

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR RESEARCH STUDIES

I. PURPOSE

To provide guidance regarding the review and approval of all research studies in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS).

II. APPLICABILITY

Research activities conducted within ACPS must receive prior written approval from the Superintendent or his or her designee. This section describes the types of research considered for approval.

A. External Research

This policy applies to all requests by individuals and organizations to conduct research activities in ACPS or receive, for research purposes, identifiable and non-identifiable ACPS student or employee data that are not otherwise publicly available under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. This policy applies to external researchers as well as ACPS employees who wish to conduct research or data collection activities when not assigned to do so by ACPS as a part of their job responsibilities.

B. Research Involving Sensitive Topics

This policy also applies to surveys conducted by ACPS employees, ACPS students, or external researchers asking about such sensitive topics as defined in [Policy KFB](#) as: political affiliations or beliefs of the student or student's parent/guardian; mental or psychological problems of the student or student's family; sex behavior and attitudes; illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of others with whom respondents have close family relationships; legally recognized privileged relationships, such as lawyers, doctors, or ministers of religion; religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or student's parent/guardian; or income (other than as required by law to determine program eligibility).

C. Exempt Research

Except for surveys including sensitive topics as outlined above, approval from the Superintendent or his or her designee is not required for research conducted by ACPS in connection with evaluating and implementing instructional programs, and work done by ACPS employees in the normal course of their employment. It is expected that staff will obtain approval from a supervisor in advance of conducting research.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Research

Any systemic investigation, including instrument development, observation, testing (including survey), data analysis, and/or evaluation, that is designed to develop or contribute to knowledge that can be applied to contexts beyond the setting in which the investigation took place.

B. Human Research

Any systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, utilizing human subjects, that is designed to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge. Human research does not include research exempt from federal research regulation pursuant to 45 C.F.R. § 46.101(b).

IV. AUTHORITY TO APPROVE

The School Board recognizes the potential benefits of research conducted by qualified individuals, organizations, or institutions in developing, validating, and standardizing programs and strategies within the field of education. The Board authorizes the Superintendent or his or her designee to approve research studies where it has been determined that such studies will confer substantial benefits to ACPS; result in no harm to students, employees, or other participants; ensure appropriate privacy protections; and impose no significant burden on ACPS activities and operations.

The Superintendent or his or her designee may revoke such authorization at any time based on procedural violations, ethical issues, a change of priority or interest by ACPS, lack of funding or resources, or other good cause.

V. RESEARCH SCREENING COMMITTEE

The Superintendent or his or her designee shall establish a committee composed of knowledgeable employees to conduct screenings of research requests. The research screening committee will be composed of representatives of varied backgrounds to ensure the competent, complete, and professional review of research activities. No member of the committee may be directly involved in the proposed research or have administrative approval authority over the proposed research except in connection with his or her responsibilities as a member of the committee. In deciding whether to recommend approval of proposed research, the committee will consider the factors listed in Va. Code § 32.1-162.19. The committee will convene twice annually to screen research requests following the deadlines for all applications of June 30 and December 31.

VI. CONFIDENTIALTY, CONSENT, AND INSPECTION RIGHTS

A. Confidentiality of Personally-Identifiable Student and Employee Information

No personally-identifiable information concerning students or employees shall be disclosed to researchers unless such disclosure is authorized by written consent of the student (if over 18 years of age), parent/guardian, or the employee, unless the disclosure is authorized by state and federal law and consistent with the School Board policies and regulations.

B. Informed Consent

Research and data collection activities shall comply with all state and federal requirements pertaining to informed consent, specifically Va. Code § 32.1-162.18.

C. Survey Inspection, Consent, and Opt Out Rights

Parents or guardians shall be provided with advance notice of, and the opportunity to inspect, any survey asking students about sensitive topics described in section II-B of this policy. For any non-federally-funded survey, a parent or guardian will be provided the opportunity to opt the student out of participation in the survey with no consequences.

These survey inspection, consent, and opt-out rights also apply to those surveys including sensitive topics administered by ACPS as part of its instructional program.

D. Use of Name

The use of the division’s name or the names of its schools in published research is prohibited unless the researcher(s) receive written permission from the Superintendent or his or her designee.

Adopted: January 9, 1997
Amended: July 1, 2005
Amended: June 1, 2006
Amended: June 11, 2015

Legal Ref.:

Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, sections [22.1- 16.1](#), [22.1-78](#), [32.1-162.20](#)
U.S.C. section 1232h (a)
45C.F.R.46.101 et seq.
[8 VAC 20-565-10](#) et seq.

Cross Ref. :

KFB Administration of Surveys and Questionnaires