



APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

Legal References:

Related References: *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*
[WRDSB Guidelines and Information for Research](#)

Effective Date: *February 23, 1998*

Revisions: *January 24, 2003; May 30, 2005; November 28, 2005,*

Reviewed: *January 22, 2018*

1. Preamble

1.1 It is the policy of the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) to permit authorized research personnel, in adherence to ethical guidelines as set out by the Tri-Council Policy Statement of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, to use its facilities and involve students, employees and/or caregivers from the WRDSB in various research projects with the prior approval of the Research Review Committee recognizing that:

1.1.1 the Board appreciates that the increasing interest in social science studies in the universities and colleges brings with it the need for research into education and the learning process;

1.1.2 Waterloo Region is a preferred area of local universities for use in various studies;

1.1.3 students, employees and caregivers can benefit in many ways as a result of some of the studies in which they participate;

1.1.4 the number of requests to conduct research in schools is of sufficient quantity to require some kind of control in order to permit schools to fulfill their main role of providing students with first class public education;

1.1.5 the Board's Research Review Committee team is chaired by a member of the WRDSB's Research and Evidence-based Practice department and will include administrators, a representative from the Waterloo Region Assembly of Public School Councils or the Parent Involvement Committee and other WRDSB staff on an ad hoc basis;

1.1.6 Superintendents and administrators will have access to a list of approved research projects.

2. Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans

2.1 The standard for university and non-university ethics review is the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2, 2014) which is a joint policy of Canada's three federal research agencies - the Canadian Institutes of

Health Research (CIHR), developed by the former Medical Research Council of Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

2.2 The complete document can be accessed on that Government of Canada website at: <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-epc2/Default/>

2.3 Included in the document cited in section 2.2 are the following three Core Principles: Respect for persons, Concerns for welfare, and Justice. The Core Principles are considered complementary and interdependent. They are applied and weighted in accordance with the nature and context of the research being conducted. The Core Principles transcend disciplinary boundaries and are relevant to the research community.

2.3.1 Respect for Persons: Respect for Persons recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due. It encompasses the treatment of persons involved in research directly as participants and those who are participants because their data or human biological materials, which for the purposes of this Policy include materials related to human reproduction, are used in research. Respect for Persons incorporates the dual moral obligations to respect autonomy and to protect those with developing, impaired or diminished autonomy.

Autonomy includes the ability to deliberate about a decision and to act based on that deliberation. Respecting autonomy means giving due deference to a person's judgment and ensuring that the person is free to choose without interference. Autonomy is not exercised in isolation but is influenced by a person's various connections to family, to community, and to cultural, social, linguistic, religious and other groups. Likewise, a person's decisions can have an impact on any of these connections. An important mechanism for respecting participants' autonomy in research is the requirement to seek their free, informed and ongoing consent. This requirement reflects the commitment that participation in research, including participation through the use of one's data or biological materials, should be a matter of choice and that, to be meaningful, the choice must be informed.

An informed choice is one that is based on as complete an understanding as is reasonably possible of the purpose of the research, what it entails, and its foreseeable risks and potential benefits, both to the participant and to others. Respect for Persons also includes a commitment to accountability and transparency in the ethical conduct of research.

Certain factors may diminish a person's ability to exercise their autonomy, such as inadequate information or understanding for deliberation, or a lack of freedom to act due to controlling influences or coercion. Such constraints may include the fear of alienating those in positions of authority, such as professional or personal caregivers, researchers, leaders, larger groups, or a community to which one belongs. Other constraints may consist of barriers to accessing resources or knowledge outside the research context. These factors and constraints should be addressed prior to any research being carried out, so as to ensure participants are sufficiently protected.

Some people may be incapable of exercising autonomy because of youth, cognitive impairment, other mental health issues or illness. While autonomy may be considered a necessary condition for participation in research, involving those who lack capacity to make their own decisions to participate can be valuable, just and even necessary. For those prospective participants, additional measures are

needed to protect their interests and to ensure that their wishes (to the extent that these are known) are respected. These measures will generally include seeking consent from an authorized third party who is entrusted to make decisions on behalf of the prospective participant, based on knowledge of that person and that person's wishes or, if such wishes are unknown, on consideration of that person's welfare. Even when the requirements of free, informed and ongoing consent cannot be met, Respect for Persons requires involving individuals in circumstances of vulnerability in decision making where possible. This may include asking about their feelings regarding participation and/or for their assent.

Where it is foreseeable that a participant may lose decision-making capacity during a research project, for example in studies of cognitive impairment, it may be appropriate to ask participants to express their preferences and ensure that they have authorized a trusted person to make decisions on their behalf should they lose the capacity to decide whether or not to continue their research participation.

- 2.3.2 Concern for Welfare: The welfare of a person is the quality of that person's experience of life in all its aspects. Welfare consists of the impact on individuals of factors such as their physical, mental and spiritual health, as well as their physical, economic and social circumstances. Thus, determinants of welfare can include housing, employment, security, family life, community membership, and social participation, among other aspects of life. Other contributing factors to welfare are privacy and the control of information about the person, and the treatment of human biological materials according to the free, informed and ongoing consent of the person who was the source of the information or materials. A person's or group's welfare is also affected by the welfare of those who are important to them. Harm includes any negative effects on welfare, broadly construed. Note that, for the purposes of this Policy, "group" and "community" are used in their ordinary sense.

Concern for Welfare means that researchers and Research Ethics Boards (REBs) should aim to protect the welfare of participants, and, in some circumstances, to promote that welfare in view of any foreseeable risks associated with the research. They are to provide participants with enough information to be able to adequately assess risks and potential benefits associated with their participation in the research. To do so, researchers and REBs must ensure that participants are not exposed to unnecessary risks. Researchers and REBs must attempt to minimize the risks associated with answering any given research question. They should attempt to achieve the most favourable balance of risks and potential benefits in a research proposal. Then, in keeping with the principle of Respect for Persons, participants or authorized third parties, make the final judgment about the acceptability of this balance to them.

The welfare of groups can also be affected by research. Groups may benefit from the knowledge gained from the research, but they may also suffer from stigmatization, discrimination or damage to reputation. Engagement during the design process with groups whose welfare may be affected by the research can help to clarify the potential impact of the research and indicate where any negative impact on welfare can be minimized. Researchers must also consider the risks and potential benefits of their research and the knowledge it might generate for the welfare of society as a whole. Where research on individuals may affect the welfare of a group(s), the weight given to the group's welfare will depend on the nature of the research being undertaken, and the individuals or

group in question. This consideration does not imply, however, that the welfare of a group should be given priority over the welfare of individuals.

- 2.3.3 Justice: Justice refers to the obligation to treat people fairly and equitably. Fairness entails treating all people with equal respect and concern. Equity requires distributing the benefits and burdens of research participation in such a way that no segment of the population is unduly burdened by the harms of research or denied the benefits of the knowledge generated from it. Treating people fairly and equitably does not always mean treating people in the same way. Differences in treatment or distribution are justified when failures to take differences into account may result in the creation or reinforcement of inequities. One important difference that must be considered for fairness and equity is vulnerability. Vulnerability is often caused by limited decision-making capacity, or limited access to social goods, such as rights, opportunities and power. Individuals or groups in vulnerable circumstances have historically included children, the elderly, women, prisoners, those with mental health issues and those with diminished capacity for self-determination. Ethnocultural minorities and those who are institutionalized are other examples of groups who have, at times, been treated unfairly and inequitably in research, or have been excluded from research opportunities. People or groups whose circumstances cause them to be vulnerable or marginalized may need to be afforded special attention in order to be treated justly in research.

The recruitment process, both of participants who may become directly involved in research and those who participate as the source of information or biological materials to be used in research, is an important component of the fair and equitable conduct of research. Participation should be based on inclusion criteria that are justified by the research question. Inequity is created when particular groups fail to receive fair benefits of research or when groups, or their data or their biological materials, are excluded from research arbitrarily or for reasons unrelated to the research question.

An important threat to Justice is the imbalance of power that may exist in the relationship between researcher and participant. Participants will generally not understand the research in the same way and in the same depth as does the researcher. Historically, there have been instances in which this power imbalance has been abused, with resulting harm to participants.

- 2.3.4 The Core Principles – Conclusion: The importance of research and the need to ensure the ethical conduct of research requires both researchers and REB members to navigate a sometimes difficult course between the two main goals of providing the necessary protection of participants and serving the legitimate requirements of research. The three core principles that express the value of human dignity provide the compass for that journey. Their application will help ensure that a balance between these two goals is maintained. Applying the core principles will also maintain free, informed and ongoing consent throughout the research process and lead to sharing the benefits of the research. These results will help to build and maintain the trust of participants and the public in the research process.