



Guidelines for Conducting Research in Seattle Public Schools

Thank you for your interest in conducting research within the Seattle Public Schools. The SPS research review process screens applications for: a) relevance to SPS strategic initiatives and goals; b) rigor of research methodology; c) risks/benefits to schools and study participants; and d) burden to the district, schools, and study participants.

These guidelines are intended to help you determine all necessary requirements for submitting a complete application, as well as the process and standards by which your application will be reviewed. As you read through the guidelines, please note that, while Seattle Public Schools recognizes the value of supporting research, it does not guarantee the right to access Seattle Public Schools students, staff, or data for research purposes. If access is granted, the researcher may only access schools, students, staff, and data relevant to the research as approved by the Research & Evaluation department (R&E). Furthermore, R&E reserves the right to modify the guidelines as needed and to request changes to multi-year approved research proposals or research proposals.

These guidelines were written in accordance with Seattle School Board Policy E14.04.

I. Research Proposal Categories

The R&E office reviews three types of research proposals: internal research, external research, and partnerships/grants. Knowing the category your proposal fits in is critical, as this will impact the application form and timeline for review.

Internal Research

Internal research does not require an application, does not require data sharing agreements (DSAs), and do not generally require parental consent or the option to opt out of student-level data collection efforts. All data requests for internal research projects should be submitted to the Department of Technology Services (DOTS). Internal Research includes:

- SPS central office managers and directors who plan and conduct research on how to improve district services and programs within their area of supervision or as part of their general job duties (Note: if your internal project involves evaluation as part of a grant application, this places your project in the “Partnerships/Grants” category).
- SPS school staff who conduct informal inquiries into classroom practices or piloting of new programs, products or services.

External Research

External research requires a full application (for first time applicants on a given project) or amendment form (for changes or extensions of ongoing approved external research). The full application includes Part I, Part II, Data Request Form (if applicable), and all attachments. External Research includes:

- Independent research conducted by individuals, organizations, or agencies not affiliated with SPS. This includes community based organizations (CBOs) who do not have a formal research agreement as part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and/or DSA with the district and are conducting research studies. (To determine if a CBO data analysis effort constitutes a research activity, the CBO section of these guidelines.)
- Research conducted by District employees for purposes outside of their work duties and/or work hours (e.g. research conducted to fulfill degree program requirements).
- Product research conducted by a company or entity to study a product's effectiveness.
- Voluntary surveys of district staff, students, or families developed by outside research institutions, non-governmental agencies or other entities.

Partnerships and Grants

Partnerships and grants are evaluated on a case-by-case basis through consultation with the R&E office, and may require that applicants fill out the Part I application. Examples of Partnerships/Grants include:

- Planned evaluation in grants to external sources with SPS as sole or joint applicant.
- Voluntary government agency (federal, state, municipal, etc.) data collection efforts (e.g. state surveys). (Note: mandatory data reporting to state or federal agencies is not subject to research review.)
- Mandatory surveys developed by outside non-governmental agencies or entities.
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs) whose activities do not fall into the "research study" category as outlined in these guidelines, and who have a formal Memorandum of Understanding and/or Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) with SPS.

II. Additional Requirements

Depending on the nature of your proposed study, the following requirements may apply.

Data Requests

If your research involves a request for secondary data (e.g., student achievement data) collected or maintained by Seattle Public Schools, you must submit a Data Request Form in addition to the Research Application. Please indicate on the form what data, including all variables and datasets, you hope to receive. Note that secondary data can only be processed at the student-level and will not contain Free and Reduced Price Lunch information.^[1] If your application involves a custom data request, please be advised that your request will be routed through the SPS DoTS. All approved research requests will be filled in a .csv file format. For all non-research related requests, please visit www.seattleschools.org to determine which category best fits your request, for example [Public Records Requests](#) and [Archives Requests](#).

Community-Based Organization Research

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) frequently collect and/or request data from participating students, teachers, and/or staff within SPS schools and the central office. Standard language will be inserted in all Memoranda of Understanding and/or Data Sharing Agreements with SPS that asks CBOs to determine if their data collection and analysis efforts constitute a research activity that merit review as part of the research review process.

What **does** constitute a research study by a CBO? This involves quantitative or qualitative data that are: a) systematically collected and analyzed to determine the degree to which services provided are “working”; and b) are presented to an external audience (e.g. funders, conferences, media). Examples of systematic studies of impact include quasi-experimental designs, Randomized Control Trial designs, and qualitative studies of perceived program effectiveness. **Important: Studies in this category must go through the full external research review process.**

What **does not** constitute a research study by a CBO? This involves: a) summary descriptive statistics of program reach and intended outcomes (using data collected during program implementation or per a data sharing agreement with SPS); or b) data collected for internal organizational programming purposes where all documentation is used purely internally, such as placing students into services/interventions, hiring of staff, determining resource placement, and/or improving delivery of services. **Important: CBOs with data collection activities in this category do not need to submit a research proposal. However, all materials using SPS data must contain caveats that explain that all reported information are purely descriptive in nature and do not indicate causal relationships.**

Clearances

If the assigned staff/researcher will be working with district students and have the potential to be unsupervised, they will need to undergo a criminal history background check. For detailed information on the process for obtaining clearances, please reference School Board Policy 4265 SP, or the Volunteer webpage within www.seattleschools.org.

Human Subjects/IRB

If the research includes an intervention or interaction with a living person (i.e., student, teacher, staff, or parent/guardian) that would not occur but for the research, or if the researcher will obtain identifiable private data or information, then the researcher must get advance approval from a Human Subjects/Institutional Review Board (IRB). Surveys, interviews, student-level questionnaires and reviews of student files are all interventions or interactions that would require IRB review. Research that is typically exempted from IRB must include an exemption letter as part of the application.

An IRB is generally associated with colleges or universities and institutions that conduct human subject research. The IRB evaluates whether the risk to the subjects of the research is reasonable in relation to the potential benefit and, if the research is approved, will specify whether the researcher needs to obtain informed consent from the subjects of the research. A researcher’s lack of affiliation with a college, university, or other institution with an IRB, does not remove the IRB review requirement from the research review process.

The fact that an IRB has approved a proposal for research does not mean that SPS must approve it. IRB approval only means that the proposed research design is in compliance with the federal regulations

regarding human subject research (which are consistent with Washington state law and SPS policy). The RRC may determine that IRB-approved research does not warrant SPS support for other reasons as described within this document.

Active Informed Consent and Assent

All external research that includes the collection of student-level data must have SPS-approved consent forms, as well as the prior written and active informed consent of a parent/guardian on behalf of a minor student before data collection commences. Active consent from the parent/guardian is also required for external research study recruitment if the study seeks students based on specific criteria considered to be protected information (e.g., a research study wishing to recruit bilingual students who have not met standard on the state assessment). Research that involves the collection of identifiable information must also have a DSA with SPS. The researcher must retain all consent and assent forms, provide copies to SPS, and must be prepared to make them available if a parent/guardian, teacher or school official questions a student's or staff member's participation. To avoid any perceived coercion, the invitation to participate in research is to be printed on the researcher's stationery, and not on that of any office or school of the Seattle Public Schools. Consent and assent forms may not indicate SPS support or approval of the research study.

Parent/guardian consent form must be written in easily understood language and should provide the following information:

- a. Title of the study and identification of the researcher(s) conducting the study and all parties to whom disclosure will be made;
- b. The purpose(s) for collecting data;
- c. Description of what participants will be asked to do;
- d. Amount of time required of participants;
- e. Description of any individually-identifiable student data to which the researcher seeks access (e.g., test scores, attendance records, address and phone number) and how and when data will be destroyed;
- f. Description of any data collection that involves the collection of sensitive student information, as detailed in Board Policy 3232;
- g. A separate yes/no check box referring to the release of student level data;
- h. Notice that all information will remain confidential;
- i. Notice that participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time, without negative consequences;
- j. Notice of any reasonably foreseeable risks or benefits to the participant;
- k. A local or toll free telephone number of researcher(s), so that the parent/guardian or participant may call if there are questions or concerns;
- l. Space and lines for the student's name and parent/guardian signature and date. There must be a check-off for either consent or refusal to participate and the parent/guardian signature must refer to "Yes, I agree to have my child participate and to disclosure the data listed above" or "No, I do not give consent for my child to participate". Active consent, i.e., signature approving participation, is required under the federal Protection of Human Subjects regulations. Passive consent, failure to object after notice, is not sufficient.

- m. If the consent form is longer than one page, a summary of what participants will be asked to do and/or the student level data to be requested from SPS must appear immediately above the parent/guardian's signature.

The parent/guardian or eligible student (18+) must provide a signed and dated written consent before any identifiable student-level data is provided to your agency. If there is the possibility that parent/guardians and/or students do not understand English, forms in appropriate alternative languages must be provided.

Student Assent Form – Students who agree to participate in a research study are required to sign an assent form. This form should include many of the elements described above and the text of the form should be at an appropriate reading level to ensure students understand their participation in the research project.

Staff Consent Form – Active informed consent forms must also be signed by any SPS staff asked to participate in research. Consent forms are to include all of the relevant elements described above.

III. Approval Process

Research Review Committee

All external and partnership/grant proposals must be reviewed and approved by the Seattle Public School's Research Review Committee (RRC), which is comprised of staff from the Research, Evaluation, and Assessment department who will invite other relevant District or school staff as necessitated by the portfolio of research requests being reviewed.

Important: Approval from the RRC to conduct external research activities provides the researcher(s) with official permission to contact schools that may be interested in participating. Approval by the RRC does not (in itself) constitute permission to carry out the research, nor does RRC approval equate to official district sponsorship of the research activities. Schools are under no obligation to participate in a study that was initiated by outside researchers or other entities. (See below for more information about the process for obtaining approval from school principals.)

The RRC will evaluate proposals via the following criteria:

- a. **Relevance:** Is the proposed research aligned to district strategic goals and priorities? Can the research meaningfully be expected to inform district policy in a constructive way? (check website for current year strategic priorities)
- b. **Rigor:** Can the research methodology be expected to reveal valid and meaningful findings?
Elements of a rigorous proposal include:
 - a. Research questions are clear and grounded in sound theoretical framework
 - b. Design focuses on impacts of programs, initiatives, and instructional techniques (experimental or quasi-experimental study design preferred but not required)
 - c. Sampling takes into account students demographic differences, particularly race/ethnicity, gender, age/grade level
 - d. Data collection uses validated instruments
 - e. Analysis plan is clear and sophisticated

- c. **Participant Risks/Benefits:** Does the research pose any potential risks to the emotional and/or physical health of human subjects? Will the proposed research yield meaningful benefits for study participants?

Notes:

- a. Important: Except in exceptional circumstances, research proposals that involve the collection of student video recordings for study recruitment or data collection will not be approved.
- b. Important: Any compensation for participation in research must be described in the application.
- d. **Burden:** Does the study impose undue burden on subjects, schools or the district? (May include time, resources, training, custom data request, etc.)

Approval of Research

If a research proposal is approved, the RRC will issue a research approval letter. The RRC's approval of a research proposal is limited to the study scope and methods outlined in the proposal. **Approval by the RRC does not (in itself) constitute permission to carry out the research.** Following approval, researchers may approach principals for signatures on a cooperation form (provided by R&E upon approval). (Note: Researchers who have not yet specified SPS schools in their Part II application may contact R&E when they are ready to reach out to schools.) **Principals must agree to participate in the research project and sign the cooperation form for researchers to begin their work in schools.** Each principal is ultimately responsible for the decision relative to the involvement of students, staff, or facilities under his or her direction. Principals may decide to appoint an appropriate designee at their schools to oversee research activities.

Upon completion of the research study, the researcher must send a letter to the RRC notifying the committee of completion of the study. A copy of the final report or summary of the results must be provided to the Research Review Committee, to the principal of the school at which the study took place, if applicable, and all SPS central office departments that provided a letter of support for the research proposal.

Seattle Public Schools reserves the right to use the information in the research report or summary for educational programming or services, planning, solicitation of grants, staff development and any other purposes to improve instruction or services to students of the Seattle Public Schools. These reports must be emailed in PDF format to research@seattleschools.org or submitted by mail to the SPS Research Review Committee.

Timelines

The Research Review Committee meets monthly. Please allow four weeks for an external research request to be completed by R&E, and another three weeks for principal approval. If your application involves a custom data request, please be advised that this timeline may be much longer, as requests must be routed through DoTS.

IV. Application Checklist

Full Application – For applications for new external research studies

- Part I (including cover page)

- Part II (for all requests involving access to our schools, teachers, staff, or students for the primary collection of data)
- Attachments:
 - Copy of the Human Subject Board/Committee’s authorization of research activity
 - Copy of all active consent and assent forms
 - Copy of all instruments, protocols, scripts or other materials you intend for use in conjunction with the research activity
 - Copy of DSA or MOU with Seattle Public Schools (if applicable)
 - Clearances (for requests involving direct interaction with students for the collection of primary data)
 - Assertion of compliance with HIPAA, FERPA, PPRA
 - Letters of Support (optional)

Amendment Form – For requests to make changes to or extend a previously approved study

Data Request Form – Addendum to research studies involving secondary data requests

[\[1\]](#) The District may only disclose students’ FRL eligibility information to individuals that are specifically authorized access under the National School Lunch Act for nutritional program purposes.