The proposal submission process

Any researcher wishing to conduct research in NYC public schools must have that research approved by the NYCODE Institutional Review Board (IRB). To do so, researchers must submit an IRB proposal outlining the project they wish to conduct. The DOE IRB only approves research proposals that meet professional standards for the treatment of human subjects, ethical practices and that have significance and relevance for the NYC public school system. Below are some frequently asked questions about the IRB submission process:

Where can I find information about what the proposal should contain?
An explanation of the proposal submission process is available online at: http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm. Proposal submission deadlines, Institutional Review Board (IRB) meeting dates and a proposal template can be found at this site, along with guidelines for submitting data requests to the DOE Research and Policy Support Group. Doctoral/thesis proposals are not accepted.

Depending on the research design, the following forms should be submitted with the research proposal:

- Principal letter:
  - Principal letters should explain the research purpose, design, methodology, time commitment required of research participants, how confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured and a statement of risks/benefits of participation.

- IRB approval letter from researcher’s academic institution

- Protocols that will be used for data collection

- Consent Forms:
  - Parent/guardian consent form for active consent for students to participate in the research and/or when student records will be accessed.
    - Use of passive consent is considered on a case-by-case basis but is generally not allowed.
    - Consent forms should be written in the preferred language of parents/guardians.
    - Parent/guardian consent forms may be sent home with students, however they must be returned directly to the researcher either in a meeting with parents or in a self-addressed, stamped envelope provided for that purpose.
  - Student assent form or script for students 18 years of age or younger, written in age-appropriate language.
  - Teacher consent form for teachers and other school staff involved in the project.
  - Principal consent form for principal if he/she will be interviewed or surveyed.

- Note: All consent forms should include the following:
  - A brief description of the study and what will be expected of participants
  - A statement of risks and benefits related to participation. Research should involve minimal risk to participants. Researchers must have a plan for how they will assist research subjects who might experience distress as a result of their participation in a study (e.g., a list of counselors who can be consulted)
A statement that participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from participation at any time without negative consequences
- A signature line with the title of the study
- An explanation of how you will ensure confidentiality and, whenever possible, participant anonymity, along with procedures for securing and disposing of data
- A separate signature line for permission to audio or videotape (where applicable)
- Contact information for the researcher and the researcher’s institution’s IRB

Who should I send my proposal to?
All proposals and related documents, including a proposal submission form, must be submitted online to RPSGresearch@schools.nyc.gov.

When will I know if my proposal has been accepted?
The DOE Institutional Review Board (IRB) meets monthly. Proposals that are received on or before the submission deadline are prescreened for completeness and compliance with DOE IRB policies/procedures. Researchers are notified within three business days if revisions or additional documents are required. Complete proposals are assigned for review at the IRB meeting corresponding to the submission deadline for that month.

What steps do I need to take once my proposal has been accepted?
Researchers whose proposals are approved will be mailed an approval packet within 3-5 days of the IRB approval date. The packet includes the IRB approval letter, a Principal Approval to Conduct Research in Schools/Districts form and fingerprinting instructions and form. A signed principal approval form for all principals involved in the research should be returned to the Research and Policy Support Group. The cost of fingerprinting is $115. Fingerprinting must take place within the school year when the approval letter was issued.
If the research will extend beyond one year, a request for a continuation must be submitted six weeks before the original approval expires. Any changes in the original research design must be approved by the DOE IRB.

What do I do if my proposal is rejected?
If your proposal is rejected, you will receive a letter explaining the IRB’s decision and what changes you would need to make to resubmit it for a second review. You may also call the Dr. Mary Mattis, who chairs the IRB, for further clarification (212.374.3913)

Can I pay my research participants?
Researchers may not provide incentives to teachers or principals in return for their participation in a study. They may make a contribution directly to the school. A modest incentive (e.g., a pen, stickers) may be given to students and to parents (e.g., a metrocard or store gift card) if they participate in the research.

Can I give out surveys to students during class?
No, Data collection and other research activities must not take place during instructional time.

I am a teacher in an NYC public school, can I conduct a study/collect surveys from students in my class (as long as it is outside of instructional time)?
No - If the researcher is a principal or teacher in a NYC public school the following regulations apply: teachers may not conduct research on their own students; requests for principals to conduct research with teachers in their school will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Can teachers/principals provide me with information from student records (i.e. attendance, disciplinary data, test score data, SPED status, etc)
Data requests should be submitted to the DOE Research and Policy Support Group at RPSGresearch@schools.nyc.gov. The DOE IRB must approve requests for data that are only available through the school. Explicit, written consent needs to be obtained from parents/guardians to access such data. Even with consent, principals and school staff are not obligated to provide data to researchers.

Note: IRB approval for a research proposal does not guarantee approval for a data request embedded in the proposal. Data requests should be submitted separately after the research is approved by the DOE IRB.