School District Research Partnerships
Northwestern-Evanston Education Research Alliance (NEERA)
Chicago Public Schools Northwestern Partnership

Introduction
School District Research Agreement

Northwestern University is dedicated to innovative research and community engagement. These missions align to help surrounding school districts by providing research on issues significant to them as well as communities around the world. We are uniquely positioned to advance research in diverse arenas such as policy, learning, and health, for example, to advance well-being and improve our communities.

Our success in achieving these missions will not be measured solely by the number of academic papers published, but by the extent to which we inform and ultimately improve teaching, learning, and the well-being of our communities and develop mutually beneficial partnerships. Research questions explored with our local school districts will thus be informed both by faculty members’ research trajectories and by the needs of our educational resource providing partners.

The School of Education and Social Policy’s Office of Community Education Partnerships (OCEP) facilitates research partnerships between researchers and school districts. It is the districts’ point of contact for data sharing and a resource for both the school districts and researchers. At the core of OCEP’s mission is engaging in actionable scholarship and partnerships that improve learning and well-being in our communities, including their school districts. Therefore, OCEP facilitates discussions between the districts and researchers that advance scholarship in areas such as learning, policy, and health; address questions that are of direct and immediate importance to the school districts; and develop partnerships for research between faculty, staff, students, and community partners and practitioners.

Researcher Commitments

Researchers who agree to work on projects through OCEP will have the opportunity to directly inform local districts. Their projects will benefit from access to a high-quality, longitudinal data, partnership with key staff within the districts and larger communities, and dissemination of findings to area education leaders and practitioners.

In exchange, researchers who agree to work on data from these districts commit to:

- Abiding by Policies
  - Respecting privacy and confidentiality of individual and institutional research subjects. Individual districts’ data sharing agreements further lay out details.
  - Supervising and aiding student, other research assistants and associates, and subcontractors in meeting the expectations outlined in these research agreements.
Sourcing district data and seeking approval for research projects with the district always in conjunction with OCEP.

- Ensuring Reliability of Research
  - Providing adequate supervision to students and inexperienced researchers either via faculty or district research staff advisors.

- Coordinating with Other Researchers as Appropriate
  - Streamlining data collection between projects, e.g. collaboratively designing and administering surveys.
  - Resolving timing or experimental conflicts internally as much as possible.
  - Sharing district and data context knowledge.

- Collaborating with Practitioners from Design through Publication. Each collaborative process will be project specific, but see companion documents for suggestions and exemplar deliverables.
  - Creating a process and schedule or timeline that allows sufficient time for feedback and collaboration regarding:
    - research design checks
    - implementation
    - status updates
    - interim and final result reporting
  - Designing research with district feedback and context in mind, e.g. choosing a feasible randomization level, finding ways to recruit students for a focus group, or selecting cohorts with fairly complete data.
  - Implementing treatments or using data in compliance with district policies.
  - Communicating with the district according to its preferences.
  - Reporting results to districts in a user-friendly way, with at least 2 months for them to review before making results public.

- Keeping OCEP in the Loop
  - Notifying OCEP of questions or issues with each research collaboration process.
  - Participating in meetings set up by OCEP with other researchers or practitioners working in the district(s) as appropriate.
  - Keeping OCEP, IRB, and districts apprised of changes to research plans.
  - Bringing any new context knowledge obtained. This will be particularly useful for any new researchers brought into work with the district(s).
  - Allowing OCEP at least 5 business days to review and provide feedback on drafts of results for districts, and at least 10 for drafts of public-facing documents. OCEP will NOT censure results. This review is to ensure that results shared within districts are user-friendly, that those shared outside districts contain appropriate contextual information, and that districts can anticipate public responses.
The purpose of this document is to make expectations of research conducted with K–12 school districts under the auspices of OCEP explicit. Each researcher who works with school districts must sign this document before working with any district. This does not displace any prior research approvals or agreements held with the district(s). Signing it acknowledges the importance of:

- maintaining good working relationships with K–12 school districts,
- using their feedback to produce the best research possible, and
- giving useful, relevant feedback to them to improve district policies and practices.

Additional questions may be directed to the Research Data Analyst Leads who are the primary OCEP contacts for data partnerships at ed_partnerships@northwestern.edu or:

Northwestern-Evanston Education Research
Lila K. S. Goldstein
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Chicago Public Schools Northwestern Partnership
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Printed Name: _______________________________ Employee/Student ID: __________________

Signature: _________________________________ Date: _________________________________
Detailed Application Process and Information on Data Access

The purpose of this document is to be a quick reference about how researchers gain access to district data and how that data is kept from the partnerships with school districts. The School of Education and Social Policy’s Office of Community Education Partnerships (OCEP) facilitates research partnerships between researchers and school districts and is the districts’ point of contact for data sharing, and a resource for both the school districts and researchers. The districts’ data sharing agreements differ slightly from one another, and this quick reference takes the more conservative line with those differences. The agreements themselves should be read in full before embarking on research with the districts and referred to if anything is ever in question. Data always belongs to the district, so if there are still questions or requests beyond these agreements, the researcher must get written consent from the district(s).

Data Application

OCEP entertains requests for data access from qualified applicants within the Northwestern University research community. Researchers who propose work with the school districts or their data will be asked to commit to working with OCEP throughout the research process from design through release as described below. All documents that need to be reviewed and completed are in blue and available in this Box folder: School District Research Partnerships

1. Review the following documents and sign as appropriate:
   a. Data Sharing Agreement and Affidavit of Nondisclosure for the relevant district.
   b. School District Research Agreement (including Researcher Commitments) and Detailed Application Process and Information on Data Access
   c. Suggestions for Collaboration with Practitioners
   d. Sample Memo and Sample PowerPoint

2. Meet with OCEP for guidance on the district’s research interests, potential research questions, and contacts within the district.

3. Use the Initial Research Proposal form to give sufficient detail on the project for OCEP and district(s) to evaluate it.

4. Submit the proposal to OCEP for guidance and district review. OCEP will provide guidance and facilitation but does not approve or reject proposals. Be prepared to answer questions, make changes, or coordinate with other researchers as needed.

5. Obtain background clearance, safety training, etc. as applicable.

6. Apply for IRB approval.

Once the project has been run by OCEP and IRB:

7. Draw up a Statement of Work (SOW) using the templates in the district Data Agreement. Districts approve, reject, or ask for modifications in SOWs.

8. Compile the SOW and all other documents and submit to OCEP at ed_partnerships@northwestern.edu
Individual and Institutional Privacy

- Treat data as though it is confidential unless it is collected from a publicly available source or is otherwise available publicly.
- Publish results of research using confidential data in ways that protect the privacy of the individuals and institutions reflected in the data. Do not publish any individually identifiable information or results for any group of fewer than 10 students.
- Allow districts 60 days before intended release of information to review and strike any identifying information for individuals and institutions (such as district or school names).

Data Locations and Transfers

- Keep data only in district-specific folders within Northwestern’s secure access server, \resfilesaudit.northwestern.edu, OCEP-created project-specific folders within Northwestern Box, or hard copy in physically secure locations. Do not save it on a thumb drive or laptop.
- Delete or shred copies and versions of data as soon as the approved project ends.
- Transfer data only encrypted and through SESP Nextcloud, a secure FTP. Do not send data via email or internet sites like Google Drive. Give passwords separately.

Signing below indicates having read the relevant data sharing agreement.

Printed Name: ________________________________ Employee/Student ID: ________________

Signature: ________________________________ Date: ________________________________
Suggestions for Collaboration and Partnership between Researchers and Practitioners

The bullets below provide examples or options, but are not exhaustive.

Timeline

Hold meetings and deliver items at mutually agreed upon intervals. Ultimately, timelines should set expectations for all involved. Some suggested high contact timelines:

- 2 months: meetings bookending, biweekly phone calls, 1 final policy memo
- School year: email as needed, triweekly phone calls, a presentation per semester
- 4 years: phone calls as needed, a meeting per semester, yearly research briefs, multiple final presentations

Design Feedback

Solicit district feedback on a design plan and allow sufficient time for the district to respond.

- Propose and hash out details in person, distributing design in writing after
- List options and pros/cons in a memo, then a phone call for questions and selection
- Give a complete design proposal with plenty of time for questions and new drafts

Implementation

Get approval on general plans for implementation before beginning any research activity. Get approval on more detailed plans for any piece of implementation before beginning each piece. For example, planning to survey teachers would need approval before any work such as classroom observations or treatment implementation were to begin. However, details of how and when to distribute the survey may wait to be approved later but before the survey begins.

Status Updates

Update the district, regardless of work completed, as frequently as the timeline indicates.

Interim and Final Results

Report results to any district whose data is being used at least a month before public release. Report results concisely and in formats that are convenient for them. Districts may use results to make decisions, so share certainty levels, and prepare to share details or advice as solicited.

- 2 page policy or research brief recommending a policy change or measure to track
- 30 minute presentation to leadership launching discussion of potential policy levers
- 45 minute presentation to educators getting buy in for new initiatives
- 3-5 key takeaways and a contact person for ongoing discussion
OCEP’s mission is to promote, build capacity for, and engage in actionable scholarship and partnerships that improve learning and well-being in our home communities of Evanston and Chicago, and beyond.

Summary of OCEP: Situated within the School of Education and Social Policy (SESP) at Northwestern University, OCEP’s mission stands on three pillars: scholarship, infrastructure and capacity building, and community partnerships.

- **Scholarship.** OCEP promotes and leverages SESP’s scholarly expertise and resources to advance research, develop programs, and engage in teaching and service-related activities that help to understand and improve learning, public policy, and well-being in our home communities of Evanston and Chicago, and beyond.

- **Infrastructure and Capacity Building.** OCEP provides infrastructure and builds capacity for researchers, practitioners, students, and diverse community stakeholders to work together. Providing institutional support for cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among these stakeholders allows us to build, share, and maximize human and financial resources; be more efficient and effective in our work; more easily identify new opportunities for engagement; and therefore, amplifies impact and makes our efforts more sustainable and scalable.

- **Community Partnerships.** Improving learning and human development requires new ways of working together in and across communities. Thus, OCEP is committed to developing community partnerships that are based on collaboration and mutual respect; common vision and goals; community needs and priorities; and the valuing and sharing of resources and expertise and seeks to document and share models and promising practices for university-community partnerships.

In sum, OCEP works to bridge the research, practice, and service missions of SESP and Northwestern University to create initiatives and partnerships that positively impact our home communities of Evanston and Chicago, but that can be shared and scaled far beyond.

For more information about OCEP please contact:

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