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## **Parsons Brings Wealth of Experience to Texas Schools Project**

**Richardson, TX (July 13, 2009)** – Jim Parsons, founding member of the Joint Advisory Board and former Humble ISD Executive Director of Accountability, has joined Texas Schools Project (TSP), at The University of Texas at Dallas, as its Assistant Director.

Parsons comes to TSP with a wealth of knowledge and experience in education research. In fact, this new position completes a journey he began over twenty years ago.

In the 1980's, as a graduate student, Parsons remembers sorting through individual student folders at Texas high schools and entering data. At the time, many Texas school districts didn't have an electronic system in place for data collection and storage. "I couldn't understand why basic information about students was only on paper records and not stored in computers or why, if I wanted to know what a student did in prior years, I had to put that chronology of data together myself, by hand," shares Parsons. He continues, "Coming from the air transport industry, I knew how data could and should be handled more efficiently and effectively."

Parsons then joined Humble ISD to supervise student assessment, research, and program evaluation. He shares, "While data access remained a huge barrier for many projects, the Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) made static data-snapshots of my school district available. While these snapshots were helpful, what I knew could really make a difference in our research and evaluation was a longitudinal database that followed students through their school career."

Several years later Parsons met a team from Texas Schools Project. "The folks from TSP talked about building a true longitudinal database of student, teacher, and finance data from the PEIMS collections, as well as adding higher education data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and other sources. I was amazed and excited. This is exactly what I had dreamed of in those dusty records vaults years before."

In 2007 Parsons was appointed as a founding member of the Joint Advisory Board (JAB), the governing body for Texas education research centers recently established during the 2006 legislative session. He shares, "To say that I was excited when I received the appointment would be an understatement. This was the opportunity I had been awaiting for as long as I had been involved in public school data. I had the chance to make a real difference, to share what I had learned and experienced both as a researcher and as someone who actually used school data."

Carla Stevens, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Research and Accountability for Houston ISD, was also a founding member of the JAB with Parsons. She comments, "As a fellow Joint Advisory Board member I have valued Jim's input and experience, especially as we have reviewed research proposals and set policy for the Board." She continues, "I know he is very well-respected from a state level and will be quite an asset in his new position."

As Assistant Director, Parsons looks forward to adding value to the ERC database, increasing TSP's program evaluation work, and enhancing communications. He explains, "TSP has made excellent progress in data documentation and the translation of the raw data to improve access for researchers. I want to go a bit further with documentation to build metadata that not only records traditional data dictionary information, but also logs the changes in data elements or coding over time."

When it comes to evaluation work, Parsons comments, "The ERC data resource gives us an advantage over almost anyone else who wants to evaluate programs in Texas public schools. That advantage, combined with our growing evaluation staff, should make an unbeatable combination in a market with an increasing demand."

Parsons expects TSP to experience significant growth in the coming years. He explains, "There is a broad hunger for answers to questions about how to improve our public education system. While that's not new, what is new is that many of those asking the questions will not be satisfied with the old answers. The big foundations, active in public education reform, are more business-based than politically-based. Even the U.S. Department of Education approach is becoming more business than bureaucrat. Program evaluations that quantify effectiveness are in high demand. If a program doesn't reach the goal, or a less expensive program does the same job, an enterprise approach takes notice. As this approach to public education gains ground, politicians get the message, and bureaucrats respond accordingly."

Parsons feels this change is the catalyst for educational research and evaluation. He remarks, "This change enhances opportunities for solid, scientifically based program evaluation. Relevant academic research can be applied to improve evaluation. Both can inform theory and practice. TSP is poised to take advantage of this new world of public education."

In addition to his extensive career in education research and evaluation, Parsons has also served as the Texas LEA representative for the U.S. Department of Education's National Forum on Education Statistics, as a member of the Policy Committee on Public Education Information for the Texas Education Agency, and as a member of the ESC Region IV Data Advisory Committee.

Jim's wife, Lynn, is also well-respected for her work in the education field, having extensive experience with federal, state and local education agencies in a wide variety of roles and settings. Her most recent project was with Houston-area teachers through the Houston A+ Challenge project. This project focused on improving classroom instruction through improved collaborative lesson design, emphasizing a variety of areas such as clarity of student outcomes, high student engagement, and high-yield instructional strategies.

"Texas Schools Project is very fortunate to have Jim Parsons as a leader in their organization," says Richard Griffin, former Conroe ISD Superintendent who is now working with the Harris County Department of Education. "He and I have worked together in a variety of capacities including as board members of the Education Foundation of Harris County – he was stellar there." He continues, "Jim brings with him a deep knowledge of Texas public school data, a superb acumen of education research, and remarkable leadership skills. He is one of the brightest people I know."

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