

## **Atlanta Public Schools Office of Research and Evaluation**

# **GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH STUDIES IN THE ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

### **Overview**

This guide is to provide researchers with information on the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) research application and approval process. The continuous development and improvement of educational programs require consistent evaluation and study. New instructional practices and administrative procedures should be developed and evaluated to ensure they meet the changing and differing needs of students. Educational research designed to achieve these purposes is encouraged in the Atlanta Public Schools. The Office of Research and Evaluation oversees the research request process.

Research studies to be conducted in APS may be undertaken only upon authorization of the Superintendent or his/her designated representative. Each research proposal shall be carefully evaluated in terms of its possible positive value to the educational program, its administrative feasibility in the schools in terms of development of teaching and administrative personnel, and its desirable contribution to the educational welfare of APS students.

This resource guide is designed to provide the following:

- Clarify expectations and requirements associated with seeking approval to conduct research at APS;
- Outline the steps required to prepare and submit a research request, as well as provide post-submission information and APS requirements upon approval; and
- Provide researchers with criteria by which the research review committee will evaluate requests

### **Process for Submitting a Research Application**

All persons interested in conducting research in APS must have approval prior to starting. This includes university faculty and research staff, students, independent research firms, APS employees conducting research outside of their job-related responsibilities, government agencies, and other individuals or organizations interested in conducting research in APS. The following are examples of research projects that require approval by APS:

- Collecting data (through surveys, interviews, or focus groups) from students, parents, teachers, administrators, or other APS staff
- Conducting observations of school sponsored activities, including classes, staff

- workshops, parent teacher meetings etc.
- Accessing administrative data to support research activities

### **APS employees conducting research**

APS employees are also required to submit an application to conduct research in APS.

### **Considerations**

- The research approval process is specific to traditional schools. If you wish to perform research in a charter school, please contact the school directly.
- Interference with school instruction and operations must be kept to a minimum. Researchers should work closely with school administrators to collect data before or after school hours.
- We have a legal and ethical obligation to protect the privacy of our students. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g and its implementing regulations) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g and its implementing regulations) are federal laws that protect the privacy of students and education records. The laws apply to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.
- APS will carefully consider the best interest of its students and staff before granting access to them and their data. Any student or staff information provided to support approved research would be de-identified. Data that is shared will be limited to what is determined to be directly relevant to the request as approved by the research review committee.
- Requesters have the right, consistent with scientific standards, to publish, present, or use from the research or data analysis, but only if the publication, presentation or its use does not permit personal identification of the district, its teachers, students, or parents. The School System and school(s) shall not be identifiable in any research activity without expressed permission of APS.
- No research activity may be conducted in schools during administration of standardized tests or at other times specified by the Office of Research and Evaluation or the school principal.
- Data collection that will lead to the identification of students are strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, videotaping of students, identified student work samples, or identified surveys. In addition, use of any student work samples or surveys must be clearly described and provided for review in the application and approval must be received prior to the use or implementation of either assessment tool.

- Researchers are strongly encouraged to use publicly available data and should review existing Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) regularly administered survey instruments for alignment and use. Research requests that require data sharing agreements will require additional levels of review.

## Required Consent Procedures

APS complies with all state and federal regulations regarding consent/assent procedures for human research. APS reserves the right to require written informed consent/assent for studies involving students, staff, or parents, even if it is waived by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) / Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB).

APS requires that researchers obtain written (active) parent consent before obtaining information from students. The participation of students, parents, and staff members in any research project is completely voluntary. All consent/assent forms must be included in the application.

## Data Requests

Requests for public records may be made directly through the APS Open Records office. Information on the process can be found on their [website](#). Request for data to support research can be made through the research request application process.

## Application Submission and Review Process

APS is committed to supporting relevant, well-designed research studies. Applications should demonstrate how their study would substantially benefit APS, its students, and/or staff. In addition, the following criteria will be used to evaluate the appropriateness of APS participation in the proposed research project:

- Use of APS staff and student time and resources
- Value of the research study to APS
- [Alignment of proposed research with APS strategic goals and objectives](#)
- Approval of school administrators to have research conducted with school staff/students
- Research design: research question and purpose, data collection methods, analytical approach, tools and methods
- Level of data extraction from central records
- Ability to comply with human research informed consent procedures
- Thoroughness of research plan and application

Electronic submission of proposals is required. Completed applications and supporting material should be emailed to: [research\\_screening@atlanta.k12.ga.us](mailto:research_screening@atlanta.k12.ga.us). Applicants should carefully review the application check-list to ensure all supporting material are included in the application. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.

Applications should include the following:

- Complete application
- Institutional IRB approval letter (or endorsement letter from the university)
- Letters of support (optional)
- Copy of all consent/assent forms
- Copy of all instruments (surveys, focus group guides, interview protocol, observation rubrics etc.)

If research will fulfill academic requirements, research proposals must be approved by the researcher's dissertation committee or department chair.

A decision to either approve, deny, or request modifications to research proposals will be made within six weeks of our receiving the proposal.

Research applications can be found on the [office website](#).

### **Application Review Process**

The review committee meets monthly to review proposals submitted the previous month. Researchers will receive a decision during the month following their submission. The committee does not meet in April or May due to state testing. The Committee consists of staff across the Data and Information Group and other APS departments who have experience conducting research and evaluation and/or have content area expertise. The Committee uses common standards for review and approval of research requests.

### **Post-Approval Process**

All individuals whose application was reviewed by the Committee will receive a decision letter. Please note that research activities may not begin until a decision has been made by the Committee.

The researcher assumes the responsibility for conducting useful and high quality research. Upon being approved to conduct research, APS expects all researchers will:

- Abide by APS policies and procedures.
- Accept the responsibility to ensure that the research will abide by all relevant laws, including but not limited to, FERPA, PPRA, and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) policies and regulations on the protection of human subjects (45 CFR 46, as amended).
- Keep all personally identifiable information (as defined in FERPA) confidential and not disclose information obtained through the research agreement without the written permission of APS.
- Agree that information gathered during this research can be used for no other purpose other than the approved.
- Agree that access to data will be limited only to those representatives of the Applicant's institution or co-principal investigators with legitimate interests under the approved research.

- Follow the procedures as approved in the application and modify procedures and only use instruments with prior approval from the Office of Research and Evaluation.
- Conduct and complete the research study within the approved timeline and meet any stipulations accompanying the letter of approval.
- All studies are approved for a specific period of time. If data collection goes beyond this period, the researcher must submit a Research Modification or Continuation Request Form.
- Submit a final report of the research findings no later than 6 months post-completion of study with APS.
- Comply with general standards of best practices in conducting research as outlined by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) at [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/13127\\_Standards\\_from\\_AERA.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/13127_Standards_from_AERA.pdf)

### **Reasons for Termination of Approved Study**

APS may terminate research being conducted within the district at any time and for any reason. This includes but is not limited to research conducted outside the scope approved by APS; disruption at the research site; and notification of harm to research subjects.