



THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, & DATA STRATEGY

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Primary Data Application: Applicant User Guide

Research & Performance Management (RPM) | User Guide | July 28, 2026

Overview Recruitment and Data Collection from School-level Participants

All plans to recruit school-level participants (teachers, school staff, principals, parents, and students) and District-level participants (Central office staff, District leaders) to collect data must go through the MSCS Research & Performance Management (RPM) department's application process and receive research/evaluation approval.

After granting approval, RPM will provide applicants with an approval letter and school principals' names and email addresses to contact principals and ask that their school participate. Principals have the final right of approval for their school to participate in data collection, and **ONLY** they can facilitate recruitment of school-level participants.

Applicants must obtain documentation (an email message, signed letter, etc.) of a principal agreeing to allow their school to serve as a research/evaluation site and agreeing to distribute recruitment materials. If the principal is the researcher, their District supervisor will need to give permission, and RPM will facilitate that request.

After agreement, the principal distributes the provided recruitment messages/flyers to distribution lists of teachers, staff, parents, and/or students using MSCS communications (e.g., emails, texts, or announcements).

Applicants must submit all primary data collection documents for review and **receive final approval from MSCS approval prior to beginning a project** (i.e., **before** reaching out to school leaders/staff, parents, students, etc.). After submitting the main application and the Primary Data Collection Form, applicants will receive an email from the data-partnerships account requesting that they respond to the email and attach files for all relevant documents. Do **not** submit multiple documents in one file.

Each document must be **submitted individually** using this **file name format**:

RAPP####_LastName_DocumentType_v# (for example: RAPP-0067_Smith_StudentSurvey_v1).

Primary Data Documents

Write the documents on a level of understanding for the person who will receive them. Remember that the general population might not understand what you consider basic terminology. A general rule is to keep the wording at no more than an 8th grade reading level.

Annotated sample documents can be found on the [Applicant Files and Example Documents](#) webpage.

I. Participant Recruitment Document Requirements

- A. Teacher, school staff, parent, student, and/or principal recruitment through schools and/or data collection at schools
- Applicants submitting primary data collection requests are also required to submit the following documents:
 1. Draft of [recruitment email to principals](#) requesting permission to recruit from and/or collect data at their schools
 - Include statement that data collection will occur outside of instructional time (except for classroom observations)
 - Applicants must ask principals for permission to use school time (including before/after school) and spaces to collect data*
 2. Drafts of [recruitment emails/flyers](#) that upon agreement, principals will distribute to school staff and/or parents and students**
 - Plan to include the recruitment email/flyer in the email or attached to the email to the principal to make it easier for them to share it with potential participants.

* For student participants, the request should include the assurance that parents will be asked to make student transportation arrangements for activities approved before/after school.

**After applicant receives District approval, principals can be recruited directly and consent to participate in research/evaluation as individuals.

B. District/Central Office staff recruitment as research participants and data collection

- After applicant receives final approval, Research & Performance Management will provide the names and contact information for District/Central Office staff
- District/Central Office staff can be recruited directly and consent to participate in research/evaluation as individuals

II. Participant Consent: Document Requirements

All participants must provide active consent/assent to participate in data collection activities, and **parents must provide active, written consent** for their children to participate.

While both anonymity and confidentiality aim to protect participant privacy in data collection, there are key distinctions between the two in the degree of information being collected and the level of assurance that is provided to study participants. In both cases, it is essential that researchers/evaluators communicate clearly with participants about how their privacy will be protected to establish trust and ensure ethical practices.

Anonymity means the researcher does not collect or know any personal identifiers (like names or IP addresses) that link a person to their data. **Confidentiality** means the researcher collects identifying information but keeps it secret, ensuring no one outside the researcher/study team can connect a participant to their answers.

Many primary data collection (and recruitment) activities are not designed to be truly anonymous, but even in those studies participants are promised that the data collected will be kept private and protected. For these reasons, confidentiality assurances are typically included in consent forms. Be clear on the degree of personal information you are collecting about participants, and in the consent form, offer the appropriate assurances for protecting personal identifiers and/or the other data collected.

A. [Adult Participant Consent Form](#) required components:

- Brief description of the study, including its purpose and intended use of results
- Eligibility criteria to participate
- What participants will be asked to do
- What data will be collected by researcher and/or be provided by MSCS RPM
- Specifics about time commitment, study duration, and meeting times and places. Include statement that data collection will occur outside of instructional time (except for observations or other approved data collection)
- Potential risks/discomforts and benefits to participants
- Assurances that participation is voluntary
- Assurances that not participating, opting out, or discontinuing participation will not negatively affect participants
- Assurances that data will be confidential (or anonymous) and securely stored
- Description of how data and results will be used. State that no data or findings will be shared that identify MSCS, schools, or individual participants by name (unless other presentation/publication plans are approved)
- Name and contact information for the researcher (and committee chair for graduate students) for participants and/or parents
- Include a place for participants to print and sign their names, a place to type their name in electronic form, or a box to check in an electronic form to indicate active consent

*Note that applicants will need to ask principals for permission to use school spaces.

B. [Active Parental Consent Form](#) for Student Participation* required components:

- A brief description of the study, including its purpose and intended use of results.
- Eligibility criteria to participate
- What student participants will be asked to do**
- What data will be collected by researcher and/or be provided by MSCS RPM
- Specifics about time commitment, study duration, and meeting times and places. Include statement that data collection will occur outside of instructional time (except for observations or other approved data collection)***

- Explanation for how parents can view the research instrument (e.g., survey questions) BEFORE they give consent. (can include electronic links in parent communications or make hard copies available at the school)
- Potential risks/discomforts and benefits to participants
- Assurances that participation is voluntary
- Assurances that not participating, opting out, or discontinuing participation will not negatively affect participants
- Assurances that data will be confidential (or anonymous) and securely stored
- Description of how data and results will be used. State that no data or findings will be shared that identify MSCS, schools, or individual students by name (unless other presentation/publication plans are approved)
- Name and contact information for the researcher (and committee chair for graduate students) for participants and/or parents
- Include a place for **parents** to print and sign their names and provide their children's names or provide a place to type their names and provide their children's names to indicate **active, written parental consent**

* Students over 18 can provide their own consent to participate.

** If data collection will occur during school time, provide an assurance that a student who does not have parental consent or decides not to participate will be given another activity/assignment that does not penalize (e.g., extra graded work) or reward (e.g., allowing students to leave class).

*** If data collection is approved by the principal to occur before or after school, parents must provide consent for them to be at school those times and agree to make student transportation arrangements.

C. [Minor Student Assent Form](#) required components written in age-appropriate language:

- A brief description of the study, including its purpose and intended use of results.
- What is required of study participants*
- Specifics about time commitment, study duration, and meeting times and places. State that their participation will take place outside of instructional time (except for observations or other approved data collection)
- Statement that their parents have provided their consent
- Potential risks/discomforts and benefits to participants
- Assurances that participation is voluntary
- Assurances that not participating, opting out, or discontinuing participation will not negatively affect participants
- Assurances that data will be confidential (or anonymous) and securely stored
- Description of how data and results will be used. State that no data or findings will be shared that identify MSCS, schools, or individual students by name (unless other presentation/publication plans are approved)
- Name and contact information for the researcher (and committee chair for graduate students) for participants and/or parents
- Provide a place for students to print and sign their name, a place to type their name in electronic form, or a box to check in an electronic form to indicate their active assent to participate

*If the plan is for data to be collected during class time, provide assurance that a student who does not have parental consent or decides not to participate will be given another activity/assignment that does not penalize (e.g., extra graded work) or reward (e.g., allowing students to leave class) them.

III. Participant Eligibility Assessment

- Provide a list of the eligibility criteria questions or a copy of the eligibility questionnaire. If needed, provide the eligibility assessment procedures (e.g., how a verbal or written questionnaire will be administered to potential participants).
- If an eligibility questionnaire is administered first, it should not include additional research questions because the potential participants have not consented to the study yet.

IV. Data Collection Instruments (surveys, interview, and focus group questions and observation rubrics) and Administration Protocols

- Provide drafts of each data collection instrument and associated administration protocols.
- If printed/signed names are requested on electronic consent forms and the researcher is promising anonymity, the signed form should be obtained separately from the online survey responses.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need District approval and school-site approval to collect data through schools?

Yes. MSCS requires applicants receive District approval first, then principals have the right to determine whether their school sites participate in primary data collection. You may not reach out to principals until Research & Performance Management (RPM) provides you with a research approval letter.

Do I contact MSCS departments, schools, and/or potential participants before applying and receiving permission to conduct research in MSCS?

No. MSCS Research & Performance Management (RPM) must provide approval first. No potential participants should be contacted and no research should be conducted in the District prior to receiving an official approval letter through this process.

Does my research/evaluation study require adult consent?

Most research/evaluation projects require active, informed consent from the research participants (e.g., teachers, principals, staff, parents, and students). Adult participants print and sign their names, type their name in an electronic form, or check a box in an electronic form to indicate active consent

Does my research/evaluation study of students require parental consent?

Per Tennessee law, parents must provide active, **written** consent for their minor age children to participate in data collection activities (e.g., surveys, interviews, etc.) for research/evaluation purposes. Students age 18 or older can give their own informed consent; parental consent is not required.

Does my research/evaluation study require student assent?

Some research projects require student assent before the student participates in the project. Assent statements should include: 1) a description of the research project and what the student is being asked to do; 2) notification that the student's participation is completely voluntary with no consequences for declining to participate; and 3) notification that the student can stop participating at any time without repercussion.

Student assent should be in language appropriate to the student's level of understanding. If you are affiliated with an institution with an Institutional Review Board (IRB), follow your institution's IRB guidelines for oral or written assent. If not, students in elementary school should receive oral assent. Students in middle school and high school should have a written assent form that is orally explained to them prior to their signature. Assent language should be at a reading level, two grade levels below the lowest intended grade.

Request for student participation during the school day should include a description of what students will do while other students are participating, if their parents do not give consent, or for students who decline to participate. They should be assigned a comparable activity or be allowed to do other academic work; they should not be rewarded (e.g., allowed to leave classroom and go to the gym) or penalized (e.g., assigned additional required work) for non-participation.

What is required in a consent form for a MSCS participant?

Listed below are the components that should be included in all consent forms. See above for additional guidance for specific participant groups. If you are affiliated with an institution with an Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, additional information may be required by their IRB. All consent forms should be written in non-technical, easy-to-understand language.

- A brief description of the study, including its purpose and intended use.
- What is required of study participants. The form must state that data collection will take place outside of instructional time unless the method is classroom observation or other collection has been approved. For student data collection, parents must be notified of how they can view the research instrument (e.g., survey questions) BEFORE they give consent.
- Specifics about time commitment, study duration, and meeting times and places. Do not assume data collection will occur at schools. Language should be included to indicate required principal approval and space availability. For students, it would also require a plan for student transportation arrangements by parents, if a project is approved by the principal to occur before or after school.
- Risks and benefits to participants.
- Assurances that participation is voluntary.
- Assurances that not participating, opting out, or discontinuing participation will not negatively affect participants. For students, have an alternative plan for what students not participating will do if data collection occurs during school day.
- Assurances that data will be confidential and securely stored.
- Description of how data and results will be used. State that no data or findings will be shared that identify MSCS, schools, or individual participants by name (or include other approved presentation/publication plans).

- Name and contact information for the researcher (and committee chair for graduate students) for participants and/or parents.
- Print and signature lines indicating consent or place to type name or check a box in an electronic form indicating consent.

Are there templates or examples of required documents?

Annotated sample recruitment messages, consent forms, and other documents can be found on the [Applicant Files and Example Documents](#) webpage.

Is there a preferred format for saving and naming documents to submit?

Please submit all materials in either PDF or Word format and save files using this naming convention: RAPP###_LastName_DocumentType_v# (for example: RAPP-0067_Smith_StudentSurvey_v1).

Each required document must be named and submitted **individually** using the approved file name format. Do not submit multiple documents in one file. This ensures faster processing of your documents.

Getting Help

Questions about specific recruitment methods and data collection activities not covered above and that may need further review: email Data-Partnerships@scsk12.org, including your full RAPP Number in the Subject.

For broader questions about the research application process with MSCS, please see our [FAQs](#).