



**Orange
County
Schools**

NORTH CAROLINA

Employee Ombuds

Annual Report

School Year 2025 - 2026

Mr. Franklin McCune
Employee Ombuds & Board Specialist



June 15, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

As I reflect on another year serving as Employee Ombuds for Orange County Schools, I am grateful for the opportunity to support the dedicated professionals who make our district a special place to work and learn. Every conversation, question, concern, and success story reinforces the importance of creating a workplace where employees feel heard, respected, and supported.

This year provided opportunities to continue strengthening awareness of the Ombuds Office, connect with new employees through orientation sessions, and engage with Ombuds professionals across North Carolina and the world through more active involvement with the International Ombuds Association. Through professional development, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices, I remain committed to ensuring that Orange County Schools employees have access to a confidential, informal, impartial, and independent resource when workplace concerns arise.

While the number of visitors to the Ombuds Office decreased this year, the importance of the role remains unchanged. Whether assisting an employee in navigating a difficult situation, identifying available resources, exploring options, or simply providing a listening ear, my goal continues to be helping staff move forward with greater clarity, confidence, and understanding.

I am continually inspired by the professionalism, dedication, and care demonstrated by our employees. Thank you for the trust you place in this office and for your ongoing commitment to serving the students, families, and communities of Orange County Schools.

I look forward to continuing this work in the year ahead and supporting all employees as we strive to foster a workplace culture built on respect, collaboration, and open communication.

Create a great day.

Franklin McCune
Employee Ombuds & Board Specialist

Office Overview

The Orange County Schools Employee Ombuds operates following the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and adheres to the following principles:

Confidentiality
Impartiality
Independence
Informality

The Employee Ombuds seeks to empower those who contact me to resolve issues on their own if possible. Depending on the situation, the Ombuds may utilize different methods/techniques to help the visitor. Some of the common methods/techniques used include:

- Listens and helps clarify visitor concerns
- Provides information and explores available options
- Identifies underlying issues and interests
- Facilitates discussions to resolve issues

While the Ombuds can assist most individuals, there are some actions the Ombuds CANNOT take, such as:

- Act as an individual's advocate
- Serve as a formal office of legal notice for OCS
- Conduct formal investigations
- Maintain records

To learn more about my role and how I can support you, please visit the Ombuds website [here](#). Due to the confidential nature of the office, visitors are seen by appointment either in person, virtually, or over the phone. To schedule an appointment directly, you can contact me in the following ways:

- Email: franklin.mccune@orange.k12.nc.us or
- Phone: 919-245-4022
- My office is located at 200 East King Street, Hillsborough, NC 27278, in the Board of Education Office.

I can also come to your school, place of work, or location you feel comfortable at.

Employee Ombuds Guiding Principles

The Employee Ombuds at Orange County Schools operates with unwavering commitment to the core values set forth by the International Ombuds Association (IOA). I prioritize active listening to communicate an accurate understanding and promote individual empowerment, self-determination, and collaborative problem-solving.

Orange County Schools Employee Ombuds

CORE VALUES

Confidential

All communication with the office is held in the strictest of confidence



Impartial

Does not advocate for one side or another but for a fair and equal process for all



Independent

Sits outside any chain of command to serve as an early warning system



Informal

A voluntary resource where discussions are considered off-the-record



The Employee Ombuds is not affiliated with any compliance function of Orange County Schools and does NOT serve as an agent of notice for the school district. The result of this work, guided by these core values, is represented in this report. This presents data and observations that reflect the experiences of visitors from our staff over this past school year.

WORKING WITH THE OMBUDS

WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP CONTACTS THE OFFICE, THE FOLLOWING STEPS ARE ADDRESSED DURING THE INITIAL MEETING OR OVER SEVERAL MEETINGS.

1

INITIAL CONVERSATION

Set up a time to meet privately and confidentially either in person, virtually, or over the phone.

2

CLARIFY ROLES

Review the standards of practice and answer any questions about the office, role, and how the office works.

3

UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

Listen and ask questions to understand the situation from the visitor's perspective, not to decide who is right or wrong.

4

ANALYSIS

Work with the visitor to look at the issue in a different way by thinking about other parties, issues, relationships, and causation.

5

EXPLORE OPTIONS

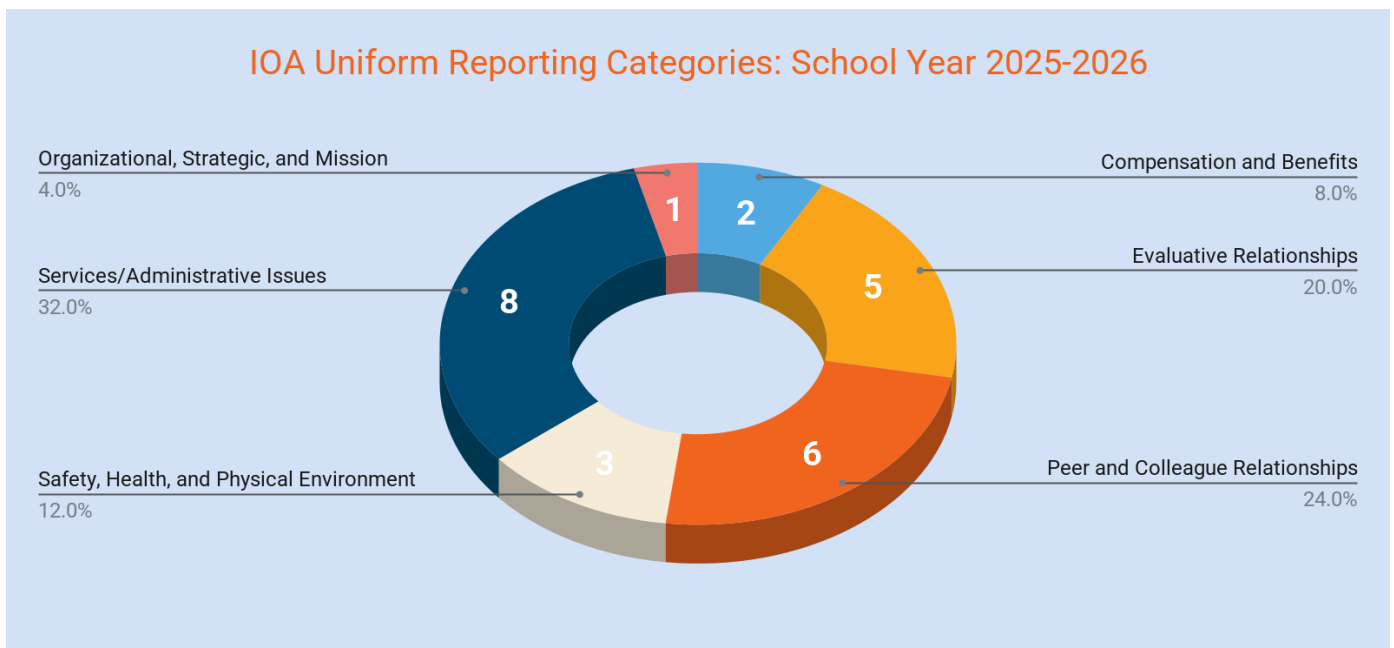
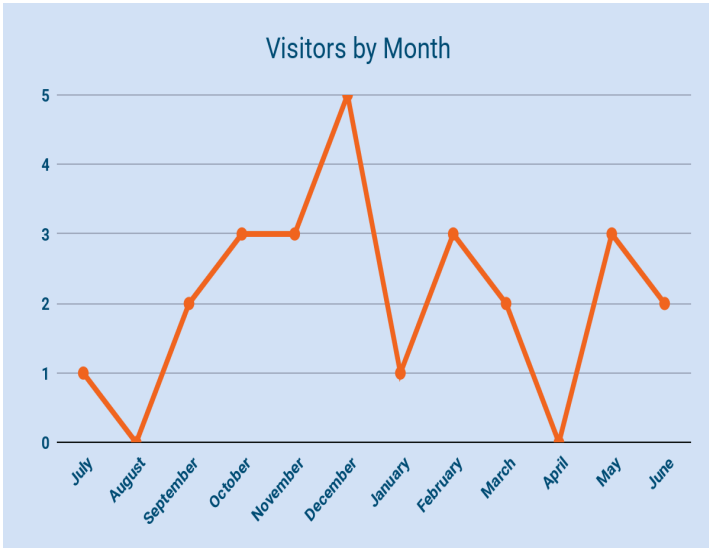
Identify potential options which may help to address the situation.

6

NEXT STEPS

As the visitor determines their way forward, the office may be involved as long as it is with the scope of the office.

Year in Review



Outreach and Professional Growth

Throughout the year, I continued to engage in outreach efforts to educate the Orange County Schools staff community about the Ombuds role and the resources available through the office. These efforts remain essential in building awareness, trust, and understanding of how the Ombuds can support employees throughout the district.

I remain actively involved in the broader Ombuds profession through participation in the International Ombuds Association (IOA), the IOA K–12 Ombuds Community of Practice, the North Carolina Regional Ombuds Group, and the Mid-Atlantic Ombuds Group. This year, I further expanded my professional involvement by joining the IOA Events Committee, providing opportunities to contribute to the planning and advancement of professional development and networking opportunities within the field.

As part of my commitment to professional growth and knowledge sharing, I had the opportunity to present to the North Carolina Regional Ombuds Group, sharing insights and practices from the K–12 educational Ombuds setting. This experience fostered meaningful dialogue among Ombuds professionals and strengthened connections across the region.

I also continue to participate regularly in Human Resources' New Employee Orientation sessions. These events provide valuable opportunities to introduce new staff members to the Ombuds Office, explain its role within the organization, and ensure employees are aware of the confidential, informal, impartial, and independent support available to them.

Ombuds Observations

Observation 1

This year saw a significant decrease in the total number of visitors utilizing Ombuds services, with overall visitor volume declining by more than 50 percent compared to the previous year. While a single year of data does not establish a trend, this reduction may suggest that staff are increasingly resolving concerns through existing channels or experiencing fewer workplace issues requiring Ombuds assistance. Continued monitoring will help determine whether this decrease reflects broader organizational improvements or changes in awareness and utilization of Ombuds services.

Observation 2

Year-over-year data continue to demonstrate a remarkably consistent utilization pattern between certified and classified staff, suggesting that workplace concerns and the need for confidential, informal support are not isolated to any single employee group. This consistency reinforces the importance of maintaining equitable access to Ombuds services across the district.

Additionally, decreases were observed in the Uniform Reporting Categories of Services/Administrative Issues and Peer and Colleague Relationships. While these reductions may indicate improvements in these areas, they are most directly attributable to the overall decline in visitor volume. Continued data collection over multiple years will help determine whether these changes represent emerging organizational trends or normal fluctuations in Ombuds utilization.

1. Compensation & Benefits

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.

- 1.a **Compensation** (rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)
- 1.b **Payroll** (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)
- 1.c **Benefits** (decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)
- 1.d **Retirement, Pension** (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)
- 1.e **Other** (any other employee compensation or benefit not described by the above sub-categories)

2. Evaluative Relationships

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)

- 2.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 2.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 2.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 2.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
- 2.e **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication)
- 2.f **Bullying, Mobbing** (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)
- 2.g **Diversity-Related** (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)
- 2.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 2.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 2.j **Assignments/Schedules** (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)
- 2.k **Feedback** (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)
- 2.l **Consultation** (requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)

2.m Performance Appraisal/Grading

(job/academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)

- 2.n **Departmental Climate** (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility.)
- 2.o **Supervisory Effectiveness** (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)
- 2.p **Insubordination** (refusal to do what is asked)
- 2.q **Discipline** (appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)
- 2.r **Equity of Treatment** (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)
- 2.s **Other** (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

3. Peer and Colleague Relationships

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization.)

- 3.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 3.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 3.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 3.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
- 3.e **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication)
- 3.f **Bullying, Mobbing** (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)
- 3.g **Diversity-Related** (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)
- 3.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 3.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 3.j **Other** (any peer or colleague relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

4. Career Progression and Development

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)

- 4.a **Job Application/Selection and Recruitment Processes** (recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection)
- 4.b **Job Classification and Description** (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)
- 4.c **Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment** (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)
- 4.d **Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity** (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories)
- 4.e **Career Progression** (promotion, reappointment, or tenure)
- 4.f **Rotation and Duration of Assignment** (non-completion or over-extension of assignments in specific settings/countries, lack of access or involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles)
- 4.g **Resignation** (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)
- 4.h **Termination/Non-Renewal** (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)
- 4.i **Re-employment of Former or Retired Staff** (loss of competitive advantages associated with re-hiring retired staff, favoritism)
- 4.j **Position Elimination** (elimination or abolition of an individual's position)
- 4.k **Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring** (classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)
- 4.l **Other** (any other issues linked to recruitment, assignment, job security or separation not described by the above sub-categories)

5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.

- 5.a **Criminal Activity** (threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)
- 5.b **Business and Financial Practices** (inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)
- 5.c **Harassment** (unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment)
- 5.d **Discrimination** (different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of, for example, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, etc.[being part of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category – applies in the U.S.])
- 5.e **Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation** (extra time on exams, provision of assistive technology, interpreters, or Braille materials including questions on policies, etc. for people with disabilities)
- 5.f **Accessibility** (removal of physical barriers, providing ramps, elevators, etc.)
- 5.g **Intellectual Property Rights** (e.g., copyright and patent infringement)
- 5.h **Privacy and Security of Information** (release or access to individual or organizational private or confidential information)
- 5.i **Property Damage** (personal property damage, liabilities)
- 5.j **Other** (any other legal, financial and compliance issue not described by the above sub-categories)
.....
.....

6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.

- 6.a **Safety** (physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for training and equipment)
- 6.b **Physical Working/Living Conditions** (temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)
- 6.c **Ergonomics** (proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)
- 6.d **Cleanliness** (sanitary conditions and facilities to prevent the spread of disease)
- 6.e **Security** (adequate lighting in parking lots, metal detectors, guards, limited access to building by outsiders, anti-terrorists measures (not for classifying “compromise of classified or top secret” information)

- 6.f **Telework/Flexplace** (ability to work from home or other location because of business or personal need, e.g., in case of man-made or natural emergency)
- 6.g **Safety Equipment** (access to/use of safety equipment as well as access to or use of safety equipment, e.g., fire extinguisher)
- 6.h **Environmental Policies** (policies not being followed, being unfair ineffective, cumbersome)
- 6.i **Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance** (Post-Traumatic Stress, Critical Incident Response, internal/external stress, e.g. divorce, shooting, caring for sick, injured)
- 6.j **Other** (any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above sub-categories)
.....
.....

7. Services/Administrative Issues

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.

- 7.a **Quality of Services** (how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)
- 7.b **Responsiveness/Timeliness** (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)
- 7.c **Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules** (impact of non-disciplinary decisions, decisions about requests for administrative and academic services, e.g., exceptions to policy deadlines or limits, refund requests, appeals of library or parking fines, application for financial aid, etc.)
- 7.d **Behavior of Service Provider(s)** (how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a constituent, customer, or client, e.g., rude, inattentive, or impatient)
- 7.e **Other** (any services or administrative issue not described by the above sub-categories)
.....
.....

8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.

- 8.a **Strategic and Mission-Related/ Strategic and Technical Management** (principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)
- 8.b **Leadership and Management** (quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)

- 8.c **Use of Positional Power/Authority** (lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)
- 8.d **Communication** (content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)
- 8.e **Restructuring and Relocation** (issues related to broad scope planned or actual restructuring and/or relocation affecting the whole or major divisions of an organization, e.g. downsizing, off shoring, outsourcing)
- 8.f **Organizational Climate** (issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)
- 8.g **Change Management** (making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)
- 8.h **Priority Setting and/or Funding** (disputes about setting organizational/departmental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)
- 8.i **Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results** (scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)
- 8.j **Interdepartment/Interorganization Work/Territory** (disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)
- 8.k **Other** (any organizational issue not described by the above sub-categories)
.....
.....

9. Values, Ethics, and Standards

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.

- 9.a **Standards of Conduct** (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Code of Conduct, conflict of interest)
- 9.b **Values and Culture** (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)
- 9.c **Scientific Conduct/Integrity** (scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship; falsification of results)
- 9.d **Policies and Procedures NOT Covered in Broad Categories 1 thru 8** (fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or needs revision, e.g., appropriate dress, use of internet or cell phones)
- 9.e **Other** (Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above sub-categories)
.....
.....