

Dear Superintendent Trevor Reid,

Thank you for considering my request and reading my letter. As outlined in my email, I am interested in working with the Sunrise School Division on a series of projects examining children's digital thinking and literacy. I selected your school division because rural schools are often overlooked by researchers. I want to elevate the voices of rural children and educators by ensuring they are included in my work and resulting datasets. *This request comes as a follow-up to a great series of meetings with Natalie Hlady (cc'd) and the team of specialists she works with.*

I am specifically seeking your approval for a few activities, which can be tailored to your school board needs. First, we would like to visit (approved schools) to conduct some engaging child-friendly research studies with students in K-Gr. 5/6. These projects will be run with Research Ethics Board (REB) oversight. They consist of us telling children about real-life digital literacy issues through mediums like stories and/or participatory design activities that are designed to elicit their thinking about important digital issues around digital safety, screen time, data ownership, privacy, and digital fairness. There are several benefits to schools, families, and children related to participating in these research projects. By participating in these research activities, children will have a chance for their voices to be elevated on pressing digital literacy issues. Engaging children in the research process (as opposed to only adults) allows for their rights as digital citizens to be promoted and respected through our work. We can't imagine more important voices to elevate than children living in rural areas who are likely having diverse experiences with technology that are going uncaptured. Further, through the activities children and teachers will also get exposed to real-time STEM-based research studies and therefore the scientific processes. They will be exposed to diverse scientists doing a real science project. These projects can be important jumping-off points for students and teachers to engage with activities that demonstrate what the scientific process looks like, and how it works. Students will get exposed to different kinds of scientists which can be important for reducing stereotypes around "what a scientist is" or "looks like". Most importantly, the research activities are child-friendly and enjoyable. Children typically have lots of fun while participating.

Parents will also benefit from the process as we will send home high-quality debriefing materials. These materials will both outline our findings but also promote the family's digital literacy knowledge. We will work with partners like MediaSmarts and the Canadian Center for Child Protection to ensure our resources are timely and reflect real-world issues. We hope these materials will open the door to important conversations around digital safety with their children.

Second, we want the schools to immediately see the benefits of our projects/findings, so I am seeking approval (assuming school/teacher consent) to run workshops to educate students and staff on digital literacy issues of their interest. These evidence-based workshops would leverage the findings from our research projects. I also discussed some interesting ideas with your literacy team around using our findings to promote math/STEM literacy in the classroom.

For example, we brainstormed ways to present our findings to students so that they can practice reading and making graphs with real data that they contributed to.

I am unsure if you have worked with professors/researchers in the past. If not, here are some procedural details you may be wondering about. First, the consent process usually begins with us calling schools from a school board approved list to get the principal's permission. After they give their permission, the general process is the same for any field trip or school activity. We work with principals to distribute (ethics board-approved) permission forms to interested classrooms. This permission form is usually distributed by the teacher who gives a copy to us when we visit the school. (We can also distribute permission forms electronically if that is the preference of the school and parents.) All children whose parents have given consent would then participate in the study/research activities. We typically run our studies in a quiet place of the school's choosing. The activities only take 15 minutes per child. Researchers work in pairs so children are not alone in the testing space with an individual researcher. We are happy to get criminal record checks as required. All sessions are audio-recorded for later reference. If at any point the students do not want to participate (or show distress), they notify the researcher and the study will stop immediately, and they will be brought back to their respective classrooms by a research assistant. We remunerate students with a sticker and certificate. Schools are given an iPad as remuneration for their time.

I have attached a copy of the approval letter for this research program from the REB at the University of Manitoba, as well as a sample permission form for your review. Please reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns about the research program, or if you would like to schedule a meeting to discuss these details any further.

We want this to be a collaborative process between our research team and the Sunrise School Division. We are open to suggestions on how to best meet your needs. Our target date to start our projects is Fall 2025. We hope to hear back from you before the end of this school year.

Thank you,



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