



WASHINGTON STATE

# Office of the Education Ombudsman

[www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org)

## OEO Partners

Department of Early Learning

Commission on Hispanic Affairs

Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs

Commission on African American Affairs

Governor's Office of Indian Affairs

Washington PTA

Human Rights Commission

Office of Civil Rights

State Board of Education

Special Education Ombudsman OSPI

Safe Schools Coalition

WEA

WSSEC

WASA

WSSDA

AWSP

ACLU

WASCLA

Team Child

Tree house

Department of Health

## 2009-2010 Annual Report

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) resolves complaints and disputes between parents and K-12 schools that affect student learning. It provides schools and families with an alternative option to costly lawsuits and administrative hearings. The state-wide agency was created by HB approved by the Washington state legislature in 2006.

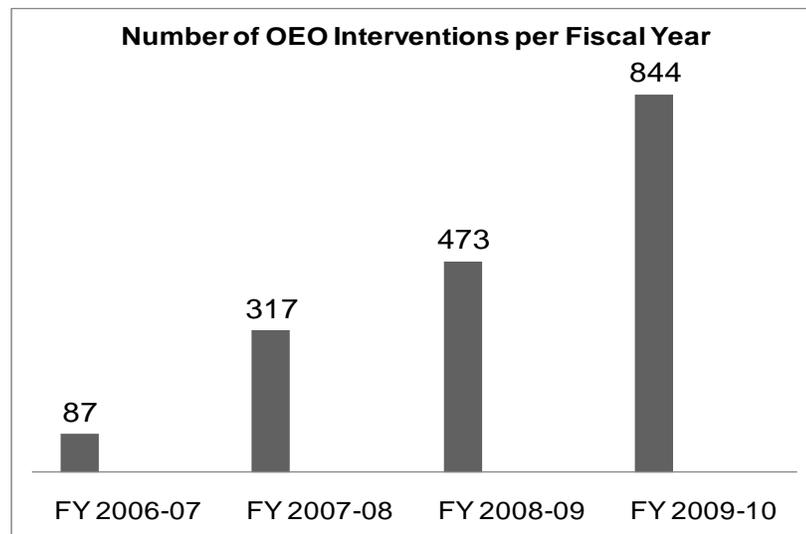
OEO advocates for fair processes for students in public schools. Its work keeps students in school, contributes to the closing of the achievement gap and helps parents to become involved in public schools. OEO is the first agency of its kind in the nation.

OEO provides efficient and accessible state-wide services exclusively by telephone. Case intake and information to the public is conducted via a toll-free number and the agency's website: [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org).

Education Ombudsmen work intensively with parents and public school officials to resolve complex situations impacting student learning or student learning environments. We categorize Ombudsmen casework as *interventions*.

### Agency Growth

Since its inception in 2006, the number of OEO's interventions has increased steadily. The chart below shows intervention numbers over the course of four fiscal years.



### Budget and staffing

OEO operates with an annual state budget of \$585,000 and employs 6.5 FTEs.

## Data Collection and Recommendations

In 2010, OEO purchased and implemented an efficient, web-based data collection system that allowed the agency to improve client intake, staff performance, case management, and generate a wider range of data reports.

OEO provides annual recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, OSPI, and the State Board of Education for the improvement of the public education system. Recommendations are based on case work issue, and demographic data the agency collects in the course of resolving complaints.

## Legislative and Public Education Work

OEO's professional experience and casework data are valued in state, local and regional committees. During 2009-2010, Ombudsmen served in numerous state committees and programs:

- The Achievement Gap Oversight Committee
- The Quality Education Committee
- The Autism Council
- Building Bridges Drop-out prevention Committee
- The Language Access in K-12 Education Task Force
- The Transitional Bilingual Review Committee
- PSED Regional Family Involvement Action Team
- WA Yellow Ribbon Program Network
- Anti-bullying/Harassment International Conference in Seattle
- Seattle University Principal Preparation Program
- Youth Suicide Prevention Program
- PESB Cultural Competence Task Force

In the 2009 and 2010 legislative sessions OEO was written into several pieces of legislation:

- **House Bill 2801** – The student anti-bullying/harassment/intimidation legislation was developed as a result of OEO's data-based recommendations. It mandated OSPI, WSSDA and OEO to update sample legislation for school districts and named OEO as the lead agency to provide resources and tools to families to prevent and identify bullying.
- **Senate Bill 5973** – Created the state's Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee and made OEO a permanent member of the Committee.
- **ES Senate Bill 6403** - Mandated OSPI to convene a work group that included OEO to develop and report recommendations to the Quality Education Committee and the Legislature for the development of a comprehensive K-12 dropout reduction initiative.

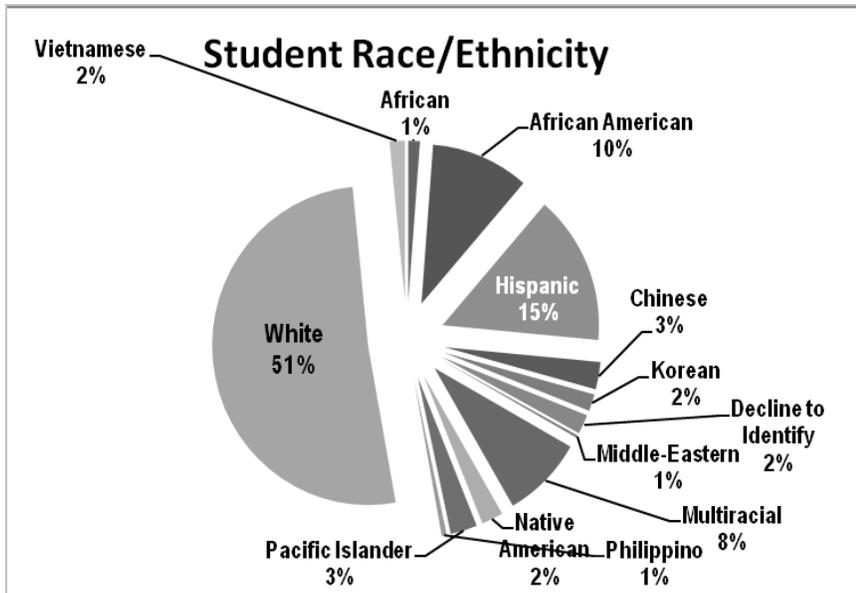
## Calls to OEO

During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, OEO staff had an average of 979 phone calls per month both incoming and outgoing. The vast majority of incoming calls to the agency were made by the parent or legal guardian of a student. Other callers were the student themselves, educators, and community-based professionals from across the state. OEO conducted outreach to various groups of constituents who were not aware of this service, such as incarcerated parents and students with incarcerated parents, students in the juvenile justice system, military families, foster families, GLBT families, adoptive families, disabled parents, Immigrant families, and refugee families.

## Interventions

This fiscal year OEO Ombudsmen intervened in a total of 844 cases from 144 school districts in the state -- an increase from 109 school districts the previous year. OEO's total number of interventions increased by 79% compared to the previous year. Ombudsmen interventions included research, investigation, consultation, coaching, phone facilitation, multiple contacts with school officials and other professionals, case administration, data input, and analysis.

Depending on the complexity of the issue(s), interventions took average of 18 hours of Ombudsmen work. The duration of cases extended from 7 to 90 days, during which time Ombudsmen contacted parents, school and district officials, students and other relevant parties as many as 56 times until positive results for the student complainant were negotiated and achieved. Results included resolution of the problem or improvement of the student's situation.



### Students Served

OEO serves students pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In the 2009-2010 fiscal year, 51% of all students served by OEO were white students and 47% were students of color. The chart at the left disaggregates the ethnicity of all students served during the 2009-2010 fiscal year

### Special Programs

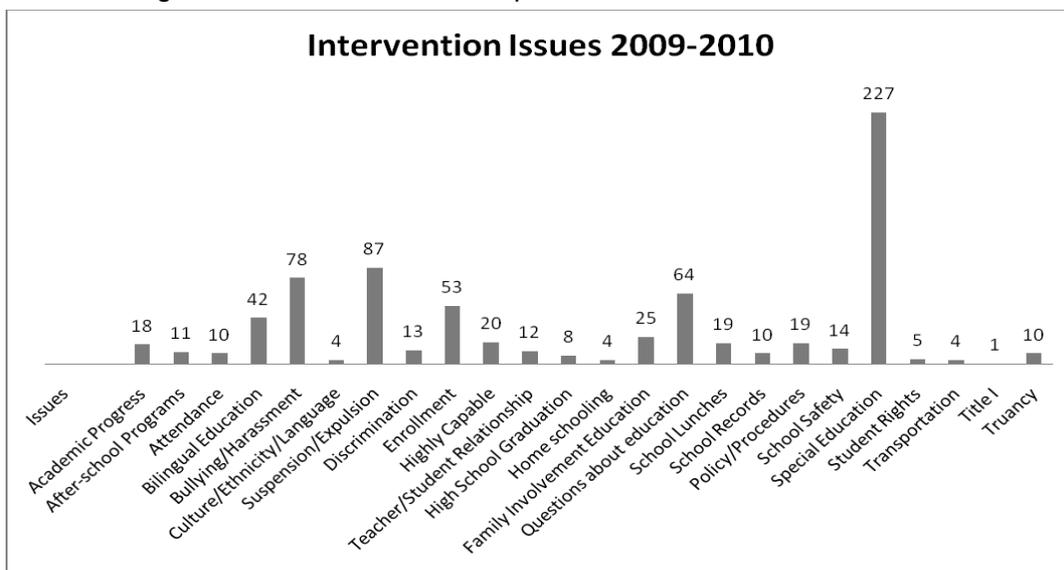
All students enrolled in public education are part of General Education with many also qualifying for special programs. The number of cases concerning Special Education

students has increased steadily since OEO's inception. This fiscal year, 59% of all students served by OEO were part of the Special Education program, 12% were in the transitional bilingual program and 3% were in the Highly Capable program.

### Issues

Ombudsmen are successful at getting suspended or expelled students back in school; helping students get back on track for graduation; ensuring that students' special needs are met and that they are able to learn in a safe school environment. Most cases were complex and involved a variety of issues affecting the student, the family and school staff. The most common issues Education Ombudsmen resolved in 2009-2010 were:

- Special education,
- Suspension, expulsion
- Student-to-student bullying/harassment
- Enrollment
- Bilingual Education
- Lack of knowledge of education laws, district policies



## OEO's Rate of Intervention Success

Education Ombudsmen resolve problematic through a collaborative method that yields positive results for the student involved. In 2009-2010 case intervention success percentages were:

### Results for students

Student provided with alternative learning opportunities.....	98%
Student able to participate in extra-curricular program.....	98%
Student safety improved.....	95%
Student able to participate in desired or needed class.....	96%
Student allowed to enroll in another school.....	92%
Student readmitted to school followed suspension.....	89%
Student back on track to graduate.....	80%

### Results for parents and school districts

Parents and school officials develop skills to communicate better with each other.....	98%
Parent changes position and consider new options for resolution.....	94%
School District changes position and considers new options for resolution.....	89%
Parent drops legal options against the district while working with the Ombudsman.....	85%

## Customer Satisfaction

OEO surveys every parent/ legal guardian and school official who works with Ombudsmen to resolve disputes, complaints, problems. 27% of OEO surveys were returned this fiscal year:

- 100% of survey respondents said that the Ombudsman provided the assistance they needed.
- 99% of respondents said their problems were resolved in a timely manner.
- 92% of respondents said the Ombudsman completely resolved their issue/concerns.
- 99% of respondents said that working with the Ombudsman helped their children's education.

***“Administrators in my son’s middle school did not want to transfer him out of his math class to another math class because it was an advanced class and he had fallen behind. They said he was in constant trouble and was sent out of the classroom almost on a daily basis. Students harassed him constantly and he was miserable. He’d rather sit in a room by himself than to be in that classroom anymore. After your intervention, they finally moved him to the other Math class. This quarter at mid-term he had six As, including one in Math. I think my son is a good example of what can happen to a kid when no one seems to care about him and what can happen when people care. Thank you!”***

***-Parent***

***“As parents of a child with special needs, we had been in conflict with our school district for over two years. Our relationship with district officials had deteriorated seemingly without repair. We had contacted an attorney.***

***Things started to change as soon as we contacted OEO. The Ombudsman helped us to better understand our position, researched laws and contacted our Superintendent to set up meetings for us. She guided us through the conversations so we could understand each other.***

***These interactions were instrumental in changing our relationship with the school and working out a plan for our daughter. She is doing better than ever and we owe it to OEO.”***

***--Parent***