

GUIDELINES FOR
CONDUCTING RESEARCH
IN THE
OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Guiding Principles for Conducting Research	3
Definitions and Types of Research	3
Research Review Committee	3
Research Review Proposals	4
Review of Proposals	7
Feedback to the Omaha Public Schools and Participants	7
Publication of Results	8
Appendices	
A. OPS Policies and Regulations: Surveying of Students	14
B. Amendments to the PPRA under the No Child Left Behind Legislation	15
C. Background on the Family Educational Rights And Privacy Act (FERPA)	17

Guidelines for Conducting Research In the Omaha Public School District

The Omaha Public Schools Board of Education recognizes the value of educational research in fulfilling the school district's mission. The Board also acknowledges the benefit of research in projecting the needs of students, measuring the effectiveness of programs and instruction, and planning and developing curriculum and instructional programs. It is the practice of the Omaha Public Schools to allow individuals, institutions, and organizations to conduct research if approved by the district's Research Review Committee.

Guiding Principles for Conducting Research

- The approved research prevents the undue disruption of the educational process.
- The approved research is in compliance with the amendments to the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) under the No Child Left Behind Legislation as well as the school district's policies and regulations. (refer to appendices)
- The approved research protects the privacy of students and staff and ensures compliance with state and federal laws. The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Nebraska's state statutes, and the district's policies and regulations are based on the idea that information about an individual student is private and confidential and generally may only be accessed with parent consent. (refer to appendices)

Definition and Types of Research

Research includes various evaluation, measurement and inquiry activities that include, but are not limited to: (1) the systematic investigation, including research development, testing and/or evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to general knowledge; (2) collecting and analyzing of information aimed at discovering new facts and their correct interpretation to draw conclusions; and (3) quantitative and qualitative study activities such as observations, interviews, case studies, ethnographic analysis, analysis of written materials, secondary analysis of data, achievement testing, surveys, experimental designs to examine causal relationships, product testing and analysis of cost and management records.

Internal Research

Internal research involves district employees who plan to conduct research on how to improve services and programs within their area of supervision or contract as part of a work assignment or as part of their general job duties. Internal researchers must obtain the prior approval of their supervisor prior to commencement of research activities.

External Research

External research includes the following:

1. Independent research conducted by individuals, organizations, or agencies not affiliated with the school district.
2. Research that is conducted by district employees for personal purposes outside of their work duties and/or work hours (e.g. research for the completion of a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation or for any other personal purposes.)
3. Product research conducted by a company or entity to study a product's effectiveness for potential utilization by the school district

External researchers must submit a full proposal as outlined in this document to the district's Research Review Committee for approval before conducting any research.

Research Review Committee

The Omaha Public Schools' Research Review Committee is charged with three responsibilities:

1. approval of research proposals,
2. maintenance of a record of research conducted within the school district, and
3. dissemination of the research findings to district personnel.

Individuals, institutions, or organizations interested in conducting research in the Omaha Public Schools must submit a written proposal in compliance with the procedure described in this document.

Criteria for approval of the research project will be based on the following:

- Is the research project relevant and have merit?
- Is the research and methodology in the best interests of the district's students, staff, and community?
- Does the research duplicate any ongoing or recently completed research or research being planned by the district?
- Is the proposed research design technically sound?
- Is the research topic appropriate for the public school setting?
- Will the research be conducted in a manner that avoids disruption to the educational process?
- Is the research in accordance with the district's policies and regulations as well as state and federal regulations?

Studies that are exempted from this review process are the following:

- studies conducted by employees as part of their normal job responsibilities
- studies conducted by outside agencies contracted by Omaha Public Schools to assess the district's needs or programs

Although the research project may be exempted from the Research Review Committee, the research project is still subject to applicable federal and state laws and other relevant district policies and procedures. The research project must also comply with ethical standards for research in education.

Committee approval does not constitute an establishment of a joint research program between the researcher(s) and the Omaha Public Schools. The approval is only the first step in accessing the schools, students, parents, and personnel within the district.

The approval also does not guarantee that a study can or will be conducted. The Research Review Committee will notify the researcher whether the proposal has been approved. Once the research proposal has been approved, it is then the researcher's responsibility to contact and ask cooperation from the particular schools that will be involved. **School principals have the final decision regarding the participation of the school in any research program.**

Research Proposal Procedures

Researchers seeking approval to conduct research involving staff, students, or parents of the Omaha Public School District must submit the following to the district's Division of Research.

1. Request for Conducting Research Form. This form is accessible through the OPS web site (<http://www.ops.org>) by clicking on the Data Request Tab on the homepage.
2. Protected Information
 - Researcher must provide detailed information explaining how the researcher will address privacy and confidentiality issues, any potential risks to participants and how those risks will be mitigated.
 - Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)
Researcher(s) must include in the proposal a statement as to whether the research seeks to elicit information from students regarding any of the following eight areas, and if so, a specification of which of the eight are involved. Written consent from parent/guardian must be obtained prior to eliciting the information for students under the age of 18. If the student is 18 years of age or older, the student may provide his/her own written consent before providing the information.

- Political affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student's parents
- Mental and psychological problems of the student or student's family
- Sex behaviors or attitudes
- Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior
- Critical appraisals of other individuals with whom the student has a close family relationship
- Legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians, or ministers
- Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or the student's parent
- Income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program)

3. Notification and Informed Consent Letter/Forms

- All prospective participants must be given adequate information that allows them to make informed decisions regarding participation in a proposed research project. Therefore, a proposed notification letter that includes the following information must be attached to the research proposal.
 - The purpose of the research
 - The procedure and criteria for selecting participants
 - The procedure to be followed, including a description of the participant's involvement
 - Anticipated benefits for general educational knowledge
 - Possible physical, psychological, or other risks
 - Whether the participants will be personally identifiable, and to whom
 - The arrangements that are in place to protect the privacy of participants
 - To whom results will be available, and for what purposes
 - The person to whom inquiries should be addressed before, during, and after the project
 - If the research instrument or interview protocol will seek to elicit information on any one or more topics of protected information under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (refer to Appendix B), the notification letter must include a description of which topics of protected information are involved and provide a description of the parent/guardian/student rights regarding prior consent.
 - A statement that the school district is not conducting or sponsoring the research project
 - The participant's right to withdraw consent at any time
 - The parent's/guardian's right to withdraw consent any time
 - There will be no adverse consequences for students, parents/guardians for not participating in the study

4. Consent Forms

- Written consent is not required for studies involving observation of unidentifiable students engaging in normal school activities, but it is required in the following circumstances:
 - from active participants or from parents/guardians of students under the age of 18 years participating in research projects involving identified students or access to student records.
 - for student surveys if they include questions that reveal information referenced in Section 11.05 – Policy and Regulations of the School District of Omaha and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment.
 - from district personnel, including teachers, who participate in the research

- for studies that involve identified personnel or access to personnel records
- An example of the Omaha Public Schools Guardian/Parent Research Consent Form can be found in on the OPS web site (<http://www.ops.org>) by clicking on the Data Request Tab on the homepage.
- In cases where informed consent may negatively impact the results of any research program, the researcher(s) should submit a detailed rationale explaining why the requirement for informed consent should be waived.

5. Security of Student Data

- The researcher will ensure that the following will occur:
 - Student information will be used only for the specific purpose of the study.
 - Student information will not be released to any other party.
 - The researcher will comply with all federal and state laws pertaining to confidentiality.
 - The researcher will describe the process to destroy student data upon completion of the research.
 - The researcher will provide the planned procedures for data security.

6. Other Information

- The researcher(s) should present any other information believed to be relevant to the review process. This should include details such as the amount of reimbursement to be paid (if any) to participants, or approval by any other research review committee (e.g., Institutional Review Board).

Feedback to the Omaha Public Schools and Participants

When the research project has been completed, the researcher must do the following:

- Provide an abstract and a final report of the results to the Research Review Committee.
- Inform the district, staff personnel, students, and/or community who were involved of the research's findings
- Present the findings to parents, teachers, and administrators of participating schools through a live presentation or video
- Provide participants access to tangible and easily assimilated materials describing the project findings, the implications for education, and the benefit(s) to the students and school(s).
- Submit a report to the Research Review Committee in the form of an annual progress report for any study that extends beyond a given school year.

The Research Review Committee will keep a copy of all research proposals and final research reports on file.

Publication of Results

The findings of the study must be shared with the Research Review Committee before being released for publication, public access, or to the news media. The researcher(s) must obtain permission from the Superintendent's Office if Omaha Public Schools will in any way be identified in released oral or written findings (e.g., research paper, conference presentation, newspaper report).

The Research Review Committee must also be provided any documentation (written or otherwise) for review prior to release to protect the rights, image, concerns, and integrity of the Omaha Public Schools.

Inquiries

All communications regarding research in the Omaha Public Schools must be addressed to:

Scott SchmidtBonne
Director, Division of Research
3215 Cuming St
Omaha, NE 68131
Telephone: (531) 299-0226

Janet Zahm
Instructional Research Administrator
3215 Cuming St
Omaha, NE 68131
Telephone: (531) 299-0226

APPENDICES

Appendix A

OPS Policies and Regulations: Surveying of Students

11.05 Survey of Students (June 19, 1995)

External requests to conduct research/studies involving students of the Omaha Public Schools must be submitted in writing to and be approved by the Research Division. Research studies include, but are not limited to, surveys, questionnaires, opinionnaires, personal or group interviews, or testing. Prior written consent of a parent (legal guardian) will be required for surveys if they include questions which reveal information concerning:

- political affiliation;
- mental and psychological problems potentially embarrassing to the student or his/her family;
- sex behavior and attitudes;
- illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating and demeaning behavior;
- critical appraisals of other individuals with whom the student has close family relationships;
- legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians, and ministers; or
- income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program).

All external and internal research study instruments such as questionnaires and opinionnaires may be reviewed by parents/guardians at any time, including in advance of their child's participation in the study.

Appendix B

Amendments to the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) under the No Child Left Behind legislation

Sec. 1061 Student Privacy, Parental Access to Information, and Administration of Certain Physical Examinations to Minors requires that schools and contractors obtain prior written parental consent before minor students are required to participate in any U.S. Department of Education funded survey, analysis, or evaluation that reveals information concerning:

- political affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student's parent;
- mental and psychological problems of the student or the student's family;
- sex behavior or attitudes;
- illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior;
- critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships;
- legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians, and ministers;
- religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or student's parent; or
- income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program).

The requirements concerning activities involving the collection and disclosure of personal information from students for marketing purposes do not apply to the collection, disclosure, or use of personal information collected from students for the exclusive purpose of developing, evaluating, or providing educational products or services for, or to, students or educational institutions, such as the following:

- College or other postsecondary education recruitment, or military recruitment.
- Book clubs, magazines, and programs providing access to low-cost literacy products.
- Curriculum and instructional materials used by elementary schools and secondary schools.
- Tests and assessments used by elementary schools and secondary schools to provide cognitive, evaluative, diagnostic, clinical, aptitude, or achievement information about students.
- The sale by students of products or services to raise funds for school-related or education-related activities.
- Student recognition programs.

This law is not intended to preempt applicable provisions of State law that require parental notification. This law does not apply to any physical examination or screening that is permitted or required by State law, including such examinations or screenings permitted without parental notification. The requirements of PPRA do not apply to a survey administered to a student in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These requirements do not supersede any of the requirements of FERPA. The rights provided to parents under PPRA transfer from the parent to the student when the student turns 18 years old or is an emancipated minor under applicable State law. The law applies to LEAs, but does not apply to postsecondary institutions. An SEA or LEA may use funds provided under part A of title V of the ESEA to enhance parental involvement in areas affecting the in-school privacy of students.

Definition of some terms used in PPRA

"Instructional Material" - instructional material that is provided to a student, regardless of format, including printed or representational materials, audio-visual materials, and materials in electronic or digital formats (such as materials accessible through the Internet). The term does not include academic tests or academic assessments.

"Invasive Physical Examination" - any medical examination that involves the exposure of private body parts, or any act during such examination that includes incision, insertion, or injection into the body, but does not include a hearing, vision, or scoliosis screening.

"Personal Information" - individually identifiable information including: 1) a student or parent's first and last name; 2) home address; 3) telephone number; or 4) social security number.

Appendix C

Background on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

www.ed.gov/offices/OM/fpco/ferpa

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students."

- Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents or eligible students to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.
- Parents or eligible students have the right to request that a school correct records which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.
- Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):
 - School officials with legitimate educational interest;
 - Other schools to which a student is transferring;
 - Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
 - Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
 - Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
 - Accrediting organizations;
 - To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
 - Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
 - State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Schools may disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. However, schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA. The actual means of notification (special letter, inclusion in a PTA bulletin, student handbook, or newspaper article) is left to the discretion of each school.