Purpose of the Research Application Resource Guide

The purpose of this Research Application Resource Guide is to provide researchers information about the research application and approval process in Fulton County Schools (FCS). The intended audience of the resource guide includes academic and research staff, students, independent research agencies, employees of FCS (conducting research outside of their job-related responsibilities) and other members of the community wishing to conduct research in FCS.

We recommend that applicants first read the Board Policy on Educational Research -ICC (which can be found under Policies and Instructional Programs once you clicked the link above) in advance of reading this resource guide.

The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) housed within the Department of Internal Audit, oversees the research request process and monitors the approved research to ensure research efforts conducted in FCS comply with relevant laws, policies, and procedures. The department places great trust in research applicants to maintain the highest standards for research and compliance with the conditions of approval outlined in the Research Approval Agreement which is issued after an applicant has been approved. You can view a sample of this agreement here on our department website. However, please note that this is only a sample.

In this document, you will find information regarding the research application submission, review, and approval process. Specifically, this resource guide is designed to:

• clarify the expectations and requirements associated with seeking approval to conduct research at FCS
• outline the steps required to prepare and submit a research request, as well as provide post-submission information and FCS requirements upon approval
• improve the quality of submitted research applications by providing prospective researchers the criteria by which the research committee will evaluate requests

This resource guide is divided into three parts:

• Part I provides general information about conducting research with FCS
• Part II outlines the application submission and review process
• Part III describes what the researcher can expect post-approval as well as FCS expectations upon approval

We welcome your interest in FCS and look forward to reviewing your complete application.

If you have additional questions upon reading this Research Application Resource Guide, please direct inquiries to DPE at 470-254-6886 or email programevaluation@fultonschools.org
Part I – General Information

Fulton County Schools believes in the power of research to improve the body of knowledge related to learning and development in our schools. We welcome partnerships with the research community that substantially benefits FCS, its students and/or its staff.

Who must apply for research approval?

All persons interested in conducting research in FCS must have prior approval. The following groups of individuals are eligible to apply:

- FCS staff (conducting research outside of their job-related responsibilities)
- Dissertation candidates (including FCS employees)
- University faculty
- Research firms
- Government agencies (except for compliance and enforcement purposes)
- Non-profit organizations

What constitutes research?

- Collecting data from students, parents, teachers, administrators, or other staff members
- Observing/conducting focus groups or individuals interviews with students, parents, teachers, administrators, or other staff members
- Accessing identifiable or non-identifiable student information to support research activities
- Use of FCS resources (staff, sites) to recruit participants for external research projects
- Any research on sensitive or protected topics

What type of research is not eligible for consideration?

- Any research that will violate Board Policies and Procedures, particularly the Board Policy and Procedure on Research.
- Master’s degree studies by individuals who are not FCS employees
- Research to meet undergraduate or non-degree seeking coursework requirements from non-FCS employees
- Studies that involve greater than minimal risk
- Exploratory research or national surveys that do not provide direct benefit to our students or practices
- Studies that would only benefit education in general, rather than the Fulton County School System specifically
Which studies are exempt from district-level approval?

- Studies being conducted only in the setting where the employee works for the sole purpose of improving practice in that setting.
- Studies using publicly available FCS data (Please contact FCS’ Open Records Officer.)
- Studies that are not part of a doctoral program.
- Studies that are not being published (conferences, academic journals etc.)

Important note for FCS employees conducting research

FCS employees who are doctoral students conducting non-dissertation research for the sole purpose of fulfilling a classroom requirement will complete a separate application. For further information, please contact the department.

Important practical considerations:

FCS focuses on student achievement and a core priority of the DPE is to serve our schools.

For those reasons:

- Interference with school instruction and operations must be kept to a minimum.
- Due to the number of requests that DPE receives, our ability to review and support external research projects, and to provide access to student data, is limited.

Important restrictions:

We are committed to protecting FCS’ educational environment, students, staff, their privacy, and the security of their data.

- We have a legal and ethical obligation to protect the privacy of our students. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g and its implementing regulations) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g and its implementing regulations) are federal laws that protect the privacy of students and education records. The laws apply to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.
• FCS will carefully consider the best interest of its students before granting access to them, their data, or our staff and their data. **Any student information provided to support approved research would be anonymous and de-identified.** Data that is shared will be limited to what is determined to be **directly relevant** to the request as approved by the DPE.

• Requesters have the right, consistent with scientific standards, to publish, present, or use from the research or data analysis, but only if the publication, presentation or its use does not permit personal identification of the district, its teachers, students, or parents. The School System and school(s) shall not be identifiable in any research activity without permission of the DPE.

• No research activity may be conducted in schools during administration of standardized tests or at other times specified by the DPE or the school principal.

• Data collections that will lead to the identification of a student are strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, videotaping of students, identified student work samples, or identified surveys. In addition, use of any student work samples or surveys must be clearly described and provided for review in the application and approval must be received prior to the use or implementation of either assessment tool.

**What about the required consent procedures?**

FCS complies with all state and federal regulations regarding consent procedures for human research. FCS reserves the right to require written consent for studies involving students, staff, or parents, even if it is waived by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) / Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB).

FCS requires that researchers obtain written (active) parent consent before obtaining information from students. The participation of students, parents, and staff members in any research project is completely voluntary. Researchers must obtain written permission from the student participant’s parents/guardians using the *Parent/Guardian permission form*, provided by DPE, in conjunction with any additional permission forms pertinent to the study before including any participant in the study.
Part II – Application Submission and Review Process

Where can I find the research application?

Research applications can be found on DPE’s website.

What criteria are used to review and approve research requests?

FCS is committed to supporting relevant, well-designed research studies. All applicants must abide by the expectations outlined in the Board Policy and demonstrate how their study would substantially benefit FCS, its students, and/or staff. In addition, the following criteria will be used to evaluate the appropriateness of FCS participation in the proposed research project:

- Alignment of proposed research with FCS strategic priorities
- Technical soundness of the research methodology, measures, and proposed analysis
- Feasibility of study design in terms of time requirements from staff and students
- Confidentiality of data and privacy of participants
- Compliance with human consent procedures
- Appropriateness of the research topic for support in the public school setting
- Clarity of purpose and thoroughness of research plan

Research applicants should review these factors prior to submitting a research application as the aforementioned factors are considered by FCS prior to moving an application forward. In addition, researchers should be far enough along in their training to understand how to develop a research question and design an appropriate study to answer the question without guidance from DPE staff.

What are some of FCS’ strategic priorities?

FCS recognizes the importance of quality research to strengthen the public education system. FCS places priority on those studies which address the five key focus areas outlined in the Strategic Plan 2022. These focus areas include instruction, people, technology, effective schools, and resources. For more information, applicants are encouraged to review Strategic Plan 2022 and clearly indicate on their application which of the focus area(s) their research has the potential to impact.

How can I avoid delays in the review process?

Every year, FCS receives far greater requests for researcher than we can accommodate. To avoid delays in the review process, researchers should submit all of the required information well in advance and adequately address protection of human subjects.
What do I submit as part of my application?

The following materials must be included in the application package of this guide in the following order:

1. Complete Application
2. Institutional IRB approval letter (if applicable)
3. Letters of support
4. Copy of all consent forms (see Parent/Guardian permission form)
5. Copy of all printed materials, surveys or tests

Letters of Support

Please include a letter of support from any district- or school-level employees if you have already obtained their support or commitment to participate in your research.

If the researcher/primary investigator is a doctoral candidate, a copy of support from the dissertation committee or a letter from the Chair of the candidate’s dissertation committee is required. This letter should indicate that the proposed research project has been approved by the candidate’s dissertation committee. Research proposals not yet approved by the candidate’s dissertation committee will not be reviewed or approved.

How do I submit my application?

All research request applications must be filled out using the district’s electronic application to conduct research

Who reviews and approves the research requests? When will my application be reviewed?

Research proposals will be accepted by the Department of Program Evaluation (DPE throughout the year except from April 1st through May 31st (black-out period) of each year.

DPE will review each proposal based on a standard rubric, and respond by email to the researcher within approximately five (5) week period of the submission date. The committee may approve, deny, or request modifications to research proposals.

Only complete research request applications will be reviewed by the Department.

Researchers are encouraged to submit their applications as early as possible to ensure that the application is complete. Please note that electronic submission of applications is required.
## 2019-20 Research Application Review Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Submission Deadline</th>
<th>Response Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>August 30, 2019</td>
<td>October 4, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 8, 2019</td>
<td>December 13, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 17, 2020</td>
<td>February 21, 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 22, 2020</td>
<td>July 10, 2020</td>
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Part III – What to Expect Post-Approval

If you have submitted a request that has been approved, the following sections will become relevant to you when completing your study.

What happens after a research request has been approved?

All individuals whose application was reviewed by the Committee will receive a decision email. For those who receive approval, please note that researchers may not begin data collection until they have received, signed, and emailed back the Research Approval Agreement.

The approval of the DPE does not obligate a particular school to participate in the research project. The decision to participate in the research rests on the principal of each school. The researcher must present the signed Research Approval Agreement to the principal to be given consideration at the school-level. Researchers must obtain written permission using the Principal Approval Form (available on our department website) prior to starting any research activities and maintain this documentation for their records.

What are the responsibilities of the researcher?

The researcher assumes the responsibility for conducting useful and high quality research. Upon being approved to conduct research in FCS, DPE expects all researchers will:

- Abide by FCS policies and procedures.
- Accept the responsibility to ensure that the research will abide by all relevant laws, including but not limited to, FERPA, PPRA, and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) policies and regulations on the protection of human subjects (45 CFR 46, as amended).
- Keep all personally identifiable information (as defined in FERPA) confidential and not disclose information obtained through the research agreement without the written permission of FCS.
- Agree that FCS will continue to own the data and agree to a data destruction schedule.
- Agree to bear all liability for activities conducted under the approved research, including, where permitted by law, indemnifying FCS and its employees, Board members and contractors.
- Agree that information gathered during this research can be used for no other purpose other than the approved.
- Agree that access to data will be limited only to those representatives of the Applicant’s institution with legitimate interests under the approved research.
- Follow the procedures as approved in the application and modify procedures and instruments only with prior approval from DPE.
• Conduct and complete the research study within the approved timeline and meet any stipulations accompanying the letter of approval.
• All studies are approved for a specific period of time. If data collection goes beyond this period, the researcher must file a Modification or Continuation Request Form.
• Submit a final report of the research findings no later than 6 months post-completion of study with FCS.
• Comply with general standards of best practices in conducting research as outlined by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) at http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/13127_Standards_from_AERA.pdf

Upon being approved to conduct research in FCS, DPE expects all researchers will not identify or include identifiable characteristics of schools or of the school division without authorization from DPE. We also expect that all researchers will not publish any information that could be used to identify individual students or employees of the school system without authorization from DPE.

**Reasons for termination of approved study**

DPE may terminate research being conducted within the district at any time for any reason deemed appropriate in the discretion of FCS alone.

**What about the sharing of the results?**

A key factor in approving application is the benefit of the research to our students. FCS requires that all approved researchers consent to providing a report of their findings no later than 6 months after the completion of their study with FCS. We anticipate that summaries would include the rationale/importance of the study, methods, bulleted findings, and implications.

**What should I do if my research changes within the year or extends beyond a year?**

If your research substantially changes or goes beyond the school year of the approval period or takes place over more than one school year in a multi-year study:

1. Complete an electronic copy of the Project Status Update form (which you can find here)
2. Submit IRB Approval (if applicable)