

DENVER
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Ombuds Office

Thought partners who listen in a safe, confidential environment.

2022-23 Annual Report





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A Message from the Ombuds

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) Ombuds team is pleased to share the results of our work for the 2022-23 school year. In this annual report we will share information and data along with recommendations for how to improve the district culture and climate for employees.

As skilled professionals, we are trained as Ombuds by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). We are dedicated to ensure that fair and equitable practices exist for employees throughout the systems and structures in DPS. As Ombuds, we listen to employees and provide confidential support to help them identify options to resolve their conflicts and disputes with the goal of creating conditions in DPS where everyone belongs and feels safe.

In August of 2022, we officially relaunched the Office of the Ombuds in DPS and began to meet with visitors. We also met with diverse stakeholders and leaders from over 60 employee groups for the purposes of informing district employees about the resources and services provided by our office. Stakeholder engagement included meetings with leaders of employee associations, central office leadership teams, directors of schools, school principals, and employees in both certified and classified positions. We presented this information in-person, virtually, and in writing.

A special thank you to DPS Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero, who is committed to sustaining the district Ombuds Office so that all DPS employees may access the services and support at no cost and independently from other district departments.

This annual report is dedicated in memory of Dr. Sharon Bailey, our dear colleague, friend and visionary leader in DPS and in the Denver community who led the charge to establish the first Ombuds Office in DPS, and one of the few Ombuds offices in public K-12 education in Colorado. As Ombuds, we honor the legacy of Dr. Sharon Bailey, her contributions and her bold and unwavering leadership throughout the district, the community and the nation.

To all of the amazing employees in DPS, thank you for your work on behalf of our students and families. We commit ourselves to work diligently to ensure that we serve you well.

In Partnership and Service,



Dr. Antoinette Hudson



Dr. Darlene LeDoux



What is an Ombuds?

We are Organizational Ombuds — we assist and support DPS employees to ensure that they receive fair and equitable treatment. We provide resources and information to help employees identify options for moving forward when in conflict. Additionally, we provide informational training sessions to help mitigate risks and to build skills to address conflict in order to establish and maintain a more positive district culture and climate.

As Ombuds in DPS, we are members of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and abide by the following strict Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. We are confidential, independent, impartial, informal and employees are welcome to voluntarily request our services. In addition, we adhere to the DPS Ombuds Charter which is signed and endorsed by the superintendent.

Throughout the remainder of this report we will often use the word, “visitor” instead of the word, “employee,” to describe the people who meet with DPS Ombuds. The word, “visitor,” is the common term used for people who meet with Ombuds in organizations throughout the nation and the world.

In addition, we use the word, “Ombuds” instead of “Ombudsman” in this report and in our office as a gender neutral word for the work that we do.

Year in Review

Who Visited the Office of the Ombuds and Why?

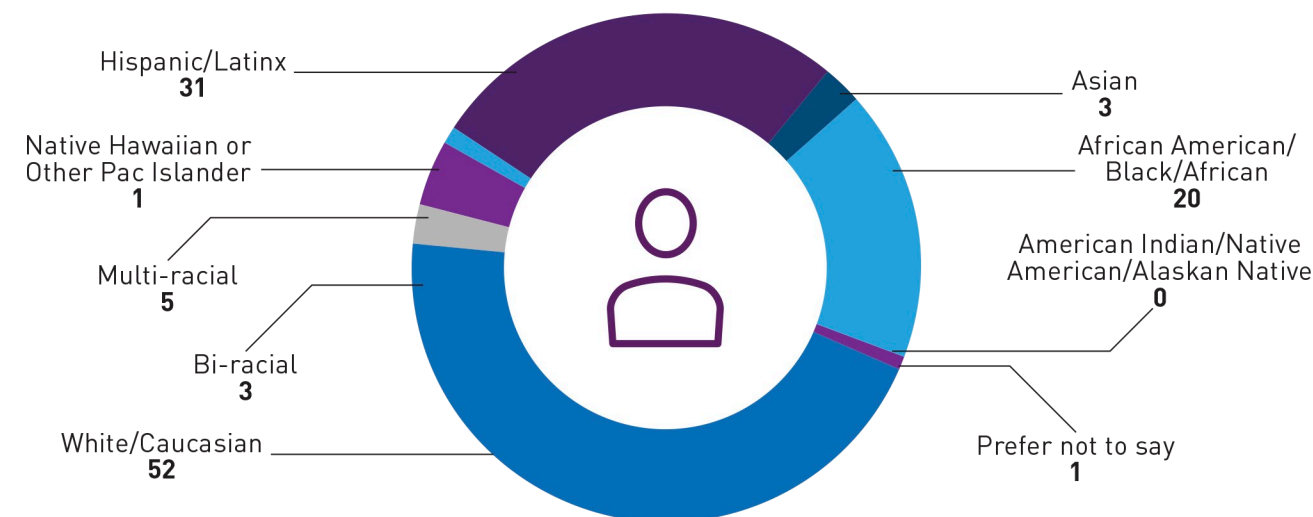


The Office of the Ombuds is an inviting and welcoming environment.

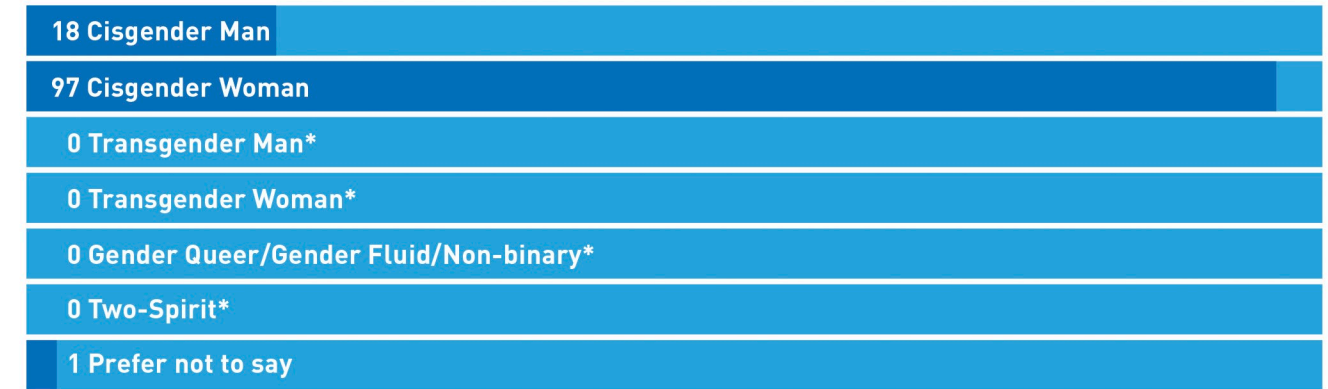
Visitor Demographics

As Ombuds, it is an honor to serve all employees (visitors) in DPS. Meetings with visitors are confidential. We explain to each visitor that we do not identify their names. We do maintain demographic information, self-identified by each visitor. For example, we maintain the following information to ensure we are serving all employees in DPS. Each visitor is asked to self-identify by; ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age group, employee status, employment type, work location, position, and number of years worked in DPS. The self-identifiers we use are recommended by the IOA.

Ethnicity



Gender

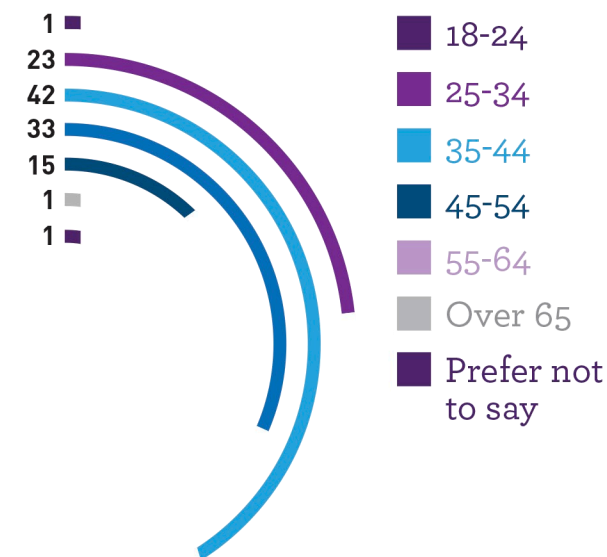


* No visitors self-identified as these gender identities.

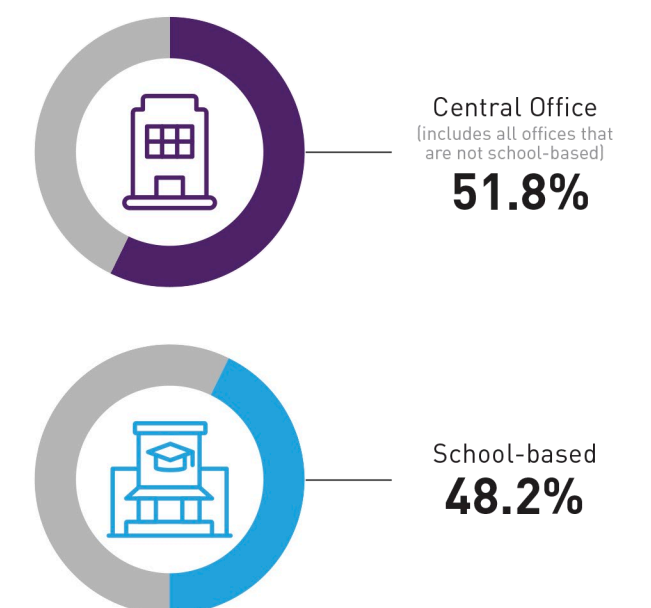
Sexual Orientation



Age Group

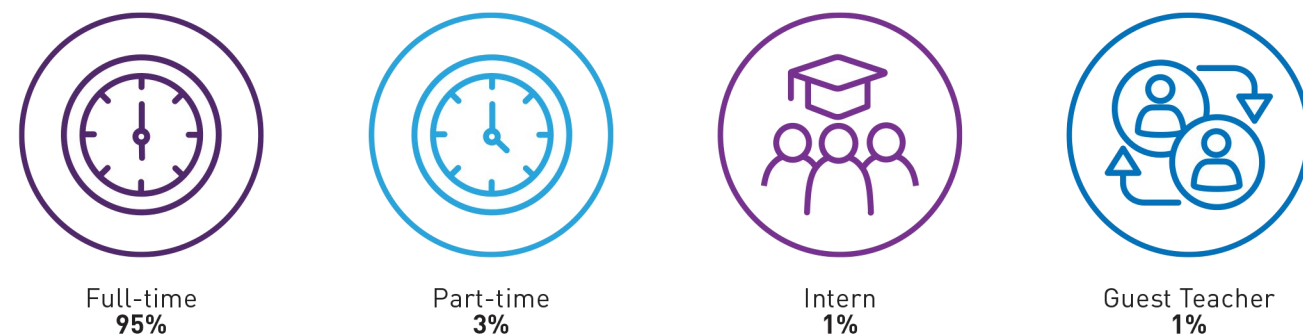


Employment Location

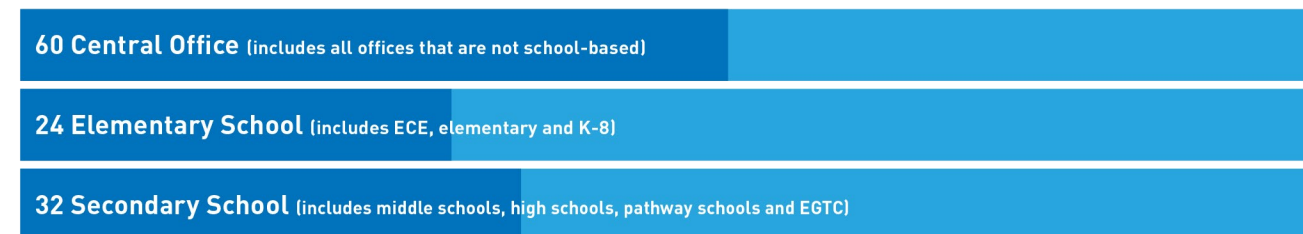


Visitor Demographics *continued*

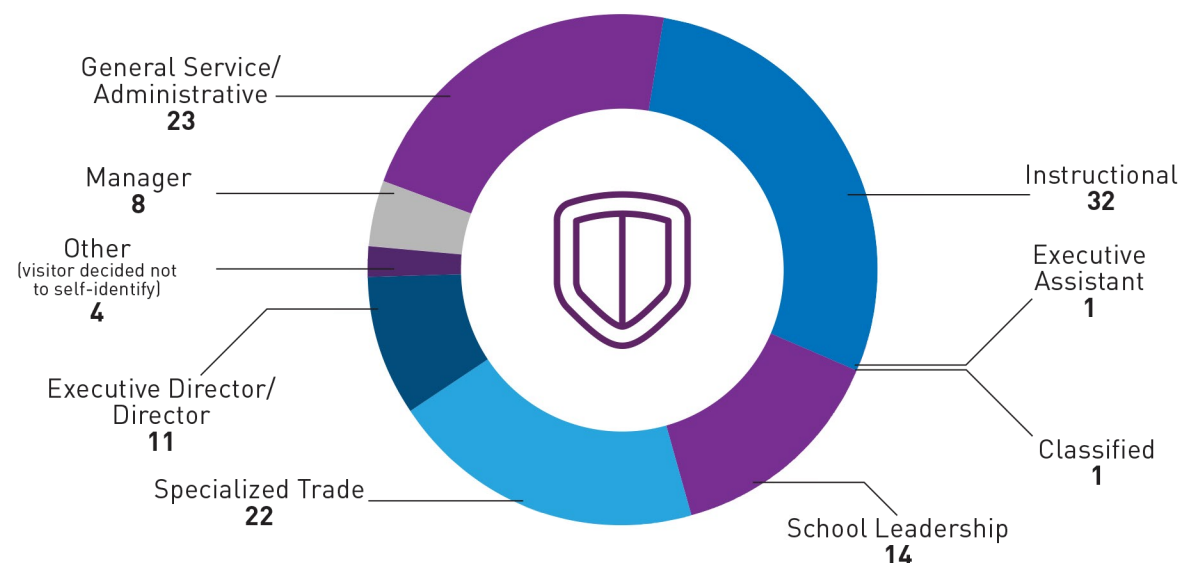
Employment Status



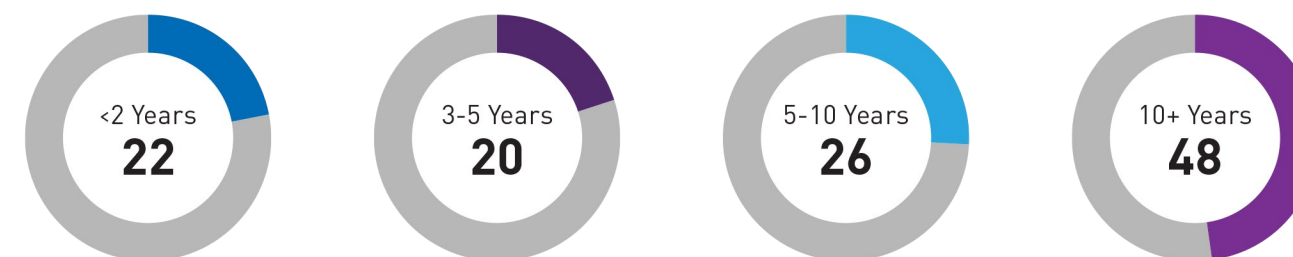
Work Location



Position



Number of Years Worked in DPS



How Did Visitors Meet with Ombuds?

Visitors decide where they prefer to meet with an Ombuds. We are available to meet before, during or after work/school hours and/or during the weekend, based on the visitor's needs.

We meet with visitors for an hour initially with opportunities to schedule additional visits with an Ombuds as needed.

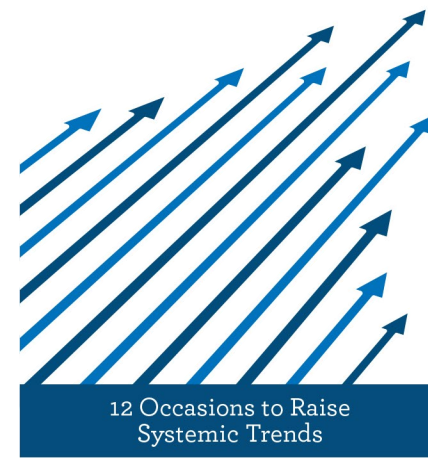


How Did Visitors Learn about Ombuds Services?

VISITORS		
Word of Mouth	32	27.5%
Referral	30	25.8%
Training	22	18.9%
Flyer/Brochure	15	12.9%
Previous visit	10	8.6%
Website	7	6.3%

Systemic Trends



One of the major responsibilities of the Ombuds Office is to elevate systemic trends and “traffic” to district leaders. When different visitors bring similar issues to the Ombuds Office, systemic change may be needed in a department or throughout DPS. Therefore, with the permission of visitors, while maintaining confidentiality, Ombuds elevate visitors’ concerns to leaders in district departments and, when necessary, to the superintendent, to improve working conditions and the culture and climate within the district



There were twelve occasions, where, with visitor permission, the Ombuds Office elevated systemic trends to department leaders or to district leaders.

Top Three Issues of Concern Identified by Visitors to the Ombuds Office

The following three issues were most frequently identified by visitors during their meetings with the Ombuds.

- 
1. Evaluative relationship with supervisor (respect, treatment, communication and supervisor skills and their lack of effectiveness).
 - Conflict with supervisors; supervisory relationship concerns.
 - Not valued, not listened to, micro-managed, inappropriate and inconsistent behaviors demonstrated by the supervisor.
 - Fear of using voice in the workplace and when voice is used, visitors perceive they are not listened to by the supervisor.
 - Mistreated, not respected.
- 
2. Career progression and development (career development, training, professional development, coaching and mentoring, equity of treatment and favoritism, career progression).
 - Fear of retaliation and hostile work environment.
 - Harassment and being bullied in the workplace.
 - Mistreatment by supervisor and colleagues.
 - Feeling targeted by supervisor or colleagues.
 - Inequality, inequities, inconsistent expectations.



- 3. Organizational, strategic and mission** (communication, leadership and management, change management and organizational climate).
 - Unable to communicate directly with departments.
 - Not able to find quick and easy ways to ask questions and get an answer from a person who works in DPS.
 - Concerns specific to compensation and how this is determined.
 - Not able to share concerns with department personnel when needed.

Main Risks and Potential Impact

Employees voiced these risks related to their issues of concern:



- 1. Loss of department productivity**



- 2. Mental health/trauma**



- 3. Potential for internal/external grievance**



- 4. Leave the district**

Recommendations Based on Findings

As a result of meeting with DPS visitors, listening to their concerns and experiences, and identifying consistent issues from different visitors, we recommend the following:



- 1. Provide ongoing and consistent training and support for supervisors to effectively lead teams**

Training can include how to lead and maintain strong relationships with employees, how to ensure all employees receive fair and equitable treatment, how to treat all employees with respect to increase productivity and retention, how to establish and maintain positive culturally responsive and inclusive practices throughout Team DPS and how to successfully communicate with team members and supervisors.



- 2. Improve communication**

Effective workplace communication is essential for every successful team and organization. Making connections with others in DPS and on our teams helps create an environment where everyone feels included and heard. Communicating clearly, effectively and in a timely manner allows individuals and team members to accomplish goals and make significant progress on behalf of our students and families whom we serve in DPS.

Three areas were identified where communication can be improved:

- Communication about DPS as an organization and why the changes have occurred.
 - Create an internal communication strategy about the changes in the district, why the changes have occurred along with updates throughout the school year.
 - Encourage different ways to communicate with individuals and teams to ensure the messages identified by the district are consistently communicated to stakeholders.
 - Provide a variety of opportunities for employees to learn about the goals of the district, new initiatives, changes and updates - in person, virtually and electronically i.e. Town Halls and additional ways to communicate in addition to the weekly district electronic communications.
- Communication between employees and supervisors/managers.
 - Nurture two-way communication - between the employee and the supervisor and employee to employee. Identify and practice different ways to communicate with colleagues. Employees want a safe place to express their opinions without fear of retaliation or job loss.
 - Training for both employees and supervisors/managers on how to navigate challenging situations, how to listen to understand, how to write clear, concise messages that lead to results and how to lead and motivate teams.
- Communication between employees in the field and employees in departments.
 - In the spirit of honoring the voices and feedback from visitors, we recommend a process for departments to receive timely feedback to improve services and enhance communication.
 - We recommend that each department have a designated phone line that employees can call and reach a person from that department who can help them with a question and/or concern. Numerous visitors have noted that they do not know how to communicate directly with DPS department personnel when they have a question or when they need to talk to a person with specific knowledge about an issue they are experiencing. Employees, especially those with limited time during their work day, need to know how to contact a real person who can answer their questions over the phone when email is not the most convenient or efficient way to communicate.



3. Provide intentional and specific training to improve organizational culture and climate, to reduce conflict throughout the district for all employees, and to better serve and understand our students and families, therefore, we recommend:

- Training for employees on change management, how to successfully navigate change, and how to remain positive and productive during change.
- Training for supervisors and employees on how to access informal support via the Ombuds Office, how to access formal mediation through the Office of Talent, Management and Development, and how to access training on district policies and procedures around retaliation, bullying and harassment.
- DPS should continue to provide the Equity Experience and the DPS Unique History of Race modules along with additional anti-bias training for all employees.

Plans for the 2023-24 School Year

In preparation for the 2023-24 school year, our main goal is to increase the number of visitors served by the Ombuds Office. In addition, we will continue intense stakeholder engagement throughout the district with increased outreach to schools. We will also partner with district leaders and teams to create and present training sessions identified by DPS employees and supervisors specific to the improvement of the district culture and climate.



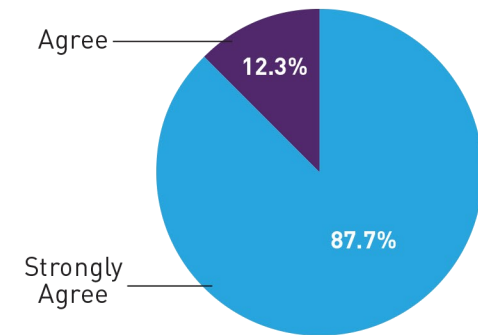
Satisfaction of Visitors as Measured by Anonymous Surveys

Customer satisfaction is important to all stakeholders in DPS. As Ombuds, we believe in continuous improvement of our services to visitors. Therefore, after every meeting, each visitor is asked to complete an anonymous survey. The feedback from the surveys for the 2022-23 school year is provided below for your information and, in addition, we will use this data for purposes of the continuous improvement of Ombuds services and future planning.

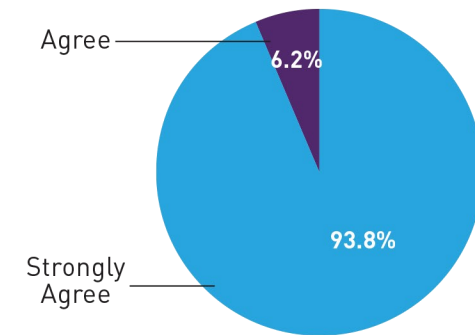
Over half (60%) of our visitors completed satisfaction surveys. Each visitor who completed the survey noted that they Strongly Agree or Agree that the Ombuds services were helpful to them. No visitors indicated in their survey that they were dissatisfied with the Ombuds services.

Survey Results

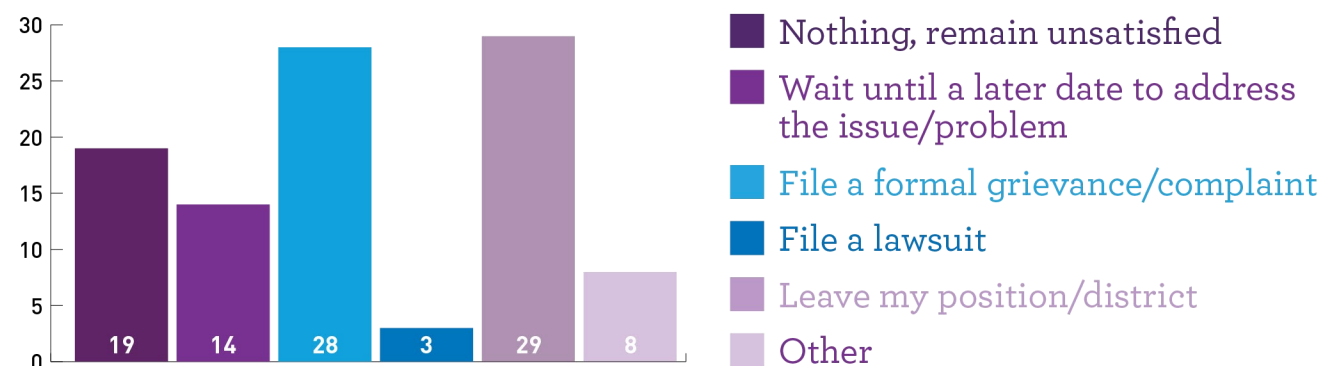
Overall, I am satisfied with the DPS Ombuds Office, regardless of the outcome of the issue/situation.



I would use the DPS Ombuds Office again or would refer others.



If you did not have the option to seek the services of the DPS Ombuds Office about your issue/concern, what action would you have taken? (visitors had the option to select more than one response to this question)



Testimonials from Visitors to the Ombuds Office

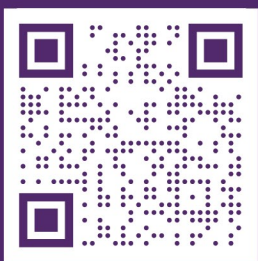
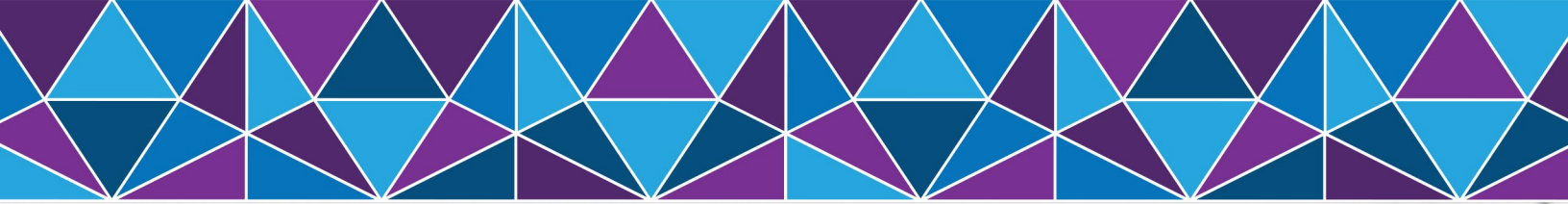
"The professional expertise and wisdom of the Ombuds is an exceptionally positive contribution to our organization. Thank you for the space and frameworks for navigation through complex matters."

"Very helpful. I feel like I was given a voice and the correct people to reach out to so that I can hopefully have my concerns resolved."

"The services I was provided helped me build confidence in myself and improve communication skills."

"I just felt so heard. It is nice to connect with someone, and a woman of color who does have some experience with life as me helps. I don't feel as alone. And it was just a 45 minute chat."

"Your service was extremely useful and gave me great insight about next steps. I gained trust in DPS because I was feeling that I was not being heard. After this meeting, I understand that I can take action to improve my situation."



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How to Contact the Ombuds Office

If you are interested to learn more about the services we provide DPS Employees, feel free to contact our office at:

720-423-4776 | ombuds@dpsk12.org