

Jumping Hurdles: Overcoming Challenges in School Based Research

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Objectives

At the conclusion of this workshop, you will be able to...

1. Identify at least three challenges faced when implementing a rigorous evaluation in a school setting.
2. Identify at least three strategies to address the presented challenges when implementing a rigorous evaluation in a school setting.
3. Discuss additional challenges and brainstorm at least one additional strategy specific to school-based research projects.

Background and Context

- Description of the study
- Evaluation design
- Characteristics of the sample



Roles of Key Players

- * School Administration
- * School-based Project Staff
- * Evaluation Team





Challenge #1: Achieving a Shared Vision

School-based research and evaluation requires the cooperation and collaboration of many different stakeholders who approach the project with varying expectations and expertise.

An Administrator's Perspective

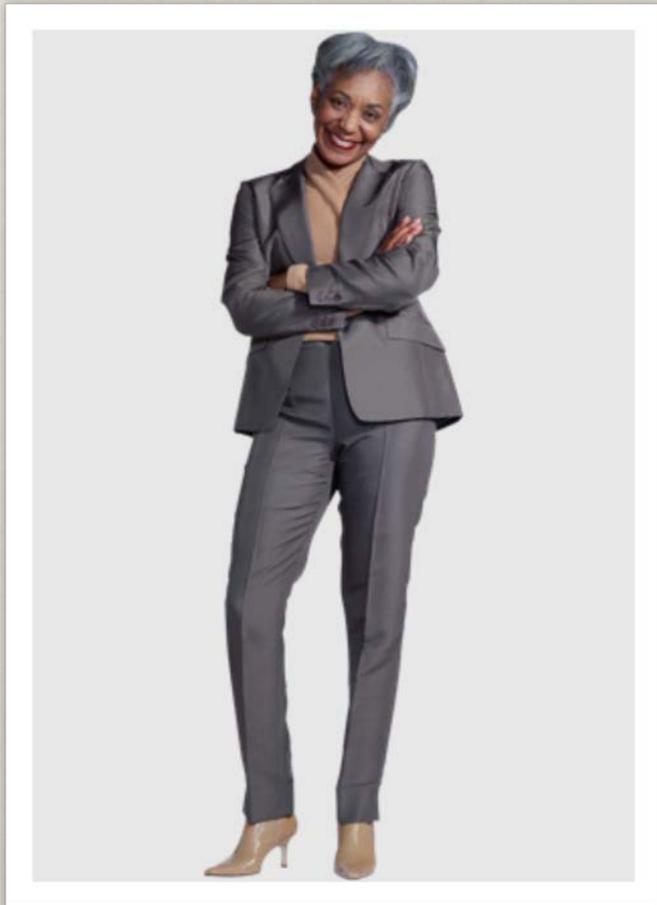
“Although most public schools today recognize the relevance of providing services for the ‘whole’ child, the public school setting is designed to provide quality instruction during the school day. There’s not much room for life skills training beyond the academic realm simple due to time constraints and state mandated initiatives.”

--District Administrator, excerpt from personal interview, 10/14/13



Primary focus of school administrators is setting and meeting academic standards.

A Project Staff Member's Perspective



“The difficult part of working with students through this project was not in doing case management, but rather ensuring the project is done with fidelity. Each student was supposed to receive the same information in the same manner. Sometimes I felt like this limited my ability to develop rapport with participants.”

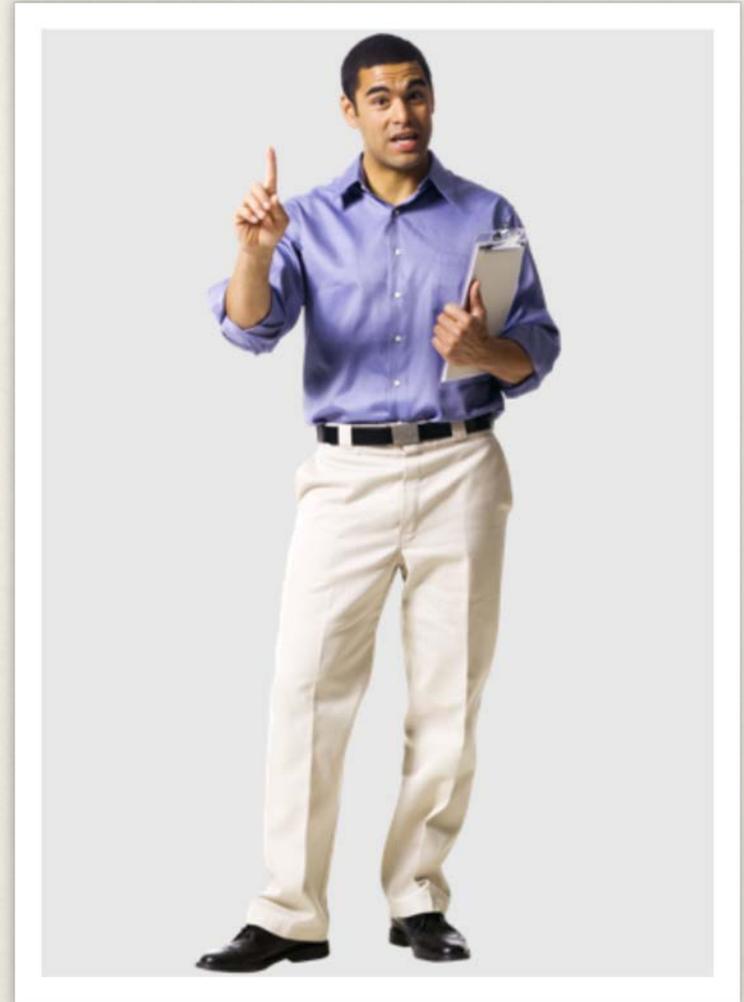
--Project recruiter, excerpt from personal interview, 10/14/13

Primary focus of project staff members is meeting the needs of participants.

An Evaluator's Perspective

“We struggled for what seemed like endless iterations of conceptualizing the project. For us, the biggest challenge was finding a way to meet the expectations of the funder while also addressing the very specific demands of school officials regarding the integration of the study in the school environment with minimal disruption of the academic process.”

--Project evaluator, excerpt from personal interview,
11/1/13



Primary focus of evaluators is maintaining a rigorous evaluation design.

Strategies for Achieving a Shared Vision

- * Maintain frequent and open communication with all stakeholders
- * Establish goals and objectives for the project based on various stakeholders input
- * Work together to establish primary and secondary goals

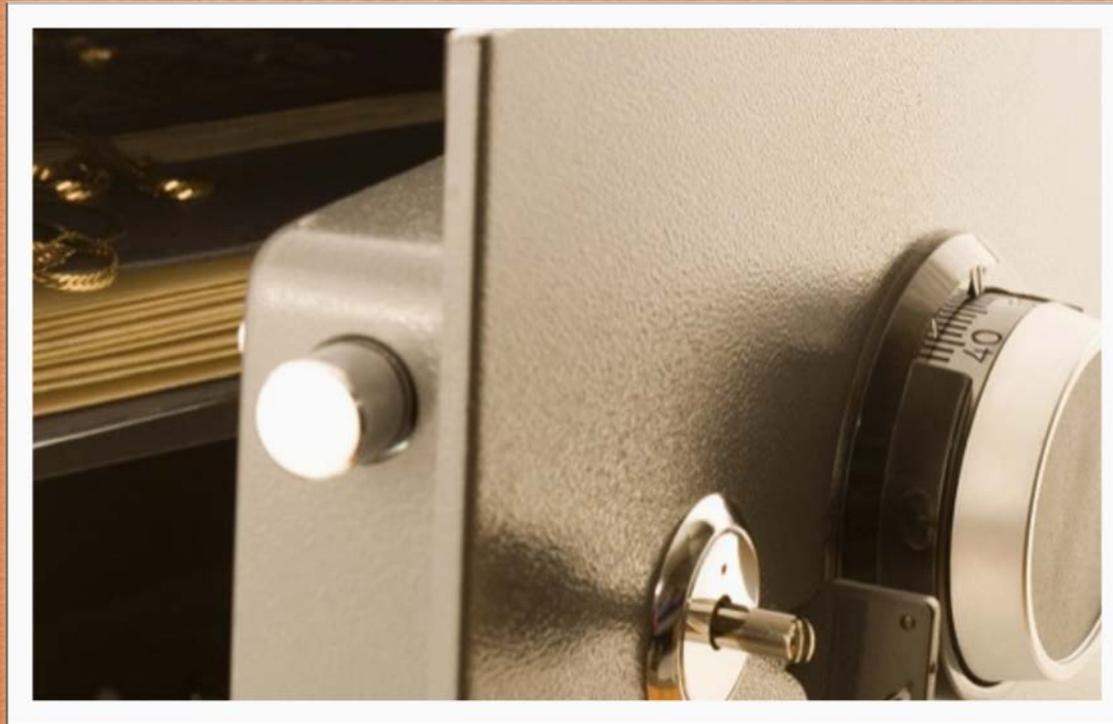
Real World Example

Funder's Objectives

- * Reduce adolescent pregnancy and risky sexual behavior
- * Implement evidence based curriculum with fidelity

Administrator's Objectives

- * Prevent school dropout and increase high school graduation rates
- * Prioritize academic curriculum and attendance



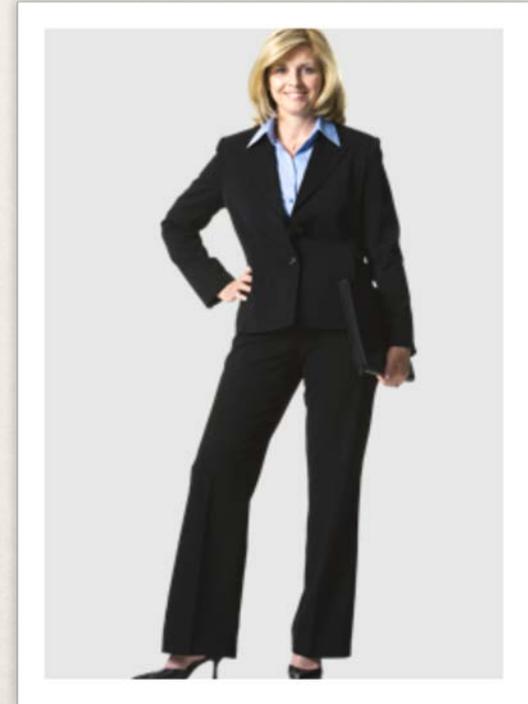
Challenge #2: Protecting Human Subjects

Attaining the parent's consent and student's assent to participate in a research study is an essential yet often difficult task associated with research studies targeting adolescent participants.

An Administrator's Perspective

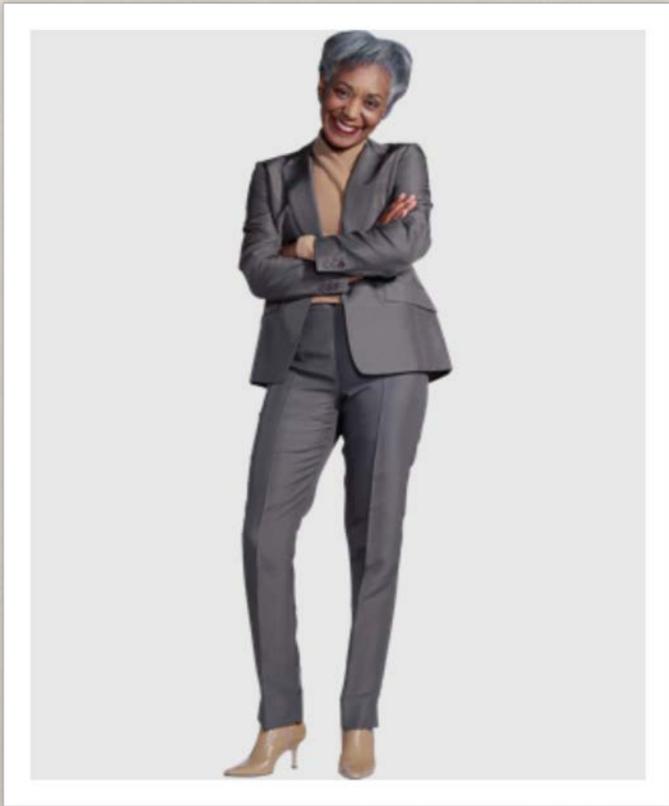
“It is imperative that students and their parents are well informed of the time away from campus as well as the one year commitment to the study. Along with informed consent and assent, we [the school district administration] also collect any travel permission forms necessary from parents and arrange a phone call home via the district's ‘tele-parent’ system to remind parents about their child's participation in the intervention.”

--District Administrator, excerpt from personal interview, 10/14/13



Primary focus of school administrators is ensuring the safety and privacy of students.

A Project Staff Member's Perspective



“Getting the paperwork returned can be a barrier. I continue to ask the students weekly for it. [I] call students to the office and then none of them show up. They are busy in class or teachers do not want to release them...Students do not turn in paperwork, but they do not want to tell you NO to participating [in the study] either.”

--Project recruiter, excerpt from personal interview, 10/14/13

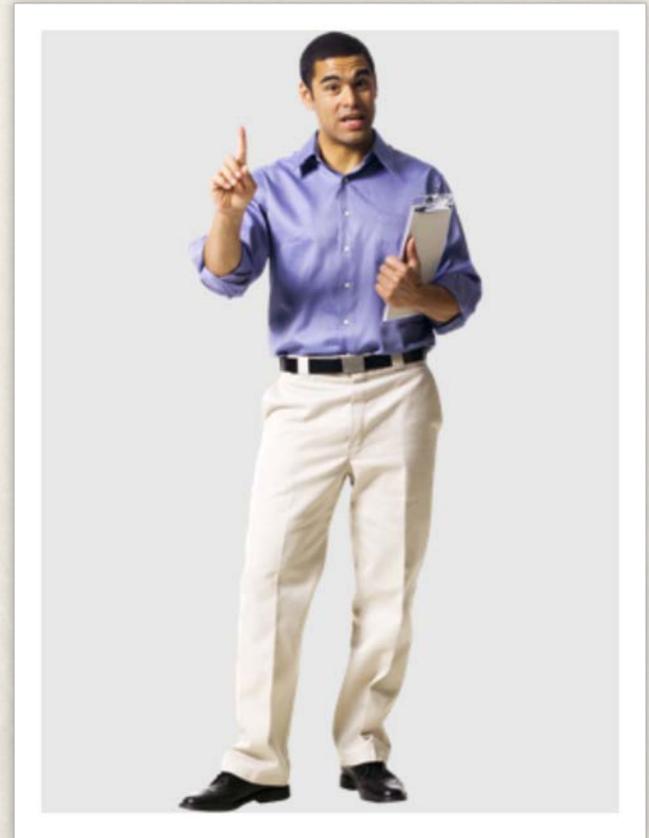
Primary focus of recruitment staff is attaining consent and assent.

An Evaluator's Perspective

“One of my main concerns during the recruitment process has always been avoiding coercion. I want to make sure that participants understand that they are under no obligation to participate in the study, even though it is being conducted at their school.”

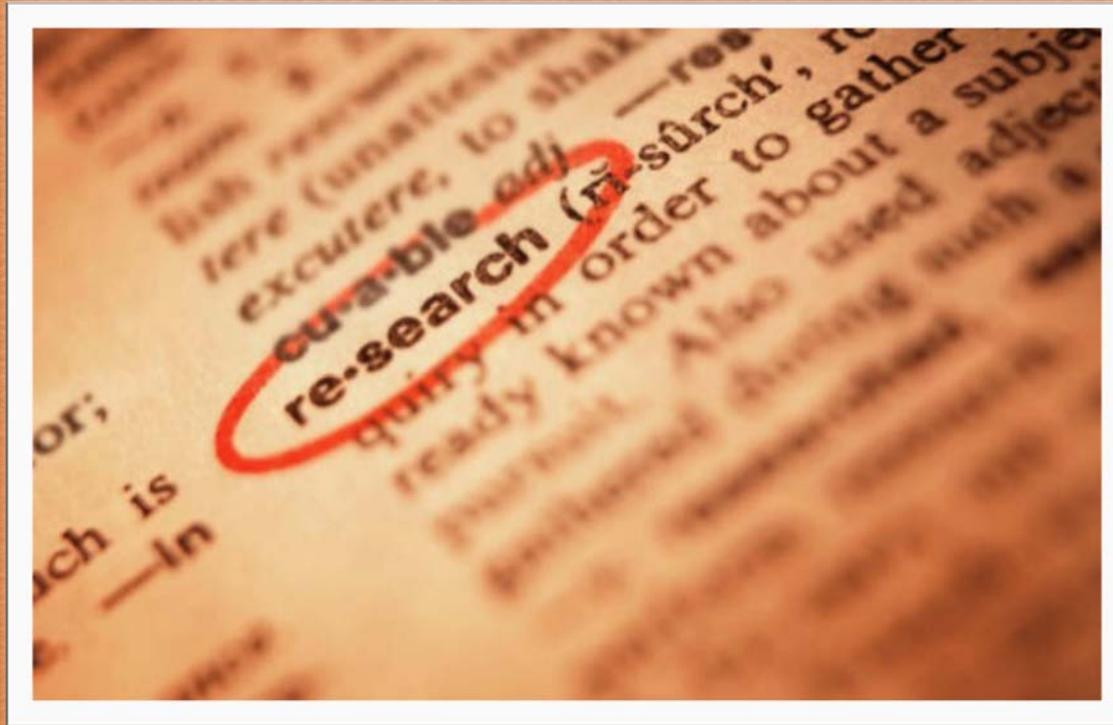
--Project evaluator, excerpt from personal interview, 11/1/13

Primary focus of evaluators is addressing coercion and reducing social desirability bias.



Strategies for Protecting Human Subjects

- * Maintain transparency in all recruitment and enrollment procedures
- * Recognize the potential for coercion and influence in the recruitment process
- * Require frequent mandatory training for all project staff with built in assessments



Challenge #3: Achieving a Randomized Design

Common sentiment among parents, teachers and school administrators is that random assignment is unjust.

An Administrator's Perspective

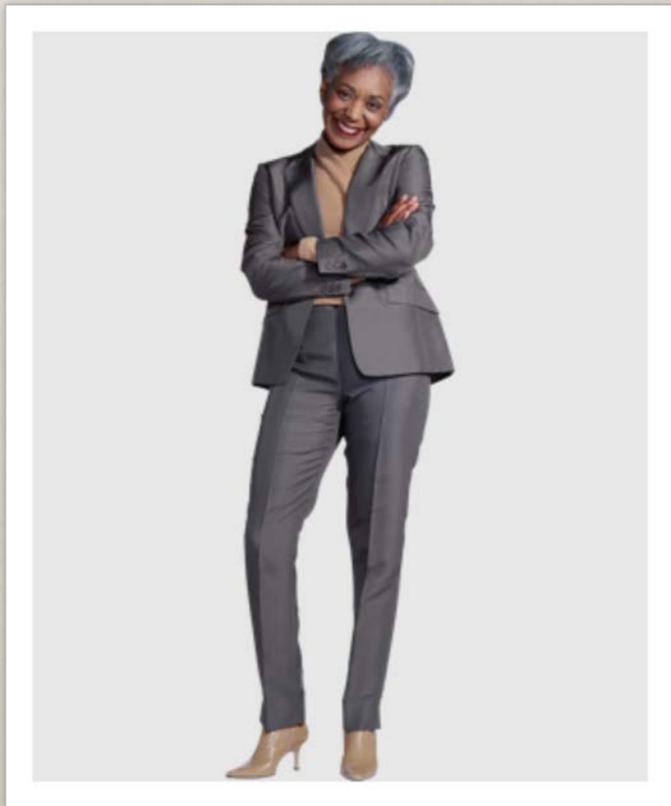
“ Public education is designed to provide equity to all school age children. Providing interventions for one subset may not be perceived as equitable. We've had to be creative in finding ways to support all students regardless of their role in the study.”

--District Administrator, excerpt from personal interview, 10/14/13

Primary focus of school administrators is equity for all students.



A Project Staff Member's Perspective



“[I have had] problems trying to get paperwork returned. I try to have all 18 and 19 year olds fill out the paperwork in the office in front of me...the 17 year olds are probably the most difficult [to get enrolled in the study] because the paperwork has to be sent home.”

--Project recruiter, excerpt from personal interview, 10/14/13

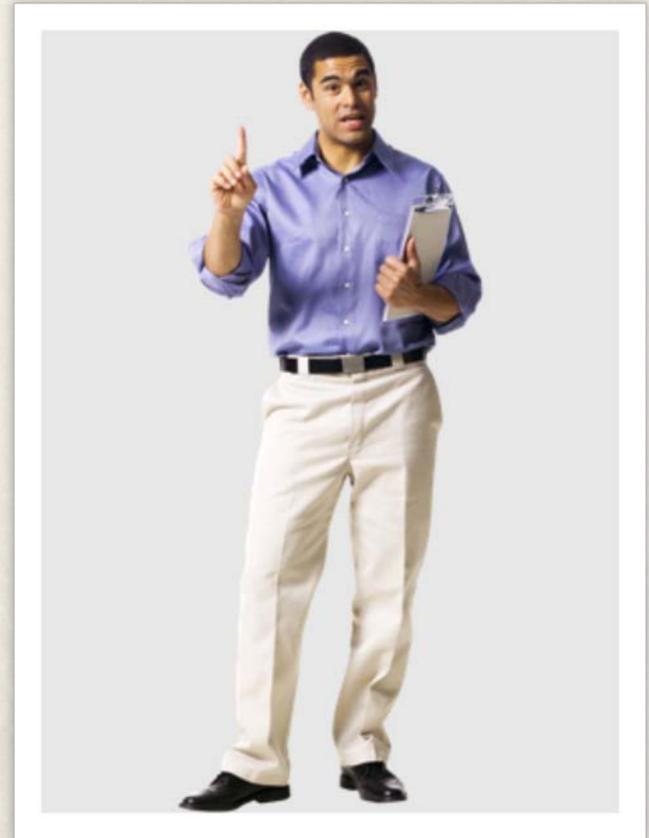
Primary focus of recruitment staff is recruiting and enrolling participants.

An Evaluator's Perspective

“One thing we focus a considerable amount of time on is making sure that selection bias does not become an issue in our study pool. We do a lot of training and reminding project staff about the importance of neutrality in the recruitment process.”

--Project evaluator, excerpt from personal interview, 11/1/13

Primary focus of evaluators is preventing selection bias and avoiding contamination.



Strategies for Achieving a Randomized Design

- * Frequently monitor characteristics of enrolled participants to identify potential selection bias
- * Recognize the potential for contamination when randomization occurs at the participant or cohort level.
- * Consider creative strategies to achieve equity concerns (i.e. various versions of delayed treatment).

Break-Out Session: Case Vignettes



Brainstorming

Identify other challenges and solutions used for other projects implemented in a school-based setting.

Questions



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