

The University of Texas at Austin
Education Research Center
Policies & Procedures:
General Information

The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center (Texas ERC)
The University of Texas at Austin
The Office of the Vice President for Research
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The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center Policies & Procedures: General Information

Overview

In 2006, the 79th Texas Legislature (3rd called session) identified the need for connecting educational information sources into a longitudinal data warehouse for the use of policy and practice. Legislators authorized the creation of three Education Research Centers (ERCs) to house Texas data and facilitate research that benefits all levels of education in Texas. The ERCs were to provide access to high quality, student-level data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and other sources of educational information for the state of Texas. The ERC data resources would span from the Pre-K level through higher education (P-16) and into the Texas workforce; it would host longitudinal information dating back from 1990 to current day. Researchers would be able to use this rich repository of data to follow individual Texas students from their first day in school to their last day on the job.

The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center (Texas ERC) serves as both a research center and as a site for the P-20/Workforce Data Repository (Repository) providing access to longitudinal, student-level data for scientific inquiry and policymaking purposes. Since its inception in 2006, the Texas ERC's goal has been to bridge the gap between theory, policy, and practice by providing a cooperative research environment for study by scholars, practitioners, and policy makers. As part of its mission, the Texas ERC works with researchers, practitioners, state and federal agencies, and other policymakers to help inform upon critical issues relating to education today.

Research Projects & Workflow

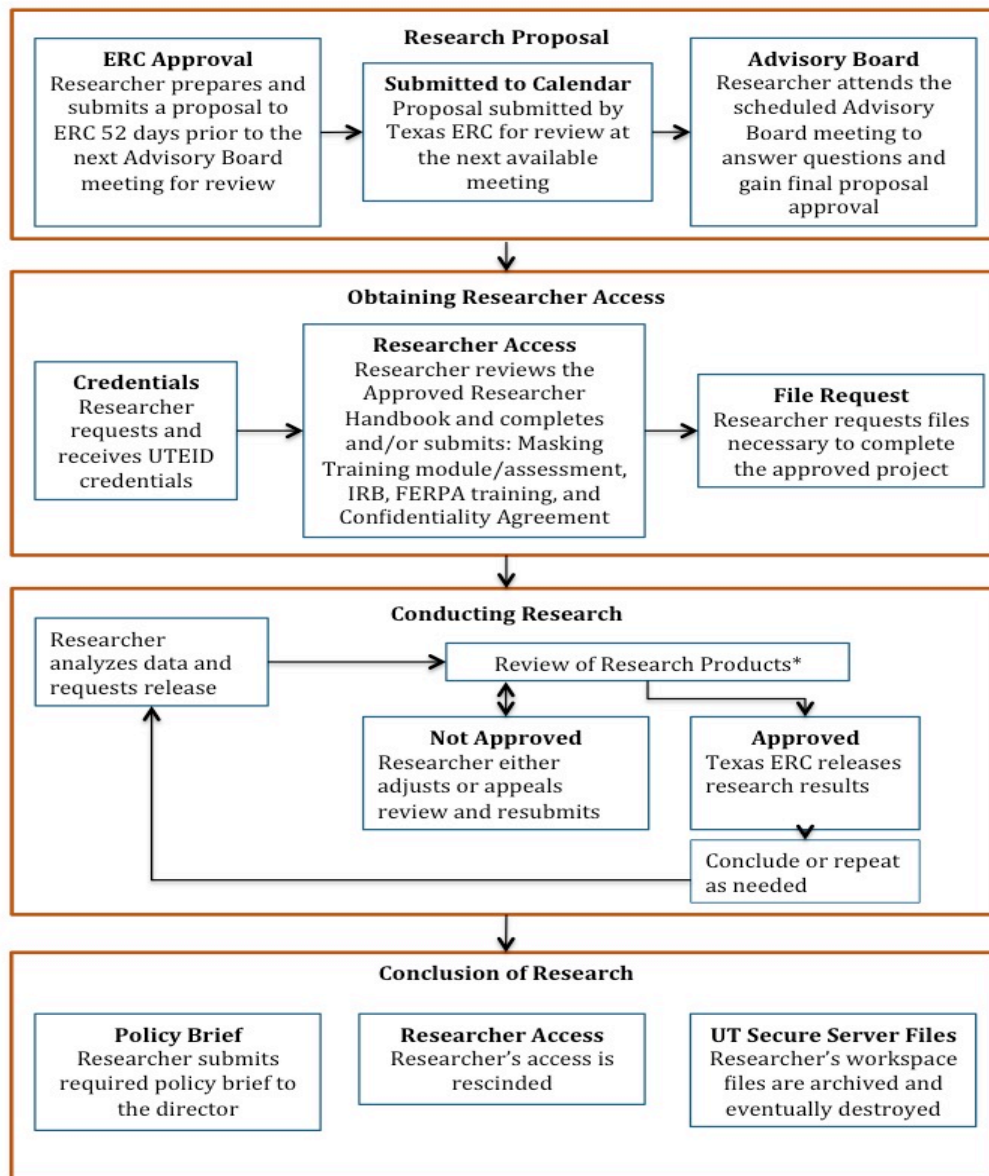
The Education Research Centers are governed by the ERC Advisory Board, which is chaired by the Commissioner of Higher Education from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Effective September 1, 2015, the ERC Advisory Board will be recognized as a governmental body by the state of Texas.¹ Representatives from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission, the ERC directors, and additional appointed experts also serve on the ERC Advisory Board. The ERC Advisory Board makes policy decisions regarding the operation of the ERCs and reviews all applications for the use of ERC resources for research. The ERC Advisory Board meets at least quarterly (1 Tex. Educ. Code §1.006).

Researchers wishing to utilize data from the ERCs must develop and submit a proposal to the specific ERC where the research will be conducted. The ERC will then review the proposal to ensure it meets a minimum standard of rigor and provides a benefit to the education in the state. Once the ERC approves the proposal, it is forwarded to the ERC

¹ Legislative changes to 1 Tex. Educ. Code §1.006 establish the Advisory Board as a governmental body for the purposes of Chapters 551 and 552. The legislative change impacts meeting and open records requirements. See 1 Tex. Educ. Code §1.006 or the analysis of SB685 of the 84th Texas Legislature for details on this change.

Advisory Board for consideration. If the ERC Advisory Board accepts the proposal, researchers are granted access to the Texas ERC Repository. Research is conducted for a designated period of time during which interim and final data products and research results are reviewed and released to the individual researcher. When a research project terminates, researcher access to the Texas ERC data is rescinded. All pertinent data in the project’s workspace is retained for five years and then destroyed as required by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

Research Project Workflow



Note: Workflow chart provides an overview of the entire process. After gaining approval from the ERC Advisory Board, researcher(s) will receive specific details and policy guides for gaining access, conducting, and concluding research.

Terms and Conditions for Texas ERC Access

For the Texas ERC to comply with the various institutional, state, and federal requirements and statutes, numerous terms and conditions must be met by researcher(s) prior to and following project approval. The Repository data housed at Texas ERC contains personal information about individuals protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). To protect the confidentiality of the educational records and personal information of individuals, terms and conditions are in place for everyone who accesses the data at the Texas ERC. Below is a general list of terms and conditions. Upon approval of a research proposal, researcher(s) will receive a handbook outlining the specifics of each requirement. The purpose of this document is to provide prospective researcher(s) with the details necessary for a successful proposal along with conditions following an approved research project.

Proposal Process & Approval

Writing Your Proposal

Prospective researcher(s) must submit both a formal research proposal and a reader's guide to the Director of the Texas ERC. The research proposal, 10-15 pages in length, should include necessary details to demonstrate that the research will contribute to theory/practice, benefits the state of Texas, and is methodologically sound. Proposals must also highlight qualifications, resources, requested data, and a dissemination strategy of the researcher(s).

Researcher(s) are required to identify requested data at the record level in their proposal. As the inventory of data is in flux throughout the year, an updated list of data by agency is available on the [Texas ERC website](#) titled *Texas ERC Data Inventory*. If the project requires supplemental data, defined as additional data not included in the Repository, then the proposal must identify what supplemental data is needed for the project. If supplemental data is needed, supplemental data request forms should be attached to the proposal (see Appendix C). The Director will submit formal requests for supplemental data if the proposal is approved by the ERC Advisory Board. Below are links to resources that to familiarize yourself with available data:

- The Texas ERC website data tab: <https://research.utexas.edu/erc/data/>
- TEA Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/peims/standards/wedspre>
- TEA TAAS and TAKS assessment data and the State Board of Education data, Testing/Accountability section, <http://www.tea.state.tx.us> under the "Testing/Accountability" link
- STAAR explanations, <http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/staar>
- STAAR testing results, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/tapr>
- THECB reports and FADS data, <http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectID=3874B639-B8B5-1533-24CEAC194113B058>
- TWC wage report data, www.twc.state.tx.us.

Researcher(s) are also required to submit a Reader's Guide using the provided template. The Reader's Guide is a short summary, 2-3 pages, covering the most frequently asked questions from the ERC Advisory Board members.

Details for the full research proposal and the Reader's Guide template are located in Appendix A. Proposals are due to the ERC Advisory Board 45 days prior to the next posted ERC Advisory Board meeting date. Additionally, the Texas ERC will need one week to review the proposal prior to submitting it to the ERC Advisory Board. At a minimum, researchers should submit proposals 52 days prior to the next ERC Advisory Board meeting date. Meeting dates are posted on the Texas ERC Website.

Submit completed Proposals and Reader's Guides to:

Celeste Alexander, Ph.D.
Director of the Texas ERC
The University of Texas at Austin
Office of the Vice President for Research
Austin, Texas 78713
W: (512) 471-4528
Fax: (512) 471-2827
celeste.alexander@austin.utexas.edu

Funding & Cost

To offset the costs of providing the operational and audit functions required by ERC contracts and to comply with the rules of the Texas education agencies and the ERC Advisory Board, the Texas ERC levies the charges shown below in the Annual Access Fee schedule.

Annual Access Fee		
Affiliation	ERC Authorized Researchers*	Student
Within System	\$13,000	\$500
Other	\$18,000	\$5000

Note: *Fee covers two researchers working on an approved project.

For approved projects with special requirements, annual fees may be negotiated between the Texas ERC and the principal investigator(s). The Texas ERC may, at its sole discretion, waive access fees. If secured funding is available for the respective project, researcher(s) should submit proof to help the Advisory Board determine the appropriate approval period for the project. In some cases, a project may be approved prior to funding and begin upon the ERC Advisory Board being notified of the receipt of funding. If the proposal has special conditions with funding, please contact the Director of the Texas ERC.

Definitions regarding within system, student, ERC Authorized Researcher, and approved project are located in Appendix B, *Texas ERC Fee Schedule*.

Obtaining Approval

The approval is two-stepped process. The first step includes a review by the Director or designate. Researcher(s) should submit proposals at least 52 days prior to the next ERC Advisory Board meeting: one week for Texas ERC review and 45 days for the ERC Advisory Board. Meeting dates are posted on the Texas ERC website. Once received, the first step of the approval process involves an initial screening at the ERC level. Staff at the Texas ERC may request revisions to the proposal. Many suggested revision are aimed at making the process with the ERC Advisory Board run smoothly, for example accurate descriptions of data required for the study. If approved at the Texas ERC level, the proposal will be placed on the agenda for next available meeting date for the ERC Advisory Board. The ERC Advisory Board has been limiting the number of proposal slots allotted to each of the ERC's due to time limitations for ERC Advisory Board members and meeting time allowance. The Director will make every effort to get a proposal scheduled upon ERC approval, but no guarantees can be made regarding the number of proposals for any given meeting date. Once a completed proposal has been approved by the Texas ERC and scheduled on the ERC Advisory Board's agenda, the proposal progresses to step two of the approval process.

The second and final step of proposal approval occurs during the ERC Advisory Board meeting. Currently, most ERC Advisory Board meetings are held by teleconference. Researchers are given the phone number to call into the meeting. During the meeting, researcher(s) are asked to briefly summarize their proposal and answer questions regarding elements on their proposal. At a minimum, one researcher per proposal must be present for the ERC Advisory Board meeting. The Texas ERC, however, strongly suggests that all listed researchers attend the meeting to ensure all questions posed by the board are answered fully.

The ERC Advisory Board may take several actions during the meeting and review of ERC proposals. These actions *may* include approval, approval with adjustments, resubmit, or denial of the proposal. If the ERC Advisory Board requests a resubmit or denial, the research team will then need to address the concerns of the board and may resubmit at a future ERC Advisory Board meeting. As the authorizing entity of the Texas ERC, the ERC Advisory Board reserves the authority to take actions other than those listed above. If the proposal is approved, the researcher(s) will then proceed with the authorized researcher requirements.

Post-Approval Conditions

After a successful proposal approval from the ERC Advisory Board, the Texas ERC will provide the researcher(s) with the *Policies & Procedures: Approved Project Handbook*. The handbook details the policies and procedures involved in obtaining access, conducting research, and concluding your project. In an effort to inform individuals interested in conducting research at Texas ERC, the following section provides a brief overview the process and conditions necessary to access, use, and conclude research at Texas ERC.

Obtaining Researcher Access

- **Institutional Review Board (IRB)**- Researcher(s) must provide confirmation that they have obtained IRB approval and provide appropriate evidence to the Director. In some situations, justification for exclusion from the IRB review process will be accepted.
- **Credentials**- The Texas ERC is affiliated with The University of Texas at Austin. To access the computer system, you must have credentials known as a UTEID. If you are not affiliated with the UT System, instructions will be provided to secure a guest UTEID.
- **FERPA Training**- Based on the researcher(s) affiliation, different types of FERPA training are accepted. Training is valid for two years, and it must be renewed if it expires mid-project.
- **Masking Training Module**- Complete an in-house masking guidelines and techniques training module and an online assessment.
- **Confidentiality Agreement**- Researcher(s) must sign and submit before they are granted access to the Repository. The Confidentiality Agreement covers issues such as data security, consent for the review of research products, and terms for data access. This form is renewed on an annual basis.
- **File Request**- Researcher(s) must formally request data files necessary to complete the approved project. Files must align with the original data request set forth in the approved proposal.
- **Supplemental Data**- Supplemental data refers to additional data not included in the Repository. If requested and approved in the proposal each agency will need to approve each request. The supplemental data will be de-identified prior to uploading to the ERC data Repository. Most supplemental data will only be available to the individual project that it has been approved for. Please note that the data may warrant an additional fee from the agencies depending on the amount of extra coding, time, and effort. The need for supplemental data should be included in the approved proposal. The formal request for this data, however, will occur following the ERC Advisory Board approval.

Conducting the Research

- **Access**- The Repository may be accessed only through secured Texas ERC workstations. All access must follow an established data and security protocol set forth by the Database Administrator and Director.
- **Review of Research Products**- All research products including tables, statistical output, graphs, and more must undergo review to ensure FERPA compliance. A Texas ERC staff member, following the guidelines set forth in the Masking Guidelines and Techniques, conducts the review of research products prior to releasing items back to the researcher.
- **Approval Period & Extensions**- The initial approval of research projects is for two years. With proof of funding, initial ERC Advisory Board approval may be established for up to 5 years. Extensions for a study have to be written and must go before the ERC Advisory Board. An extension may be granted up to 2 years without funding and up to 3 years with secured funding.

- **Research Project Information**– Researcher(s) must provide the Texas ERC with regular updates regarding progress, changes, and extensions.
- **Project Amendments**– If the original proposal needs amended after the approval by the ERC Advisory Board, then researcher(s) must submit a request to the Director. The project amendment for a study must be in the form of a written request and must go before the ERC Advisory Board. If the changes are major, researcher(s) may be asked to resubmit the project as a new proposal.

Concluding the Research

- **Policy or Practice Brief**– Researcher(s) must create a policy brief for public dissemination. The policy/practice brief serves to benefit the state of Texas, and it is part of the agreed upon elements of access to the Repository data at Texas' ERCs.
- **Other Research Products**– Researcher(s) should also inform the Director of other outcomes of the research conducted at the Texas ERC. This may include journal article or other publications that emerge from work conducted at the ERC. Copies of publications must be provided, at no cost, to the cooperating agencies.
- **Conclusion**– Researcher(s) will have access rescinded and workspace files archived for a period of five years. Five years after the conclusion of the study, workspace files will be destroyed.

References

1 Tex. Educ. Code § 1.006

Appendix A

Template for Reader's Guide

Instructions– *Below is a template for a Reader's Guide, which should be 2-3 pages and attached before your full proposal. The sections in the Reader's Guide cover the most frequently asked questions by Board members (these sections have been derived from newly adopted rules and previous proposal procedures which are attached to the end of the template). The Reader's Guide should help inform the Board as well as frame your proposal for success.*

Following the Reader's Guide, you should attach a Full Proposal (10-15 pages) that fully outlines your project and its design. In the Full Proposal, you should detail the need for the study, the framings/underpinnings of your work based on current research, the study's design including sampling and methodology, and considerations of implications for furthering academic research and policy.

Date

Proposed Project:
Title

Researcher Name
Researcher Affiliation

Abstract
(No More than 200 Words)

Give a brief description of the project if the abstract is not enough information. This may include who the researcher is (if it is an organization), what the impetus is for research, and other information that speaks to the importance of the project.

Research Questions

1. ...
2. ...
3. ...

Data Needed from the ERC Database (for example....)

For this analysis, we will need access to the following data housed at ERC:

- TEA Student-level data (XXXX - current): State testing data, all available student level demographics, enrollment and attendance, course completion, dropout, graduation information, and other variables describing teacher-student interaction (such as special education inclusion status).
- TEA School-level data (XXXX - current): school-level student demographics within each grade and school as a whole, AYP status, TEA rating, school and district funding, campus level accountability, district-level accountability, and state-level accountability.
- THECB Student-level data (XXXX - current): college applications, college readiness measures, demographics at the time of application, where a student enrolls, credit hours attempted in a semester, credit hours completed in a semester, graduation information including degree type and major, and grade earned in a course if available.
- SBEC data (XXXX - current): Teacher certification and test scores.
- FADs data (XXXX - current): types of financial aid awarded to a student by each institution, any included additional family information, including family income.
- TWC student-level data (XXXX - current): quarterly earnings data, county unemployment levels, NAICS industry codes for each quarter.
- NSC data (all years available): Currently, only 2008 and 2009 are available, but other years become available we would like to access that data.

If supplemental data is needed, be sure to include it in your request.

Research Methods

Share briefly your analytic approach without bogging down the reader in jargon (you may get more specific in your full proposal).

Researcher's Qualifications

Name and share a small amount of pertinent information for all researchers who will be involved with the project and/or data.

Benefit to Texas

Make sure to include not only what you intend to examine, but how the research will benefit education in the state. Consider including implications such as broadening the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, geographic, etc.), enhancing the

infrastructure for research and education, and benefiting and/or informing educational policy and practice.

Related Policy

Identify probable areas that the predicted results and outcomes will be able to influence or address.

Dissemination Strategy

It is a requirement upon completion of the project that you complete a short, implication-g geared paper (Policy or Practice Brief) that links your findings to Texas policy or practice (2-5 pages). First, speak to what audience you intend to write your policy brief towards (policymakers, practitioners, etc.). Then share the rest of your dissemination plans including presentations, conferences, peer review journals, and other strategies for publishing and sharing findings.

Financial Resources

If it is a funded project, indicate where the funds will come from to cover the cost of data access.

ATTACH FULL PROPOSAL

Full Proposal

The Reader's Guide serves as a quick overview for the ERC Advisory Board, yet a full proposal is needed should questions arise about the proposed research. Proposals should be no longer than 15 pages in length excluding references and the Reader's Guide. They may take the format most suited to the researcher(s), but should adequately address and fully explain the following:

Potential contribution to theory and/or practice

- Theoretical and/or empirical support for the proposed project is stated
- The practical importance of the project is clear

Potential to benefit education in the state of Texas

- The proposal makes a strong case for benefiting education in the state of Texas

Strength and appropriateness of methodology

- Proposal contains clear, concise hypotheses or research questions
- Data selected are appropriate for addressing the research questions
 - Clearly identify data at the record not the variable level using the ERC Inventory document
 - If supplemental data is needed, provide justification and attach the appropriate supplemental external data request form (see Appendix C).
- The type of analysis being proposed is appropriate given the research objectives
- If the project involves evaluating an intervention, the type of intervention being evaluated (e.g. curriculum, teacher professional development, policy) is described
- Participants and/or student population is described
- If the project requires the collection of primary supplemental data, the instruments to be used in the project are described

Researchers qualifications

- The researcher, research team or doctoral student (or advisor) demonstrates expertise in the relevant content area and other related research activities (e.g. data analyses)

Broader impact of the proposed project, whereby the proposed project is likely to:

- Broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, geographic, etc.)
- Enhance the infrastructure for research and education
- Benefit and/or inform educational policy or practice

Dissemination strategy

- The proposal lays out an effective strategy for disseminating results

Access to adequate resources

- The researcher(s) have adequate resources to complete the project in a timely manner

Appendix B

Texas ERC Fee Schedule

To offset the costs of providing the operational and audit functions required by ERC contracts and to comply with the rules of the Texas education agencies and the ERC Advisory Board, the Texas ERC levies the charges shown below in the Annual Access Fee schedule.

Annual Access Fee		
Affiliation	ERC Authorized Researchers*	Student
Within System	\$13,000	\$500
Other	\$18,000	\$5000

The Texas ERC may, at its sole discretion, waive access fees.

* The charge for ERC Authorized Researchers covers **two** researchers working on an Approved Project. For Approved Projects with special requirements, annual fees may be negotiated between the Texas ERC and the principal investigators.

Definitions

- **Approved Project**– A research project utilizing the ERC data, to be conducted under the auspices of the ERC and for which approval has been granted by the Advisory Board.
- **Authorized Representative**– The State of Texas’ designated ERC (The University of Texas at Austin and the other at The University of Texas at Dallas) are considered authorized representatives of the state as defined by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).
- **ERC Authorized Researcher**– An ERC Authorized Researcher is considered an **Agent** of the ERC. An **Agent** is a person who is authorized to access the ERC data to conduct work as part of an approved project at a designated ERC access location. An **Agent** or ERC Authorized Researcher must either be a primary investigator designated for an approved project or be assigned to conduct work on behalf of an approved project by one or more of its primary investigators of record. An **Agent** or ERC Authorized Researcher must have a current, signed confidentiality agreement on file with the Texas ERC.
- **Student**– An ERC Authorized Researcher who is currently seeking a college degree and has received IRB Approval from their respective institute of higher education.
- **Within System**– An institution that is a member of the same Texas university system as the Educational Research Center’s institution (e.g. The University of Texas at San Antonio).

Appendix C

Supplemental Data Request Forms

The forms below are those used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and other cooperating agencies. As a reminder, these forms should accompany your proposal to the ERC Advisory Board. Requests for supplemental data will not be accepted by the respective agency without the project approval of the ERC Advisory Board. All requests will be processed through the Director. Please also copy the Database Administrator on your request. **Electronic versions of these forms are available on the [Texas ERC website](#).**

ERC Request for Supplemental External Data–To TEA

Texas Education Agency Procedures For Processing Supplemental Data For Use By Education Research Centers With Advisory Board-Approved Projects

Supplemental data requiring processing. TEA must process any supplemental student or staff data that are to be matched to individual K-12 student or staff records in the ERC database. This supplemental data processing request form applies only to individual-level data. Data not at the individual level (e.g., school level, district level) do not need TEA processing.

Supplemental data acquired by a researcher. Supplemental data that is owned by a researcher must be destroyed by the researcher prior to its placement in an ERC by THECB. TEA will process the supplemental data and provide the de-identified dataset along with the original dataset to THECB; THECB will provide the supplemental dataset to the ERC once the researcher has certified the original dataset has been destroyed; and, at the conclusion of the research project, THECB will return the original dataset to the researcher. Supplemental data owned by a researcher must be sent directly to TEA via the secure file sharing program, Accellion. Prior to transmitting data to TEA, the researcher must submit the Supplemental Data Processing Request Form (attached) to Nina Taylor and have obtained permission to submit data. TEA will not accept data unless prior permission has been obtained from the agency. Contact Nina Taylor at (512) 475-2085.

Supplemental data maintained by an entity other than the researcher. Supplemental data owned by an external source such as a school district must be sent directly to TEA by the external owner, not the researcher, via the secure file sharing program, Accellion. Prior to transmitting data to TEA, the researcher must submit the Supplemental Data Processing Request Form (attached) to Nina Taylor and have obtained permission for the external owner to submit data. TEA will not accept data unless prior permission has been obtained from the agency. Contact Nina Taylor at (512) 475-2085.

Quality of matches between supplemental data and TEA data. Note that successful matching of supplemental data to TEA data is dependent on the quality of identification fields (e.g., first name, last name) in the supplemental dataset. TEA will not clean or modify supplemental data to increase successful matches.

Timeline for processing supplemental data. Requests are processed in the order received. THECB will notify the researcher when the supplemental data are available.

How to begin the supplemental data request process. Submit the attached form to Nina Taylor at Nina.Taylor@tea.state.tx.us or call her for instructions at (512) 475-2085.

Texas Education Agency Supplemental Data Processing Request Form

1. Instructions

- a. Complete this form and send it to: Nina.Taylor@tea.state.tx.us
 - b. Attach the data element documentation or data dictionary.
-

2. To be completed by Requestor

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| a. Research Project Number: | <input type="text"/> | b. Research Project Name: | <input type="text"/> |
| c. Advisory Board Approval Date: | <input type="text"/> | d. Date Request was Submitted: | <input type="text"/> |
| e. Education Research Center: | <input type="text"/> | f. Contact for this Request: | <input type="text"/> |
| g. Contact Phone Number: | <input type="text"/> | | |
-

3. To be completed by TEA Staff

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--|----------------------|
| a. Date Data Received by TEA: | <input type="text"/> | b. Date Supplemental Data Sent to THECB: | <input type="text"/> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--|----------------------|

ERC Request for Supplemental External Data - To the THECB

(Use this document for all requests that are not sent to the Texas Education Agency)

Note: *This document must be **approved and submitted by the ERC Primary Contact**. Requests for external data will only be accepted if an applicable Research Project has already been submitted to the THECB, or is accompanying this document. Please avoid using abbreviations and acronyms in your request.*

I. Project / Requestor Information

- 1) ERC Requesting the data:
- 2) Date of Request:
- 3) ERC Primary Contact Name:
- 4) Institution or organization conducting the research:
- 5) Project contact for this data request
Name:
Telephone Number:
Email Address:
- 6) What is the name of the project that this data request is to be associated with?

II. Data

- 1) Agency or Organization that owns the data:
- 2) Agency or Organization contact information:
Name:
Telephone Number:
Email Address:
- 3) Please provide information about the data requested.
 - a) Period of time the data should cover (mm/dd/yy through mm/dd/yy):
 - b) Description of the requested data:
 - c) Specific data items that need to be included as part of the request (e.g. SSN, Race, Age etc.):
 - d) Data destruction date:
- 4) Please provide any other information that will help assure timely and accurate handling of this request: