

## 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.
- Download and complete the TDSB Research Application Package from the TDSB ERRC website.
- Save all documents in one pdf file.
- Complete the online form and submit your research application. See link below or visit the TDSB ERRC website.

[https://tdsb.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0HXtoypPyehJ7Rr](https://tdsb.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0HXtoypPyehJ7Rr)

Please email [ERRC@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:ERRC@tdsb.on.ca) for questions or concerns.

## WHAT HAPPENS?

- There are five committee meetings throughout the school year (between September and June). 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 Application

### ERRC Meeting Dates for 2020-21

September 16, 2020	October 2, 2020
November 18, 2020	December 4, 2020
January 13, 2021	January 29, 2021
March 24, 2021	April 9, 2021
May 26, 2021	June 11, 2021

- 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 the study relevant in terms of TDSB's strategic goals and priorities?
- 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 CONSENT FORM**  
(Letterhead of the institution you represent)

**Date:**

**Study Name:**

**Researchers:** *[Include your name, office address, contact information]*

**Purpose of the Research:**

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** Provide a brief description of what you will be asking participants to do *[Include a statement regarding the estimated time commitment for the participant]*.

**Risks and Discomforts:** Provide a description of any real or perceived risks (physical, emotional, economic, social) or potential discomfort that may result from participation in the research. If there is a possibility of harm or discomfort it **must** be described and the mitigation methods **must** be indicated.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** Include a statement regarding any benefits of the research as well as benefits to the research participants.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your son/daughter's attendance in class or his/her evaluation by the school. [...] In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:** All information collected will be strictly confidential. After all data have been collected, the students will not be identified individually.

*Indicate:*

- *if the interviewing or recording of the participant will be associated with identifying information*
- *how the data will be collected, e.g. handwritten notes, video/audio tapes, digital device*
- *how the data will be securely stored and who will have access*
- *how long the data will be stored and whether it will be destroyed after the study (and how) or will the data be archived (and if so, where).*

**If you intend to use the data for future research purposes**, the following text should be included:

*The data collected in this research project may be used – in an anonymized form - by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by researchers' respective institutions. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.*

**If you intend to make the data available to a data repository**, describe the manner in which the data will be provided (anonymized; identifiable) and the name of the repository/repositories if or wherever possible.

**If you intend to use Online surveys:** Note that online surveys (Qualtrics, Survey Monkey etc.) may allow researchers to capture and access additional information about each respondent over and above what they provide in the online survey. In addition, when researchers use the internet to transmit or receive participant data, they should be aware that while in transmission, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries. Therefore, when a researcher is using one of these online survey systems a statement like below should be added to the consent form:

*“The researcher(s) acknowledge that the host of the online survey (e.g., Qualtrics, Survey Monkey etc.) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses.) Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant’s consent on the researchers system. Further, “Because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.”*

**If you intend to use online technology for interviews, please specify the technology for participants and related confidentiality and privacy points.**

**Please note parents must consent to researchers contacting their children via email. If research methods include online methods, please ensure a space on the parent consent form where parents may consent to researchers contacting their children via email as well as a space for them to enter the email address.**

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact [...]

This research has received ethics review and approval by [...]

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 this school.

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I (student / staff / parent name), consent to participate in (insert study name here) conducted by (insert investigator name here). I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Name of Student** (where applicable)

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional consent (where applicable)**

You must seek additional consent by including check boxes or requesting additional signatures for the following:

- [For audio recording, please include the following:]

**1. Audio recording**

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

- [For video recording/authorize use of photographs, please include the following:]

**2. Video recording or use of photographs**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to the use of images of me (including photographs, video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	<input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y
In print, digital and slide form	<input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y
In academic presentations	<input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y
In media	<input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y
In thesis materials	<input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name:

- If you are offering the participants the option to waive anonymity, include the following:

**3. Consent to waive anonymity**

I, <<insert participants name>>, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name:

*Adapted from York University Research Ethics Board and Office of Research Ethics (October 2020)*