Obtaining Parental Consent for Educational Research: Challenges and Solutions

Presented by Laura Satkowski, M.A.
Evaluation Manager
Education Through Music, Inc.
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
Ethics of Parental Consent

- Required for research with children involving greater than minimal risk (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008)
  - Not required for study of typical educational processes (Fisher, 2008)
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• Information to be included on parental consent form (Fisher, 2008):
  ▪ Purpose
  ▪ Duration
  ▪ Right to decline or withdraw and associated consequences
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- Information to be included on parental consent form (Fisher, 2008):
  - Purpose
  - Duration
  - Right to decline or withdraw and associated consequences
  - Potential risks and benefits
  - Limits of confidentiality
  - Incentives
  - Contact information
Active versus Passive Consent

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

Passive Consent
• Parents are informed, but do not need to return signed form unless indicating dissent
  (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)
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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)
Challenges of Active Consent

• **Sampling bias and generalizability** (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008; Unger et al., 2004)
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- **Cost** (Johnson et al., 1999; Secor-Turner et al., 2009; Stein et al., 2007)
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- **Coercion** (Secor-Turner et al., 2009)
Solution: School Support

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  ▪ Build relationships early, involve in process, and foster buy-in (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008; Fletcher & Hunter, 2003; Ji et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 1999)
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  ▪ Ask them to write a letter or sign your letter to parents (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008; Johnson et al., 1999)
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  - Recruit teachers or school personnel to help coordinate process, advocate, and answer questions (Esbensen, Melde, Taylor, & Peterson, 2008)
Solution: Incentives

• 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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• Class: pizza or ice cream party (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)
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• Teacher: gift cards (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)

• Class: pizza or ice cream party (Fletcher & Hunter, 2003)

• 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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• 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)
• Share what worked/did not work!


