

# The Texas Schools Project: Research Possibilities and Opportunities

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## Premise

- Educational research has become increasingly empirical.
- Explicit recognition that the educational process is a pipeline where student outcomes depend on prior *inputs*.
- Therefore, longitudinal data that allow researchers to follow individuals over time as they move through the educational system is particularly valuable.
- The Texas Schools Project houses UT-Dallas's Education Research Center (ERC)
  - The Education Research Centers are state approved entities that provide administrative data to researchers with approved projects that benefit education in Texas (*More on this later...*)
- **The Texas Schools Project** presents a wonderful opportunity for graduate students to work with dedicated faculty and use a premiere data source to produce innovative, policy relevant research.

## A Brief History of The Texas Schools Project

- In 1992, John Kain, widely known for The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis, founded the Texas Schools Project.
- During a visit to Texas in the early 90's he noted that Texas's Accountability system required annual testing of all public students to determine academic progress.
- Dr. Kain, along with fellow collaborators Eric Hanushek and Steve Rivkin, realized that these data could be used to create rich data sets that would allow them to create rich panel data sets that would allow them to follow students over time.
- Dr. Kain's efforts at UTD resulted in the formation of Texas's Education Research Center Program.

## What are the Education Research Centers?

- There are three Education Research Centers located at UT Dallas, UT Austin, and the University of Houston.
- The ERC's were established by the Texas Legislature to provide data for researchers with projects approved by the advisory board that benefit education in Texas.
- Administrative data is provided by three agencies:
  - ① Texas Education Agency (TEA): Pre-Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade (PK-12) Data
  - ② Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB): Postsecondary Data
  - ③ Texas Workforce Commission (TWC): Quarterly Earnings Data
- It is possible to follow an individual from Pre-Kindergarten through college and well into the labor force if the individual remains in Texas
- Researchers with an approved project have the capacity to create boutique data sets that are uniquely tailored to their research question.

## Proposal Process

- The Advisory Board—representatives of the agencies, appointed experts, and representatives of the ERC—determine whether a given proposal is granted access.
- The advisory board meets quarterly (Four times per year).
- Each ERC is usually allowed to bring forward a maximum of five projects per meeting. However, if an ERC brings forward less than this number, then the other ERCs can “take up the slack” and bring forward additional proposals.
- Researchers are required to submit the proposal and accompanying materials approximately 45 days in advance of the meeting.
- The meeting takes place telephonically. At the meeting, researchers provide a brief summary of the proposal and answers any questions posed by the advisory board. The advisory board then votes on whether or not to approve the proposal and grant access to the data.

## Proposal Process

- Graduate students are allowed to put forth proposals; however, they must have an advisor to guide the work.
- Many UTD students as well as graduate students from Cornell, Stanford, Yale, The University of Chicago, Vanderbilt University, The University of Illinois-Chicago, and The University of California-Davis
- There is a fee to support the infrastructure needed to house, secure, and analyze these data, but for our graduate students it is heavily subsidized.
- In addition to providing a copy of research products produced by the project, researchers must also provide a policy brief that summarizes the work and is suitable for a layperson.
- If you are interested, then please contact me:  
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## Examples of Topics Pursued Using ERC Data

Teacher Quality, Teenage Pregnancy and School Dropouts, The Effect of College Quality on Earnings, Neighborhood Effects on Student Achievement, The Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners, The Racial College Completion Gap, Charter School Quality, The Achievement Gap, School Choice, Special Education, Class Size, The Effects of College Remediation, Arts Education, Signalling Value of Credentials, School Accountability, Alternative Admissions Programs and College Access, Advanced Placement Exams, The Effect of School Leadership, Peer Effects

## Some Journals where work using ERC data have been published

Proceedings of The National Academy of Science, Social Science Quarterly, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Education Policy Analysis Archives, Sociology of Education, Journal of Higher Education, The Journal of Political Economy, Econometrica, Research in Higher Education, Review of Economics and Statistics, Journal of Labor Economics, Economics of Education Review, Journal of Public Economics, Journal of Human Resources, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, Review of Educational Research, Physics Education Research, American Behavioral Scientist, American Economic Review...



## Faculty Members at UTD that have used ERC data and other consideration...

- UTD Faculty Members: Rodney Andrews (Me), Kurt Beron, Evgenia Gorina, James Harrington, Holly Kosiewicz and Trey Miller.
- Students have also networked, coauthored with, and received letters of recommendation from faculty outside of the university.

# The Texas Schools Project

Texas Schools Project supports and conducts high-quality academic research to improve academic achievement and teacher effectiveness, increase transitions to and success in postsecondary education, and improve labor market outcomes of students in Texas and the nation.

## **Personnel:**

- Dr. Trey Miller: Director of The Texas Schools Project
- Dr. Rodney J. Andrews: Research Director of The Texas Schools Project
- Greg Branch: Outgoing Director of The Texas Schools Project
- Zhixiang (Mark) Lu: Data Manager
- Janie Jury: Administration

# The Texas Schools Project

- UTD graduate students with dissertations using ERC data have been placed well:
  - Academic Appointments: Kennesaw State University (2), The University of Tulsa
  - Professional Appointments: Charles Rivers Associates, Capital One, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Citi
  - We expect that there will be opportunities for graduate students to work on projects as Research Assistants and pursue their own research research interests.
- Successful Dissertations
- Publications
- Employment

## The Texas Schools Project

- It is possible to supplement ERC data with micro data from other sources—for example, Natality Files and Texas Department of Criminal Justice Data
- A prime feature of the Texas Schools Project is the potential to work with ERC data; however, the Texas Schools Project provides the capacity to host data from other entities. For example, Drs. Hanushek and Rivkin used data from the Dallas Independent School District to evaluate the effects of DISD's Pay for Performance Program on academic and teacher outcomes.

## Texas Schools Project Website

I encourage you to visit our website:

<https://tsp.utdallas.edu/>