



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

OFFICE OF AUDIT AND CONSULTING SERVICES
800 W. CAMPBELL RD. SP2 33, RICHARDSON, TX 75080
PHONE 972-883-4876

Date: November 20, 2023

To: Dr. Trey Miller, Director of the Texas Schools Project
Dr. Holly Kosiewicz, Director, Education Research Center

From: Toni Stephens, Chief Audit Executive

Subject: Education Research Center

We have completed the Education Research Center (ERC) compliance certification as part of our [FY23 Audit Plan](#). The objective of this engagement was to determine whether the ERC at The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) is in compliance with terms of the contract between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and UT Dallas. The report is attached for your review.

Overall, the ERC complied with the terms of the contract between UT Dallas and the THECB. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments regarding this engagement.

Distribution List:

Members and ex-officio members of the UT Dallas Institutional Audit Committee

Responsible Vice President

- Dr. Inga Musselman, Provost and VP for Academic Affairs

Other Interested Parties

- Dr. Jennifer Holmes, Dean of the School of Economic, Political & Policy Sciences
- Ms. Sanaz Okhovat, Chief Compliance Officer/Associate VP for Research
- Mr. Nate Howe, Chief Information Security Officer
- Ms. Heather Burge, Associate Provost

External Parties

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- The University of Texas System Audit Office
- Legislative Budget Board
- Governor's Office
- State Auditor's Office

Staff Assigned:

Project Leader: Steve Sizemore, IT Audit Program Manager, UT System Audit Office

Background

In 2006, the 79th Texas Legislature authorized the Commissioner of Education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish statewide centers for education research. The Education Research Center (ERC) at UT Dallas, a sub-entity of the Texas Schools Project, is charged with facilitating education research that will benefit Texas students from pre-kindergarten to college and into the workforce by providing approved researchers access to individual-level administrative data that can be used to study the progress and performance of students, teachers, and schools.

As stated on their [website](#), the Education Research Center facilitates research to benefit education in Texas by providing researchers with access to individual administrative data through the State of Texas Education Research Center Program. The ERC is currently handling 48 projects with researchers from multiple universities.

A contract was signed on September 1, 2017, to continue the authorization of an ERC at UT Dallas through August 31, 2024, unless extended. The contract states, “At a minimum, the Internal Auditor of UTD shall annually certify that the ERC is in full compliance with all terms of this contract and all applicable state and federal laws.” The contract also stipulates that the ERC will report compliance with Information Security policies to the Chief Information Security Officer and the Assistant Vice President of Research Compliance annually. The primary requirements of the contract include the responsibility of the data and security of confidential research data.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objective of this engagement was to determine whether the ERC at The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) is in compliance with terms of the contract between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and UT Dallas. The scope was state fiscal year 2023 and relevant activities through the end of fieldwork in October 2023.

We performed the following procedures to meet our objective:

- Interviewed responsible ERC and Office of Information Security (ISO) management to gain an understanding of processes and controls for overseeing the THECB contract and ensuring compliance with requirements.
- Reviewed activities designed to monitor servers storing THECB data and protect the data while at rest and in transit.
- Tested a sample of projects to ensure (a) THECB and/or Advisory Board approval was obtained and (b) written agreements and signed statements were obtained for individuals with access to THECB data.

Results

We tested for compliance with the requirements of the THECB contract. We determined that ERC management provided appropriate oversight, worked in coordination with ISO to ensure technical controls were in place to protect THECB data, and ensured individuals with access to THECB data submitted required written agreements and signed statements.

Conclusion

Based on the audit work performed, the ERC complied with terms of the contract between UT Dallas and the THECB in fiscal year 2023.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation received from the management and staff in both the ERC and ISO during this engagement.