

When addressing your concerns, the following guidelines** may be useful in facilitating discussion and problem resolution:

Organize Your Thoughts

- Clearly state the issue or the problem you are experiencing.
- Prepare/obtain supporting documents.
- Make a list of questions or points you would like to make.
- Identify several possible solutions you think would resolve your concern.

Stay Calm; Maintain A Civil Tone

- Focus on the facts, not on the person with whom you are discussing the issue.
- Avoid blaming, demands and "shoulds." Say "I believe...", "I feel...", rather than "You should..."

Clarify Rather Than Assume

- If you are not sure about something or what you heard, ask for an explanation or clarification.
- Try to understand the other person's view of the situation and the solutions they might propose.

Be Flexible

- Recognize that problems can be solved in more than one way.
- Be open to alternative solutions.

Keep Records

- Make notes of meeting dates and times, who you talked to and what was discussed.
- Save copies of letters, forms and other material related to your concern.

** Source: Based in part on guidelines from the State of Washington, Office of the Governor, Office of the Education Ombudsman.

How to Contact the Ombudsman

Office: 410-313-6850
Cell: 443-869-1474
email: ombudsman@hcpss.org
Private fax: 410-313-1590

Office Hours
Monday through Thursday
9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Other days/hours available as needed.



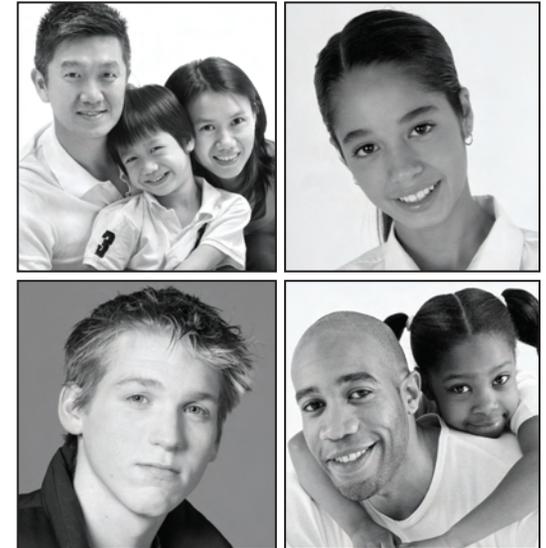
10910 Clarksville Pike
Ellicott City, MD 21042
www.hcpss.org

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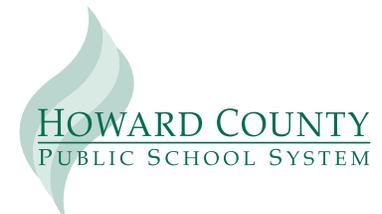
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THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HOWARD COUNTY

OMBUDSMAN



**a neutral, impartial, confidential
advocate for fair and
meaningful problem resolution**





Howard County parents, families and community members are active partners in educating children and share a vital role in ensuring their success in school. There may be times when you, as a parent, guardian, custodian or community member will need to address a concern or may disagree with a decision or action taken by Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) personnel. The role of the Ombudsman is to provide information and assist with the resolution of problems you may encounter.

The Ombudsman must follow Board of Education policies and HCPSS procedures, and does not have the authority to change policy or force school personnel to take specific action. The Ombudsman does not decide who is “innocent” or who is “guilty.” However, the Ombudsman will listen, review your situation, and assist with the timely and equitable resolution of your concerns.

Services of the Ombudsman include:

- Confidential discussion of your concern.*
- Research of applicable school system information, including Board of Education policies and procedures.
- Referrals to appropriate school system and community resources.
- Assistance with the HCPSS problem resolution process.
- Facilitation of communication/discussion, as needed.

What to do When You Have a Concern

The HCPSS has both informal and formal processes for responding to concerns and disagreements. To ensure a timely and equitable resolution of your problem, start addressing your concern with the staff member most closely involved. If the problem is not resolved, you may request a review of your concern at a higher administrative level.

You can request assistance from the Ombudsman at any point in this process.

Informal Process

Level 1: Speak with the school staff member who is most closely and directly involved in the situation.

Level 2: Contact a member of the school’s administrative team. If an assistant principal works on resolving the concern, but a resolution is not found, contact the principal with the concern prior to moving to the formal process.

Formal Process

Level 1: Outline specific concerns by completing Part I of the Parent Concern Form and submit the form to the principal. The principal will arrange a meeting to further discuss the concern. At this time, agreements and next steps will be documented. The principal will complete Part II of the Parent Concern Form.

Level 2: If the problem is not resolved at Level 1, request a review by the appropriate Administrative Director in the Division of Instruction. The principal will forward copies of the written description of the concern, principal’s response and supporting documents to the responsible administrative director, who will review the matter and forward a written decision to the parent and principal.

Level 3: Contact the Executive Director of School Improvement and Administration in writing if the issue is not yet resolved. The Executive Director will review the documentation and provide a written response within 15 school days.

More in-depth information on the informal and formal processes for resolving school concerns and disagreements can be found in the Student/Parent Handbook.

For more information on the role, responsibilities and authority of the Board of Education’s Ombudsman, see Policy 2030 Ombudsman at www.hcpss.org.

If you do not speak English, an interpreter will be provided.

*School system employees are required to report allegations of child abuse and neglect, risk of harm to oneself or others; and provide records subpoenaed by the court, and information requested via the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA).