

# Obtaining Parental Consent for Educational Research: Challenges and Solutions

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# Overview

- Ethics of Parental Consent
- Active versus Passive Consent
- Challenges of Active Consent
- Solutions: School Support, Form Design, Incentives, Student-Delivered Method, Postal Method
- Questions

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  - Right to decline or withdraw and associated consequences
  - Potential risks and benefits
  - Limits of confidentiality
  - Incentives
  - Contact information

# Active versus Passive Consent

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- Parents must opt-in by returning signed consent form (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)

## Passive Consent

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May yield comparable return rates (Eaton et al., 2004; Secor-Turner et al., 2009), while one study reported that passive consent yielded nearly twice as many returns as active consent (Courser et al., 2009)

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- **Coercion** (Secor-Turner et al., 2009)

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  - Recruit teachers or school personnel to help coordinate process, advocate, and answer questions (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008)

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- Offer student, teacher, class, or school incentives for each returned form and/or for meeting target rate to offset inconveniences (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008) and foster buy-in (Secor-Turner et al., 2009)

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- School: donorschoose.com

# Solution: Form Design

- Should be clear, concise, and conspicuous (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)
  - Printing on neon paper has increased return rate (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)
  - Translate to most commonly-spoken languages (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)
  - Highlight sections that parents must fill out (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)
- Offer to provide hard copy of survey (Secor-Turner et al., 2009) or summarize survey items (Stein et al., 2007)

# Solution: Student-Delivered Method

- Forms sent home with and returned by students
  - Students return to school and place in designated box (Secor-Turner et al., 2009)
  - Method has demonstrated mixed results (McMorris et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 1999; Secor-Turner et al., 2009; Stein et al., 2007)
  - Attach forms to school forms that require signatures (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008)
    - Yielded 68% return rate in one study (Ji et al., 2004)
    - School personnel recommend distributing in the fall (Johnson et al., 1999)



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- Send younger children home with sticker notifying parents to look for form (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)

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- May yield higher rates when children do not handle forms (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003), particularly when sent by the superintendent (Johnson et al., 1999)
- Combine with student-delivered and send copy home with stamped envelope (Secor-Turner et al., 2009)

# Questions

- Other strategies for improving return rate?
- Other ideas for personnel, parent, or student incentives?

# Next Steps

- Discuss parental consent with stakeholders and IRB
- Consider your budget
- Contact me with questions  
([lsatkowski@etmonline.org](mailto:lsatkowski@etmonline.org))
- Share what worked/did not work!

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