A Primer on the Utah Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)

This document serves as a basic primer on the requirements laid out in Utah’s Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, or PPRA. The guidance here is specific to Utah PPRA requirements, so please note that there are other state and federal requirements governing access to student records, information about free and reduced lunch status, etc. This document is intended to provide basic information about state-mandated restrictions on data collection and consent processes surrounding the topics detailed below.

The Utah PPRA (53A-13-302 Utah Code) essentially requires researchers to obtain active consent from parents when Utah students are being interacted with regarding certain topics.

What are the topics?

Any psychological evaluation, test, or treatment OR any survey, analysis, or evaluation concerning the student’s or a student’s family member’s:

- Political affiliations or philosophies
- Mental or psychological problems
- Sexual behavior, orientation, or attitudes
- Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior
- Critical appraisals of individuals with whom the student or family member has close family relationships
- Religious affiliations or beliefs
- Legally recognized privileged relationships (attorneys, ministers, spouses, doctors, etc.)
- Income.

What does this mean for researchers?

A researcher wishing to get information related to the topics listed above must obtain prior written consent from the parent or legal guardian of every child the researcher wishes to interact with. This is true whether the information obtained is identifiable or not.

Additionally, researchers must first give ample written notice that parents may review the questions the researcher plans to ask before the consent form can be distributed. Those questions must be made available at the school. Finally, a “reasonable opportunity” to obtain written information about the study procedures and purposes must be presented to the parents alongside the written notice. The USU IRB typically requires two weeks between the notice and the distribution of the consent document.

Tips:

- Letters of Information or other passive consent processes will not be sufficient under the PPRA.
- Make sure that work closely with the school’s personnel to ensure that the research instrument and study information are readily available to any parent requesting it. Informed consent is only legally effective of those things are available to the parents beforehand.
- Prepare your recruitment material (i.e. the written notice) before you submit your protocol when working with these topics!

Resources