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## The Q&A: Pedro Reyes

- by [Christine Ayala](#)
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*With each issue, Trib+Edu brings you an interview with experts on issues related to public education. Here is this week's subject:*

**Pedro Reyes** is the primary investigator for the Texas Education Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. His research focuses on fostering high academic success among children of poverty and on diminishing the stratification of learning opportunities for children of color. Reyes is also the university's Ashbel Smith Professor of Education Policy within the Department of Education and has been the executive vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Texas System since 2011. Reyes received a bachelor's degree in American history and education and a Ph.D. in education policy and administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

*Editor's note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

**Trib+Edu:** What is the goal of the center's current research?

**Pedro Reyes:** The purpose is to provide longitudinal student level data for scientific inquiry and policymaking. Our goal is really to bring data and information so that we can help policymakers and practitioners make the best decisions that they can. We create a synergy for theory, policy and practice. It makes for better decisions for our students and policymakers and practitioners. We are providing access not only for our folks here in Texas, but also across the nation we have researchers connected to the ERC doing different projects that are really important to the world of research and policymaking.

**Trib+Edu:** What are some of the center's recent projects?

**Reyes:** All of the projects are really great. The studies are having an impact on policymaking and people who work to make sense of data. When we defined the ERC, one of the goals was to really improve the information available for policymaking.

We did a study on the effect of dual credit employment and then how that coursework affects postsecondary outcomes. This is more of a theoretical discussion. Students who pass dual credit have double the odds of gaining access to post secondary institutions. That is something that we needed to know. In Texas, dual credit is a policy that was initiated a long time ago without a lot of data. So in a way, this is reinforcing that the policy was a good policy.

This session, there are one or two bills already that are looking at dual enrollment and how we can strengthen dual enrollment. So this information will give that kind of information to policymakers to strengthen the potential policy that will be affected this coming session.

Another one I like to point to is teacher quality analysis that we are doing here for the state. We are looking at how we can enhance training programs for teachers to improve the outcomes that we have in public education. The dropout rate is significant in public education. It is also significant in higher education, and that has to do with preparation and teacher quality. A high-quality teacher really adds one or two years in terms of student achievement to any student. A teacher that is not well-prepared detracts from that student achievement.

We are trying to find the key elements of teacher quality and how can we help teacher preparation programs in the current ISDs to improve the workforce in that area. We have to succeed with our students in public education. If we don't, we are going to have big challenges in the Texas economy. That is really an important project we are doing.

Last session, we did a study on the practices for standard English learners, and we looked at how to better teach English language to language learners. We have a large population in the state for whom English is not the first language and they struggle. In that study that we did for the Senate, we identified some really important practices that could be brought to the ISDs to train or retrain the teachers so that we can improve our odds of doing a better job with English language learners.

**Trib+Edu:** What data from the center will be used this legislative session?

**Reyes:** We have a piece of work on charter schools in Texas. It was produced for the Texas Education Agency and the Legislature. There is a lot of interest about charter schools in Texas and across the nation, and this would be very helpful.

The other piece that we are looking at is transition points, from middle school all the way to employment. For example, we look at what kinds of curriculum configurations help the student make a successful transition from middle school to high school. There we look at what advising and counseling is needed to make sure these kids stay and move on to be

sophomores. Another critical point is from high school to postsecondary and how to make sure we can sustain that success.

We are looking at this legislative session to bring new ideas, and, obviously, we will be receptive because we want to support our legislative bodies and we want them to support us as well. I think the ERC is just a jewel in terms of specific analysis and how we can improve what we do throughout the education cycle, including the workforce.

**Trib+Edu:** Why track kids through the workforce?

**Reyes:** There are not very many places that have the longitudinal data that we have. Only Florida really comes close. We have a connection all the way from K-12 to higher education to the workforce. It is critical that we map out the success pathways so that we understand better how our students do in the world of work and how successful they are so we can improve upon those pathways. There is nothing like connecting the pieces throughout the life cycle of the student to understand those pieces.

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