

Our role at the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) is to:

Listen to concerns and perspectives and offer accurate, independent, and impartial answers to questions about the K-12 public education system

Offer collaborative problem-solving and dispute resolution tools to address family-school conflicts and promote equity and access

Provide coaching, facilitation, and training to support family and community engagement and systems advocacy

Collect data, identify trends, and make policy recommendations to elected officials and state educational leaders to promote fair and equitable processes and positive student outcomes



Our Vision: We envision an equitable public education system that is responsive and accountable to every student in the State of Washington.

Our Values: Impartiality, Independence, Responsiveness, and Accuracy

Casework

We answer questions and provide impartial, independent perspectives on public K-12 school issues. We offer direct, informal, and collaborative support on behalf of students facing opportunity gaps and barriers to inclusion.

Our Goals:

Respond to questions and concerns about the state's K-12 public schools with accurate and impartial information. Target our direct ombuds support to the opportunity gaps in our state, as identified by our statewide policy partners.

Initiatives:

- Use existing definitions of opportunity gaps and access barriers from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Governor's Office, and legislature to target our direct Ombuds support to increase positive outcomes for students experiencing: discipline, graduation barriers, academic failure (or immediate risk), chronic absenteeism; harassment or bullying; inclusion for students with disabilities; transition from high school for students with disabilities; and language access.
- Share timely and helpful resources and identify gaps where families, schools, and communities need more information and tools.
- Provide consistent opportunities for families and communities to have questions addressed through Ask an Ombuds webinars, email, and other ways.

Outreach and Training

We improve families and communities' understanding of how our public K-12 schools work so that schools, families, and communities can start from the same place to make decisions that support students, strengthen the family-school relationship, and reduce opportunity gaps.

Our Goals:

Build ongoing relationships with community partners to empower families, communities, and educators to work together to solve problems and make decisions that improve students with disabilities' transition from high school; language access; school climate; and equitable discipline. Over 3 years, OEO will reach every educational service district in the state to offer an event or training.

Initiatives:

- Help organizations expand their advocacy skills by offering online and in-person trainings, clinics, and listening sessions. We will focus on families and students that are: Limited English Proficient; experiencing bullying or harassment; preparing for the transition from high school with disabilities; affected by the incarceration or reentry of a family member; or disproportionately affected by discipline.
- Promote equitable access to our services through multimedia and advertising in different cultural and geographic communities in the state.

Policy Partnership

We believe that good policy begins with positive relationships. We listen to the perspectives of families, students, educators, and community advocates, and share those voices in state policy conversations to improve outcomes for students. We also share policy changes with families and communities to make sure that they know what is happening and can give their feedback.

Our Goals:

Facilitate family, community, and educator input into education policy from its development to its final stage. We focus on improving collective problem-solving to make processes easier to understand and navigate. As a team, we provide training on important policy changes to communities so that they can be supported in their daily efforts to reduce opportunity gaps and make schools more transparent, collaborative, and inclusive.

Initiatives:

- Use data from our cases and collaborate with policymakers to elevate student and family voice in critical policy decisions in these areas: language and disability access, harassment and bullying, and welcoming, inclusive school climates.
- Share latest policy changes and best practices with families and schools through our casework.
- Provide quarterly training to stakeholders on recent policy changes to make sure that policy is transparent, inclusive, and accessible to the people affected by it.

Team Culture

We strengthen our team's resilience and effectiveness by improving our communication and problem-solving skills with one another and the public. We promote a culture of shared commitment to educational equity, cultural responsiveness, and public service.

Our Goals:

Provide opportunities for staff to grow professionally by improving their communication skills and being culturally responsive with each other and the public. Use our team's individual and collective strengths to maintain an efficient, effective organization, and foster a shared commitment to reducing opportunity gaps for students.

Initiatives:

- Support peer and new employee mentoring.
- Increase clarity, responsiveness, and efficiency of team communications by using collaborative planning tools and technologies.
- Offer quarterly team activities focused on wellness and collaboration to help every team member reflect on how he or she would like to contribute to the team and grow professionally.
- Nurture staff learning and expertise for growing areas of work, such as supporting incarcerated parents, honoring cultural diversity, and reducing bullying.