

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Quarterly Report January 1, 2021 – March 31, 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.

Office Activity- Visitors & Concerns

During the first three quarters of Fiscal Year 2021, there were 134 visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman. Between January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021 (the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2021), there were 51 visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman, 40 of whom were employee visitors. There were also eight parent visitors and three visitors who were students or members of the community. These visitors are in addition to the 83 visitors who initially contacted the Office of the Ombudsman in the first six months of the Fiscal Year (July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020), many of whom continued to receive ombuds services during the third quarter of the fiscal year.

Third Quarter Visitor Concerns by Level

During the third quarter, 17 visitors expressed concerns primarily related to the elementary school level, eight visitors expressed concerns related to the middle school level, and 11 visitors expressed concerns related to the high school level. The remaining 15 visitors expressed concerns primarily associated with central administration offices/functions.

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.

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).*



Visitor Concerns by Category Quarters One, Two, and Three



During the first three quarters of Fiscal Year 2021, the most prevalent category of concerns involved *evaluative (supervisory/employee) relationships*. Seventy-four 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 category of concerns involved *safety, health, and physical environment* (questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about safety, health and infrastructure-related issues), where 51 visitors expressed concerns. The often-most expressed related sub-categories were: *safety* (physical safety, meeting federal and state requirements); and *telework* (ability to work from home or other location because of a business or personal need). The next most frequent category of concerns involved *legal, regulatory, financial, and compliance*. The often-most expressed sub-categories were: *disability/reasonable accommodation*, and *discrimination* (different treatment compared with others based on protected category).

Pandemic Related Concerns

In reviewing the data collected by the Office of the Ombudsman from July 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021, concerns

related to safety were identified. Visitors shared their observations related to inconsistent procedures to track who entered classrooms, and those visitors assigned to more than one school shared concerns about inadequate communication from some school-based administrators. These concerns are in addition to the previously reported concerns of Tier One employees (those with underlying medical conditions at increased risk for severe illness in the event they contract COVID-19), who continued to express concerns during the third quarter about the manner in which the Division engaged in the interactive process and the lack of virtual assignment options. These concerns were brought to the attention of Division leadership, while protecting the anonymity of visitors. Division leadership shared with the ombuds efforts taken to address concerns.

Compilation of Concerns Related to Specific Schools/Offices

In reviewing the data collected by the Office of the Ombudsman from January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, a compilation of concerns related to one school (which was noted in an earlier report) continues to be identified. This was brought to the attention of Division leadership, while protecting the anonymity of the visitors. *Concern One* was previously reported and continues to involve an elementary school where employee and parent visitors expressed concerns related to school leadership and lack of clear and timely communication. Visitors also shared that they feared retaliation and/or believed they had been retaliated against as a result of expressing concerns.

Community Outreach

During the third quarter, the Office of the Ombudsman contacted 38 community organizations to share information about the availability of ombuds services and raise awareness of the office. This outreach resulted in virtual introductory meeting with representatives from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Settle the Debt, Chow Wagon, and The Links Incorporated. Additional introductory meetings are anticipated during the fourth quarter.

During the first three quarters of Fiscal Year 2021, the ombuds and the ombuds specialist, Rosamaria Manzines, presented at a total of 18 virtual school staff meetings and 10 parent advisory meetings. Additionally, the ombuds addressed the following councils: Superintendent's Advisory Council on Equity and the Special Education Advisory Council. The ombuds specialist provided information at the Parents as Educational Partners and Transition Fair virtual events.