Guidelines for Conducting Research and Requesting Data in School District of Lancaster

Overview

School District of Lancaster (SDoL) receives a significant number of research and data requests throughout the calendar year. SDoL recognizes this research can be of great benefit to the district's students and programs. Despite this, the district has limited time and resources to dedicate to fulfilling requests. To ensure research maintains student data privacy and aligns with key district priorities, requestors must submit an application for review. This guide outlines the key components needed to submit a request and the steps of the research process.

District Research Priorities

Given the significant number of research requests, School District of Lancaster prioritizes requests that meet the district's key priorities. Before submitting a research request, review the district's Theory of Action and strategic priorities listed below to determine if your request meets these priorities.

SDoL Strategic Priorities

- Objective 1 (Climate and Culture): Ensure the effective implementation of the equity policy and report card
- Objective 2 (Teaching and Learning): Improve student learning, with a focus on instructional delivery, curriculum, and MTSS as measured by key equity indicators
- Objective 3 (Teaching and Learning): Ensure the effectiveness of innovative programs responsive to student needs as measured by key results identified through Academic Return on Investment (AROI) studies
- Objective 4 (Community Engagement and Operational Effectiveness): Ensure a positive experience and smooth transition for students, families, and schools related to school boundary and Policy 206 changes
- Objective 5 (Operational Effectiveness): Ensure high quality, safe, secure facilities
- Objective 6 (Culture and Climate and Operational Effectiveness): Ensure we are attracting, retaining, and developing high-quality staff

Request Types

Administrative Data Requests: Administrative data refers to already existing data including educational records such as test scores, grades, attendance, etc. This type of data request does not require any new data collection through research instruments such as surveys or interviews.

Human Subjects Research Request: Individuals looking to complete original research involving students, families, or staff (i.e. conducting a student survey or focus groups). This type of research request requires submitting additional documentation to ensure student data privacy.

Required Materials for Human Subjects Research Requests

Letter of IRB approval or exemption: All requestors affiliated with academic institutions conducting Human Subjects research must provide a letter of IRB approval of letter outlining why the research is exempt from the approval process. Requestors should connect with their institutions' research office to obtain this approval.

Background Clearances: If the requester plans to have any direct contact with students they must provide three background clearances: [PA Criminal Background](), [PA Child Abuse](), and [FBI Fingerprinting](). All submitted copies should be recent as of three years of the research and data request. The requestor is responsible for all costs associated with these clearances.

Recruitment method and materials (if applicable): Requestors that plan to recruit parents/guardians, students, or staff to participate in research must provide their recruitment materials and methods. Identify any incentives you plan to offer and copies of marketing materials such as flyers, letters, or emails.

Informed consent forms (if applicable): Informed consent gives students, parents/guardians, and staff the opportunity to decide for themselves if they will participate in research. These individuals must actively consent to participate in these students, which requires documentation. A helpful guide with template documents is available [here]().

Interview/Focus Group/Observation protocols (if applicable): Requestors that plan to interview/observe/focus group with individuals must outline the steps they will take in this process. These steps should clearly account for participant privacy.

Survey/assessment (if applicable): Copies of all surveys or assessments utilized for the research must be included for review.

Application and Approval Process

Requestors submit an electronic application through the SDoL website. As part of this application, you must submit the components listed below. <u>Incomplete applications will NOT be reviewed.</u>

All requests:

- Name and contact for requestor(s)
- Title of study
- Proposed start and end dates of research (if applicable)

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- *Data requested (for data requests specifically)*

If the requestor plans to carry out any Human Subjects Research Requests (i.e. direct original research such as surveys or interviews):

- Letter of IRB approval or exemption
- Clearances (PA Criminal Background, PA Child Abuse, FBI Fingerprint) if requestor will have any contact with students
- Recruitment methods and materials (if applicable)
- Informed consent forms (if applicable)
- Interview/Focus Group/Observation protocols (if applicable)
- Survey/assessment (if applicable)

Once the application is received, a committee composed of members of the Office of Data Analytics and other district departments will review to determine initial approval. This team meets monthly, plan for at least four weeks to process the initial application. A rubric for the evaluation process is available for your review on the district website; requestors can utilize this when planning an application. After initial review, requestors will receive notification if the application was accepted, rejected, or in need of revision. If revisions are required, requestors have sixty days to make changes and submit an alternate version or the application will close.

Once approved, requestors will receive a research and data memorandum of understanding (MOU) to sign electronically via DocuSign. No research may begin until this MOU is signed by the Superintendent or his/her designated approver. If approved for administrative data, the Office of Data Analytics will then begin compiling the data request. Note that while the Office of Data Analytics aims to complete this within four weeks, there is a small team managing many internal and external requests. Requestors receiving approval to conduct Human Subjects Research can then begin the research in coordination with the Office of Data Analytics.

Research Considerations

- SDoL prioritizes research that directly relates to the district's Theory of Action and strategic priorities. Consider whether research aligns with these prioritizes and what value it provides directly to the district.
- Student data privacy is paramount. Student data privacy is protected by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). Requestors should familiarize themselves with this federal legislation and ensure research does not conflict with the legislative requirements.
- Unless the requestors receives written consent from parents/guardians, students should not be identifiable in research or data collection. Any data collection that leads to identification, such as videotaping/photographing students or requiring names of student surveys, will not be approved.

- A significant amount of data is available through alternative means. Examples include the [Future Ready PA Index](#), [National Center for Education Statistics](#), [Penn Data](#), [Safe Schools](#), and [Civil Rights Data Collection](#). Be sure to explore these resources prior to the request to ensure data is not already available publically.
- Carefully consider the timing of survey collection and how it compares to the district calendar. State testing windows, for example, will be difficult to accommodate.

Sharing Research Findings

To ensure the fullest benefit of research and data requests, we ask that requestors share their final research with the Office of Data Analytics. This helps us utilize the work to improve programs, practices, and student outcomes. We are eager to see the impact of this research and data analysis to improve the School District of Lancaster.

Questions

If you have any questions please contact researchanddatarequests@sdlancaster.org.