



**Department of  
Education**

# Conducting Research in New York City Public Schools

## PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

**THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

The New York City Department of Education is the largest and most complex public school system in the nation. Its student population varies considerably in its demographic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. There is also a great variety of programs established to meet the needs of this diverse population. As a result, many researchers are interested in conducting studies in the system.

While the Department of Education (DOE) allows outside researchers to conduct studies in our school system, it must ensure that all research does not compromise the privacy of our students and their parents, or disrupt the work of our students, administrators and teachers. Consequently, it only approves research proposals that meet professional standards for the treatment of human subjects, research design and ethical practices, and additionally have significance and relevance for the NYC public school system. For this reason, the DOE has developed guidelines for investigators who wish to conduct research in our schools and it has convened the Proposal Review Committee (PRC), an Institutional Review Board (IRB), to review their proposals. This publication presents these guidelines and summarizes the proposal review process. Please read it carefully.

### **What is the Proposal Review Committee?**

The Proposal Review Committee was established in 1980 to screen external requests to conduct research in New York City public schools. It is composed of staff and consultants from the DOE. Representatives from other DOE offices and other city agencies join the committee as warranted by specific proposals. The committee reviews over 300 requests annually.

### **Who should submit a proposal to the committee?**

Any person who wishes to conduct research at a school site, gather information on or from students, or survey school staff must obtain written approval from the PRC. Doctoral and master's degree candidates, university faculty, independent researchers, and private and public agencies must all submit proposals before conducting research. This procedure applies even if the researcher is employed by the school system in another capacity (e.g., teachers conducting research during sabbaticals, or school staff doing doctoral dissertations).

### **What proposal materials should be sent to the committee?**

Please note that a research proposal must be submitted online by completing a submission form ([click here](#)) and attaching all relevant documents to the e-mail generated by the submission form.

Researchers should also have obtained prior approval from their home institution's IRB, when appropriate. In the case of doctoral and master's candidates, they should provide the PRC with the written approval (in PDF format) from their dissertation/thesis committee, as well as their university's IRB.

Any proposal should include the following:

1. A statement of the research objectives and a description of the implications of the research for New York City schools.
2. A summary review of the literature in the area of inquiry.
3. A list of research hypotheses.
4. A research methodology that fully describes the subjects and details the instruments and procedures in collecting the study's data. It should be as specific as possible in regard to the number of subjects and how they are recruited and the estimated time required of the participants for the study's research activities. A timeline is very helpful to the researcher (as well as the reviewers) in mapping out the research methodology.
5. A detailed explanation of the data analysis plan.
6. A statement of the risks and benefits of the study. (This statement should also be present in any consent letters).
7. All surveys, questionnaires, and protocols for interviews, focus groups and observations, along with any technical data describing validity and reliability of the instruments.
8. A letter of invitation to principals to conduct research in their schools
9. Sample letters of consent for the study's participants. For additional guidance on consent letters, please read the section on Informed Consent on page 4.

All proposals should be no more than 15 pages, not including the instruments, protocols and letters.

### **What criteria are applied by the committee in considering a research proposal?**

The committee considers a number of factors in its review of a research proposal:

- The proposed research should be of an educational nature and relevant to NYC schools.
- A sound research methodology that uses reliable and valid instruments.
- The benefits of the research must outweigh the costs, which include staff and student time and other resources. Any potential effects on participants should be addressed in the research methods, and steps should be taken to eliminate any possible negative impacts. It is particularly important that investigators offer feedback to participants. The feedback may take a variety of forms (e.g., a written summary or an oral presentation).
- The study should embody procedures that respect the confidentiality and privacy rights of staff, students, and parents. Provision must be made for truly informed consent of participants and parents of student subjects.

## **Informed consent**

For projects in which informed consent is required, a copy of the consent form should also be included. The consent form should be in the form of a letter addressed to parents/guardians or participants. The researcher needs to provide the following information, in the consent letter:

1. The identification of the researcher(s) conducting the study;
2. The purpose(s) for collecting data;
3. Description of the activities that participants will be asked to complete (e.g., fill out a survey, be interviewed, etc);
4. A description of the individual student data that you seek (e.g., test scores, attendance records, etc.);
5. The amount of time involved for participants;
6. A statement that all information will remain anonymous and confidential; and that participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time, with no consequences;
7. A local or 800 phone number of the researcher, so that the parent or participant may contact the researcher if there are questions or concerns;
8. A space for a signature and check-off for either consent or refusal to participate. Most studies require active consent for the subject's participation. If students are to be audio- or videotaped, a separate approval line for parental permission must be provided along with an explanation of the purpose of the tapes as well as a disposal plan for the tapes once research is completed.

If there is the possibility that parents do not understand English, letters in their native language must be provided. Researchers must retain all consent forms, and must be prepared to make them available to a parent, teacher, or DOE official.

The invitation to participate in research should be printed on university or a research group's stationery, and not on that of any office or school of New York City Department of Education (unless the study is being conducted by a DOE office). Also, school staff or administrators or the PRC, should not be mentioned as supporting your research.

The researcher must also send letters to the prospective principals in your study inviting their schools' participation. These letters should similarly describe your study and its impact upon the school and ensure anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary involvement for all study participants.

When appropriate, letters of invitation should be sent to teachers. These letters describe their involvement in your study and should ensure anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation.

## **What are the steps in the review process?**

Once a complete proposal is received electronically previous online submission, it is reviewed by members of the Proposal Review Committee and discussed at a monthly meeting. After the meeting, an email is then sent to the researcher indicating the PRC's decision. The committee may approve the proposal or require the researcher to clarify or modify the proposal in order to satisfy Department of Education guidelines.

**PLEASE NOTE:** An approval letter indicates that the proposal has met the research and ethical standards required by the DOE. However, it does NOT commit a school, teachers or students to participate. Researchers must, on their own, obtain the principal's signature which indicates their permission to proceed with the research in their school or district. The principals signature form, which is enclosed with the approval letter, must be returned to the Proposal Review Committee once it is signed.

## **How long does the review take?**

The length of time required to review and approve a proposal depends primarily on the completeness of the proposal and the researcher's prompt response to requests from the committee for clarification and/or additional information. Proposals received after April 1 cannot be assured of being reviewed for research to be conducted in that school year. Teachers conducting sabbatical research should submit a request as soon as approval for a sabbatical has been granted. In most cases, no more than four to six weeks are needed to complete the proposal review process. However, the process may be protracted if a proposal requires extensive clarification and revision. If the PRC has concerns about a proposal, it will send the researcher a letter which lists the concerns and requests the researcher's response to these issues.

## **Continuing Review:**

It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit a continuing review once per year for the duration of the project. Continuing Review Applications must be submitted six weeks before the expiration date of the original protocol acceptance letter. Continuing Review Applications should include the following:

1. The proposal submission form indicating 'continuation' under type of request.
2. A progress report regarding the previous year's implementation of the project. This should include the following information:
  - a. The number of subjects recruited (and a brief summary of results-to-date when available.)
  - b. A summary of any unanticipated problems and/or adverse events (if any – if none, please state.)
  - c. A summary of any withdrawal of subjects from the research since the last IRB review (if any – if none, please state.)
  - d. A summary of any complaints about the research since the last IRB review (if any – if none, please state.)

- e. Any amendments or modifications to the protocol since the last IRB review.
- f. Any other relevant information, especially regarding risks associated with the research.
- g. A copy of the current informed consent(s) and any new consent documents (if changing at all from previous year).

**Post-Research Follow-Up:**

Researchers are strongly encouraged to provide their findings to the DOE.  
Please e-mail an electronic copy of your research to [RPSGResearch@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:RPSGResearch@schools.nyc.gov).

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