



**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:** October 29, 2024

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

**From:** Toni Stephens, Chief Audit Executive

DocuSigned by:  
*Toni Stephens*  
26B49AE7B918458...

**Subject:** Education Research Center

We have completed the Education Research Center (ERC) compliance certification as part of our FY25 Audit Plan. The objective of this engagement was to perform a compliance certification to determine whether the ERC at The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) is in compliance with the terms of the contract between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and UT Dallas for FY24. 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 Vice President for Research and Innovation
- Mr. Nate Howe, Chief Information Security Officer
- Ms. Heather Burge, Associate Provost for Administration
- Dr. Camila Morales, Director of Research, Education Research Center

**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: Luis Carrera, CPA, CIA, CISA, IT Audit Manager

## 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 original contract was signed on September 1, 2017, to continue the authorization of an ERC at UT Dallas through August 31, 2024; the contract was later extended through August 31, 2027. 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.

The Office of Audit and Consulting Services conducted the last annual audit of the ERC, Report No. R2402, dated November 20, 2023. The report concluded that the ERC complied with the terms of the contract between UT Dallas and the THECB.

## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objective of this engagement was to perform a compliance certification to determine whether the ERC at The University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) is in compliance with the terms of the contract between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and UT Dallas. The scope was state fiscal year 2024 and relevant activities through the end of fieldwork in October 2024.

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 the following areas:
  - Oversight and Compliance
  - Data Security, Transmission, and Storage
  - Access Control and Monitoring
- Procedures included testing 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 the terms of the contract between UT Dallas and the THECB in fiscal year 2024.

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