

Program for Protection of Research Participants

This document explains how Empirical Education Inc. complies with the requirements of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), federal regulations, and other ethical standards for research with human subjects.

Empirical Education conducts research on the effectiveness of instructional programs such as teaching techniques, curricula, classroom management methods, and staff development. It is important that our research results inform practical decisions concerning these programs so the research is conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices. The research does not address sensitive, private information such as religious or political beliefs, psychological problems, or anti-social behavior. To as great an extent possible, we make use of student data and testing results that the district or schools routinely collect. Researchers do not test or interview individual students although the schools may agree to conduct additional testing to support the research. Classroom observations may be used to assess program implementation but they do not record individual student identities and researchers do not interact with students.

Underlying all our work is our basic ethical concern to protect the participants in our research in accordance with the principles set out in what is known as the Belmont Report. While participant consent is an important principle, school districts may modify or improve their ordinary educational practices without individual student or parental consent. Recognizing this, FERPA allows school systems to provide student data to organizations such as Empirical Education to conduct studies without obtaining the written consent of the students or their parents providing the students cannot be personally identified by anybody outside the company and providing the research has the purpose improving educational practices. In addition, the federal regulation concerning protection of human subjects exempts research, which involves normal educational practices, from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. Nevertheless, the company always gives priority to the specific policies of the agency or school district it is working with. An agreement is signed between the district and the company before any data collection can begin. The company does not request an exception from subpoenas and will comply with legal requests for data.

It is our practice to ask teachers to volunteer to take part in the research after having been given a full explanation of the purpose, methods and the nature of their involvement. The company obtains signed consent from each teacher and keeps it on file. Because we are interacting personally with the teacher participants in interviews and surveys, we obtain teacher names and contact information but personal identities and school names are never used in research reports or in reports to the school district.

To maintain continued compliance with participant protection procedures, our research protocols are considered annually by the IRB maintained by Independent Review Consulting, Inc. (August 2009 is the most recent review). In the case of research conducted with other organizations, methods specific to those collaborations have been reviewed by other IRBs including those of Stanford University and University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Staff who are involved with research sites or data have been trained in responsible conduct of research and retake the human subject assurance training every three years. The company has Federal Wide Assurance # 00007032 from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Empirical Education's procedure is to submit a formal report of any unanticipated problems related to research conducted by us or on our behalf to the appropriate IRB, study sponsor, or other authority or agency within five days of the event for further consideration. Questions concerning this policy or any concern about misconduct related to any research with which Empirical Education is associated should be directed to Gloria Miller, who serves as Human Research Administrator, or to Denis Newman, President of Empirical Education. They can be reached toll free at (888) 486-8886 or via email at dn@empiricaleducation.com or gmler@empiricaleducation.com.