

# New grant-funded educator misconduct database used as research and prevention tool

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Credit: UTSA

A researcher and an alumna at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) have teamed up to document a disturbing phenomenon in Texas, the seemingly increasing number of investigations into allegations of educator misconduct that make headlines across the state.

David Thompson, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the UTSA College of Education and Human Development, and Catherine Robert '17, Ed.D, an assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), are developing a database with information about Texas certified [educators](#) who have engaged in [sexual misconduct](#) during the last two decades (1999-2019) to provide [empirical data](#) on educator sexual misconduct (ESM) that can inform education policymakers at the national and state levels.

The database includes Texas educators who had their educator certificate(s) sanctioned in some way and will include employment and certification data for the educator. This information can be used to describe and predict patterns among educator offenders in Texas.

Thompson said he and Robert focused on analyzing data from 1999 to 2019 because 1999 brought significant changes to how the Texas Educators' Code of Ethics was enforced. Robert said this time-period also captures offenses both before and after the rise of social media use.

Robert and Thompson conducted research into Texas social media policies in 2014-2015, and they found that roughly 10% of Texas school districts did not have a social media or electronic communication policy at the time. They provided testimony to the Texas Senate Committee on Education and the Texas House of Representatives Public Education Committee between the 84th and 85th Legislature on their findings regarding social media use.

Senate Bill 7 (SB7) subsequently passed during the regular session of the 85th Texas Legislature in 2017 requiring school districts to have social media policies.

Thompson said in addition to that legislation, the State Board for Educator Certification added a standard to the Educators' Code of Ethics in 2010 that regulates social media use by Texas educators for certificate discipline purposes.

Thompson and Robert have conducted extensive research about ESM in Texas. Their work began five years ago and is a multiphase effort that encompasses collecting ESM data and measuring the changing definition and nature of ESM in addition to considering issues inherent in creating a database using aging data from multiple resources.

Out of a sample of 1,241 cases in which discipline and employment data were collected, the researchers noted some big takeaways:

- Offense rates among female educators appears to have doubled over the past 15 years, from approximately 13% of offenders in a study by the Dallas Morning News in 2003 to 25% of offenders being female educators in Thompson and Robert's most recent publication in the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*.
- Their data reveals that nearly 50% of the offenders in the database that encompasses 2008-2016 received supplemental pay of at least \$500, which is a good indicator that the educator was engaged in extracurricular duty supervision of students (coaches, sponsors, band directors, University Interscholastic League (UIL) sponsors, and the like).

The data shows what an offending educator's teaching assignment was during the year that the offense occurred for which the educator ultimately received a [certificate](#) sanction.

Robert said another notable finding is that 36% of sanctioned teachers were in their first year of teaching in the school district in which they were sanctioned. This speaks to the importance of scrutinizing candidates applying to be teachers.

"For experienced teachers moving school districts, why are they leaving their current positions? For new teachers, training regarding appropriate educator-student boundaries is critically important. Close supervision of new hires can hopefully prevent more offenses," explained Robert.

Thompson added, "Accurate data can ideally prevent the phenomenon by providing descriptive and predictive information; this research has implications for school district employment practices and educator professional development."

The UTSA database will be used for research purposes and to inform policy, and will not be made public. The researchers plan to request data annually to update their [database](#) and to develop instructional materials on educator ethics, educator sexual misconduct, and educator professional standards for educator preparation programs across Texas.

Thompson and Robert recently received a \$301,000 grant from the Texas Office of the Governor for the project, titled Educator Sexual Misconduct in Texas: Research, Instruction, Prevention.

The two researchers are working alongside Alejandra Gonzalez-Mejia, Ph.D., a graduate research assistant and M.Ed. Candidate in the UTSA Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Brandon Tate, a Ph.D. candidate in the UTSA Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and Manisha Vaswani, a Ph.D. candidate in the UTA College of Business.

Provided by University of Texas at San Antonio

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