

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Catherine E. Pugh**  
*Mayor, City of Baltimore*

**Cheryl A. Casciani**  
*Chair, Baltimore City Board of  
School Commissioners*

**Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

## **Conducting Research in City Schools: Information for Researchers**

Baltimore City Public Schools welcomes outside researchers and external organizations to conduct studies within the system while ensuring that any research underway does not compromise the privacy of its students and parents or disrupt the work of students, teachers and administrators. As part of its mission, the Office of Achievement and Accountability supports research conducted by the System's partners, from City Schools' staff who pursue advanced degrees and from federally or state mandated studies. All other studies are approved depending on interest and the system's capacity to support them.

Any person (even those affiliated with City Schools) who wishes to conduct research at a school site must first obtain written approval from the City Schools' Institutional Review Board (IRB). Those who want to request school and student level data must do so through the City Schools' website. Additionally, publicly available data sets and previous research can be found on the City Schools' website, Maryland Report Card, and Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) at <http://baltimore-berc.org/>.

What is the process for submitting a research proposal?

In order to conduct research in Baltimore City Public Schools, you must submit your request via City Schools electronic submission platform, IRBManager. To log on to the system go to: <https://baltimorecityschools.my.irbmanager.com/>. If you do not have an account within IRBManager, please use the "Click here to Register" link located on the log in screen to establish an account. The IRBManager can be used to submit the following requests:

- Research studies involving data request only
- New research studies involving data collection (and, if applicable, requests for administrative data)
- Revisions to an existing IRB proposal
- Renewal of an IRB approved research study

Researchers are not permitted to request data directly from schools or other departments within the District Office.

### **What is the City Schools' IRB?**

The IRB works as a gatekeeper for all primary research involving human subjects proposed to occur in City Schools. The IRB is composed of members with a variety of backgrounds, experiences and interests. The members represent multiple departments in the central office as well as a representative from the community. The purpose of the IRB is to review and

make decisions regarding whether the proposed research should take place in City Schools. The IRB meets on a monthly basis to review new proposals. The schedule for IRB meetings can be found by visiting our website.

### **Who should submit a research proposal to the IRB?**

Individuals seeking to conduct research studies involving the collection of new data or the implementation and evaluation of a new intervention in City Schools must submit a research proposal to City Schools' IRB, using City Schools' electronic submission platform, IRBManager. Instructions for the submission of research application can be found on our website. This process of submitting research proposals to the IRB applies to both City Schools' employees and external researchers.

### **When is IRB approval not required?**

IRB approval is not required when you are only requesting City Schools' administrative data and will not be doing any new data collection.

### **What does the IRB look for when evaluating research proposals?**

During the review process, the IRB ensures that the rights and welfare of human subjects are protected and that potential risks due to participation in research are minimized. The IRB also discusses the scientific merit, privacy procedures and potential benefit of the research study to City Schools.

### **What happens to a research proposal once it is submitted?**

Research proposals are pre-screened for completeness by the Director of the IRB. Individuals with incomplete proposals are notified by email that revisions are needed. Each proposal submitted to the IRB is reviewed by two committee members and discussed in the monthly IRB meeting. For the calendar of IRB meetings as well as the deadlines to have proposals reviewed can be found on the City Schools' website. After the meeting, the researcher is sent a letter, which indicates whether the proposal was approved, approved pending revisions or not approved. This letter also includes information about any required next steps, such as fingerprinting and background checks which are required for conducting research in City Schools.

### **What type of research is not allowed in City Schools?**

Poorly designed research studies will not be approved by the City Schools' IRB. Also, any form of clinical trial involving medication, drugs or collection of any bodily fluids/specimens is not allowed in City Schools.

### **Can research take place during instructional time?**

Research should not impede instruction. All efforts should be made to minimize disruptions to instruction. If your research is expected to occur during instruction, prepare to work closely with school leadership to develop a data collection schedule and process that minimizes disruptions to instructional time as much as possible. Additionally, the IRB will specifically look at the time spent during instruction in the review process because of the concern that schools could be overburdened by research.

### **Can I audio or video record interviews or observations?**

Researchers must have active consent from parents/guardians for the participation of their child in any research study in which their child will be audio or videotaped. The consent form must specifically state that video or audiotaping is involved in the research.

### **What are the rules/regulations for classroom observations?**

Researchers must obtain teachers' consent to observe classroom activities. If the focus of the observation is strictly on the teacher, researchers do not need parent/guardian consent. However, researchers must send a letter to parents informing them that there will be an observer in their child's classroom. If the students will be the focus of the observation, the researcher must obtain active parental/guardian consent.

### **What does approval from the City Schools' IRB mean?**

The approval of a study does not constitute an endorsement of the study and such language should be included in final reports. Once IRB approval is received, completion of the proposed project is contingent upon approval of principals, teachers, students and completion of informed consent forms by parents, as appropriate. Permission of research studies is for one year unless otherwise noted in the approval letter. Research studies that will extend beyond one year must submit an application for continued approval prior to the expiration of the current approval.

### **What procedures should be followed for identifying and recruiting research participants in City Schools?**

Approval of the research proposal by City Schools IRB does not guarantee access to schools, staff or students. Principals decide whether to allow research to be conducted in their schools and the consent of the principal does not guarantee the participation of school personnel or students at that school. Participation in all research studies is voluntary. A principal may opt for the school not to participate in the research or may withdraw the school from participating at any time. Similarly, staff and students may also choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any point. It is the responsibility of the researcher to contact principals and other relevant

parties to obtain the required permissions before initiating the research study.

Additionally, researchers can ask for principal assistance with identifying school staff that teach specific grades, subjects or hold certain responsibilities. However, to protect staff privacy and anonymity, researchers cannot ask principals to recommend certain staff members to participate in the study or give out staff members' contact information. With principal permission, you can put flyers in teachers' mailboxes, post recruitment announcements in the teachers' lounge or host an information session at the school as a way to recruit participants.

### **What is the difference between active and passive consent for participation in research? When is active consent needed?**

Active consent involves obtaining a written agreement to participate from potential research subjects prior to initiation of the study. In contrast, passive consent involves sending letters to participants or parents of participants letting them know about the study and requesting that they sign and return a form to the researcher only if they do not want to participate or do not want their child to participate in research. Active consent is required for classroom observations, surveys, interview and focus groups as well as any other circumstance where there could be increased risk.

### **What is the difference between consent and assent?**

Assent is the mechanism for obtaining permission from student research participants who are under the age of 18. Assent is used with minors because they are not legally able to give informed consent. Students who are 18 or older should be given a consent form rather than an assent form. When obtaining assent from young children, the researcher may use a script to read the information to the child and then obtain his/her verbal or written assent with a witness present.

### **Can City Schools' principals and teachers conduct research with their own students/staff?**

Teachers should refrain from conducting research with their own students due to the potential for coercion. Instead, teachers who are interested in conducting research should recruit students from other schools to serve as research participants. Similarly, an administrator should not conduct research with those employees he or she supervises.

### **What if I also need administrative data from City Schools?**

An [application](#) for requesting existing City Schools' data is available within [IRBManager](#).

### **Is a background check required?**

Any research team member who is not currently employed by City Schools and may have contact with students must complete the fingerprinting and background procedures required of the City Schools' Department of School Police.

## **Can teachers and students be compensated for their participation? Can schools be compensated?**

City Schools prefers that incentives for teachers/administrators be in the form of gift cards or educational materials (potentially through a site like Donor's Choose) if participants are involved in study activities during normal working hours. Compensation for students should be developmentally appropriate. Schools can be compensated for participation in research. School compensation should come through Donor's Choose or a similar system.

## **What qualifies as an adequate data security plan?**

Researchers should ensure that all hard copy and electronic data are securely stored to prevent unauthorized access, disclosure or loss of information. If records are in hard copy, they should be stored in a way that only authorized individuals may have access to them. Electronic data should be saved on a device that has security safeguards such as password protection, encryption, anti-virus controls and scheduled and automatic backups.

## **What qualifies as an adequate data disposal plan?**

Data disposal plans should describe when and how data collected in the study will be destroyed, which includes the shredding of paper documents, erasing of computer data and disposal of any audio or videotapes. Federal regulations require that research data and related documents such as consent forms must be kept in a secure location for a minimum of three years.

## **How can I get a renewal of my research project?**

IRBManager is also used for the renewal or revision of an existing research project that has previous IRB approval. These forms can be started within IRBManager in the study details screen, which can be accessed by clicking on the study listed at the bottom of your dashboard. You will be asked to address any changes to your proposal as well as include details about your progress toward completion of your project, the status of subject recruitment and enrollment, the status of data collection and any unanticipated obstacles or problems you have experienced.

## **What is the procedure for multiyear studies?**

IRB approval is only for one year. If your project will extend beyond the year that IRB has granted approval, you must apply for a continuation at least six weeks before the IRB approval will expire using IRBManager. You will be asked to address any changes for the upcoming year of data collection as well as provide an interim report describing the data collection and document activities that took place during the previous year.

### **What if I need to change an aspect of my research design?**

Changes in research design that will take place during the year that IRB approval has been granted must be reported to the IRB and reviewed for approval. These changes are submitted through [IRBManager](#). If there will be changes in the research design past the initial year of approval, those changes should be included in the renewal application.

### **What do I need to do at the close of my study?**

Once your research study has been completed, please provide a copy of your report and description of your findings to the Office of Achievement and Accountability (OAA). In addition, you should log into [IRBManager](#) to complete and submit the Closure Form.