

Research in K-12 Schools

SPECIAL NOTE: Researchers who propose to conduct research within classrooms where they are employed as a teacher or where they have a relationship with the participants must be especially careful when designing their research protocol. The IRB will expect to see additional safeguards for minimizing the risk of undue influence in the research design of these studies. (See suggestions for additional safeguards below.)

IRB Guidelines for Research in K-12 Schools

Site permission – The IRB requires site permission documentation from an appropriate authority at each school or district. Use the template on the "FORMS" page of this website (OR) provide a signed approval letter (on school/district letterhead) (OR) an email (from the school / district email address) that includes:

- Person or entity providing permission including title, contact information and confirmation of appropriate authority to provide permission
- Title of the study
- Description of the project and activities to be conducted at the site

Engagement – If teachers, other than the researcher, 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. “Engagement” is based on involvement in any research activity including recruitment, consenting, data collection, data analysis, answering questions about the project, etc.

Consent/Assent – Consent for involvement of a child (under 18) in a research study is a two-stage process. The first stage is seeking the consent of the parent. The protocol must include an appropriate method for providing the study information and consent forms to parents for review and for collecting the forms from the parents, without engaging staff (see “engagement” above).

The child’s assent is also required (stage two). After parental assent has been obtained, consented students can be asked to provide assent. The assent form must be appropriate for the age, reading level, etc. of the population.

“Passive consent” or opt-out procedures cannot be used as an acceptable form of confirmed consent when conducting research in the K-12 classroom.

Checklist for consent/assent forms

- Stress on the consent and assent form that this is an outside research study that is being conducted towards the fulfillment of a (Doctoral, Master’s or Bachelor’s) Degree at Kean University.
- Highlight that this activity is not affiliated with any educational activity that they might have participated in previously. This project is not endorsed nor is it affiliated with (INSTITUTION WHERE RESPONDENTS ATTEND SCHOOL).
- Include language on the consent form that states:
 - Participation is completely up to the parent and their child.
 - At no time should participants feel that they have to participate. They should only participate if they want or choose to.
 - Participation will not impact any educational benefit that they are entitled to. If at any time they feel uncomfortable or decide not to participate, they can withdraw from the study. No one will be penalized if they choose to withdraw.
 - Participation in this research study will have no impact whatsoever on the child’s grades or standing in the class. If the parents decide not to participate they (or their child) will not receive any penalty. Likewise, if they do participate they will not receive any extra reward or special favor.
 - Do not include language on the consent and assent forms thanking participants for their participation.

Separate consent and assent should be obtained in situations where the research activity is also part of the normal educational lessons taught in the classroom. At the most basic level, parents are consenting to have their child receive normal educational lessons that they are entitled to. There should also be separate consent to have the child’s work/test scores/etc. included as part of the study. Thus, parents may consent to have their child receive the instructional strategies described but may decide that they don’t want to have the test data included.

Background checks – Some schools require research personnel to undergo background checks before engaging in research activities with students/staff. Please consider this in your research design and timetable.

FERPA – A researcher who has access to student records as part of their employment cannot access these records for research purposes without appropriate consent. Parental consent is required for the release of FERPA protected student records for minors.

Suggestions for additional safeguards to minimize risk of undue influence:

- Consider displaying recruiting materials in the workplace where public announcements are permitted or using some other non-direct solicitation method of co-workers or subordinates.
- Consider having a fellow researcher administer the survey or data collection instruments. The teacher-researcher is out of the room at the time of data collection if possible.
- Any data collected for the research project that is from current students of the teacher-researcher, will not be accessible to the researcher until the grades for this class have been turned in/submitted.
- If any treatments are found to be effective, then these treatments should be administered to others.