

Annual Report 2018-2019

Washington State
Governor's Office of the



Education
ombuds

We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.
Phone: 1-866-297-2597 Web: www.oeo.wa.gov

Promoting 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.

September 1, 2019

TO: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Randy Spaulding, Executive Director of the State Board of Education
Members of the Legislature

One of the gifts of being the Director of the Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) is working with families, educators, and students to see them through collaborative problem-solving processes. While difficult, our work makes a difference in whether or not students remain in school, connect with others socially, and reach their full potential. This year, we served almost 1,000 students, families, and educators through our informal dispute resolution and reached almost 37,000 Washingtonians through our outreach. As a team of fewer than 7 full-time employees, we do this work with few resources.

Some highlights of my year have been working with our team to create new language access materials, forging relationships with new communities, supporting incarcerated parents in maintaining relationships with their children's schools, and engaging schools in using our [One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project](#) materials in their classrooms. OEO is shifting conversations about what it means to have a disability and how others can be allies and champions of inclusion and belonging. This work resonates with me personally as a woman with a disability who did not see teachers with disabilities until college or know how to talk about my disability as a child.

Besides the meaningful connections with families, students, schools, and community groups all working to improve Washington's schools, the most valuable experience that I have daily is supporting my amazing colleagues. I asked them this year to provide some highlights of their year:

- Danielle: "A highlight for me has been communicating with our contacts in the Black Prisoners Caucus about their appreciation for the work we are doing to increase information about and communication with the school system so that they can best support their children's education."
- Rose: "One that sticks with me was overhearing a mom, who was explaining to someone who she was talking to on the phone (while on the phone with me), say: 'She helps me understand things.'"
- Sam: "My highlight for the year was hearing from multiple parents directly that our work helped them feel a sense of hope and empowerment as they better understood the educational system."
- Sean: "I loved being able to include the Congolese Integration Network in the group of folks we help."
- Stephanie: "My highlight has to be watching the online intake portal switch to a new language when selected in the language picker."
- Yordanos: "One of my highlights that sticks out is a teacher who reached out to our intake line for help with a concern who shared that he'd been aware of our office being helpful to families, which encouraged him to reach out."

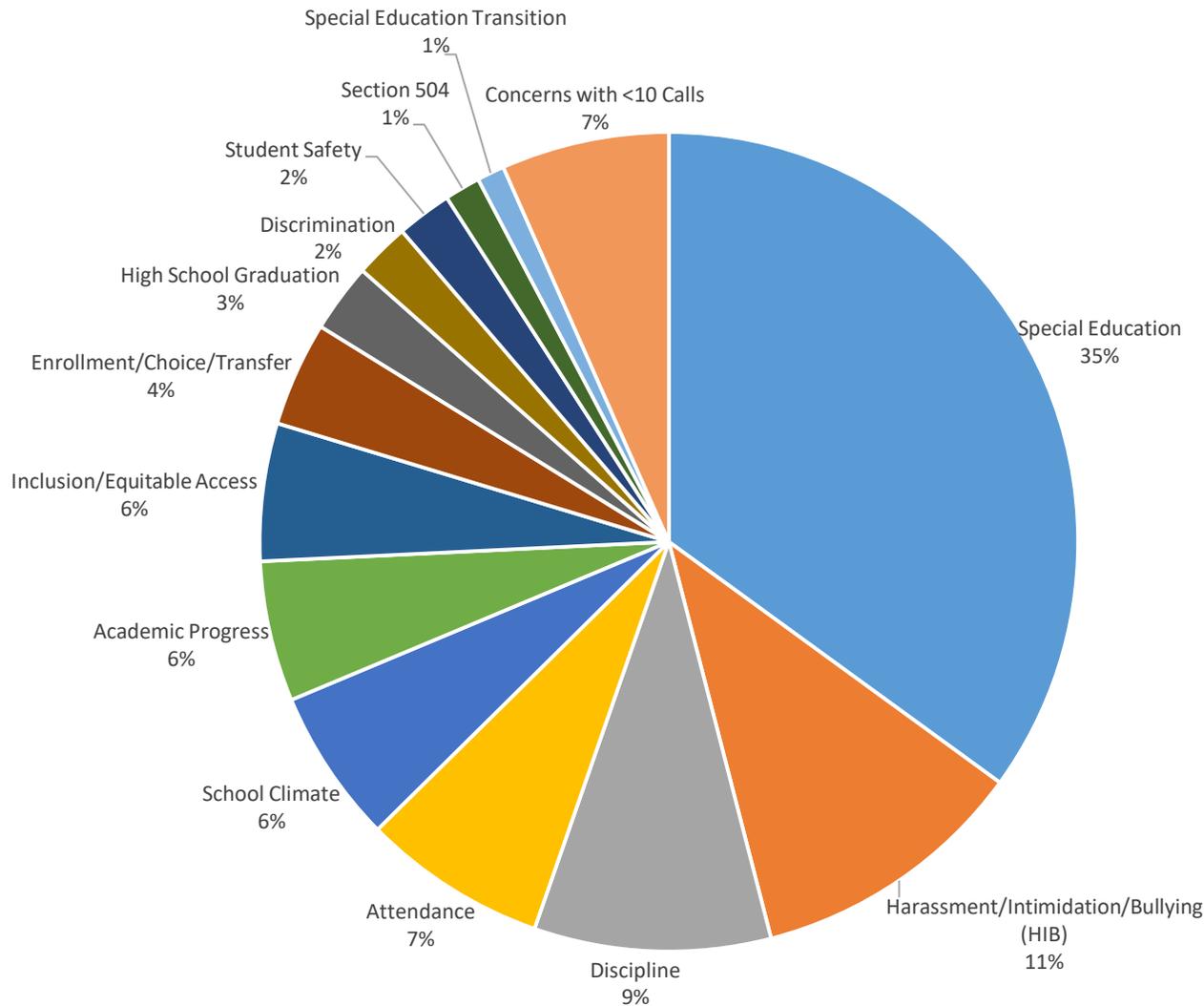
I am proud of them, as well as everyone who has collaborated with our office this year. When adults put students first, they witness amazing growth.

Seeking to improve student experiences with each of you,
Carrie Griffin Basas, JD, MEd,
Director

2018 - 2019 Data Overview

OEO received a total of **920** education-related concerns during the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Of those 920 concerns, **525 involved OEO strategic plan issues**. The primary categories of concern were much like last year's patterns and centered around **Special Education, Discipline, and Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB)**.

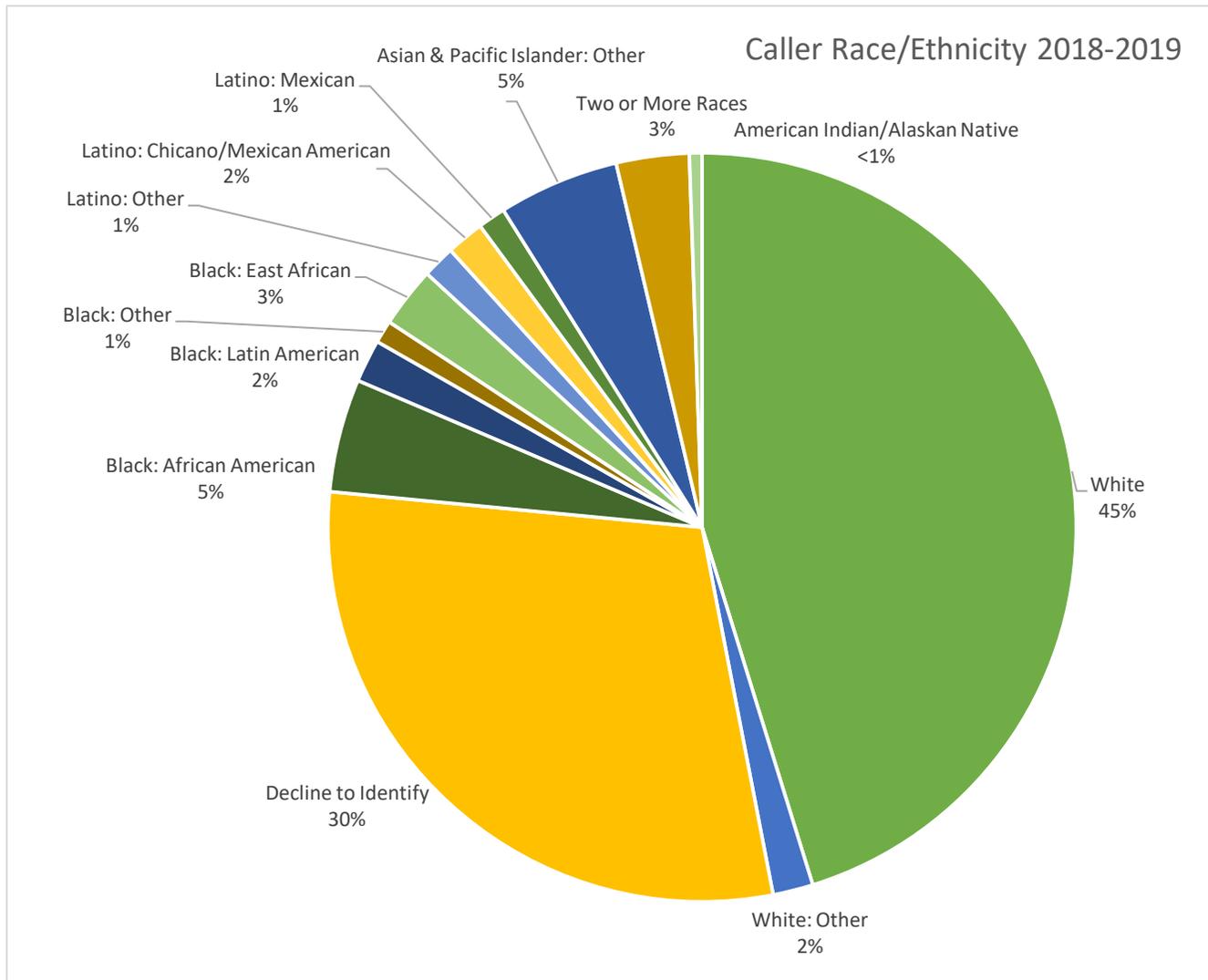
Concerns by % 2018 - 2019



Education Concerns 2018-2019

The chart to the left represents the overall kinds of concerns brought to OEO, but OEO provides direct intervention for a subset of issues within its strategic plan: discipline, graduation barriers, academic failure, chronic absenteeism, harassment or bullying, inclusion for students with disabilities, transition from high school for students with disabilities, and language access.

OEO's Strategic Plan Categories	% of Strategic Plan Issues
More Than One Strategic Plan Category Identified	23%
Inclusion/Equitable Access	19%
HIB	15%
Discipline	14%
Academic Progress	11%
Attendance	11%
Special Education Transition	3%
High School Graduation	2%
Language Access	2%



How People Contacted OEO:

Historically, people called OEO's toll-free phone number to discuss concerns and questions they had about their students in public schools. Last year, OEO implemented a new online intake process, which is now available in ten languages: Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, English, Korean, Russian, Somali, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The new online intake is available at: <https://watech.service-now.com/oeo>.

During 2018-2019, 22% of concerns were submitted via online intake. OEO also saw an increase in referrals from the OEO website, from 20% last year to 27% this year.

Referrals to OEO:

Community Professionals: 29%

OEO Website: 27%

Other Parents/Friends: 10%

6.2% of families requested phone interpretation.

Callers' languages in 2018-2019 included: Spanish, Arabic, Somali, Vietnamese, Kiswahili, Cantonese, Farsi, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Tigrinya, and Ukrainian

Districts Collaborating with OEO on 20+ Issues included:

Seattle, 60; Pullman, 53; Federal Way, 36; Kent, 35; Lake Washington, 23; Tacoma, 23; Everett, 22

Student Issues

For all student issues that OEO heard about from families of different races and ethnicities, **special education** was the largest concern, along with **discipline** and **harassment, intimidation and bullying**.

The charts to the right display various student groups, and the top issues for those groups. There were slight deviations for some groups:

* Pacific Islander students' top issues were **special education**, followed by **academic progress** and **high school graduation**.

*For students whose primary language is other than English, top concerns were **special education**, **HIB**, **academic progress**, **language access**, and **high school graduation**.

* For students experiencing *foster care* or *homelessness*, **special education**, **discipline** and **attendance** were the biggest issues.

Student Race/Ethnicity	% of Their Concerns Involving: Special Education	% of Concerns: Discipline	% of Concerns: HIB
White	47	13	12
Black	47	17	15
Latinx	35	12	21
Asian	48	13	10
Native American	29	7	21
Pacific Islander*	50	<1	<1
Bi-/Multi-Racial	42	8	17

Other Groups	% of Their Concerns Involving: Special Education	% of Concerns: Discipline	% of Concerns: HIB
Students with Disabilities	61	8	5
English Language Learners*	53	5	16
Students Receiving Free and Reduced Meals	47	13	10
Foster & Homeless*	44	26	<1

Policy Recommendations –

Each year, OEO recommends ways for policymakers to reduce opportunity gaps, foster greater family and school collaboration and shared decision-making, and improve outcomes for every student. Families, schools, and community organizations drive our work and the recommendations. This year, those relationships have strengthened our commitments to not only equity and inclusion, but also to anti-racist and anti-ableist¹ action.

Framework Guiding Our Recommendations

As a team, we recommit to taking an active stance against prejudice and discrimination. It will require us to be learners: to deepen our understanding of the racist and ableist ideas that have shaped our current institutions and policies. It will require us to be listeners: to learn from those who experience racism, ableism, and other forms of oppression. It will require us to be agents of change: to use the privilege and power we have to advance more just and equitable processes and systems.² It will also mean taking the time to build and deepen relationships with others seeking to transform our public schools into more inclusive and welcoming communities. We are excited to be partners in this work.

In the words of Ann Ishimaru, Professor at the University of Washington’s College of Education:

We want to move from educational equity being something we do *to* or *for* people to something we do *with* people . . . The process of educational equity is just as important as the inputs and outputs.³

What does this commitment mean for OEO? We will use co-design, guided by the principle of “Nothing About Us, Without Us”⁴ in each stage of our work – from identifying issues and strategies to assessing success.

Broad Policy Recommendations to the Legislature

We invite our state’s policy and education leaders to be partners in our framework as they continue their important work toward racial equity and social justice. We recommend the following strategies for reaffirming these values and commitments to co-design and learning in our education system:⁵

- **Articulate a vision that all leaders in our public education system will be lifelong learners to deepen their understanding of systemic oppression.** To realize this vision, the legislature should invest in a long-range plan to design and implement a continuing education program for adult learners that builds on the materials developed for the *Since Time Immemorial* curriculum, OEO’s *One Out of Five Project* (focused on disability history and pride), government-to-government training, tribal consultation models, and the soon-to-be developed ethnic studies curriculum. This effort should include a set of incentives to encourage all state policymakers, decision-makers, districts,

¹ See, for example, a definition and discussion of ableism in the Allyship Lesson from the *One Out of Five Project*, available at: <https://live-oeo-wa.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/Lesson-5-Allyship-PowerPoint-w-Notes.pdf>.

² See, for example, organizer and activist Kayla Reed’s elucidation of what it means to be an ally: “ALLY: always center the impacted; listen & learn from those who live in the oppression; leverage your privilege; yield the floor.” <https://twitter.com/ikaylareed/status/742243143030972416?lang=en>

³ <https://education.uw.edu/news/aera-highlight-engaging-families-drivers-educational-equity> (emphasis added).

⁴ See, for example, Ivanova Smith’s short video explaining the *Nothing About Us Without Us* principle in the disability community, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvUDSkmPivw> (part of a series: *Conversations with Ivanova*).

⁵ OEO’s *Quick-Start Guide for Listening Sessions and Co-Design*, <https://live-oeo-wa.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/QuickGuideforListeningandCoDesign.2018.07.02.pdf>

school board directors, superintendents, principals, and other education leaders to participate in this program.

- **Ensure, through specific provisions in legislation, that all future education-focused workgroups, advisory boards, and task forces include students, families, and community members at the table *and* allocate sufficient resources for community-based co-design processes.** To achieve this goal, workgroups will need to bring their planning and decisions into community spaces where youth, families, and community members already are. They will also have to receive and prioritize resources for language and disability access.

Specific Policy Recommendations to the Legislature Focused on Inclusive Schools and Supports for Incarcerated Parents

In addition to these overarching recommendations, we recommend two specific policy actions for the legislature’s consideration:

Recommendation #1: Invest in Building Community-Wide Capacity for Supporting Inclusive Schools

OEO urges the state to invest in a train-the-trainers program focused on families becoming local resources for diversity, equity, and inclusion in their schools and communities. OEO would lead this training model by designing with and for families, students, and communities.

Last fall, OEO launched the disability history and pride-focused *One Out of Five Project* which centered student storytelling to shift attitudes about disability and identity. As we have taken those resources to schools, community groups, universities, and workplaces, we have been asked for more videos and resources for adults to talk about disability with children and their surrounding communities. Families, students, and educators want to nurture inclusive school climates. Adults understand that they are critical in modeling for children what a better Washington can look like—where everyone lives and grows together in community.

This spring, the state re-worked the special education funding formula and invested an additional \$25,000,000 dollars over the next two years to support professional development for inclusive teaching practices. That investment is important but teachers cannot make communities more welcoming without help. Creating truly inclusive schools requires the commitment and capacity of the entire school community—families, students, and neighbors, not just educators. To dismantle stereotypes and assumptions about disability, we need to have community-wide and intentional conversations about disability, ableism, and other forms of discrimination.

OEO proposes an extension of its *One Out of Five Project* by launching a co-designed train-the-trainers program specifically for families. Student voice will drive the materials for adult learners and families will become on-the-ground resources for fostering inclusive schools and communities. The training program will expand from disability to materials and lessons about other important diversity and equity issues, such as race, ethnicity, language, immigration status, and Native identity.⁶

The legislature would have to invest resources in this kind of effort to ensure that materials are responsive, accessible, and begin with family,

⁶ The idea for the *One Out of Five Project* was inspired by the advocacy of students with disabilities who persuaded the state legislature to declare October “Disability Awareness Month” in our public schools. Accordingly, the project focused on disability history, identity, and the disability rights movement. We know from our day-to-day work with families, students, community organizations, and educators that they seek different kinds of conversations about race, ethnicity, mental health, and other critical issues. There are efforts across the state to respond to these needs. For example, please read about the work of parent leaders in the Kent School District who identified fostering positive racial and cultural identities as priorities for their family engagement curriculum: *Families in the Driver’s Seat: Parent-Driven Lessons and Guidelines for Collective Engagement*, University of Washington (2015), accessed at: <https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/programs/epsc/ParentCurriculum-FINAL-Print.pdf>.

student, and community voice. OEO is committed to providing language and disability access. By leveraging its existing partnerships and forging new ones, OEO would co-design and offer a culturally responsive, accessible training with materials in English and Spanish for all of our state's nine ESD regions over the next six years. Through this project, we would model what it means to have our state's innovations led by communities, families, and students most marginalized by discrimination and inequities.

Recommendation #2: Reinvalidate the Former Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Committee and Place Youth and Families' Voices at the Center of the Work

Every year we emphasize the importance of strong school and family partnerships to support student learning. However, what if a parent or other family member is incarcerated and wants to remain involved in their student's life? That is the question we asked ourselves as we had opportunities to hear from families experiencing these barriers and seeking continuity for themselves and their children.

According to the *Governor's 2016 Executive Order, 16-05, Building Safe and Strong Communities Through Successful Reentry*, approximately 50% of the 17,000 adults in Washington State prisons are parents.⁷ Notably this number accounts only for those parents in state prisons and not those in federal prisons or local jails. While Washington has one of the lowest incarceration rates in the United States, we must continue to address the problem of mass incarceration, racial disparities, and structural racism, and their impacts on children and families.

A parent's incarceration is a traumatic experience that can have cascading effects on a family's well-being, financial situation, housing, and community supports, continuing well after the incarceration has ended. Children with incarcerated family members experience challenges with mental health, academic progress, and school engagement, as well as significant stigma.⁸ Some studies have shown that even when organizations discuss or advocate for greater supports for individuals affected by incarceration, they can unintentionally increase negative assumptions about families and children navigating these experiences. However, no child or parent should be invisible.⁹

Robust school-family partnerships under these circumstances require resources and coordination among several different state and local agencies. They also depend on trust from communities. Organizations such as the Black Prisoners Caucus, Village of Hope, and Fabian's Fund provide bridges between incarcerated families and the communities they will rejoin. No one can do this work alone.

⁷ https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe_order/eo_16-05.pdf. These numbers may not capture the full picture. This estimate of 50% of the population being parents is lower than the numbers cited in a 2010 update report from the Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Committee. That report referred to a 2006 survey concluding that "15,000 of the 18,000 offenders in confinement in Washington State Department of Corrections facilities are parents . . . and those confined offender parents have approximately 29,000 dependent children." *Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Committee Annual Report*, January 2010, accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=Children%20and%20Families%20of%20Incarcerated%20Parents%202009_499fc72e-e0e8-4021-b6da-a27bb0f5e063.pdf.

⁸ See, for example: *Children of Incarcerated Parents, a Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families and Communities*, The Anne E. Casey Foundation, April 18, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence/>.

⁹ Conway, J. & Jones, E., *Seven Out of Ten? Not Even Close. A Review of Research on the Likelihood of Children with Incarcerated Parents Becoming Justice-Involved*, accessed at: https://www.ccsu.edu/imrp/Publicatons/Files/CIP_Seven_Out_of_Ten_Not_Even_Close.pdf.

More than ten years ago, Washington State began to address these obstacles by creating the Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Group. That important work was cut in 2010 as part of the economic downturn.¹⁰ Not only should the legislature invest in recreating this advisory group, but it should also provide more resources for existing efforts, such as parent-teacher conferences and information-sharing.

Currently, the state has a program to facilitate incarcerated parents' participation in parent-teacher conferences.¹¹ Each year, the Department of Corrections coordinates with local school districts to connect parents via video call with these opportunities. Parents have been using these tools, participating in an average of 41 parent-teacher conferences each year, over the past 3 school years.¹² Families are hungry for more opportunities to collaborate with schools outside these opportunities which exist twice a year.

Family members in prisons also want greater access to information about what is happening in schools today. They want to understand everything from learning standards to graduation requirements, social-emotional learning programs to course selection. Working with the Department of Corrections (DOC), Secretary of State (SOS), State Board of Education, and OSPI, OEO was able to stock prison libraries with copies of current learning standards. Community-based organizations and state agencies will collaborate and keep these resources updated and accessible, but they will need time and other supports to know if they are helpful to incarcerated parents.

As OEO learned this year from families, community organizations, and state agencies, the state has a good foundation from which to address these gaps for family engagement, but it requires more resources. OEO recommends that the legislature:

- Reinvigorate the interagency workgroup on children and families of incarcerated parents, with sufficient funding to support a sustainable co-design model with youth, families, and communities most affected by incarceration;
- Ensure that all state policy and decision-makers involved in that workgroup are provided with opportunities to deepen their knowledge of racial bias in the criminal justice system and public schools;
- Seek the voices of youth with currently or formerly incarcerated parents and let their insights guide policymaking.¹³

Oftentimes, citing statistics about mass incarceration and racial disparities can further exacerbate the stereotypes and disparities we seek to reduce.¹⁴ We invite you, instead, to listen to those individuals directly impacted by criminal justice policies, as well as their children and communities, and take next steps from that place of responsiveness.¹⁵ We are growing in this work, too.

¹⁰ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=72.09.495>.

¹¹ <https://www.doc.wa.gov/family/conferences.htm>.

¹² <https://www.doc.wa.gov/family/conferences.htm>.

¹³ The *Echoes of Incarceration* profiles are one place to start: <http://www.echoesofincarceration.org/Watch.html>

¹⁴ See, for example, Hetey, R. & Eberhardt, J., *The Numbers Don't Speak for Themselves: Racial Disparities and the Persistence of Inequality in the Criminal Justice System*, 2018, explaining their findings that "informing White Americans of racially disproportionate incarceration may paradoxically bolster support for the very policies that perpetuate those disparities." Accessed at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0963721418763931>.

¹⁵ See, for example, Ghandnoosh, Nazgol, *Racial Perceptions, Race and Punishment: Racial Perceptions of Crime and Support for Punitive Policies*, 2014, The Sentencing Project, accessed at: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/race-and-punishment-racial-perceptions-of-crime-and-support-for-punitive-policies/>; and Coates, T., *The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, October 2015, The Atlantic, accessed at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/>.

In addition to the annual report, OEO shares policy recommendations and improves experiences for students while serving on many Policy Committees and Stakeholder Groups, such as:

[A Human Workplace: Seattle \(state sponsor\)](#)

[Becca Task Force](#)

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Training Workgroup, Department of Enterprise Services](#)

[Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee \(EOGOAC\)](#)

[ESD 105 Youth Advocates](#)

[Kittitas County Parent to Parent](#)

[Kittitas County Transition Council](#)

[Office of Administrative Hearings Suitable Representative Advisory Committee](#)

[OSPI's Graduation: A Team Effort \(GATE\) Workgroup](#)

[Results WA: Goal 1 Council \(World Class Education\)](#)

[Social Emotional Learning Indicators Workgroup](#)

[OSPI Special Education Advisory Committee \(SEAC\)](#)

[Washington State Coalition for Language Access \(WASCLA\)](#)

[Yakima County Interagency Transition Network](#)

Outreach to Families, Students, Educators, and Community Stakeholders 2018-2019

OEO participated in 111 in-person presentations, workshops, clinics, webinars, blog posts and outreach events this year, reaching more than 36,900 people.

This year, OEO presented in **9 different languages**, including Spanish, Arabic, Kiswahili, French, Somali, Cantonese, Mandarin, Amharic and Tigrinya. Presentation categories included Inclusion/Equitable Access, Special Education Transition, Language Access, School Climate, and Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying.



Figure 1: One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project Team

OEO also held **6 in-person clinics**. Four of these clinics were with Open Doors for Multicultural Families, where interpretation was offered in Cantonese, Mandarin, Kiswahili, Amharic, Spanish, Vietnamese and Arabic. OEO partnered with the Congolese Integration Network for two clinics, with interpretation in Kiswahili and French.

OEO launched its learning resource for celebrating disability history and pride in Washington State called [The One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project](#) and continued its partnership with Rooted in Rights this year to produce four more student videos, bringing the total number of student videos to six. In the coming year, OEO will also collaborate with researchers at the University of Washington's College of Education to better understand how educators are using the resources, as well as to observe the impacts on school climate and attitudes.

OEO produced a toolkit for educators on “[Communicating with Families using an Interpreter](#)” as well as an “[Interpretation Support Tip Card](#)” for families in Spanish and English. OEO updated the [Attendance Toolkit](#) and [Prior Written Notice \(PWN\) Toolkit](#). OEO also posted a [Basic Event Accessibility Checklist](#) to the OEO website.

OEO continued to use media to share information to a larger audience with its limited resources. OEO had over 5000 views on its [YouTube channel](#), and added new webinars and informational videos, such as:

- [College-Bound with a Disability Webinar](#)
- [Making Special Education Work for Students in Foster Care Webinar](#)
- [Fostering Together: Four-Part Webinar Series](#)
- [How to Request Interpretation or Translation in Schools in Spanish: Como pedir interpretación o traducción en las escuelas.](#)
- [Commission on Hispanic Affairs interview with Spanish Spelling-Bee winner Lus Gallardo \(in Spanish and English\)](#)
- [Accessibility Together Webinar](#)

How Satisfied Are Our Stakeholders?

- Of the 18% of returned surveys for Ombuds, **88% liked their experience with OEO’s Senior Ombuds as they assisted with concerns.**
- Of the 4% of returned surveys for Intake/Associate Ombuds, **94% liked their experience with OEO’s intake process and the Associate Ombuds.**

OEO values continuous improvement and the trust of the families, students, and educators that work with us. Please reach out if we can be of assistance.

Questions and/or comments about this report can be sent to:

3518 Fremont Avenue North, #349
Seattle, WA 98103

Or emailed to: oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov

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