



**BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HOWARD COUNTY
MEETING AGENDA ITEM**

TITLE: Ombudsman Report **DATE:** November 21, 2013

PRESENTER(S): Rose Dennison, Ombudsman

OVERVIEW:

The Board of Education of Howard County established the Office of the Ombudsman in January 2005. The core role, responsibilities and authority of this position are described in *Policy 2030 Ombudsman* and in the *Charter for the Office of the Ombudsman*, approved November 2011. The Ombudsman serves as a neutral party, collaborating with Howard County Department of Education personnel, to ensure a fair problem resolution process that equitably and reasonably addresses concerns received from parents, employees, and community members. The Ombudsman's services include confidential discussion of concerns, review of relevant school system policies and procedures, and the identification of resources that may assist in resolving the issue. The level of Ombudsman involvement is determined on a case-by-case basis.

During the last school year, July 2012 through June 2013, assistance was provided for 54 cases. (A case is defined as a situation where the individual bringing the concern [visitor] had already taken steps to address the concern with the appropriate personnel but felt that the situation was not satisfactorily resolved.) A summary of aggregated case and demographic data is presented that highlights the types of cases involving the Ombudsman. For comparison purposes, aggregated data reported from the five previous school years are included in the data charts found in Appendix A. (Data prior to 2007 is not available.)

This report also contains a brief description of other activities of the Ombudsman that support professional growth, community outreach, and systemic feedback via the annual policy review process. While most of these activities are ongoing from year to year, some specific activities will be replaced with new program goals that highlight continuous overall program improvement and active support of Goal 3 of the Superintendent's Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDATION/FUTURE DIRECTION:

Submitted by: _____
Name: Rose Dennison
Title: Ombudsman

Ombudsman Report

Summary of Cases, July 2012 through June 2013

Cases by Category

As in years past, visitors classified as Parents/Extended Family Members contact the Ombudsman most frequently with student concerns. During the last school year this group was the source of 88% of the cases (n=48). In previous years, cases from this group accounted for 94% (n=65) in 2011-2012, 93% (n=83) in 2010-2011, 94% (n=94) in 2009-2010, 87% (n=75) in 2008-2009, and 96% (n=66) in 2007-2008. The report categories with the most cases reported this past year are Bullying/Harassment, Curriculum/Instruction and Discipline, with 8 cases each.

HCPSS Personnel and Community Members are the two other stakeholder groups served by the Ombudsman. This year there were five cases reported by school system personnel and one case from a community member. School system personnel reported concerns involving Bullying/Harassment, Child Abuse/Neglect, Discipline, Human Resources and Personnel (School-based.) The Community Member concern also involved School-based Personnel.

Cases by School Level

During this past year the number of cases involving elementary schools and middle schools dropped from last year while the number of high school cases remained the same. The report categories with a count of the most cases for elementary school students were Discipline (4 cases); and Curriculum/Instruction, Enrollment/Residency and Personnel (School-based) with three cases each. Middle school report categories include Bullying/Harassment and Special Education (3 cases each), and Enrollment/Residency and Personnel (School-based) with two cases each. High school report categories with a count of the most cases are Bullying/Harassment (6 cases), Discipline (5 cases), and Curriculum/Instruction and Personnel (School-based) with four cases each.

Students Receiving FARMS (Free and Reduced Meal Services)

This category of student was represented in 18% (n=10) of the cases reported. Areas of concern involving these students cannot be determined due to federal law prohibiting identification of students who receive FARMS.

Cases by Gender

The number of cases involving female students remained the same as last year and is half the number of cases involving male students. The most frequently reported areas of concern for female students were Curriculum/Instruction and Enrollment/Residency with four cases each, and Personnel (School-based) with three cases. Categories with the most cases involving male students were Discipline (8 cases), Bullying/Harassment (7 cases) and Personnel (School-based) with six cases.

Students Receiving Services Administered by the Office of Special Education and Student Services

Concerns about students with IEPs were reported in the categories of Personnel, (School-based), three cases, Special Education (3 cases) and Discipline (2 cases.) Students with 504 Plans were reported in the following categories: Special Education (2 cases), and one case each in Attendance, Bullying/Harassment, Discipline and Transportation.

Cases by Race/Ethnicity and Hispanic or Latino of Any Race

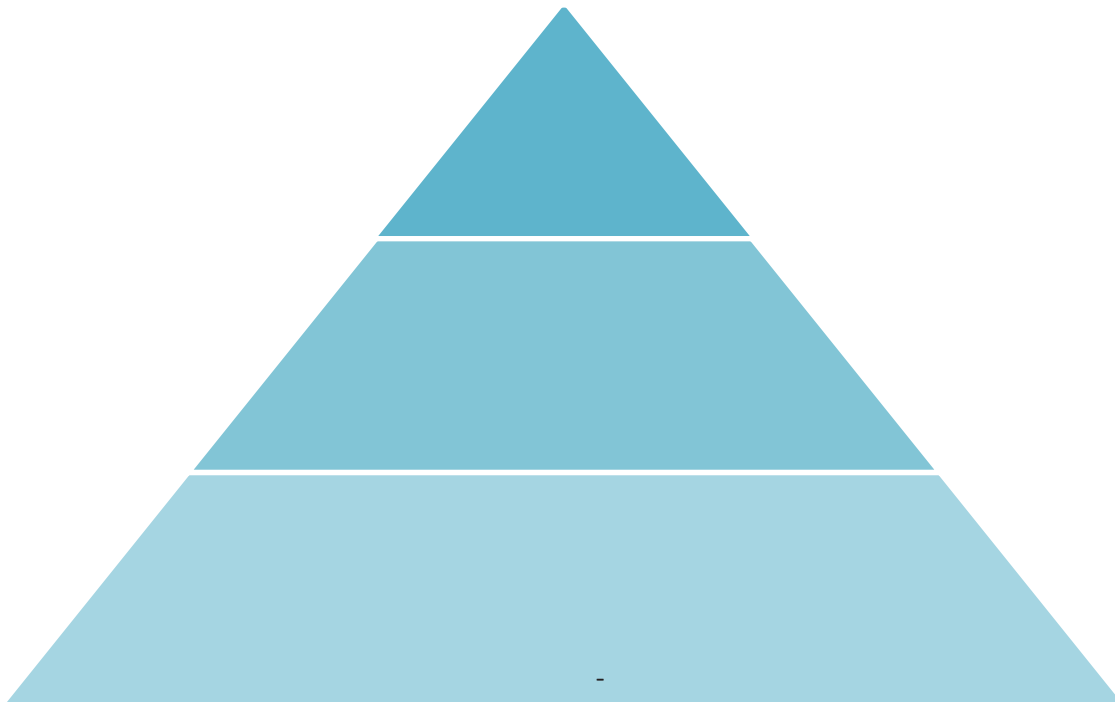
The number of cases involving all reported Race/Ethnicity groups dropped from last year. Report categories for Asian students are Bullying/Harassment and Discipline, one case each. Report categories for Black/African American students are Bullying/Harassment, Curriculum and Enrollment/Residency, four cases each. The report categories for White students are Discipline and Personnel (School-based), six cases each, and Curriculum (4 cases.) Students identified as Two or More Races are reported in the categories of Enrollment/Residency, Special Education and Transportation, one case each. Students reported as Hispanic or Latino of Any Race identify a concern in the category of Special Education (1 case.)

Contact Time/Involvement

This report introduces the concept of categorizing all contacts with the Ombudsman by time and involvement level. In past reports, the only contacts reported were for those situations that developed into cases. It is assumed that cases take time and a certain level of involvement from the Ombudsman, but this aspect of case management was never reviewed.

Other communications with the Ombudsman include requests such as meeting preparation assistance, clarification of policies and procedures, and requests to provide feedback as a visitor developed a problem resolution strategy. While the time involvement is minimal on a case by case level, the overall amount of time engaged in this work has been underrepresented in past reports.

The following diagram illustrates the number of contacts assigned as Level 1 (minimal) to Level 3 (maximum) time/involvement. These assignments are mutually exclusive. As a general rule contacts that required more time/less involvement, or more involvement but less time, were assigned to Level 2. Contacts that required a significant amount of both were assigned to Level 3. And contacts that required a minimal amount of both were assigned to Level 1. (All "cases" identified in this report are assigned a Level 2 or Level 3 designation.) In addition to the number of contacts, the average number of days and median number of days cases were active is reported for each level.



Ombudsman Activities

Community Outreach

Policy 2030 directs the Ombudsman to continuously engage in community outreach activities that increase knowledge about HCPSS problem resolution procedures and visibility of the Ombudsman's role. In particular an effort is to be made to reach beyond traditional home/school organizations and communities. This past year, in addition to distributing a new Ombudsman brochure, the Ombudsman Services Presentation was given in October 2012 to the participants of the International Parent Leadership Program (IPLP) and to parents of students attending the BSAP Saturday Math Academy. Additional presentations were given to the PTA Council of Howard County (December 2012), the Department of Student, Family and Community Services Advisory Committee (February 2013), and in April 2013 to the parents attending the Parent Education Night at Lake Elkhorn Middle School and Chinese Language School of Columbia.

Additionally, the Ombudsman regularly attends community meetings sponsored by the HCPSS as well as other home/school community organizations. Last year the Ombudsman served as a facilitator at the School Safety Forum, provided logistical support for two of the Superintendent's Strategic Planning Focus Groups, and attended five Listen & Learns sessions offered throughout the county.

Policy Development and Review

Comments were submitted for four policies that were actively under review last year: Policy 3040 Technology Security, Policy 8080 Acceptable Use of Technology, Policy 9000 Enrollment, Residency, Student Assignment and Admission to Pre-K and Kindergarten and 9200 Discipline.

Cultural Proficiency

Level I Cultural Proficiency Training, offered by the HCPSS, was completed in July 2012, and Level II Cultural Proficiency Training was completed during the 2012-2013 school year.

This past year the Ombudsman was an active member of the Howard County Ethnic Community Roundtable convened by the Special Assistant for Minority Affairs, Office of the County Executive. Specifically, subcommittee work involved drafting a proposal for an electronic and hardcopy resource map for immigrant and limited-English proficient newcomers to Howard County as part of a larger "Welcome Howard County" plan. The final report is expected to be presented to the County Executive in January 2014.

Goals for 2013-2014

Community outreach continues to be a goal this year. The Ombudsman will be working with the Community Outreach Specialist in the Office of Public Information to develop a comprehensive outreach plan. Part of that plan includes creating an FAQ which will offer information on the process for resolving concerns, services of the Ombudsman and information on topics that continue to be at the top of the list of concerns for which the Ombudsman is contacted for assistance. This goal and plan supports the Superintendent's Strategic Plan, 3.3, "HCPSS engages families and the community through relevant, timely, accessible and audience-focused communications." This information is to be made available in multiple languages and across a variety of communication platforms.

Appendix A

Cases by Report Category

Parents & Extended Family	Report Category	Nov 2007- Jun 2008	Jul 2008- Jun 2009	Jul 2009- Jun 2010	Jul 2010- Jun 2011	Jul 2011- Jun 2012	Jul 2012- Jun 2013
	Athletics	1	2	1	5	0	0
	Attendance	2	2	6	2	0	1
	Bullying/Harassment	4	9	14	10	14	8
	Child Abuse/Neglect	0	0	1	1	2	0
	Civility	1	1	3	0	1	0
	Curriculum/Instruction	7	16	12	10	14	8
	Discipline	19	12	14	18	6	8
	Discrimination	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Enrollment/Residency	4	9	18	7	4	6
	FNS	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Gangs					0	0
	Health Services	0	1	0	1	0	0
	Homeless Children/Youth	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Human Resources					0	0
	Personnel (CO)	2	0	0	1	0	0
	Personnel (School-based)	13	16	8	12	13	7
	Safe School Environment	0	0	0	0	0	1
	School/Community Involvement	0	1	0	0	1	1
	Special Education	10	3	12	9	8	5
	Student Records/Confidentiality	0	0	2	2	1	1
	Transportation	1	3	3	5	1	2
Total		66	75	94	83	65	48

Cases by Report Category (con't)

HCPSS Personnel	Report Category	Nov 2007-Jul 2008	Jul 2008-Jun 2009	Jul 2009-Jun 2010	Jul 2010-Jun 2011	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	Jul 2012-Jun 2013
	Attendance	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Bullying/ Harassment	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Child Abuse/ Neglect	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Curriculum	0	1	1	0	0	0
	Discipline	0	0	1	2	0	1
	Employee Benefits	1	0	2	0	0	0
	Facilities/ Maintenance	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Fiscal Management	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Health Services	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Human Resources	0	0	0	2	0	1
	Personnel (School-based)	0	2	1	1	0	1
	Sexual Harassment	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total		1	6	5	6	2	5

Community Member	Report Category	Nov 2007-Jul 2008	Jul 2008-Jun 2009	Jul 2009-Jun 2010	Jul 2010-Jun 2011	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	Jul 2012-June 2013
	Athletics	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Enrollment/ Residency	1	0	1	0	0	0
	Human Resources	0	1	0	0	1	0
	Personnel (School-Based)	0	0	0	0	0	1
	School/ Community Involvement	0	2	0	0	0	0
	School Renovation/ Construction	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Special Education	0	1	0	0	1	0
Total		2	5	1	0	2	1
Total All Cases		69	86	100	89	69	54

Cases by School Level

School Level	Nov 2007-Jun 2008	Jul 2008-Jun 2009	Jul 2009-Jun 2010	Jul 2010-Jun 2011	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	Jul 2012-Jun 2013
Elementary	15	30	21	29	19	14
Middle	23	20	25	19	26	11
High	28	35	52	40	23	27
Unknown/Not Applicable*	3	1	2	1	1	2
Total	69	86	100	89	69	54

Cases by Gender

Gender	Nov 2007-Jun 2008	Jul 2008-Jun 2009	Jul 2009-Jun 2010	Jul 2010-Jun 2011	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	Jul 2012-Jun 2013
Female	28	24	43	30	17	17
Male	40	53	54	57	50	36
Unknown	0	2	0	1	0	0
Not Applicable	1	7	3	1	2	1
Total	69	86	100	89	69	54

Cases by Students Receiving Services through the Office of Special Education and Student Services

Special Student Services	Nov 2007-Jun 2008	Jul 2008-Jun 2009	Jul 2009-Jun 2010	Jul 2010-Jun 2011	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	Jul 2012-Jun 2013
IEP (Individual Education Plan)	20	15	23	16	14	9
504 Plan	3	6	9	3	5	6
Unknown	4	5	7	3	0	1
Not Applicable	3	7	4	2	2	4
No Services	39	53	57	65	48	34
Total	69	86	100	89	69	54

Cases by Race/Ethnicity and Hispanic or Latino of any Race

Race/Ethnicity	Nov 2007- Jun 2008	Jul 2008- Jun 2009	Jul 2009- Jun 2010
African American	25	22	40
American Indian/Alaskan	1	0	0
Asian	6	2	6
Hispanic	3	2	3
White	29	45	40
Unknown	5	8	9
Not Applicable	0	7	2
Total	69	86	100
Race/Ethnicity	Jul 2010- Jun 2011	Jul 2011- Jun 2012	Jul 2012- Jun 2013
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	1	0
Asian	5	3	2
Black or African American	36	28	18
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0
White	38	34	26
Two or More Races	4	1	3
Unknown	2	0	0
Not Applicable	2	2	5
Total	88	69	54
Hispanic or Latino of any race	1	3	1

Cases by Students Receiving FARMS

Students Receiving FARMS	Nov 2007- Jun 2008	July 2008- June 2009	July 2009- June 2010	July 2010- June 2011	Jul 2011- Jun 2012	Jul 2012- Jun 2013
	13 (19%)	14 (16%)	20 (20%)	17 (19%)	17 (25%)	10 (18%)

APPENDIX B

For the purpose of collecting and reporting data related to the Ombudsman's work, mutually exclusive reporting categories have been created to align with school system policies, and administrative and instructional areas. As the work of this office develops, categories may be merged and/or added as subject areas are refined and redefined. It is envisioned that these categories will stabilize and be useful in trending concerns brought forward to the Ombudsman's office. Any concerns that appear, as a result of changes in HCPSS policy or procedures or new/changed legislation, may be tracked separately. Also, any changes that are temporary and limited in scope and have the potential to lead to an artificial inflation or deflation of trend data will be broken out for monitoring and reported separately.

The following categories for this report are:

Athletics: *Policy 9070 Academic Eligibility for High School Extracurricular Activities; Policy 9080 Interscholastic Athletic Program, and the implementation of those policies.*

Attendance: *Policy 9010 Attendance and issues where attendance might have a significant impact on the application of other policies.*

Bullying/Harassment: This includes all issues that fall under *Policy 1060 Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment or Intimidation*. This category will include *Policy 1020 Sexual Harassment* if it exclusively involves students. Violations of *Policy 1020* and *Policy 1010 Discrimination* by staff, volunteers and third party providers are investigated by the Office of Equity Assurance and are not reported here.

Child Abuse/Neglect: Issues covered under *Policy 1030 Child Abuse and Neglect*.

Civility: Issues involving the use of the *Policy 1000 Civility* when all other subject areas are exhausted. For example, management of a situation could involve applying the *Civility Policy* as a tool. That situation will not be counted in this category. In general, this category will include those situations where issues cannot be effectively resolved due to uncivil behavior or civility is a running theme through the management of several issues over time. Issues involving *Policy 3020 Trespassing or Willful Disturbance* will be counted in this category.

Curriculum/Instruction: Currently, this category is very broad. It includes grading, promotion/retention, graduation, materials, field trips, foreign travel, teaching and testing. A major change in policy or procedures that has an effect on any one area would be explained in the accompanying narrative. As more data is collected, or if over time, there is a continuing issue involving one subcategory, this could be broken out for reporting and tracking purposes.

Discipline: This includes implementation of *Policy 9200 Student Discipline* and the *Student Code of Conduct*.

Discrimination: Discrimination complaints are forwarded to the Office of Equity Assurance for investigation. However, a case will be reported in this category if the Discrimination determination was arrived at after some discussion and involvement and the visitor agrees that this is at the core of the issue(s) presented.

Employee Benefits: Concerns related to benefits received by active as well as retired employees.

Enrollment/Residency: This may also include redistricting concerns if they are not about the redistricting process. The process will have its own category since it is a time limited event, as opposed to concerns that may arise throughout the school year.

Facilities/Maintenance: Concerns related to the maintenance of the schools and other HCPSS property; and *Policy 6060 Community Improvements to School Sites or School Facilities*.

Fiscal Management: This category is very broad. Possible issues reported here are governed by the following policies: *4010 Donations*, *4020 Fund Raising* and *4030 School Activity Funds*.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS): Implementation of the relevant aspects of *Policy 9090 Wellness Through Nutrition and Physical Activity*, and issues falling under the purview of this department.

Health Services: This includes *Policy 5100 School Health Services*, *Policy 5120 Communicable Diseases-Prevention and Control*, and Home/Hospital Teaching.

Human Resources: Employment questions and those policies defined under Policy Series 7000: Human Resources.

Personnel (Central Office): If the issue cannot be placed in any other category as a primary concern and there is significant involvement/responsibility with Central Office staff.

Personnel (School-based): This category would be utilized if investigation of the issue does not uncover an area of primary concern. This includes complaints about teaching styles, the perceived effectiveness of a staff member, or an employee that appears to be the center of several issues and/or the concern of several parents/community members.

Safe School Environments: Issues covered under *Policy 1040 Safe School Environments*.

School/Community Involvement: Parent and community involvement in school activities; use of school facilities by non-school groups; and distribution of community information and materials.

School Construction/Renovation: This category has been created as an area of concern due to the school system commitment to a plan of school renovation.

Special Education: This is a very broad category. If one or more subcategories of issues emerge, they may be tracked separately.

Student Records/Confidentiality: Issues related to *Policy 9050 Student Records and Confidentiality*.

Transportation: Concerns related to the transportation of students and school bus operations.