

Action Research Proposals (EdS/Master's Level)

- Participatory action research may be eligible for an expedited review, in which we only look for potential harm to the student or to the learning environment.
- For the universities' protection, graduate students should not conduct action research in classrooms or at the whole-school-level without district approval. MNPS requires that all action research proposals be submitted for review (in a batch per semester, if possible).
- Action research that is outside the scope of innovations in everyday practice and/or requires fellow staff to participate will go through the regular process of a full committee review, including asking the researcher to complete the research outside their own school (see below). This includes action research proposals submitted by deans or assistant principals that require student surveys, staff surveys, or staff participation.

Research Proposals at the Doctoral Level and Above – Recurring Reasons for Denial

- **Studying peers or subordinates: researchers should not study their own schools, students, faculty, or staff except in extraordinary circumstances or in classroom-level action research.**
 - Principals are often uncomfortable when their staff members request to conduct research in their own schools, and they ask our committee to deny the research.
 - Voluntariness may feel questionable when working with peers and students, as they sometimes don't know if they can say "no." Also, voluntariness can be perceived as non-existent, such as when an assistant principal or principal asks a teacher to volunteer for a study.
 - Objectivity is difficult in one's own school.
- **Correlational designs without triangulation:** Strictly correlational (or associational) designs usually are not sufficient for committee approval unless correlational data are triangulated with other data. Occasionally a proposal is approved when a correlation is extremely innovative and other data are not available.
- **Ex post facto and causal-comparative designs:** The committee often denies ex post facto and causal-comparative research. These methods are correlational research that include a categorical independent variable instead of a continuous variable, and this variable is often pre-determined (e.g. inclusion in a group that received an intervention or participated in a program). As with other forms of correlational and associational research, it is stronger when other data that support the study are included.
- **Nonequivalent groups:** The committee often denies research when the proposed control groups are not equivalent to treatment groups in terms of income levels, race/ethnicity, exceptional education status, or English Learner status.
- **Extensive student or staff time:** The committee often denies projects that propose extensive engagement with staff or students. Resentment exists in the district regarding the number of surveys teachers and students are asked to take. In the absence of a direct benefit and sometimes even an incentive, proposals that require extensive student or staff time are denied. (We will develop guidelines on how much surveying is acceptable, especially during certain months when we know district surveys, etc. are administered.)
- **Biased questions for surveys/focus groups/interviews:** The committee often denies surveys or focus groups that include questions that are biased toward a particular response and/or that have not been validated prior to proposal submission. Researchers' hypotheses should be falsifiable.
- **Methodology is not appropriate to the research question or researcher does not display methodological understanding:** Occasionally proposals include methodology that is not compatible with the research question, a sample size that is not appropriate for the scope of the study, or the researcher demonstrates an incomplete understanding of the methodology they intend to employ. In such cases the researcher is typically asked to revise and resubmit the proposal.
- **No valuable contribution to MNPS or the broader field:** Occasionally the committee denies research because there is no contribution made to knowledge applicable to MNPS or the broader field of education research.
- **Proposals are not comprehensible:** Dissertation proposals often have extensive spelling and grammar errors. While we never deny on the basis of these errors, they often interfere with understanding a proposal's intent.

A final note about project timelines:

- We ask that no graduate student propose a study that depends on MNPS approval and/or depends on our approval within a specific time period. Students should have backup plans for going to another district and/or taking zero credit hours until a proposal can be reworked or abandoned in favor of another topic.