

# Heller Research Associates

Educational Research, Evaluation, Assessment

Joan I. Heller, M.A., Ph.D.  
Director

Fall 2008

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child's science teacher is taking a science class as part of a research study. The research examines ways to improve student achievement by strengthening the training that teachers receive in science. This project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. I am writing to introduce you to the study, explain how it may involve your child, and answer any questions you may have.

Please read this letter and fill out the form on the last page to indicate whether you give consent for your child to participate in the project. **Forms should be returned to your child's teacher within two weeks.**

If you have questions or concerns about the project after reading this letter, please contact me at the number or email address provided below, or contact your child's teacher directly. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Joan I. Heller, Ph.D.  
510-873-0808  
jheller@edservices.org



**How the study will involve your child.** As part of the research study, the class will take *two science quizzes* (no more than 30 minutes apiece). Your child's teacher will be teaching a classroom unit on force and motion, and we may also *observe and audio-record two of the lessons in this unit*. All lessons will be those that ordinarily take place as part of regular classroom activity.

We are not studying individual students' behavior in the classroom—we are interested in seeing how teachers use in the classroom what they learn in courses for teachers. Observing the lessons and audio-recording the classes are good ways to do that.

A member of our research staff will also *talk with a small number of students* outside of the classroom to understand how courses for teachers may influence students' science learning. In these 20-minute interviews, students who are selected at random from the class will be asked to explain to the researcher their answers to some force and motion problems. The researcher will be taking notes and making audio recordings of the things the student says. Each student's participation is voluntary—if your child is selected for this part of the study, he or she does not have to talk with the researcher if you or your child does not consent, and she or he can stop at any time. Also, the student's responses are completely confidential. What a student does and says will not be shared with the teacher or anyone else other than researchers, and will not affect their grade in the science course.

**Adding to classroom instruction.** The science course your child's teacher is taking is designed to help him or her become an even better science teacher. We will work with the teacher to make sure that the audio recording does not interfere with classroom instruction. It has been our experience that students adapt very quickly to the presence of an observer and audio-recorder. Whenever we record, we will be present for the entire lesson so that we do not disturb the class by setting up or removing equipment while instruction is underway. All team members are experienced in classroom research, and will be able to record in the classroom with minimal interruption.

**How the data will be used.** We will use the quiz and classroom data to help us learn how to better support science teachers and student learning. Excerpts from the audio



recordings may be included in teacher education and research publications. Recordings may also be played for graduate students in teacher education programs and at meetings of educators and educational researchers. No recording will be used commercially in any way.

**Confidentiality.** We will keep the information we collect entirely confidential. Your child's name will not appear with any quiz, recording, transcript from an observation, report, or other publication. If any students are called by name on the audio recording, their names will be erased from the recording within three days of the class observation. No names will appear in transcripts of the audio recordings. Therefore, although it will be possible to hear students' voices on the recordings, the voices will not be identifiable. All student names and ID numbers will be stored in a locked cabinet or password-protected computer file, to which only the research staff will have access.\*

**What we're asking you to do.** We hope you will agree to let us make use of your child's data. This research is intended to benefit students and schools by contributing to the improvement of teaching. Student quizzes and recordings of actual classroom interactions are important parts of such research. I hope that you will consent to letting us use short segments of classroom audio recordings in occasional research presentations.

In addition, if your child is selected for the brief interview, we are asking your permission for one of our researchers to ask him or her questions about force and motion.

We envision no risks to your child from being recorded in the classroom. Your child cannot be identified based only on these audio recordings, and their name, their teacher's name, and the name of their school will never be revealed. The audiotapes will focus on academic instruction in science. All interactions are those that ordinarily take place as part of regular classroom activity.

The interviews also pose little risk to students. The questions we will ask about students' science ideas are those that students typically are asked in classrooms or homework about force and

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\* Responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law.



motion, and there will be no grading or evaluation of the students' answers. If a student experiences discomfort at any time while answering the questions, he or she may stop the interview.

A consent form is included with this letter. We hope that you will offer your consent for your child's participation.

Thank you for considering this request.



Joan I. Heller, M.A., Ph.D.  
Director

## Parent/Guardian Consent Form Force and Motion 2008-09

I have read the description of this research.

I DO       I DO NOT consent to my child's science quiz data being used in this research study.

I DO       I DO NOT consent to your asking my child to talk about his or her science ideas and audio recording my child's responses.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Science teacher name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or guardian name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
School name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or guardian signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Please return this form **within two weeks** to:*

[Teacher name]

[School name]

Teacher ID Number: [ID number]

