

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 merit and 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 six evaluation researchers (including the chair) who review proposals submitted to the district.

During the 2019-20 school year, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD transitioned students to at-home learning on March 23 until the end of the school year. In 2020-21, Dallas ISD delayed the start of the school year until September 8, 2020 and implemented at home learning districtwide for the first four weeks and modified the school calendar from a six-week schedule to a nine-week schedule. The district also implemented COVID protocols that restricted and limited campus visitors to only essential

personnel. As a result, approved research studies with active in-person data collection activities were discontinued or transitioned to virtual data collection methods (e.g., online surveys, virtual interviews, etc.).

In 2021-22, the district returned to in-person instruction for all students, with minimal exceptions. The district was able to offer virtual learning to a small subset of students who met district eligibility requirements. To help mitigate learning loss and further support students, the district offered three different school calendars in 2021-22 (School-Day Redesign, Intersession, and Base/Traditional) and other supports.

During the 2021-22 school year, restrictions to in-person data collection activities remained in place, and all active data collection activities were conducted virtually. Board members made several changes to refine the RRB online proposal process including transitioning the Research Modification Request form and the Data Request and Completion Log from the JotForm web platform to the Qualtrics web platform. In addition, board members continued to collaborate with the Office of Legal Services, Procurement Services department, Information Technology department, and Volunteer and Partnership Services department to review 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, Southern Methodist University (SMU), NWEA, the University of Pittsburgh, Dallas College, 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.

Consortium for Educational Research and Improvement

During 2021-22, board members worked collaboratively with SMU staff to establish the *Consortium for Educational Research and Improvement (CERI)* advisory committee with the stated goal of supporting and facilitating mutually beneficial educational research within Dallas ISD.

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 2021-22 school year, between June 2021 and May 2022, 49 proposals and 14 modification requests were submitted (Table 1). During 2020-21, there were 43 proposals submitted.

Out of the 49 proposals submitted, the RRB approved 39 (80%) of proposed studies while rejecting two proposals (4%). Researchers for the remaining eight (16%) proposals withdrew their submission for various reasons. Out of the 39 approved proposals, twenty-four (62%) were employee graduate research projects. All 14 modifications submitted were approved.

Table 1: 2021-22 Proposals and Modification Submissions

Status	N	%
Proposals		
Approved	39	79.6
Closed*	8	16.3
Rejected	2	4.1
Total	49	
Modifications		
Approved	14	100.0
Closed*	0	0.0
Total	14	

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; poor research design or lack of sufficient information about the study (e.g., program, population, research methods, etc.), and/or review and

approval of program materials and content by Dallas ISD curricular departments.

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 2021-22, 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 decreased from 219 hours of staff time in 2020-21 to 127 hours of staff time in 2021-22.

RRB Expectations for 2022-23

The Dallas ISD RRB will continue to refine its processes and procedures during the 2022-23 school year including the full transition from the JotFrom web platform to the Qualtrics web platform. The RRB will also continue to work collaboratively with SMU to support the *CERI* advisory committee. *CERI* advisory committee meetings will begin in the Fall 2022.

REFERENCES

Featherston, L. (2021). 2020-21 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.