

Governor's
Office of the Education
Ombuds
Washington State



WE LISTEN. WE INFORM. WE CAN HELP.

Year 1 -Strategic Plan
Implementation
Report

2014-2015

(2015-2016)

(2016-2017)

REVISED July, 2015

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 of 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.

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.

As Ombuds, we are required to consult 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 is also required to collaborate with all four of the state ethnic commissions which includes the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Washington State Commission on African-American Affairs, Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, and the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs.

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.

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).

Guiding Principles

OEO operates according to the following guiding principles:

- Adhere to high standards of ethical behavior in all of our actions.
- 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.
- 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 dispute.
- 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 complaints
- ❖ 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 over the phone, online, by fax, mail or in person in any language.
- Ombuds conduct the majority of their work 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, 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.

OEO will prioritize direct intervention and outreach **using its limited resources** to:

- Students who are or experience the following:

Out of School or **at Significant Risk of Being Out of School**
 Chronic Disciplinary Action
 In Truancy or Drop Out Status
 Institutionalized or Recently Institutionalized or **At Significant Risk of** Being Institutionalized,
 including Juvenile Rehabilitation, In-patient Admission, Placed in CLIP Facility
 Under the Care of Grandparent or Extended Family Member
 Homelessness, Youth in Foster Care, At Risk of Out-of-Home placement, in State Care
 Academic Failure or At Significant Risk of Not Graduating
 Subject to **Restraint or Isolation** at School
 Mental Health Issues, including Suicidal Ideations or Expressions
 Bullying, Intimidation, Harassment
Discrimination

- A Parent or Care-Giver Who is:

Limited English Proficient
 Migrant, Immigrant or Refugee
 Incarcerated Parent
 Experiencing Mental Health Issues

- When the process is:

Unfair or Has Not been Followed Correctly

- The relationship between the adults directly affecting the student’s outcome is:

Destructive, Hostile or Combative
 Imbalance of Power

Impact Statement: In order to ensure that the limited resources of the OEO are used consistently with the current strategic plan, in each case, before providing direct intervention, the Ombuds must conduct an assessment of the impact that their direct intervention may result in for an individual student or group of students.

In making a determination about direct intervention, the Ombuds should consider whether:

- 1) there could be a clear corrective or positive impact to a student or group of students currently enrolled or eligible to be enrolled in a Washington K-12 public school, and
- 2) the nature of the issue is or will be compelling and significant to the overall quality of the student's current or immediate school experience.

Ombuds should consider direct intervention only in such cases as the Ombuds believes they can affect a positive change in outcome for an individual student or group of students that:

- Allows a student to return to school;
- Corrects a discriminatory impact against the student;
- Significantly Improves the Safety or Well-Being of a Student at School
- Addresses the student's academic failure or significant risk of failure without intervention, OR
- Significantly improves the cultural responsiveness of a school toward the student and/or their family.

The Ombuds' assessment of the parent's ability to effectively advocate for their own student's need may also be a factor in deciding whether or not to provide direct intervention in a case.

The same criteria for determining the level of direct intervention in any individual case may also serve as a guide for deciding when to close any particular case. In addition, if the facts, situation, or urgency of a case changes as a result of direct intervention or other influences, and the situation no longer meets the criteria established in the strategic plan, an Ombuds may decide to close a case.

The Ombuds may close a case if the Ombuds determines that direct intervention is not likely to affect a change or will have a direct, positive, or compelling impact on an individual student.

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 FAQs and toolkits for parents.

Activities:

- 1) Ombuds conducted visitations to 2 homeless shelters, one in Seattle, WA, one in Spokane, WA.
- 2) Participated in radio talk show at Skagit College in Spanish to explain OEO services to radio listeners
- 3) Ombuds attended and participated in Western Washington and Washington State Indian Education Association Rural Conferences.
- 4) OEO had a 32% increase in caseload over the past year, and 45% of students served by OEO through case intervention were eligible for free and reduced lunch.
- 5) Conducted focus groups in 9 different languages through interpreters (Arabic, Amharic, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese) to better understand the experiences of families who are limited English proficient who need the use of an interpreter to interact with their child’s school. These groups were conducted

as part of report to the legislature on Language Access for Limited English Proficient Families in Washington Public Schools.

- 6) Refined online intake process, increasing intakes online to nearly 60% of case referrals.
- 7) Used targeted data points to assess the percentage of cases that met the strategic plan criteria. Over 67% of OEO's cases met the criteria for the strategic plan.
- 8) Reserved and conducted administrative days for Ombuds to facilitate the closing of cases and improved data collection.
- 9) Developed Draft FAQ for evaluation and child find.

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 system.
- ✓ *Strategy:* Share information with educators and community professionals.

Activities:

- 1) Regional Ombuds provided significant outreach to approximately 700 educators and parents in eastern Washington, including multiple presentations in Spanish;
- 2) Ombuds provided presentations to Tulalip Tribes Youth Services; Latino Family Leaders in Snohomish County; Indian Civil Rights Commission/LaBe Ta Yah Youth Home; Open Doors Latino Families Group; DSHS Yakima/JR-Probation Youth-At-Risk; Treehouse Education Advocates (foster youth); Open Doors for Multicultural Families; and White Center Promise;
- 3) Facilitated community listening session for Sikh community in collaboration with White House Initiative to Prevent Bullying – Asian Pacific Islanders Task Force;
- 4) Presented section in Autism 200 Series at Children's Hospital, Seattle;
- 5) Conducted presentations in school districts in Yakima, Toppenish, Easton, Ellensburg, Sunnyside, Selah, and Wenatchee.

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

Activities:

- 1) Conducted and published a report to the state legislature on Providing Language Access Services for Limited English Proficient Parents in Washington Public Schools: OEO Feasibility Study for Foreign Language Educational Interpreter Training and Certification
- 2) Conducted Stakeholder Groups in Spokane and Olympia to provide input to the formation of a Special Education Task Force
- 3) Produced 2014-2015 Annual Report

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 state Opportunity Gap, Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB), Quality Education Committee, Special Education, Language Access and Discipline.
- ✓ *Strategy:* Report to the Legislature on the development of a Special Education Task Force.

Activities:

- 1) Collaborated with stakeholder groups on language related to change in law related to restraint and isolation.
- 2) Developed memo to Governor's Office supporting the change in law related to restraint and isolation of students in public schools.

- 3) Provided comments in response to Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services on SEIS and Significant Disproportionality in Discipline
- 4) Collaborated with stakeholder groups regarding the formation of SEL workgroup at OSPI
- 5) Presented to WA School Psychologist's Association regarding access to mental health in public schools;
- 6) Attended legislative workgroups: EOGOAC monthly meetings, HIB Workgroup through OSPI; Discipline Workgroup, OSPI;
- 7) Provided report to legislature on Improving Language Access for Limited English Proficient Families in Public Schools;
- 8) Provided report and testified in House Education Committee regarding the creation of a Special Education Task Force
- 9) Monthly participation as member on Washington State Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee meetings.

Goal 3:

Improve the capacity of families and schools to partner in 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:* Develop materials and publicize phone and other interpretation services available to schools and families using outreach to schools and educators, the OEO website and published materials in translated languages.
- ✓ *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.

Activities:

- 1) Conducted and provided report to legislature on Improving Language Access to LEP Families in Public Schools.
- 2) Developed and printed new materials for schools and educators on how to access telephone interpreter services
- 3) Improved OEO website for easier use and information navigation for Spanish speaking consumers

- 4) Translated variety of OEO materials into Spanish for presentations and community events
- 5) Met with WSSDA to discuss recommendations related to model language access policy.
- 6) Met with key legislators to share language access report.
- 7) Translated HIB materials into Punjabi.
- 8) Facilitated listening session in Punjabi in collaboration with White House Initiative on the Prevention of Bullying - Asian American and Pacific Islander

Objective 2:

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

- ✓ *Strategy:* Collaborate with Schools, Districts, ESDs, and OSPI to develop Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Tool Kits.
- ✓ *Strategy:* Collaborate with state ethnic commissions, state and regional PTAs, district family liaisons.
- ✓ *Strategy:* Partner with Districts, ESDs and others to provide educational opportunities for educators.
- ✓

Activities:

- 1) Developed and printed new materials for schools and educators on how to access telephone interpreter services for limited English proficient parents
- 2) Monthly participation as member on Washington State Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee meetings.
- 3) Developed FAQs for accessing OEO's services
- 4) Developed FAQs (in draft form) for special education evaluation and child find

Objective 3:

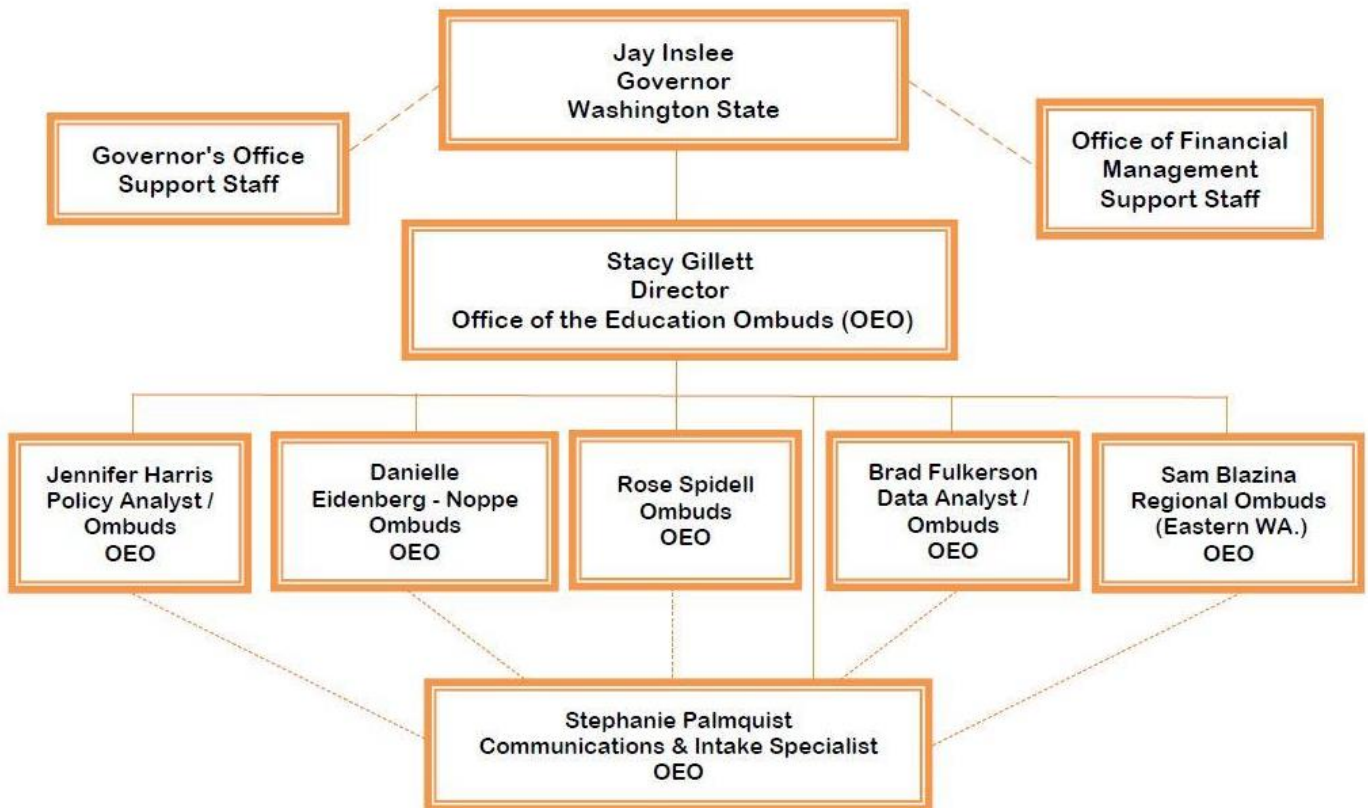
Build capacity of families to work effectively with educators to support student achievement.

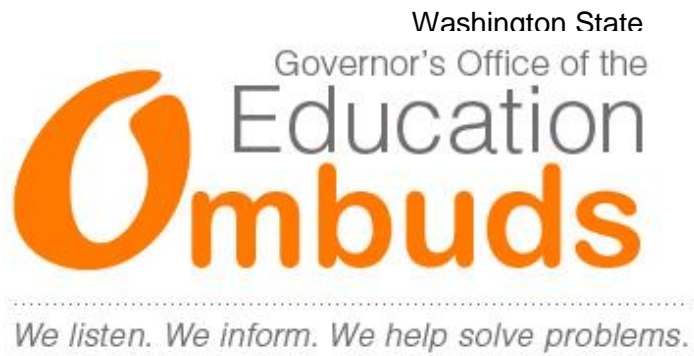
- ✓ *Strategy:* Provide trainings and workshops to families and educators to build capacity to support student achievement.
- ✓ *Strategy:* Partner with community groups to provide trainings regarding student rights and conflict resolution.

Activities:

- 1) OEO conducted 55 presentations, including 13 in Spanish and 7 in multiple other languages with the use of interpreters to diverse audiences across the state, reaching more than 2200 families, educator and community professionals in 5 regions of Washington.

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





State of Washington

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