

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Who should I contact if I'm interested in conducting research in Durham Public Schools?** Contact the DPS Research and Accountability Department. **DO NOT** go straight to principals, teachers, department heads, or other school officials. All research in Durham Public Schools **MUST** be reviewed by the RDA department and cannot begin without RDA approval.

**What is considered research?** Any investigation into students or staff in Durham Public Schools is considered research. This includes all data collection involving DPS students or staff.

**What's the difference between external and internal research?** External research is research requested by agencies outside of Durham Public Schools, such as colleges and universities. It can also be research conducted by a DPS staff member for purposes not related to his or her job, such as completing a dissertation.

**Why are all these procedures necessary?** There are several very important reasons for the research proposal procedures. First, instructional time must be protected. Without the procedures, we would have no way to protect students and teachers from an overwhelming amount of research. Secondly, all research must be of high quality, aligned with the Strategic Plan, and benefit the school system or individual school(s). Third, the procedures highlight privacy laws that researchers must be aware of, and it allows us to establish clear agreements between DPS and researchers.

**How do you make your decisions?** The Research Review Committee will review the proposal based on the following criteria:

1. There **MUST** be ***minimal*** impact on instructional time.
2. The research should be beneficial to DPS and aligned to the Strategic Plan. Risks to DPS and its students **MUST** be minimal.
3. Research conducted primarily to add to the general body of literature, without significant benefit to DPS, its schools or departments, may be considered. However, they will be considered low priority proposals and have a very low chance of being approved.
4. All research **MUST** be completed before April 30<sup>th</sup>. Research proposals will not be reviewed during the months of May - June.
5. All research must support the Strategic Plan and best practices.
6. All research **MUST** be legal, ethical, and in line with DPS policy. The privacy of research participants must be protected at all times. Requests for data involving personal student data and information about their families will not be approved. **(No research involving personal and/or controversial student/family data will be approved.)**
7. Researchers must be qualified to conduct research in the school district. The design and implementation of the proposal must be well constructed and acceptable to DPS.

8. Any cost to DPS MUST be approved. Generally, proposals involving monetary cost to DPS are not approved. Research requiring the participation of large numbers of DPS employees, students and parents is also given low priority status. Research requiring a large amount of time from administrators, teachers, parents and/or students is rarely considered for approval.
9. Research requiring particular risk for students, teachers, schools, parents, etc., such as, external research dealing with self-worth, family/personal problems, race, sexual behavior or orientation, illegal activities, etc. Benefits provided by external research in these areas do not compensate for the potential risks to participants.
10. Research must be approved by school principals or district administrators involved in the proposed study.
11. Data collection for a class project of an individual university or college student is generally not approved. However, observations and archival records may be acceptable. Approval for surveys will not be granted.

**Who reviews research proposals and make the final decisions?** The Coordinator of Local Assessments, Grants and Program Evaluation completes the initial screening of all internal and external research proposals. Viable proposals are reviewed by the Research Review Committee. Input from principals, district office staff and teachers may also be used to make decisions regarding research approval

**Will I be contacted if my proposal is denied?** Yes. You will be notified in writing. You may request reconsideration of your proposal if you can provide additional pertinent information and/or clarify information you feel may have been misunderstood during the review. Reconsidered proposals must be resubmitted with suggested changes by the next research proposal deadline.

**What happens if my proposal is approved?**

1. You will be notified in writing. You will be asked to sign a Statement of Agreement stating the responsibilities of both DPS and you/your organization.
2. You should contact the principal or district office staff involved in the research. Present your approval notification and fully explain your research proposal BEFORE beginning the project.
3. Keep in mind that **final approval rests with the school principal** or other parties involved the research.
4. All meetings with school staff, students and parents must be arranged in advance. Meeting times must be convenient to and approved by participants. A research monitor must be designated.
5. Full disclosure must be given to parents to ensure informed consent. Parents must sign a parental permission form granting permission for their child to participate in the research. All signed consent forms must be kept on file with the research monitor.

## **LEGAL AND ETHICAL RISKS and OBLIGATIONS**

The study shall conform to federal regulations, DPS policy and sound educational research practice that ensures negligible risks for those involved and family/pupil privacy and protection rights. To this end, the originator of the request shall have the qualifications necessary for working in the school system as an educational researcher. Specific sections of the law may be found on the internet under the following headings.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)

Office for Human Protection - Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects  
American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct

Although case-by-case, district approval shall be granted until specified data collection has concluded OR for a maximum of one-year from the approval letter's date, whichever comes first. After one-year the researcher must submit for approval a request for extension. For any research extending beyond one school year, the researcher shall submit an annual progress report along with a request for extension.

District approval does not constitute approval for the study to be conducted in any specific school. Researchers must obtain written approval of principals and others involved, prior to conducting research in the district. The researcher shall present the Research Committee's approval letter and briefing materials to school principals or department heads before or upon an entrance meeting at the school or collection site. The school or district administrator shall have several days to notify the researcher or Local Assessments, Grants and Program Evaluation Coordinator if the school/entity does not wish to participate. The highest-ranking individual (usually the school principal) at the site of data collection must be briefed throughout the project's duration in his/her school. Data collection must be scheduled far enough in advance to allow for adequate planning at the school or classroom site.

If students participate, copies of all approved and completed informed consent forms shall be stored by the researcher for possible district review. Again, the researcher will be responsible for archiving and presenting this information upon request. No personal information on students shall be made available until parental permission forms are secured for each participant.

Confidentiality of student records and all student information shall be observed. The privacy and rights of individuals and schools shall be respected. Data with student, employee, school, or other personal identifiers shall not be reported or presented (school identifiers may be reported upon explicit approval). In addition to maintaining complete anonymity, all personal-identifying data shall be destroyed upon completion of analysis and the final report.

When conducting research in schools, individuals shall abide by DPS standards of professional conduct and dress. Failure to do so will be cause for immediate termination of the study and retraction of research approval.

The Coordinator of Local Assessments, Grants and Program Evaluation may withdraw district approval at any time and for any reason. If approval is terminated, all research and accompanying activities involving the district, the external researcher, and/or the external agency will cease in DPS. Note, the district does not merge, compile, or collect data for external research, unless required by law or contractually based. All research approval or denial is determined at the sole discretion of the district's research committee. Due to the number of request received throughout the year, denial or rejection letters may or may not indicate reasons for denial or recommendations for improvement. All research approval or denials are made on the merits of the information contained in the application. Therefore, the committee does not contact the researcher if questions arise. The application is the source of information on which all decisions are made. **Again, all research approval or denial is determined at the sole discretion of the district's research committee.** Below is a sample list of external projects typically not approved.

- ♦ Data collection involving a loss of instructional time for students and DPS employees.
- ♦ Research requiring district resources (DPS employees, students, parents time AND/OR large numbers of participants)
- ♦ Research requiring particular risk for students, teachers, schools, parents, etc., such as, external research dealing with self-worth, family/personal problems, race, sexual behavior or orientation, illegal activities,

etc. Benefits provided by external research in these areas do not compensate for the potential risks to participants.

- ♦ Research scheduled to be conducted in the second semester (Jan. thru June).

Upon conclusion of the research, a copy of the final report will be submitted at no charge to the Coordinator of Local Assessments, Grants and Program Evaluation. **A copy of the final report must be submitted within two months of final data collection.** However, if a more formal report is to be released (dissertation, thesis, book, journal article, etc.), the author shall provide DPS a formal copy at no charge. The researcher further agrees to release this report for use by DPS without remuneration.

Furthermore, all data and databases are to remain secure at all times. If the school district supplies extent data or a database(s), then upon completion of the original dissertation, study, or research, the database(s) will be returned to the Coordinator with no copies remaining. In the event a researcher wishes to publish using extent data via analyses or methods not originally produced or approved within the study, Durham Public Schools reserves the right to disallow/allow access to data for further analyses and reporting. In the event you wish to publish using analyses or methods not originally produced or approved within the study, and you receive DPS approval, the Coordinator or a representative will be assigned to work with you as a second author and/or consultant.

Finally, in exchange for the cooperation of DPS, the researcher shall be prepared to assist the school and/or district through unpaid volunteer projects (e.g., conducting a workshop for staff regarding the research and implications for practice/policy). That is, the researcher agrees to present his/her results to the district's management team and possibly provide personal feedback and a workshop to principals and others involved in the study.