members continued to collaborate with the Office of Legal Services, Procurement Services department, and Volunteer and Partnership Services department to 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, American Institutes for Research, Westat Corporation, Southern Methodist University, the University of Pittsburgh, Youth Guidance, and the Holdsworth Center to assist in the successful completion of the Wallace Foundation Social Emotional Learning grant, the Montessori school project, the Urban Teachers project, 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 Dallas ISD students, staff, or parents (e.g., surveys, assessments, interviews, observations, focus groups), 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 2020-21 school year, between June 2020 and May 2021, 43 proposals and 25 modification requests were submitted (Table 1). During 2019-20, there were 32 proposals submitted.

Out of the 43 proposals submitted, the RRB approved 35 (81%) of proposed studies while rejecting five proposals (12%). Researchers for the remaining three (7%) proposals withdrew their submission for various reasons. Out of the 35 approved proposals, fourteen (40%) were employee graduate research projects. Of the 25 modifications submitted, 23 (92%) were approved while two (8%) were closed.

Table 1: 2020-21 Proposals and Modification Submissions

Status	N	%
Proposals		
Approved	35	81.4
Closed*	3	7.0
Rejected	5	11.6
Total	43	
Modifications		
Approved	23	92.0
Closed*	2	8.0
Total	25	

Source: Research Review Board database dated 06/02/2021.

Note: * = Proposals were withdrawn or closed due to various reasons.

There are several reasons why proposals were rejected. The most common reasons included no clear and direct educational value to the district; and/or poor research design or lack of sufficient information about the study (e.g., program, population, research methods, etc.).

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 2020-21, nine new data sharing agreements were submitted by researchers with approved research studies. In addition, twelve data sharing agreements were submitted for renewal by researchers with approved, ongoing research studies. Data fulfillment associated with all active data sharing agreements increased from 206 hours of staff time in 2019-20 to 219 hours of staff time in 2020-21.

RRB Expectations for 2021-22

The Dallas ISD RRB will continue to refine its processes and procedures during the 2021-22 school year. The RRB will also collaborate with the Office of Legal Services to provide feedback to the Texas Education Agency on the model data sharing agreement established by Senate Bill 788.

REFERENCE

Featherston, L. (2020). 2019-20 Dallas ISD Research Review Board. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

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An electronic version of this report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888.

For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.