



Texas Schools Project
The University of Texas at Dallas



The Texas FERPA Story

Dan O'Brien

Texas Schools Project

University of Texas at Dallas and CALDER

November 21, 2008

CALDER





Introduction

- Texas Schools Project
 - Research focus
 - Researchers and results
 - www.utdallas.edu/research/tsp
- Texas Education Research Center
 - Linked education data from TEA, THECB
 - Additional data from TWC, other sources
 - www.utdallas.edu/erc





Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

- History of FERPA
- The importance of access and privacy
 - Parental access to education records
 - Fundamental rights to privacy
 - Uses of education data
 - Example: Teacher effectiveness measures
 - Recent issues
 - Identify theft



FERPA

- Administrators
 - Understanding and compliance
- Policymakers and researchers
 - Informing policy with research
 - Individual student and classroom data
 - Linked over years
- Interpretation and Enforcement
 - Family Policy Compliance Office





State Systems

Source: Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT-AERA)

- North Carolina
 - NCERDC (Duke, UNC, NCDPI)
 - Encrypts ID's, checks for consistency and accuracy
 - Merges across agencies and years
 - Supports qualified researchers
- Michigan
 - REL-Midwest
 - MSU as agent of the state
 - Responds to questions from Michigan Dept. of Education
 - Linking longitudinally not currently possible
- Florida
 - Follow up for students in education programs
 - Merges and de-identifies data from multiple agencies



Texas Education Agency

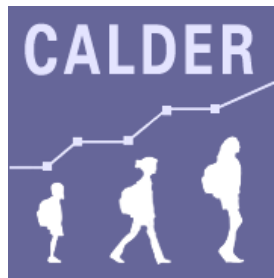
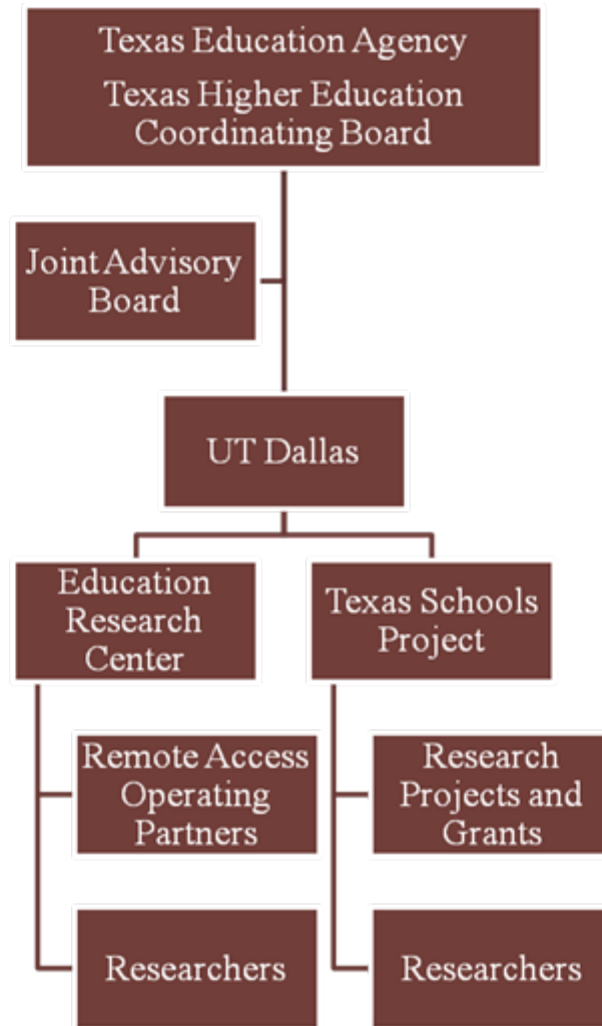
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

- Establish up to three ERC's
- Direct joint supervision of the ERC's
- Establish a Joint Advisory Board (JAB)
 - Reviews ERC management plans
 - Allocation of research capacity
 - Annual internal audit certification
 - Annual budget
 - Fundraising for ERC Support
 - Approves research projects
- Provide individual longitudinal data





The Texas ERC Structure





Data Flows

TEA Student and
Teacher Data
Personally Identifiable
K-12 Data

THECB Public
College
Information
Removes Names,
SSN, Date of Birth
Assigns Random
Identifier

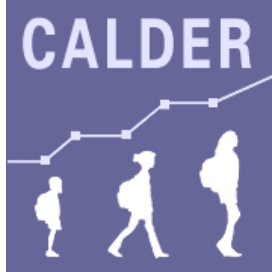
UTD ERC Data
Warehouse
Standardizes Data in
STATA Format
Documents Data
Elements and Layouts





ERC Responsibilities

- Conduct research for the benefit of education in Texas
- Conduct independent research
- Respond to public information requests
- Maintain ERC data and data security
 - Data remains on site
 - Provides processing capabilities for local and remote access researchers
- Ongoing Funding





Research Projects

- ERC Review
 - Requires longitudinal individual student data
 - Benefits Texas education
 - Methodologically sound
 - Certification that resources are available
- Joint advisory board approval
- Research results
 - Available to agencies
 - ERC review for FERPA Compliance



Access

- Onsite data warehouse
 - Data cleaning and maintenance
 - Documentation
 - Technical environment and controls
- Remote access
 - Operating partners
 - Quadrilateral agreement
 - Bilateral operating agreement
 - Cost sharing
 - Annual Audit





Challenges

- Funding continuing operations
 - Targeted grants for infrastructure funding
- Staffing
- Adding external data
 - Student-teacher links
- Out-of-state access
 - Control
 - Audit/security



Summary

“In general, the TEA and THECB appear to have developed a model approach for the conduct of independent education research in accordance with FERPA requirements. It also appears that ERC data will prove more valuable to researchers than what is available under current practices because longitudinal student information can be made available to the ERC’s without having to address confidentiality issues associated with small data cells.”

Source: Letter from the Family Policy Compliance Office



- As such, we anticipate that the ERC approach will become the preferred method for conducting longitudinal educational research with State education data

Source: Letter from the Family Policy Compliance Office