



Ombudsman Division



Definition-Description



- ▶ The WCSD ombudsman addresses **school related** issues brought by students and families, usually related to District practices and policies, through informal means. For example, but not limited to, issues including:
 - ▶ Disciplinary practices
 - ▶ Grading
 - ▶ Athletics
- ▶ The ombudsman will operate independently from schools, & informally, impartially, and confidentially.
- ▶ The processes used by the ombudsman to address complaints are not a part of, and do not replace, formal processes used by District/School administration to handle disputes/claims.
 - ▶ Seeking assistance of the ombudsman is voluntary.



Purpose



- ▶ As a **continuous improvement and** learning organization, the District is setting out to better serve students and families through:
 - ▶ Informal means of addressing complaints.
 - ▶ As warranted, providing conflict mediation support.
 - ▶ Identifying systemic patterns of conflict that may be related to staff support, district policy, regulation, and/or guidance.



Informal Complaints

- ▶ Situations in which students/families have concerns that they would like addressed without going through formal complaint process.
 - ▶ The ombudsman can outline informal steps that can be taken as well as referral to relevant administrators and formal processes when requested/warranted.
 - ▶ The ombudsman can explore claims informally and this may include, and is not limited to, interviewing of various parties, requesting factual information, conducting focus groups, conducting mediations.*
 - ▶ *The ombudsman may refer a case to the General Counsel if, in his/her judgment, the evidence warrants a formal investigation.
 - ▶ The ombudsman may make recommendations regarding how to best resolve a conflict situation.



Conflict Mediation

- ▶ Either as a means of resolving informal complaints, or as an outcome of formal complaint processes, the ombudsman can facilitate/coordinate conflict mediation. This can include, but is not limited to:
 - ▶ Use of restorative conferencing.
 - ▶ Working with 3rd party mediators.



Patterns of Conflict



- ▶ In order to improve outcomes for students across the district, the ombudsman will make efforts to organize information gleaned from claims to identify patterns of behavior related to conflict. Toward this end, the ombudsman will:
 - ▶ Collect and **analyze** data, and store securely and confidentially.
 - ▶ Develop report(s) that summarize activities.
 - ▶ Make recommendations to the **Deputy Superintendent and other relevant stakeholders** as warranted, regarding:
 - ▶ Professional development and/or training needs **of district personnel**.
 - ▶ Policy/regulation/guidance revisions **and/or development**.
 - ▶ **Review of district-wide practices**



Essential Characteristics

- ▶ To provide the intended service to students and families, the ombudsman, to the extent possible, must maintain neutrality. In order to maintain neutrality, the ombudsman will have **degrees of:**
 - ▶ Independence
 - ▶ Impartiality
 - ▶ Confidentiality



Independence

- ▶ The ombudsman must be free from interference in carrying out his/her duties.
- ▶ The ombudsman is free to contact any department or level within the District in the course of handling a case.
- ▶ The ombudsman shall have access to organizational records, such as information stored in Infinite Campus, needed to carry out his/her duties.
- ▶ The ombudsman exercises discretion over whether and how to act regarding individual matters and systemic concerns, based on issues brought to the ombudsman or directly observed.



Impartiality



- ▶ In serving students, families and the District, the ombudsman advocates only for fairness and equity.
- ▶ The ombudsman will refrain from offering legal, medical, or psychological advice.
- ▶ The ombudsman will not direct specific action (may make recommendations) but will aim to facilitate communication assisting parties in reaching mutually acceptable resolutions.
- ▶ The ombudsman will make every effort to avoid involvement in matters where there may be a conflict of interest.



Confidentiality



- ▶ Communication is to be kept confidential to the greatest extent feasible and legally permissible.
- ▶ Unless a complainant gives consent or unless legally compelled, the ombudsman will secure and protect confidential information.
- ▶ The ombudsman takes reasonable steps to store confidential information securely when reporting information:
 - ▶ the ombudsman will attempt to report aggregate information and/or mask any case specific information so as to maintain anonymity on the part of the complainant(s).
- ▶ The ombudsman will maintain a confidential calendar regarding the informal complaint process, to which only the office has access.



Process



- ▶ The ombudsman will work with the Deputy Superintendent and the Office of General Counsel to develop a process map detailing the relationship between handling claims informally and more formal District complaint processes.
- ▶ The ombudsman will work with the Deputy Superintendent, the Office of Communications and Community Outreach, and the Department of Family School Partnerships to develop a website presence and other means of communicating the availability of the office and services.



Questions



- ▶ Any questions should be directed to Dr. Paul LaMarca, Chief Ombudsman & Strategies Officer:
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