

*MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC BOARD OF EDUCATION OPERATES AS MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC SCHOOL DIVISION,
AND FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE REFERRED TO AS "MHPSD" AND/OR "DIVISION"*

SECTION 900 – School and Community Relations

**ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE: CONDUCTING RESEARCH STUDIES
WITHIN MHPSD**

PROCEDURE CODE:	904 AP 003
Policy Reference: 904 - Partnerships	Exhibits: 904 E 001 – Research Application and Approval Form

PROCEDURE

Medicine Hat Public School Division (MHPSD or the Division) recognizes the importance of educational research in improving theories of teaching and learning and values the role it plays in contributing to innovation and continued improvement. At the same time, MHPSD remains mindful that students have been entrusted to our schools and as such, any external research must be done without detriment to academic programming or the wellbeing of students. Therefore, the Division will cooperate with institutions undertaking research provided the research:

- Does not interfere with the primary mission or values of the Division
- Is not undertaken for personal gain of the researcher or participants
- Does not undermine, interfere with, jeopardize, or threaten the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, or physical wellbeing of any participant (staff or student)

DEFINITIONS:

Research – any process that gathers information for the purpose of dissemination of findings through publications, presentations, collegial sharing, or the fulfillment of degree requirements for the improvement of practice as it relates to the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Quality Assurance (QA) or Quality Improvement (QI) Projects – these activities are generally administered in the ordinary course of the operation of the organization for assessment, management of improvement purposes. Although the project may be exempt from research ethics review, it is expected the projects be conducted professional and ethically.

Evaluation – the systematic assessment of the design, implementation, and results of an initiative for the purpose of learning and/or decision-making.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES & REGULATIONS

1. All inquiries to conduct research within MHPSD, as well as research applications, must be submitted to the Associate Superintendent: Learning and Student Supports for approval. Any research studies being conducted within MHPSD should be in alignment with the Division education plan. Approval of the research study must be received before any further aspects of the study can commence; this also applies to any Division staff who are conducting research.
 - 1.1. Note that any research projects that require videotaping or photography of students during school time and/or on school property will not be approved.
2. Applicants will receive a confirmation email indicating the research application has been received; a confirmation email does not mean the research application has been approved. If the applicant does not receive a confirmation email within seven days of submission, a follow-up email should be sent by the applicant. Application processing can take up to eight weeks to complete.
 - 2.1. Researchers may be contacted to provide further information and clarification or to consider revisions to their application based upon review of the initial application.
 - 2.2. It is highly recommended that researchers submit their applications as early as possible to ensure that a final decision is made well in advance of the research start date. If it is essential that the study be conducted within a specific timeframe, this should be clearly indicated in the application for consideration. Research studies commencing within the eight-week review period cannot be guaranteed approval within the desired timeline.
3. Following the review, the applicant will receive a communication indicating whether or not the study has been approved.
4. If the application is approved, the researcher will be notified of permission to approach school principals for permission to conduct research. It should be noted that approval to conduct research from MHPSD does not obligate any school or individual within the school community to participate in the proposed research.
5. Only research studies with a direct relevance to education, as well as demonstrable benefits for participants (students, staff, and MHPSD) will be considered. Researchers interested in conducting studies within MHPSD are asked to focus on research that demonstrates potential to inform and enhance teaching practices, advance learning, and promote ongoing improvement.
 - 5.1. Proposals involving market research or for-profit endeavours will not be considered; research applications viewed as using staff or students for research and development purposes (i.e. beta testing software, program evaluation) will not be considered. Further,



if the intent of the research is to improve the offerings of a specific service or product, the application will not be approved.

6. Any study that meets the definition of research under the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)* must have Research Ethics Board (REB) approval in place prior to submission of an application to MHPSD. This requirement applies to all research involving MHPSD students or the collection of student or staff data. Researchers must also provide evidence that they have met the research ethics training and compliance requirements of their REB or reviewing institution, in accordance with TCPS2. A copy of the approved REB application must be included with the MHPSD research application; submissions without this documentation will be considered incomplete and will not be reviewed.
7. Informed consent is required for any research conducted with or about MHPSD staff, parents, legal guardians, and student 18 years of age or older, or 16 years of age and considered to be an Independent Student as per the Education Act. Assent must be provided by any MHPSD student under the age of 18 years (unless the student is identified as an Independent Student).
 - 7.1. Active, signed legal guardian informed consent is required for any research with or about students under the age of 18. Students under the age of 18 must provide active assent to their participation in the research.
8. As a condition of approval, it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide MHPSD with a report of the study upon completion. The researcher will also arrange to provide results to participating schools.
9. The study team must submit a progress report and request for continuation or extension of the study if it goes beyond the original time frame. Any changes to the research team, scope of the study, or methodology will require a resubmission to the application process.
10. MHPSD principals will make the final decision about their school's involvement in research projects. The researcher must contact the school principal through public channels (i.e. school website information), provide the notice of approval from MHPSD, provide an introduction to the proposed research study, and seek permission to conduct research in the school.
 - 10.1. It is the responsibility of the researcher to inform the principal of any existing relationships with any potential participants at the school. If the researcher wishes to work with specific participants, they must provide this information with a rationale.
11. If the principal approves the study, they use the introduction provided by the researcher to communicate the proposed study to school staff. Before approving the study, the principal must ensure that teachers and other staff participants feel no coercion and enter the study voluntarily.



- 11.1. If a staff member provides informed consent to participate in the study, the principal provides information to legal guardians about the research studying being conducted within the class and invites legal guardians to contact the researcher directly if they are interested in their child participating in the research study.
12. MHPSD staff shall contact the researcher directly if they are interested in participating in the study for themselves and/or their class of students.
13. No research may impede on instructional time. If the research is to occur during instructional time, evidence of a direct link between the time spent participating in research and the Alberta Program of Studies must be clearly described.
14. The study should be minimally intrusive in terms of time and numbers; the demands on the school and study participants must not be excessive or in conflict with students' academic programs.

POPA & SAFETY REGULATIONS

1. The research must ensure that the confidentiality of information regarding the MHPSD, MHPSD schools, staff, legal guardians, and students is protected and that no MHPSD school, staff, student, or legal guardian is identified in any report. Individual participants may provide consent to be identified through the informed consent process; for participants under the age of 18 the legal guardian must provide this permission. The MHPSD may be identified as a "school board in Western Canada."
2. Under Alberta's Access to Information and Protection of Privacy (POPA) Act, personal information or identifiable individual records are not disclosed to independent researchers by MHPSD. Individual participants who are 18 years of age or older, or those who are 16 years of age and considered to be legally independent must provide consent to the provision of their own personally identifying information. Legal guardians of participants under the age of 18 must provide consent for the collection of personally identifying data for their child. All identifying data collected must be directly relevant to the research being conducted.
3. All data collected must be stored in Canada; digital data must be stored on Canadian servers.
4. All persons conducting research that involves students, student data, or being around students and MHPSD staff must provide certification of a Police Record Check with a Vulnerable Sector search prior to the commencement of the study. Checks are accepted within 1 year of issue; employees of the MHPSD conducting research need not submit a check as one will already be on their personnel file.
5. Proposals with pre-existing relationships between the researcher and the potential participants must consider the conflict of interest these relationships may pose; clear evidence of consideration and mitigation of these issues must be described in the application.



Special Considerations for Researchers Who Are MHPSD Employees:

1. Proposals must consider how employment with the Division may create the appearance of power over potential participants and result in coercion, even if unintended (i.e. parent/guardian may feel their child could be penalized or miss out if they do not provide consent for their child to participate in their teacher's research project). Proposals must also consider perceived conflict of interest by potential participants and clear evidence of these considerations and migration of these issues must be addressed in the application.
2. The research must not impede on the duties of the employee. Proposals must clearly demonstrate that the research does not receive priority over employee duties.
3. Employees must not use their job-related access to sensitive information and resources to benefit their research. Consideration of ethical and fair access to potential participants and information for research is necessary and must be demonstrated.
4. To avoid infringement upon principal autonomy, issues of bias, or coercion, employees may not conduct research in their current schools; research applications from MHPSD employees who seek participation from students and/or staff in their current school will not be approved.
5. Employees may not use their job-related access to Outlook, Powerschool, Edsby, or any other MHPSD platforms to find or contact potential participants.
6. Without an approved research application, an employee may not use student work, information from Powerschool, Edsby, EdForms, or any other information found in official student records or student data. If clarification is required on this issue, please direct your inquiry to Associate Superintendent: Learning and Student Supports.
 - QI and QA projects require submission of Institutional Review Board documents to Associate Superintendent: Learning and Student Supports and notification of approval.

Policy adapted from Calgary Board of Education policy *Conducting Research*; Lethbridge School Division *Policy 1003.5 Conducting Research*, and Edmonton Public Schools Administrative Regulation *Conducting Research within the Division*.

QI & QA definition obtained from University of Waterloo - <https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-human-participants/pre-submission-and-training/human-research-guidelines-policies-and-resources/quality-assurance-or-quality-improvement-projects>

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