

# Practical Strategies for Recruiting Districts and Schools for Education Impact Studies

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## Why this brief?

Conducting rigorous impact studies that produce actionable evidence for educators and policymakers is a key goal of the [Standards for Excellence in Education Research \(SEER\)](#). Although studies can be initiated by individual districts or schools, researchers often conduct their own studies to address broadly relevant questions about the effectiveness of an education program, policy, practice, or intervention. Recruiting a sample of districts and schools that represents the study's population of interest is essential to answering these questions (Tipton & Olsen, 2022). However, recruiting a study sample that is both appropriately generalizable and sufficiently large to support precise impact findings is a perennial challenge, particularly for randomized controlled trials (Roschelle et al., 2014). This challenge does not seem to have abated in the years during and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Hennessy, 2023).<sup>1</sup>

This brief offers practical strategies for researchers newer to school-based impact studies to consider during the various phases of a study, with the aim of helping them achieve their recruitment goals (Box 1). The strategies focus on four topics that, based in part on the authors' knowledge of recent recruitment efforts, may play an increasingly important role in affecting a district's or school's ability and willingness to participate in impact studies:

1. **Attention to urgent priorities and needs.** Given that many districts and schools have to grapple with a seemingly growing set of needs, they may focus only on research efforts that are aligned with their most pressing priorities.
2. **Limited staff capacity.** Even if a study aligns with their priorities, districts and schools may have limited capacity to participate in research because of persistent staffing pressures.
3. **Commitment to fairness and collaborative practices.** Many districts and schools may be wary of random assignment because of concerns about fairness and potential disruptions to their collaborative practices.
4. **Protection of student and staff privacy.** Districts and schools may be hesitant to share data with researchers because of their responsibility to protect students' and staff members' personal information.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, recent panel sessions in [2022](#) and [2023](#) at the Institute of Education Sciences' Annual Principal Investigators Meeting highlighted recruitment challenges and potential strategies to address them.

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## Box 1. Purpose, audience, and data sources

### Who is this brief for, and how can it be used?

- This brief is primarily intended for newer researchers, regardless of how they are funded, who conduct randomized controlled trials to evaluate the effectiveness of education interventions.<sup>2</sup> This brief is not meant to be a comprehensive guide on how to recruit districts and schools for impact studies. Experienced researchers likely will be already familiar with these issues, which is why the brief may be most useful to newer researchers. However, experienced researchers may still benefit from considering the brief's content.
- The strategies in this brief are intended to help newer researchers design and implement successful recruitment efforts. Some of the strategies focus explicitly on steps during the active recruitment phase of a study, while others relate to study design and planning decisions that often affect recruitment. For example, decisions about the unit of random assignment and an intervention's components typically figure heavily in the design phase of a study. However, researchers' decisions around these issues could affect districts' and schools' willingness to participate in a study and, ultimately, recruitment outcomes. As a result, the brief touches on a range of decisions, including those that may not typically be thought of as part of a study's recruitment phase.

### What informed the content of this brief?

- This brief is informed by the authors' and their colleagues' experiences from recent recruitment efforts for federal- and foundation-funded impact studies (from 2019 to 2023) and interviews with selected district staff (conducted in 2022 and 2023) about their experiences participating in research (see the appendix for more details). These sources form the basis for the four topics (that is, attention to urgent priorities and needs, limited staff capacity, commitment to fairness and collaborative practices, and protection of student and staff privacy) and the accompanying strategies for each. The perspectives in this brief may not reflect the experiences of all researchers.
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## 1 Attention to urgent priorities and needs

Districts and schools may limit the research studies they participate in to those that align with a strategic priority or that help address one of their urgent needs. For example, [Chicago Public Schools](#) is considering only research requests that district and school leaders have designated as high priority. In addition, many district research offices, such as that of [Boston Public Schools](#), require researchers to demonstrate how the study meets one of the district's stated strategic priorities and to submit a letter of support from a district sponsor. This focus on research that is relevant to districts' and schools' priorities may be even more important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many districts and schools wish to devote more attention and resources specifically to addressing the increased needs of students and staff (DeArmond et al., 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> For simplicity, this brief uses the term "intervention" to refer to the education program, policy, practice, or intervention whose effectiveness is being evaluated.

**All districts interviewed noted that alignment with their priorities and needs is an important factor in their evaluation of research requests.**



**Interviewer:** “What does your district take into consideration when deciding whether to participate in research?”



**Respondent:** “It is about whether or not it’s a systemic priority. When you have limited resources, as most school districts do, you have to focus on what you can control and what matters.”

**Strategy:** Align the focus of the study with common priorities of districts and schools.

Whether researchers begin with a specific intervention to test or with a broad topic of interest to investigate (such as elementary math instruction or new teacher development), before recruitment begins, they should consider how the focus of the study aligns with districts’ and schools’ strategic priorities. Conversations with key groups that may be involved in the research, such as educators, students, parents, or community members, may help researchers identify districts and schools whose priorities align with the study’s intervention (Box 2). For example, researchers might look to established networks of districts and

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### Box 2. Guiding questions to understand priorities

- To what extent does the topic resonate as a need for additional support?
  - To what extent might the topic address a need to better support the success of one or more student groups?
  - What successes has your state, district, or school experienced in addressing this topic? What challenges have you faced?
  - What strategies are you interested in implementing or receiving supports to implement on this topic?
  - What excites or concerns you about a study focused on this topic?
  - What do you think is important for researchers to know if we embark on a study focused on this topic?
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schools with a shared commitment to the goal of the study’s intervention. In instances where researchers are looking to narrow the focus of a study to a specific intervention, they might incorporate perspectives from these key groups. Consistent with the [SEER standard on equity](#), this approach may uncover pressing issues that many districts and schools share—such as those that contribute to inequitable education outcomes—and allow researchers to better align the study’s focus in ways that might help address those issues.

► **Recruitment in action: Narrowing the focus.** To design a study to inform after-school programs, researchers interviewed state administrators, staff of foundations that support after-school programs, and other leaders in the field. Through these conversations, researchers learned that improving students’ social and emotional skills was a common priority in the after-school community. Based on this input, researchers chose to study a professional development model focused on building staff capacity to support students’ social and emotional skills that could be implemented across different types of after-school programs. ◀

**Strategy:** Offer targeted supports that supplement the potential of the study’s intervention to help districts and schools address a need.

The conversations with districts and schools that uncover common priorities, described above, could also explore what related supports, beyond the intervention itself, might be beneficial. These supports could include, for example, helping districts and schools sustain the study’s intervention, organizing a peer learning community for districts and schools participating in the study, providing access to technology or technical support, or holding a learning session to help district and school decision makers interpret and use the study findings. Researchers may want to include these kinds of supports in initial requests for study funding because it may otherwise be difficult to secure funding for these additional supports in the midst of recruitment. In the request, researchers could emphasize that offering greater benefits to districts and schools may be a worthwhile investment to encourage participation and increase the likelihood that the study succeeds.

Researchers should consider tailoring these supports according to the needs of prospective districts and schools. For example, if researchers anticipate that eligible districts and schools will agree that the study’s intervention addresses a pressing need but will be concerned about suddenly losing access to the intervention and related training after the study ends, researchers could discuss with prospective funders the option of providing technical assistance or training in the years following the study. These supports could help sustain the intervention, if the study finds promising results, and could be particularly helpful for those in the comparison group who may receive the intervention after the study ends.

► **Recruitment in action: Providing data to support decision making.** For a study of school improvement networks, researchers anticipated that districts and schools might be concerned that impact study findings would not be available for several years. To help address districts’ and schools’ need for data to support their decision making in real time, researchers produced snapshots with interim district- and school-specific survey results, study briefs describing the ongoing implementation of the intervention, and a data dashboard to share lessons learned. To be mindful of data sharing and reporting requirements, these resources were only available to districts and schools participating in the study. ◀

In some cases, offering targeted supports as a recruitment strategy could affect what the study is able to measure the effectiveness of. Researchers should keep the primary research questions in mind and plan to carefully document supports that supplement the intervention, so they understand the full nature of the intervention that was tested.<sup>3</sup>

**Strategy:** Communicate how the study addresses districts’ and schools’ priorities and needs.

During recruitment, researchers should consider developing a strategy to communicate clearly to districts and schools how the study aligns with their priorities and can help address their urgent needs. The first piece of the study’s communication strategy could involve working with partners who have

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<sup>3</sup> The Institute of Education Sciences’ [Conducting Implementation Research in Impact Studies of Education Interventions](#) guide (Hill et al., 2023) includes information about documenting direct and supportive components of an intervention.

direct experience with the study’s intervention or population of interest, and, when possible, current or former educators, especially those with existing relationships with districts or schools that might be eligible to participate in the study. These partners could help develop materials that describe how the study relates to common priorities, outline the potential benefits of the intervention and direct supports, and discuss the value of the evidence that the study will generate in helping districts and schools make decisions to meet the needs of those they serve. Partnering with educators, staff, and organizations that are respected in the study’s content area can help build trust with districts and schools and ensure that the recruitment team’s language and materials resonate with educators.

► **Recruitment in action: Partnering with educators to communicate and build interest.** In a study of teacher leadership, researchers partnered with former educators and teacher leaders to recruit districts and schools to participate. A former educator with extensive experience in teacher leadership introduced the study and explained to district administrators the connection between the study’s goals and data collection activities and the district’s strategic priorities. Former teacher leaders then joined recruitment conversations to promote the study and speak from firsthand experience about the benefits of the intervention. ◀

For the second piece of the study’s communication strategy, researchers should consider identifying administrators or staff in prospective districts and schools who can serve as “champions.” Champions can help forge connections to other key staff, including school leaders and staff from district research offices, who are often central to securing participation in a study (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). To be effective, these champions should be invested in the study’s area of focus and hold a position that enables them to advocate for their district’s or school’s participation. For example, for a study focused on instructional practices in math, a district’s math curriculum lead or a school’s math instructional specialist might be an effective champion. District or school websites and organizational charts may be useful resources for identifying an appropriate contact. For studies of programs funded by federal or state grants, the agency overseeing the grant may be able to help connect researchers to potential champions, such as district or school grantee directors. Once researchers identify a champion, they should maintain consistent communication to ensure the champion’s continued understanding of what study participation entails and how the study addresses a priority or an urgent need.

► **Recruitment in action: Identifying and establishing connections through a study champion.** For a study of career navigation in adult education programs, researchers partnered with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education to contact state directors of adult education. Researchers introduced the study to the state directors, who invited the program directors in their state to attend a webinar to learn more about the study. After the webinar, researchers held individual calls with interested program directors, who then championed their program’s participation in the study. Some program directors provided letters of support to accompany study research applications; these letters explained how the study’s focus on training for career navigators aligned with the program’s strategic priorities. Other directors scheduled time for researchers to present the study to the school board to approve the program’s participation. ◀

## 2 Limited staff capacity

Districts and schools have long faced staffing constraints, with a limited supply of certified educators to meet their needs (Sutcher et al., 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, as districts and schools have reported difficulties in retaining staff, hiring replacement staff, and identifying coverage for absent teachers in the wake of the pandemic (Destler & Hill, 2022). Staff have also reported spending more time addressing increased student needs, such as student absenteeism and behavior concerns (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022). Although district or school leaders might recognize the importance of the study, their concerns about staff well-being and retention, which have also grown since the pandemic (Steiner et al., 2022), may make them reluctant to add responsibilities or new tasks to educators' workloads.

### All districts interviewed mentioned concerns about staff capacity in weighing research requests.



**Interviewer:** *“What does your district take into consideration when deciding whether to participate in research?”*



**Respondent:** *“There is so much potential benefit to studies and figuring out what works during this time of advanced needs, but I am extremely reluctant to ask anyone in the district to do more.”*

### Strategy: Compensate district and school staff for time spent participating in research.

To recognize additional work that comes with participating in research, researchers should consider including in their initial request for funding plans to compensate district and school staff for completing study activities, such as implementing the study's intervention, completing surveys or interviews, and sharing administrative data (Box 3). The plans might also include compensation to help districts and schools pay additional staff, such as substitute teachers, to cover time when regular staff are participating in study activities. Offering meaningful compensation can signal to districts and schools that researchers respect staff time. When proposing compensation, researchers should be prepared to honor any restrictions or requirements of funders

#### Box 3. Key considerations for compensating staff participating in research

- **Aligned.** When possible, compensate staff who spend time participating in the study, rather than or in addition to compensating the district or school as a whole.
- **Commensurate.** Consider staff's typical payment rate when setting the compensation amount. This might mean compensating participating staff—for example, teachers and paraprofessionals—at different rates.
- **Organized.** Develop a secure and privacy-protecting process to collect necessary financial information, such as W-9 forms.
- **Adaptable.** Consider alternative approaches if district or funder policies limit the ability for researchers to provide monetary compensation to staff, such as donations, access to paid resources or materials, or training and networking opportunities.

and districts. For example, federal funders might have a maximum rate at which staff can be compensated. As another example, some districts might prefer that the study pay the district or school, which can then compensate staff directly at their hourly rate, whereas other districts might prefer that the study pay individual staff directly for the hours spent conducting study activities.

► **Recruitment in action: Compensating staff for their time.** In a study of after-school programs, staff and instructors received instructional coaching. These participants, many of whom worked part time for the after-school program or held full-time positions during the school day, received compensation for time they spent working with a coach outside their regular work hours at the after-school program. In addition, after-school centers assigned to the comparison group and school districts that provided administrative data received compensation for participating in the study's data collection activities commensurate with the burden those activities required of staff. ◀

**Strategy: Integrate the intervention into existing practices, and prepare to adapt implementation to accommodate districts' and schools' capacity.**

In the study design phase, researchers should consider the burden of implementation when selecting the intervention and plan to provide training and support to help districts and schools implement the intervention alongside their existing practices as seamlessly as possible. To do this, researchers might consider the following:

- Providing different ways for districts and schools to receive training on the intervention, such as synchronous webinars and pre-recorded videos
- Modifying the timeline for implementing the intervention to avoid busy periods, such as the beginning of the school year or state testing periods, or spreading implementation across a longer time frame
- Working with district and school leaders to integrate implementation of the intervention into normal operations, such as accessing a study's education technology intervention through the district's existing learning management system

Researchers cannot expect the same approach to work for all districts and schools that participate in a study, as staff in participating districts and schools may have varying capacity to implement the intervention in the prescribed way. Adapting implementation to accommodate specific district or school constraints typically must be balanced with the importance of implementing the intervention as intended. To weigh these trade-offs, researchers might first identify the components of the intervention that are central for its theory of action and then consider which other components could be optional or adapted for districts or schools with limited capacity.<sup>4</sup> During recruitment, researchers should be transparent and forthcoming with districts and schools about the planned implementation of the intervention—for example, how many hours of staff time are required. Such frank conversations

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<sup>4</sup> Researchers should consider how they will document and report on adaptations to the intervention, including how different districts and schools implemented the intervention and the cost implications of these adaptations. Doing so will help researchers understand the adaptations and analyze the cost of implementing the intervention in different ways, as suggested in the SEER standards on [implementation](#) and [cost analysis](#). The Institute of Education Sciences' [Conducting Implementation Research in Impact Studies of Education Interventions](#) guide (Hill et al., 2023) includes guidance on measuring intervention adaptations.

will help researchers understand whether implementing at least the “core” components of the intervention is feasible for the district or school.

► **Recruitment in action: Adjusting implementation to accommodate capacity while maintaining intervention fidelity.** In a study of after-school programs, researchers wanted to understand the impact of a “core” intervention that included training workshops followed by direct coaching from the intervention provider to help program leaders apply the lessons from the workshops. As a supplemental component not fundamental to the intervention’s theory of action, the intervention also included professional learning community (PLC) sessions to potentially enhance program leaders’ ability to apply lessons in practice. To accommodate different programs’ capacity for involvement, the researchers offered, but did not require, the addition of PLCs. This approach enabled more programs to participate in the study without undermining the study’s ability to test its core intervention. The researchers noted which programs opted for the PLCs and then collected data to document the extent to which the programs in the intervention and comparison groups actually ended up implementing each component of the intervention, including the PLCs. This last step was essential to understand what the study ultimately tested and how to interpret the resulting impacts. This was a particularly important step given that implementation typically varies in practice, regardless of whether a study intends to allow for the possibility of variation (Hill et al., 2023).◀

### **Strategy: Limit the burden of data collection activities.**

Researchers should be mindful of staff capacity constraints when they plan a study’s data collection and consider data collection activities that limit the burden on district and school staff (Box 4). When designing data collection activities, researchers should first assess the extent to which the district’s or school’s existing data could help answer the study’s research questions. Then, researchers should design the remaining primary data collection to obtain information essential to answering the study’s research questions. In addition, researchers may want to propose avoiding data collection during school hours or busy time periods, limiting the length of surveys or interviews to reduce burden on staff and students, and adapting in-person data collection to minimize disruptions.

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#### **Box 4. Potential ways to streamline study data collection**

- **Administrative data from districts and schools**, such as student attendance and assessment data, can replace burdensome study-administered assessments.
  - **Administrative data collected by state or federal agencies**, such as data on college enrollments, can replace some student surveys.
  - **New items added to districts’ existing teacher or student surveys**, such as a school climate survey, can replace or shorten a study-specific survey.
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► **Recruitment in action: Offering flexible data collection timing.** For a study of education technology tools to support writing, researchers consulted district and school calendars when offering dates for data collection, thereby limiting potential conflicts. They avoided collecting student writing assessments for the study during busy time periods, such as the first month of the school year, when schools noted that teachers were focused on establishing norms and building relationships with new students.◀



### 3 Commitment to fairness and collaborative practices

Districts and schools do not typically use random assignment to allocate resources, and they may feel that it is not fair to withhold a potentially promising intervention from those assigned to a comparison group (Troyer, 2022). Further, districts and schools typically encourage staff, students, and families to share information and resources (Positive Action, 2021). For example, some schools convene PLCs so that teachers in the same grade or subject area may collaborate on lesson planning and professional development (Serviss, 2022). Participating in a study where some teachers are not allowed to receive the intervention might be seen to undermine such collaborative practice.

**Strategy:** Be transparent about random assignment, and, when possible, adapt processes to accommodate districts' and schools' collaborative practices.

During recruitment conversations with districts and schools, researchers should be transparent about random assignment and explain its value in understanding whether a potentially promising intervention is effective and worth future investments. Describing random assignment as a lottery, a fair mechanism to determine eligibility for an intervention when resources are constrained, might help districts or schools feel more comfortable with the process. For example, outside of a research study, districts may sometimes introduce a new intervention in a few schools at a time if they do not have the resources or capacity to provide the intervention to everyone at once. In this scenario, researchers could propose a similar approach for the study and note that random assignment is a fair way to select which schools will implement the intervention first. Additionally, researchers could note that participating in a study with this rigorous design can help the district understand whether the intervention is effective in its unique context before implementing the intervention districtwide. If districts and schools understand the reasons for random assignment, they may be more willing to participate in the study despite initial concerns about fairness or interruptions to collaboration.

Before recruitment begins, researchers should consider districts' and schools' potential concerns about random assignment. This includes deciding whether the study will randomly assign students, teachers, schools, or another unit to receive the intervention or to the comparison group. Although the appropriate unit of random assignment depends on the intervention and context, widening the unit of random assignment (for example, assigning schools rather than teachers or students) may be less disruptive and more palatable to districts and schools (Troyer, 2022). To guide these decisions, researchers should consult with content experts and education practitioners, as they may have insight into which unit of random assignment might be appropriate.

► **Recruitment in action: Consulting an advisory group for study design decisions.**

For a study of career navigation in adult education programs, researchers consulted with adult education practitioners, who were part of the study's advisory group, to select the unit of random assignment. Practitioners cautioned that randomly assigning career navigators within programs to receive the study's training intervention would raise concerns from programs, as navigators within a program often work together on student support plans. Based on this insight, researchers decided to widen random assignment to involve whole programs rather than career navigators within a program.◀

In addition to considering the appropriate unit of random assignment, researchers might think about how to make random assignment more appealing to districts and schools by increasing the number of participants (for example, schools or teachers) who receive the intervention. Researchers could consider increasing the proportion of the sample randomly assigned to receive the intervention or offering the intervention to schools or grades that are not participating in the study. As described earlier, they could also offer the comparison group access to the intervention after the study ends. These options may help address some of districts' and schools' concerns about fairness, but they may also increase costs, decrease statistical power, or limit the ability to examine longer-term impacts (Box 5).

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### Box 5. Trade-offs to consider for decisions about random assignment

- **Statistical power.** Widening the unit of random assignment can decrease statistical power, meaning that researchers will need to recruit a larger sample size to detect impacts (Schochet, 2008). Increasing the proportion of the sample assigned to the intervention group can also decrease power, though moderate increases are unlikely to have a substantial impact on power (Bloom, 2006).
  - **Potential for exposing the comparison group to the intervention.** Narrowing the unit of random assignment makes it easier for participants assigned to different groups to collaborate, decreasing the contrast between groups and making it harder to detect impacts (What Works Clearinghouse, 2022).
  - **Cost.** Providing the intervention to more participants during or after the study increases the costs of the study.
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## 4 Protection of student and staff privacy

As the use of education technology and online learning tools grows, districts and schools are increasingly concerned about the general safeguarding of data to protect student and staff privacy (Louisiana Department of Education, 2018). For example, nearly all states enacted new student data privacy laws between 2014 and 2020 (DQC, 2020), reflecting concerns about who can access data and how to use it. As they fulfill their responsibility to protect student and staff privacy, districts and schools may be hesitant to share data with researchers.

### Most districts interviewed noted their responsibility to protect student and staff privacy.



**Interviewer:** “What does your district take into consideration when deciding whether to participate in research?”



**Respondent:** “Data privacy and security are a challenge. The district’s legal team wants a data use agreement and will go through it line by line to ensure the project director has no malicious intent....we have to ensure everyone’s best interest is taken into account.”

**Strategy:** Articulate how the study will use and protect data, and prepare to accommodate districts' and schools' sensitivities about sharing data.

In communicating with districts and schools, researchers should convey that they share the responsibility to protect student and staff privacy. To do so, a study's memorandum of understanding (MOU) should clearly outline how researchers will use and protect data (Box 6). Researchers may need to be flexible to respect districts' individual policies around the content of the agreement. As part of negotiating the MOU at the end of study recruitment, researchers should offer to meet with districts' legal teams, school boards, and research offices to explain in detail researchers' data privacy and security procedures. Researchers should understand basic information about data security matters but also have access to their organization's legal and data experts to answer specific questions.

► **Recruitment in action: Accommodating districts' policies.** For a study of school improvement networks, researchers adapted to each participating district's policy on data sharing. Some larger districts had internal research applications and required researchers to use their templates for data sharing or data use agreements. Smaller districts often preferred an MOU or a letter of commitment from the researchers outlining the study's data collection activities. Before one district would agree to share student data, researchers had to complete training on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act to reinforce and demonstrate their understanding of important student privacy protections.◀

In addition to explaining clearly how they will use and protect data, researchers should budget sufficient staff and resources to obtain consent in a manner that adheres to districts' and schools' requirements and limits burden on participants. Researchers should be prepared to accommodate districts' and schools' varying requirements for collecting consent from staff, parents, and students. Some districts, such as [Milwaukee Public Schools](#), have developed consent form templates that outline the information researchers must include, while other districts expect researchers to develop their own consent forms. Similarly, some districts and schools allow researchers to obtain passive consent, where parents receive a notice about the study and return the signed form only if they do not want their child to participate. Others require researchers to obtain active consent, where the parent must return the signed form for their child to participate.

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### Box 6. Safeguards for collecting student and staff data

- When using data provided by districts and schools, such as test scores, request merged, de-identified data when possible.
- Remove personally identifiable information (PII) from data files in the early stages of data cleaning.
- Create a crosswalk between PII and anonymized study identifiers, then use study identifiers in place of PII in all other data files.

The [Sharing Study Data](#) guide (Neild et al., 2022) includes more strategies for collecting and sharing data.

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► **Recruitment in action: Offering options to obtain parental consent.** For a study of education technology tools to support writing, researchers offered each participating district the option to collect passive or active consent from parents. Researchers then worked with schools and teachers to determine the best mode for obtaining consent. Options included adding parent consent forms to the introductory packet of forms sent to all parents at the beginning of the school year or sending an electronic consent form through the school’s learning management system.◀

## Summary

The challenges and strategies in this brief highlight the importance of building a trusting and mutually beneficial partnership among researchers and educators. To build these partnerships, researchers should consider the perspectives and needs of educators, families, students, and communities as they design and implement studies and be ready to adapt their approach, to the extent possible, as circumstances evolve. This approach can both help support the recruitment effort and increase the chances of conducting a successful impact study that produces relevant evidence for educators and policymakers.

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## Appendix. Data sources and methods

Two data sources inform the content of the brief: (1) the authors’ and their Mathematica colleagues’ experiences from recent recruitment efforts, and (2) interviews with selected district staff about their experiences with and perspectives on participating in research. This appendix describes these data sources in more detail and the authors’ approach to analyzing the interview responses.

### Recent recruitment efforts

Though the content of the brief is informed by the authors’ and their colleagues’ overall recruitment experiences, the specific examples cited in the brief are drawn from the recruitment efforts of five randomized controlled trials (Exhibit A.1). These efforts, which occurred from 2019 to 2023, succeeded in recruiting districts, schools, or other entities to participate in the impact studies.

#### Exhibit A.1. Recruitment efforts cited in the brief

Study	Recruitment time frame	Recruitment sample size
<b>Funder: Institute of Education Sciences</b>		
<a href="#">The Effects of a Systematic Approach to Improving Quality in Afterschool Programs: An Impact Evaluation to Inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Program</a>	2020-2021	101 after-school centers from 17 21st CCLC grantees, including school districts and community-based organizations
<a href="#">Assessing Evidence of Effectiveness in Adult Education: Study of Career Navigator Training</a>	2021-2023	67 adult education providers, including school districts, postsecondary institutions, and community-based organizations
<a href="#">Impact Evaluation to Inform the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program</a>	2019-2021	95 schools from 10 school districts
<b>Funder: Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation</b>		
<a href="#">Evaluating the Development of Secondary Writing Teaching &amp; Learning Solutions</a>	2020-2021	19 schools from 2 school districts
<a href="#">Evaluation of the Networks for School Improvement Initiative</a>	2020-2021	10 school districts

### District interviews

The authors conducted six interviews from December 2022 through February 2023 with select district staff to learn about their experiences with and perspectives on participating in research. Interview respondents were selected based on their participation in recent impact studies. The staff who took part in interviews included two directors of district research offices and four directors or coordinators of other district offices. Staff who took part in interviews received a gift card to acknowledge their time.

The authors used a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviewer asked respondents about the key factors they consider when deciding whether to participate in research. To analyze these responses, the authors tabulated factors reported by at least three respondents (Exhibit A.2). Selected interview quotes are included in the brief to illustrate examples of these factors. These quotations were purposefully selected for clarity and relevance and are not representative of all responses.

**Exhibit A.2. Common factors district respondents report considering when deciding whether to participate in research**

Factor	Number of respondents
Alignment with their priorities and needs	6
Intended benefit of the research study for participants	6
Staff capacity to participate	6
Time commitment and burden for staff and students	6
Protection of student and staff privacy	5
Fairness of random assignment	5
Authority of or existing relationship with the person or group conducting the research <sup>a</sup>	5
Research design, methods, and data collection	5
Study timeline	3
Total number of respondents	6

Source: Six interviews with district administrators, December 2022 through February 2023.

Note: The table shows the factors reported by at least three respondents.

<sup>a</sup> Although most respondents reported this as a consideration, it is not included in the brief because it is not an actionable strategy within researchers’ control.