



Office of Ombudsman

for Portland Public Schools

Introduction	3	Visitor Statistics	7
PPS Facts and Figures	4	Observations and Recommendations	12
Ombudsman Process	5	FAQ	14
Definitions	6	IOA Code of Ethics	18

Introduction

What is an ombudsman?

In general, an ombudsman is a neutral representative of a governmental entity or company who responds to questions or concerns brought by the public. An ombudsman may report trends, systemic problems, and organizational issues to high-level executives and directors in a confidential manner.

The Portland Public Schools District Ombudsman is a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner® and adheres to the professional ethical principles set forth by the International Ombudsman Association. These ethical principles are Independence, Neutrality and Impartiality, Confidentiality, and Informality.

How does the Ombudsman work to address concerns?

If possible, the ombudsman will encourage the person with a concern to first discuss it with the teacher, staff person, or principal involved. Many concerns can be solved at the local source. Individuals may contact the ombudsman at any point in the problem solving process. The ombudsman will help determine the best steps to address and ideally resolve the concern.

Specifically, the ombudsman will:

- Listen and identify the areas of concerns and the appropriate first place to seek resolution.
- Serve as a resource to help connect the right people to address the relevant concern(s).
- Provide information about district policies and procedures.
- Conduct informal interventions and mediations
- Facilitate conversations
- Recommend policy or practice changes to the superintendent and district leadership to make PPS more responsive to all families.

Judi Martin

District Ombudsman, Portland Public Schools

Co-Chair Education Chapter, United States Ombudsman Association

Proud Parent of a PPS Student

Portland Public Schools Facts & Figures 2017-18

Student EnrollmentFigures

District Schools.....	46,503
Community Based Programs	1035
Special Services Program	455
Public Charter Schools.....	1,564
Total.....	49,557

Student Information

Latino	16.3%
African American.....	9.3%
Asian	7.1%
Native American/Alaskan Native ...	0.6%
Pacific Islander	0.7%
White.....	56.1%
Multi-Racial - Asian/White.....	3.9%
Multi-Racial - Other Ancestries	6.0%
Receive English as a Second Language Services.....	7.40%
Eligible for free meals via Direct Certification	23.6%
Receive Special Education Services	14.1%

Schools

Elementary	32
K-8	25
Middle Schools.....	11
High Schools.....	10
K-12	1
Total.....	79*

*PPS students also attend the Head Start Early Childhood Education program, 10 community-based programs, 8 charter schools, 4 alternative programs, and 10 special services programs

Employees Numbers

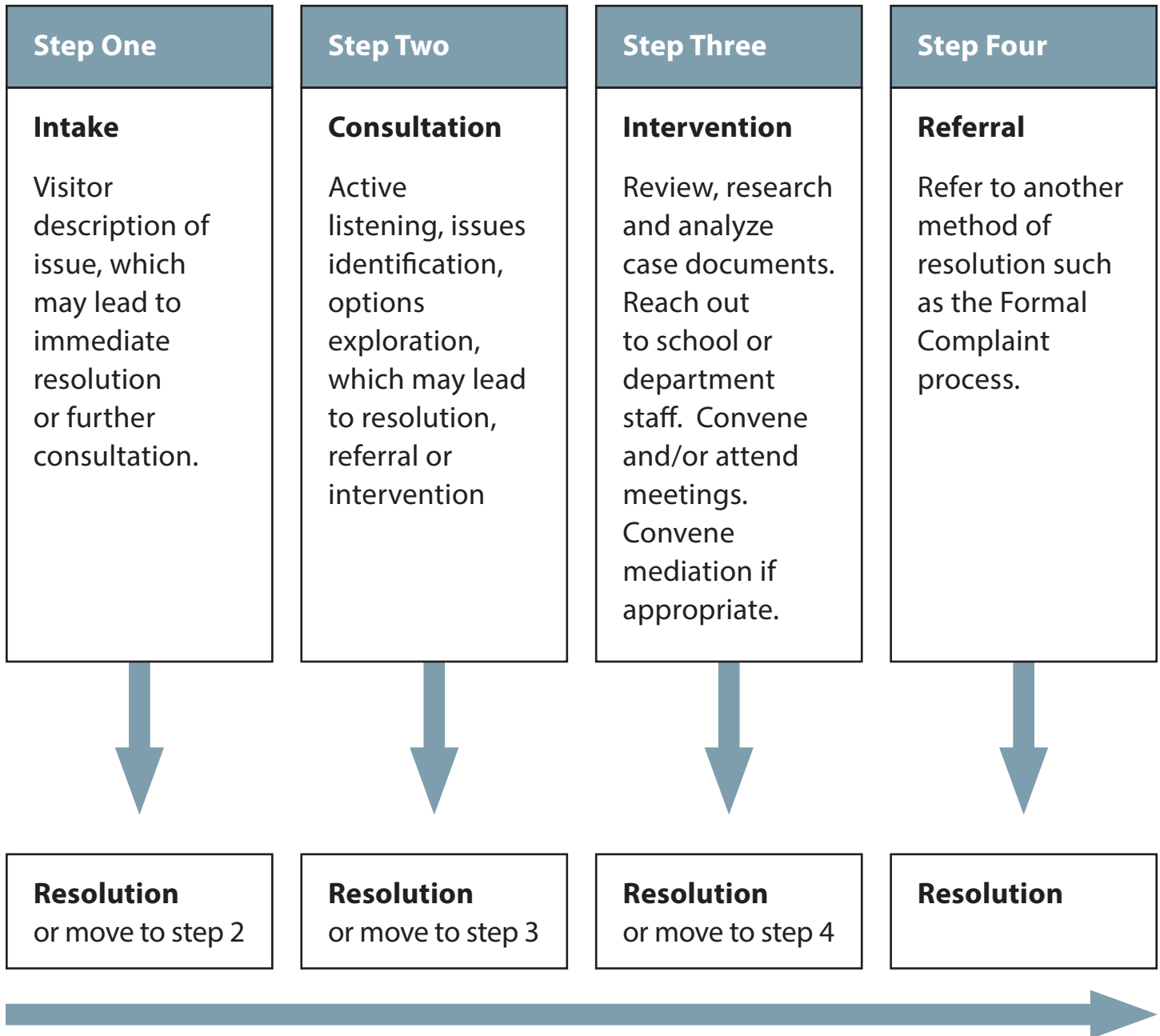
Teachers	3,439
Classified Represented.....	2,031
Licensed School Administrators ...	173
Not Represented	425
Substitutes.....	866
Other.....	666
Total.....	7,600

**"I just wanted to say
thank you for your
help and guidance."**

- Parent

Ombudsman Process

The Ombudsman process has four basic steps. Some steps may be repeated



Definitions

Visitor

Ombudsmen use this term to describe anyone who receives services from their offices. It is preferable to “customer” or “client”, as those terms imply a relationship that is not neutral in nature.

Out of Jurisdiction

Any issue that is brought to the Ombudsman that is not within Portland Public Schools purview to resolve.

Personnel Complaint

Any allegation of misconduct or improper job performance by a PPS employee that, if true, would constitute a violation of district or professional standards reasonably expected of the employee.

Formal Complaint


A concern that is addressed by Portland Public Schools administrators via the processes outlined in Administrative Directive 4.50.031. The ombudsman does not participate in formal processes.

Informally Resolved

Concerns that are resolved via informal dispute resolution processes. Most problems can be addressed by speaking with the people directly involved such as teachers and/or principals. The Ombudsman can facilitate the problem-solving process using strategies including mediation and shuttle diplomacy (shuttling information between people who are not able to engage each other directly).

Unable to Complete

Incidents in which a visitor could not be reached due to factors such as not leaving a working number or otherwise being unable to contact.



**“Thank you again for
your assistance along
the way to understand
our rights.”**

- Parent

Office of Ombudsman

Visitor Statistics

July 2014- June 2018

Please be aware:

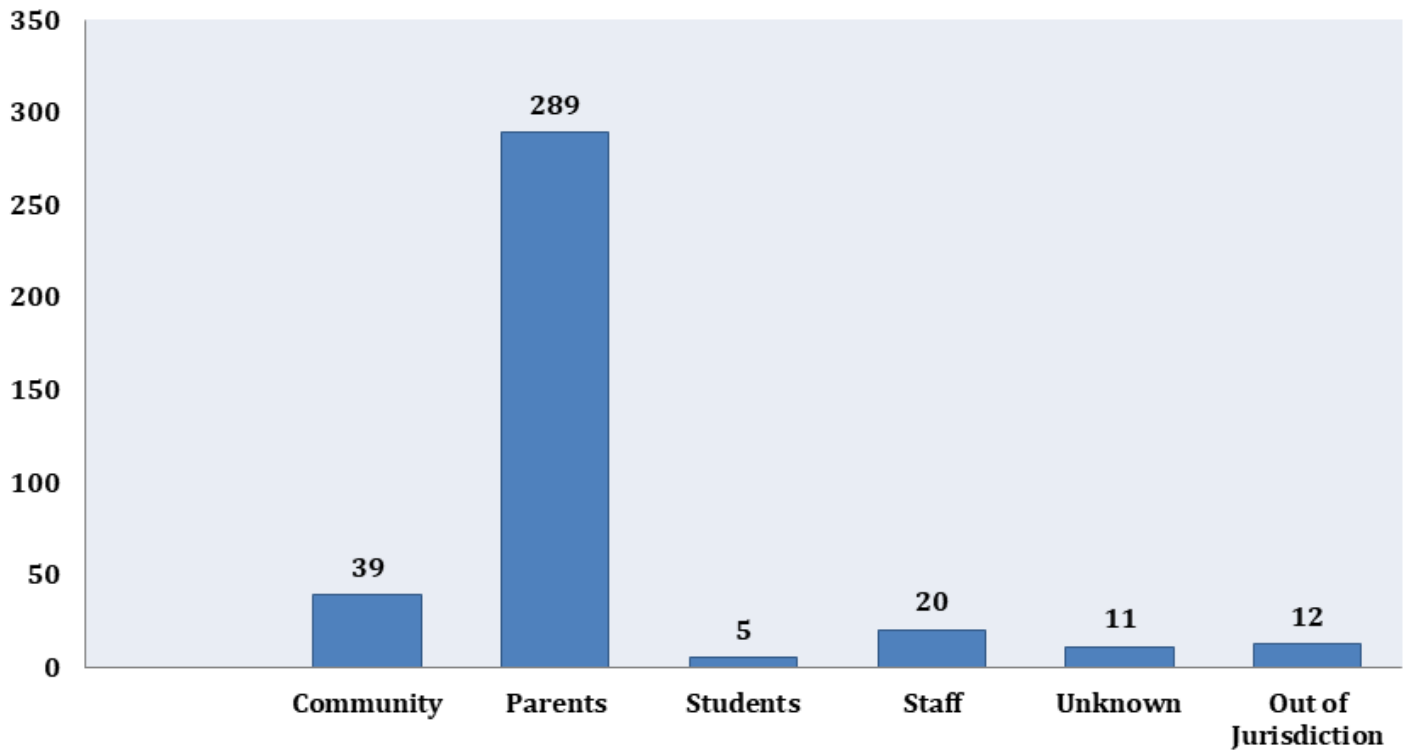
- The following figures are solely reflective of the number of visitors accessing the services of the independent Office of the Ombudsman.
- The figures do not reflect the total number of concerns brought to the Portland Public School District at all levels (ex: schools, individual departments, or from outside agencies)

Number of Visitors Accessing Ombudsman’s Office by Monthly Comparison

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	TOTAL
2014-2015	0	3	33	10	12	19	22	28	39	67	26	18	277
2015-2016	3	34	29	33	27	14	23	16	22	28	42	22	293
2016-2017	4	35	35	30	26	20	10	29	32	20	24	29	294
2017-2018	14	15	42	48	31	21	44	42	40	34	18	27	376

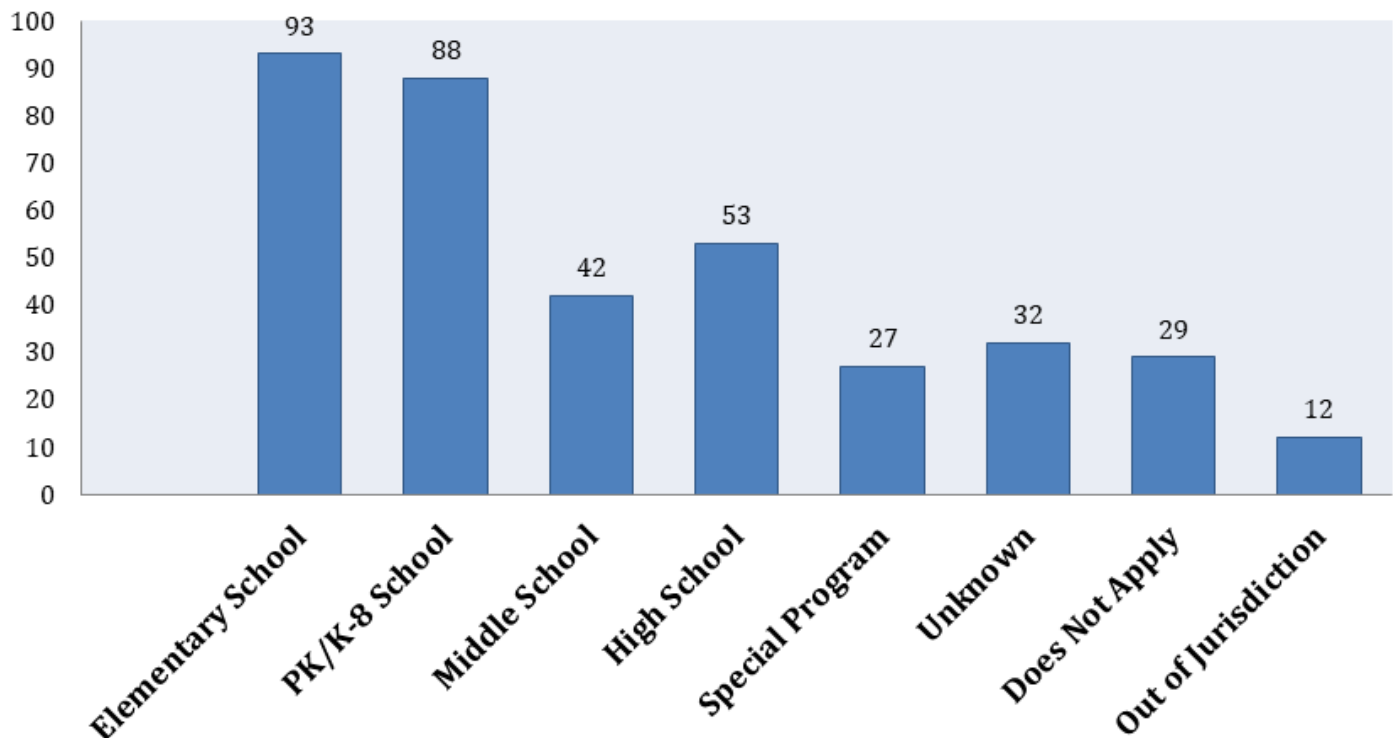
Who came to the Office of the Ombudsman?

Of the 376 visitors, an expected majority were parents of students in PPS. The services of the ombudsman were accessed by a variety of methods including phone, email, referral and in-person.



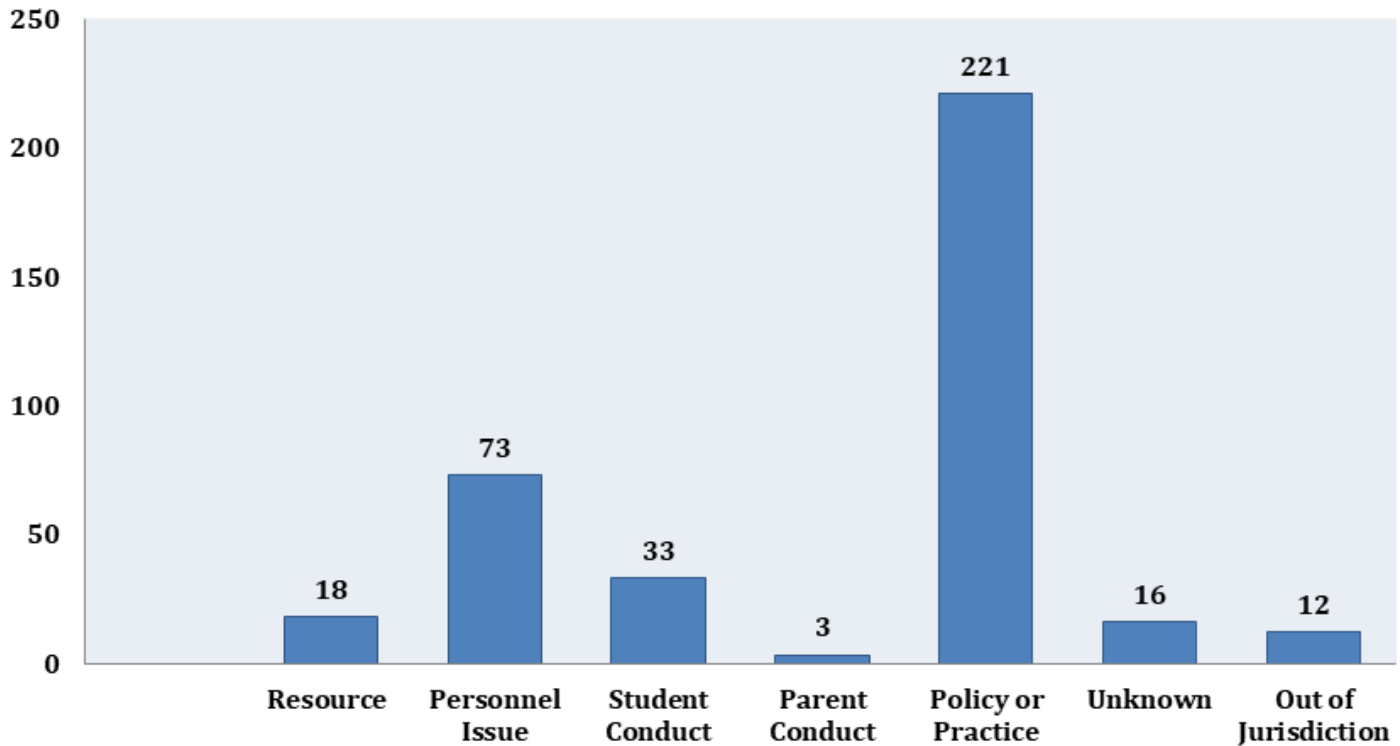
Where did the issue originate?

Parents of younger students bring forward the most areas of concern. Older students often become better able to self advocate and develop their own effective problem solving skills.



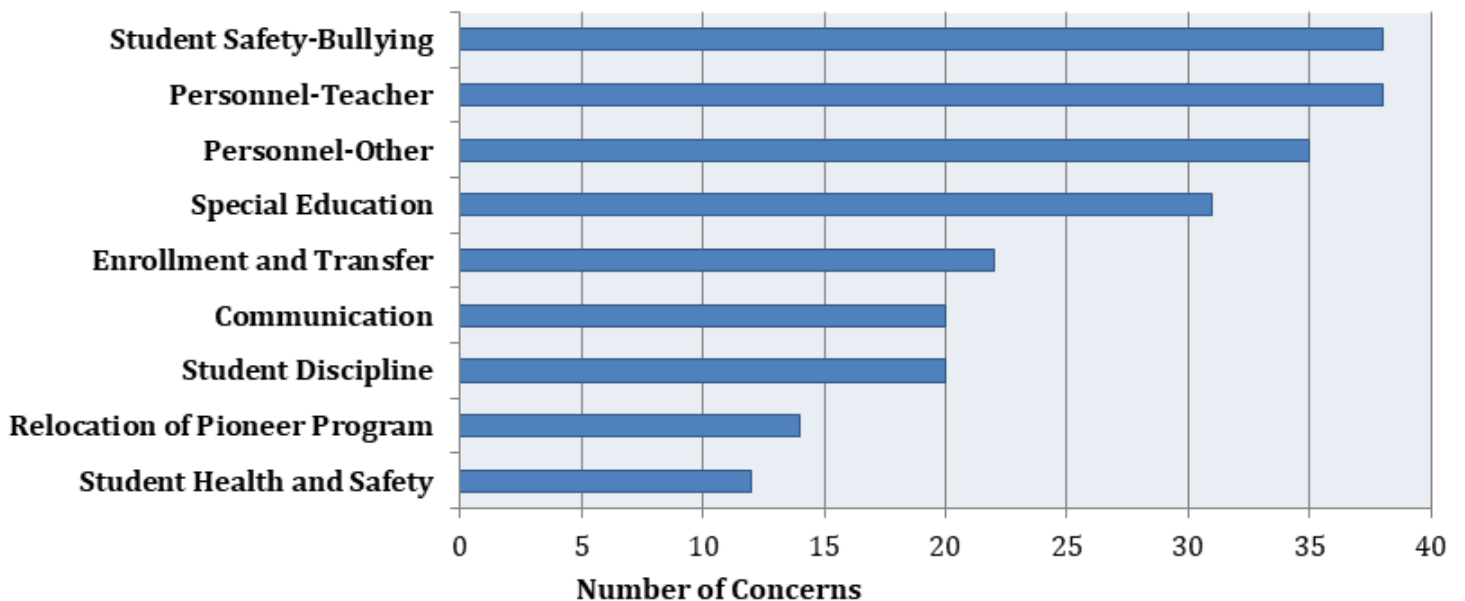
Why did people come to the Office of the Ombudsman?

Most people contact the ombudsman because they have a concern and have been unable to find resolution. It is often not what happened, but how it happened that is the source of contention. This is reflected in the data that shows a majority of concerns related to policy or practice.



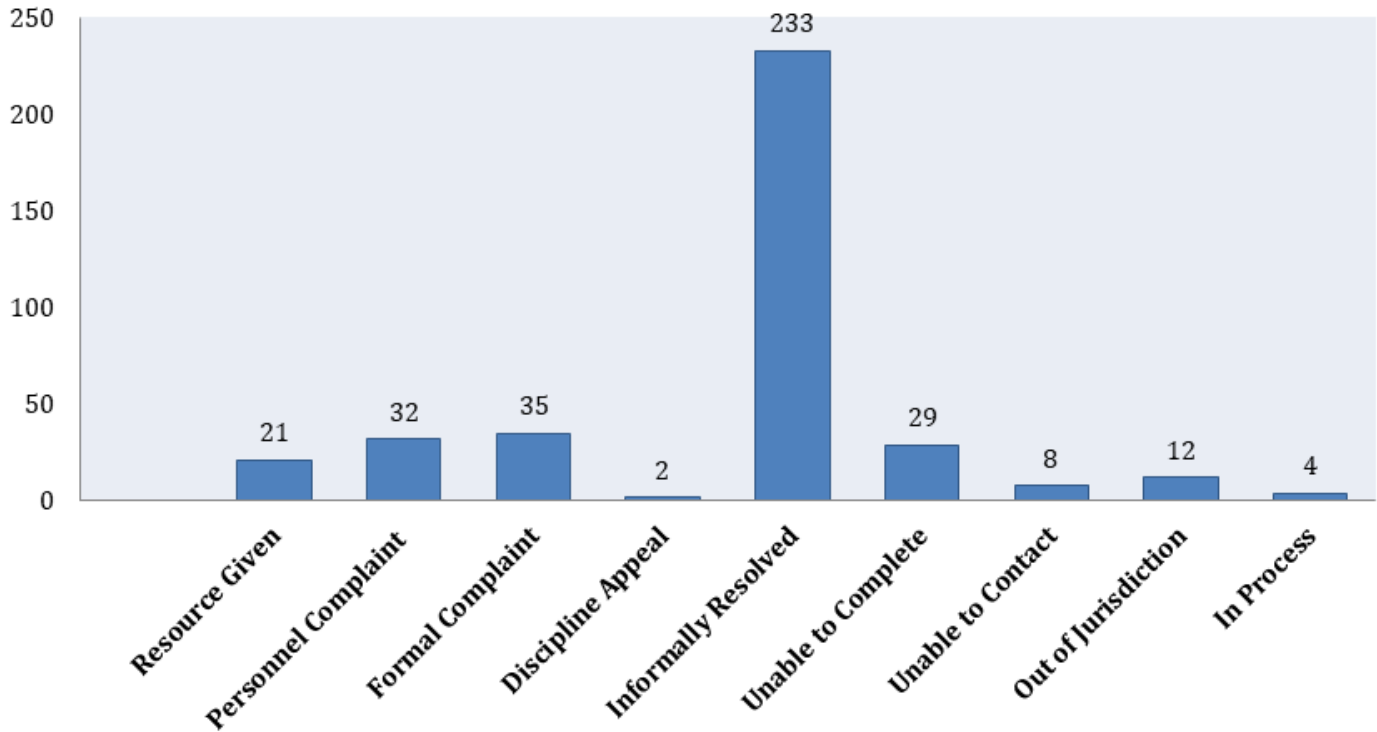
What were the top concerns?

Portland Public Schools is an institution of people working and learning together. Human interaction is the predominant activity that takes place in classrooms, playgrounds and offices. Consequently, the majority of issues that are of concern are relational.

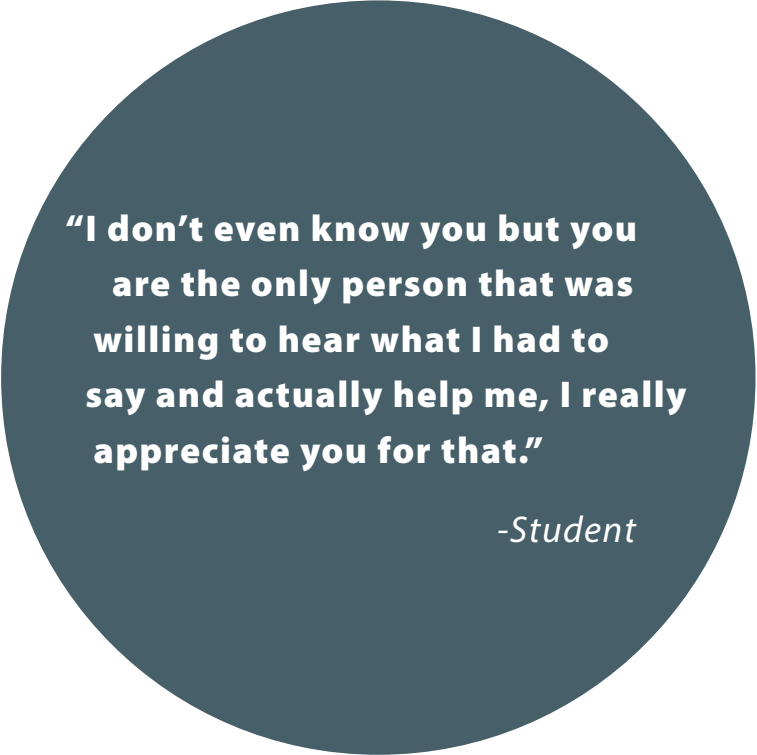


What was the outcome?

The majority of concerns were informally resolved by speaking with the person closest to the source of the issue. Typically this was a teacher or a principal.



**Thank you so
much! Your help
was invaluable**
- Principal



**“I don’t even know you but you
are the only person that was
willing to hear what I had to
say and actually help me, I really
appreciate you for that.”**

-Student

Observations and Recommendations

Observation: Readiness to Learn

We live in a challenging society. Even on the best of days, in a family experiencing economic and emotional security, children may come to school underfed, under rested, and/or over stimulated by technology. In families experiencing hardships such as health issues, economic stressors, addiction, relocation, or family break up, children may arrive at the school steps with their need for care and compassion exceeding their ability to attend to learning. When a student begins to reach the limits of their ability to cope with their environment, they may behave in ways that put themselves and others at risk. The expectation that these students will sit, verbally participate, and engage in the lessons of the day cannot be met without attending to their primary needs.

Recommendation: Wrap-Around Service Coordinator

Portland Public Schools is implementing a robust Multi-tiered Systems of Support model to better ensure the safety and well-being of students. Under the direction of the Office of Student Support Services (OSSS), thoughtful placement of staff and additional supports are being utilized where most needed. Even so, a public school is not equipped to manage all of the challenges that can impact a child's readiness to learn and PPS cannot work in isolation to support families. Portland's service agencies need to work effectively together to provide the wrap-around services and resources that families need when experiencing challenges. PPS does not currently have a designated position dedicated to coordinating services with outside agencies. Such a position located in the OSSS could help to ensure that PPS has a consistent and effective process by which to assist students and their families with accessing multiple systems of support.

Observation: Social Media – the Newest Playground

PPS students are avid users of social media sites such as Instagram and Snapchat. According to the Pew Research Center, 45% of teens are online "almost constantly". This percentage has almost doubled since 2015. In addition, 95% of US teens have access to a smartphone. These numbers are consistent across demographics including race and income.

Just a few years ago, students interacted almost entirely with kids from their same school and neighborhood. Now, they are able to make and maintain friendships with students from other schools via social media platforms. While this can be a positive experience, PPS has also been involved with situations in which cyber-bullying has taken place that spanned several district boundaries.

Recommendations:

1. Mandatory social media training for staff and students

Staff could have an annual online training that ensured they understood relevant PPS policies and best practices.

Students could also have an online training, possibly in the 5th grade, that gives them tools and information for responsible use of social media.

2. Continued system improvement within PPS

The Office of Student Support Services is addressing the need to have protocols for when behavioral incidents span more than one school. If action needs to be taken, who takes the lead? How does PPS coordinate a response and support services? How does PPS ensure that any disciplinary response is consistent? This conversation needs to continue and systems need to be refined as we learn more through experience.

Observation: Communication-It's not "what", it's "how"

The majority of concerns at PPS are relational in nature. That is, issues and conflict arise between students, parents, and staff. In most cases, the actual source of the conflict could be efficiently and adequately addressed rather quickly. Instead, there is often a conflict in personality or style that causes communication breakdown in the problem solving process. The result is that instead of the problem being resolved, it gets compounded and feelings of anger and mistrust become barriers to effective problem solving.

Recommendation: Portland Public Schools can look into effective communication training models for all staff.

For example, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District adopted a training called Communicate with H.E.A.R.T (Hear, Empathize, Apologize, Respond, Thank). It was developed by the Cleveland Clinic and helps to reinforce empathy as a core component of providing compassionate service. The goal of communicating with H.E.A.R.T is to consistently deliver an excellent customer experience every day to every customer.

Frequently Asked Questions K-12 Ombuds Programs

Compiled by the American Bar Association Dispute Resolution Section Ombuds Committee in collaboration with K-12 Ombudsmen including the Portland Public Schools District Ombudsman

February 2017

What is an [Ombuds] Ombudsman?

An Ombuds [or Ombudsman] is an independent, neutral, informal and confidential resource who assists parents and other members of the District community in surfacing issues and in resolving complaints, conflicts, and other school related issues in the District. The Ombuds will listen to your concern, help you obtain necessary information, and offer impartial guidance on how you may raise or resolve your issue. The Ombuds also helps identify systemic issues for the District without disclosing your confidential communications with the Ombuds.

Who can use the Ombuds program?

- Parents
- Students
- Residents of the District
- Teachers and other staff

What does the Ombuds do?

- Provides confidential, neutral, independent, and informal assistance to constituents
- Listens to concerns and provides guidance, information, and individual coaching
- Serves as a resource by providing information, helping locate the appropriate person who can assist with an issue, clarifying processes, and seeking options for resolution
- Explains District policies and procedures and how they relate to an individual situation
- Helps identify a range of resolution options, including formal and/or informal channels
- Increases social capital by enhancing communication and mitigating conflict
- Helps bridge communication between visitors and others in the organization
- Identifies trends and makes recommendations for organizational improvement and policy or practice changes to prevent recurring issues
- Assists in achieving outcomes consistent with fairness and established policies
- Facilitates communication through a variety of techniques including shuttle diplomacy

What does the Ombuds not do?

- Act as a place to receive notice of formal complaints against the District
- Act as an advocate for any individual or cause
- Breach confidentiality by revealing anything that could disclose the identity of a visitor
- Maintain permanent records of confidential communications
- Conduct formal or in-depth investigations
- Make management decisions for the District or school administration
- Create, change or set aside established policies
- Replace existing formal channels of communication or reporting
- Testify or otherwise participate in grievances or other formal processes
- Offer legal advice
- Answer questions about visitors with whom the Ombuds may have spoken or disclose an individual visitor's name or specific issue with anyone outside of the Ombuds Office, unless in the course of their confidential communications, the visitor gives the Ombuds consent and the Ombuds agrees to do so
- Determine guilt/innocence, right/wrong, etc.

Is visiting the Ombuds Office voluntary or required?

Visiting the Ombuds Office is completely voluntary. It is not a required step in any other complaint or dispute resolution process.

Is there a charge for going to the Ombuds?

There is no charge to contact or meet with an Ombuds or otherwise utilize the services of the Ombuds Office.

How is going to the Ombuds different from using other District channels or resources?

- The Ombuds is a voluntary and informal process
- It is not part of any formal process for investigation and resolution of claims
- The Ombuds is not authorized to receive notice of claims against the District, but the Ombuds can assist visitors in identifying formal channels for raising or giving notice of claims
- The Ombuds will not serve as anyone's advocate, lawyer, or counselor
- The Ombuds is committed to a fair process for raising issues and resolving conflicts
- The Ombuds Office and its published materials will provide information about formal processes if a visitor wants to put the District on formal notice of a claim or resolve claims through a formal process

Are communications with the Ombuds confidential?

Confidentiality is essential to the effective functioning of the Ombuds Office. Ombuds assert that communications with the Ombuds are privileged with the privilege being held by the Ombuds Office. In addition, because the Ombuds program was created to be a purely voluntary, confidential, informal, impartial, and independent resource for District constituents, visitors to the Ombuds Office will be understood to have agreed to abide by the principles on which the office was established and made available to them, including not calling the Ombuds to testify in formal or legal proceedings with respect to confidential communications.

Are there exceptions to confidentiality?

Ombuds are required by law to make a disclosure when the Ombuds determines that disclosure is necessary to prevent an imminent threat of serious harm to an individual. Ombuds are generally required by law to report what they determine is suspected child abuse. Ombuds will endeavor to protect the confidentiality of communications with visitors but state or federal laws may, in some cases, mandate disclosure or limit the ability of Ombuds to keep certain discussions confidential.

Who does the Ombuds report to and what type of reports are made to the District?

While the Ombuds Office was created to be an independent, impartial, and confidential resource, the Ombuds reports for administrative purposes to the Chief of Staff with direct access to the Superintendent at any time necessary. In doing so, however, the Ombuds does not disclose the identity of the visitors to the Ombuds Office or the substance of confidential communications unless required by law to do so. In addition, the Ombuds will regularly report trends and systemic issues to administrators.

Does the Ombuds maintain permanent records on behalf of the District?

Because the Ombuds Office is an independent and informal resource, Ombuds do not maintain permanent records of confidential communications on behalf of the District. Ombuds take very limited notes, which are used solely as a memory aid for the Ombuds and not disclosed outside the Ombuds Office. To the extent permitted by state and federal law, these notes are not kept once a matter is concluded. The only permanent records maintained by the Ombuds relate to non-confidential documents about the general operations of the Office and statistical summaries and reports.

Can the Ombuds work with union member employees?

The Ombuds cannot and will not participate in collective bargaining discussions or activities, but in many cases the Ombuds can work with employees who are members of a union with a collective bargaining agreement with the District. For matters within the scope of the collective bargaining agreement, the Ombuds will refer union members to their respective union resources. For matters outside the scope of the collective bargaining agreement, the Ombuds may be able to work with individual employees to answer questions and help resolve issues.



INTERNATIONAL
OMBUDSMAN
ASSOCIATION

IOA CODE OF ETHICS

PREAMBLE

The IOA is dedicated to excellence in the practice of Ombudsman work. The IOA Code of Ethics provides a common set of professional ethical principles to which members adhere in their organizational Ombudsman practice.

Based on the traditions and values of Ombudsman practice, the Code of Ethics reflects a commitment to promote ethical conduct in the performance of the Ombudsman role and to maintain the integrity of the Ombudsman profession.

The Ombudsman shall be truthful and act with integrity, shall foster respect for all members of the organization he or she serves, and shall promote procedural fairness in the content and administration of those organizations' practices, processes, and policies.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

INDEPENDENCE

The Ombudsman is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.

NEUTRALITY AND IMPARTIALITY

The Ombudsman, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The Ombudsman does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Ombudsman holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm.

INFORMALITY

The Ombudsman, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention.

Judi Martin
Certified Organizational
Ombudsman Practitioner®


Portland Public Schools
District Ombudsman

Chair of the Education Chapter of the
United States Ombudsman Association

ombudsman@pps.net
503-916-3045

Neutral. Independent. Confidential. Informal.







PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**THE PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL
DISTRICT OMBUDSMAN**


Neutral-Independent-Confidential-Informal

Judi Martin
Portland Public Schools District Ombudsman
Chair of the Education Chapter of the
United States Ombudsman Association
Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner®



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WHAT IS AN OMBUDSMAN?



Four basic principles

- Neutrality
- Independence
- Confidentiality
- Informality

An ombudsman is an advocate for a
FAIR PROCESS



Definition



The Organizational Ombudsman—Role and Function

The primary duties of an organizational ombudsman are


- (1) to work with individuals and groups in an organization to explore and assist them in determining options to help resolve conflicts, problematic issues or concerns, and
- (2) to bring systemic concerns to the attention of the organization for resolution.






PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

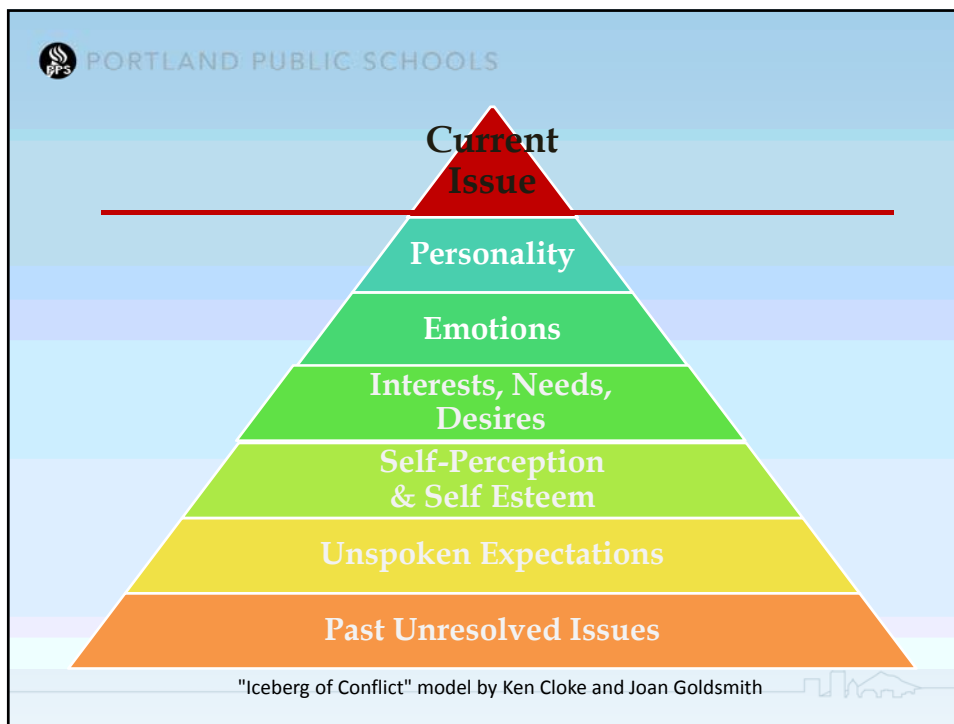
**ADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE
DISPUTE RESOLUTION**



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The way we do things now
sets the stage for what comes next.






PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Use of the Ombuds in Response to Conflict

- Voluntary
- Visitors are in control of the process
- Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies **minimize adversarial and rigid posturing**


A large red curved arrow on the right side of the slide points from the top right towards the bottom right, indicating a flow or relationship between the title and the listed points.

The slide has a background of horizontal blue and light blue stripes. The Portland Public Schools logo is in the top left corner, and a small house icon is in the bottom right corner.


 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As Opposed to... Formal Processes in Response to Conflict

- Formal Complaints
- Grievances
- Tort Claim Notices




- Often outside the control of the claimant
- More limited confidentiality
- More adversarial and rigid due in part to formality and legal overlay

 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Ombudsman's Office...

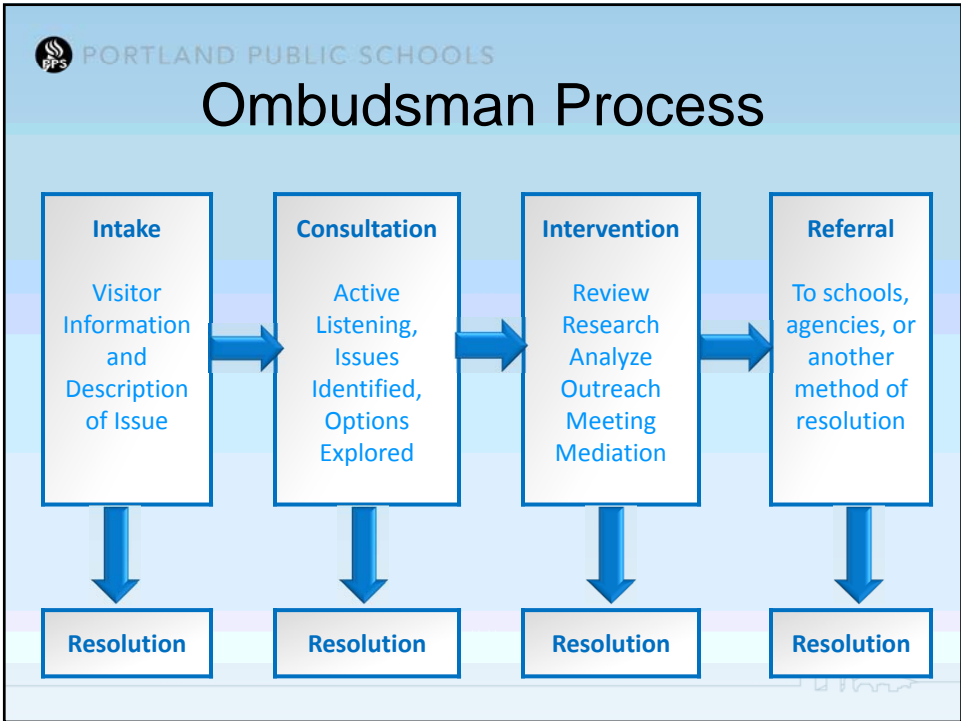
- Provides a **confidential** place to **voluntarily** share a concern, **evaluate** the situation and **plan** next steps
- Is an alternative dispute resolution resource that offers a **safe** place to discuss concerns without fear of retaliation or formal action
- Assists visitors in achieving **fair, equitable outcomes** consistent with district policies & statutory regulations
- Supports **systemic changes** to achieve this goal


 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Ombudsman

Can help employees, students, families, and community partners:

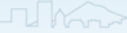
- Express concerns
- Resolve disputes
- Manage conflicts
- Learn more productive ways of communicating & collaborating




 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS


Ombudsman Strategies

Listen Attentively	Identify Issues	Facilitation
Informal Mediation	Coaching	Shuttle Diplomacy
Training	Refer to Appropriate Resources	Feedback



 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2017-18 OVERVIEW





PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Visitor Statistics

Office of Ombudsman

July 1, 2017- June 30, 2018

Please be aware:

- The following figures are solely reflective of the number of visitors accessing the services of the independent Office of the Ombudsman
- They do not reflect the total number of concerns brought to the Portland Public School District at all levels (ex: schools, individual departments, or from outside agencies)



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Definitions


- *Visitor*-Ombudsmen use this term to describe anyone who receives services from their offices. It is preferable to “customer” or “client”, as those terms imply a relationship that is not neutral in nature.
- ***Out of Jurisdiction***- Any issue that is brought to the Ombudsman that is not within Portland Public Schools purview to resolve.
- ***Unable to Complete***- Incidents in which a visitor could not be reached due to factors such as not leaving a working number or otherwise being unable to contact.



 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

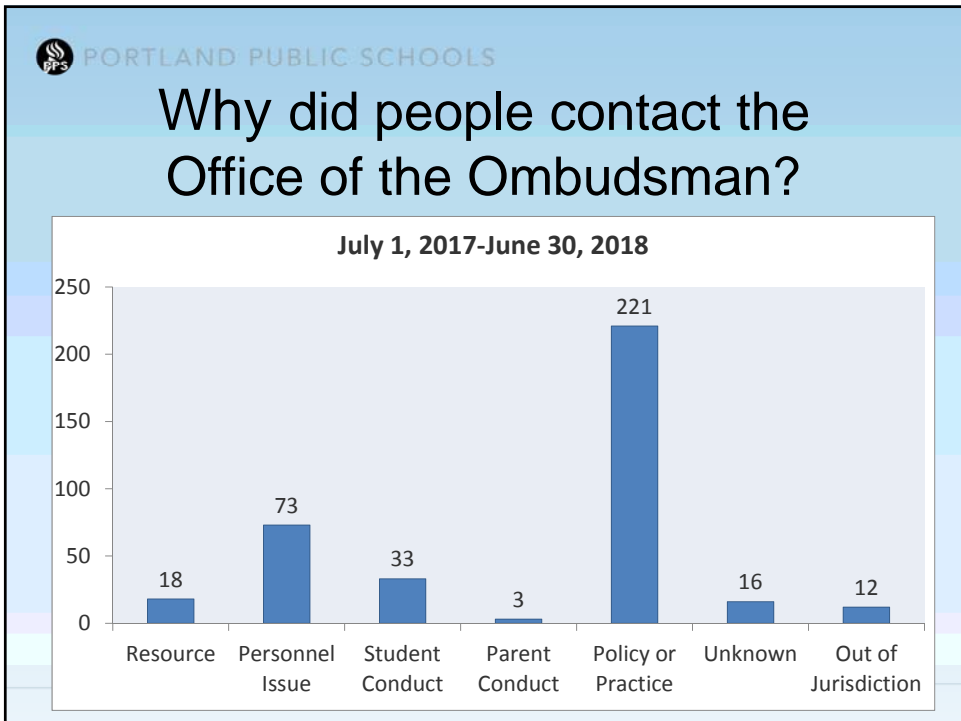
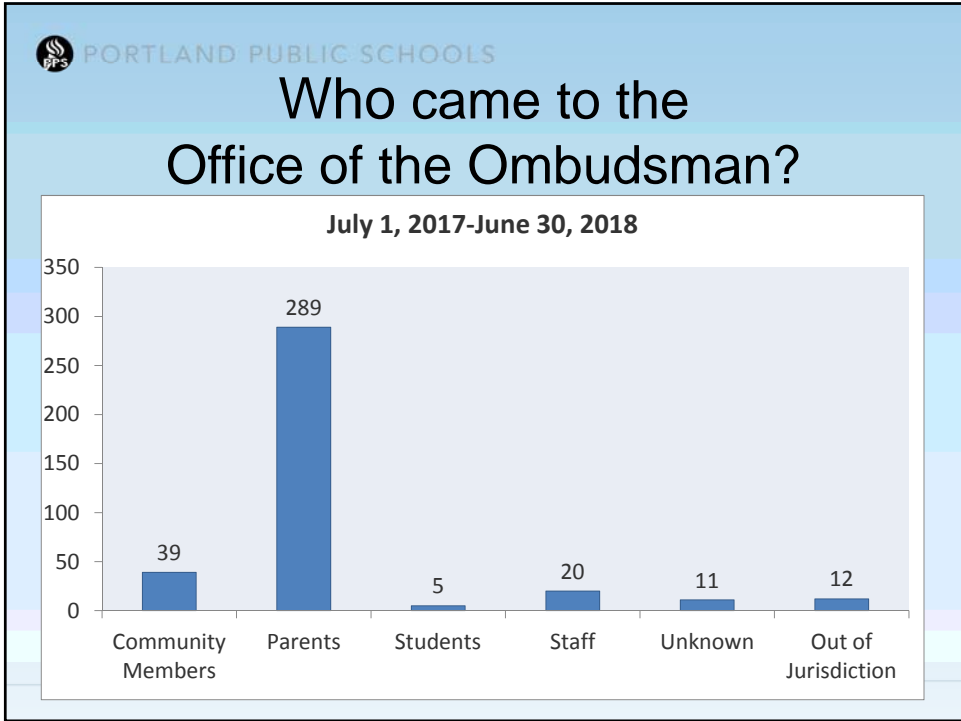
376 visitors accessed the Office of the Ombudsman in the 2017-18 school year

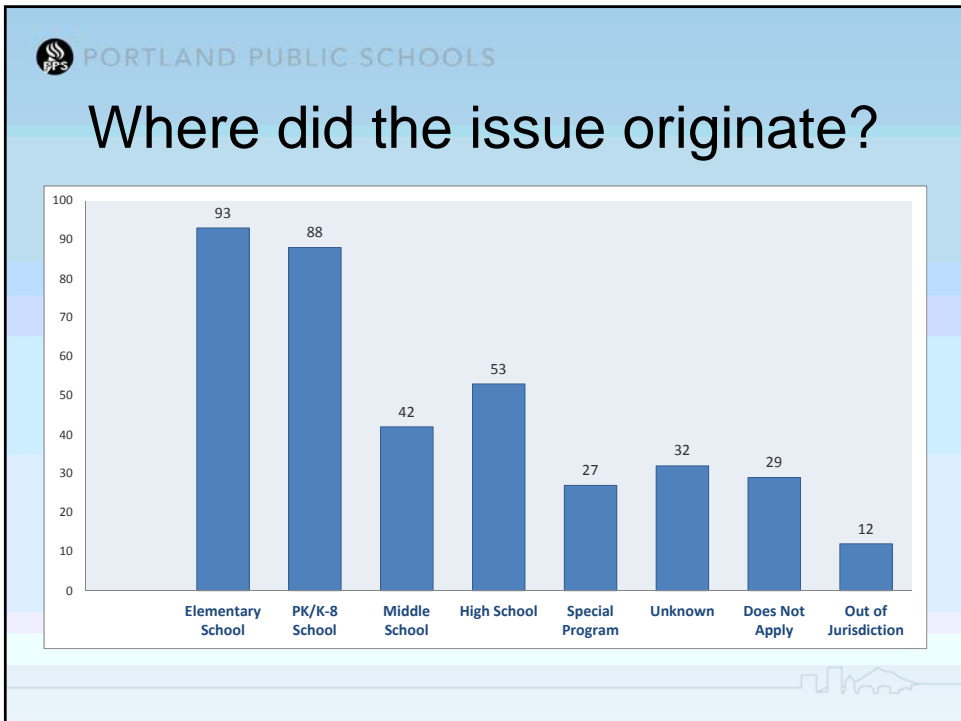
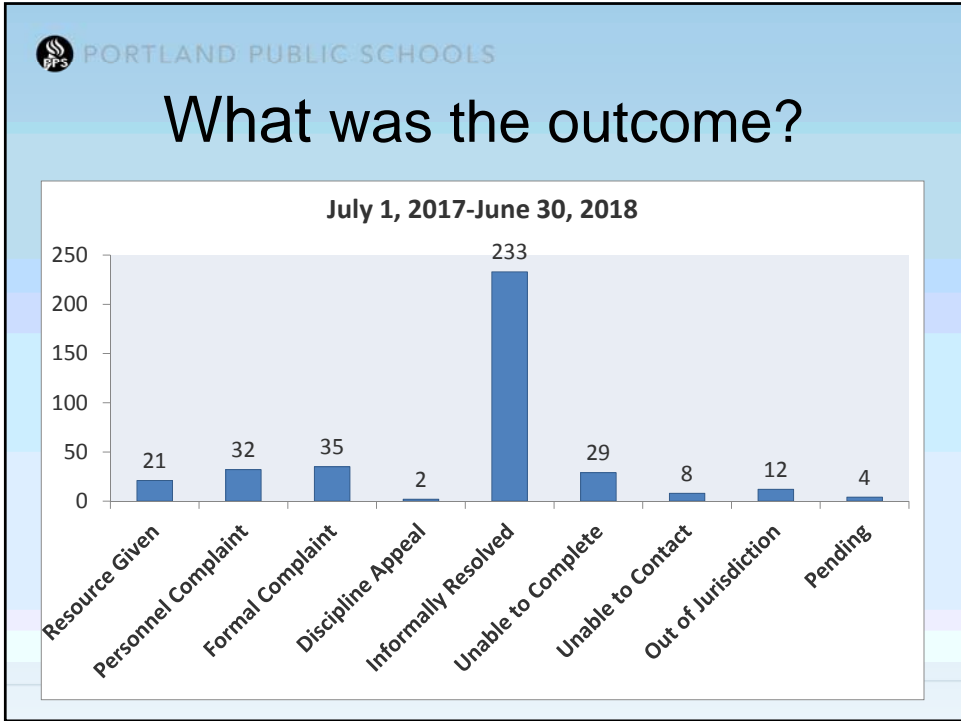


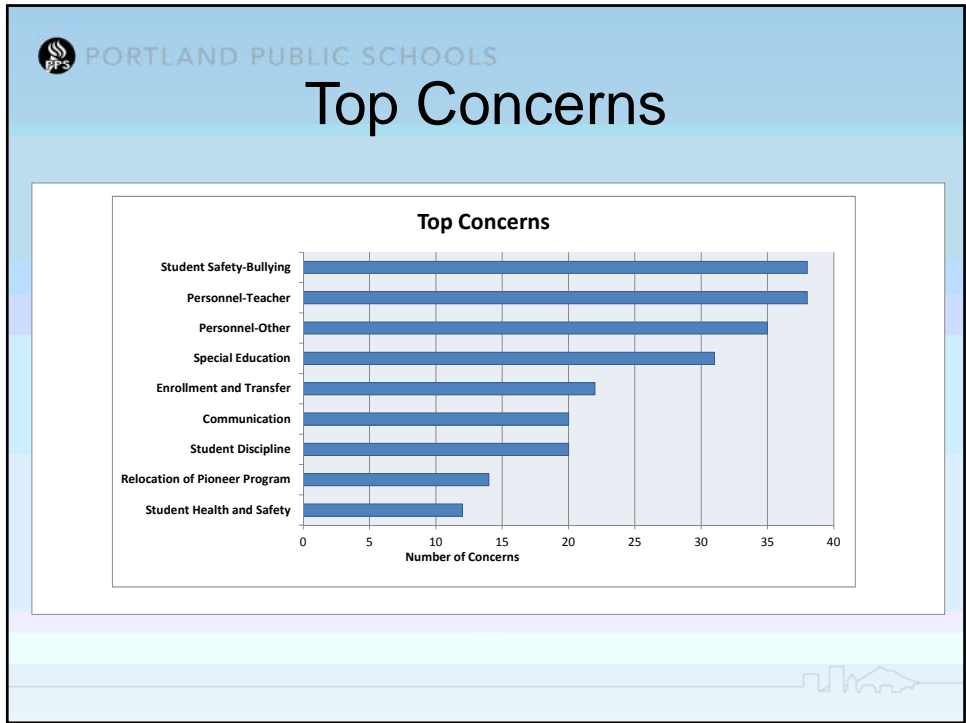
 PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Number of visitors accessing Ombudsman’s office by monthly comparison

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	TOTAL
2014-15	0	3	33	10	12	19	22	28	39	67	26	18	277
2015-16	3	34	29	33	27	14	23	16	22	28	42	22	293
2016-17	4	35	35	30	26	20	10	29	32	20	24	29	294
2017-18	14	15	42	48	31	21	44	42	40	34	18	27	376







- PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
- ## Other issues raised include:
- After school programs
 - Attendance recording
 - Budget
 - Class Placement
 - Curriculum and grading
 - Custody Issues
 - Equity in race and gender issues
 - Extra-curricular activities
 - Facilities
 - Records
 - School Climate
 - Staff Evaluations
 - TAG Services
 - Teacher Placement
 - Transportation



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Contact Information

Judi Martin
Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner®
Portland Public School
District Ombudsman
ombudsman@pps.net
503-916-3045

Chair of the Education Chapter of the
United States Ombudsman Association
www.usombudsman.org

