The Dallas ISD Research Review Board

Dorothea Weir, Ph. D., Chair
Nora Douglas, Ph. D.
Karen Thierry, Ph. D.

At-a-Glance

The 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 to and reviewed by the district's Research Review Board (RRB). The RRB is housed within the Department of Evaluation & Accountability, 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, not just to the profession of education in general; 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. Dallas ISD strongly encourages and gives priority to external research projects that contribute to or complement the district's research agenda.

Review Board Responsibilities

The Research Review Board was reorganized in December, 2010, with the establishment of the Office of Applied Research. 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. During the 2010-2011 school year, the chair of the RRB took on additional responsibilities of providing technical assistance to schools and acting as district liaison with researchers involved in large studies conducted by the Texas Education Agency and the U.S. Department of Education.

The Office of Applied Research was charged with developing, coordinating, and implementing a district research agenda, aligned with district initiatives and adaptable to changing district priorities. In recent years, areas of emphasis have included college and career readiness; the Freshman Success Initiative; middle grades policies and practices; and teacher quality and effectiveness. Currently, the research agenda is being updated to focus on issues that address the goals of Destination 2020.

In addition, the Office of Applied Research provided assistance to schools and departments applying for grants with a research or data component, including issuing formal letters of support as needed. The office and RRB also supported district employees pursuing advanced degrees, assisting them in matters of research design and data analysis as well as guiding them through the proposal process.

In 2009-2010, the RRB conducted an extensive analysis of requirements for conducting external research in large urban districts nationwide, with the consequent revision of the district’s research review policies and procedures. This process continued through the 2011-12 school year.

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

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 they are requesting an extract of individual-level data maintained by Dallas ISD on district
databases, including demographic, achievement, attendance, personnel, or other district records.

Application materials must be submitted electronically. Research guidelines and application materials are available on the district's website at http://www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/research/proposals.htm. Applications or questions about the application process should be submitted to research@dallasisd.org.

Proposal Review

The number of research proposals received by the district has increased significantly over the past few years. In 2007-2008, the district received a total of 25 proposals for review, of which 23 were approved. Between January and August 2010, despite a six-weeks moratorium on submissions during the transition to new procedures, the Research Review Board accepted 46 proposals for review. In 2010-11, a total of 56 studies were reviewed, and in 2011-12, a total of 62 studies were reviewed. Of these, 51 were approved, and 11 were either rejected by the RRB or withdrawn after revisions were required, resulting in an acceptance rate of 82%.

The proposals accepted fell into three broad categories. The first category included external studies that were not sponsored by any district department or school. These fell into two groups: major state and national research projects, and studies conducted by university researchers. The second category consisted of district-sponsored research projects supporting an internal program or initiative. The third category included graduate (thesis or dissertation) research projects, primarily that of current district employees. Examples of approved research projects in each of these categories are listed below, along with the research organization conducting the study.

External studies


Multisite Evaluation of the Implementation and Impact of Supplemental Education Services (University of Texas at Austin).

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 2011-12 (National Center for Education Statistics).

District-sponsored studies

A Review of Services: Crisis Response Improvement Survey (Dallas ISD Psychological Services Department).

Big Brothers Big Sisters: Evaluating the Impact of One-to-One Mentoring on Academic Success Indicators in the Dallas Independent School District (Big Brothers Big Sisters).

Project SCOPE (Summer Counselor Outreach for Improving Postsecondary Enrollment) (Johns Hopkins University).

Study of Reasoning Mind in Dallas ISD (Reasoning Mind, Houston, TX).

Summer Learning Demonstration Assessment (RAND Corporation).

Texas GROW! EAT! GO! (University of Texas School of Public Health).

Graduate research projects

Cultural Proficiency, Culturally Responsive Leadership and Effective Leadership Among Principals (University of North Texas).

Effectiveness of AP Programs on the Academic Performance and College Readiness of High School Students (Texas Southern University).

Observing the Performance and Student Graduation Rates of Grade 8 Students Who Failed to Meet Texas Student Success Initiative Requirements (Texas A&M University, Commerce).

Urban Underrepresented Minority Students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math: An Analysis of the Relationship between External Assets, Internal Assets, and Academic Achievement (University of Texas at Arlington).

The initial moderate decrease in proposals submitted following the revision of RRB procedures was attributable to several causes. First, in line with current practice in other large Texas districts, Dallas ISD introduced a required application fee of $40, waived for district employees. Second, the RRB has made considerable effort to inform researchers, in advance of formal submission, of Dallas ISD’s constraints on external studies. These constraints include limitations on use of district email to recruit participants; the requirement of an internal district sponsor for all studies with an instructional, training, or intervention component; and strict limits on studies requiring student or staff participation between Spring Break and the end of the school year, due to demands of the testing schedule.
Ongoing and future RRB projects include continued improvement of the online proposal submission process; setting up a searchable database of approved projects for easy reference by district staff; and increased follow-up of completed projects and improved reporting of results to interested parties within the district.

For more information, contact Dr. Dorothea Weir at 972-925-6413.