

1 APPROVAL PROCESS FOR RESEARCH STUDIES

2  
3 The School Board recognizes the potential benefits of research conducted by qualified individuals,  
4 organizations, or institutions in developing, validating, and standardizing programs and strategies within  
5 the field of education. The Board authorizes the Superintendent or designee to approve research studies  
6 where it has been determined that such studies will confer benefits to ACPS; result in no harm to students,  
7 employees, or other participants; ensure appropriate privacy protections; and impose no significant burden  
8 on ACPS activities and operations.

9  
10 This policy provides guidance regarding the review and approval of all research studies in Alexandria  
11 City Public Schools (ACPS).

12  
13 With the exception of the Exempt Research described below, research activities conducted within ACPS  
14 must receive prior written approval from the Superintendent or designee. The Research Application Form  
15 is available on the ACPS website. This section describes the types of research considered for approval.

16  
17 **External Research**

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

24  
25 **Research Involving Sensitive Topics**

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

34  
35 **Exempt Research**

36 Except for surveys including sensitive topics as outlined above, approval from the Superintendent  
37 or designee is not required for research conducted by ACPS in connection with evaluating and  
38 implementing instructional programs, and work done by ACPS employees in the normal course  
39 of their employment. Staff will obtain approval from their supervisor in advance of conducting  
40 research.

42 **DEFINITIONS**

43

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

47

48 **Human Research** - Any systematic investigation, including research development, testing and  
 49 evaluation, utilizing human subjects, that is designed to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge.  
 50 Human research does not include research exempt from federal research regulation pursuant to 45 C.F.R.  
 51 § 46.101(b).

52

53 **RESEARCH SCREENING COMMITTEE**

54

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

64

65 **AUTHORITY TO APPROVE**

66

67 Based on the recommendations from the screening committee, the Superintendent or their designee may  
 68 approve or deny applications for research. If approved, the Superintendent or their designee may revoke  
 69 such authorization at any time based on procedural violations, ethical issues, a change of priority or  
 70 interest by ACPS, lack of funding or resources, or other good cause. If the research is being conducted by  
 71 an individual or organization with an Institutional Review Board (IRB), both ACPS and IRB approval  
 72 must be obtained.

73

74 **CONFIDENTIALITY, CONSENT, AND INSPECTION RIGHTS**

75

76 **Research Data Confidentiality Agreement**

77

78 All researcher applicants must agree to the ACPS Research Data Confidentiality Agreement which  
 79 includes topics such as data collection, data sharing, data destruction, data access, and security  
 80 controls.

81

82 **Confidentiality of Personally Identifiable Student and Employee Information**

83

84 No personally identifiable information (PII) concerning students or employees may be disclosed  
 85 to researchers unless such disclosure is authorized by written consent of the student (if over 18  
 86 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. FERPA defines the  
 term personally identifiable information to include direct identifiers (such as a student's or other

87 family member's name) and indirect identifiers (such as a student's date of birth, place of birth, or  
 88 mother's maiden name).

89  
 90 **Informed Consent**

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

93  
 94 **Survey Inspection, Consent, and Opt Out Rights**

95 Parents or guardians will be provided with advance notice of, and the opportunity to inspect, any  
 96 survey asking students about sensitive topics described in section II-B of this policy. For any non-  
 97 federally funded survey, a parent or guardian will be provided the opportunity to opt the student  
 98 out of participation in the survey with no consequences. These survey inspection, consent, and  
 99 opt-out rights also apply to those surveys including sensitive topics administered by ACPS as part  
 100 of its instructional program.

101  
 102 **Use of Name**

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

- 105  
 106 Adopted: January 9, 1997  
 107 Amended: July 1, 2005  
 108 Amended: June 1, 2006  
 109 Amended: June 11, 2015  
 110 Amended: June 1, 2023

- 111  
 112 Legal Ref.: Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, sections §§ 22.1- 16.1, 22.1-78, 32.1-162.20  
 113 U.S.C. section 1232h (a)  
 114 45C.F.R.46.101 et seq.  
 115 8 VAC 20-565-10 et seq.

- 116  
 117 Cross Ref.: JO Student Records  
 118 KFB Administration of Surveys and Questionnaires