

## **Policy and Guidelines for Conducting Educational Research in the Boston Public Schools**

**Updated October 1, 2017**

### **Overview**

The basic purpose of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) is to educate children. BPS will, therefore, only approve research that is aligned to district priorities and will assist executive Boston Public School staff in achieving our mission and goals. Research project proposals must demonstrate they can be of benefit to the district by studying a subject area in alignment with stated goals of improved teaching and learning while not unduly taking away from instructional time and BPS resources. Approval by the researcher's IRB and/or BPS building administrators schools does NOT guarantee approval of research proposals by the BPS Office of Data and Accountability (ODA). While research may be approved by ODA, for research not mandated by federal, state or BPS requirements, BPS building administrators have the final say in whether or not their particular school will participate in any given study.

All research activities must be coordinated through the Office of Data and Accountability. In some instances approval is not required for the use of data and summary statistics available in public records such as on the BPS public website: [Facts and Figures](#). A list of current sources of publically available data can be found [here](#). In these instances, the researcher may use the data presented from these sources as long as the sources are cited and any modifications or analysis done by the researcher is clearly delineated.

### **Who May Conduct Research**

Any academic or professional organization or any individual doing doctoral work may submit a proposal to conduct research with the Office of Data and Accountability in BPS. Doctoral candidates must submit written evidence that their proposed research has been approved by their University's IRB and will be supervised by their advisor(s).

### **Boston Public Schools Sponsorship Requirements**

We require that all researchers have a Boston Public School central office department head or higher level district sponsor for each unique research project. Sponsorship should represent the active ownership and interest in the findings of a given research

from an appropriate central office department invested in the research such that action can be taken on the findings of the study. The sponsor may not be a building administrator and may not be a researcher's direct supervisor. Research project sponsorship should be established prior to research proposals being submitted with a required email authorization or letter confirming the support of the study.

It should be noted that administrators from Boston Public Schools should not feel obligated or required to sponsor a research project, since their ability to sponsor will depend on the office's required mandates and tasks, priorities and goals.. The sponsor should be willing to assist with facilitating the process such as suggesting possible schools and who should be given a copy (along with ODA) of the study results. The sponsor should not be developing the research plan but may suggest possible research question(s).

### **Other Research Requirements**

Note that if the research project extends beyond the completion date indicated in the Application to Conduct Research, an electronic [application](#) must be submitted for ODA approval. In addition, it is at the discretion of the principal(s) or headmaster(s) to extend the research project beyond the scheduled completion date. **The researcher must submit copies of the signed Research Proposal Review Form(s) in the new academic year if the research is conducted past the first academic year of the research.**

### **Required Information**

To submit an application that can be reviewed, the researcher must complete the online application form and attach a MS word or pdf document that includes all the required information outlined below. **Incomplete applications will not be reviewed until they are resubmitted with all required components and information.**

Note that the executive summary must be entered on the application in the text box provided and should be the equivalent of one single spaced page.

The following sections must be included in the attachment submitted with the online application and must be in the following format and order. Each section must start on a new page with the page number on the bottom of each page.

1. *Impetus for Research.* State why this research is being conducted. **If it is the basis for a dissertation, include a letter of approval and commitment to supervision from the faculty advisor(s) along with the college/university Internal Review Board approval notice in the Appendix section.** If applicable, indicate the source and amount of funds that support the research.
2. *Statement of Problem.* Describe both your reasons for choosing this research topic and the particular educational problem being addressed by the study.
3. *Review of Literature.* Discuss the results of previous research which has addressed this problem and how the proposed research will contribute to knowledge in this area. The works cited must be listed in the Bibliography section.
4. *Statement of Hypotheses and Research Question(s).* Specifically state the research hypotheses, or indicate (if hypotheses are not appropriate) the research questions and objectives of the project.
5. *Research Design and Procedures.* Delineate the methodology which will be used to test the hypotheses. This delineation should include: 1.) A description and justification of all statistical or other data analysis; 2.) Copies of all data collection instruments (provided in the appendix), and 3.) A detailed description of the procedures and operations to be used for data collection, including the approximate anticipated amount of time subjects will spend on tasks and when the activities will occur such as homeroom, before or after school, etc). Please specify any student or staff data that will be collected from records kept at the school. Provisions to ensure that all research activities will involve minimal intrusions upon the administrative and instructional processes at the core of BPS' work should be clearly described. **NON-SUBMISSION OF DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS AND SURVEYS will DELAY APPROVAL.**
6. *Administrative Data Request.* If your study requires administrative data from BPS central records, please list the data elements and years required. Please be as specific as possible. For example, grade 7 MCAS ELA scaled scores from the Dewey Elementary school for SY 2016-17. Please list the data elements by line or in a table. If the application is approved, a mutually agreed upon list of data and timeline for the creation of the data files will be negotiated between BPS and the researcher and you

may be asked to submit a formal online data request. ODA will create the NDA to be signed before the release of any data. The requested data may not be provided if in the

judgement of BPS is that the data request is too broad (i.e. requested data are not essential in answering a research questions in the approved proposal, asking for all school data to create a comparison group, etc..

7. *Protection of Human Rights.* Delineate the procedures which will be used to ensure that the rights of research participants to confidentiality and freedom from harm will be protected, including the storage of the information collected. If the home language is other than English, the researcher is responsible for providing translations. Consent forms, if required, must be returned from every participant or parent/guardian (if participant is under the age of 18) and kept on file by the researcher. If the study continues into a subsequent school year, consent forms must be collected again from the participant. Only under exceptional circumstances may parental consent be sought for multiple years of study. ODA may ask for signed copies of the consent forms for auditing purposes after the commencement of the study. The express written active consent of all research participants or the parents/guardian of students (if the student participants are younger than 18 years of age) is required. No person may participate in the absence of the signed form. The consent letter must include specific content that is listed in the FAQ (link). In general, university IRB forms comply with these required elements. If you plan to offer remuneration for research participation, note that Massachusetts public employees are limited to cash or gifts of no more than \$50 and that Students may not be given any remuneration. See FAQ for more details.

8. *Impact of Results and plans for reporting the results.* Explicitly state the impact and expected benefits of the research to education in general, and usefulness in promoting educational excellence in the Boston Public Schools. In particular, the researcher should indicate how this research will benefit the schools and improve teaching and learning. Also plans for publication and dissemination of results must be clearly stated. If reference is made to the Boston Public Schools as the source of the data in the study, then approval must be received from ODA prior to the dissemination of any report. Otherwise, no references can be made to the participation of the Boston Public Schools in the study, but particular findings should be linked to BPS.

9. *Appendices, IRB and other additional materials* should be included at the end of the submission. Please include all instruments, consent/assent forms and other supporting documentation in the order listed.

- IRB: A valid IRB approval or exemption must be included. Provide the appropriate IRB documents or evidence that IRB review is not required.
- Copies of surveys, interview questions, etc.
- References
- A letter or copy of email(s) that indicates the support of the research by a Boston Public School Central Office Department Head or Higher Level Person.

## **Research Proposal Review Process**

### **Step 1**

To initiate the research review process the researcher must submit to ODA a completed online application and the full proposal described in this document. The website has specific time windows when research applications may be submitted and review times when new applications will not be accepted. Please plan accordingly.

### **Step 2**

Upon receipt of the complete online application and additional documentation, ODA will review the proposal to determine whether or not it satisfies the criteria outlined in this document. Applications that are incomplete, lack an appropriate sponsor, or that are not properly formatted will be declined and the submitter will be notified. ODA reserves the right to require changes in the research design, procedures, or times when it will be conducted by the schools prior to its approval. In general, complete applications are reviewed after the submission window closes. Decisions will usually be made within 90 days, but consultation with other BPS offices may result in a longer time for a final decision.

### **Step 3**

If the proposal passes this review, it is the responsibility of the researcher to submit copies of the research executive summary along with a Research Proposal Review Form to the appropriate headmaster(s) or principal(s) of each school where the study is to be conducted for their approval and signature.

**All copies of the signed Research Proposal Review Forms from the schools must be returned directly to ODA.** Only if the principal(s)/headmaster(s) are willing to participate in the study can the research be conducted in the given school. Initial approval by ODA does not ensure that selected schools will be willing or able to participate.

### **Step 4**

After all Research Proposal Review Forms form have been submitted and approved, the researcher may begin the study. Once the study is completed, a copy of the final research report must be filed with ODA. It is also advisable and essential to provide a copy of all findings to participating schools and/or programs. Whenever feasible, the

researcher should visit the school(s) to explain the findings to the principal(s) and headmaster(s) and other school staff.

### **Step 5**

If your study requires administrative data from BPS central records, a non-disclosure agreement will be required which will include mutually agreed upon data to be released by BPS to the researcher.

A charge will be levied for a data request not related to a mandated research or evaluation project.

### **Step 6**

If you make substantive changes to a project after it has begun, such as requesting additional data, or a change in participating groups/schools, you must submit:

- A new Online Application (with the Amendment to study box checked off); and
- Amended proposal that highlights what changed, either submitting a PDF/Microsoft document of the proposal with typewritten annotations, or a letter documenting what has changed by making reference to the original page numbers and sections.

If your study goes beyond the current school year then you must submit a new application during the appropriate application window that includes all study information and required attachments and forms. Please select the Extension/continuation section on the online application.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office of Data and Accountability at 617-635-9450 or email at [rc069@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:rc069@bostonpublicschools.org)

**Please click link to submit online application:**  
[Application to Conduct Research Boston Public Schools](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is the difference between active and passive consent?***

Active consent of the research participant or if the student is under the age of 18, the parent/guardian. This means that the parent/guardian has received a letter and has completed and returned a written form giving consent for the child to participate.

### ***What is required in the consent form?***

Consent <sup>1</sup>Requirements

The consent letter to the research subject or parent/guardian must: 1.) Describe the purposes, procedures and content of the research, including a statement of any possible risks; 2.) Indicate the types of activities that the student will engage in when participating in the research, the amount of participation time by the student and the start and end dates of the study; 3.) Describe, if applicable, the data elements that will be collected from each student and indicate how the researcher will keep this information confidential ; and 4.) Identify all individuals responsible for the research, including their institutional affiliation, by providing completed contact information including an address and phone number. If the parent/guardian requires a translation in their native language, please use the language preferred by the parent/guardian in the request letter

### ***Why do we require central office department head level staff to sponsor research?***

The Office of Data and Accountability receives many research proposals each year and cannot serve as an internal point person for each project. Additionally, ODA cannot necessarily speak to the importance of each project and its potential findings to BPS's larger goals and values. Sponsors also have pertinent subject area knowledge beyond the knowledge base of staff in ODA and they are in the best position to determine whether or not the proposed research will meet the needs of BPS.

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<sup>1</sup> The Consent requirements are governed by The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232h: 34 CFR Part 98) and Massachusetts Record Regulations (603 CMR)

***What is the role of the sponsor?***

Their role is to serve as an internal point person who can help to shepherd the research project forward, including tasks such as making sure that required data are accessible, etc.

***Who can submit a proposal to conduct research in Boston Public Schools?***

Academics, students wishing to conduct their dissertation, research firms, non-profit or government agencies wishing to collect data for a purpose that is not part of regular district business are able to submit their proposal.

***Are applications reviewed in the order received?***

Often times, but not exclusively. Priority is given to studies that are mandated by state and federal requirements or those studies that have a topic area that is directly linked to current BPS research and/or instructional needs.

***May I provide remuneration to schools, staff or students for their participation?***

Monetary compensation for students in any form (cash, gifts, gift cards, raffle entries, etc.) is not permitted. For public employees the calendar year limit is money or gifts of no more than \$50. Guidelines from the BPS Office of the Legal Advisor indicate that a class gift is limited to no more than \$150 and there is no stated limit if money or items are provided to schools but that the remuneration must be used for the benefit of the class or school and a record must be kept of how the money or items are used.

***What do you mean by the term “administrative student or staff data” and what data can I request?***

This is information about students from a central office database which are often data that encompass several variables for one or more school years that are often de-identified. The administrative data box should be checked on the application form. Please be as specific as possible as to what data are being requested. Indicate the data elements, school years, and scope of data needed such as school names and grade levels. Please list specific data elements such as MCAS 2017 ELA and Math performance levels. Requests such as all achievement data that are available is not acceptable. The data requested must be justified by the indicated data analysis plan submitted. (Note: a charge will be levied for creating or accessing data files)

***What if I am requesting to do a study that takes longer than a year?***

You are only able to submit a proposal to do research within one school year. If your research is a multi-year study, you must submit a new application and you should indicate any preliminary findings. In order to do this, please submit the online application and check off Extension of Time Request for Study approved box.

***What if something changes in my study during the year?***

If there are changes such as having a new principal investigator, adding or removing schools, or eliminating a survey, etc. in the research, you will need to submit an online [application](#) and select Amendment to Study.

***What do you mean by “benefit to the BPS”?***

Boston Public Schools must prioritize its goals which are foremost educating children. Researchers must demonstrate that their study contributes to achieving BPS goals and does not only fulfil goals that are external to the district.

***What are reasons why a proposal would not be approved?***

There are three (3) common reasons why a proposal would not be approved.

1. Lack of Applicability- A study is deemed to be lacking relevance if the variables are not directly related to the operation of Boston Public Schools.
2. Lack of Quality- If an ample level of scientific consistency is not demonstrated. BPS observes professional standards and the work of external researchers must be held to the same standards. If some elements of the proposal are missing or unclear, ODA will contact the researcher (via email and/or phone) to resubmit and/or clarify information.
3. Burden on Boston Public Schools resources- Research would place a strain on resources than BPS would be able to accommodate. This includes not unduly taking away from instructional time during schools hours. Times when BPS resources have been limited by budget cuts or other means can be another reason for a proposal not to be approved.

***Does approval by ODA guarantee I will be able to get the data I need from BPS?***

No, while the research requests may be sound and be of interest to BPS, a data request may be declined or be required to be revised with a revised data request.

Student or staff data Requested administrative student or staff data (If applicable)  
This is required if the administrative data box is checked on the application form. Please

be as specific as possible as to what data are being requested. Indicate the data elements, school years, and scope of data needed such as school names and grade

levels. Please list specific data elements such as MCAS 2017 ELA and Math performance levels. Requests such as all achievement data that are available is not acceptable. The data requested should have been justified by the indicated data analysis plan submitted. (Note: a charge may be levied for creating or accessing data files)

***Does approval by ODA guarantee I will be able to conduct my study in BPS?***

No. Approval from ODA means that the proposal is practically sound and it is likely to benefit BPS. Only if the principal(s)/headmaster(s) are willing to participate in the study can the research be conducted in the given school.

***May I contact people to solicit their participation in my research while the proposal is undergoing review?***

No. Researchers may not contact schools, students or their families without having a formal letter of approval from ODA.

**EMAIL OR FAX COPIES OF APPLICATIONS ARE NOT PERMITTED**