

Washington State Governor's

Office of the Education Ombuds



2013-2014 Annual Report Executive Summary



OEO promotes equity in education by working with families and schools to remove barriers so that every student can fully participate in and benefit from public education in the State of Washington.

October 20, 2014

LETTER FROM THE STATE EDUCATION OMBUDS

TO: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
Randy Dorn, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Members of the Legislature
Washington State Board of Education

We are grateful for the opportunity to present you with this annual report of the Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds, as required by RCW 43.06B.050.

The Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) is seated independently outside of the education system it monitors. In its service as "citizen's aide," OEO facilitates resolution of conflict between families, students and their schools regarding any issue that impacts students within the K-12 public education system. OEO provides recommendations to decision-makers and elected officials who affect policy and legislation.

In its eighth year of operation, OEO has just completed its first year with a new director, and its highest number of cases: over 1038 statewide. In May, 2014, for the first time, we were able to hire a bilingual, regional Ombuds based in Eastern Washington. We also hired a bilingual intake specialist. This has allowed OEO to better connect with families whose first language is Spanish and have greater presence in Central Washington, the lower Yakima Valley, and the Spokane region.

Over the course of the past year, parents, educators, students, grandparents, foster parents, medical and health professionals, legislators, and others contacted OEO to ask for assistance to resolve a significant problem or concern related to a public school student. As in most years, complex concerns involving students with disabilities were the most frequently identified issues for intervention or consultation, along with issues related to student discipline, enrollment, bullying and harassment, and barriers to language access for limited-English speaking families.

We want to express our deep appreciation for the collaboration of the many educators we contacted to resolve concerns brought to us, and thank them for their ongoing commitment to building positive relationships with families and students in their communities.

Most importantly, we thank the families who brought concerns to our attention and put their trust in our office. We consider it an honor to have heard so many stories, met so many families, and had the opportunity to make a difference in the outcomes for so many children.

Thank you again for the chance to share what we have learned.

Respectfully Submitted,



Stacy Gillett, Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington public schools enrolled over a million children across the state last year. About 46% of those students were eligible for free or reduced lunch; more than 20% came from families with a first language other than English; nearly 16% were identified as having a disability; and nearly 41% were children of color.¹ We are experiencing the greatest racial and ethnic changes in American history to-date: there is no question that we are a profoundly multiracial and multicultural society. And yet, across the nation and in our state, there are neighborhoods and schools that remain segregated by poverty and race. This segregation perpetuates gaps in opportunity and outcomes for our students. It is notable that it has been 60 years since the decision in *Brown v Board of Education* and while the legal obstacles to integration in our public schools are gone, the social obstacles persist and confound us.

Statewide, about 23% of our students do not make it to graduation. Dropout is not a term that adequately describes the reasons and situations that lead young people to decide they can't finish school. It is important to understand why our schools fail to graduate some young people despite historic advances in boosting graduation rates. In our current system, students' race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and disability status become predictors of whether they are more or less likely to drop out or be pushed out of school. Most schools with high concentrations of students of color are located in high-poverty neighborhoods, doubling the risk factors for their students. One of the student groups most affected by low graduation rates from our public schools is our Native American students.² We know that in some districts, African American boys are between two and five times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers.³ We also know that suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to be suspended again. They are also more likely to be brought into contact with the juvenile justice system, where we have disproportionately high numbers of youth of color.

The Opportunity Gap is evident on nearly every indicator of child well-being - from health issues to neighborhood safety to educational outcomes. Our systems leave children who are living in foster care or experiencing homelessness or poverty lagging behind their more economically-secure peers and faring worse in all areas. Last year, more than 30,000 students in Washington public schools experienced homelessness; in 2012-2013, only 45.1% of students who experienced homelessness, and only 36.6% of students in foster care graduated on time. We need new strategies to reach and provide meaningful educational supports to children whose lives are complicated by unstable housing and poverty.

Students with disabilities experience similar opportunity gaps. Nearly 16% of all students in our state currently receive educational supports to address adverse impacts of a disability through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Section 504 Plans. In some districts, students with an IEP were more than 2 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their non-disabled peers;⁴ they were also less likely to graduate, and less likely to be employed or enrolled in a postsecondary program one year after leaving

¹ See the Washington State Report Card at <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us> and Data Report for English Language Learners, Languages Spoken at Home, at: <http://data.k12.wa.us/PublicDWP/web/Washingtonweb/DataTables/EIIDTViewer.aspx>.

² Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report, 2012-13, at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2014documents/GraduationAndDropoutStatisticsAnnualReport.pdf>.

³ See analysis of preliminary discipline data from 2013, at: <http://www.waappleseed.org/#!/school-discipline/c6wu>.

⁴ Analysis of preliminary discipline data from 2013, at: <http://www.waappleseed.org/#!/school-discipline/c6wu>.

school. We need to build capacity for educators to provide inclusive, high-fidelity, evidence-based classroom practices so that a student's gaps in skills can be addressed early and quickly, and without unnecessary stigmatization or segregation.

Students need relationships with caring adults and need to know *how* to have positive relationships with each other so they feel connected, safe, and that they belong at school. In education, we should first do no harm, and addressing the adverse childhood experiences and trauma that some students come to school with should be a skill that all educators possess. In addition, all educators need to be empowered to create and support a positive school climate that is welcoming to all students and free from bullying, harassment, and intimidation.

The following recommendations are made in an effort to improve outcomes for all children and to reduce the disparity and inequity experienced by vulnerable populations of students in Washington public schools.

Ensuring Language Access for All Families

To meet schools' growing needs for interpretation and translation services, required to ensure equity for all students, the State should:

- Provide **training resources** for school and district personnel to **effectively access telephone interpreters**;
- **Convene a task force** to explore ways of ensuring **access to quality interpretation and translation services** in all schools; and
- **Develop language access policies and procedures** to ensure clarity and consistency across the state.

Ensuring Access and Equity for Students with Disabilities

To ensure access and equity for students with disabilities across the state, the State should:

- **Convene a task force** to improve outcomes for students with disabilities;
- Create a **dedicated funding source** to support **timely and comprehensive evaluations** of students with suspected disabilities;
- **Support greater inclusion** of students with disabilities by: investing in **training for all educators**; creating standards for **certification of paraprofessionals**; ensuring **consistent compliance with Section 504**; and supporting **meaningful parent participation**; and
- Define appropriate **limitations on the use of restraint and isolation**.

Transforming School Discipline

To support current efforts transforming school discipline in Washington, the State should:

- Require Districts to adopt and implement **training, policies, and practices** that **directly reduce disproportionate impacts** from disciplining students of color, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty;
- Promote positive student reengagement and academic success by **providing funds necessary for Districts to offer interim educational services to students excluded for more than 10 days**, and revise rules on distribution of Basic Education Allotment funds to ensure funds are available to support reengagement of students out of school for extended periods of time;

- **Redefine Basic Education** to embrace all areas of learning necessary to student success, including **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**;
- Support Districts' **implementation of reengagement meetings and plans** to ensure students find new and sustainable success upon return to school; and
- Support **strategic data collection and reporting** to inform discipline reform efforts.

Preventing Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying

To reduce the occurrence of harassment, intimidation and bullying, the State should:

- Require and support **training for HIB coordinators and school personnel**;
- Increase and continue funding for **school wide systems to address school climate**;
- **Add Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** to the definition of **Basic Education**; and
- **Reduce reliance on zero tolerance discipline** that excludes students rather than focus on conflict resolution and opportunities for social-emotional development.

Enhancing Family and School Partnerships

To build capacity for effective family and school partnerships, the State should:

- **Allocate full funding** for at least **one family engagement coordinator in each school**;
- Incorporate **principles of effective family engagement** in **teacher and administrator preparation programs**;
- **Support the cultural competence of all staff** in their interaction with families; and
- **Support replication of successful programs** to build sustainable family and school partnerships.

To ensure equity for all children in our public schools, there is no more critical issue than eliminating the Opportunity Gap that affects students of color; who are learning English; who may have disabilities; who may live with high mobility; or who live in impoverished communities or homes. This includes students who experience homelessness, who are in our foster care system, who need access to mental health services, or who may need help getting their basic needs met.

Research shows that working families trust teachers and support public education. We know what works and WE MUST DO WHAT MATTERS for the children of Washington. We are privileged to work with families each day to better understand their needs - and their children's experiences in our public schools. We must listen closely to the stories that families and young people share with us about the effects that leaving school has on them, about the barriers they face in getting a high school diploma, and what they say makes them come back to school and re-engage once they leave.

These are difficult conversations that we must have in a spirit of mutual respect for the sake of our children who face a limited and confined future without our strategic commitment to their success.

OEO Staff

Stacy Gillett

Director

Jennifer Harris

Education Ombuds / Policy Analyst

Sam Blazina

Regional Education Ombuds (Eastern WA)

Danielle Eidenberg-Noppe

Education Ombuds

Brad Fulkerson

Education Ombuds / Data Analyst

Rose Spidell

Education Ombuds

Stephanie Palmquist

Intake Specialist and Communications Support Staff

The Office of the Education Ombuds

155 NE 100th Street, #210

Seattle, WA 98125

1-866-297-2597

www.governor.wa.gov/oeo



We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.