

# The Office of the Education Ombudsman Quarterly Report

#### October 2006/January 2007

The mission of the Office of the Education Ombudsman is to promote equity in education and ensure the academic success of all elementary and secondary students in the state of Washington. We fulfill our mission by providing information to families, students, and communities regarding the public school system, promoting family and community involvement in education, and helping resolve conflict between families and schools.

#### Who we are A voice for everyone

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is a new public service agency within the Governor's Office. It was created by House Bill 3127 and approved by the Legislature in 2006.

OEO is staffed by a group of diverse professionals, with expertise in K-12<sup>th</sup> education, family and community involvement in schools, and mediation, who are dedicated to the academic success of Washington state students.

We provide information, referrals, consultation, and training opportunities for families regarding the public education system. As a neutral party, we also provide assistance resolving conflict between families and schools.

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# **Customer satisfaction**

"This was the best half hour I have spent talking to anyone about my kids' education and schools. I have learned so much! Thank you!"

Vietnamese father, Highline School District

"Thank you for being there...listening and helping me problem-solve. Now I know what to say when I talk to my daughter's principal."

Mother, Spokane School District

"I just want to say how glad I am you are there. You are a great resource to parents and educators."

Teacher, Richland School District

#### **Emerging K-12<sup>th</sup> issues** *What Washington families are saying*

The Office of the Education Ombudsman hears from K-12<sup>th</sup> parents, educators and community members in the state. They contact us to express their concerns and opinions about issues that affect student achievement and to seek assistance in solving problems with schools.

The following issues are consistently identified by callers as problematic:

- Bullying in schools elementary & secondary.
- Student/family discrimination racial, sexual orientation, religious beliefs.
- WASL test scores' appeal policy.
- Special education-related issues.
- Family involvement in schools parents are not made to feel welcome, poor school-family communication.
- Teaching strategies not individualized or tailored to diverse learners.

### Fact-finding What is missing in education

OEO identifies missing systemic pieces that affect K-12<sup>th</sup> education and the academic success of Washington state students. We analyze data, education policy, national research, and we hear from families and educators. Here are recent findings:

- Washington state educational data is hard to access, difficult for the general public to understand, and not disaggregated by student ethnicity. This makes it nearly impossible for ethnic communities and educators to identify groups of students that need tailored programs to achieve.
- Washington state does not have a 'Bill of Parents' Rights' in Public Education, A good example is the State of California.
- There is no consistency across Washington public schools' complaint resolution systems. While some schools have developed policy and procedures, others have not.

## OEO empowering families across the state

**Workshops** – Knowledge is power. In the next few months OEO staff will be teaching free workshops for parents, families and students in; Yakima, Seattle, Pasco, Walla Walla, Olympia, and Vancouver. Some of the workshop titles are: *Effective Communications Between Families and Educators, How to Resolve Conflict so Students Can Succeed, Understanding the Public School System*, and *Getting Involved in Your Child's Education.* 

**Publications** – OEO informational materials regarding the public education system, family involvement in education, complaint resolution, academic standards, and more, will be available as of March, 2007. These brochures and booklets are designed to be easy to read and understand. They will be translated in different languages and distributed widely to families across the state via schools, community organizations, churches, and businesses.

**Website for families -** The OEO website: <u>www.waparentslearn.org</u> will be up and running in March 2007. The site will offer a wealth of information regarding the Washington state public education system, family involvement, academic standards and related resources for families. Information posted on the site will be multilingual.

Washington families served by OEO this quarter: 352

#### The Education Ombudsman complaint data base

OEO's complaint data base, which will become operative in March, will provide the agency with technology to track information and create reports about the number of parent/student complaints that are submitted to our office, the issues presented, the location and school district where they originate and more. Data collected will serve as the basis for the OEO annual report to the legislature and as a tool to evaluate the quality of our services.

#### January conference for families a success

Neither snow nor ice kept 140 parents and family members from across the state from participating in the *Partnering for Student Success* conference at the Seattle Sheraton Hotel on January 11, 2007. The conference was jointly organized by The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) and the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL) and a part of OSPI's annual conference for educators. Conference sponsors included: Partnership for Learning, AWSP, WA State PTA, CLS, Seattle Public Schools, Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, Commission for African American Affairs, Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Governor's Office on Indian Affairs, Washington Appleseed, Skokomish Tribal Nation, and U.S. Department of Education, Region X.

Parents from as far as Spokane and Toppenish, came together to learn how to support Math learning at home, understand High School graduation requirements, and find out how to become more involved in the education of their children. OEO Director Adie Simmons and CISL Director Janet Hayakawa welcomed speakers Terry Bergeson and Representative Sharon Tomiko-Santos (D) Seattle (via video tape) who highlighted the importance of school-family partnerships. Participants enjoyed dinner together and an information and resource fair.



## Did you know...?

National research consistently shows that family involvement in education is a key element in student achievement. Among the many types of family involvement, supporting education at home is the best predictor of student academic success and high school completion. This holds true across families of all ethnicities, socio-economic levels, and education backgrounds. "Schools must become proficient at establishing solid partnerships with all families, and providing them with opportunities to understand academic goals, and learn how to support and extend student learning at home."

Mapp, K.L., & Henderson, A.T., (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

- A study conducted in several East Coast urban schools found that many low-income and/or diverse families make a deliberate and intentional choice not to participate in school activities and/or become involved in the education of their children because of:
  - Self-perception Families not clear about their role and responsibilities in the education of their children.
  - Sense of efficacy Families lack confidence in their own level of education and their ability to contribute to the education of their children.
  - Past experience Family members had negative past experiences with the education system
  - School climate Schools' climate can sometimes be unwelcoming and uninviting. Families may not feel respected and valued by school staff.
    - Hoover-Dempsey,K.,& Sandler,H. (1997). Review of Educational Research,67,3-42

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