

## Russell Sage Foundation *\*and\** William T. Grant Foundation – Educational Opportunity Monitoring Project

Improving Education and Reducing Inequality in the United States: Obtaining New Insights from Population-Based Academic Performance Data

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**Website:** <https://www.russellsage.org/funding/improving-education-and-reducing-inequality-united-states>  
**Submission Limitations:** None  
**Foundation Deadline:** **April 29, 2021**

*Please contact your RAS unit **\*and\*** Tiffany Worboy to inform them of your intent to submit*

### Overview

We seek research projects that aim to deepen our understanding of educational opportunity and success in the United States by analyzing data on academic achievement from the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA) constructed by Sean Reardon and colleagues at The Educational Opportunity Project (EOP) at Stanford University (<https://edopportunity.org>).

### Data

Using data on the results of roughly 430 million standardized achievement tests taken by roughly 45 million public school students from 2009 to 2018, Reardon and colleagues have constructed detailed measures of academic performance on a common scale in every public school and every school district in the United States. Examples of the available statistics include:

1. Average test scores
  - By test subject (math and ELA), grade (grades 3-8), and year (2009-2018)
  - For all 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico
  - For all students, and by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender
  - By public school, school district, county, commuting zone, and metropolitan area
  - Measured on a common national scale
2. Measures of the rate of change in average test scores and test score gaps
  - Within cohorts, across grades
  - Within grades, across cohorts
3. New data available in 2021
  - Data for 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years (available February 2021)
  - Data from Puerto Rico schools (available Spring 2021)
  - Data from Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools (available Spring 2021)
  - Data for Native American Students (available Spring 2021)
  - Data for 2018-19 school year (likely available in second half of 2021)

Because the data include school, school district, county, commuting zone, metropolitan area, and state identifiers, researchers can link them to any other source of data with corresponding geographic identifiers. Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals utilizing this new data resource (especially in combination with other data sources).

### Research Goals

Studies that can plausibly identify the *effects* of policies, practices, and conditions on achievement and achievement inequality, or the effects of achievement and achievement gaps on other outcomes and forms of inequality, will be preferred over descriptive or correlational studies. We are particularly, though not exclusively, interested in studies aimed at understanding how to reduce educational inequality or subsequent forms of inequality.

Studies may make use of **variation across places** (schools, school districts, counties, commuting zones, metropolitan areas, states), **grades** (grades 3-8), **years** (2009-2018), **birth cohorts** (there are 15 birth cohorts in the data – born roughly 1995-2009), and **student subgroups** to identify mechanisms that affect inequality.

- For example, if researchers could identify policies and practices that affected certain grades (such as middle school, but not elementary school) or were enacted in specific years (or in different years in different places), such variation might plausibly be used to identify the effects of some policies.
- If there were policies that affected some birth cohorts (perhaps state pre-school programs began in a given year in some states and different years in others), this might produce exogenous variation in access to preschool, the effects of which might be observed by comparing the achievement patterns of different cohorts as they progress through school.
- Finally, policies that differentially affect some schools and/districts but not others (such as school finance policies and changes in such policies, Title 1 funding, NCLB waivers or accountability sanctions, federal SIG grants, and so on) may provide a source of exogenous variation that could be used to identify the effects of specific policies on inequality.

Examples of the types of research topics of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The effects of federal, state, or district education policies on educational achievement and the reduction of educational inequality (standards, teacher recruitment, retention, and evaluation policies, student assignment and discipline policies, etc.);
2. The effects of residential or school integration on educational achievement and the reduction of educational inequality;
3. The role of school finance and funding in shaping achievement patterns (among states or districts, as well as within-districts);
4. The effects of local housing policies or bank lending practices on racial inequality in achievement;
5. The role of social policies and outside-of-school conditions in reducing inequality (public pre-school, family support policies, after school programming, neighborhood safety and conditions);
6. The role of school choice, charter schools, and other market-based mechanisms in educational outcomes;
7. The effects of achievement patterns and gaps on disparities in college enrollment and completion;
8. The effects of educational achievement and inequality on other social outcomes or aspects of social inequality (e.g.: criminal activity and incarceration, young adult earnings, social mobility);
9. The relation between policing practices, neighborhood violence, and racial disparities in school performance.

The Russell Sage Foundation (RSF) and the William T. Grant Foundation have co-funded three previous competitions, in 2016, 2018, and 2020. Twenty grants were approved over these three rounds. [Click here for a list of funded projects.](#)

#### Research Conference

Researchers who receive grants are expected to present their results at a one-day academic conference in Spring 2022. The aims of the conference will be to improve the quality of the research and foster collaboration among early career researchers interested in educational inequality. Grantees will be free to publish their work in their preferred outlet. RSF will cover the costs of the conference and reimburse participants for reasonable travel expenses.

#### Funding

Accepted proposals will receive **up to \$20,000 in funding for a faculty project** and **up to \$10,000 for a graduate student project**. Applications may be submitted by teams of researchers. The maximum funding for a faculty project will be \$20,000. If a graduate student project has multiple students, we will consider funding up to \$15,000.

#### Eligibility

Applicants can be **doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows** or **assistant professors** who received their Ph.D. on or after August 31, 2013.

We are particularly interested in promoting racial/ethnic, gender and disciplinary diversity and strongly encourage applications from scholars who are underrepresented in the social sciences.

## How to Apply

Applications must be submitted via the RSF online application portal, [Fluxx](#).

1. Create an account or log in to your existing account. ***\*\*Allow up to 2 business days for a new account to be approved\*\****
2. Start a new “Targeted Competition” application
3. Submit the following documents:
  - A concise single-spaced proposal (4 pages maximum) detailing the proposed work;
  - A detailed Excel budget using the Foundation’s [budget template](#);
  - A budget narrative;
  - An up-to-date **abbreviated** CV (maximum of 5 pages per CV);
  - An organization confirmation letter – a letter from your home institution stating that it will manage the funds for the project should a grant be made;
4. Doctoral students must also submit:
  - One letter of recommendation from the student’s faculty advisor.

Applicants are encouraged to explore in detail the available data at <http://edopportunity.org> and to be very specific in the proposed analysis, describing which data from the project they plan to analyze and any additional sources of data that will be required to carry out the project.

For detailed information about what can and cannot be included in the budgets, as well as the budget template, please read the RSF Budget Guidelines at: <http://www.russellsage.org/how-to-apply/apply-project-grants/budget>

- **Applications will be accepted through April 29, 2021 at 2pm Eastern time.**
- Decisions will be announced in early July 2021.
- We expect to fund five to seven proposals in each round.