

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): Education Research Projects

Document Title: Standard Operating Procedure for Education Research Projects

Effective Date: early 2026

Version: 1.0

Approved By: Cabinet

Prepared By: Dr. Amanda Mayes, Data Research Manager, Data Management Office

Review Date: October 31, 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to establish clear, consistent processes for initiating, conducting, managing, and closing education research projects at the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE).

This SOP ensures that research conducted or supported by the Department adheres to ethical standards, complies with state and federal regulations, and aligns with Delaware's strategic education priorities.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to all education research projects conducted by or in partnership with DDOE, including but not limited to:

- Program evaluations and intervention studies
- Data analyses and reporting related to student outcomes
- Collaborations with universities, research organizations, and contractors
- Pilot studies or field tests involving Delaware schools or districts

It applies to all DDOE staff, contractors, and external partners engaged in research activities involving DDOE data, programs, or personnel.

3. Definitions

- **Principal Investigator (PI):** The individual primarily responsible for the design, conduct, and reporting of the research project.
- **Institutional Review Board (IRB):** The committee that reviews and approves research involving human subjects to ensure ethical compliance.

- **Data Steward:** The DDOE official responsible for overseeing data privacy, access, and governance in accordance with FERPA and state law.
- **FERPA:** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. §1232g), which protects the privacy of student education records.
- **Research Protocol:** The formal document that outlines the study’s objectives, design, methods, and ethical safeguards.
- **Data Sharing Agreement (DSA):** A legally binding document outlining the terms, conditions, and responsibilities for the secure sharing, use, and protection of DDOE data by external partners. It specifies data elements to be shared, intended use, duration, security standards, and restrictions on re-disclosure.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Data Research Manager	Oversees education research projects and ensures alignment with DDOE priorities, data governance, and compliance standards. Provides technical review of research proposals and manages data requests and agreements.
Principal Investigator (PI)	Develops research proposal and protocol; ensures ethical compliance; manages research team; communicates with DDOE throughout the project.
Research Team / Contractor	Conducts research in accordance with approved methods and data-sharing terms; ensures data security and confidentiality.
DDOE Data Steward	Reviews and approves data access requests; ensures compliance with FERPA and state data privacy requirements.
IRB Liaison (if applicable)	Coordinates IRB submissions and maintains documentation of approvals and renewals.

5. Procedure

5.1 Project Initiation

1. **Identify Research Need:** Align the project with DDOE's research priorities and goals.
 2. **Develop Research Proposal:** [A Letter of Intent](#) (LOI) to conduct research should be completed and submitted to the Data Research Manager. Document will include:
 - Research questions
 - Brief description of requested data
 - Methodological approach of the study
 - Benefits of the proposed research
 3. **Submit for Review:**
 - Internal DDOE review by the Data Research Manager and relevant DDOE leadership
 - IRB approval (if the study involves human subjects)
 - Completion of a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) for any data access
 4. **Approval Notification:**
 - Written authorization from DDOE is required before data is released or research begins.
-

5.2 Planning and Design

1. Define study design broadly (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods).
 2. Select or develop research instruments (surveys, assessments, interview guides).
 3. Create a detailed project timeline and communication plan.
 4. Develop a data management plan (DMP) specifying:
 - Data collection methods
 - Storage and access controls
 - Anonymization/de-identification procedures
 - Retention and disposal schedule
-

5.3 Data Collection

1. Obtain all necessary permissions and informed consent in accordance with IRB approval and FERPA guidelines.
 2. Train all personnel on data handling and confidentiality procedures.
 3. Collect data consistently and securely, following approved protocols.
 4. Transmit and store data only through DDOE-approved secure systems.
 5. Document any deviations from approved procedures and report to DDOE.
-

5.4 Data Analysis

1. Clean and verify data accuracy.
 2. Conduct analyses according to the approved plan. Document and justify any deviations.
 3. Document all statistical or qualitative methods used.
 4. Maintain version control of datasets and analysis scripts.
 5. Ensure reproducibility by linking raw data, documenting cleaning procedures, etc. to ensure results can be independently reproduced.
-

5.5 Reporting and Dissemination

1. Prepare technical reports, policy briefs, and presentations.
 2. Submit findings for internal review prior to dissemination.
 3. Acknowledge all partners, funders, and data providers.
 4. Disseminate results responsibly, protecting participant identities and avoiding misinterpretation.
 5. Archive final datasets and documentation according to the retention policy.
-

5.6 Project Closeout

1. Complete all deliverables and submit final reports.

2. Confirm all data has been stored or destroyed per the data management plan.
 3. Conduct debrief with project staff to capture lessons learned.
 4. Update institutional repository with project documentation and metadata.
-

6. Compliance and Ethics

All projects must adhere to:

- **Federal Regulations:** FERPA, PPRA, and related human subjects protections
 - **Institutional Policies:** Redact any data fields with risky cell values
 - Redact any cell whose student or teacher population value is less than 15
 - **Ethical Standards:** Honesty, objectivity, confidentiality, and respect for participants
-

7. Documentation and Recordkeeping

All research-related documents must be stored in secure, access-controlled repositories, including:

- IRB approval letters and consent forms
- Research instruments and protocols
- Data management plan
- Data use agreements
- Reports and publications

Retention period: Minimum of **5 years** after project completion or as required by regulation.

8. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance activities include:

- Periodic audits of data and documentation
- Internal peer review of methods and findings
- Annual training on research ethics and data privacy