

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

**TITLE:** Ombudsman Report **DATE:** August 14, 2014

**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. The charter was approved on November 3, 2011.

The Ombudsman serves as a neutral party, collaborating with Howard County Department of Education personnel, to ensure a fair 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.

From July 2013 through June 2014, assistance was provided for 43 cases. A summary of aggregated case data is presented that highlights the types of cases involving the Ombudsman. For comparison purposes, aggregated data reported from the six previous school years are included in the data charts found in Appendix A. (Data prior to 2007 is not available.)

The Board's support of the Ombudsman services continues to demonstrate commitment to Vision 2018 and promotes a safe, welcoming, and nurturing environment for students, employees, and the community at large.

**RECOMMENDATION/FUTURE DIRECTION:**

**Submitted by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Rose Dennison  
Ombudsman

**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Renee A. Foose, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Susan C. Mascaro  
Chief of Staff

# **Ombudsman Report**

## **July 2013 - June 2014 Summary of Cases**

### **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 83 percent (n=40) of the cases. In previous years, cases from this group accounted for 88 percent of the cases (n=48) in 2012-2013, 94 percent (n=65) in 2011-2012, 93 percent (n=83) in 2010-2011, 94 percent (n=94) in 2009-2010, 87 percent (n=75) in 2008-2009, and 96 percent (n=66) in 2007-2008. The report categories with the most cases reported during 2013 through 2014 are Curriculum/Instruction (eight cases,) Special Education/Student Services (seven cases), and Enrollment/Residency and Personnel (school-based) with six cases each.

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) personnel and community members are the two other stakeholder groups served by the Ombudsman. During 2013-2014, there were two cases reported by school system personnel and one case from a community member. HPCSS personnel reported concerns involving Curriculum/Instruction and Personnel (school-based.) The community member concern involved Transportation.

### **Cases by School Level**

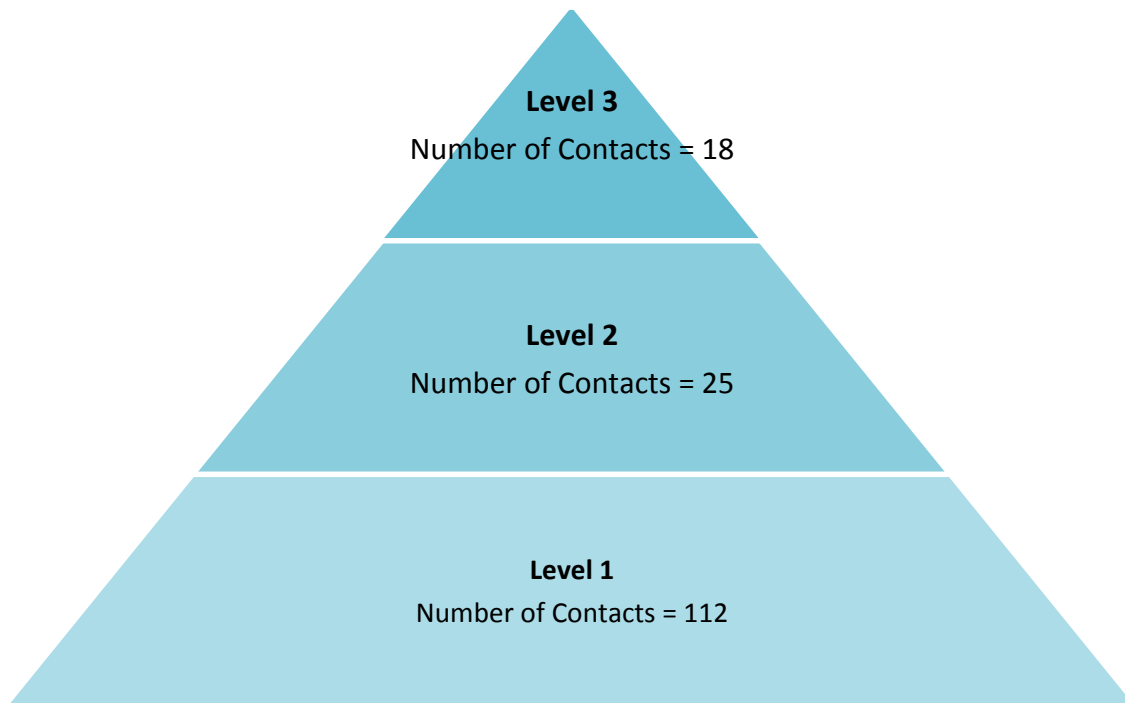
This past year, elementary and middle schools were identified with 12 cases each. High schools accounted for 17 cases. (In two cases the school levels were unknown or not applicable.) The report categories with a count of the most cases for elementary school students were Special Education/Student Services (three cases); Enrollment/Residency, Personnel (school-based) and Transportation with two cases each. Middle school report categories include Curriculum/Instruction and Special Education (three cases each), followed by Enrollment/Residency (two cases.) High school report categories included Curriculum/Instruction (five cases), Personnel (school-based) (four cases), followed by Discipline (three cases).

### **Contact Time/Involvement**

Prior to the 2012-2013 report, the only contacts reported were for 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 meeting preparation assistance, clarification of policies and procedures, and requests to provide neutral feedback, and problem resolution strategies. 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 from Level 1 (minimal) to Level 3 (maximum) time/involvement. These assignments are mutually exclusive. As a general rule, contacts that required more time and 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. Lastly, contacts that required a minimal amount of both were assigned to Level 1. (All "cases" identified in this report have been assigned to a Level 2 or Level 3 designation.)



## **Ombudsman Activities**

### *Community Outreach*

Policy 2030 directs the Ombudsman to engage in community outreach activities that increase knowledge about HCPSS problem-resolution procedures. This past year the Ombudsman Services Presentation was provided to the PTA Council of Howard County (PTACHC) and the participants of the International Parent Leadership Program (IPLP). Additionally, the Ombudsman regularly attends community meetings sponsored by the HCPSS as well as other home/school community organizations.

### *Cultural Proficiency*

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 was presented to the County Executive in January 2014.

## Appendix A

### Cases by Category

| Parents & Extended Family          |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                         |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Report Category                    | Nov 2007-<br>Jun 2008 | Jul 2008-<br>Jun 2009 | Jul 2009-<br>Jun 2010 | Jul 2010-<br>Jun 2011 | Jul 2011-<br>Jun 2012 | Jul 2012-<br>Jun 2013 | July 2013-<br>June 2014 |
| Athletics                          | 1                     | 2                     | 1                     | 5                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                       |
| Attendance                         | 2                     | 2                     | 6                     | 2                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                       |
| Bullying/Harassment                | 4                     | 9                     | 14                    | 10                    | 14                    | 8                     | 1                       |
| Child Abuse/Neglect                | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 1                     | 2                     | 0                     | 1                       |
| Civility                           | 1                     | 1                     | 3                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Curriculum                         | 7                     | 16                    | 12                    | 10                    | 14                    | 8                     | 8                       |
| Discipline                         | 19                    | 12                    | 14                    | 18                    | 6                     | 8                     | 5                       |
| Discrimination                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Enrollment/Residency               | 4                     | 9                     | 18                    | 7                     | 4                     | 6                     | 6                       |
| FNS                                | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Health Services                    | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Homeless<br>Children/Youth         | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Human Resources                    | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Personnel (CO)                     | 2                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                       |
| Personnel (School-<br>based)       | 13                    | 16                    | 8                     | 12                    | 13                    | 7                     | 6                       |
| Safe School<br>Environment         | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                       |
| School/Community<br>Involvement    | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 1                     | 2                       |
| Special Education                  | 10                    | 3                     | 12                    | 9                     | 8                     | 5                     | 7                       |
| Student<br>Records/Confidentiality | 0                     | 0                     | 2                     | 2                     | 1                     | 1                     | 0                       |
| Technology/Social Media            | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                       |
| Transportation                     | 1                     | 3                     | 3                     | 5                     | 1                     | 2                     | 2                       |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>66</b>             | <b>75</b>             | <b>94</b>             | <b>83</b>             | <b>65</b>             | <b>48</b>             | <b>40</b>               |

### Cases by Category (continued)

| HCPSS Personnel             |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                        |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Report Category             | Nov 2007-<br>Jul 2008 | Jul 2008-<br>Jun 2009 | Jul 2009-<br>Jun 2010 | Jul 2010-<br>Jun 2011 | Jul 2011-<br>Jun 2012 | Jul 2012-<br>Jun 2013 | Jul 2013-<br>June 2014 |
| Attendance                  | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                      |
| Bullying Harassment         | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                      |
| Child Abuse/Neglect         | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                      |
| Curriculum                  | 0                     | 1                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                      |
| Discipline                  | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                      |
| Employee Benefits           | 1                     | 0                     | 2                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                      |
| Facilities/Maintenance      | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                      |
| Fiscal Management           | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                      |
| Health Services             | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                      |
| Human Resources             | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 2                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                      |
| Personnel<br>(school-based) | 0                     | 2                     | 1                     | 1                     | 0                     | 1                     | 1                      |
| Sexual Harassment           | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                      |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>1</b>              | <b>6</b>              | <b>5</b>              | <b>6</b>              | <b>2</b>              | <b>5</b>              | <b>2</b>               |

### Cases by Category (continued)

| Community Member                   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Report Category                    | Nov 2007-<br>Jul 2008 | Jul 2008-<br>Jun 2009 | Jul 2009-<br>Jun 2010 | Jul 2010-<br>Jun 2011 | Jul 2011-<br>Jun 2012 | Jul 2012-<br>Jun 2013 | Jul 2013-<br>Jun 2014 |
| Athletics                          | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     |
| Enrollment/ Residency              | 1                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     |
| Human Resources                    | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     |
| Personnel<br>(school-based)        | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     |
| School/ Community<br>Involvement   | 0                     | 2                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     |
| School Renovation/<br>Construction | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     |
| Special Education                  | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     | 0                     | 0                     |
| Transportation                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 0                     | 1                     |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>2</b>              | <b>5</b>              | <b>1</b>              | <b>0</b>              | <b>2</b>              | <b>1</b>              | <b>1</b>              |
|                                    |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| <b>Total All Cases</b>             | <b>69</b>             | <b>86</b>             | <b>100</b>            | <b>89</b>             | <b>69</b>             | <b>54</b>             | <b>43</b>             |

## Cases by School Level

| School Level               | Nov 2007-<br>Jun 2008 | Jul 2008-<br>Jun 2009 | Jul 2009-<br>Jun 2010 | Jul 2010-<br>Jun 2011 | Jul 2011-<br>Jun 2012 | Jul 2012-<br>Jun 2013 | July 2013-<br>June 2014 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Elementary                 | 15                    | 30                    | 21                    | 29                    | 19                    | 14                    | 12                      |
| Middle                     | 23                    | 20                    | 25                    | 19                    | 26                    | 11                    | 12                      |
| High                       | 28                    | 35                    | 52                    | 40                    | 23                    | 27                    | 17                      |
| Unknown/Not<br>Applicable* | 3                     | 1                     | 2                     | 1                     | 1                     | 2                     | 2                       |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>69</b>             | <b>86</b>             | <b>100</b>            | <b>89</b>             | <b>69</b>             | <b>54</b>             | <b>43</b>               |

## 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 continues, 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.

The following categories for this report are as follows:

**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:** Bullying/Harassment 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, the Curriculum/Instruction 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:** The Discipline category 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 redistricting 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.



## **Appendix B** (continued)

**Fiscal Management:** The Fiscal Management category is very broad. Possible issues reported are governed by the following policies: Policy 4010 Donations, Policy 4020 Fund Raising, and Policy 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):** The Personnel (school-based) category would be utilized if investigation of the issue does not uncover an area of primary concern. This includes complaints regarding teaching styles, the perceived effectiveness of a staff member, or an employee that appears to be the center of several issues and/or concerns 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:** Special Education 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.

**Technology/Social Media:** Issues related to Policy 8080 Responsible Use of Technology & Social Media

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