

# Office of the Education Ombudsman



**2007–2008 Annual Report**  
Reporting Period: July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008

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STATE OF WASHINGTON  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
OFFICE OF THE EDUCATION OMBUDSMAN

1110 Capitol Way S, Ste 304 • Olympia Washington • 98504-0004 • 1-866-297-2597 • [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org)

December 1, 2008

The Honorable Chris O. Gregoire  
Honorable Members of the Legislature  
Washington State Board of Education

I am pleased to submit the second annual report of the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO), as required by RCW 43.06B.050. This report covers our first full year of conflict prevention and resolution services for K-12 students and schools around the state.

We are happy to report that our services have been well received by parents, students, educators and other public education stakeholders. Our dedicated staff has worked hard to resolve problems and conflict so that students stay in school and have the opportunity to succeed. We have tackled hard issues and made a difference in the lives of many students this year.

While providing services, we have continued to develop internal structures and improved data collection systems in order to better serve our customers and connect with urban and rural school communities throughout the state.

We feel privileged to contribute to the academic success of Washington State students and are committed to developing a model K-12 Ombudsman office in the nation.

Respectfully submitted,

Adie Simmons  
Director  
Office of the Education Ombudsman



## Table of Contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
<b>I. The Office of the Education Ombudsman</b> .....	3
<i>Working to support student achievement</i>	
A Student Story – A bullying incident leads to a special education plan.....	7
<b>II. Resolving Conflict</b> .....	8
<i>Contributing to academic success, one student at a time</i>	
<b>III. Serving Students</b> .....	10
<i>OEO facts and figures</i>	
A Student Story – Adapting to a new school .....	27
<b>IV. Preventing Conflict</b> .....	28
<i>Public information and outreach</i>	
A Student Story – How does the system work?.....	32
<b>V. Promoting School-Family Partnerships</b> .....	33
<i>Why Family Involvement in education matters</i>	
<b>VI. Recommendations</b> .....	36
<i>Working to improve the education system</i>	
<b>VII. Looking Back and Ahead</b> .....	39
Goals and strategies	
<b>Staff and Partners in Education</b> .....	43

The way schools care about children is reflected  
in the way schools care about the children's families.

If educators see children just as students, they are likely  
to see families and communities as separate from the school.

If educators see students as children, in the context  
of their families, culture, and communities, they are likely  
to partner with all stakeholders in education.

*—Joyce Epstein, Ph.D.  
Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD*



# The Office of the Education Ombudsman

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## 2007- 2008 Annual Report

### Executive Summary

A mother waited 6 months to get an appointment with a school district director regarding special accommodations for her middle-school daughter; a partially disabled high school student was deemed incapable of taking Math II, although he had passed Math I with flying colors; Spanish-speaking parents in Eastern Washington missed the opportunity to appeal their son's suspension because they received communications in English, although the school employs Spanish speaking staff. In these and many other cases, the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) worked hard to keep Washington students in school, get their educational needs met and ensure that kids and families are treated fairly in the public education system.

During its first full year of operations, fiscal year 2007-2008, OEO provided services to a **total of 2,234 students, families and educators**. Education Ombudsmen intervened in a total of **317** cases of conflict between families and K-12 schools regarding educational issues. In the course of their conflict resolution work, Ombudsmen established connections with **117 rural and urban school districts** across the state. **58% of all interventions involved students in the Special Education program and 28% of all interventions involved student bullying and harassment issues.**

To educate the public and prevent conflict, **OEO provided training seminars to a total of 1,917 parents and educators** across the state covering topics such as: conflict resolution, family involvement in education, parent leadership, and understanding the public school system.

**OEO distributed 89,621 publications statewide** through schools, community-based organizations, and parent groups. OEO publications inform families how to understand and navigate the school system, about their rights and responsibilities in public education and how to resolve conflict with schools. OEO brochures are translated in 7 languages: Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

### Working with School Districts

At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, school district superintendents in the state were provided with a data report summarizing OEO interventions in their schools and the issues involved. Frequent communications and collaborative relationships with school districts improves OEO's rate of conflict resolution and contributes to positive outcomes for students.

## Recommendations

- The development of Washington State family involvement standards.
- State conflict resolution policy for schools.
- Improvement of teacher preparation programs.
- Development of a parent education advocacy/training program.
- State education interpreters and translators policy.

## Partners in Education

OEO consults and collaborates with the following partners: Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA), Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), Washington State Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), Washington Education Association (WEA), Commission on Hispanic Affairs (CHA), Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA), Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs (GOIA), Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA), Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL), Washington State Special Education Coalition (WSSEC), Special Education Ombudsman – OSPI, Partnership for Learning (PFL), Treehouse, TeamChild, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Washington State Human Rights Commission, OEO Parent Advisory Council (in development process).



# I. The Office of the Education Ombudsman

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## Working to Support Student Achievement

*“The Ombudsmen’s office is a must have for all parents trying to make sure their children get the best education possible. Thank you for your help!”*  
– Parent

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is an agency within the Office of the Governor, independent of the public education system. It was established by House Bill 3127 and approved by the state Legislature in 2006. OEO began to offer services to families and schools in February 2007.

RCW 43.06B.010 established OEO’s purpose as:

- To provide information to students, parents and interested members of the public regarding the state’s public elementary and secondary education system.
- To refer complainants and others to appropriate resources, agencies or departments.
- To facilitate the resolution of complaints made by parents and students with regard to the state’s public school system.
- To develop parental involvement materials.
- To identify obstacles to greater parent and community involvement and recommend strategies for helping parents and community members participate effectively in education.
- To identify and recommend strategies for improving the success rates of ethnic and racial student groups with disproportionate student achievement.
- To provide the Governor, the Legislature, and the Board of Education with recommendations for the improvement of the public education system.



### Vision

OEO envisions Washington State families, students, communities, and educators as empowered partners in a responsive, accountable, and equitable public education system focused on student academic success.

## Mission

OEO promotes equity in education and the academic success of all students attending elementary and secondary public schools in the state of Washington. OEO fulfills its mission by providing information to families, students, and communities regarding the school system, promoting family and community involvement in education, helping resolve conflict between families and schools, and providing recommendations to public officials to improve the public education system.

## Advocacy

OEO does not advocate for any particular individual, but for fair and equitable processes that support student academic achievement. Advocating for processes allows OEO to identify gaps in the public education system and make recommendations for systemic improvement.

## Staff

OEO is staffed by a group of multi-cultural professionals who are dedicated to the academic success of students and have expertise in the fields of K-12 education, family involvement in schools, education law, conflict resolution and mediation. Their goal is to provide exceptional customer service and individualized attention to students, families and educators in need of assistance.

## Budget

OEO operates with an annual budget of \$900,000 from the state general fund. In the 2007-2008 academic year, the total number of students enrolled in Washington public schools was 1,022,834. The cost of OEO's services per student is: \$0.88 cents.

## Data Collection

OEO maintains a database to track demographic customer information, issues, and other information related to cases we work with. Data collected by OEO serves as the basis for reports and recommendations to the legislature, the Governor and public officials.

## Customer Satisfaction

Parents, schools and community members responding to OEO's customer satisfaction surveys frequently compliment our services. Here are some of their comments:

- "I appreciate that you're unbiased and come in to bridge the gap between families and schools." - *Grandfather raising his three grandchildren*
- "I really appreciate your advice about the kind of tone to take during my meeting with my child's school. If I hadn't spoken with you, my tone would have been very combative." – *Parent*
- "Thank you for being there. We were lost and didn't know where to turn. I am glad you are here to help families. The translated information you provided was of great assistance." – *Parent*
- "Without your office, we probably would have made a lot of mistakes about how we approached people. We felt that doors were closed, and with your office, people were more responsive." – *Parent*
- "The help we received from the Ombudsman was very helpful in resolving our issues with the school. Our voice has been heard. Thank you." – *Parent*
- "The Ombudsman was wonderful. She had great energy and listened well. She helped us cool down. The school district seemed very nervous, but the Ombudsman was very good at soothing all that were involved." – *Parent*
- "I would like to thank you for your assistance with resolving some issues of concern at an elementary school." – *School Superintendent*

## Customer Satisfaction

- “The Ombudsman was very compassionate and truly cares about education for children.” – *Parent*
- “Wonderful experience! I have told many parents about you!” – *Parent*
- “Thank you! The Ombudsman helped my family just before my daughter started kindergarten. This has given us resources, behavior improvement, and a great attitude starting school.” – *Parent*
- “The Ombudsman was empathetic; the Ombudsman is a parent and former teacher. She was impartial.” – *Parent*
- “The Ombudsman gave me lots of ideas of where I could go next.” – *Parent*
- “The Ombudsman was very informative, friendly, and very knowledgeable. Felt very confident with her. “ – *Parent*
- “Your work dramatically changed the outcomes for a couple kids I’ve been working with....the thoroughness of the work you all did, including educating the probation officer, was remarkable and really helped this young woman.” – *Staff of a community based organization working with foster youth*
- "I so appreciate your attention to the process all of us are going through. It is very healthy for you to be involved in this process." – *School Superintendent*

## Services

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) provides the following free services:

- Public information, consultation and referrals regarding the Washington State public education.
- Conflict resolution services for parents, legal guardians or students experiencing conflict with public schools.
- Training seminars for families, educators and community-based professionals about the public education system, conflict resolution, and school-family partnerships.
- Publications and training manuals translated in various languages.
- A website with extensive information about the public school system, family involvement and resources.

OEO services are free and available statewide. Customers access OEO services by calling toll-free:1-866-297-2597 or visiting OEO’s website: [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org). Interpretation services in over 110 languages are provided for customers whose primary language is not English. OEO brochures are translated into 7 languages.

## Policies

OEO services must be requested by parents or legal guardians or students who are currently enrolled or eligible to be enrolled in elementary or secondary public schools.

OEO does not replace existing public school governance systems or local, state, and federal grievance or appeal procedures and does not provide legal advice or representation.

OEO maintains confidentiality around all records, materials, and information gathered in the course of resolving conflict, unless disclosure is otherwise required by law.

To protect customer privacy OEO does not do business via e-mail or accept requests for services from third parties.

### **Concerns not Accepted**

The Office of the Education Ombudsman does not accept or help resolve concerns involving elected officials, private schools, private organizations, businesses, or allegations of professional misconduct.

### **Systemic Research**

The Office of the Education Ombudsman may conduct research on systemic K-12 issues when, based on data collected, the agency determines that there are patterns or system-wide practices in K-12 public schools that may have negative implications for the learning environment or academic performance of students. Based on research, OEO makes recommendations to the Governor, legislators and other public officials.

### **Reports for Superintendents**

OEO maintains frequent communications with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and with Superintendents of all school districts in the state. This fiscal year, OEO initiated the practice of sending Superintendents a summary data report at the end of the school year listing cases and issues OEO worked with in their schools. More frequent reports will be sent as OEO continues to improve its data base system.

## ***A Student Story***

### ***A bullying incident leads to a special education plan***

When GT called our office, her voice was full of tears.

As a single mother of three public school children – seven, nine and eleven, GT was comfortable speaking up on behalf of her children’s education. This was up until the day she called OEO.

When she called, she shared that her seven-year-old son, Martin, was being bullied. Martin was the child who had most looked forward to school. This excitement wasn’t with him anymore. Martin came home withdrawn, escaping to his room. He was withdrawn at school, too, and his grades were declining.

GT had tried to tackle this problem - to the point of exhaustion and tears. No one at school seemed to listen. She had called the teacher and school principal many times. Incident reports were filed, but the bullying continued.

During their first conversation, the Ombudsman listened compassionately to GT. She asked GT what outcome she would like. With GT’s signed permission in hand, the Ombudsman then called the principal to gain the school’s perspective.

The principal and vice principal were concerned and unaware of the details of the problem. They shared what the school had done to address GT’s incident reports and said Martin may need to be evaluated for Special Education accommodations. The Ombudsman shared this with GT. She agreed that her son’s educational needs were not being met and was relieved they wanted to evaluate him.

Because the lines of communication were opened between GT and the school administrators, a safety plan was created: Martin could turn to the school counselor anytime he felt bullied. The Ombudsman learned that the school had scheduled a Student Intervention Team (SIT) meeting to discuss the case.

The Ombudsman followed-up with GT after the SIT meeting and learned that the SIT recommended an evaluation of Martin. GT checked in with the Ombudsman after the evaluation results came back and said the SIT determined that Martin needed a 504 plan to provide him with accommodations in his classroom. GT felt Martin’s work would improve with these accommodations. As GT expected, positive results became evident soon after the accommodations were made.

GT felt that the Ombudsman provided invaluable assistance during a difficult time in Martin’s life and is assured that she could rely on OEO for any future concerns about her children’s education.

*Communications between an Ombudsman and a client are confidential; therefore, the names and situations in this story have been changed to not compromise the identity or privacy of our clients or our services.*

## II. Resolving Conflict

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### Contributing to academic success, one student at a time

OEO Education Ombudsmen are trained problem solvers who bring families and educators together to resolve conflict and solve problems that impact student learning. They help families understand how the state public education system works, how they can get their needs met and what to do when conflict happens. They help educators understand how to build relationships with families, solve problems and ensure that students achieve.

Ombudsmen rely on their experience in facilitation, mediation, and extensive knowledge of the public education system. They intervene early to prevent conflict from escalating and becoming lengthy and costly to families and schools. As impartial third parties they provide consultation, research-based information, options and guidance to resolve problems focusing on the best possible outcomes for the student involved. They are culturally competent and frequently serve as cultural brokers for schools when working to resolve conflict involving diverse families.

When assigned a case, Education Ombudsmen spend hours researching applicable state, federal laws and school district laws and learning about the issues involved. They can juggle up to 10 different cases per week and cases can last anywhere between 1 week to 3 months before closure. The collaboration of school district officials is critical to achieve results for the student involved as Ombudsmen do not have the power to force a school or school district to take a specific course of action.

The Office of the Education Ombudsman may make recommendations to school districts regarding patterns of unfair or inequitable practices based on data collected in the course of the conflict resolution work.

### Ombudsmen Interventions and Results

Ombudsmen provide services of information, referral, and consultations regarding public education to the general public and conflict resolution interventions to parents, legal guardians, students and educators.

During conflict resolution interventions, Ombudsmen work more intensively with the school and the parents, legal guardians or students to achieve results. Methods may include:

- Contacting various school officials.
- Requesting of student records using OEO form letter.
- Contacting OSPI officials. Contacting other organizations or institutions.
- Discussing research with customer and with school officials.
- Using shuttle-diplomacy.
- Teaching conflict resolution skills to all parties.

- Acting as a cultural broker and explaining cultural norms. Bringing parties together for facilitated conversations.
- Mediating in person or by phone.
- Providing options to achieve results for the student.

The Ombudsman closes the case when he/she and parties involved agree that positive results have been achieved. In most cases, results are achieved that directly impact the academic success of the student involved. Examples of results include:

- Problem is resolved by school district actions.
- Problem is resolved by parent/legal guardian or student actions.
- School officials and the parent/legal guardian reach an agreement.
- Parents or school officials learn new information from the Ombudsman leading to the resolution of the conflict.
- Parent or school official chooses one of the options presented by the Ombudsman.
- School district develops new policy that positively affects the case and prevents future problems.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, OEO Education Ombudsmen intervened in a total of **317 cases** affecting students and worked with **117 school districts** around the state.

Ombudsmen tackled the following issues:

### Intervention Issues

Multiple Issues	65	21%
Special Education	50	16%
Bullying/Harassment	41	13%
Discipline-Suspension/Expulsion	29	9%
Parent Involvement Education	24	8%
Enrollment/Reducing/Reridencency	22	7%
High School Grad Requirements	16	5%
Discrimination	15	5%
Harassment Teacher/Student	15	5%
Attendance	9	3%
School Safety	8	3%
Bilingual Education	4	1%
Gifted Program/Highly Capable	4	1%
Tutoring	4	1%
After-school Programs	3	< 1%
Home Schooling	3	< 1%
School Records	3	< 1%
Alternative Education	2	< 1%

**Total 317**

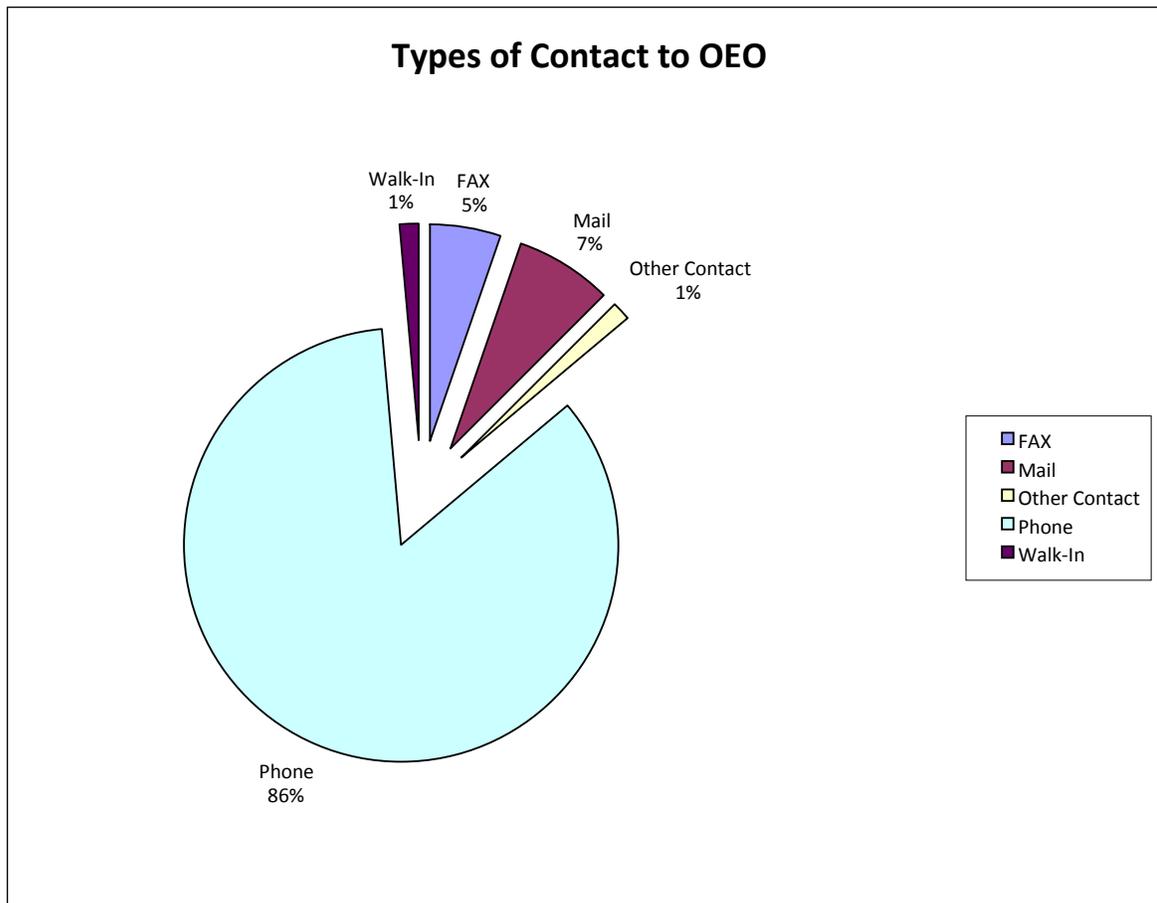
### III. Serving Students

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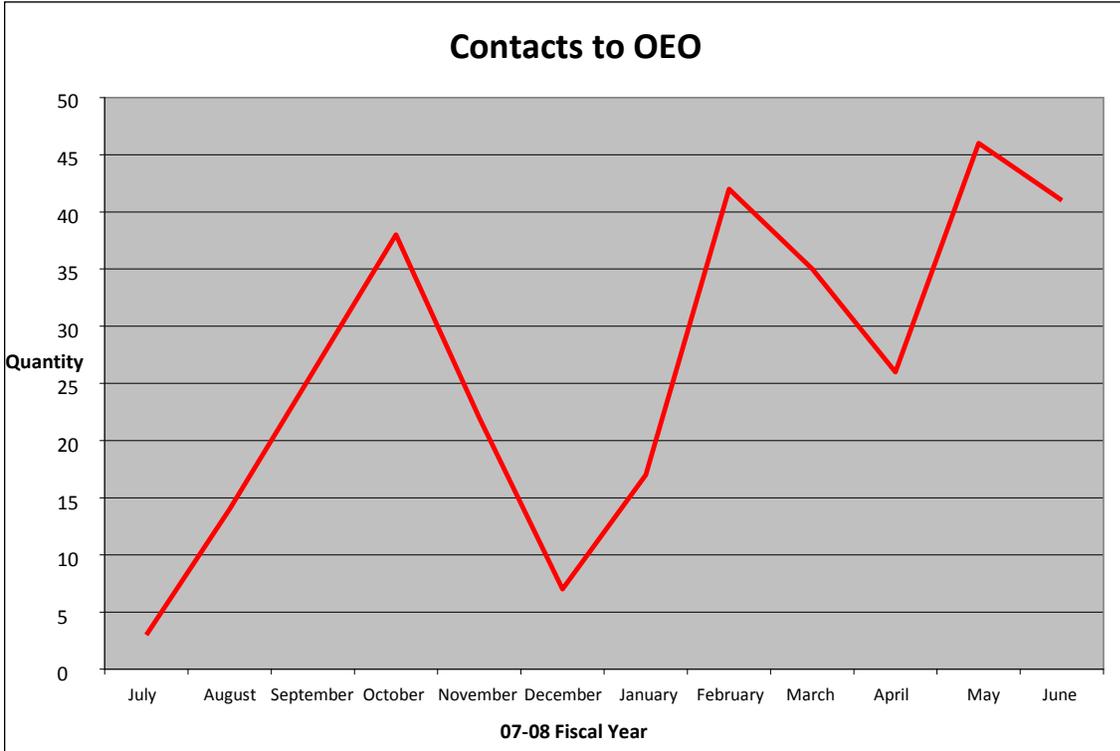
The general public can contact OEO to get information or referrals about the public school system. In addition, parents, legal guardians or students can request the assistance of an Ombudsman to solve conflict with a particular school. The majority of public contacts to OEO are through the toll-free number: 1-866-297-2597. Phone interpretation services are available for over 100 foreign languages.

The following is summary data regarding the customers served by OEO between July 1st, 2007 and June 30, 2008.

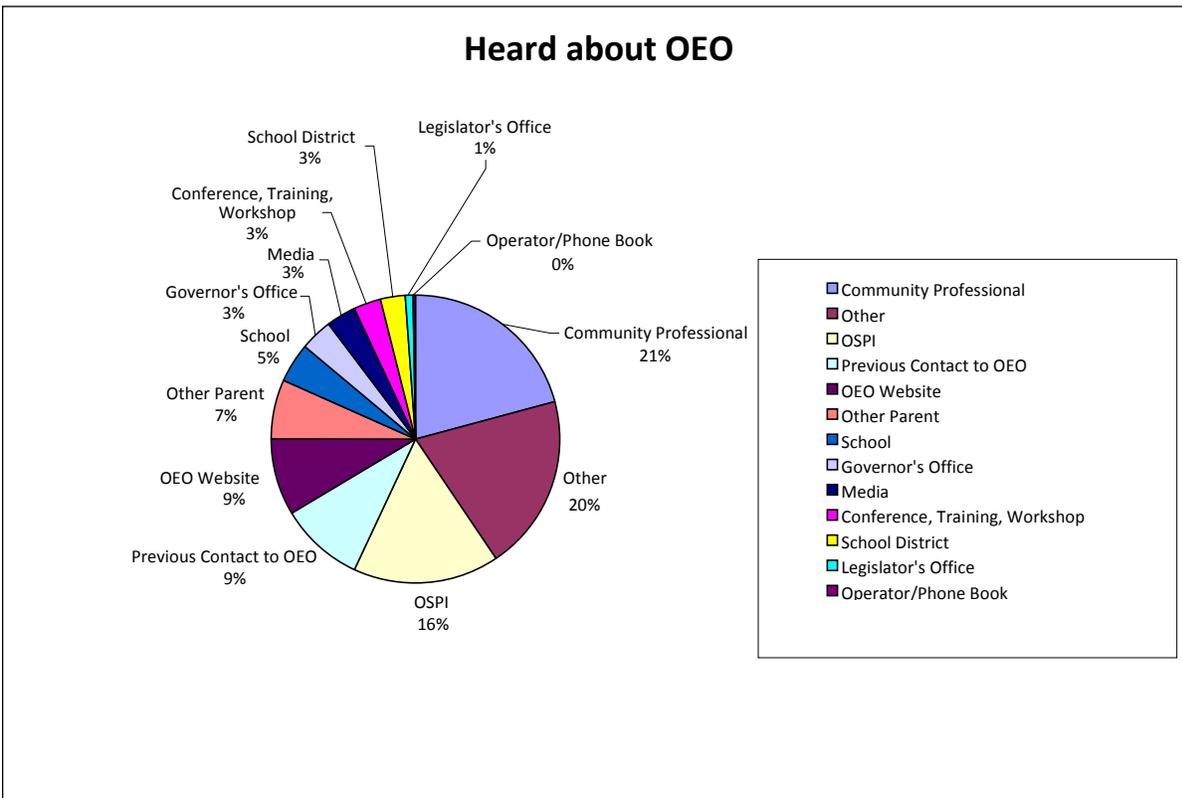
#### How customers contacted OEO



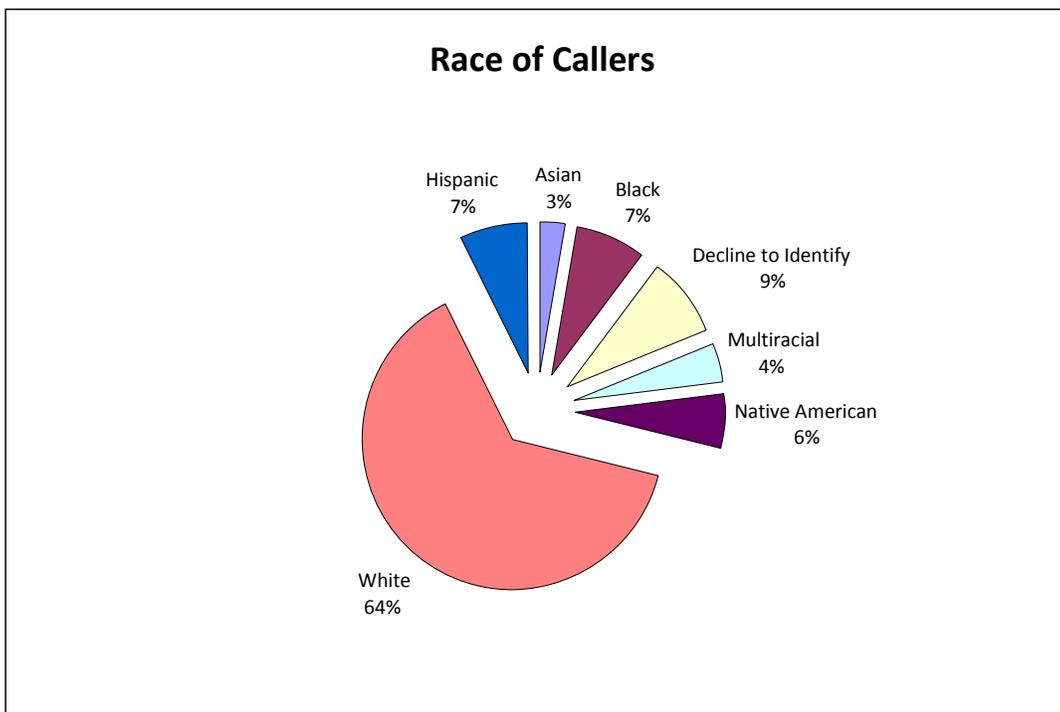
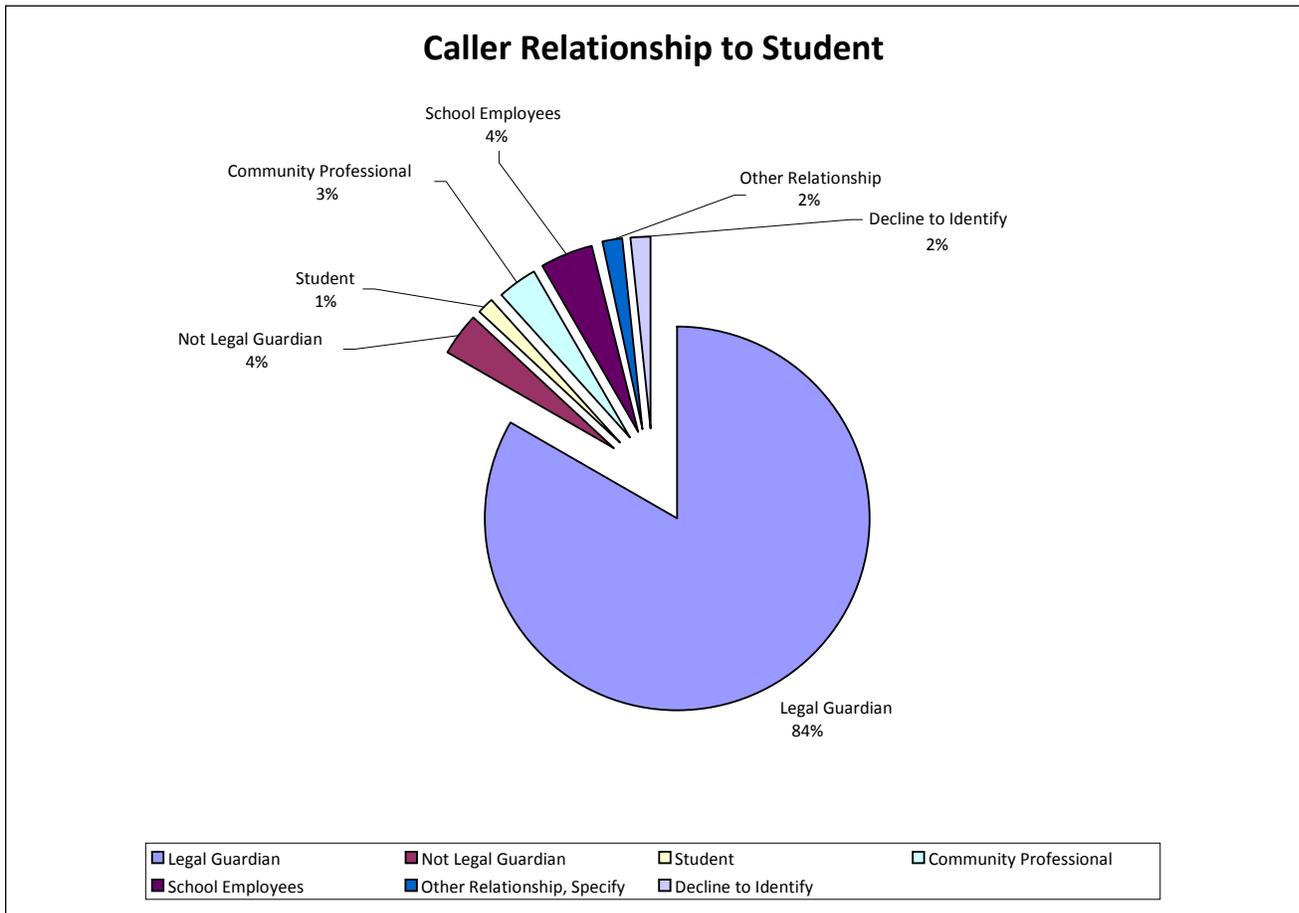
## When did callers contact OEO



## How did callers hear about OEO



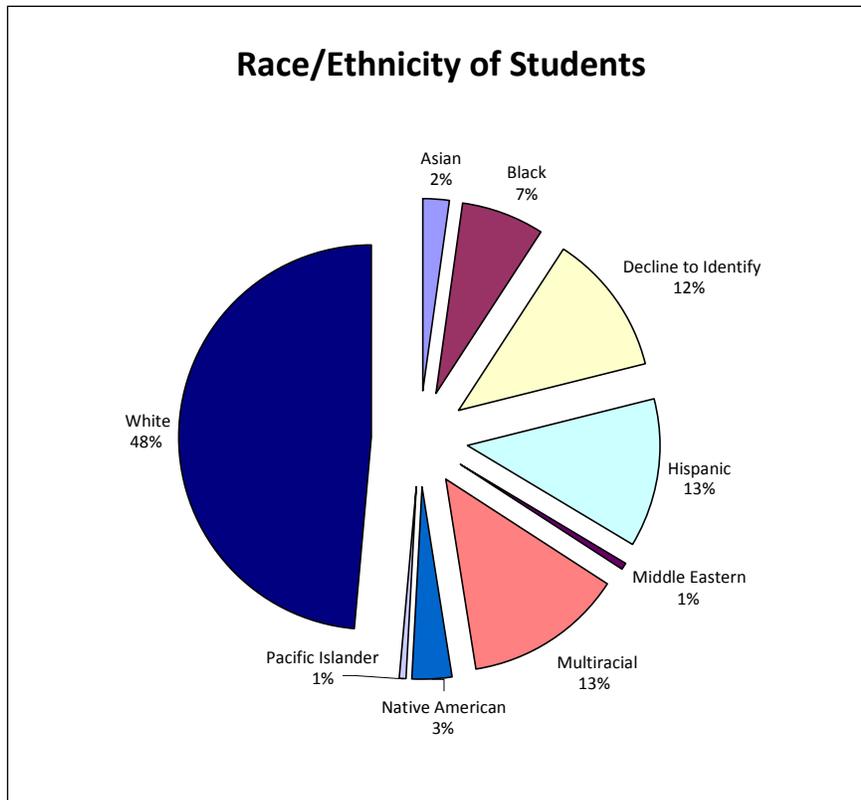
## Who contacted OEO



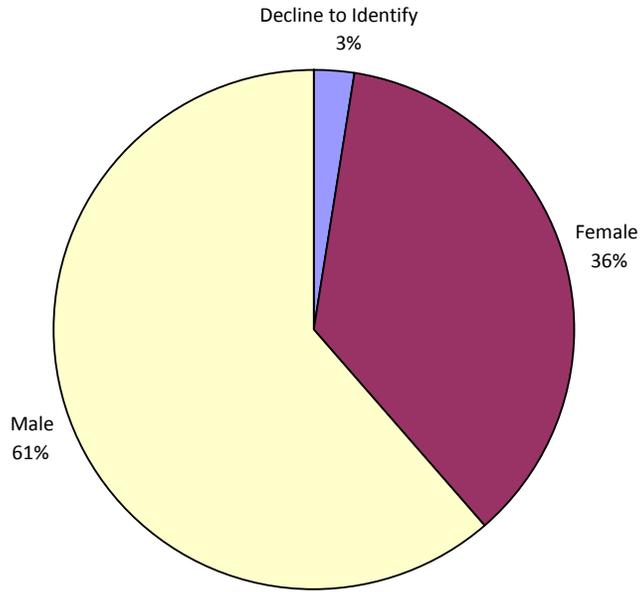
## Language of callers

Primary Language of Caller	
American Sign Language	1
Cambodian	2
English	296
Farsi	2
Korean	1
Spanish	14
Vietnamese	1
	317
Primary Language of Student	
English	147
Spanish	4
Vietnamese	1

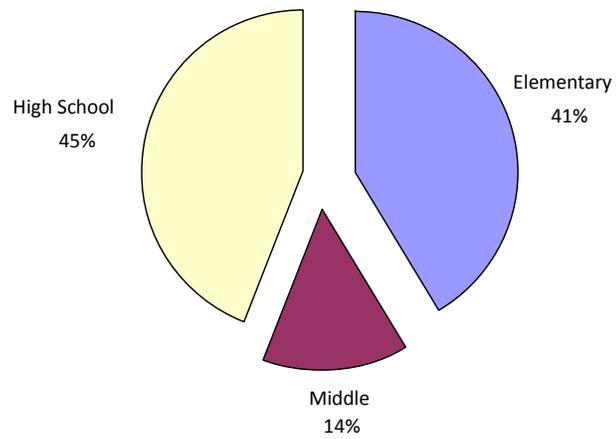
## Race/Ethnicity of Students



### Gender of Students

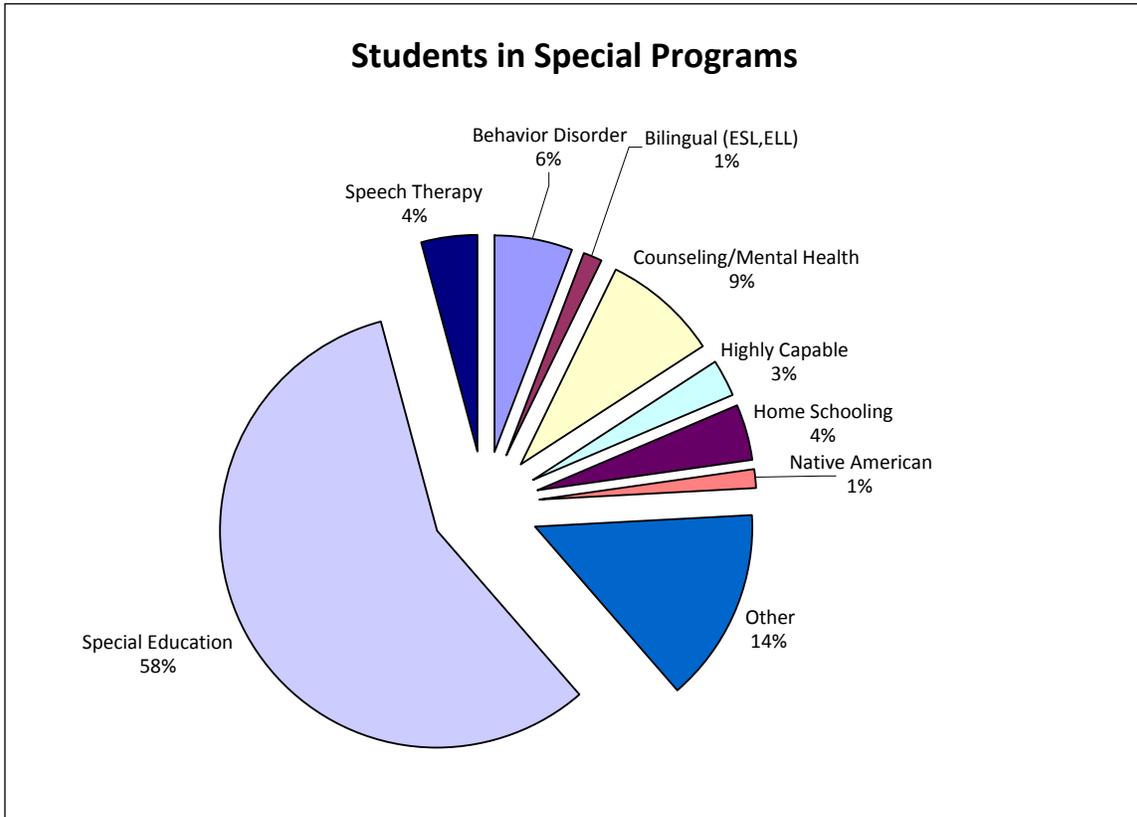


### Interventions by School Level



## Serving Students with Special Needs

OEO believes that all students enrolled in public schools are part of general education but some have special circumstances that require specialized programs. The majority of students served by OEO during the 2007-2008 fiscal year (58%) were part of the Special Education program.



## Student Ethnic Profile Comparison

	WA State Student Data*	OEO Student Data-07-08 Fiscal Year
White	66.20%	48%
Black	5.50%	7%
Native American	2.70%	3%
Asian	7.80%	2%
Pacific Islander	0.60%	2%
Multiracial	N/A not collected	13%
Hispanic origin	14.70%	13%
Decline to Identify	N/A not collected	12%

## Customer Ethnic Profile Comparison

	WA State Population by Race and Hispanic Origin**	OEO Customer Data-07-08 Fiscal Year
White	76.20%	64%
Black	3.40%	7%
Native American	1.40%	6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.9%	3%
Multiracial	4%	4%
Hispanic origin	7%	7%
Decline to Identify	9%	9%
<b>Citations</b>		100%

\* OSPI, WA State Report Card 2007-2008

<http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?year=2007-08>

\*\*OFMF Forecasting Executive Summary-Population by Race and Hispanic Origin 2000 and 2008 [www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/race/2008estimates.asp](http://www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/race/2008estimates.asp)

## Interventions by School District and Educational Service Area

OEO worked collaboratively with the following school districts to solve problems and conflict that affected students.

Educational Service District 101	Interventions	Issues	Number of Occurrences
Benge School District	1		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
Cheney School District	1		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
Chewelah School District	1		
		Home Schooling	1
Kettle Falls School District	1		
		Special Education	1
Lind School District	2		
		Special Education	2
Newport School District	1		
		Learning Disability	1
Pullman School District	1		
		Special Education	1
Spokane School District	6		
		Bullying/Harassment, Student/Student	1
		Discrimination	1
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	1
		School Safety	2
		Special Education	1
St. John School District	5		
		Bullying/Harassment, Student/Student	2
		Multiple Issues	3
<b>Totals for ESD 101</b>	<b>19</b>		<b>19</b>

Educational Service District 105	Interventions	Issues	Number of Occurrences
East Valley School District (Yakima)	1		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
Ellensburg School District	2		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	2
Goldendale School District	1		
		Graduation Requirements	1
Grandview School District	1		

		Discipline, Suspension	1
<b>Selah School District</b>	3		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Special Education	1
<b>Sunnyside School District</b>	1		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Toppenish School District</b>	2		
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	1
		Special Education	1
<b>Wapato School District</b>	1		
		School Safety	1
<b>Yakima School District</b>	5		
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	1
		Multiple Issues	1
		Special Education	1
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		WASL, General	1
<b>Zillah School District</b>	1		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Totals for ESD 105</b>	<b>18</b>		<b>18</b>

<b>Educational Service District 112</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
<b>Battle Ground School District</b>	1		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Camas School District</b>	1		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Evergreen School District</b>	1		
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	1
<b>Kelso School District</b>	4		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Discrimination	1
		Learning Disability	1
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Longview School District</b>	2		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
<b>Ocean Beach School District</b>	1		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Vancouver School District</b>	4		
		Multiple Issues	1

		Learning Disability	1
		Parent Involvement Education	1
		Discipline, Suspension	1
<b>Washougal School District</b>	<b>3</b>		
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	2
		Special Education	1
<b>Totals for ESD 112</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>17</b>

<b>Educational Service District 113</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
<b>Cosmopolis School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Graduation Requirements	1
<b>Elma School District</b>	<b>3</b>		
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	1
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
		Tutoring	1
<b>North Beach School District</b>	<b>2</b>		
		School Records	1
		Special Education	1
<b>North Thurston Public Schools</b>	<b>4</b>		
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
		Parent Involvement	1
<b>Oakville School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Special Education	1
<b>Olympia School District</b>	<b>11</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	2
		Learning Disability	1
		Multiple Issues	4
		Request for OEO Publications	1
		Special Education	2
		Truancy	1
<b>Rainier School District</b>	<b>2</b>		
		School Records	1
		Discipline, Suspension	1
<b>Shelton School District</b>	<b>2</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Tenino School District</b>	<b>2</b>		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Multiple Issues	1

<b>Tumwater School District</b>	<b>3</b>		
		Special Education	1
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	2
<b>Totals for ESD 113</b>	<b>31</b>		<b>31</b>

<b>Educational Service District 114</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
<b>Bremerton School District</b>	<b>6</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Discrimination	1
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	1
		Parent Involvement Education	2
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
<b>Port Angeles School District</b>	<b>2</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Home Schooling	1
<b>Quilcene School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
<b>Quillayute Valley</b>	<b>1</b>		
		School Records	1
<b>South Kitsap School District</b>	<b>4</b>		
		Multiple Issues	2
		Graduation Requirements	2
<b>Totals for ESD 114</b>	<b>14</b>		<b>14</b>

<b>Educational Service District 121</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
<b>Auburn School District</b>	<b>4</b>		
		Bilingual Education	1
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Request for OEO Publications	1
<b>Bainbridge Island School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Special Education	1
<b>Bellevue School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Special Education	1
<b>Bethel School District</b>	<b>3</b>		
		Special Education	1
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	1

		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
<b>Clover Park</b>	5		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Special Education	2
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	1
		Request for OEO Publications	1
<b>Eatonville School District</b>	1		
		Special Education	1
<b>Enumclaw School District</b>	1		
		Parent Involvement	1
<b>Federal Way School District</b>	10		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Harassment Teacher/Student	3
		Graduation Requirements	1
		Multiple Issues	3
		Special Education	1
<b>Fife School District</b>	3		
		Discrimination	1
		Special Education	2
<b>Franklin Pierce School District</b>	2		
		Discrimination	1
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
<b>Highline</b>	1		
		Truancy	1
<b>Issaquah School District</b>	2		
		Bilingual Education	1
			1
		Parent Involvement	
<b>Kent School District</b>	9		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	3
		Discipline, Suspension	2
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	2
		Multiple Issues	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
<b>Lake Washington School District</b>	2		
		Graduation Requirements	1
		Discrimination	1
<b>Mercer Island School District</b>	1		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
<b>Northshore School District</b>	9		
		Bilingual Education	1

		Parent Involvement	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
		Multiple Issues	5
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
<b>Orting School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
<b>Peninsula School District</b>	<b>4</b>		
		Discrimination	3
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Puyallup School District</b>	<b>6</b>		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Discrimination	1
		Parent Involvement	1
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Discipline, Suspension	2
<b>Renton School District</b>	<b>11</b>		
		After School Programs	1
		OSPI	1
		Multiple Issues	3
		Parent Involvement	5
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
<b>Seattle Public Schools</b>	<b>28</b>		
		Discipline, Suspension	3
		Multiple Issues	8
		After School Programs	2
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	1
		Gifted Program Highly Capable	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
		Learning Disability	1
		Parent Involvement	4
		Request for OEO Publications	1
		Special Education	5
<b>Shoreline School District</b>	<b>8</b>		
		Gifted Program Highly Capable	1
		Parent Involvement	1
		Special Education	1
		Enrollment/ Redistricting/ Residency	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
		Multiple Issues	1
		School Safety	1
		Truancy	1

<b>Snoqualmie Valley School District</b>	5		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Request for OEO Publications	1
		Special Education	1
		Multiple Issues	1
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
<b>Steilacoom Hist. School District</b>	1		
		Parent Involvement	1
<b>Sumner School District</b>	2		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Discrimination	1
<b>Tacoma School District</b>	12		
		Alternative Education	1
		Discrimination	1
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
		Multiple Issues	5
		Parent Involvement	2
		Special Education	2
<b>Tukwila School District</b>	2		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	2
<b>Vashon Island School District</b>	1		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Totals for ESD 121</b>	<b>136</b>		<b>136</b>

<b>Educational Service District 123</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
<b>College Place School District</b>	2		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Discrimination	1
<b>Dayton School District</b>	1		
		Discrimination	1
<b>Kennewick School District</b>	2		
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Special Education	1
<b>Pasco School District</b>	1		
		Special Education	1
<b>Prosser School District</b>	2		
		Home Schooling	1
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Richland School District</b>	2		
		WASL, Appeal/Retake	2
<b>Totals for ESD 123</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>10</b>

<b>Educational Service District 171</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
Cascade School District	1	Multiple Issues	1
Eastmont School District	1	Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	1
Ephrata School District	1	Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
Lake Chelan School District	2	Truancy	2
Mansfield School District	1	Parent Involvement	1
Moses Lake School District	1	Harassment Teacher/Student	1
Oroville School District	1	Truancy	1
Wenatchee School District	2	Discipline, Suspension	1
		Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
Wilson Creek School District	3	Bullying/Harassment Student/Student	1
		Multiple Issues	2
<b>Totals for ESD 171</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>13</b>

<b>Educational Service District 189</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>
Anacortes School District	2	Discipline, Suspension	1
		Parent Involvement	1
Arlington School District	5	Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	2
		Gifted Program/ Highly Capable	1
		Multiple Issues	2
Bellingham School District	2	Multiple Issues	1
		Special Education	1
Blaine School District	2	Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	1
		Parent Involvement	1
Concrete School District	4	Attendance	1
		Special Education	1

		Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	2
<b>Edmonds School District</b>	<b>4</b>		
		Request for OEO Publications	1
		Special Education	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
		School Safety	1
<b>Everett School District</b>	<b>7</b>		
		Alternative Education	1
		Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	2
		Discrimination	1
		Graduation Requirements	1
		School Safety	1
		Learning Disability	1
<b>Lopez School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Discipline, Suspension	1
<b>Marysville School District</b>	<b>6</b>		
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
		Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	1
		Gifted Program/ Highly Capable	1
		Special Education	2
		School Safety	1
<b>Monroe School District</b>	<b>2</b>		
		Harassment Teacher/Student	1
		Bilingual Education	1
<b>Mount Baker School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Tutoring	1
<b>Mount Vernon School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Mukilteo School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Oak Harbor School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	1
<b>Sedro-Woolley School District</b>	<b>1</b>		
		Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	1
<b>Snohomish School District</b>	<b>4</b>		
		Special Education	1
		Discipline, Suspension	1
		Truancy	1
		Multiple Issues	1
<b>Totals for ESD 189</b>	<b>44</b>		<b>44</b>

Undisclosed School/ School District	Interventions	Issues	Number of Occurrences
	<b>15</b>		
		Bullying/ Harassment Student/Student	2
		Enrollment, Redistricting, Residency	3
		Learning Disability	1
		Parent Involvement	1
		Special Education	2
		Truancy	2
		Multiple Issues	4
<b>Totals for Undisclosed Districts</b>	<b>15</b>		<b>15</b>

## A Student Story

### *Adapting to a new school*

DB was close to pulling his son out of high school. The local high school was turning out to be a tough place for his son Aaron. His grades, test scores, and attitude reflected this; DB also worried about his son's self-esteem.

The family had just moved to town last year. Aaron was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and didn't pass sections of the WASL. DB was angry and skeptical that OEO could do anything for his son. He felt powerless as a parent. He told us he had moved away from the city thinking smaller schools would be better for his kids' education. Now, he wasn't sure it was the right decision.

DB explained, "I've called the school and they suggested that I give this more time, but I'm concerned that this will impact Aaron's chance to graduate. I'd like someone to think about my child's individual needs. Education is the way to a better way of life. I want Aaron to go to college because I never did."

After listening to DB, the Ombudsman clarified that Aaron had never had any special accommodations before, and had passed all of his classes at his previous school. The Ombudsman asked if DB thought it would be helpful to speak directly with Aaron. DB agreed. When the Ombudsman spoke with Aaron, it became clear that the transition between schools had been extremely traumatic.

The Ombudsman offered some ideas: either Aaron could try to talk with the counselor about finding academic help; his dad could make that contact for him; or the Ombudsman could intervene and talk to the counselor. Aaron thought the Ombudsman should speak to the counselor and DB agreed.

After getting a signed permission from DB to contact the school, the Ombudsman called Aaron's counselor. She was concerned about Aaron's stress and grades. She offered to get his teachers together and meet with Aaron and DB to discuss his work - and which assignments he needed to turn in. She also mentioned a free after-school homework center in the library. As a new student, Aaron had not been aware of this opportunity. The Ombudsman shared the counselor's ideas in a phone call with Aaron and DB. Aaron felt hopeful about the homework center and a counselor. DB was pleased with the idea of bringing all the teachers together for a meeting.

Later, the Ombudsman checked-in with Aaron and DB about the meeting of Aaron's teachers. Aaron felt confident he could get back on track.

DB explained that after this meeting, the stress had lifted from Aaron's shoulders. DB was grateful for the support of the Ombudsman in making connections with the right people at Aaron's school.

*Communications between an Ombudsman and a client are confidential; therefore, the names and situations in this story have been changed to not compromise the identity or privacy of our clients or our services.*

# IV. Preventing Conflict

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## Public Information and Outreach

### Public Awareness

Informing, educating and reaching out to the public are critical functions of the Office of the Education Ombudsman. In the course of its first year, OEO worked across the state to provide information about the public education system, family involvement in education, and raise awareness of the importance of resolving conflict between families and schools. OEO uses the following avenues to deliver information:

- Publications aimed at families whose children attend K-12 public schools, translated into 7 different languages.
- OEO's website: [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org).
- Print and broadcast media, including Spanish language media.
- Presentations, forums, and workshops taught by OEO staff.



### Informing the public about OEO

This year OEO initiated a statewide media and public relations campaign in order to inform the public about its mission and services. The campaign included newspaper and magazine articles, live radio and TV interviews, purchased print advertisement, and website enhancement.

OEO's website [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org) was improved to offer more information for schools and parents and a new section focusing on family involvement. All OEO publications were made available to be downloaded from the website.

OEO was the subject of the following media interviews, articles and advertisements during this fiscal year:

#### **Broadcast media**

- Live interview with OEO Director, Univision TV, June 4, 2008
- Live interview with OEO Director, Univision TV, April 11, 2008
- Live radio interview, KDNA, Yakima April 4, 2008
- School Ombudsman Takes Complaints, KPLU 88.5 FM, April 7, 2008
- Live interview with OEO Director, KUNS TV, Seattle, April 21, 2008
- New state agency guides parents through educational system, KOMONews.com April 28, 2008

### Print Media

- New education office welcomes parents' questions and gives help around the state, The Voice, May 2008
- Education Ombudsman helps parents in conflict with WA schools, The Columbian, April 28, 2008
- Shoreline Resident leads Ombudsman, The Enterprise, April 28, 2008
- Agency helps navigate schools, HeraldNet, April 28, 2008
- New state agency helps parents navigate school system, conflict, The Olympian, April 28, 2008
- Education ombudsman helps parents in conflicts with WA schools, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, April 28, 2008
- An Ombudsman in Education; State education office helps students achieve, The Skanner, April 15, 2008
- School complaints? Call independent advocates; State agency operates outside school districts to aid military families, Fort Lewis Ranger, April 10, 2008
- Inequity in Our Schools series, Seattle's Child, April 2, 2008
- Education Ombudsman will head Sunnyside gathering, Yakima-Herald-Republic, April 2, 2008
- Family, Community Involvement Key to School Success, Migrant Ed News, Fall issue, 2007

### Newspaper advertising

- South Seattle Residents Guide

## Publications

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year OEO distributed 89,621 of its publications around the state through schools, community based organizations and parent groups. Ombudsmen also distributed publications during public presentations and forums. OEO publications are translated into Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

This year OEO, in partnership with TeamChild, an organization serving youth involved or at risk to be involved with the juvenile justice system, published a series of four handbooks titled *"What every parent needs to know"* for parents and caregivers of children in elementary and secondary public schools. The manuals, which present an overview of the public education system in an easy-to-read question and answer format, were translated into Spanish. The manuals include:

1. **"How to be an Education Advocate"** informs readers about the public school system and how to advocate for students and form partnerships with schools to support student achievement. It gives practical tips for good communication with schools to prevent conflict and how to make the most out of meetings with school staff.
2. **"Basic Education Rights and Opportunities in Public Schools"** helps readers understand student rights and responsibilities in Washington State; attendance policies, what to do if a truancy petition is filed; home schooling and educational and vocational opportunities for students.
3. **"Discipline in Public Schools"** helps readers understand how and why students can be disciplined; short and long-term suspension; expulsion, emergency expulsion, and discipline hearings.

4. **“Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools”** assists readers with understanding the special education system and the legal protections and policies for students with disabilities.

## Innovation

- Radio Ombudsing – OEO staff were featured live on Spanish radio stations taking calls from parents and educators and responding to questions about the public education system and how to solve education-related problems.
- Webinars – OEO has plans to offer its popular seminars about family involvement in education and parent leadership live via the web. This system not only saves resources but has the capacity of reaching out to up to 200 participants who can register in advance to access the presentations on their home or office computers.
- Publications on CDs – All publications developed by OEO are made available on a CD Rom format to schools and community groups. This includes translated materials, posters, manuals, brochures, handouts, flyers and more.

## Trainings & Outreach

*"The presentation was the best presentation I have heard about the public education system. I personally am very pleased that you are doing exactly what our community needs an Education Ombudsman to do for the families." – Staff from a community based organization*

OEO Ombudsmen traveled around the state educating the public to better understand and navigate the public education system and establishing connections. They provided workshops and seminars and participated in education-related events and conferences.

**A total of 1,917 parents, family members, students, educators, and community members were trained** to resolve conflict, communicate better and understand how to form partnerships to support student achievement.

Here is a sample of OEO’s trainings and presentations:

- Cleveland High School – Seattle, June 2008
- University of Washington – Seattle, June 2008.
- Becca Bill /Truancy Human Rights Commission Forum – Seattle, June 2008
- Encompass (Spanish-speaking parent group) – North Bend – May 2008.
- Pasco Educational Service District - Pasco – May 2008.
- Washington State Parent Teacher Annual Conference – May 2008.
- City of Seattle Human Services Department – Seattle, April 2008.
- East African Youth Conference – Seattle, April 2008.
- Parent Leadership Institute – Sunnyside, April 2008.
- Washington State Indian Education Association Conference – Yakima, April 2008.
- McKnight Parent Teacher Association – Renton, March 2008

- Tukwila School District – Tukwila, March 2008.
- Health Department Latino Family Gathering – Olympia, March 2008.
- Pasco Education Service District – Pasco, March 2008.
- Seattle University – Seattle, March 2008.
- Refugee Women’s Alliance - Seattle, March 2008.
- Kellogg Middle School – Shoreline, February 2008.
- Washington State School Directors’ Association meeting – Lacey, February 2008.
- Refugee & Immigrant Legislative Day - Olympia, February, 2008.
- Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs Legislative Day – Olympia, February 2008.
- African American Affairs Commission Legislative Day - Olympia, February 2008.
- Washington State Parent Teacher Association Legislative Day – Olympia, February 2008.
- Commission on Hispanic Affairs Legislative Day – Olympia, January 2008.
- Campana Quetzal Annual Board Meeting -Seattle, January 2008.
- School Superintendents’ meeting of King and Pierce counties – Renton, January 2008.
- Gear Up Conference – Seattle, January 2008.
- East Hill Elementary – Kent, January 2008.
- Puget Sound Educational Service District “Readiness to Learn Consortium” - Tacoma, November 2007.
- Washington State School Directors’ Association Annual Conference – Seattle, November 2007.
- Pasco School District – Pasco, November 2007.
- Washington Education Association Multicultural Educators Conference– Federal Way, October 2007.
- Black Educators Association Conference– SeaTac, October 2007.
- Sound Mental Health meeting– Auburn, October 2007.
- Chehalis Tribe Parent/Community Forum – Chehalis, August 2007.
- OSPI Summer Institute, Auburn High School - Auburn, August 2007.
- OSPI Summer Institute, Skyview High School - Vancouver, August 2007.



# V. Promoting School-Family Partnerships

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## Why Family Involvement in Education Matters

*“A growing body of research builds an ever-strengthening case (that) when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”*

*—(Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement.)*



Research shows that across families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds family involvement does have a positive impact on student academic achievement. Partnerships that are student centered, academic focused, and which are viewed as the shared responsibility of all school staff and all families are the most successful. High performing schools are intentional in linking family involvement strategies to academic goals. Family involvement efforts are based on best practices, integrated into teaching and learning plans and centered in collaborative relationships between teachers, parents and the community.

The Office of the Education Ombudsman promotes equal and active partnerships between families and schools and believes that all families have hopes and dreams for their children, want them to succeed in school, and have the capacity to support student learning but many may not know how. Educators have the best interest of children at heart but they struggle to find ways to form relationships and partner with families so students succeed.

OEO finds there is a need for a paradigm shift in Washington State. It has become clear that Washington families need to move from passive recipients of the public education system to informed consumers and partners in education. Likewise, family involvement and cultural competence curricula must become a legitimate part of teacher and principal college preparation programs.

During this fiscal year, strengthening school-family partnerships was identified by OEO as a high priority in public education and a critical element for the closing of the achievement gap of minority students in the state of Washington.

### Closing the Achievement Gap

In the course of its work, OEO has found that when it comes to minority families, there exists a family involvement gap across the state. Parents of color feel disconnected from their children’s learning experience and lack information about their fundamental rights and responsibilities in public education. This lack of information limits their ability to fully participate as equal and active partners in education.

As Washington schools have moved into a system of standards and assessments, we have also created an urgent need for parents and other adults in the lives of children to become better informed and educated about the public education system. In today's educational environment, the involvement of families in education must go beyond school volunteerism and include activism and adult continuing education.

In March of 2008, the state legislature approved House Bill 2722 which created a state-level blue ribbon committee to develop a report with recommendations for the closure of the achievement gap of African American students. The Director of the Office of the Education Ombudsman was appointed to work with the committee and assist in the development of the goals and strategies which will become part of the recommendations. The committee's report was presented to the state Legislature in December 2008.

### **OEO Working with Experts**

This year OEO established working relationships with two of the most prominent researchers and authorities in the field of family involvement in education: Dr. Karen Mapp, professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and author of *"Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships"*, and Dr. Joyce Epstein, author, social scientist, and Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University. These experts provide OEO with the latest research, resources, examples of best practices, and technical support.

### **What OEO has heard from Families**

Washington parents contacting OEO have expressed concern about the quality of public education their children are receiving and the lack of support services available in schools for children who need extra help.

We also hear the following:

- All families want their children to do better than the previous generation.
- Parents worry about teacher quality. It matters what teachers do and say in the classroom, and students and families can tell whether educators care about them.
- School matters to lower income families, but schools have to be well organized and provide a network of social services, after-school programs and homework assistance to become more relevant.
- For many families of color, education is a way to a better life.
- Most parents of color want their kids to attend college and are disheartened when told about vocational programs in schools.
- Public schools were created for all children and their families, but many parents do not feel welcome or treated with courtesy.
- Clear school policies and procedures help parents better understand the school system and avoid conflict.

# Building School-Family Partnerships Capacity

## Parents and Students Talking Together (PT3)

This fiscal year, OEO brought a new school-family partnership tool to Washington State. The Parents and Teachers Talking Together (PT3) program, created by the Kentucky Center for Parent Leadership, consists of a system of facilitated discussions that enhance and improve parent/teacher relationships in schools.

A PT3 session brings together the adults in a K-12 school who deal most directly with the students to exchange ideas on their aspirations for children and what each wants to happen to improve student achievement. The sessions are led by trained facilitators and involve no more than 30 participants (15 teachers and 15 parents from the same school) and are held in local settings like community centers, schools, churches, and private homes.

OEO contracted with the Kentucky Center for Parent Leadership trainers to come to Seattle and train 25 parents, educators, community agency representatives, OEO Ombudsmen, and Educational Service District staff members from the Puget Sound region to become PT3 facilitators. The role of the facilitators is to outline the session format and ground rules, assist participants in their discussions both as large and small groups, help the group consolidate and record their ideas, help the group decide next steps and report the results of the session. Facilitators are also trained to coordinate events with local sponsors. Local groups such as business/civic groups, PTAs, Family Resource Centers, or school councils can serve as sponsors for PT3.

The overall format of PT3 includes a series of questions which participants discuss in small groups and then as a large group. The discussion begins with parents and teachers answering two questions: “What do we want for our students?” and “What do we need to do to get what we want?” The entire discussion process is estimated to take four hours and includes a meal shared by the participants.

Trained facilitators have begun to offer PT3 sessions in their communities. These local conversations will help both parents and teachers understand each other better, improve home-school communication, and focus on partnerships that improve student achievement.

# VI. Recommendations

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## Working to improve the education system

### 2006-2007 Recommendations and Results

- **Parents' Bill of Rights in Education**

OEO has found that many families in Washington State lack basic information about their fundamental rights and responsibilities in public education. The Washington State legislature can strengthen the vital partnership between families and schools, and support student achievement, by developing a comprehensive "Parent Bill of Rights and Responsibilities" regarding K-12 public education. The bill of rights should be based on legal and social science research, written in plain language, translated, and otherwise made easily accessible to all families, educators, administrators, school board members and the general public. This legislation would be the foundation from which other education-related legislation and district policy can stem.

**Result** – In the spring of 2007, OEO presented Governor Chris Gregoire and Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos with a recommendation for the development of a Washington State Parents' Bill of Rights in Education. At this writing, the proposed Bill was in the drafting process and slated to be introduced at the 2009 legislative session.

- **State Family Involvement Policy**

OEO has found that the majority of school districts in the state of Washington lack comprehensive Family Involvement policy and some have adopted Title I/NCLB-related policy in compliance with Federal mandate. Policy addressing the participation of all families in education and in school buildings improves the ability of school districts to create internal structures, goals and strategies to partner with families and helps families understand the role they play in student achievement.

In the course of conducting research, OEO also found that both the State Board of Education and The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) have not developed state-level family involvement policy.

In the fall of 2007, OEO contacted the State Board of Education and OSPI to discuss this omission and offered to partner with them to develop state policy but was met with a lack of interest and told it was a low priority at the time.

**Result** – At this writing, OEO in partnership with the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) has developed sample Family Involvement Policy to be shared with all school districts around the state. OEO believes that this sample policy will serve as the springboard for the development of state policy and plans to continue to pursue the matter.

- **Recommendations to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)**

Parents reported to OEO staff that getting information or answers to questions from OSPI staff can be difficult and frustrating. Phone messages went unanswered or were forwarded to departments that did not have pertinent information. OEO recommended that the agency develop internal customer services policies and procedures and clarify their functions to the public.

OEO also recommended that OSPI develop plain-language materials for schools to pass on to parents regarding graduation requirements and grade-level learning expectations.

**Result** – During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, OSPI conducted internal research to identify gaps in customer services practices. At this writing, staff were developing customer services policies and procedures and piloting new practices in some departments.

To answer to OEO recommendations, OSPI staff worked on defining the purpose and functions of the agency and making this information clear to the public by publishing a brochure and improving their website.

Quality materials for parents were also produced and translated in various languages and disseminated to all school districts.

## **2007- 2008 Recommendations**

### **Family Involvement Standards**

OEO recommends that Washington State becomes the first state in the nation to set a standard for family and community involvement in schools focusing on improving student achievement. The standards should include a comprehensive performance assessment tool, goals, strategies, and performance descriptors that can be used as a rubric or scoring guide. There should also be a way to evaluate the impact of this work on levels of family and community involvement, teacher satisfaction, school climate, and student outcomes and recognize schools and districts that have fully implemented new standards.

### **Improvement of Teacher Preparation Programs**

Teacher quality is a very important factor in student achievement. So is the partnership of teachers and families working together to support student learning at school and at home. OEO believes that family involvement is a legitimate part of the public education system and part of every educator and school staff member's work. As such, it should also be a legitimate part of teachers and principals preparation programs. OEO recommends that courses on family partnerships and cultural competency are integrated into teacher and principal preparation curricula in private and state colleges and universities.

A series of required professional development classes should also be developed by OSPI for certificated teachers and principals, particularly for those working in diverse, low income K-12 schools.

### **Parent Leadership Training**

Parents and family members who contact OEO are interested in learning more about effective family involvement in education. Many families struggle to identify what role they should play in the education of their children and want the opportunity to develop new skills and learn about the public education

system. OEO recommends the development of state-wide parent involvement capacity through the creation of a state Parent Leadership Institute and a Washington State parent education curriculum centered in student achievement. Curriculum should include student education advocacy, understanding the public school system, how to become a partner in education, communication and conflict resolution skills and supporting education from home.

### **Conflict Resolution Policy**

The majority of Washington State school districts have not developed complaint resolution policy and procedures aside from the Special Education grievance process. Families experiencing conflict with schools express frustration at the lack of guidelines and unclear processes that exist in some school districts. OEO has not found state policy from the State Board of Education or sample policy from WSSDA regarding this matter.

Conflict between families and schools impacts student learning. OEO recommends the development of state legislation that requires school districts to adopt conflict resolution policies and procedures.

### **Interpreters and Translators State Policy**

In the course of their work, OEO Ombudsmen have found that the use of interpreters for parent meetings, and translated documents for bilingual families, is inconsistent in school districts around the state. In high-stakes situations where parents are asked to make decisions that affect student learning and achievement, many school districts provide no interpreter or ask the student in question to act as the interpreter for his family—even if the student is very young. OEO recommends the development of state legislation that sets interpretation standards for high-stakes cases that impact student achievement, mandates the development of a training program for Education Interpreters/Translators and requires that interpreters utilized in schools are trained adults who understand the public education system and can explain it to parents.

# VII. Looking Back and Ahead

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## Goals, Objectives & Strategies

### Goals

OEO has created broad long-term goals to guide its development toward becoming a model K-12 public education Ombudsman office. The objectives and strategies outlined below will contribute to reaching the long-term goals. Progress towards meeting these goals will be described in future annual reports.

- 1. Public Information Goal:** Become a trusted and valued source of education-related information for students, families, and diverse communities across the state.
- 2. Conflict Resolution Goal:** Become a recognized state leader in K-12 family-school conflict prevention and resolution in the state.
- 3. Family Involvement in Education Goal:** Contribute to student academic success by becoming a state leader in family and community involvement in education across Washington State.
- 4. Public Policy Goal:** Contribute to student academic success by providing the Governor, Legislature, and State Board of Education with recommendations to improve the public education system and contribute to the closure of the achievement gap.

### Meeting 2007-2008 Objectives and Performance Measures

- 1. Public Information Objective** - Disseminate information about OEO services, the public education system, student and parent rights, and family and community involvement in education to students, families, and diverse communities across the state.

#### Performance measures met

- Number of presentations, workshops, and coverage in print and broadcast media.**  
OEO staff conducted 35 presentations around the state.  
There were 17 radio, TV and magazine features about OEO and 1 print advertisement in a community newspaper.
- Number of “partner” organizations.**  
OEO consults and works with its “Partners in Education” collaborative group formed by 18 education-related entities and parents.
- Increase number of total contacts to OEO.**  
OEO’s first Annual Report covered the span of 5 months of service provision –from February to June 2007. In comparison, from February to June 2008, OEO increased the number of total customer contacts by 120% - from 87 contacts reported in 2007 (first Annual Report) to 190 in 2008.
- Increase number of contacts from diverse community members.**  
Students served by OEO in 2007- 2008 were: 48% White, 7% Black, 3% Native American, 3% Asian Pacific Islander, 13% Hispanic and 14% multiracial. These statistics are aligned with

the 2007 Washington State ethnic population statistics: 76% White, 3.4% Black, 1.4%, Native American, 6.9%, Asian/Pacific Islander, 9.3% Hispanic and 2.8% multiracial.

OEO plans to tailor outreach and services to the Asian and Pacific Islander populations during the next fiscal year.

*(Note: 13% of OEO customers declined to identify their ethnicity/race.)*

- 2. Conflict Resolution Objective:** Raise awareness of OEO's role in family-school conflict prevention and resolution in the state.

**Performance measures met**

- Increase number of OEO clients provided with coaching services.**  
100% of OEO conflict resolution customers were provided with coaching services in the fiscal year 2007-2008. This service was not available to OEO customers in the 2006-2007 fiscal year.
- Increase number of workshops on conflict prevention/resolution taught by OEO staff.**  
OEO staff taught 15 conflict resolution/prevention workshops this fiscal year.
- Increase number of school districts adopting conflict resolution policy and procedures.**  
OEO continues to work on this issue and will pursue the development of state sample conflict resolution policy.

- 3. Family Involvement Objective:** Increase public awareness of the positive relationship between family and community involvement in education and student academic achievement.

**Performance measures met**

- Number of family and community involvement workshops and presentations.**  
OEO staff taught 25 family and community involvement workshops and presentations this fiscal year.
- Number of school districts adopting family involvement policy and procedures.**  
During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, OEO conducted a review of existing family involvement policy and procedures in Washington school districts and concluded that the majority lacked this policy. OEO staff worked with WSSDA to develop a sample policy which will become available to all school districts during the 2008-2009 school year.

- 4. Public Policy Objective:** Provide innovative and actionable recommendations to improve the education system in Washington State.

**Performance measures met**

- Ratio of recommendations issued to recommendations acted on by the Governor, Legislature, and State Board of Education.**  
This fiscal year, OEO recommended the development of the Parents' Bill of Rights in Education to the Governor and the Legislature. At this writing, the bill was in the drafting process and it will be presented during the 2009 legislative session.

## 2008-2009 Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Measures

- 1. Public Information Objective:** Prevent conflict from happening in schools by disseminating statewide information about the public education system, the importance of resolving conflict between families and schools, and providing workshops and training opportunities.

### **Strategies**

- Develop a state-wide constituent list that includes educators, community-based organizations, parent groups and other education-related entities.
- Create a digital monthly bulletin to be e-mailed to constituents around the state. Include conflict resolution tips and information about the public education system.
- Create a menu of web-based training workshops and presentations for parents and educators.
- Develop materials that help families better understand the public education system. Post materials on OEO website.
- Improve OEO website and tailor its content to families and educators.

### **Performance Measures**

- Baseline number of constituents receiving monthly OEO e-bulletins.
- Baseline number of web-based seminar participants statewide.
- Increase number of website hits by 25%.

2. **Conflict Resolution Objective:** Increase the number of OEO customers that are provided with conflict resolution consultations and interventions.

### **Strategies**

- Initiate a public relations/marketing campaign to inform families and public school staff about OEO's free conflict resolution services.
- Acquire an improved system to collect customer data and oversee Ombudsmen work.
- Develop relationships with school Superintendents and Principals and help them understand the value of OEO services.
- Send customized OEO conflict resolution data reports to Superintendents around the state.
- Develop an Education Ombudsman complaint resolution model and training manual.
- Focus on outreach and information to Asian/Pacific Islander families.

### **Performance Measures**

- Increase ratio of print, broadcast and web media exposure by 20%.
- Generate 2 customized conflict resolution data reports for all school district superintendents.
- Publish Education Ombudsman manual.
- Increase number of Asian/Pacific Islander families utilizing our services by 20%.

3. **Family Involvement Objective:** Assist families and school staff to understand the importance of equal and active partnerships centered in student achievement.

### **Strategies**

- Initiate a public relations/marketing campaign to inform families and public school staff about the positive connection between student achievement and family involvement in education.
- Disseminate sample Family Involvement Policy to school districts around the state.

- Identify best practices of family involvement and successful Washington State school models.
- Develop and implement a Parent Education Advocacy training module.
- Partner with private organizations and institutions to offer conferences and symposiums focusing on family involvement in education.
- Develop a diverse Parent Advisory Council to assist OEO in state-wide family involvement efforts.
- Focus on tailored outreach and information to Asian/Pacific Islander families.

**Performance measures**

- Increase number of family involvement presentations and materials for Asian/Pacific Islander by 100%.
- Baseline number of school districts adopting new family involvement policy.
- Baseline number of parents trained on the Parent Education Advocacy training module.
- Baseline number of family involvement events developed with community partners.
- Baseline number of members of the OEO Parent Advisory Council.

**4. Public Policy Objective:** Provide innovative and actionable recommendations to improve the education system in Washington State.

**Strategies**

- Collect data from customers to identify patterns and trends regarding public education across the state.
- Identify systemic gaps in education based on OEO research and recommend new state and school district policy.
- Recommend educational practices to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction based on data collected from students, families and community partners in education.
- Issue Special Reports on issues affecting student learning and make recommendations for systemic improvement.

**Performance measures**

- Increase number of issue reports from OEO data base by 100%.
- Increase ratio of recommendations to public officials by 100%.
- Baseline number of Special Research Reports published by OEO.

## OEO Staff

*July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008*

### **Director**

Adie Simmons

### **Communications/Policy Research**

Megan Palchak

### **Communications**

Patti Carey

### **Education Ombudsmen**

Kelly Warner-King (Legal Analyst)

Heidi Henderson-Lewis

Maria Flores

Danielle Eidenberg-Noppe

### **Information & Referral**

Ashley Gotcher

Andrea Duane

### **Operations/Office Administration**

Susan Bauer

Toni Peycheff

## OEO Partners in Education

The Office of the Education Ombudsman consults and works collaboratively with the following entities:

Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)  
Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA)  
Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)  
Washington State Parents and Teachers Association (PTA)  
Washington Education Association (WEA)  
Commission on Hispanic Affairs (CHA)  
Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA)  
Governor's Office of Indian Affairs (GOIA)  
Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA)  
Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL)  
Washington State Special Education Coalition (WSSEC)  
Special Education Ombudsman - OSPI  
Partnership For Learning (PFL)  
Treehouse  
TeamChild  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)  
Washington State Human Rights Commission  
OEO Parent Advisory Council (in development process)

*Original artwork by Kimberly Perry, age 9 and Amelia Carey, age 5.*

“This agenda starts with education. A highly-educated and skilled workforce will be the key not only to individual opportunity, but to the overall success of our economy as well. We cannot be satisfied until every child in America — and I mean every child — has the same chances for a good education that we want for our own children.”

—*President Barack Obama*



WASHINGTON STATE

## Office of the Education Ombudsman

[www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org)

1110 Capitol Way S, Suite 304  
P.O. Box 40004  
Olympia, WA 98504-0004

Northgate Executive Center 1,  
Building B, Suite 210  
155 NE 100th Street  
Seattle, WA 98125-8012

