

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE – AP802-1

Educational Research in Schools

Area: Student Services
Policy Reference: Educational Research in Schools (PO802)

Approved: Dec. 1, 2003
Revised: Nov. 9, 2015; June 8, 2020

1. Purpose

The purpose of this administrative procedure is to outline the process for conducting research within the Durham Catholic District School Board. It is written in accordance with the guiding principles in the Educational Research in Schools Policy (PO802) which supports and encourages quality educational research in schools.

2. Definitions

Research Advisory Committee – a committee who reports to the Director of Education or designate, reviews all proposals for research to be conducted in the schools and provides recommendations to approve a research project based on the established criteria contained in this administrative procedure.

Research – the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.

Survey – the investigation of the opinions or experiences of a group of people by asking them questions.

3. Procedures

3.1 The Research Advisory Committee will be composed of at least:

- a) the Chief Psychologist (Chair)
- b) one elementary school administrator
- c) one secondary school administrator
- d) Psychological Services staff with research background

- 3.2 The term of membership on the Research Advisory Committee is two years renewable, excluding the Chief Psychologist.
- 3.3 At the request of the Chair, the Research Advisory Committee will meet to:
- a) review research proposals and approve those which meet the criteria outlined;
 - b) identify areas where research would be of potential value to the system;
 - c) offer advice and assistance, when appropriate, on matters of research methodology, statistical analysis, etc.;
 - d) monitor the quantity of research requests and approvals to ensure a fair distribution of research studies throughout Durham Catholic District School Board schools;
 - e) play a role in protecting staff and students from invasion of privacy and from unwanted and excessive demands on their time by researchers;
 - f) promote research and a culture of inquiry in schools; and
 - g) receive interim and final reports from researchers on approved research studies.
- 3.4 Four criteria are used by the Committee when reviewing proposals:
- a) Relevance – to education in general; to education in the Durham Catholic District School Board; consistency with the Board’s policies, priorities, and strategic plan; beneficial in some way to the Durham Catholic District School Board;
 - b) Protection of Staff and Students – reasonable expectations for staff and student time; minimal disruption to school program; minimal degree of intrusiveness; protection from physical and mental discomfort or harm; free from sensitive or offensive items and activities; free from racist, sexist, religious, or other bias; active, informed written consent; protection of confidentiality of participants;
 - c) Study Design – acceptable overall design; appropriate instruments and instructions to participants including those with special needs; appropriate qualitative or quantitative approaches; acceptable research procedures and statistical analysis; research questions clear; sufficient information provided; sample selection;
 - d) Feedback of Results – process for feedback to schools, individuals, Committee.
- 3.5 If the proposal is deferred or rejected, the applicant will be provided with an explanation. If the study is accepted, the researcher will be informed once any required changes have been resubmitted to the Committee. The Chair of the Research Advisory Committee will be responsible for preparing written notification to applicants on behalf of the Director/designate. Principals of the

schools will be notified and their participation encouraged. These principals may decide to participate or decline the involvement of staff and students at those schools. Individual potential participants (staff members, students, and parents) also have the right to decline to be involved in the study without negative consequences for declining.

3.6 Projects Requiring Research Advisory Committee Approval: Unless exempted from this procedure (see Section 3.8 Exemptions), applications are required from researchers or students from:

- a) external agencies or institutions (e.g., University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Trent University, University of Toronto, Addiction Research Foundation, District Health Council, etc.);
- b) co-op students from colleges and universities conducting research;
- c) Board staff conducting research for outside agencies or institutions, including research requirements for a degree, or when on a leave of absence from the Board for this purpose; and
- d) parent(s)/guardian(s) or individual community members, members of local associations, and school councils.
- e) online, written/verbal survey material intended for students that originate from external sources, including board staff who are conducting research as part of the requirements for a degree.

3.7 Proposal Qualification Notes

- a) It is recognized that small community groups and some individuals may have difficulty in complying fully with the application requirements, and this will be taken into consideration when reviewing submitted proposals.
- b) The research proposal must have the prior ethics approval of the applying agency or institution if external to the Board.

3.8 Research that is Exempt from Research Advisory Committee Approval

- a) Research as directed by the Board or the Ministry of Education is exempt (e.g., EQAO assessments).
- b) The regular activities which teachers and students conduct in their own classrooms as a matter of assessing and evaluating student's progress or their own instructional effectiveness are exempt. Furthermore, if the results of such activities are not disseminated beyond the school in which they are conducted unless the identifying information is removed from the

report, these activities are exempted if they are approved and supervised by the school principal.

- c) The Durham Catholic District School Board values “Student Voice” and from time to time distributes survey materials to students. Such surveys will be in accordance with Board mission, vision, and values and policy and regulation related to the protection of privacy.
 - i. All online, written/verbal survey material intended for students must be thoroughly screened by appropriate administrative/managerial staff to ensure that the content and the intended outcomes are consistent with the mission, vision, and values of the Durham Catholic District School Board and the learning expectations described in the Ontario Curriculum Kindergarten to Grade 12, as well as provisions contained in the Education Act.
 - ii. Each principal is required to develop a school based procedure to ensure screening and approval mechanisms for the distribution of online, written/verbal survey materials to students. This procedure should also include a protocol to shred survey material(s) in a manner so as to prevent their reconstruction once the survey process is completed. Such procedures shall be consistent with this policy and shall be communicated to students and staff.
 - iii. Online, written/verbal survey material intended for students that originate from within the school shall not be distributed to students without the prior approval of the school principal and/or manager.
 - iv. All staff must exercise caution and diligence when distributing online, written/verbal survey material particularly in regards to student and parental/guardian rights concerning informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. All online, written/verbal survey materials collected by, or on behalf of the Board, are subject to the provisions of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. See 3.13.

3.9 Exemptions – Additional Notes

- a) While not required to submit an application to the Research Advisory Committee to conduct the above activities, staff are invited to have their proposals and materials reviewed by the Committee, and may consult with the Committee for suggestions about questionnaire design, sampling techniques, data analysis, etc.
- b) In all cases, whether or not there is a formal application to the Committee, it is expected that there will be adherence to the criteria and principles of quality research and the protection of individuals as outlined in this

administrative procedure. Principles may elect to refer questions from their staff members to the Committee for decisions about the advisability of proposals proceeding.

- 3.10 Research Proposal Application Process: Applicants wishing to conduct research in the Durham Catholic District School Board will adhere to the following process and considerations when submitting proposals to the Research Advisory Committee.
- a) Applications will be reviewed three times per year, with the deadlines for submissions to be August 30, November 30 and February 28.
 - b) Submission of the “Application to Conduct a Research Study” form (Form 8500).
 - c) The “Application to Conduct a Research Study” form (Form 8500) and all related documents must be submitted by email to the Chair of the Research Advisory Committee at least six (6) weeks in advance of the proposed date for beginning data collection. The researcher and the researcher’s supervisor may be required to attend a meeting of the Research Advisory Committee.
 - d) Where personal information is requested, the researcher must collect such information in compliance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990.
 - e) For research activities beyond assessment and evaluation of student progress or principal-approved instructional activities, student consent is required. Parental/guardian consent is also required for any research with or about students under eighteen (18) years of age in Board schools. Students have the option of not participating or withdrawing from the research study even if parent(s)/guardian(s) have agreed to their participation. All permission by participants must be in the form of active, written, and informed consent.
 - f) Data collection will normally not be permitted in September, January, May or June due to other activities in the schools.
 - g) The principal makes the final decision about whether the research proposed by an external agency will be conducted in the school in which the principal is the administrator, even if the study is approved by the Research Advisory Committee.
 - h) Only minor changes to the research methodology will be considered once the study has been approved and all such changes must be submitted in writing to the Research Advisory Committee as soon as they are known.

- i) Research that is conducted on a yearly basis and has prior Research Advisory Committee approval may not require full re-submission every year. Researchers should contact the Chair of the Research Advisory Committee to determine what information needs to be submitted for the current year's approval.

3.11 Responsibilities of Researchers Conducting Educational Research

- a) The rights and well-being of participants must be protected.
- b) Researchers working directly with children or adolescents are subject to the Board's Collection of Personal Information Concerning Criminal Background Checks and Offence Declarations Policy (PO314) and must provide evidence of a Criminal Offences Screening.
- c) The researcher shall ensure that the confidentiality of information about the Board, schools, staff members, and students is protected, and that no individual school, staff member, or student is identified in any report. However, the Board should be acknowledged in publications resulting from studies that take place within its jurisdiction.
- d) The researcher shall agree to arrange for feedback of the results to the participating schools and Research Advisory Committee.
- e) The researcher shall agree to provide an interim written summary of the study, including the results, to the Research Advisory Committee within three (3) months of the completion of data collection.
- f) All researchers shall adhere to the Board's policies and administrative procedures while conducting research in the Board, and are responsible to the school principal or respective department manager.
- g) The Board shall incur no financial costs as a result of approving a research proposal unless there is prior authorization.
- h) The Board shall not be held liable for the activities of researchers conducting research within its jurisdiction.

3.12 Responsibilities of Principals Regarding Educational Research

- a) Principals will monitor the activities of researchers in their schools. Perceived irregularities or issues will be reported to the Chair of the Research Advisory Committee immediately for response and/or clarification.

- b) Principals are responsible for approving and supervising activities of a research nature which are school initiated and school-based as described in Section 3.8 (Exemptions).
- c) Principals will inform the Research Advisory Committee about research activities being conducted in their schools, and will provide the Committee with copies of all surveys, questionnaires, etc., used in these undertakings. In this way, the Committee can maintain a resource library of materials which may assist staff in other schools who are conducting similar activities.

3.13 Procedures for Collecting Information: The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990, as it suggests, consists of two main parts.

- a) Freedom of Information – to provide a right of access to information under the control of institutions (e.g., school boards). The public has a presumed right of access to general records and exemption from that right should be limited and specific.
- b) Protection of Privacy – to protect the privacy of individuals with respect to personal information about themselves held by institutions. A disclosure of information is presumed to constitute an unjustified invasion of personal privacy if the personal information:
 - i. relates to a medical, psychiatric, or psychological history, diagnosis, condition, treatment, or evaluation;
 - ii. relates to employment or educational history;
 - iii. consists of personal recommendations or evaluations, character references, or personal evaluations;
 - iv. indicates the individual's racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or religious or political beliefs or associations.
- c) Under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990, information which is collected as part of school records is not obtained with the expectation that it will be disclosed to independent researchers. Therefore, it is not possible for the Durham Catholic District School Board to identify particular individuals or groups of students or staff members for researchers or provide the names of individual students to researchers. The researcher would have to find a way to get the sample needed without undue demands on the school system.

3.14 Implications for Researchers Proposing to Conduct Research in Durham Catholic District School Board Schools

- a) The following are terms and conditions relating to security and confidentiality to which a person is required to agree before personal information can be disclosed to another person for a research purpose:
- i. The researcher shall use the information only for the research purposes set out in the proposal approved by the Research Advisory Committee.
 - ii. The researcher shall name in the agreement any other persons who will be given access to personal information in a form in which the individual to whom it relates can be identified. Before disclosing personal information to another person, the researcher shall enter into an agreement with those persons to ensure that they will not disclose it to another person.
 - iii. The researcher shall keep the information in a physically secure location to which access is given only to the researcher and to the persons given access under paragraph 3.14(a) ii.
 - iv. The researcher shall destroy all individual identifiers in the information by the date specified in the agreement.
 - v. The researcher shall not contact any individual about whom personal information relates, directly or indirectly, without the prior written authority of the Durham Catholic District School Board.
 - vi. The researcher shall notify the Board in writing immediately if the researcher becomes aware that any of the conditions set out in this section have been breached.

3.15 Informed Consent Provisions

- a) Written, informed and active consent must be obtained from all participants in a research study. The following information must be clearly specified on the document which is signed by the participants:
- i. who is conducting the research and how that person can be contacted;
 - ii. the nature of the involvement of the participants (e.g., the data to be collected and the method for collecting them, the amount of time needed, setting, tasks, and all features of the research which might reasonably be expected to influence willingness to participate);
 - iii. when the study will take place;
 - iv. samples of questions similar to those used in the study;

- v. that the individual may decline to participate in, or withdraw at any time from, the research;
- vi. the implications, if any, of not participating in the study;
- vii. guarantee of confidentiality of individual results is explained;
- viii. the use to which the data will be put;
- ix. the methods to be employed to ensure the security of the data;
- x. conditions under which the data will be made available to another person;
- xi. the length of time the data will be retained;
- xii. the process for withdrawing consent and the title of the official to whom the retraction request should be made;
- xiii. a sample of the letter used to obtain informed consent must also be included with the application.

4. Sources

- 4.1 Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990
- 4.2 The Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards
www.acposb.on.ca

5. Appendices

Nil

6. Related Policies and Administrative Procedures

- 6.1 Educational Research in Schools Policy (PO802)
- 6.2 Freedom of Information and Protection of Individual Privacy Policy (PO201)

7. Related Forms

- 7.1 Application to Conduct a Research Study (Form 8500)