

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

Lower Merion School District

Administrative Regulation No.: 244
Section: STUDENTS
Title: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
Date Adopted: November 11, 2016
Date Last Revised: May 10, 2019

R244 EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Definitions

“Graduate Student Researchers” are Outside Research Entities requesting permission to conduct research in response to a course assignment or degree requirement at an accredited college or university graduate education program.

“Institutional Review Board” (IRB) refers to the administrative body within a university or other organization receiving federal funds charged with protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects as required through the Code of Federal Regulations (see 45 CFR 46).

“Outside Research Entities” (OREs) are any persons or organizations requesting access to District students, families, staff, programs, or data to implement a research study on behalf of their own professional interests.

“Outside Research Partners” (ORPs) are any persons or organizations conducting research on behalf of the District, as documented through a written agreement in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) under the studies exception (see 20 U.S.C. §1232g(b)(1)(F) and §99.31(a)(6)).

“Research Review Panel” (RRP) is the committee established to review and make recommendations for the approval of research by the Superintendent. The RRP shall include at least one individual who maintains current certification through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (or similar institution upon prior approval of the Superintendent) and at least one Board member.

Principles for Approving Research by Outside Research Entities

The following principles shall guide the decision to approve ORE access to District students, families, staff, programs, or data to implement a research study:

1. Approved research must have the potential to provide a direct benefit to the Lower Merion School District or its professional staff, or have the potential to benefit education generally in ways that align with one or more strategic pathways as outlined in All Forward.

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2. Research activities must not disrupt the educational process or instructional time for students.
3. Proposals from Graduate Student Researchers will only be considered from those who are current, full-time employees of the District, absent evidence of a compelling educational benefit to the District, as determined by the Superintendent or designee.
4. Researchers who are employees of the District may not conduct research with students or staff under their authority except for studies designed specifically to examine innovation and improvement within the researchers' own practice. Examples include action research, design-based research, and program evaluation.
5. Building- and/or district-level administrators under whose responsibility the research study is situated shall affirm support of the project prior to approval and implementation.
6. The project may not overlap, duplicate, or detract from other District-initiated research or evaluation activities.
7. Research studies must be reviewed and approved by the ORE's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to implementation.
8. The Research Review Panel reserves the right to require that Researchers gather informed consent/assent from families and students, even if not required by the ORE's IRB.

Proposal Process

Permission to conduct research is granted through the Superintendent's office, documented via electronic communication with the applicant, and announced to the Board of School Directors prior to commencement of the research study. No one, including District employees, may conduct educational research as an ORE without the written approval of the Superintendent or his/her designee.

For the District to ensure that the research study is conducted with the highest ethical standards, any ORE interested in conducting research within the Lower Merion School District will be required to file an application with the Superintendent's office at least 60 days prior to the intended start date. Standard application forms shall be provided on the District website. Employees of the District who are requesting permission to conduct research to fulfill a course

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assignment may qualify for expedited review, as outlined in Appendix A: Research for Graduate Course Assignments.

Screening. Proposals shall be screened by the chair of the RRP, as appointed by the Superintendent, to determine if (a) the proposed project aligns with the Principles for Approval outlined above, (b) all required documents have been received, and (c) if the proposed project is eligible for expedited review as outlined in Appendix B: Research for Graduate Course Assignments.

RRP Review. Proposals that pass initial screening and require full review by the RRP are placed on the next RRP agenda. The RRP reviews research requests every other month according to the schedule posted on the District's Office of Research and Evaluation website.

Recommendations for approval, conditional approval, or denial of research requests are provided to the Superintendent, who makes final decisions and initiates communication of the decision with requestors.

Notifications of Approval

Notifications of Approval. Upon approval or conditional approval of a project, the ORE shall receive notification of the decision with an approval number and an unsigned Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which will outline any conditions of approval that may apply. The ORE shall acknowledge his/her/their obligation to meet the conditions of approval, and comply with all federal and state laws and Board policies pertaining to maintaining confidentiality of data acquired during the study by signing the MOU and returning it to the Superintendent or his/her designee.

Notification of the Board of School Directors. The Superintendent shall notify the Board of School Directors of approved research prior to implementation.

Recruitment of Participants

All recruitment activities shall be coordinated through the District's Office of Research and Program Evaluation. Invitations to participate shall be distributed by the District on behalf of OREs and shall contain:

- a) a brief description of the research aims and activities,

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- b) procedures for acquiring more information about the study, typically through the attachment of an information sheet or informed consent/assent documents;
- c) confirmation that participation is voluntary, and instructions for confirming interest in participation;
- d) a statement of the Superintendent's approval of the research.

Notification to Parents. The District, on behalf of the Researcher/s, shall provide notification to parents/guardians of students identified for potential involvement in the approved research study and the extent of their right to have their child and/or information about their child excluded from research.

Availability for Questions: All parties conducting research in the District are to assume responsibility for making themselves available to answer questions about their approved research study from members of the RRP, parents/guardians, and/or students. Contact information for the researcher and all approving bodies, including the District's RRP and the originating institutions IRB, must be included on all recruitment materials and consent/assent/information forms.

Recruitment Materials. In addition to the IRB's approval stamp, all recruitment materials, such as information sheets and consent/assent forms, must contain the LMSD Research Approval Number and contact information for the researcher, the District's RRP, and the researcher's approving IRB.

Data Requests

Approved projects that require more than one hour of administrative time to fulfill data requests may be billed at an hourly rate corresponding to the per diem rate for the employees involved in preparing the data file.

After Study Completion

In all cases the Superintendent and RRP shall be informed of the results of the study in the form of an abstract not to exceed 300 words. Copies of presentations and published works resulting from the study shall be provided to the Superintendent. This is not intended to assert any right to editorial control over the study by the Superintendent or District.

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Use of Student Personal Information for Marketing Purposes

The School District does not permit Researchers to collect, use, or disseminate personal information about students for marketing or commercial purposes.

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Appendix A: Research for Graduate Course Assignments

Full-time employees under contract with the District may be eligible for expedited review of requests to conduct research activities that have been assigned through graduate education coursework. Expedited review requests should be submitted at least 30 days in advance of the date that data collection is expected to begin. Dissertation studies are not eligible for expedited review.

Research for graduate course assignments may qualify for expedited review and approval under the following conditions:

- 1) The course assignment does not disrupt the educational process or instructional time for students.
- 2) The course assignment does not overlap, duplicate, or detract from other District research, evaluation, or strategic activities.
- 3) The course assignment does not involve the collection of new student data.
- 4) The course assignment does not interfere with employees' professional responsibilities.
- 5) The course assignment is eligible for exemption from IRB review as per 45 CFR §46.104.
- 6) Informed consent/assent will be obtained, as appropriate, in accordance with 45 CFR §46.116 and 117.
- 7) Appropriate supervisory permission has been secured.
- 8) The physical and digital products of assignment will not be shared beyond the audience specifically required by the course assignment. The identity of research participants will remain confidential and protected.

To submit a request for permission to conduct research as a graduate course assignment, submit the following documentation to the chair of the Research Review Panel at least 30 days prior to the expected date on which data collection will begin:

- 1) Completed application form (available on the District's Office of Research and Program Evaluation website)

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- 2) Copy of course syllabus
- 3) Copy of course assignment instructions

Copies of any and all research tools (e.g. survey instruments, observation protocols, interview questions)