

## GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING EXTERNAL RESEARCH IN TDSB

The following guidelines provide information to external researchers interested in conducting studies involving TDSB schools, staff, students or parents. Generally this applies to any non-Board initiated research that is intended to take place with these groups or on school/ board premises.

The Board values educational research, however we are also mindful that students have been entrusted to our schools for their personal education and so any external research must not be done at the expense of students' academic programs. To request access to TDSB schools, applications for conducting research are assessed by the **External Research Review Committee (ERRC)**, who then carefully considers all applications according to the criteria outlined on the following pages. It should be noted that even if the External Research Review Committee approves a project, this does not automatically guarantee access to a particular school. The school principal must also be willing to accommodate the study in his/her school.

### WHO MAY APPLY?

Applications are accepted from:

- Master's thesis candidates
- Doctoral thesis candidates
- Institutionally funded projects
- Externally funded projects
- TDSB staff doing research for external agencies or to meet academic course requirements as above

**PLEASE NOTE:**

- (1) *Due to a high volume of applications, ERRC gives lower priority consideration to undergraduate projects.*
- (2) *While the formal ERRC review process is not required for "internal action research" initiated by the school or classroom teacher(s), some guidelines can be provided for this type of research upon request.*

### HOW TO APPLY?

- Obtain approval from the sponsoring agency or institution representative.
- Obtain approval from the Ethics Review Board of sponsoring agency or institution.
- Complete the TDSB Research Application form.
- Email an electronic version of the completed application form with all attachments in a single file to [ERRC@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:ERRC@tdsb.on.ca). Enquiries may be sent to this email address as well.
- **AND** also submit nine (9) collated paper copies of the proposal (*original signatures required on one copy*) and relevant appendices.
- Send your hard copy submission to:

Sally Erling  
Chair, External Research Review Committee  
Toronto District School Board  
1 Civic Centre Court, Lower Level  
Toronto, ON M9C 2B3

## WHAT HAPPENS?

- There are six committee meetings throughout the school year (between September and May). The completed application and all relevant attachments must be received by the application deadline dates in order to be placed on the next agenda for review.

### Deadline Date for Applications

September 13, 2018  
October 18, 2018  
November 29, 2018  
January 17, 2019  
March 21, 2019  
April 25, 2019

### ERRC Meeting Dates for 2018-19

September 27, 2018  
November 2, 2018  
December 14, 2018  
February 1, 2019  
April 5, 2019  
May 10, 2019

- The External Research Review Committee (ERRC) considers the proposal by taking into account the criteria and policy guidelines outlined in the following pages.
- There are circumstances when a researcher may have contacts in a particular school or wish to include preferred schools for a reason related to the study design. The reasons should be explained in the proposal.
- At the discretion of the Chair, the review of an application may be expedited if: (1) the study involves a minimal number of data collection activities and participant groups (e.g. 1 school, 1-2 classes, 1 grade, a few teachers) over a short time period and poses no risk to participants; or (2) it is for the renewal of a previously approved project where there has been little or no change in the research protocol.
- The applicant will be notified in writing and/or by e-mail regarding the final decision for the project. Proposals may be Approved; Conditionally Approved (e.g. with revisions or additional information required); Deferred (e.g. not enough information to make a decision); or Not Approved.
- Only after ERRC approval is granted, may the researcher make initial contact with the principal(s) to invite participation. In order to make an informed decision about participation, the researcher will provide the principal with (1) a copy of their letter of approval from ERRC and (2) a study information letter fully disclosing the purpose and details of the study and the direct commitments that would be required by their students, staff and/or parents.
- Committee approval does not obligate schools to participate in a study. It is the principal's prerogative to decide whether or not his/her school will be involved.
- If agreed, the applicant and the principal make practical arrangements for the scheduling and implementation of the research and to ensure that there are minimal disruptions to regular routines.
- Potential participants (staff, parents and students) also have the right to decide whether or not they wish to participate in the project, and may opt out at any time during the study.
- Please note that ERRC takes responsibility only for the approval of research-related protocols and components and has no authority to grant approval for the provision of a partnership program, intervention or service offered by an external partner or agency. Agencies proposing to offer either partnership programs or supplemental student services as part of their research application will be instructed to initiate a formal partnership agreement with schools first (see TDSB Operational Procedures PR.700 and PR.578 SCS on [www.tdsb.on.ca](http://www.tdsb.on.ca) under Educational Partnerships). Potential approval by the ERRC for research components would be "conditional" upon the completion of this partnership agreement process.
- In circumstances when a research study/program is to be implemented off school or board premises, applicants looking to recruit a particular target population for their sample may request permission *only* if it has direct educational relevance and value for participants. ERRC does not officially endorse such research, although if the details about the study are fully disclosed and pose no risk to participants, approval for the display of information flyers or brochures within a school may be considered, subject to principal agreement. However it is generally recommended instead that volunteers/ samples for off-site studies be recruited by alternate means.

## WHAT CRITERIA DOES THE COMMITTEE CONSIDER?

### **Relevance to education:**

- Is the study relevant to education in general?
- Is the study relevant to education in Toronto?
- Is the study consistent with Board policies and priorities?
- What is the value and/or benefit to the system?
- Is there an acceptable process for providing feedback of results to participating schools?

### **Research methodology:**

- Is the study well designed?
- Is the methodology appropriate given the purpose of the study?
- Are the theory and research questions clear and presented in plain language?
- Are there clear procedures for sample selection?
- Are the research instruments adequate and appropriate?

### **Protection of staff and students:**

- Are the demands made on the system and on the time of students and staff realistic?
- Is the study free from sensitive or intrusive items?
- Are the confidentiality of data and the rights of the participants protected?
- Is the well-being and safety of participants ensured at all times?
- Are there clear procedures for obtaining informed consent? (See sample parent consent form attached.)
- Is there an appropriate protocol to deal with sensitive issues arising during the research (e.g., students' who wish to withdraw from the study, disclosure of sensitive information by participants, debriefing participants)?

## RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE POLICY GUIDELINES

1. While the External Research Review Committee considers all proposals from external researchers from recognized institutions and agencies, because of the large number of requests to do research in TDSB schools, proposals from undergraduates are given low priority and research for commercial or market purposes is generally not considered.
2. Studies that have direct relevance to education and demonstrable benefits for participants, education and TDSB will be given priority.
3. Submissions must be typed and formatted within the TDSB Research Application template.
4. All materials must be submitted in FINAL form (e.g., data collection instruments, letters). Drafts will not be considered.
5. The research proposal must have the support of the researcher's affiliated agency or institution and where applicable their Research Ethics Board's approval prior to submission to the TDSB.
6. Any person conducting research with students must provide certification of a Criminal Records Background Check and Vulnerable Sector Screening prior to commencement of the study. The TDSB's Police Reference Check Office can help to facilitate that.
7. The rights, well-being and safety of study participants must be protected at all times.
8. The research must ensure that the confidentiality of information about TDSB schools, teachers and students is protected and that no TDSB school, staff or student is identified in any report without permission.
9. Under Freedom of Information legislation, personal information or identifiable individual records are not disclosed to independent researchers. TDSB also does not identify particular individuals for the researcher's study sample.
10. Active parental permission is required for any research with or about students under the age of 18 years in TDSB schools. Passive consent is not accepted and parent permission must be by signed informed consent. Copies of consent letters must be included with the application.
11. Researchers will not be allowed to conduct research in TDSB schools during September, after mid-May or in January in semester schools, except in very rare circumstances.
12. The study should be minimally intrusive in terms of time and numbers. The demands on schools and study participants should not be excessive or conflict with students' academic program.
13. Principals in TDSB schools will make the final decision about their involvement in research projects.
14. As a condition of ERRC approval, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide a report of the study to the TDSB upon completion. The researcher shall arrange feedback of results to participating school(s) as well.
15. ERRC approval is for one year. Ongoing and longitudinal studies require annual renewal and approval. To request an extension or expansion of an existing study, a status report letter and/or revised application form must clearly indicate any modifications to the research protocol (e.g. samples, target schools, tasks, data collection tools, time requirements, etc). Updated documentation (e.g. institutional REB approval letters, police checks) is to be included and participant consent must also be renewed annually. A separate form for requesting renewals or extensions is available on the ERRC homepage.

### GUIDELINES FOR PRINCIPAL INFORMATION & INVITATION LETTERS

1. An introduction with specific, detailed information about the researcher and the purpose of study.
2. Information about the nature and extent of participant involvement (i.e. students, teachers, parents, office staff, administrators) including numbers, data collection or assessment methods, administrative support and/or facilities required, debriefing plans, and estimated time commitments.
3. Timelines about when data collection will take place.
4. Assurances that the study has been approved by TDSB (Providing a copy of the ERRC approval letter is recommended).
5. Researcher contact information for additional questions or requests for further information.
6. An invitation for verbal agreement/ assent to participate.

### GUIDELINES FOR PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORMS

The parent/guardian consent form should be written in clear and plain language, and at a minimum should include the following information:

1. An introduction with specific and detailed information about the researcher and the research.
2. Information about the nature of a student's involvement (e.g., data collection tools, number of sessions and total time commitments, group or individual participation, in-class or withdrawal, opportunity to decline questions or withdraw from study at any time, etc.)
3. Timelines about when data collection will take place.
4. Specific samples of the types of questions, survey or test items, or demographic data being asked of their child to ensure full disclosure for informed consent. There must also be a strong rationale for asking any detailed demographic information or personal questions about sensitive issues.
5. Assurances that the study has been pre-approved by TDSB and the school's principal.
6. A guarantee that individual identities and results will remain confidential and a description of data security protocols.
7. The researcher's contact information for parents/ guardians who may have questions or require further information.
8. A clear statement about what is being agreed to with space(s) for a signature. Consent may be requested for the study in its entirety if necessary and/or options can be provided for separate consent for multiple components.
9. Video/digital recording or photographing of subjects may require multiple levels of consent. E.g., (1) for the use of images solely for research purposes and to be viewed exclusively by designated research staff, and/or (2) for the use of images for public display or the presentation of results at a later date. In this case, participants may request a preview and/or modification of their images or recordings prior to their release.
10. Translation of letters where appropriate.

*A sample consent letter is provided on the following page*

Note:

- Signed Parent Consent is required for students under 18 years of age.
- Children under 18 years old are not required to provide signed written consent in addition to their parents' consent. Verbal assent to participate is sufficient if given a full description of the project and commitments prior to participation. A verbal script or student information letter may be appended if applicable.

**SAMPLE PARENT/GUARDIAN LETTER**  
(Letterhead of the institution you represent)

(Date)

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a researcher from \_\_\_\_\_ studying the factors that influence the career plans of youths. I am interested in determining when such plans are made, who may have helped in the making of the plans, and the relationship between career plans and attitudes regarding the world of work. Such information will be useful to schools in designing better programs to prepare youths for future employment.

The External Research Review Committee of the TDSB has granted approval for this study. The school Principal has also given permission for this study to be carried out in your son/daughter's school.

Your son/daughter will be asked to complete a survey in \_\_\_\_\_ which will take 30 minutes. The survey will include questions about his/her career plans, interests, school achievement, background information (e.g., place of birth), and opinions about entering the work world (e.g., whether he/she agrees that schools should make sure that students have the skills needed for the working world). About one week following the survey, your child may also be asked to participate in a more detailed focus group interview with 4-5 other students which will be audio-taped. This would occur during the school day and last approximately 15 minutes. He/she may withdraw from the research at any time.

As a parent, you will also be asked to complete a brief survey in February.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your son/daughter's attendance in class or his/her evaluation by the school. All information collected will be strictly confidential. After all data have been collected, the students will not be identified individually.

Please indicate on the attached form whether you permit your son/daughter to take part in this study. Your cooperation will be very much appreciated. Contact me (telephone number or e-mail address) if you have further questions.

Sincerely

XXXXXXX

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**PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

YES, I agree to allow my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in:  
(son/daughter's name)

(a) the written survey

(b) the focus group interview

NO, I do not wish my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in:  
(son/daughter's name)

(a) the written survey

(b) the focus group interview

Parent's/Guardian's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Revised (April 2017)