THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA Research & Partnerships

Research in K-12 Setting

Background

Research in educational settings requires special conditions to be put in place to ensure the safety and welfare of teacher and student participants. Considerations specific to research involving teachers or students in K-12 settings include gaining permission to access school sites and obtaining parental permission and child assent for the students. In Arizona, the age of majority is 18 years of age, and any participant under 18 is considered a minor requiring a legal adult to consent for research on their behalf. The age of majority can differ based on local and state regulations and interpretation.

Site Permission

All research conducted in or in cooperation with schools or school districts requires approval from the district prior to the initiation of the study. Principal approval and approval from other involved parties (i.e., the teacher) from each school utilized within that district is also required prior to the initiation of the study. Typically, district and principal approval comes in the form of a site letter (on institutional letterhead) signed by the administrator in charge of making such decisions at the school site, or via an email approval from an institutional email address. A copy of this letter or email should be included in the submission materials to the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Each K-12 site may have different procedures for approving external research. It is the expectation of the IRB that researchers will contact the schools/districts/administrators to get permission from the appropriate authority. Some sites may have an additional research review committee. Depending on the review and approval process at sites, it is important to plan additional time into the approval process since the project may be reviewed by both the University of Arizona IRB and the school's review committee.

The UA IRB typically requires school district approval prior to the review of the study. Include a copy of both district and principal approval from each school with submission material to the IRB. However, some sites may require IRB approval prior to the issuance of site approval. Please inform the Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) of this at the time of submission.

If working with a private or charter school, researchers should work with the school administration to determine where "district-level" approval should come from for their research.

Engagement

If teachers or school staff are engaged in research activities, as researchers themselves, the research becomes multi-site. Please review our *Single IRB Review* guidance and webpage. Please note, the IRB will not charge for review of these types of multi-site studies.

Parental Permission and Child Assent

For research conducted with participants who are under the age of majority, parental permission is required in addition to the child's assent. Parental permission should be done in a manner that actively engages parents in the consent agreement. Passive consent is when an individual does not actively consent but also does not object to participation. Passive consent is **not** accepted by the UA IRB. Once parental permission has been obtained, students can be asked to provide assent.

Often, researchers will ask teachers or school staff to facilitate this process by sending home recruitment material and consent forms with students in their 'backpack mail' or through school email.

When recruiting in this manner, the researcher's contact information should be included in this information.

Parental permission and assent form templates are located on the HSPP Consent Templates webpage.

Use of Audio and/or Video Recordings

Some schools place limitations on the use of audio or video recording in classrooms. Research recordings should only capture students who have agreed to participate in the study. Researchers must include a plan to deidentify the voices and video recordings of non-participants. If a parent/participant has not agreed to be audio/video recorded, then the researchers must make sure that these participants are out of the audio/video shot range and/or that these persons are deleted from any audio/video recordings collected during the research process. Subsequent use of video recordings must exclude participants who did not agree to be video or audio recorded.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records (ER) maintained by schools. ER include, but are not limited to, class assignments, grades, grade point average (GPA), attendance, disciplinary reports, and individual student educational plans. Each school or school district is the "owner" of the educational record and is responsible for identifying what is public information versus private information related to the educational record. The district is also responsible for approving what information may be shared or disclosed from the educational record, or whether a waiver of the FERPA law applies. A researcher who has natural access to student records as part of their employment **cannot** access those records for research purposes without appropriate approval from the school or district, and likely the permission of the parent. Parental permission is required for the release of FERPA protected student records for minors.

Additional Considerations

When submitting a study for research in an educational setting, the following information should be considered and addressed in the submission:

- Undue influence is difficult to avoid in a classroom setting where activities are determined and implemented by adults. Research designs should include strategies to reduce this risk. For instance, clear procedures should be in place for handling students who are not participating in the study to minimize interruption to the typical school day. Although students are generally obligated to participate in activities designed for the whole class, activities specifically implemented for the research need to be clearly explained and alternatives need to be provided for those choosing not to participate.
- Clearly describe the difference(s) between what would typically occur in class and what will occur related to the research.
- Some school systems may require that researchers obtain criminal background checks prior to conducting research.

Common School Districts for UA Researchers

- Tucson Unified School District (TUSD)
- Sunnyside Unified School District (SUSD)
- Vail Unified School District (VUSD)