INSTRUCTION

Program Evaluation and Research Activities: Research/Surveys/Evaluations

I. Types of Research

In developing or administering research activities, the following types of research will be considered:

A. External Research

External research applies to:

1. All requests by individuals, groups, and organizations, including PWCS employees and students, to conduct research activities in PWCS or receive, for research purposes, identifiable and/or non-identifiable information.

2. PWCS student or employee data that are not otherwise publicly available under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, which is addressed in School Board Regulation 912-1.

3. Requests made by researchers, including PWCS employees and students, who wish to conduct research or data collection activities when not assigned to do so by PWCS as part of their job responsibilities (e.g., to satisfy course requirements, advanced degrees, or continuing certification).

All external research must be submitted to Program Evaluation and approved before any research related activities can begin.

B. Internal PWCS Research

Internal PWCS research applies to internally generated program evaluation and activities, undertaken for the purpose of improving programs and services, which shall not be subject to external research approval procedures. School Division personnel who undertake program evaluation and research projects shall be responsible for complying with all appropriate local, state, and federal guidelines involving protection of participants (e.g., confidentiality, parent permission, and access to student information).

School principals shall be responsible for all internal program evaluation and research activities conducted by their schools, including those activities conducted by student organizations, parent organizations, etc. Principals shall review and approve all internally generated projects prior to their start. Submitting in-house research activities to Program Evaluation shall not be required.
C. Under no circumstances shall Prince William County Public Schools participate in studies (internal or external) that require students to provide information in any of the categories listed below, without prior parental/guardian written consent. Parents/guardians shall be notified 30 days prior to administration of the study and shall have the right to inspect data collection instruments requiring students to provide information in any of the following categories.

1. Political affiliations of the student or the student’s parents.
2. Mental or psychological problems of the student or the student’s family.
3. Sex behavior or attitudes.
4. Illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior.
5. Critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships.
6. Legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians, and ministers.
7. Religious practices, affiliations, or beliefs of the student or student’s parent.
8. Income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program).

II. Definitions

In developing or administering research activities, the following definitions shall be used:

A. Research

Any systematic quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods investigation, including but not limited to instrument development, pilot testing, testing, and evaluation that is designed to develop or contribute to knowledge that can be applied to contexts beyond the setting in which the investigation took place. Science fair experiments, unless otherwise deemed necessary by the Supervisor of Science and Family Life Education (or designee), shall not be considered research.
B. Data Collection

The gathering of information (e.g., figures, words, or responses) that describe some situation for the purpose of supporting or drawing conclusions.

C. Human Research

A human subject as a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains:

1. Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or

2. Identifiable private information.

III. Stakeholders Impacted

This regulation shall apply to all research activities involving staff members, students, parents, or community members whether they are elementary or secondary-related and whether they are school or community-related

IV. Criteria for Approval

A. Approval for conducting external research shall require the conformity to all requirements of this regulation. The burden of presenting proof of such conformity rests with the agency or individual conducting the research activity. The initiating agency or individual shall also be responsible for complying with all appropriate local, state, and federal guidelines involving protection of participants (e.g., confidentiality, parent permission, and access to student information).

B. Proposed research activities will be evaluated on the following factors:

1. Quality of the research design as outlined in the research proposal, including purpose and time line of the study, data collection instruments, data analysis procedures, informed consent, audience for the information, and a description of what shall be included in the summary.

2. Amount of intrusion upon instructional time.

3. Amount of participant and staff time required for participation or coordination of research activities, including time needed to obtain
parental permission and allow inspection of third-party created survey forms.

4. Compliance with federal, state, and School Division requirements for students’ right to privacy.

5. Amount of Prince William County Public Schools supplies and equipment required.

6. Potential benefit of the study to the school, students, staff and/or community.

7. As appropriate, input from stakeholders in PWCS.

V. General

The following practices and procedures shall be followed when considering or conducting research activities:

A. All external research activities (instructional and non-instructional) involving student and staff time are to be submitted to Program Evaluation for review and approval using the Application for Approval of Research Proposal form.

B. When research activities involve multiple schools, consent shall be secured from building principals and appropriate level associate superintendents.

C. When research activities actively involve central departments, consent shall be secured from department heads and the appropriate associate superintendent.

D. Where parental permission is necessary, evidence of approval shall be secured prior to a student’s participation in the study.

E. Parent(s) or guardian(s) of a student may inspect any data collection instrument created by a third party for external research purposes before it is administered. Schools shall notify parents at least thirty days prior to administration of the survey and shall honor requests to inspect the survey as soon as practicable.

VI. Procedure

The steps outlined below shall be followed when a research activity is submitted:
A. All research activities shall be reviewed first by Program Evaluation in the Office of Accountability. The researcher shall be informed if additional information is required before the proposal is considered.

B. Program Evaluation will seek input from appropriate stakeholders regarding the request and make a recommendation to PWCS leadership.

C. Once the request is reviewed and approved or disapproved, a letter from Program Evaluation shall be sent informing the researcher of the status of the request.

The Associate Superintendent for Student Learning and Accountability (or designee) is responsible for implementing and monitoring this regulation.

The Associate Superintendent for Student Learning and Accountability (or designee) is responsible for reviewing this regulation in 2018.