

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Quarterly Report July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021



PWCS Office of the Ombudsman

The PWCS Office of the Ombudsman www.pwcs.edu/ombuds began offering ombuds services to employees, parents/guardians, students, and members of the community in August 2019. Pursuant to PWCS Policy 180, the Office of the Ombudsman provides confidential, impartial, and informal assistance in resolving Division-related concerns, conflicts, and issues.

Services include:

- Listening and helping to clarify underlying interests;
- Providing information and exploring options available to visitors;
- Facilitating discussions and/or mediating disputes to resolve issues, as appropriate;
- Collecting data on emerging trends and patterns while safeguarding anonymity;
- Utilizing data to make quarterly and annual reports to the School Board and the Division Superintendent, including annual recommendations for systemic and organizational change.

The Office of the Ombudsman operates in accordance with the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Code of Ethics, including:



- **Confidentiality***
- **Impartiality**
- **Independence**
- **Informality**

**The Office of the Ombudsman is not affiliated with any compliance function and does NOT serve as an agent of notice. The exceptions to confidentiality are 1) where the ombuds believes there is a risk of serious harm; 2) the ombuds is a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse/neglect; and 3) where Title IX reporting requirements are implicated (sexual harassment or sexual assault).*

Office Activity-Visitors & Concerns

During the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2022, there were 51 visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman. This is an increase in the number of visitors as compared to the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2021,

when there were 33 visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman. Of the 51 visitors, 28 visitors were employees and 23 visitors were parents and members of the community.

Visitor Concerns by Level

During the first quarter, 10 visitors expressed concerns primarily related to the elementary school level, six visitors expressed concerns related to the middle school level, and 10 visitors expressed concerns related to the high school level. The remaining 25 visitors expressed concerns primarily associated with central administration offices/functions and/or the School Board.

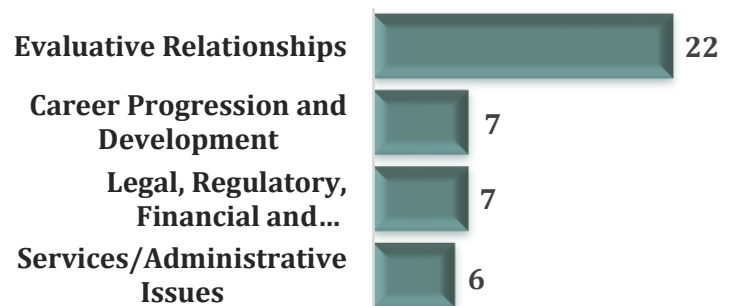
IOA Categories of Visitor Concerns

To promote uniformity and protect anonymity, visitor concerns are categorized into the nine uniform reporting categories suggested by the IOA, as follows:

- (1) Compensation and Benefits;
- (2) Evaluative Relationships;
- (3) Peer and Colleague Relationships;
- (4) Career Progression and Development;
- (5) Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance;
- (6) Safety, Health, and Physical Environment;
- (7) Services/Administrative Issues;
- (8) Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related; and
- (9) Values, Ethics, and Standards.

Additionally, there are numerous subcategories associated with each category. Visitors often express concerns related to more than one category.

Top Employee Visitor Concerns by Category



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During the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2022, the most prevalent category of employee concerns involved **evaluative (supervisory/employee) relationships**. Seventy-nine (79%) percent of employee visitors expressed concerns related to this category. The often-most expressed related sub-categories were: **retaliation or fear of retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments); **respect/treatment** (inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness); and **communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication). The second most prevalent categories of concerns involved **legal, regulatory, financial, and compliance**, where the often-most expressed sub-categories were: **disability/reasonable accommodation**, and **discrimination** (different treatment compared with others based on protected category, and **career progression and development**, where the often-most expressed sub-categories were **job application/selection and recruitment processes**, **involuntary transfer/change of assignment**, and **career progression**.

Top Parent & Community Visitor Concerns by Category



During the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2022, the most prevalent category of parent and community concerns involved **values, ethics, and standards** (questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards). Forty-three percent of parent and community visitors expressed concerns related to this category. The often-most expressed related sub-categories were: **values and culture** (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization); and **policies**

and procedures (other) (fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or policy needs revision).

The second most prevalent categories of concerns involved **services/administrative issues** where the often-most expressed sub-category was: **administrative decisions and interpretation/application of rules**. Thirty-nine percent of parent and community visitors expressed concerns related to this category. The next most prevalent category of concerns was **safety, health, and physical environment**, where the most prevalent subcategory was **safety**. Thirty-five percent of parent and community visitors expressed concerns related to this category.

Compilation of Concerns Related to Parents & Community

In reviewing the data collected by the Office of the Ombudsman from July 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021, concerns related to the Equity Policy (Concern One), School Board Citizen Comment Period (Concern Two), and Pandemic Related Virtual Options (Concern Three) were noted.

Concern One involves parent and community members concerns related to the adoption of the PWCS Equity Policy as well as significant concerns as to how the policy would be implemented and actualized.

Concern Two is related to **Concern One**, in that parent and community visitors expressed concern that their ability to comment and be heard by the School Board, as related to the Equity Policy, was limited and dissenting voices were not provided an adequate opportunity for meaningful dialogue.

Concern Three involves parents who believe there should be additional opportunities to opt-in to virtual school during the current school year because of safety and health concerns related to the pandemic.

Recruitment for New Ombuds

The Office of the Ombudsman continues to assist visitors and appointments remain available during the recruitment and selection of a new ombuds. To schedule an appointment, please email ombuds@pwcs.edu or call the office at 703-791-8587.