



Colorado Springs School District 11

External Research Request

Handbook Procedures and

Application

Procedures for Requesting Data or Conducting Research in Colorado
Springs School District 11

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Introduction

Colorado Springs School District 11 (D11) serves a diverse population of schools, educators, staff members, and students, creating a valuable environment for educational research. Through partnerships with universities, foundations, state agencies, and federal organizations, D11 supports research that contributes to advancements in leadership, teaching, and learning. The district seeks to foster evidence-based practices that enhance student achievement within D11, throughout Colorado, and across the United States.

Although D11 values research and innovation, its primary mission remains the education and well-being of every student it serves. Research proposals are considered for approval when they align with the D11 Strategic Plan, address identified district priorities, avoid duplicative efforts, and minimize disruptions to instructional programs and district operations.

The purpose of the research review process is to encourage collaborative and cooperative research that informs educational practice while safeguarding instructional time and ensuring the efficient operation of schools and district programs. D11 also welcomes opportunities to partner with research institutions, educational organizations, and other agencies on joint research initiatives and scholarly publications.

Oversight of research activities within D11 is provided by the Education Insights Research Review Board (RRB). The RRB is responsible for:

1. Reviewing and evaluating research proposals;
2. Monitoring approved research projects;
3. Coordinating research activities across the district; and
4. Facilitating the dissemination of research findings to district stakeholders.

D11 appreciates the interest of researchers and partner organizations in contributing to the advancement of educational knowledge and practice. We welcome opportunities to collaborate in ways that support both rigorous research and positive outcomes for students.

Research Activities and Proposal Review Policy

The Colorado Springs School District 11 (D11) Board of Education recognizes that research conducted by district personnel, external researchers, and partner organizations can provide educational and social benefits to students, educators, and the broader community. At the same time, research activities often require the participation of students and staff and may affect instructional time and school operations. Consequently, all proposed research projects are subject to careful review before approval is granted. All research requests must be submitted through the Education Insights Office. Completed applications are forwarded electronically to the appropriate district personnel to facilitate timely review, coordination, and approval. Required application materials and submission forms are available through the Education Insights Office and on the district website.

To protect the rights and interests of students and families, information regarding any approved research project must be provided to participating students and their parents or guardians in advance of data collection. No student may participate in a research project without prior written informed consent from a parent or legal guardian, or from the student if the student is 18 years of age or older. Passive consent procedures, in which consent is assumed unless a form is returned, are not permitted. Researchers are required to provide a clear and accessible written explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, anticipated benefits, expected outcomes, and intended uses of the findings. Decisions by students or parents/guardians to decline participation must be respected, protected, and kept confidential.

Consistent with applicable federal requirements, no student may be required to participate in a survey, analysis, or evaluation that reveals information concerning the following topics without prior written consent:

1. Political affiliations or beliefs.
2. Mental or psychological conditions that may be sensitive or potentially embarrassing to the student or the student's family.
3. Personal attitudes or behaviors related to sexual matters.
4. Illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior.
5. Critical evaluations of individuals with whom the student has close family relationships.
6. Legally protected privileged relationships, including those involving attorneys, physicians, counselors, clergy, or similar professionals.
7. Income information, except when required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or receipt of financial assistance.

Guidelines for Research Projects

The following requirements apply to all research studies, evaluations, experiments, and related services conducted within D11:

1. Research proposals must be submitted a minimum of six weeks before the anticipated project start date.
2. All instructional, assessment, and supplementary materials associated with a research project must be available for review by the parents or guardians of participating students.
3. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and all applicable student privacy requirements must be strictly followed. Research activities should also adhere to the professional and ethical standards established by relevant educational and behavioral science research organizations.
4. Research findings must be reported in a manner that protects the confidentiality of participants. Individual students, schools, and the district should not be identifiable in published reports or presentations unless specifically authorized.
5. In evaluating proposals, the district will consider both the relevance of the research to district priorities and the time, resources, and operational impact required to conduct the study.

D11 encourages research partnerships that contribute to educational improvement while safeguarding student privacy, supporting instructional effectiveness, and ensuring the efficient operation of district schools and programs.

Federal Regulations Compliance

The Education Insights Research Review Board (RRB) reviews all research proposals to ensure compliance with applicable federal, state, and local requirements related to student and staff privacy, data security, and ethical research practices. Particular attention is given to compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), when applicable.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA; 20 U.S.C. § 1232g) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. FERPA provides parents and eligible students with specific rights regarding access to and disclosure of educational records, including, but not limited to, academic transcripts, report cards, disciplinary records, class schedules, and student contact and family information. All research activities involving education records must comply with FERPA requirements and district data governance policies.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule establishes protections for individuals' protected health information (PHI). When research activities involve health-related information subject to HIPAA, researchers must comply with all applicable privacy, confidentiality, and disclosure requirements. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that participants are informed of their privacy rights and that any protected health information is collected, stored, and used in accordance with federal regulations.

Key Departments and Contacts for Data Requests

Data requests are reviewed in collaboration with the appropriate district departments responsible for maintaining specific records and information systems. Researchers are encouraged to consult publicly available data sources before requesting district-level data.

Many commonly requested educational data elements are available through the Colorado Department of Education's SchoolView data portal. Researchers should review these resources to determine whether the information needed for their study is already publicly accessible prior to submitting a district data request.

Data Availability and Restrictions

To protect student and staff privacy, certain data elements are unavailable or subject to disclosure limitations.

Student Demographic Data

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) Data

- Only aggregate, non-suppressed data that are publicly reported through approved sources may be shared.
- Data will generally be released only when reporting groups contain a sufficient number of individuals to protect confidentiality.
- Individual student-level FRL information will not be disclosed.

Human Resources Data

The Human Resources Department is unable to provide:

- Personally identifiable employee information.
- Demographic information for employee subgroups that do not meet minimum reporting thresholds established to protect confidentiality.
- Individually identifiable school leader demographic or performance data.
- Teacher performance data or information related to personnel decisions without sponsorship and authorization from an appropriate district executive leader.

Additional restrictions may apply based on legal, contractual, and privacy requirements.

Developing a Successful Research Application

Successful applications demonstrate a clear connection between the proposed research and district priorities while maintaining high standards of methodological rigor, feasibility, and ethical responsibility. Researchers are encouraged to reference district strategic plans, initiatives, and publicly available reports when describing the significance of their study.

To be considered for approval, proposals should meet the following criteria:

1. Alignment with District Priorities

The proposed research should provide value to D11 by contributing to district goals, strategic priorities, or continuous improvement efforts.

2. Methodological Quality

Research designs should be pedagogically relevant, methodologically sound, and capable of producing meaningful and actionable findings.

3. Feasibility and Resource Considerations

The proposed study must be practical in scope and implementation. Researchers should demonstrate that the project can be completed within a reasonable timeframe and without placing undue burdens on students, educators, staff, district resources, or school operations. Cost recovery determinations will be made on a case-by-case basis and communicated prior to project approval.

4. Protection of Students and Staff

There must be a reasonable expectation that participation in the research will not result in educational, psychological, social, or other adverse consequences for students or staff members.

5. Privacy and Legal Compliance

Research activities must protect the confidentiality and privacy of all participants and comply with applicable federal and state laws. FERPA, HIPAA, and related privacy regulations require that personally identifiable information be protected and disclosed only under authorized circumstances.

The policies and procedures described in this handbook are intended to support productive and innovative research partnerships while ensuring responsible stewardship of district time, resources, and data. These guidelines are designed not to discourage creative scholarship, but to maximize the educational value of research activities while safeguarding the interests of students, staff, and the district community.

Research Review Procedures

Who Must Submit an External Research Application?

External researchers, evaluators, organizations, and D11 employees conducting research outside of their assigned job responsibilities must submit an application to the Education Insights Research Review Board (RRB) when a project involves human participants or access to non-public district data.

For purposes of this handbook, *research* refers to a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

Projects requiring RRB review include:

- Independent research conducted by individuals, agencies, universities, or organizations external to D11.
- Program evaluations involving D11 students, staff, schools, or district data.
- Product evaluations intended to assess the effectiveness of educational products or services.
- Master's theses, doctoral dissertations, or other scholarly projects conducted by D11 employees outside their normal job responsibilities.
- Research conducted by organizations participating in formal partnerships with D11.

Projects that rely exclusively on publicly available, aggregate data generally do not require RRB review.

Review Process

The RRB uses a risk-based review process designed to match oversight requirements with the level of participant involvement and data sensitivity. Approval decisions are based on the overall balance of educational value, methodological quality, participant protections, operational impact, and alignment with district priorities.

Tier 1: Administrative Review

Typical Review Timeline: 10 business days

Projects may qualify for Administrative Review when they:

- Use publicly available data;
- Use de-identified district data;
- Involve secondary data analysis only;
- Present minimal risk to students and staff; and
- Do not require direct interaction with participants.

Administrative reviews are conducted by designated RRB personnel and do not require full board review.

Tier 2: Expedited Review

Typical Review Timeline: 20 business days

Projects may qualify for Expedited Review when they:

- Involve low-risk surveys, interviews, focus groups, or observations;
- Engage adult participants only; or
- Have minimal operational impact on schools or district departments.

Expedited reviews are conducted by designated RRB members.

Tier 3: Full Board Review

Typical Review Timeline: Up to 30 business days

Projects require Full Board Review when they:

- Involve direct data collection from students;
- Include sensitive topics protected under federal law;
- Require extensive access to district records;
- Introduce interventions or experimental conditions;
- Affect multiple schools or district programs; or
- Present elevated privacy, operational, or ethical considerations.

The RRB reserves the right to elevate any proposal to a higher review tier when additional review is necessary.

Application Review Process

Step 1: Submission

Researchers submit all materials electronically to the RRB at RRB@d11.org.

Within five business days, applicants will receive acknowledgment that the application has been received.

Step 2: Administrative Screening

Applications are reviewed for completeness.

If materials are missing, applicants will be notified and provided an opportunity to submit revisions. Minor omissions will not restart the review timeline.

Step 3: Review

The RRB evaluates proposals based on:

- Alignment with district priorities;
- Educational value;
- Methodological quality;
- Participant protections;
- Privacy and data security safeguards;
- Feasibility; and
- Impact on district operations.

Step 4: Determination

Applicants will receive one of the following determinations:

- Approved
- Approved with Conditions
- Revision Requested
- Not Approved

Applicants whose proposals are not approved may either revise and resubmit their proposal or request reconsideration. Requests for reconsideration must be submitted electronically to rrb@d11.org within 30 calendar days and must address the reasons for denial.

Application Components

A complete application includes the following materials.

Required for All Applications

1. Application Form

The Research Request Application serves as the primary application document and includes:

- Principal investigator information;
- Institutional affiliation;
- Contact information;
- Project title;
- Proposed timeline; and
- Requested schools, participants, and data elements.

2. Research Abstract

Applicants must provide a concise summary of no more than 500 words describing:

- Purpose of the study;
- Research questions;
- Participants;
- Data collection methods; and
- Anticipated benefits.

The summary should be written for a general audience.

3. Research Proposal

The proposal should address:

Purpose and Significance

- Problem or issue being investigated;
- Research questions or hypotheses; and
- Potential contributions to D11 and the educational community.

Methods

- Participant population;
- Sampling strategy;
- Data collection methods;
- Research instruments;
- Data analysis procedures; and
- Estimated participant time commitment.

Project Timeline

Include anticipated dates for:

- Recruitment;
- Data collection;

- Analysis; and
- Reporting.

Additional Documentation (If Applicable)

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Documentation

Researchers affiliated with a university or research institution must provide documentation of IRB approval or exemption determination before data collection begins.

Consent Materials

Researchers collecting primary data must submit participant recruitment materials and consent forms.

Data Request Documentation

Projects requesting non-public district data may be required to complete a Data Protection Agreement (DPA) before data are released.

Partnership or Funding Documentation

If the project is associated with a grant, contract, memorandum of understanding, or formal partnership agreement, supporting documentation should be provided.

District Collaboration and Endorsements

Researchers are encouraged, but not required, to identify a district partner or point of contact who can help ensure findings are relevant and useful to D11.

For projects involving substantial participation from a specific school, principal consultation will occur before approval is granted.

For projects involving multiple schools, the RRB will coordinate district-level review and stakeholder consultation. Individual principal approval may be required when substantial building-level participation or disruption is anticipated.

Human Subjects Protections

Protecting the rights, welfare, privacy, and dignity of participants is a fundamental requirement for all research conducted within D11.

Researchers must describe:

Confidentiality and Privacy

- How participant privacy will be protected;
- How confidential information will be secured;
- Who will have access to data; and
- How findings will be reported.

Data Security

Researchers must provide a plan describing:

- Storage methods;
- Encryption and security procedures (if applicable);
- Data retention periods; and
- Authorized users.

Data Disposal

Researchers must describe how data will be destroyed, archived, or de-identified at the conclusion of the study.

Benefits, Risks, and Compensation

Researchers must disclose any participant risks, incentives, compensation, or anticipated benefits.

Consent Requirements

Parental consent is required for direct collection of primary data from students unless otherwise permitted by law and approved through IRB and district review procedures.

Researchers must provide consent materials in languages appropriate for participating families whenever feasible.

Conducting Approved Research

After approval, researchers must:

1. Conduct the study in accordance with the approved protocol.
2. Obtain any required Data Protection Agreements before receiving district data.
3. Comply with FERPA, HIPAA, district policies, and applicable state and federal laws.
4. Minimize disruption to instructional activities and district operations.
5. Notify the RRB of any significant concerns, adverse events, or compliance issues.

Modifications and Continuing Review

Researchers must notify the RRB of substantial changes to an approved study, including:

- Addition of schools;
- Expansion of participant groups;
- New data requests;
- Significant methodological changes; or
- Extensions beyond the approved study period.

Minor administrative updates may be approved through administrative review.

Projects extending beyond one year may require an annual continuing review update.

Dissemination of Findings

Researchers are expected to share study results with D11 upon project completion.

Final reports should include:

- Major findings;
- Practical implications; and
- Recommendations, when appropriate.

Researchers should provide D11 a courtesy copy of reports, presentations, manuscripts, or publications prior to public release so that confidentiality, privacy protections, and factual references to district operations can be reviewed.

Nothing in this review process grants D11 editorial control over scholarly findings, interpretations, or conclusions.

Researchers who fail to provide final results may be considered ineligible for future data requests until reporting obligations have been satisfied.

Background Checks and Researcher Responsibilities

Researchers and research personnel who will have direct access to students, staff, or district facilities may be required to meet district background check requirements before beginning research activities.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all members of the research team comply with applicable district policies, legal requirements, and participant protection standards.

The RRB reserves the right to request evidence of compliance at any point during the project.