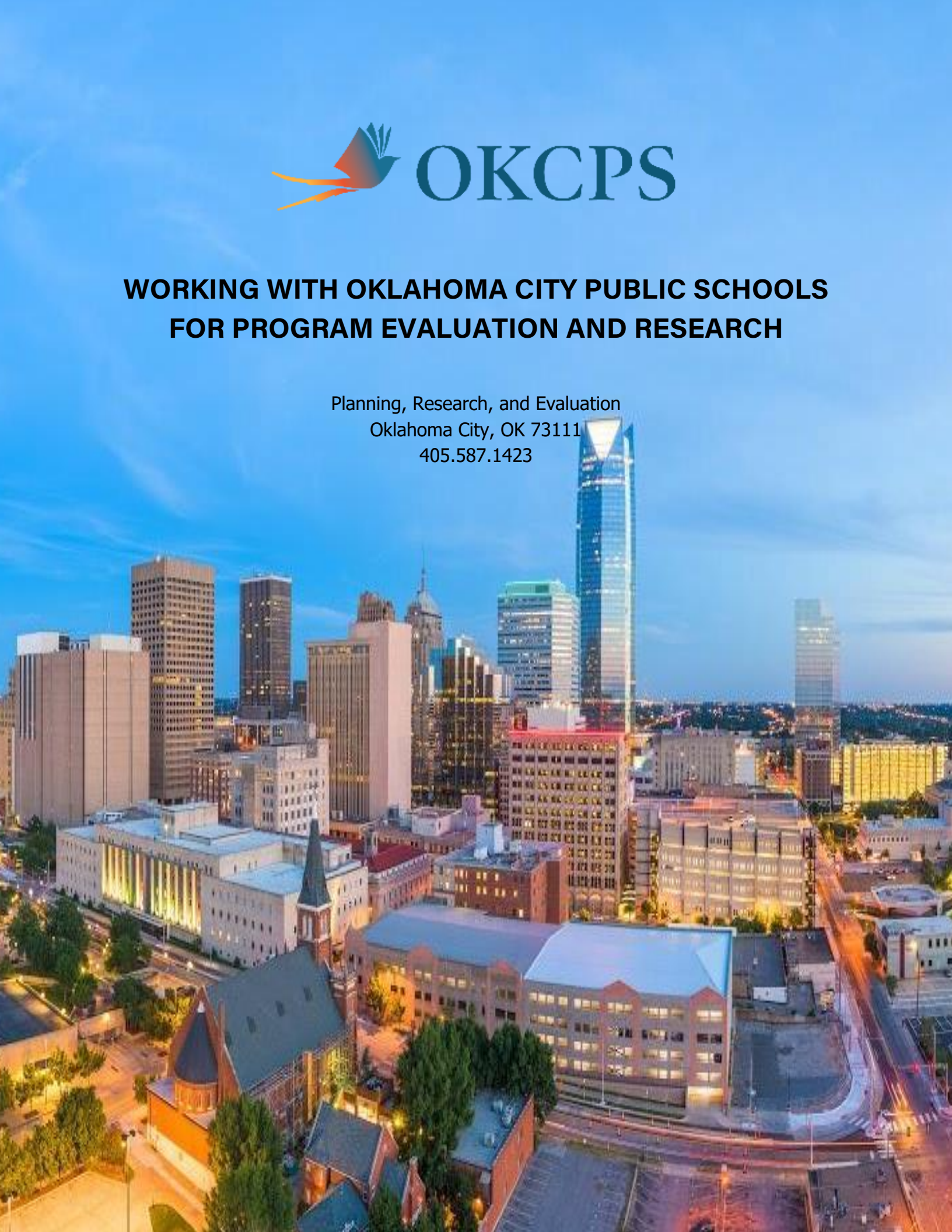




# **WORKING WITH OKLAHOMA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION AND RESEARCH**

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# Overview

Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) is the largest school district in Oklahoma. We have a wonderfully diverse student population that differs considerably from most other Oklahoma districts in its demographic, cultural, linguistic, and academic characteristics. To serve the variety of needs our students bring to our schools, the district also offers a number of services and resources to assist students in reaching graduation.

Every year, a large number of researchers express interest in conducting research in the district, either collecting their own data or analyzing district-collected data. Concurrently, we also partner with community organizations who share our commitment in the success of our students and who need access to student data to evaluate their contributions to the student experience.

OKCPS encourages these efforts. At the same time, the district must ensure that it does not compromise the privacy of our students, parents, or staff. We take seriously our responsibility to safeguard the members of our community, and to ensure that research does not disrupt the work of our students, teachers and administrators.

This overview document will help you understand how to work with the Planning, Research and Evaluation Department (PRE), whether your goal is to measure the impact of a program you're offering in partnership with the district or to conduct independent academic research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the PRE office at 405-587-1423.

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## Types of OKCPS Data

**Student and/or Staff Records:** this information is collected by OKCPS as part of our daily activities. This information contains specific references to individuals within our district, such as attendance, grade-level performance, courses taught, behavior reports, etc. This information is not publicly available. Academic researchers often use this type of data in studies of student experience or performance. Community partners often request this type of data when conducting program evaluation, particularly for reports to funding agencies.

Researchers or evaluators seeking this data will need to complete "Section 3: Data Request" in the Outside Research and Data Request application.

**Direct Data Collection:** this information is collected directly from students, parents, or employees through surveys, polls, questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. When appropriate, OKCPS approves organizations or researchers to interact with members of the district to collect specific data from those individuals. This type of data is often used for academic research of student experience, or by community members who seek direct feedback from participants as part of their program evaluation.

Researchers or evaluators seeking to directly collect data will need to complete "Section 2: Data Collection Plan" in the Outside Research and Data Request application.

**Public Information:** this is aggregated student information, often requested by community members, members of the press, etc. It describes the district as a whole without identifying individual students or employees, and is typically available in district reports or on the OKCPS web site.

This type of information is commonly acquired through *open records requests* that are coordinated through the OKCPS Communications Department.

Organizations or individuals wishing to access student and staff records or to directly collect data from members of the district **must complete the application and approval process** through the Planning, Research and Evaluation Department.

## Who Should Submit an Application?

**OKCPS staff members or faculty** are exempt from the application process, providing that they are conducting research or data collection within the scope of their employment for the purpose of classroom or school use. For example, an application is not required for an OKCPS employee surveying students for work-related reasons within the building where that employee works.

**OKCPS staff members or faculty who** conducting research for an external purpose, e.g., their own thesis or dissertation research, are required to submit an application. In this case, employees should note that they are not allowed to conduct research on their own students, but can collect data from other students in the district.

**Representatives of community groups and partners** who wish to use OKCPS records data or to collect their own information for the purpose of program evaluation must have approval from PRE before collecting participant responses or accessing district data. The Office of Strategic Planning & Partnerships will direct you to the PRE application process once your partnership with the district has been approved.

**Graduate students, university faculty, independent researchers, and private and public agencies** must all submit formal proposals before conducting direct data collection or accessing OKCPS district data. Applications from graduate students are only accepted for the purpose of thesis or dissertation research; applications are not accepted for assigned coursework. Contact PRE directly to begin the application process.

Contact Planning, Research and Evaluation if you have specific questions about whether your project requires approval.

## Criteria for Approval

**Program Evaluation Applications** are considered based on a number of factors, including:

- The program must already have approval from the Office of Strategic Planning & Partnerships to offer services to students, staff or families in the OKCPS district.
- External expectations for evaluation, e.g., requirements from funding agencies, should be identified.
- The program evaluation plan should clearly relate to the model of the program being evaluated.
- Any potential risks for participants should be addressed in your application and steps should be taken to ensure that risks to participants are minimal.
- Program evaluation should embody procedures that respect the confidentiality and privacy of staff, students and parents, in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines.
- Conditions must be made for truly active and informed consent and assent of all participants and parents of student participants. Guidelines for what constitutes appropriate informed consent can be obtained from PRE.

**Outside Research Proposals** are considered based on a number of factors, including:

- The topic should be of an educational nature or beneficial to students in general (e.g., health, safety, welfare) as well as relevant to OKCPS.
- The benefits of the research must far outweigh any “costs”, both tangible and intangible – *including instructional time*.
- Any potential risks for participants should be addressed in the research methods and steps should be taken to ensure that risks to participants are minimal.
- The study should embody procedures that respect the confidentiality and privacy of staff, students, and parents in accordance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines.
- Conditions must be made for truly active and informed consent and assent of all participants and parents of student participants. (Guidelines for what constitutes appropriate informed consent are included in Appendix B.)
- The proposal must use a sound research methodology that uses reliable and valid instruments.

Some well-developed research proposals or program evaluation plans might not be approved for any of the following reasons:

- Excessive pupil or staff time requirements
- A lack of potential educational or social significance
- Potential disruption of the school or classroom
- Potential interference with professional relationships
- Perceived invasion of privacy
- Replication of concurrent research or school programs or services
- Research instrument (questionnaire, survey, or interview protocol) not clearly aligned to study

**Researchers and evaluators should also be aware of the following:**

- If your institution has an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or any review committee that approves research with human subjects, you must have approval from that body. A copy of that approval should be filed with PRE, prior to initiating any research.
- Teachers, principals, or other school staff who wish to conduct research must do so with students and staff *other than their own*. This guideline is intended to protect participants from coercion. In rare cases, such as purely quantitative research conducted under conditions of strict anonymity, this requirement may be waived.
- All aspects of data collection are the sole responsibility of the researcher and must not impose any burden on teachers or other school staff.
- Researchers and evaluators requiring identifiable student data must obtain active parental consent to receive such data from the district.
- Research and evaluation activities should not take place during instructional time in core classes. Researchers and evaluators must work with school staff to find the least disruptive time to conduct research activities.
- Researchers and evaluators are responsible for supplying PRE with a written summary of their findings and may be requested to report detailed research findings to interested school personnel.

## Gaining Access to Participants

An approval letter from PRE indicates that the proposed research or evaluation has met the research and ethical standards required by the district. However, schools, school staff and students and non-school-based OKCPS staff are *never* obligated to participate in *any* research.

After the proposal has been approved by the district, researchers or community partners **must** obtain the principal's approval to proceed with the research in each school. This applies both to academic research and to program delivery and evaluation.

Teachers, school administrators and other OKCPS staff cannot receive compensation (monetary or non-monetary) to participate in research studies. However, researchers may provide donations directly to the schools.

Participation in research studies and programs from community partners must be completely voluntary. School-level administrators cannot be asked to select schools, teachers, or other staff to participate.

School-level administrators are not allowed to supply contact information for staff, parents, or students, or to provide student data.

Please note that unless explicitly requested at the time of application, approval to conduct research or collect evaluation data is understood to be for the *current school year only*. If a study needs to be extended because of unforeseen circumstances, you must apply for a continuation detailing any changes made to the previously approved research proposal, including changes to the original timeline, research participants yet to be recruited, copies of revised forms, letters and protocols and a summary of findings to date.

## The Review Process

The Planning, Research, and Evaluation Department (PRE) may prescreen applications as a courtesy to researchers and evaluators. In most cases, any feedback on prescreened proposals will be provided to researchers via email within 10 instructional days after submission.

In most cases, an ad hoc OKCPS IRB group will consider the application within 30 instructional days and an email will be sent to the researcher indicating the OKCPS IRB decision to: (1) approve the proposal outright, (2) require the researcher to clarify or modify the proposal, or (3) disapprove the proposal.

Approval of the application does not guarantee admission into a school building. All research personnel who will be entering OKCPS sites must check in at the site office. Once the application has been approved, the researcher or evaluator can then obtain approval from the school principal to begin the study. All logistics must be finalized with the school principal prior to the start date for data collection.

### How long does the review take?

The length of time required to review and approve a proposal depends primarily on the completeness of the proposal and the researcher's prompt response to requests for clarification and/or additional information. It is our intent that proposals be processed in no more than 30 instructional days. Researchers will be informed of the outcome of the IRB review 3-5 business days after the IRB meeting. However, the process may be protracted if a proposal requires extensive clarification and revision.

### Post-Research Follow-Up

Upon completion of a research study or program evaluation, researchers and evaluators are required to provide their findings to the district. Interim findings, if any, should be included with requests for continuation of the research or evaluation. Please e-mail an electronic copy of your research or evaluation report to PRE.

**Please note:** if a copy of your findings are not received within 3 months of the completion date in your application, your advisor will be contacted and a moratorium on any research by any members of your institution may be enacted until a satisfactory response is obtained.

**Failure to comply with all OKCPS requirements will revoke the researcher's permission to continue research in the district and jeopardize his or her organization from conducting future research in the district.**



## APPENDIX A: Overview of the Application

For the **Outside Research and Evaluation Proposal**, you will be asked to *summarize* your research or evaluation plan. For the requested information, please provide brief but sufficient information to help PRE staff and other district personnel understand your needs for district data, your planned procedures for using and/or collecting it, and your systems for maintaining student privacy and FERPA compliance.

Consequently, our proposal form requires:

- A short, succinct statement of the research or evaluation questions and objectives and a description of the implications of the research for OKCPS.
- A “procedures” section that explicitly details the exact logistics of how you expect to conduct the research or collect data. (How will your surveys be delivered to the schools? Distributed? Retrieved?) This section should paint a clear picture of your exact activities in our schools.
- A “methodology” section that fully describes the subjects or participants and how they will be recruited as well as the instruments to be used in collecting the data. We will ask you to be as specific as possible in regard to the number of subjects, how they are to be recruited and the estimated time required of all participants.
- A list of the study/program site(s)
- A timeline that outlines the data collection activities.
- Consent forms and assent forms for the all participants including school administrators, teachers, other school staff, students and parents.
- A plan to guarantee confidentiality for research subjects and program participants, and to ensure that study findings are reported anonymously.
- A statement of the risks and benefits of the study.
- A copy of all surveys or questionnaires, along with a short summary of technical data describing validity and reliability of the instruments. Remember, even though the instrument may be common in your field, do not assume the district personnel reviewing your proposal are familiar with it.
- Protocols for any interviews, focus groups, or observations.
- A complete description of all student or school-level data that will be requested.
- A letter of invitation to principals to conduct research in their schools, or a copy of your approval to deliver programs to students in the OKCPS district
- A detailed explanation of the data analysis plan.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Guidelines for Active and Informed Consent**

All research and program evaluation in OKCPS require active, informed consent from parents or guardians for all students up to the age of 21. Assent is required from students under the age of 18.

*Additionally*, active, informed consent is required for adult research participants including students 18 and older.

Evaluators and researchers must provide potential participants with an informed consent form that includes the following:

- the study title or name of the community program being offered
  - the title of the study or program must be included on the signature page of all consent documents.
- identification of the researchers or individuals conducting the study or evaluation
- purposes for collecting the data
- a clear description of the participant's activities (e.g., complete a 20 item survey, participate in an interview, etc.)

PLEASE NOTE: If any activities or survey questions could be considered remotely controversial, the topic must be disclosed; such questions are sometimes permitted when the data is essential to the research, but oral and printed directions must state that the individual may omit any questions which he or she prefers not to answer.

- a description of any individual student data that you will request from OKCPS (e.g., test scores, attendance records, etc.)
- the amount of time involved for participants
- a statement that all information will remain anonymous and confidential
- a statement that participation is entirely voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the study or program at any time without consequence
- a statement describing risks and benefits of the study or program
- a valid local (or toll free) phone number and an email address for the researcher or evaluator, so that the parent or participant may contact them with questions or concerns
- when applicable, a valid local (or toll free) phone number and email address for the researchers' IRB so that the parent or participant may contact them with questions or concerns about human rights

- a space for a signature and date and a clear indication of *either* consent or refusal to participate

## **Considerations for Consent and Assent**

- If adult participants are to be recorded (audio or video), a separate signature line for research participants' consent/assent must be provided along with an explanation of the purpose of the recordings as well as a disposal plan for the recordings once research is completed. Audio recording of students requires specific parental consent.
- Photography or videography for research purposes is generally not permitted. All photography or videography in schools for public use must be approved by the OKCPS Communications Department.
- Student assent forms should be written in age-appropriate language.
- Assent scripts to be read to participants may be used if students are in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or lower or have specific reading disabilities.
- Consent forms for parents should be easily understandable and free of technical research terms (8th grade reading level is recommended).
- If there is the possibility that parents or students do not understand English, forms in their native language must be provided.
- Researchers or evaluators must make consent and assent forms available to a parent, teacher, or OKCPS official. Proof of active informed parental consent must be provided to PRE as part of the data request process mentioned above in order for the researcher or evaluator to obtain identifiable student data.
- Consent and assent forms, other documents, and research data must be retained in a secure location for a minimum of three years.
- Your invitation to participate in the research should be printed on letterhead from your organization, university or research group and not on that of any OKCPS department or school unless the study is being conducted by an OKCPS department or school.
- The researcher or community partner must also send letters (email is acceptable) to the prospective principals in the study inviting their schools' participation. These letters should describe your study or program and its impact upon the school and ensure anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary involvement for all study participants. The letter of invitation should not include a signature line for the principal's consent, which can only be requested after the study is approved.