IRB GUIDANCE: Conducting Research in K – 12 Schools

This guidance provides an overview of the unique aspects of conducting research in K – 12 schools.

School based research projects require special considerations beyond the federal regulations and University policy. The following considerations should be addressed if a research project will be conducted in a K-12 school:

Site permission

K-12 school sites are autonomous institutions that retains the right to approve/reject any human subjects research to be conducted on their site, in their facilities, or with their teachers, staff or students. Therefore, for research in schools, the IRB requires site permission documentation form an appropriate authority at each school or district.

Each K-12 site may have different procedures for approving external research. It is the expectation of the IRB that researchers will contact schools/districts/administrators to get permission from the appropriate authority. Depending on the specific site, permission may be granted by a superintendent, principal, or by a committee at the district.

If a school district uses a committee to review research proposals, it is important to plan additional time into the approval process since the study will be reviewed by both the DU IRB and the school’s review committee. Often K-12 school sites will require proof of IRB review prior to their approval. The IRB can provide conditional approval as evidence of that review to sites. However, final approval will not be granted until appropriate site permission has been submitted to the IRB via IRBNet.

As differ in their review and approval process, the IRB sees many different types of site permission documentation. However, any letter of support/approval must indicate that the site understand the scope of the project. In addition, the IRB looks for the following to be included in site permission letters:

- Protocol title (name of study);
- A scope of the research and/or activities to be conducted at the site;
- Person or entity providing permission (including title, contact information, and confirmation of appropriate authority to provide permission).

Engagement

If teachers are engaged in research activities taking place in their school or classroom, they must complete human subjects training and be listed on the protocol application. The IRB defines
engagement based on involvement in any research activities including recruitment, consenting, data collection, data analysis, answering questions about the project, etc.

**Background checks**

Some schools require research personnel to undergo background checks. Be sure to check to see if your specific school district requires background checks for members of the study team engaging in research activities in their district or with their students/staff.

**Use of instructional time for research purposes**

Many school districts will not allow research activities to take place during normal class time. Please consider this as part of your research design.

**Consent/Assent**

Parental consent is required for minors to be included as research subjects. It is important to plan for an appropriate method to obtain consent form parents (i.e. send the study information and consent forms to parents for review, etc.). Often, research will ask teachers or school staff to facilitate this process by sending home recruitment material and consent forms with students in their “backpack mail”. You will also need to plan for a method of collecting the forms form the parents, without engaging staff.

Minor assent is also required prior to including minors as research subjects. Once parental consent has been obtained, consented students can be asked to provide assent. The assent process follows the consent process, and should be similar format/procedures. The assent document should be appropriate for the subject population (reading level, assent procedures, etc.). If the student is not

See IRB Guidance: Research with Minors for more information

**Use of Video or Audio Recording**

Many schools place limitations on the use of video or audio recording in classrooms. In addition, only consented and assented students should be captured on the recording. The school will want to see your video/audio recording procedure, and the IRB requires that it is included as part of your description of the scope of research to potential sites.

**FERPA**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records maintained by schools. Educational records include class assignment, grades, GPA, attendance, disciplinary reports, individual student educational plants, etc.
A researcher who has natural access to student records as part of their employment cannot access those records for research purposes without appropriate consent. Parental consent is required for the release of FERPA protected student records for minors.

See IRB Guidance: FERPA for more information

For additional guidance and information, contact University of Denver Office of Research Compliance at (303)871-4050 or at: IRBAdmin@du.edu