

Working with Students in Primary & Secondary Education

Research with youth plays a vital role in the development and improvement of our education systems. There are specific considerations for researchers wishing to conduct studies in K-12 settings. The federal government has outlined special protections for youth involved in research, and researchers planning to conduct their studies in educational settings should adhere to these to special protections when planning their research protocols. In addition, researchers should consider the following guidelines:

School District Research

School districts follow distinct protocols for reviewing and approving research initiatives conducted within their educational institutions and involving their student body. To ensure compliance and proper authorization, researchers must obtain approvals from both the Medical University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the respective local school district before commencing any research activities on school premises.

Researchers are advised to establish contact with the school well in advance to gain a comprehensive understanding of the district's research review process, timeline, and permissible research scopes. Notable considerations encompass:

Data Sharing and Collection: Adherence to school district regulations and policies concerning data sharing and collection is imperative.

- **Student level data collection:** Any information that teachers, schools, or districts collect on students can be considered student-level data (e.g., assessments, demographic information). If researchers are accessing de-identified data, they should consider any risk to students if that data is exposed. A data release form is often used if a researcher plans to access identifiable student-level

data and should be signed by both the parent and student. The IRB reviews student-level data protocol requests on a case-by-case basis. The source(s) of the student-level data, how the data will be accessed, transferred, secured, and stored are all considered when reviewing data requests.

- **Teacher level data:** Curriculums, instructional methods, lesson plans, and teacher reflections can all be considered teacher-level data. Researchers should seek a data release form from the teachers. Additionally, researchers should consider that some instructional materials and curriculums do not always belong to the teacher. Many curriculums are implemented on a school-wide level and are the property of the school to release, rather than the teachers'.

FERPA Compliance: Researchers must familiarize themselves with and adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines.

PPRA Compliance: Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) requirements must also be observed.

Consent:

- **Parental Consent:** Nearly all research involving school children needs signed parental consent or written notification to parents regarding the research.
- **Student Assent:** Researchers planning to conduct studies in which youth under the age of 18 are the study subjects should seek both youth assent and parental permission prior to engaging in study activities. For school-based studies, parental permission and assent should be obtained before engaging at the study site. The assent procedure, including communication content and delivery method, should be tailored to the children's maturity and cognitive capacity.

- **Teachers Consent:** Teachers should be consented before engaging in a research study. Even if a study is implemented on a school-wide basis, teachers should have the ability to opt-in to a study or disagree to participate.
 - Researchers should always consider the burden their study will place on educators, administrators, and districts. To alleviate the burden on educators, researchers should coordinate with each teacher's and the school's schedule, communicate de-identified study findings, or provide free instructional insights based on observations. In reviewing a protocol, the IRB will weigh the burden on the school against the researchers' plans to alleviate those burdens.
 - If you are recording/observing classroom instruction, consider whether students will be involved in the observation. For example, researchers who are recording instructional methods may inadvertently capture students' faces and voices. In these types of cases, researchers should either seek to mitigate the risk that non-participants will be in the research study or include students as part of the research population and seek their assent.

Additional Considerations

Alternate Procedures

In the event parents do not allow their child to participate, investigators should make accommodations for children not participating keeping in mind that these children should not be made to feel excluded from activities.

Teacher Involvement

Investigators are responsible for conducting study procedures. In school-based research, investigators should not have classroom teachers conduct study procedures unless the classroom teacher has been listed as co-investigator in the IRB application.

Local Context considerations

The need to collect local consideration information is based on the interpretation of the Common Rule [45 CFR 46.107(a)], which require IRBs to be sufficiently qualified through the experience and expertise of its members (professional competence) and the diversity of its members to be sensitive to such issues as “community attitudes”. Local considerations are issues that are unique about, or specific to, the site where the research will occur.

The study team must provide a complete and comprehensive review of the relevant state laws and policies and how they are addressed by the research.

Partnering with Schools

Each public school system has its own application procedure. Procedures range from simply emailing the protocol to a designated representative (such as the superintendent) to a formal online application process.

Researchers are expected to contact school districts to determine the appropriate authority from whom they must receive permission. Schools may require that permission is granted by the district superintendent, school principal, or by an internal committee (IRB). Final MUSC IRB approval to conduct research activities in a school will not be given until the researcher has submitted school system IRB approval (if applicable) or documentation of permission to the MUSC IRB, and the submission has been approved. If a school requires MUSC IRB approval before granting their own permission, the researcher

may request that the IRB issue a conditional approval letter stating that final approval is conditional upon the IRB's receipt of documentation of permission from the school.

Resources and Links

[Charleston County School District Procedures for Research](#)

[Dorchester County School District Research](#)