

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Quarterly Report – January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020



PWCS Office of the Ombudsman

The PWCS Office of the Ombudsman www.pwcs.edu/ombuds began offering ombuds services to employees, parents, 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.

**Beginning March 16, 2020, due to the closure of PWCS for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of the Ombudsman has temporarily transitioned to providing remote ombuds services. To seek assistance, the ombudsman can be reached at ombuds@pwcs.edu or 571.245.0336. Meetings are conducted by phone or video.*

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



Confidentiality: The Office of the Ombudsman “holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so” to the extent permissible by law.* The exception is where the ombudsman believes there is a risk of serious harm. The ombudsman is a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse/neglect.

Impartiality: “The Ombudsman, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial.”

Independence: The Office of the Ombudsman “is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.” The Office of the Ombudsman reports to the School Board and Division Superintendent.

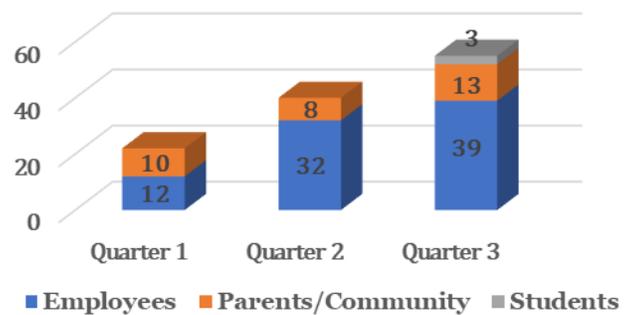
Informality: The Office of the Ombudsman, “is an informal resource, [and] does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention.”

**The Office of the Ombudsman is not affiliated with any compliance function and does NOT serve as an agent of notice.*

Office Activity- Visitors

Between January 1, 2020– March 31, 2020 (the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2020), there were 55 first-time (unique) visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman. This number is distinct from the 62 visitors who first contacted the Office of the Ombudsman in the first and second quarters (many of whom continued to receive ombuds services during the third quarter).¹ Of the 55 unique visitors, 39 were employees of the Division, 13 were parents and/or concerned members of the community, and three were students.² This equated to 71% of visitors categorized as employees, 24% of visitors categorized as parents and/or concerned members of the community, and 5% of the visitors categorized as students. The number of visitors in the third quarter exceeded the number of visitors in the first quarter as well as the second quarter, of the fiscal year.³

Fiscal Year 2020 - Visitors



Overall, 36% of the visitors expressed concerns primarily related to the elementary school level, 15% expressed concerns related to the middle school level, and 30% expressed concerns related to the high school level. The remaining 19% of visitors expressed concerns primarily associated with central administration offices/functions.⁴

Visitor Concerns – IOA Uniform Reporting Categories

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.

¹ There have been 117 unique visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman through March 31, 2020.

² This category includes visitors who are current employees, former employees, and applicants for employment at PWCS. It does not include employees who are accessing the Office of the Ombudsman to discuss issues primarily related to their roles as parents of PWCS students; these visitors are categorized as parents.

³ The first quarter of the fiscal year ombuds services were provided from August 5, 2019-September 30, 2019. The second quarter of the fiscal year ombuds services were provided from October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019. Data from these two quarters was included in Office of the Ombudsman Quarterly Report One.

⁴ Some visitors expressed concerns related to multiple levels/offices.

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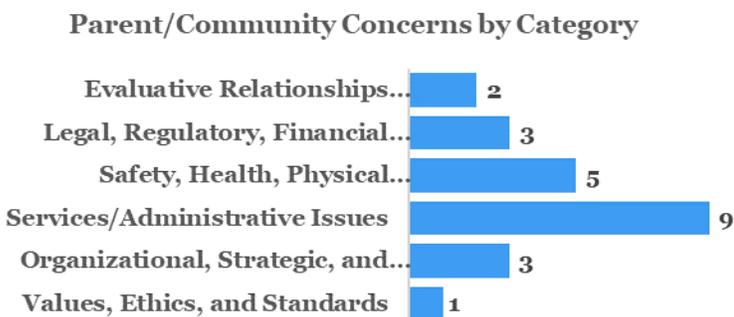
Employee Visitor Concerns

The most prevalent category of employee concerns involved evaluative (supervisor/employee) relationships. Of the 39 employee visitors, 21, 54% of employee visitors, expressed concerns related to evaluative relationships. The often-most expressed sub-categories within the category of evaluative relationships were: retaliation or fear of retaliation (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments); respect/treatment (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, etc.); departmental climate (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors have responsibility); and supervisory effectiveness (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues).



Parent/Community Visitor Concerns

Of the 13 parent/community visitors, nine expressed concerns related to *services/administrative issues*. This equated to 69% of parent/community visitors. The most frequent sub-categories associated with this category of concern were: *responsiveness/timeliness* (time involved in receiving a response or return call); *behavior of service provider* (how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a parent); and *retaliation or fear of retaliation* (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments).



Student Visitor Concerns

The concerns of the three student visitors related to the following categories: *evaluative relationships (teacher/student)*; *legal, regulatory, financial, and compliance*; and *services/administrative issues*.

Patterns & Trends

The ombudsman will include patterns of concerns identified at particular locations or within particular programs, as well as information related to the previously identified work location and program compilation of concerns, in the first annual report (which will be submitted by August 2020). Also included in the annual report will be Division-wide, systemic trends identified by the ombudsman after her analysis of data collected in Fiscal Year 2020.

COVID-19

This report, with the exception of approximately 15 days (March 16 - March 31), includes data collected and services rendered prior to the physical closing of school buildings and offices to slow the spread of Covid-19. However, within that 15-day period, the ombudsman received concerns from new and previous visitors related to employee safety and evaluative relationships (as impacted by circumstances). The ombudsman conveyed safety concerns to Division leadership, and Division leadership was responsive in addressing safety concerns raised.

Outreach and Education

During this reporting period, the ombudsman made presentations and engaged in extended school visits. Presentations were made at various meetings, including the Safe School Advisory Council and the Career Technical Education Advisory Council. School visits to four elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools consisted of individual meetings with principals, followed by outreach conducted in the staff/teacher lounge for a minimum of 90 minutes during lunch periods, including the distribution of ombuds materials and in formal conversations about ombuds services. Four presentations were made at school staff meetings. The ombudsman provided information and spoke with parents at the Office of Special Education Parents as Partners event.

*Respectfully Submitted by Sarah Miller Espinosa, J.D.,
Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP)*