

REQUESTS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM (WCPSS)

*These procedures are administered by Evaluation & Research Department,
5625 Dillard Drive, Crossroads 1, Cary, NC 27518*

- **BE SURE TO READ THE COMPLETE SET OF PROCEDURES**
- **THE CONFIDENTIAL NATURE OF RECORDS MUST BE OBSERVED AT ALL TIMES.**

How is research defined?

Research is defined as any data collection from or about WCPSS students or staff.

The following activities are not considered research:

- Observations, class visitations by university classes or by individuals in such classes where no data collection is involved. Contacts regarding these visits should be made with the school principal.
- Piloting of WCPSS materials or techniques where no data collection for external purposes occurs. Contacts should be made with the office of the Chief Academic Officer at (919) 850-1796.

With whom does initial contact occur?

The first contact regarding research should always be with the Evaluation and Research Department (919-850-1798) rather than directly with school staff, principals, or individual staff members.

What are the purposes of these procedures?

These procedures are established to govern and coordinate research conducted in WCPSS. One primary purpose is to protect staff and students' time from unauthorized or excessive data collection and thereby protect instructional time. A second purpose is to review the request in light of current laws covering privacy and research. A final purpose is to ensure that the research is of high quality and will improve educational practices.

How does someone make a research project application?

- Complete the electronic application form and print a paper copy.
- Have the paper application signed by a qualified sponsor, if applicable. Student research projects always require a sponsor. A sponsor may be a college or university faculty member, an agency staff member, or a WCPSS staff member. Faculty members and independent contractors do not need a sponsor for their research, although they may include one if they prefer.
- Attach copies of your IRB/OMB approval letter.
- Attach copies of all questionnaires, tests, or data collection instruments to be used, if any.

- If data will be collected about or from individual students, active parental consent will be required and a copy of a proposed parent consent letter should be attached to the application. This letter should permit the parent to give full and informed consent. Applications that include passive consent letters will not be approved. The final parent consent must include the following:
 - ▶ Signed and dated parental (or guardian) consent form;
 - ▶ Description of the data collection process and specific student data needed;
 - ▶ Reason for the data collection or release;
 - ▶ Information specifying the persons and institution to which the information will be released; and
 - ▶ Must be active consent (rather than passive).

Submit **one copy** of the completed application packet to the Evaluation and Research Department's email address at: wcpss-data-accountability@wcpss.net

Who reviews applications?

The Assistant Superintendent of Evaluation and Research has established a Research Review Committee. Staff members were selected from among those most likely to be knowledgeable about or concerned with the proposed research subject or population. The committee will submit comments and recommendations to the Assistant Superintendent.

What is the basis for decisions?

The criteria for review are as follows:

- The study results should have high value to the particular school or to the school system as a whole. Studies benefiting education in general, rather than WCPSS or its schools specifically, will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but are given a much lower priority.
- The study should be compatible with WCPSS policy and sound educational practices.
- The relative cost-benefit to the school system should be favorable.
- The design and instrumentation of the project should be sound and acceptable to the school system.
- The originator of the request should have the status and qualifications necessary for working in the school system as an educational researcher.
- Except by special arrangement, no data collection on students and/or staff will be allowed between April 15 and September 1. Please plan your research accordingly.

What projects are usually not approved?

Regardless of whether the proposal fits one of the categories already described, the following projects are usually denied:

- Data collection as part of an individual college or university student's class project, unless this data collection is solely through observations or archival records (no surveys), or unless one is a WCPSS staff member/teacher.
- Research that would require a large amount of teacher time or involves large numbers of students to complete a test, questionnaire, or other type of instrument will not be approved, in most cases.
- Data collection involving a loss of instructional time for students.

- Data collection that includes requests for personal information about students or their families. For example, projects dealing with self-esteem, family problems, personal values, sexual behavior or orientation, illegal alcohol and/or drug use on the part of students or their parents, whether students have engaged in or witnessed other illegal activities are typically not approved. While research on these topics may be important, they do not generally provide adequate benefits to offset the risks of the research.
- Research involving physical and/or physiological measurements of students.

Who makes the decision?

The Assistant Superintendent of Evaluation and Research and/or the Research Review Committee will examine the committee members' recommendations and determine whether the application should be accepted, rejected, or accepted with stipulations/revisions.

- If the application is approved or denied, the committee will notify the applicant in writing.
- If it appears that the project could be approved with minimal changes, the applicant may be advised to reapply.
- In some cases, the Assistant Superintendent and/or the Research Review Committee may convene to hear an appeal of the decision.

What happens after central administrative approval?

- If the study is administratively approved, the researcher is notified in writing and must provide a copy of the approval letter to the school principals or departments involved.
- Administrative approval does not necessarily constitute approval for the study to be conducted in any specific school. Researchers must obtain the approval from principals and others involved, prior to conducting research in specific schools.
- Meetings, interviews, and the administration of instruments, etc., must be scheduled far enough in advance to allow for adequate planning at the schools involved.
- Active parental consent of direct participation by any student in the research project is usually required. The researcher will provide schools with sufficient copies of an IRB approved parental consent form. At least two copies of the form per student should be maintained as records. The principal or her/his designee will be responsible for disseminating forms to the students and obtaining parental consent; one form will be placed in the student's file and another one maintained by the researcher.

What are the requirements while the project is being conducted?

- ***Confidentiality of student records must be observed, and the privacy and rights of the individuals and schools must be respected. Data with student names or identities must be destroyed when they are no longer needed.***
- Researchers who intend to carry out research at a school site must register and submit to the volunteer screening process. In planning a research timeline please allow for the completion of this process at: <http://www.wcpss.net/volunteer/index.html>
- While conducting research studies in the schools, individuals should abide by WCPSS standards of professional conduct and dress. Failure to do so will be sufficient cause for termination of the research study.
- Any violation of procedures noted by teachers or other participants in the study should be reported to the school principal. The principal should then, if indicated, discuss such infractions with the Assistant Superintendent of Evaluation and Research.

What other obligations does the researcher have to the school system in return for its cooperation?

Some research projects are conducted as partnerships between school or district staff and researchers not officially affiliated with the school system. However, most studies are not of this type and staff spend time and energy assisting the researcher. Often, student time is used, as well. Researchers should be prepared to assist the school or district through some unpaid volunteer projects (such as conducting a workshop for staff) in exchange for the cooperation of the school(s) involved in the research study. The specific details will need to be worked out on a case-by-case basis with the schools or departments involved.

What happens after the first study?

- Abstracts of the results must be provided to WCPSS upon completion of the study. A copy of any full report is also appreciated, but the abstract or summary is essential. Please submit by email to wcpss-data-accountability@wcpss.net at the completion of the study.
- For any study extending beyond a given school year, the researcher should submit a report in the form of an annual progress report, the first of which is due one year from the date on the approval letter received from the Assistant Superintendent.
- The applicant agrees to release this report for use or publication by WCPSS without remuneration.
- If the study is later reported in a more complete form, (e.g. book, dissertation, journal article, etc.) the author should include an appropriate acknowledgement of or reference for the data received from WCPSS. The researcher must also provide WCPSS with an electronic copy and/or a hard copy of the completed work product. WCPSS also encourages the researcher to provide personal feedback to the principals and teachers involved in a study.
- The faculties of local universities and colleges conducting research in WCPSS are encouraged to refer students to the Assistant Superintendent for Evaluation and Research at a point in their graduate program prior to the finalization of thesis or dissertation plans, in order that closer coordination between district needs and research efforts can occur. The office will discuss topics of concern to WCPSS with researchers upon request or refer them to appropriate administrative or supervisory staff for such discussion.
- Discussing a potential project with the Assistant Superintendent before details are finalized may assist a researcher in coming up with a viable design.

These procedures shall in no way be interpreted as in conflict with open records requirements. Request for public information extant in system records and involving no school research should be directed to the Public Information Office.