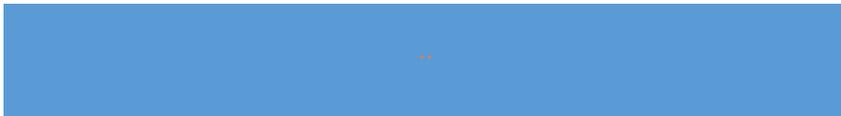


Governor's

Office of the Education

Ombuds

Washington State



WE LISTEN. WE INFORM. WE HELP SOLVE PROBLEMS.

Strategic Plan

2014-2017

Revised July, 2014

# The Office of the Education Ombuds

## **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.

## **Vision**

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

# The Office of the Education Ombuds

Governor's Office

State of Washington

## Introduction

The Washington State Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) is an organization within the Office of the Governor established to advocate on behalf of public school elementary and secondary students and to provide information regarding parent and student rights and responsibilities to parents, students, and others. OEO functions independently from the Washington state public education system.

Created by House Bill 3127 in March, 2006, OEO's primary charge is to resolve individual complaints, disputes, and issues between families, students, and their public schools in all areas that affect student learning. Chapter 43.06B RCW establishes the agency's responsibilities and includes serving as the lead agency on model policies and procedures to address harassment, intimidation, and bullying, promotion of family engagement practices, and making recommendations to policy-makers on strategies to reduce the education opportunity gap experienced by racial and ethnic minority students and students with disabilities.

OEO's services are free, confidential, and available to families and students from kindergarten to 12th grade. Because some students with disabilities are eligible for public school services from birth through age 21, OEO's services also extend to students who receive early intervention services and secondary transition services from their public schools under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Individuals contact OEO to seek information and assistance. We directly intervene in the majority of cases we are contacted about. This means that an Ombuds spends time counseling, coaching and assisting complainants to understand their options and interests, obtaining school records, contacting school district authorities at appropriate levels to get more information, and facilitating resolution of the concerns. Ombuds frequently organize and facilitate structured meetings with all stakeholders involved in the conflict to provide opportunities for resolution with an outcome focused on the student. OEO does not have the authority to conduct formal investigations or direct district personnel or OSPI to take certain actions, so we work primarily by supporting people in taking action on their own behalf, mediating between the parties, and providing other assistance. Not all inquiries and complaints require a formal or lengthy involvement by the Ombuds, and in these cases, information, referral, limited research, consultation, or counseling may be provided to the caller.

Through the collection of data regarding the types of complaints we receive and how they are resolved, OEO identifies trends and recommends improvements to the public education system.

OEO consults with representatives of the Washington State PTSA, certificated and classified school employees, school and school district administrators, parents of special needs students, and parents of English language learners regarding systemic issues that create obstacles for student's to access and to benefit from public schooling.

OEO also collaborates with all four of the state ethnic commissions which includes the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Washington State Commission on African-American Affairs, and Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs.

## Guiding Principles

OEO operates according to the following guiding principles:

- Adhere to high standards of ethical behavior
- Advocate for fair and impartial processes to resolve issues that affect students
- Ensure all students have the opportunity to access and benefit from Washington’s public education system
- Ensure families get access to information in their primary language
- Encourage collaborative partnerships among families, communities, schools, and educators focused on enhancing family engagement and fostering student success
- Promote the family as a child’s first teacher and essential to student success
- Ensure policies, processes, and decisions are culturally appropriate and informed by our diverse constituencies
- Engage and foster respectful communication through conflict mediation
- Approach conflict as an opportunity to increase understanding and identify best outcomes for children or an individual child
- Intervene at the lowest possible level to resolve disputes
- Empower consumers with tools and information to act on their own behalf and reduce potential issues that can lead to crisis
- Focus on student outcomes that foster academic success, graduation, and post-secondary opportunities

## Role of Ombuds

- Listen to concerns and perspectives
- Advocate for consumer access to fair processes
- Ensure focus is on positive student outcomes
- Resolve complaints through alternative dispute resolution techniques
- Collect data, identify trends, and report recommendations to policy makers and elected officials to improve educational access and outcomes for students
- Answer questions about the public education system

## Values

- Fairness
- Independence
- Confidentiality
- Impartiality
- Compassion
- Integrity

## OEO Services

- Facilitate resolution of individual complaints regarding issues or concerns that impact any student in Washington's public school system.
- Provide public information, consultation, and referrals regarding the Washington State public education system.
- Train families, educators, and community-based professionals about the public education system, conflict resolution, and effective parent engagement.
- Produce publications and tools for parents translated in a variety of languages.
- Collect and report data annually regarding annual statewide complaint patterns and trends related to concerns and issues brought to OEO.
- Make data informed recommendations and strategies for the improvement of policies, procedures, and requirements within the public education system that will improve the success rates of racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and students within the Opportunity Gap.
- Collaborate with families and educational stakeholders to address systemic issues including bullying and harassment, school discipline, and the educational Opportunity Gap.
- Outreach to underserved communities across the state to assist in accessing and navigating Washington's public education system.

## OEO Policies

- Complaint resolution may be requested by any member of the public.
- Complaints must be related to Washington's public education system and students who are currently enrolled or eligible to be enrolled in or receive services from Washington's public school system.
- Ombuds will intervene directly only with written permission of parents/legal guardians and/or students who are currently enrolled or eligible to be enrolled in elementary or secondary public schools in the State of Washington.
- Complaints are taken in any language over the phone, online, by fax, mail or in person.
- Ombuds work primarily by phone, phone conferencing or video conferencing and attend meetings, as resources allow, to achieve the most positive result possible during alternative dispute resolution processes.
- OEO does not replace existing public school complaint 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 providing services, unless disclosure is otherwise required by law. To protect consumer privacy, OEO does not disclose any personally identifiable information in its data and reporting.
- OEO does not intervene with elected officials, private schools, universities, colleges, businesses, or preschools.
- OEO does not conduct formal investigations or make findings on any issue, including complaints regarding allegations of professional misconduct.

- OEO does not serve as an enforcement agency, and does not have authority to direct schools and districts to take particular actions.
- OEO utilizes alternative dispute resolution techniques.

In order to maximize the impact of its limited resources in reducing the Opportunity Gap, OEO prioritizes direct intervention and outreach to:

- Students who experience the following:
  - Exclusion from or extended periods out of school
  - Chronic disciplinary actions
  - Truancy or drop out
  - Current or recent institutionalization, including juvenile rehabilitation, in-patient admission, or placement in CLIP facility
  - Living in kinship care, including with a grandparent or extended family member
  - Homelessness, placement in foster care, in state care or at risk of out-of-home placement
  - Academic failure or high risk of not graduating
  - Restraint, isolation or aversive interventions at school
  - Mental health issues, including suicidal ideations or expressions
  - Bullying, intimidation, harassment
- A student whose parent or care-giver is:
  - Limited English speaking
  - Migrant, immigrant, or refugee
  - Incarcerated or detained
  - Experiencing mental health issues
- When the process is unfair or has not been followed correctly
- When the relationship between the adults directly affecting the student's outcome is destructive, hostile, or combative and/or reflects an imbalance of power

# A Vision for the Future

*“Every child deserves a world-class education that prepares him or her for a healthy, productive life.”*

*- Goal 1, World Class Education, Results Washington*

## Goal 1:

**Provide effective information, consultation and intervention services to Washington’s public school families, students, and educators at the highest level of customer care.**

### Objective 1:

**Improve strategic support and intervention to underserved and vulnerable populations of students and their families.**

- *Strategy:* Increase clinics and targeted presentations to foster youth, homeless youth, kinship care organizations, Native American communities and tribes, and immigrant and migrant families.
- *Strategy:* Improve internal processes to ensure efficient management of limited resources.
- *Strategy:* Refine data points for collection of information on student, parent, and school demographics for underserved populations who seek OEO’s services.
- *Strategy:* Develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and toolkits for parents to support self-advocacy.

### Objective 2:

**Build relationships with educators and community professionals including those working with underserved and vulnerable populations.**

- *Strategy:* Expand outreach to rural schools and schools with highly diverse community populations, professionals serving youth in juvenile justice and child welfare systems.
- *Strategy:* Exchange information with educators and community professionals regarding opportunities and best practices for supporting underserved and vulnerable student populations and their families.

## Goal 2:

**Engage schools, families, and policy makers in addressing systemic issues that contribute to the Opportunity Gap and interfere with the success of students in Washington public schools.**

### Objective 1:

**Publicly communicate trends in complaints brought to OEO for resolution that reflect barriers to educational access and high school graduation.**

- *Strategy:* Report annually to the Governor, Legislature, and Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- *Strategy:* Continue to refine OEO data collection system.
- *Strategy:* Improve website as an information hub for the general public.

### Objective 2:

**Develop recommendations that impact systemic change.**

- *Strategy:* Collaborate with stakeholder groups on the issue of restraint and isolation to reduce the reliance on and use of these practices in school settings.
- *Strategy:* Collaborate with stakeholder groups on the incorporation of social emotional learning in basic education.
- *Strategy:* Collaborate with stakeholder groups on the issue of access to mental health services in school settings.
- *Strategy:* Participate in stakeholder meetings and established task forces regarding the Opportunity Gap (EOGOAC), Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB), Quality Education Committee (QEC), Special Education, Language Access and Discipline.
- *Strategy:* Report to the Legislature on the development of a Special Education Task Force.

## Goal 3:

**Improve the capacity of families and schools to partner for student success in Washington's public schools.**

### Objective 1:

**Assist and support school communities to increase language access to families who have limited English proficiency.**

- *Strategy:* Update and provide translated materials to families regarding student rights and responsibilities.
- *Strategy:* Publicize phone and other interpretation services available to schools and families using the OEO website and outreach to schools and families.
- *Strategy:* Conduct feasibility study on the availability of trained interpreters in public schools and report to the Legislature.
- *Strategy:* Collaborate with WSCLA and WSSDA to develop state-wide model language access policy.

### Objective 2:

**Assist and support school communities to engage families using culturally relevant and sensitive strategies.**

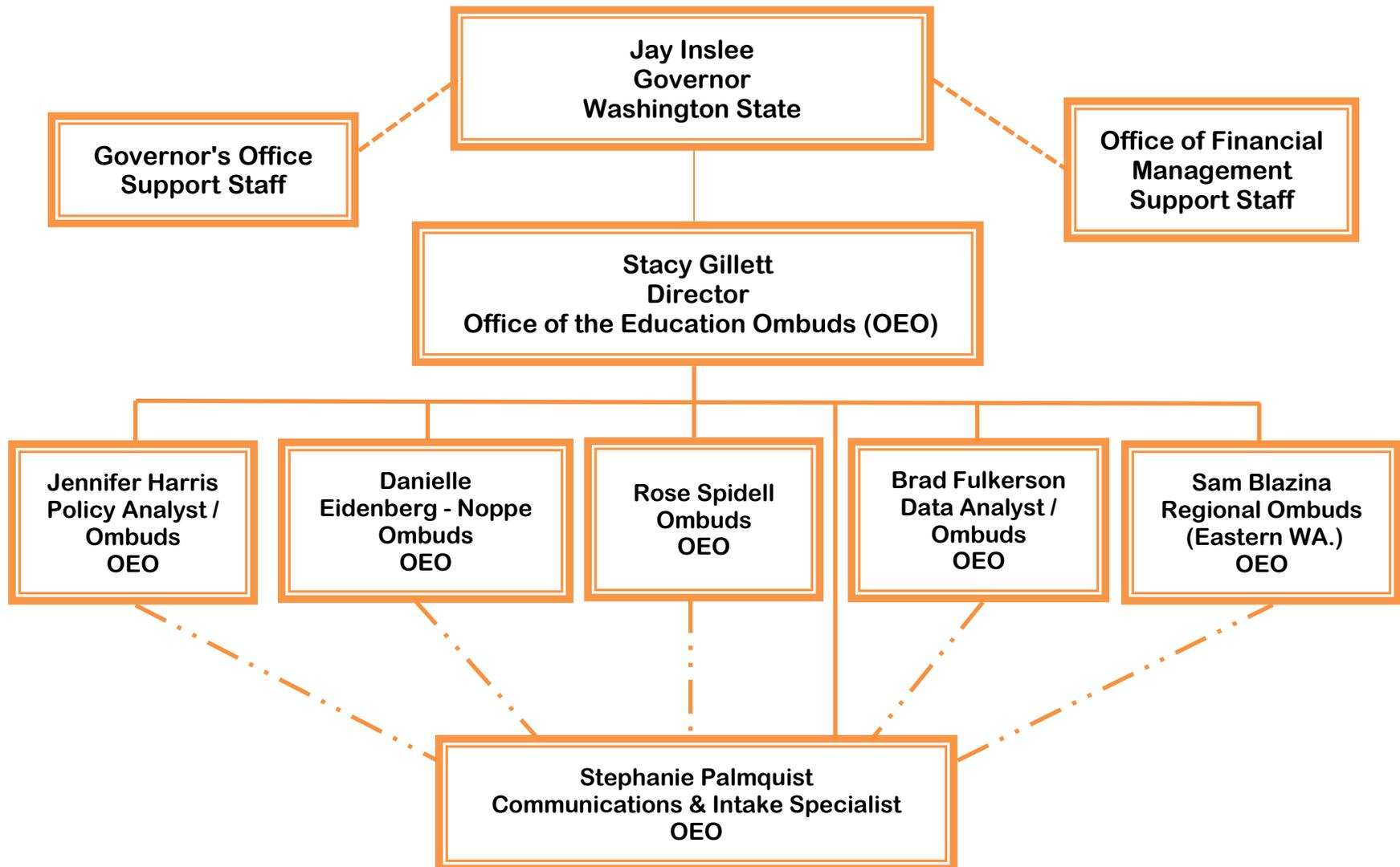
- *Strategy:* Consult with schools, districts, ESDs, and OSPI to develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and toolkits.
- *Strategy:* Partner with state ethnic commissions, state and regional PTAs, district family liaisons.
- *Strategy:* Collaborate with districts, ESDs, and others to support professional development opportunities for educators.

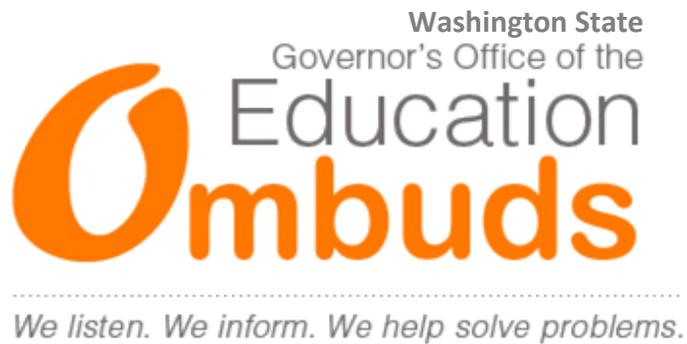
### Objective 3:

**Build capacity of families to work effectively with educators to support student achievement.**

- *Strategy:* Provide workshops to families and educators to build capacity to support student achievement.
- *Strategy:* Partner with community groups to provide trainings regarding student rights and conflict resolution.

**Washington State Governor's  
Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO)  
Organizational Chart 2014-2015**





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