

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The purpose of this letter is to describe the various Carnegie Mellon programs in which the Children's School is engaged and to obtain your formal permission to allow your child to participate in them. As a university laboratory school associated with the Psychology Department, our mission is to support research in varied fields related to child development, as well as relevant research training and advances in research-based educational practice.

### Course Projects

As part of the *Principles of Child Development* course that is taught every semester, students learn observational methodology and practice observing and recording the behavior of the preschool and kindergarten children. In the more advanced *Practicum in Child Development*, students serve as assistants in our classrooms and learn participant observation techniques. Students with a special interest in developmental research may take *Research Methods in Child Development*. This course involves learning to conduct laboratory experiments with children. Students work in pairs or small groups to practice administering assessments wherein the child participates in a learning or problem-solving situation of some sort. The purpose, of course, is to train the student, not to obtain information about the child. Any test scores obtained under such conditions are not considered valid and are not recorded anywhere in the child's records. Indeed, the students are not even given the last names of the children.

When time and space permit, students from other university courses may conduct projects at the Children's School. Recent examples include students from a Modern Languages course observing children learning English as a second language, Design students testing prototypes for indoor/outdoor riding toys, and students from the Entertainment Technology Center play-testing a computer game designed to teach building principles. In all cases, the course faculty thoroughly review and approve student projects to ensure that they are aligned with the course goals and developmentally appropriate for the children. In addition, all course projects are discussed with Dr. Carver and have the full cooperation of the teaching staff, as well as the day-to-day monitoring of the school's administrative coordinator.

### Education Practicum Experiences

Though Carnegie Mellon does not offer degrees in education, we collaborate with other local institutions to support their Early Childhood Education majors. Students from the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, Carlow University, Chatham University, the Community College of Allegheny County, etc. can conduct brief observations, do short term practicum placements, or do their student teaching experience at the Children's School. As part of these experiences, they may simply observe regular classroom practice, but they usually work in the school with the children, assisting regular teachers in a variety of ways. Sometimes they design and carry out special projects - such as a math or science lesson - with the children.

A second type of practicum experience involves students who are training in areas other than preschool education, such as art or music. Students in these areas sometimes have special projects involving the children. For example, dental hygiene students from Pitt have given dental health presentations, music education students have taught eurhythmics, and drama students have collaborated with us on a whole school Theatre Arts Unit. All practicum experiences are coordinated by Dr. Carver, monitored by the administrative coordinator, and supervised by the Children's School teaching staff.

### Developmental and Educational Research

Periodically during the year, the children participate in research being conducted by members of the Carnegie Mellon community, with preference given to projects associated with the Psychology Department.

In one project, for example, the five year olds looked at a series of pictures and told the experimenter whether or not one picture "belonged" with another - whether a letter "belonged" with a postman, a diamond ring "belonged" with a pigeon, etc. They explained their reasons, and the experimenter was thus able to construct a theory of how young children differ from adults in their concepts of real world relations. Research descriptions from the past several years are available for review at [www.psy.cmu.edu/cs/research/index.html](http://www.psy.cmu.edu/cs/research/index.html).

### Research Integrity and Compliance

The ethical, legal and scientific issues surrounding the use of human subjects in psychological research are very complex, particularly when the subjects are children. These issues have received much attention in recent years from professional societies such as the American Psychological Association, the World Medical Association and The Society for Research in Child Development, and from Federal agencies such as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the National Science Foundation and the Institute for Education Sciences, which supports much of the developmental research at Carnegie Mellon.

All research activity involving the use of human subjects conducted on our campus must be reviewed and approved by a university committee called the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is part of the university's Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (ORIC). The IRB ensures that the research activity is conducted in accordance with federal regulations governing the protection of human subjects in research. The IRB has determined that research activity at the Carnegie Mellon Children's School is limited to experiments that pose *no more than "minimal risk"*, meaning that the probability or magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. The IRB monitors the school's research activity via our annual renewal, which includes a record of the studies conducted, the number of children in each age group participating in each study, and the number of children who decline participation or terminate a research session early.

Subjects must be **informed of the general nature** of what they are to do, why they are to do it, and what will be done with the information obtained. They must be **free to refuse** to participate or to terminate participation without any penalty, overt or covert, physical or psychological. In the case of children, we must first obtain consent from the parents - to whom we can explain the purposes of the experiment - and then from the children - to whom we can indicate our desire to have them participate and their option to agree or disagree to do so.

The child's **right to privacy** must in no way be infringed by the research procedures. The school provides researchers with children's first names and last initials, birth dates, gender, sibling status, and languages spoken, basically so they can check whether these characteristics correlate with the children's performance. Occasionally, the teachers are also asked to rate children's behavioral characteristics, such as levels of curiosity, attention, or compliance. In all of the experiments, only the principal investigator and the research assistants have access to the list that connects individual names to experimental data. In all further analysis, the child's identity is concealed, and experimental records are maintained separately from all other school records. No information about the child's performance is ever revealed to other children, teachers, or parents, beyond the fact of participation itself, and no information from the child's health records, conference reports, or other school records, beyond the basic demographics mentioned above, are shared with researchers.

In addition to the IRB approval and the written parental consent, further approval must come from Dr. Carver regarding the participation at any particular time of any specific child, depending upon the teacher's assessment of the appropriateness of the child's participation at that time. Dr. Carver's assessment focuses on the consistency of the research activities with the Children's School philosophy and the potential impact of one study on another or of participating in multiple similar studies. Finally, the children always are asked, in the presence of their teachers, if they want to participate on a particular day. With very few exceptions, children enjoy these "special games" and typically they eagerly volunteer to participate.

You may find all of this rather elaborate and formal, but we want you to be aware of the extensive consideration we have given these issues and of the great responsibility we feel in involving your child in our programs. In actual practice, scientific research in the Children's School is fun for both the children and the adults involved.

In a typical experimental session, the child and experimenter(s) go to a small playroom within the Children's School where the child is presented with some task and asked to "play a game". The experimenter usually records the child's responses on paper, via computer keystrokes, and with audio, video, or eye-tracking equipment. The child is watched carefully for signs of worry or boredom and is always free to refuse to participate. As you might imagine, however, the children have such a good time that refusals are extremely rare. Indeed, participation is viewed by the children as one of the "goodies" in the Children's School.

Please carefully review and sign the enclosed **consent form** to indicate your willingness to let your child participate in the research as described above. Then return one copy of the completed form to the Children's School as soon as possible, while keeping the other for your records. If you would like further information about the experiments or the general procedures outlined here, please feel free to call me (412-268-3151) or Sharon Carver (412-268-2199). The school's web site also offers detailed information about the research policies and procedures, sample studies and results, etc. ([www.psy.cmu.edu/cs/research/index.html](http://www.psy.cmu.edu/cs/research/index.html)).

Occasionally, you or your child may be invited to participate in additional research projects that do not fall within the parameters of this consent form. Such cases might involve researchers interested in studying parents or older siblings, researchers using new technologies such as near-infrared spectroscopy<sup>1</sup> (NIRS), researchers from outside Carnegie Mellon, researchers collaborating with a commercial company that would involve a conflict of interest (e.g., Disney, Google, etc.), or research funded by agencies that require separate consent for each study. Dr. Carver considers all such projects on a case-by-case basis and then sends the consent forms to families for consideration.

Carnegie Mellon's laboratory school is a valuable resource for university research, training, and practical applications of scientific theories. We aim for excellence in all aspects of our research policy and practice, as we seek to contribute meaningfully and significantly to the advancement of developmental and educational science.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Scheier, Ph.D.  
Professor and Head, Department of Psychology

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<sup>1</sup> A portable, non-invasive method of assessing brain function that can be used even with infants.

**CARNEGIE MELLON CHILDREN'S SCHOOL**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH**

My child, \_\_\_\_\_, has my permission to participate in the educational and research projects conducted by the faculty, researchers, and students of Carnegie Mellon University within the Psychology Department Laboratory School during the 2013/2014 academic year.

I have read and understand the letter from Dr. Michael Scheier describing the nature of the research activity at the Children's School. I understand that the Children's School is a laboratory school context in which research and experimentation is an integral part of the school's mission. I am aware that I may call Dr. Sharon Carver (412-268-2199) or Dr. Scheier (412-268-3151) if I have any questions. I have been informed of the general nature of these projects, their operating procedures and their administration, and I am aware that Dr. Carver will provide additional detail via the monthly newsletter or special memo prior to the conduct of the studies. In the case of final course projects, when the research descriptions are not available in advance, I understand that the research descriptions will be sent home with my child after participation in a specific study.

I understand that

- (1) by signing this consent form in advance of the study design, I am relying on Dr. Carver's professional expertise in determining the appropriateness of the research activities,
- (2) all studies conducted at the Children's School have been deemed by the Institutional Review Board as posing no more than "minimal risk" to my child,
- (3) my child has the right to refuse participation or to terminate participation in any specific study at any time without penalty,
- (4) researchers will only receive basic demographic data and necessary teacher ratings about my child, who will be identified only by first name and last initial,
- (4) my child may be audio or video-taped during classroom activities or research sessions, as well as having data recorded by a computer or eye tracker,
- (5) no specific data about my child will be released to me or to the school personnel, and
- (6) my child's anonymity will be maintained in all analyses and presentations of research data, including audio and videotapes, by using participant numbers rather than names.

I have been provided with an additional copy of this consent form for my records. I am aware that I may direct questions about Carnegie Mellon's research procedures to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (412-268-5460).

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(Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian)

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(Date)

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