

Washington State
Governor's Office of the
Education

Ombuds

We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.



2014-2015 Annual Report

Letter from the Director

August 1, 2015

LETTER FROM THE STATE EDUCATION OMBUDS

TO: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
Randy Dorn, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Members of the Legislature
Washington State Board of Education

Mission

OEO promotes **equity** in education by working with **families and schools** to **remove barriers** so that **every student can fully participate in and benefit from public education** in the State of Washington.

In the 2014-2015 fiscal year, OEO continued its work of listening to concerns and perspectives of families and educators; answering questions about the public education system; and resolving complaints using alternative dispute resolution techniques. We experienced a 32% jump in caseload, with a total of 1367 calls for our services during the year. We expect the numbers of people reaching out for help will continue to grow as familiarity with our office continues to increase. Last year, we developed a strategic plan to ensure that even as our budget and staff remain lean, we continue to find new ways to reach out to families and communities that may not find us on their own.

This past year, OEO met with community health services and health advocacy organizations to discuss access to mental health services in public schools, partnered with community groups to deliver trainings in Spanish and other languages for family leadership groups, participated in the Western Washington and Washington State Indian Education Associations' Annual Conferences, and conducted outreach to teen homeless shelters in Spokane and Seattle. We increased our number of publications available in multiple languages and improved access to Spanish language materials on our website.

In fiscal year 2014-15, OEO completed two extensive reports as directed by the legislature: the [November 2014 report on convening a Statewide Special Education Task Force](#) and the [January 2015 feasibility study on Improving Language Access](#) for Limited English Proficient Parents in Washington schools. OEO continued to partner with education policy makers and stakeholders through its participation in the Education Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC); RESULTS Washington; the SB5946 Student Discipline Task Force; the Disability Task Force (facilitated by the Washington Student Achievement Council); the Paraeducator Task Force (facilitated by the Professional Educator Standards Board); the Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program Advisory Committee, and the GATE Dropout Prevention Task Force Advisory Board.

During the year, we sat down with school district Superintendents and other key administrators in some of the largest and most diverse districts to share insights from our work. Most importantly, we had the honor of talking directly with hundreds of mothers, fathers, grandparents, teachers, principals, district administrators, social workers, physicians, clinicians and others working to improve outcomes for students in our state's public schools. We deeply appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of the insights, concerns and issues we learned about this year.

Vision

OEO envisions an equitable public education system that is responsive and accountable to **every child** in the State of Washington.



OEO Recommendations

OEO is charged with making recommendations to Washington state’s policy makers on ways to increase access, decrease opportunity gaps, and improve outcomes for *all* children in our state’s public schools. Data and experience teach us that making changes in the areas of school discipline, services for students with disabilities, and responses to harassment and bullying can make a tremendous difference improving outcomes for individual students and narrowing the Opportunity Gap. Real and lasting improvement in any of these areas depends on the existence of true partnerships between families and schools. In order for districts to partner effectively with families to address issues involving discipline, access to services for students with disabilities, and bullying or harassment, they need **ready access to quality interpretation and translation services**. Our [January 2015 report on Language Access](#) identifies several steps the state can take to ensure compliance with the civil rights obligations of ensuring equitable access for all families—regardless of the language they speak. By moving forward to improve language access, in addition to taking the steps identified below, the state can expect to see real progress in improving outcomes for *all* children in our schools:

The foundation for successful family-school partnerships is effective communication—across language and cultural barriers and in high-conflict situations. The result of successful family-school partnerships is student success.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE:

Discipline practices should support student academic and social learning and must be applied in an equitable manner.

- Add Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to basic education;
- Require districts with disproportionate discipline data to evaluate and address the role of implicit bias in implementation of facially neutral policies;
- Suspend the use of exclusionary discipline for elementary school students;
- Provide training for school staff, including teachers and building administrators on SEL, restorative justice practices, and trauma-informed teaching.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Public schools should represent the best of inclusive communities.

- Provide professional development for general education teachers and building administrators to support students with disabilities;
- Monitor Least Restrictive Environment requirements to ensure integration;
- Provide sufficient funding for timely, comprehensive evaluations;
- Ensure continuity of instruction and services across special education and general education environments;
- Provide adequate resources and oversight to ensure consistent implementation of Section 504 plans;
- Provide all students access to supports as needed, including study skills instruction, counseling and tutoring.

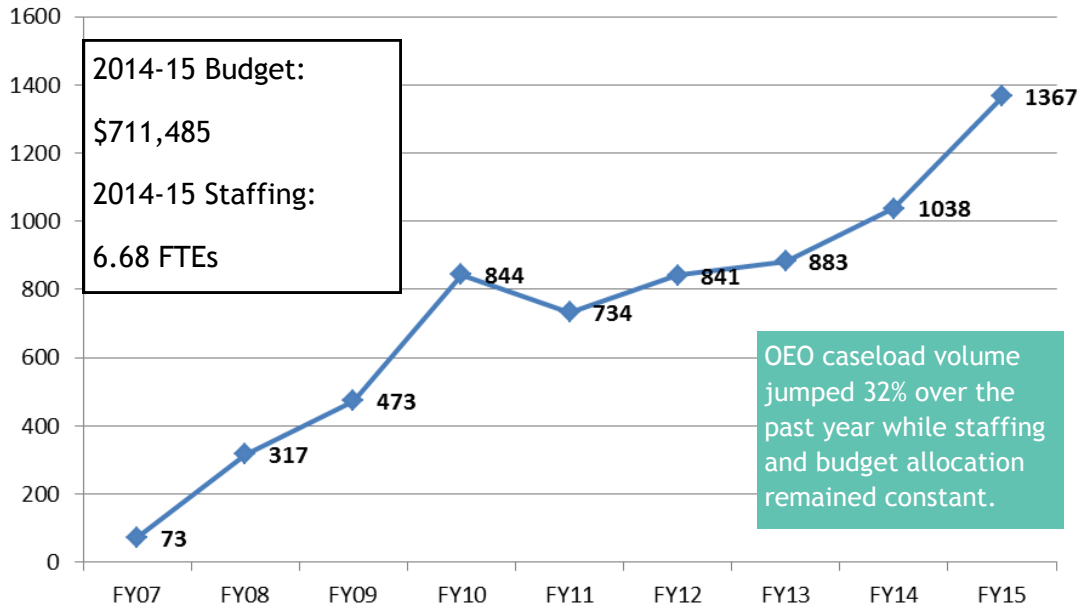
HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION & BULLYING (HIB):

More work is needed to ensure anti-harassment policies are effectively implemented.

- Continue to improve school climates with training in compassionate schools models and SEL;
- Require and fund training for HIB compliance officers and building administrators;
- Support districts’ work to accurately identify and effectively respond to instances of discriminatory harassment (based on race, gender, religion, disability, etc.);
- Ensure consistent use of written safety plans;
- Encourage reporting through wide distribution of reporting forms and anonymous reporting systems.

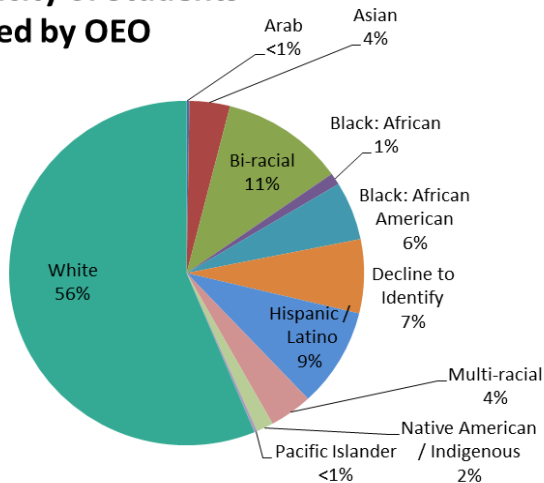
Data Summaries

OEO Caseload 2007–2015



In 2014-2015, OEO conducted 55 presentations, including 13 in Spanish and 7 in multiple languages with the use of interpreters, reaching more than 2200 families, educators and community professionals around the state.

Race/Ethnicity of Students Served by OEO



45% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch; 38% not eligible; and 17% declined to answer.

In 2014-2015, OEO worked with 65% more families whose primary language was one other than English compared to 2013-2014.

More than 80% of OEO's callers were parents or legal guardians of children in our public schools; others included community professionals; school or district staff; relatives; students; and staff from other government agencies.

80.8% of cases were considered resolved.

Multiple Layers of OEO Cases: Contributing Factors

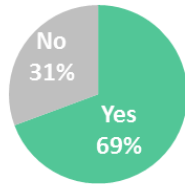
OEO tracks the type of case and the various “contributing factors” or issues that families raise or Ombuds identify in the course of a case, in order to understand more about when and how conflicts arise that lead families to reach out for help.

These pie charts show how often Discipline, Special Education or Section 504, and Harassment, Intimidation or Bullying (HIB) were identified as issues in OEO cases. The graphs show the other contributing factors most commonly associated with discipline, special education/504 and HIB.

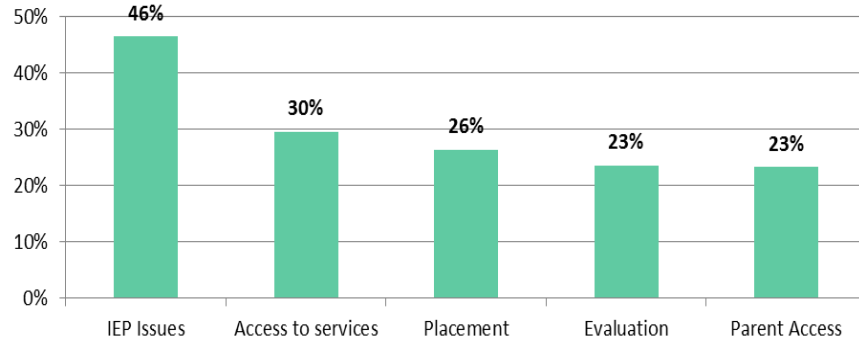
Among students with disabilities, the top four disabilities identified were:

- Autism
- ADD/ADHD
- Learning Disabilities
- Anxiety

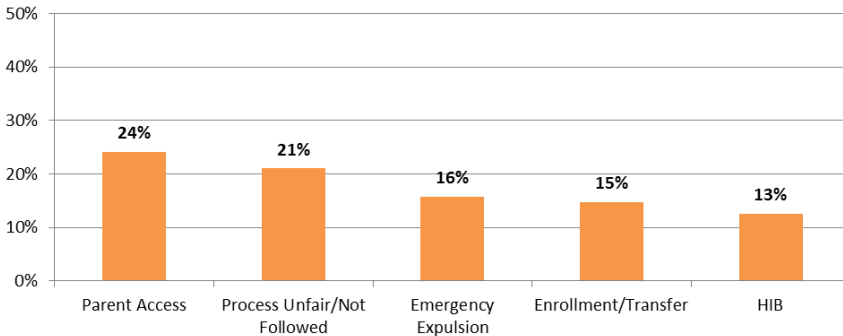
Sped/504



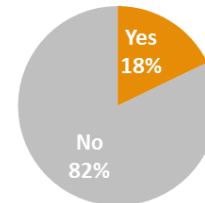
Special Education/504 Cases



Discipline Cases



Discipline



“Parent access” as a contributing factor refers to situations involving poor communication or relationship breakdowns between the family and school.

Other Issues Addressed in OEO Cases include:

Academic progress

Athletics

Attendance

Enrollment

Graduation

Highly Capable Programs

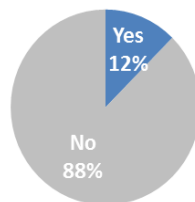
Language Access

Online Learning

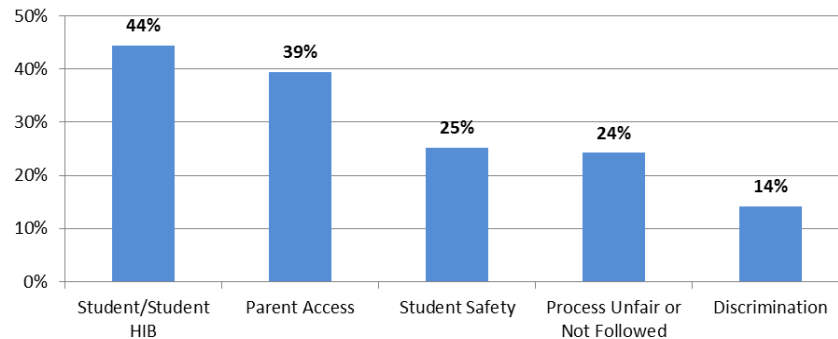
Student Safety

Transfer

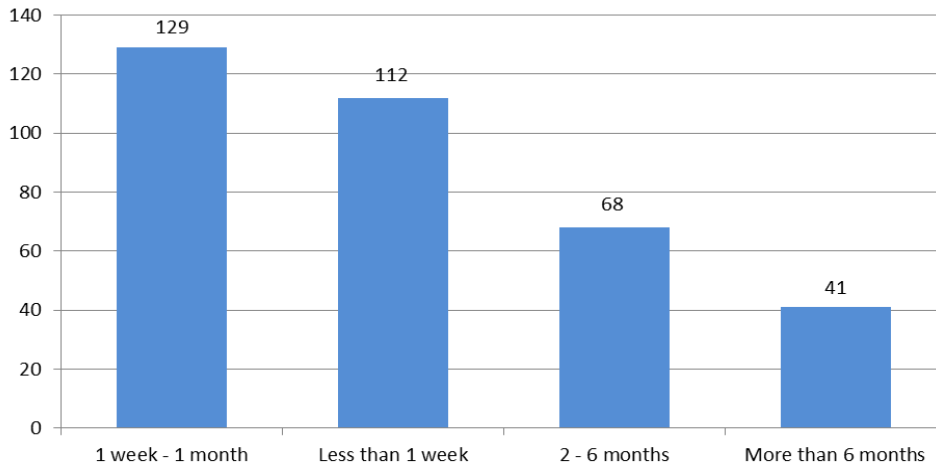
HIB



Harassment/Bullying Cases



Students Out of School



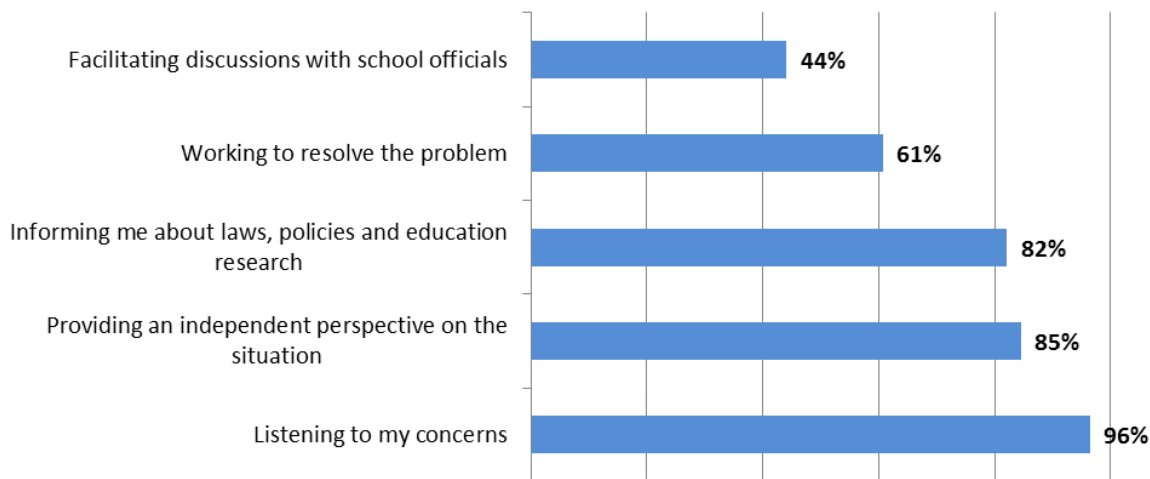
Almost 2/3 of the students out of school were students with IEPs, 504 plans or evaluations in progress; 54% were students eligible for free or reduced lunch; and 43% were students of color.

More than 1/4 of the cases handled by Ombuds in 2014-2015 involved students who were out of school for periods ranging from less than a week to more than 6 months.

Contributing factors in cases involving students out of school included: discipline, relationship breakdowns between family and school, disagreements over special education services and placement, and enrollment or transfer issues.

Ombuds worked with families and educators in these cases to try to repair relationships and engage teams in renewed efforts to reach resolution focused on the child.

Ways callers reported OEO services were helpful:



25% of OEO's cases were brief consultations where Ombuds provided information and referral; 75% were interventions where Ombuds provided more intensive support, including exploring options, coaching to support effective communication, and in some cases, interfacing directly with schools and district staff.

"This is one of the most important resources I use and share with other parents/families. The only true 'watch dog' where schools are concerned."—Community Professional

2014-15 Highlights

Partnered with community professionals to train staff on a variety of topics with:

- Administrative Law Judges;
- Children’s Autism Center;
- Children’s Hospital;
- ESD 105;
- Nisqually Tribes’ Early Childhood Education;
- Open Doors for Multicultural Families;
- Senate Legislative Staff;
- Treehouse;
- Tulalip Tribes’ Youth Services;
- Washington Association of School Psychologists;
- Washington Charter Schools Association;
- Washington Initiative for Supported Employment; and
- Yakima Children’s Center.

Developed [a new website](#) and an online intake process, with easier access to information in English and Spanish, improved resources, and faster response to current events.

Case example—A family contacted OEO to get help with re-enrolling their child in school. The child suffered from severe anxiety, causing her to miss a lot of school. The family had requested that the district evaluate her for special education services but was told the student had not been in school enough to be evaluated. The district filed a truancy petition when absences continued. The family transferred the student to an online program, but the student continued to struggle. The parents were finally able to connect with a private mental health counselor who was working with their child. The counselor recommended the family re-enroll the child and again request an evaluation for special education or services under Section 504 to support her academics and social skills.

The parents feared the district would deny the evaluation and that they would face another truancy petition. The Ombuds worked with the family to understand their concerns, talked with school officials to relay the family’s fears and hopes, and focused on the student’s needs throughout the process.

The Ombuds connected the family with a representative from the district who worked closely with the family and the child’s counselor through the process of evaluation and consideration of options to support the student’s return to the regular school environment.

The family felt more confident and comfortable working with the district and hopeful for their child’s future.

Produced new translations of publications and tools for parents in a variety of languages, including **Punjabi, Spanish, Vietnamese and Russian.**


“The Ombuds had a very helpful way of communicating and a knowledge of dealing with school administrators that she conveyed to us. Her voice of reason and listening skills were helpful in overcoming a difficult situation.”—Parent

“This office is priceless and **needed!**” - Parent

5 education ombuds
served more than 1100
students in **793** schools
in **185** school districts in
36 of **39** counties
in Washington state.

69% of families
called about
students with
special needs.

Each education ombuds
worked on an average of
263 cases

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We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.

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45% of callers
were referred to
OEO by
Community
Professionals,
OEO's website
and other
Parents.