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## **UT Dallas Education Research Center Launches Remote Data Access**

The University of Texas at Dallas Education Research Center (UTD-ERC) houses a wealth of data that is used extensively for academic research on education policy. The Center is now making this data more accessible to approved ERC research partners through remote access.

Because this is first time remote access has been achieved under Texas ERC regulations, it is an important milestone in education research in Texas. Previously, operating partners were required to travel to the UTD-ERC facility or work with an on-site research assistant to access data.

The first researchers to use this remote access are Christopher King, Director, and Deanna Schexnayder, Associate Director, with the The Ray Marshall Center (RMC). The RMC is one of five UTD-ERC research partners approved by the Joint Advisory Board, the entity that oversees Texas' designated ERCs, to access ERC data.

King and Schexnayder are using the data as part of two research projects, "College Readiness, Transition, and Performance" and "An Analysis of Early Education Factors Associated with School Success in the Elementary Years." Schexnayder comments, "This new remote access enables us to conduct research using these data at our own office without having to travel, thus reducing our costs. It also allows more than one member of our research team to work together on the project based on near-real time quantitative results. While we would prefer to have the data files located in our office, this arrangement is the next best option for promoting efficiency in conducting our research."

In developing the process for remote access, compliance with both Family Education Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations and even more stringent Texas ERC contractual regulations, which protect the privacy of students in Texas, was vital. The importance of such compliance is well understood by Leigh Hausman, Computer Systems Technologist for the UTD-ERC. She says, "To ensure FERPA and ERC contractual compliance, individuals who have been granted remote access are not allowed to remove data from the server and must have their output reviewed before it leaves the site." She continues, "While the requirements are rigorous, they are important in protecting the privacy of the individuals represented in the data and the confidentiality of their educational records."

The UTD-ERC is one of three education research centers designated by the State of Texas in 2006 to conduct research that benefits education in Texas. It is administered by the staff at Texas Schools Project, an independent education research center founded in 1992, which is part of in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences at The University of Texas at Dallas.

In April 2008, the United States Department of Education, in its review of the Texas ERCs commented, ". . . the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board appear to have developed a model approach for the conduct of independent education research in accordance with FERPA requirements. . . . As such, we anticipate that the ERC approach will become the preferred method for conducting longitudinal educational research with State education data."

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