

Consortium on Educational Research and Improvement (CERI)

What is CERI?

The Consortium on Educational Research and Improvement (CERI or “the Consortium”) is a collaboration between Southern Methodist University (SMU) and the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD). SMU and Dallas ISD are working together to identify and support mutually beneficial research, evaluation and improvement projects.

Why was CERI developed?

The Consortium was developed to help support the next generation of SMU research by faculty and graduate students and promote the sharing of new knowledge to educational leaders. One goal of CERI is to make research endeavors between our institutions more efficient and ultimately more impactful. Leaders at both SMU and Dallas ISD acknowledged that while we have always had a vested interest in knowledge generation, proposing and executing research studies or other collaborative projects’ pathways were often confusing and cumbersome.

As a result, important findings with high potential for positive outcomes for students were not being translated into practice. CERI’s establishment as a collaborative entity will make research, evaluation and improvement more accessible and ensure that the new knowledge generated by our work together has an outlet for being cyclically shared and acted upon.

CERI is guided by the following principles:

- Mutuality - CERI is an intentionally highly collaborative research-practice collaboration developed to benefit both SMU and Dallas ISD.



- Collaboration - SMU faculty, staff and graduate students and Dallas ISD leaders are encouraged to pursue studies collaboratively. Additionally, practice-based questions may emerge from Dallas ISD leaders that SMU faculty can help investigate and/or theory-based questions may emerge from SMU that Dallas ISD leaders can help explore. Also, SMU and Dallas ISD may wish to collaborate with other educational stakeholders to identify questions of local and/or broad relevance.
- Contribution - Findings and learnings from all CERI supported projects are expected to be shared for learning and improvement opportunities across our institutions and with our broader fields.

What permissions does CERI give researchers?

CERI’s primary objective is to act in a consultative and supportive capacity to help SMU faculty and graduate students prioritize research and evaluation topics and efforts and make these research endeavors between our institutions more efficient and ultimately more impactful. CERI does not have authority to approve projects on behalf of SMU nor Dallas ISD.

All proposed projects are required to meet the Dallas ISD Board of Trustee’s strategic goals, the Dallas ISD Research Review Board (RRB) criteria, and SMU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) criteria.

Depending on the nature of the project, additional Dallas ISD sponsorships or school-level permissions may be required.

What kinds of projects are the best fit for CERI?

A goal of CERI is to encourage a wide variety of research, evaluation, and improvement initiatives across all educational topics. Over time, CERI may identify priority topic areas or rotating themes that will be given preference; however, alignment with Dallas ISD’s strategic goals is the main criteria to consider. Projects can be qualitative or quantitative in nature and include a variety of primary data collection types, secondary/extant data analyses, and/or educational interventions that involve members of the Dallas ISD (e.g. with students, teachers, parents and school leaders/administrators) or SMU communities, as well as nonprofits, partners and/or the learning ecosystem. Examples of improvement projects may include utilizing data being generated from Dallas ISD-based projects or from other sources and may include professional development, continuous improvement, coaching and/or plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycles.



What is the benefit of conducting a project under CERI?

The primary benefits of conducting a project under CERI are assistance with DALLAS ISD RRB processes, support for identifying who needs to sign key paperwork, a platform to generate collaborative research partnerships, a platform to disseminate findings in local context, and efficient and accelerated access to extant data from DALLAS ISD through SMU CORE.

Who can conduct a project under CERI?

CERI is designed for both SMU and DALLAS ISD to be able to engage in research collaborations, partnerships for improvement and targeted studies. SMU faculty, research staff, and students under the supervision of a faculty advisor as well as Dallas ISD leadership and school level staff may wish to conduct studies and/or improvement projects. Although CERI was initiated at SMU by the Simmons School of Education and Human Development, any SMU faculty, staff or students interested in a collaboration with DallasISD may benefit from engaging with CERI.

How does CERI work?

The Consortium is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SMU and Dallas ISD as well as an associated data sharing agreement, allowing for Dallas ISD to share extant data with SMU for approved purposes. All CERI supported projects must also receive Dallas ISD RRB approval and if led by a SMU researcher, Institutional Review Board (IRB) permissions must be in place. (See checklist below for more information).

CERI is chaired by one representative from SMU and one from Dallas ISD; chairs are Dr. Tony Petrosino (Associate Dean for Research at SMU) and Dr. Cecilia Oakley (Deputy Chief, Evaluation & Assessment at Dallas ISD). Drs. Petrosino and Oakeley identify members of the CERI committee. During the 2022-23 school year those committee members are: Dr. Annie Wright (SMU CORE), (SMU IRB representative, to be

named), Dr. Larry Featherston (DALLAS ISD RRB Chair), Shannon Trejo (DALLAS ISD Chief Academic Officer). In addition to the committee members, chairs will regularly invite subject matter experts or leaders of key divisions to any CERI meetings and/or to provide input on an as-needed basis.

CERI will hold 4 committee meetings per year and chairs and committee members also communicate frequently between set meetings. Additionally, CERI chairs will provide regular updates to SMU and Dallas ISD leadership.

What is the role of SMU CORE?

Simmons' Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE) provides logistical and data supports on behalf of CERI. CORE receives extant data from Dallas ISD and with proper permissions in place, can develop project-specific data files for SMU researchers and evaluators including faculty, staff and students. CORE also maintains a roster of active and proposed collaborations between our institutions and helps ensure that, over time, findings or new knowledge emerging from our joint projects are being shared.

If I'm already conducting a project with Dallsa ISD, how can CERI benefit me?

If your project involves collection of extant Dallas ISD data, CERI and CORE can facilitate the data exchange. CERI may also be able to consult on project challenges and/or on possible expansions or continuation of the research.

What if I am applying for a grant and I'm not ready to start a project yet?

CERI may be a useful resource for grant applications; support letters from Dallas ISD and/or SMU stating that the Consortium and data sharing agreement are in place may be requested and submitted. Additionally, CERI chairs and committee members may be able to help support or shape grant narratives, analysis plans or research design. Upon possible award of the grant, PIs will then need to complete any remaining

permissions; support letters for grants do not constitute approval of any given study or project.

For more information...

contact Annie Wright, director of the SMU Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE) or Dr. Tony Petrosino, Simmons Associate Dean of Research and Outreach.