

Conducting Research in
Haywood County Schools

Research Proposal
Guidelines

September 2011
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Haywood County Schools (HCS) recognizes the importance of conducting educational research in school settings and is supportive of researchers who wish to conduct research in our schools. Researchers will find many opportunities to conduct cutting-edge research, tapping into the diversity of the students, teachers, families, and administrators who constitute our school system. Of particular interest to us are research proposals that help us fulfill our mission and identify the most effective means of attaining our strategic goals.

Although we are eager to learn all we can about our students, their families, our teachers, our curriculum and our instructional practices, support for educational research is tempered by the need to protect the instructional time of our teachers and students. Additionally, research conducted in our schools must not compromise the privacy of any member of our system. We can only approve research proposals that meet legal and professional standards for research and ethical practices, and those that clearly demonstrate high potential for helping us attain our strategic goals as a district.

For these reasons, the Department of Research and Assessment has developed guidelines for researchers who wish to conduct research in our schools.

I. General Principles

HCS recognizes the value of conducting high-quality research for improving education and serving the needs of our current and future students. On the other hand, the district has legal and moral obligations that require oversight of research activities conducted with district resources (e.g. data, student/staff time, facilities). Research proposals must include the following protections:

- i. Protecting students and employees from risk of harm, violation of rights, and loss of privacy.
- ii. Protecting the educational process from unwarranted distractions and interruptions
- iii. Protecting public resources (including data) from misappropriation for private or unjustified use

II. Legal and Ethical Principles

a. Legal protections

- i. HCS requires that all research conducted in the District adhere to all appropriate federal, state, and local regulations regarding the rights of students, teachers, administrators, and family members.
- ii. Researchers must strictly adhere to federal guidelines regarding the privacy and protection of human subjects, specifically Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (34 CFR Part 97). This policy can be found in the Department of Education website (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/fund/reg/humansub/part97-3.html>)
- iii. Additional protections for Children Involved as Subjects in Research can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/print/policy/fund/reg/humansub/part97-3.html>
- iv. HCS prides itself in the relationship we have with our students and their families, and this relationship must be protected. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA:34 CFR Part 98) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA:34 CFR 98) impose stricter requirements on the district than those imposed on researchers by Institutional Review Board reviews. These rules can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/pdf/ferparegs.pdf>

b. Ethical Principles

- i. We expect researchers to abide by the code of ethics for their respective disciplines. We offer the following principles from the American Psychological Association's (1992) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct as a general guideline. These documents are available at <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html>
- ii. Additional guidance for researchers can be found in the Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association.

III. The Approval Process

a. **Who should submit a research proposal?**

Any person who wishes to conduct research at a school site, gather information on or from students, or survey school staff, must obtain written approval from the Department of Research and Assessment. Undergraduate and/or graduate students, university faculty, independent researchers, and private/public agencies must all submit proposals before conducting research in our schools. This procedure applies to all researchers, even if the researcher is employed by the school system (e.g. school staff doing doctoral dissertations). If the research involves only the collection of aggregated student information that is already publicly available, researchers need not submit a proposal. Current HCS faculty and staff members wishing to conduct action research should contact Dr. Allan Sterbinsky to discuss potential waiver of the formal approval process.

b. **Statement of agreement.**

We require that all researchers sign a statement of agreement. This statement establishes that your research activities within HCS are in compliance with all applicable legal and ethical codes. It further establishes that the research you conduct will not differ significantly from the research proposed, and that a copy of your findings (including an executive summary) will be submitted to the HCS Department of Research and Assessment before publication or distribution of the results. A copy of the Researcher's Statement of Agreement can be found at: <http://haywoodschools.com/>

c. **Required Proposal Elements**

- i. Title of the project
- ii. Researchers' identities, contact information (address, phone numbers, email addresses), positions, and relevant publications
- iii. Institutional support – The researcher(s) must submit a copy of their institution's IRB letter of approval for this research to be conducted. Research cannot be approved without this letter of approval from the researcher's institution.
- iv. Statement of purpose
- v. Literature review, research questions, hypotheses, and anticipated contribution to the field.
- vi. Methodology

It is in the best interest of the district to minimize the human costs of conducting research in our schools. For this reason, it is essential that the research proposal provide a clear rationale for the sample selection, the number of participants in the study, and the total amount of time required from each participant. These points should be addressed in the Sample and Procedures sections of the proposal. The quality of the research proposal will also be judged on the procedures used to analyze the data.

1. Sample(s)
 2. Procedures
 3. Anticipated analysis
- vii. Instruments
- Instruments that are used in high quality research have known reliability and validity estimates. Without these estimates, the results of the research will be in question and valuable student/teacher/administrator time and resources may be jeopardized. For this reason, all research proposals should report the reliability and validity estimates for each instrument used in the study. For instruments under development, the researcher should describe how the reliability and validity estimates will be derived for those instruments. Copies of all instruments (or originals of copyrighted instruments) must be submitted with the proposal.
- viii. Informed Consent
- Active consent is required for all research involving data gathered from district personnel. Passive consent will not be approved. For collection of student data, a parent or guardian must sign an informed consent to allow his/her child to participate in the research project, and the student(s) must assent to participate in the study. Researchers should describe how their data collection process will ensure that no data are gathered without a signed consent form for each student or staff member. Proposals should also include an explanation of how the data collected will remain confidential.

The parent/guardian informed consent form should be in the form of a letter. In a conversational format that is easily understood by parents/guardians/participants, the researcher should provide the following information:

1. identification of the researcher(s) conducting the study (e.g., graduate student at a local University);
2. the purpose(s) for collecting data;
3. the activities participants will be asked to complete (e.g., participate in a focus group with five other students, complete a survey online, complete a short reading test);
4. if the student will be audio- or videotaped, request permission to participate in the taping sessions, explaining how the tapes will be used, what will happen to the tapes once the research is completed, and how the privacy of the students/participants will be protected;
5. the individual student data requested of participants (e.g., student-level test scores, attendance records, and address and phone number for follow-up);
6. the total amount of time required for the student/participant;

7. that all information will remain anonymous and confidential;
8. that participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences;
9. telephone number of researcher(s), so that the parent or participant may call if there are questions or concerns;
10. space for a signature and space for either consent or refusal to participate.
11. name, title, and telephone number of the Chair of the Institution's IRB, along with an invitation for participants to call regarding any concerns they have regarding participation in the research.

If the parents/guardians of students do not speak English, it is the responsibility of the researchers to provide the consent forms in an alternative language that is understood by the parent/guardian. English versions of any non-English informed consent form must be provided with the proposal.

The researcher must retain all consent forms, and must be prepared to make them available if a parent, teacher, or school/district official questions a student's participation.

To avoid any perceived coercion, the invitation to participate in research is to be printed on the researcher's stationery, and not on that of any office or school of the Haywood County Schools. Also, school administrators or staff will not be mentioned as supporting the research.

The signature portion of the informed consent will simply state that "I agree to let my child _____(name) participate in the study described above." Caveats should not be used (e.g. "I understand that participation of my child is voluntary"). Such statements must be provided in the letter to parents, and not put into the parent's mouth.

- ix. Anticipated benefits of research
The proposal must identify the benefits provided by the research, including benefits to the district, schools, principals, teachers, and students.
- x. Potential risks to participants
The research proposal will clearly describe any risks to the participants of the research study.

- d. **Submit a copy of the proposal.** The full proposal (including copies of all instruments, consents, IRB approval letters, etc.) should be submitted to Dr. Allan Sterbinsky, 900 East Main Street, Brownsville TN 38012. Requests received after April 1st will probably not be approved for that academic year due to the demands on schools during this time of year. Undergraduate or graduate student proposals must contain the signature of the student's primary advisor, signifying that the institution's quality standards have been met.
- e. **The review process.** The Review Committee will review the proposal and respond within three weeks. Please note that approval of the research proposal does not commit specific schools, principals, teachers, or students to participate in the research study, nor does it authorize you to claim HCS support or endorsement for your research. After approval from the Department of Research and Assessment, researchers must, on their own, obtain the principal(s), teacher(s), and parent/guardian(s) permission to proceed with the research in their school(s).
- f. **After approval.** Once permission is obtained from the principal(s) to conduct research in specific schools, an Agreement to Participate form must be signed by the appropriate principal(s) and teacher(s) and received by the Department of Research and Accountability before the research project can begin. This form can be found at the following website: <http://haywoodschools.com/>
- g. **Data requests.** In an effort to provide the maximum protection of the district's confidential information, we do not release data on individual students or teachers. For researchers whose research proposals require these data, the data analysis will be completed by the district and only summary results will be provided.