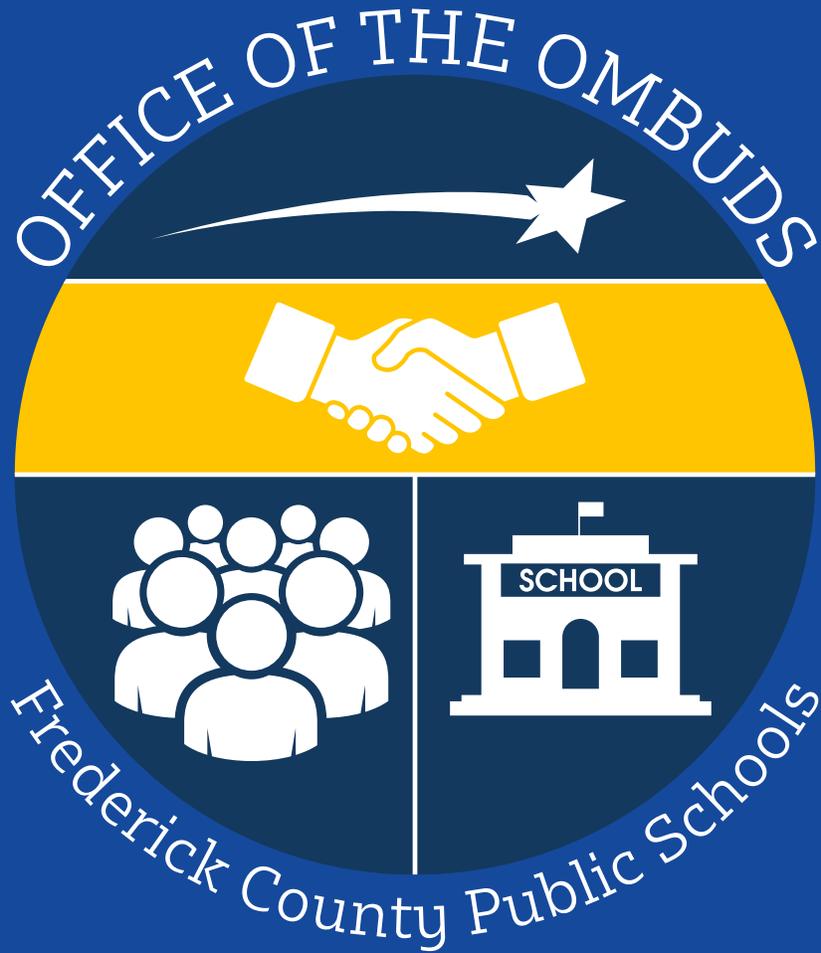


FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
**OMBUDS ANNUAL
REPORT 2019-2020**



A NOTE FROM THE OMBUDS

The Office of the Ombuds is excited to have completed its inaugural school year! This past year has been both rewarding and challenging. The mission and goals of the office were initiated in May 2019. One month later in June, the Office of the Ombuds website was launched. Marketing of the Office of the Ombuds was established as a primary initiative for the inaugural year. The Office of the Ombuds was able to build essential relationships with staff and community over the past year. The Office of the Ombuds became a member of the International Ombuds Association (IOA) and the American Bar Association Dispute Resolution committee. These organizations provided training and resources to enhance the ability to provide top quality service. There have been many challenges due to FCPS being closed because of the global pandemic. Challenges became opportunities! Within a virtual platform, the Office of the Ombuds has developed new ways to connect and build relationships. Flexibility and adaptability allowed for this office to swiftly meet the ever changing needs of students, families, staff and the community.

The Ombuds supports all five strategic goals of FCPS by listening, helping individuals navigate concerns, exploring options for resolution, and by raising awareness of concerns. Listening to concerns gives visitors a safe and confidential environment to share. Providing resources helps navigate a pathway within FCPS. Options are choices of each visitor on how or if they wish to proceed. Raising awareness promotes opportunity for improvements. This was an opportune year to initiate the Office of the Ombuds for FCPS.

Personally, being part of a workplace and school system that supports one another and is open to new opportunities is both rewarding and essential. Thank you to the Board of Education, Dr. Alban, FCPS staff, and the community for partnering with the Office of the Ombuds throughout the 2019-2020 year. Looking forward to our continued partnership in the 2020-2021 school year!

All the best,
Sabrina Nail
FCPS Ombuds

INDEPENDENT

The Office of the Ombuds reports directly to the Board and is not part of another department. The Ombuds position is outside of all regular chains of authority and reporting responsibility. An Ombuds emphasizes fairness in seeking solutions to problems.

NEUTRAL/IMPARTIAL

The Office of the Ombuds will not take sides or advocate any particular position. Instead, we collaborate to find options with the best possible outcome for all involved. We advocate for fairness and a fair process. The Office of the Ombuds is an agent for change.

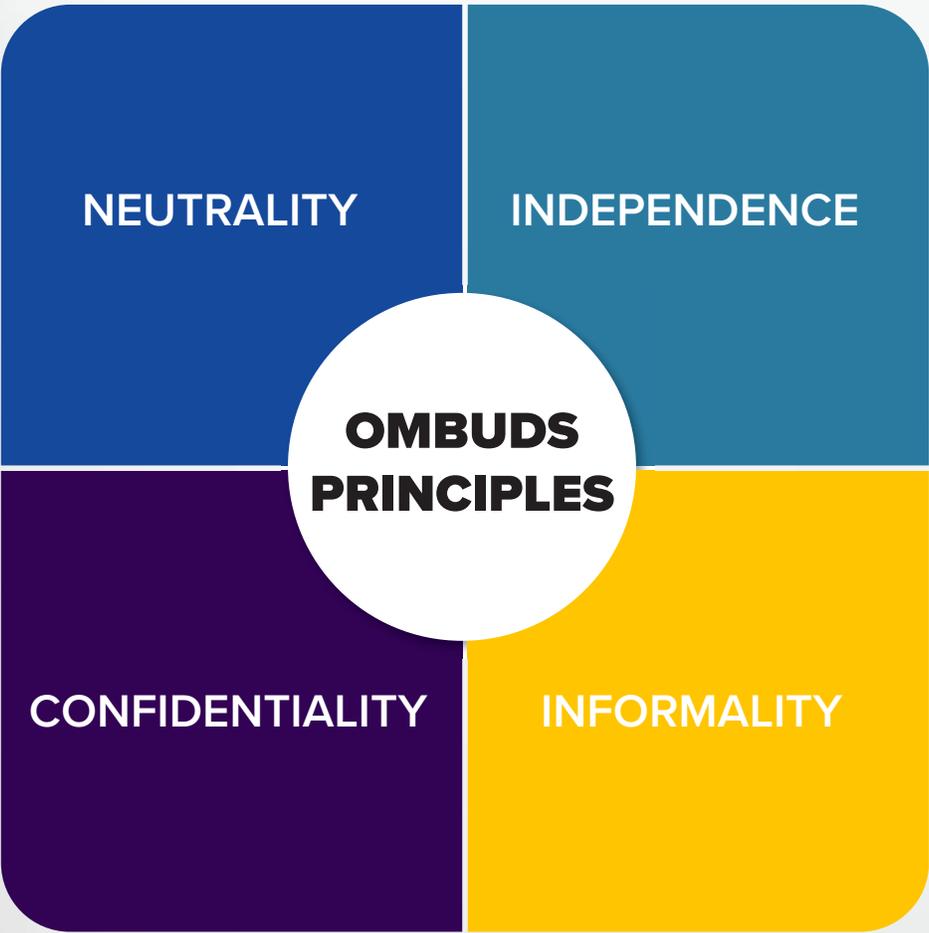
CONFIDENTIAL

The Office of the Ombuds is firmly committed to maintaining the confidentiality of those who use its services and keeps all information confidential to the extent allowed by law and provided no risk of harm is of concern. The identity of those who contact the Ombuds and information presented to the Ombuds will NOT be passed on to other parties without the express permission of the visitor. In the event information is shared that infringes on the legal rights or safety of others, such information may be shared with staff anonymously to ensure the matter is addressed. The Ombuds will provide a safe forum for discussing concerns.

INFORMAL

The Office of the Ombuds is a place to explore informal options and work for collaborative resolutions. This helps to provide more freedom to consider options and psychological safety. Communication with the Ombuds does not put the county “on notice” of a problem. The Ombuds advises about the process and options of resolution consistent with Board policies, regulations or negotiated agreements. Use of the service is free, voluntary, and not a required step in any procedure.





VISION

The Ombuds fosters partnerships, builds relationships, and services FCPS students, families, staff, and community members, empowering them to thrive and work together. The Ombuds supports the Board of Education and wider community by analyzing FCPS data and suggesting ways to improve student achievement and enhance FCPS's organizational efficiency.



MISSION

- The Ombuds partners with students, families, staff, and the community to navigate educational challenges and provide options for collaborative, fair resolutions while also identifying areas for the Board of Education to review and potentially improve.
- The Ombuds serves the community by listening to and understanding concerns, providing information about FCPS resources and how to access them, and providing support to help resolve concerns. The Ombuds does not replace other FCPS tools to resolve problems and conflicts, but rather supplements those tools, provides resources, and fosters collaboration.
- The Ombuds helps community members navigate FCPS processes and empowers them to work toward best possible outcomes. The Ombuds is committed to a fair and credible process for resolving concerns.



GOALS

With IOA Standards of Practice as guiding principles, the Ombuds has four strategic goals that align directly to the Board's Aspirational Goals.

Strategic Goal 1

Promote awareness, understanding and use of Ombuds services among members of the community. (aligned to Aspirational Goal 4)

Strategic Goal 2

Provide high quality customer service and options to resolve challenging situations. (aligned to Aspirational Goals 1, 2, 4 and 5)

Strategic Goal 3

Educate community members about fair and equitable processes to resolve issues and concerns, leading to a collaborative culture. (aligned to Aspirational Goal 1, 2 and 4)

Strategic Goal 4

Provide systemic feedback that results in continuous process improvement. (aligned to all Aspirational Goals)

HOW THE GOALS WERE MET



Social media presence
Attended resource fairs
Presented to staff and community
Visited each school



Positive feedback surveys
Timely contacts
Virtually worked with staff providing
connectedness during pandemic

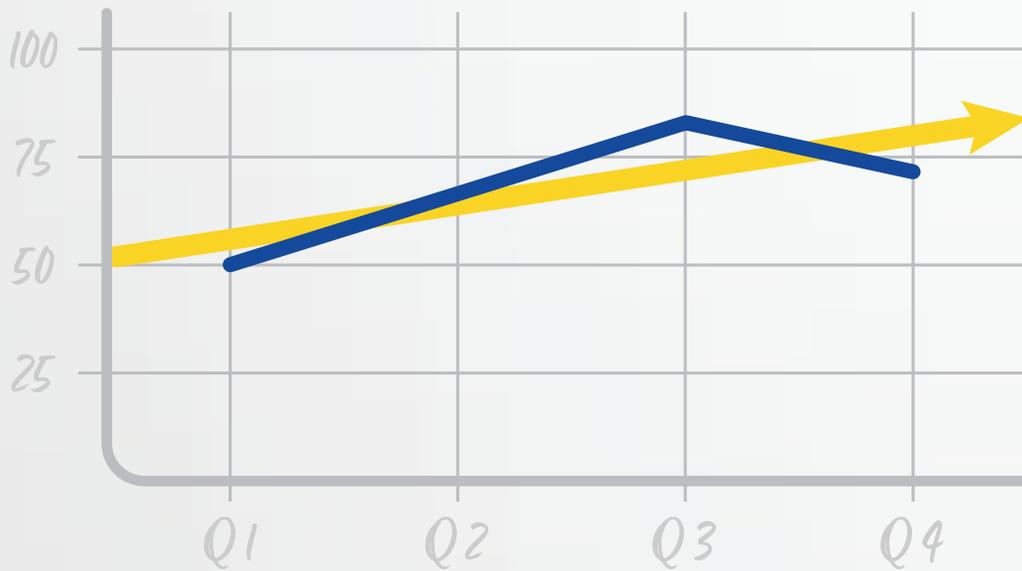


Resources provided additional information that
informed contacts toward resolution
Presented information about Office of the
Ombuds and communication to staff



Ombuds provided employee feedback as a
member of the reopening Employee Relations
and Communications workgroup
Serves as a board liaison on the Racial Equity
Committee sharing examples of concerns
Communicates directly with upper level staff

TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS



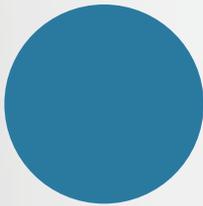
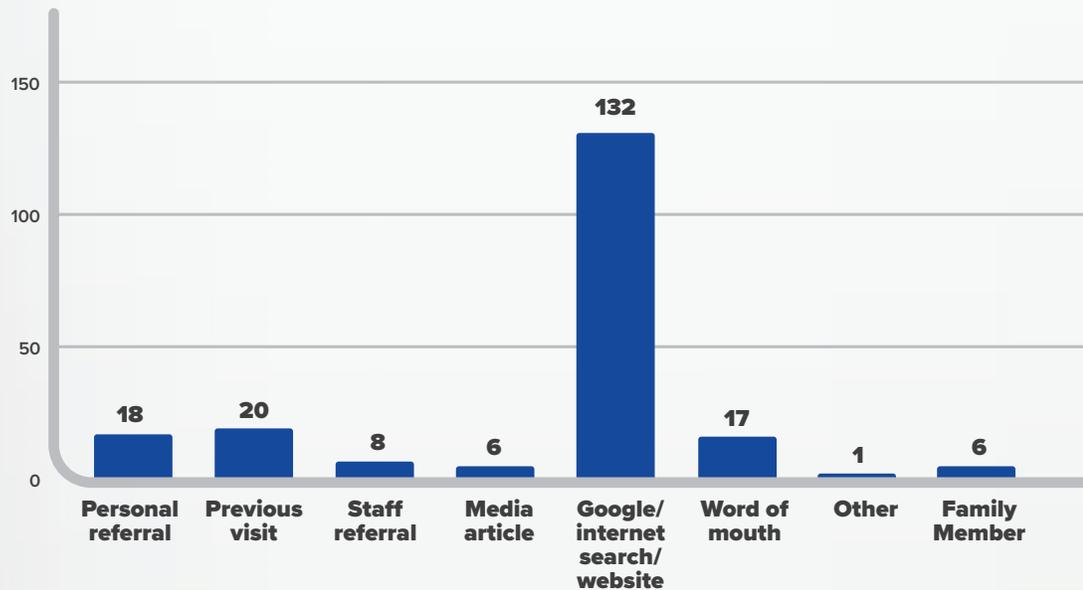
266 TOTAL CONTACTS OVER THE YEAR

Schools closed due to pandemic March 13, 2020 (Quarter 3 runs Jan 2020 - March 2020)



The **yellow** line shows the **upward trend** of contacts

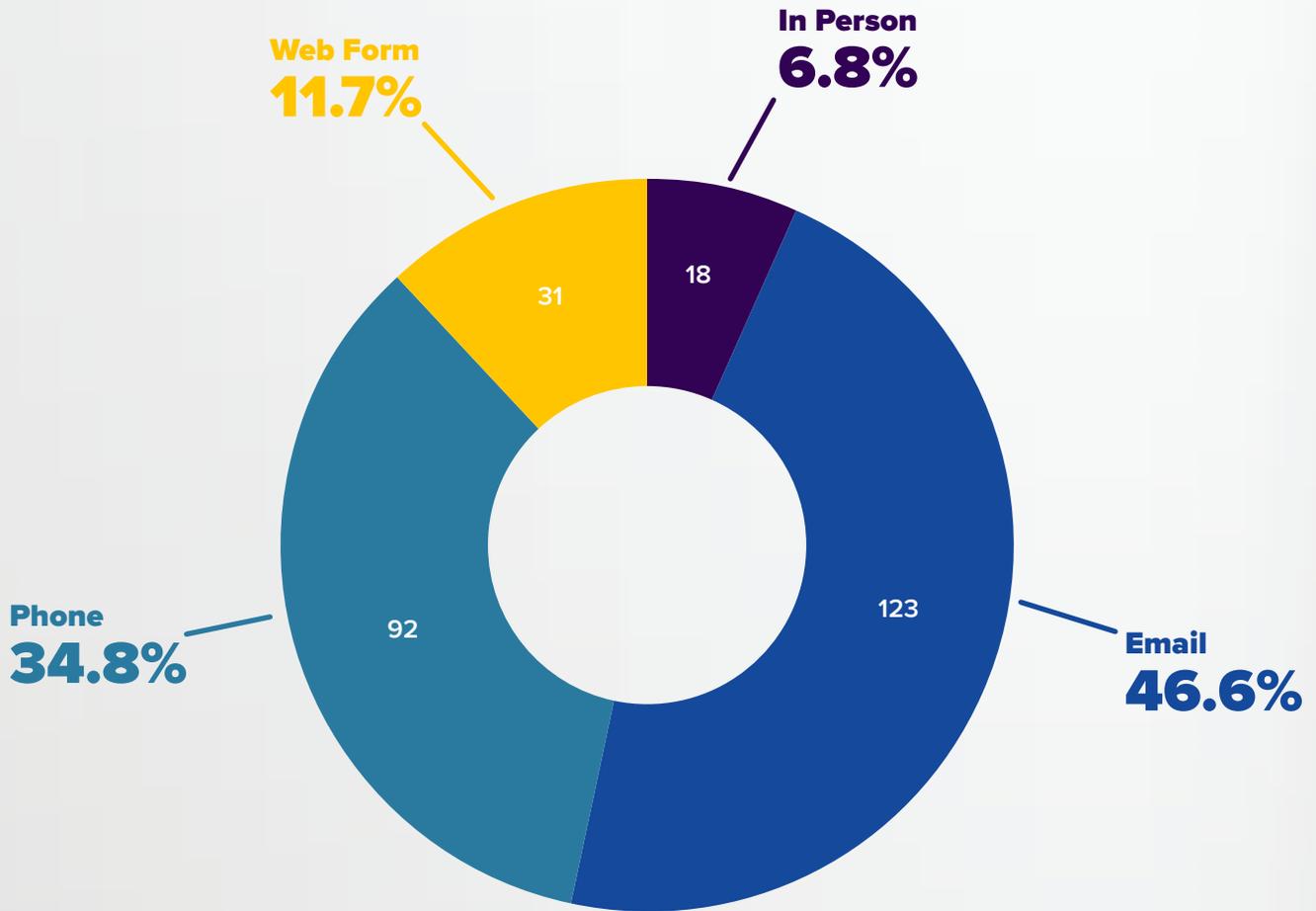
HOW CONTACTS **LEARNED** ABOUT THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS



Most contacts **learned** about the Office from the FCPS Webpage, Google or Internet search

Note: This question was not asked in 1st Quarter, therefore only 202 contacts queried instead of 266

HOW VISITORS REACHED THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

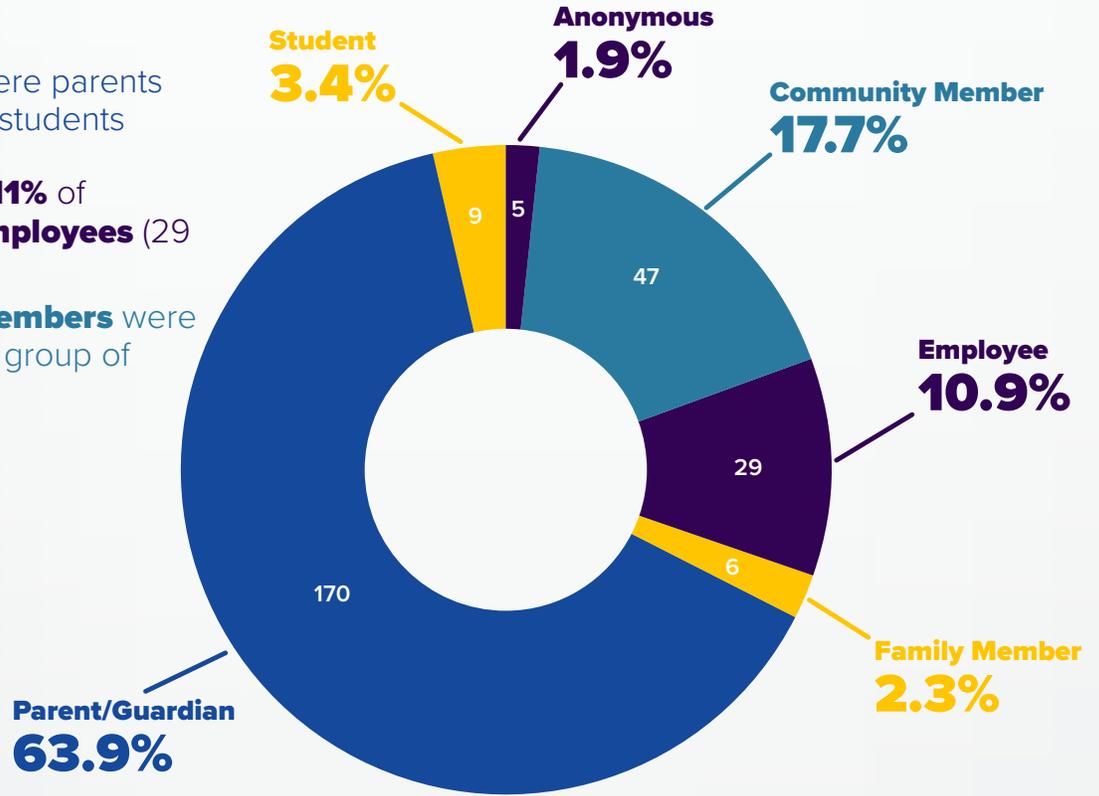


Most **contacts** were received by **email** at **47%** to ombuds@fcps.org

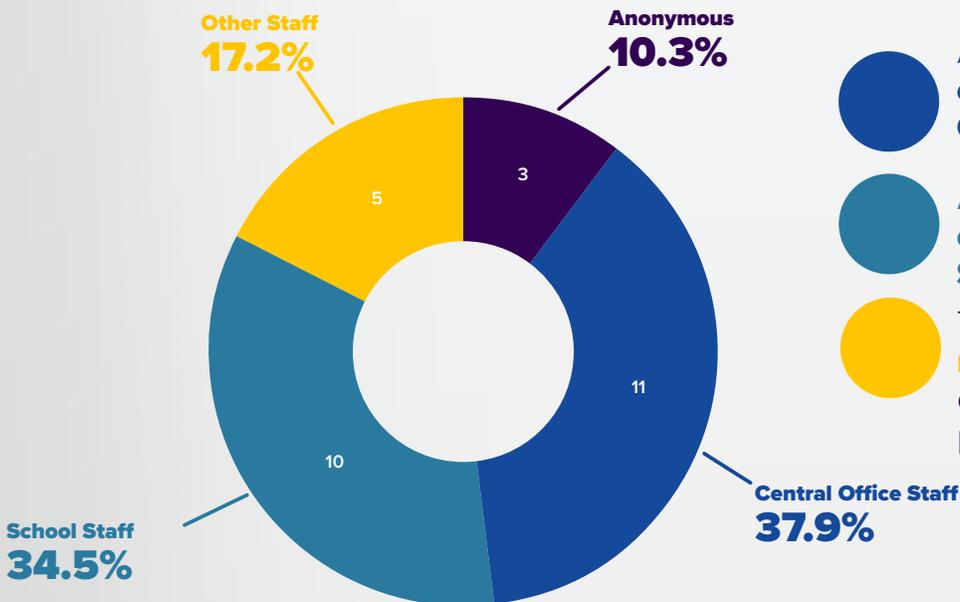
Initial **phone** contact was close behind at **35%**

WHO CONTACTED THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

- Most** visitors were parents or guardians of students
- Approximately **11%** of visitors were **employees** (29 employees)
- Community members** were the next largest group of contacts

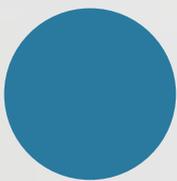
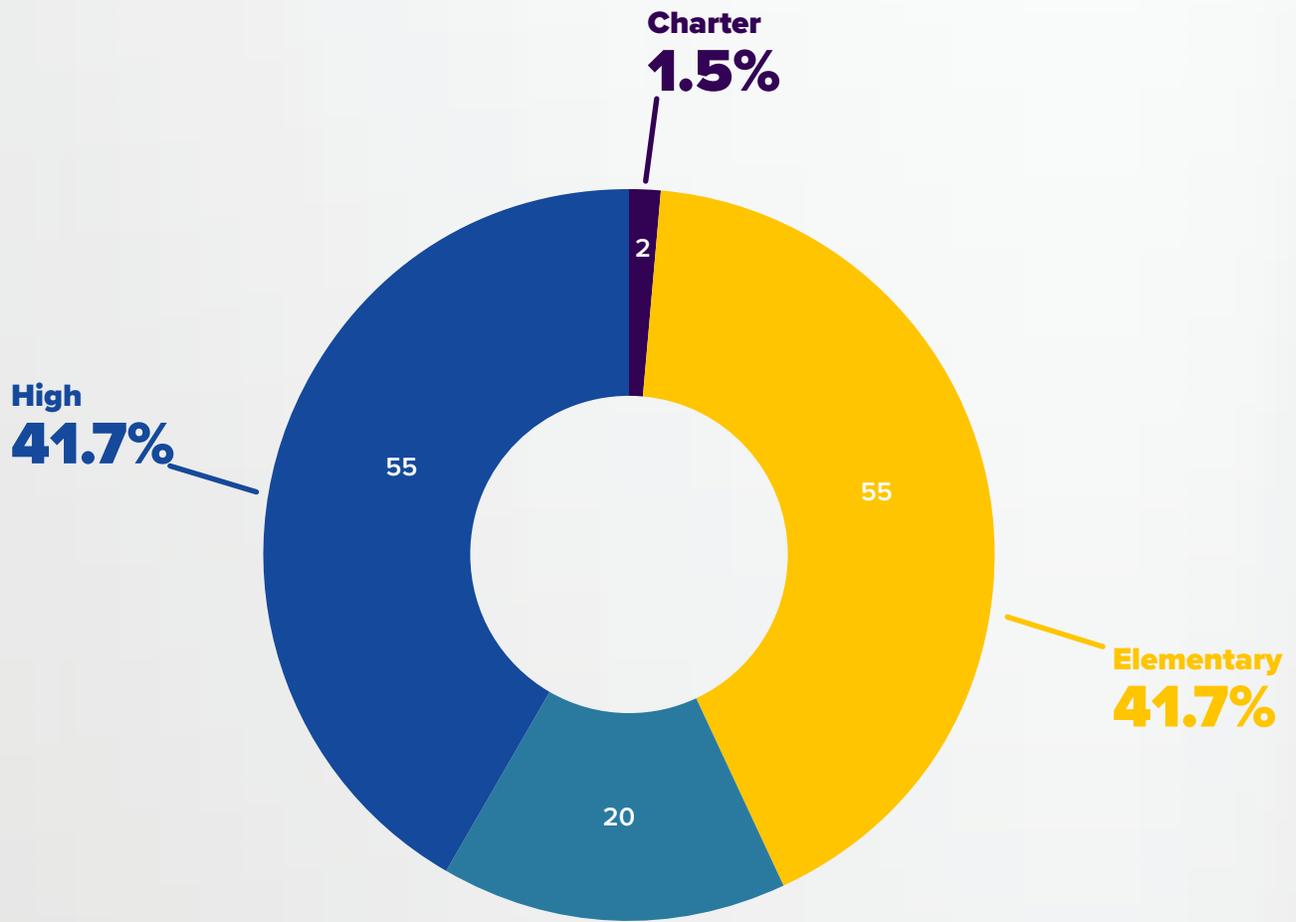


FROM THE 29 EMPLOYEE CONTACTS

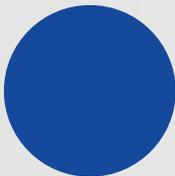


- Approximately **1/3** of the **29 employee** contacts were from **Central Office** Staff
- Another **1/3** of the **29 employee** contact were from **School** Staff
- The **remainder** were either **not** housed at **Central Office** or at a **school** or they did not provide their work location

CONCERNS BY SCHOOL LEVEL



There were a total of **132 concerns** where grade or school level information was shared.

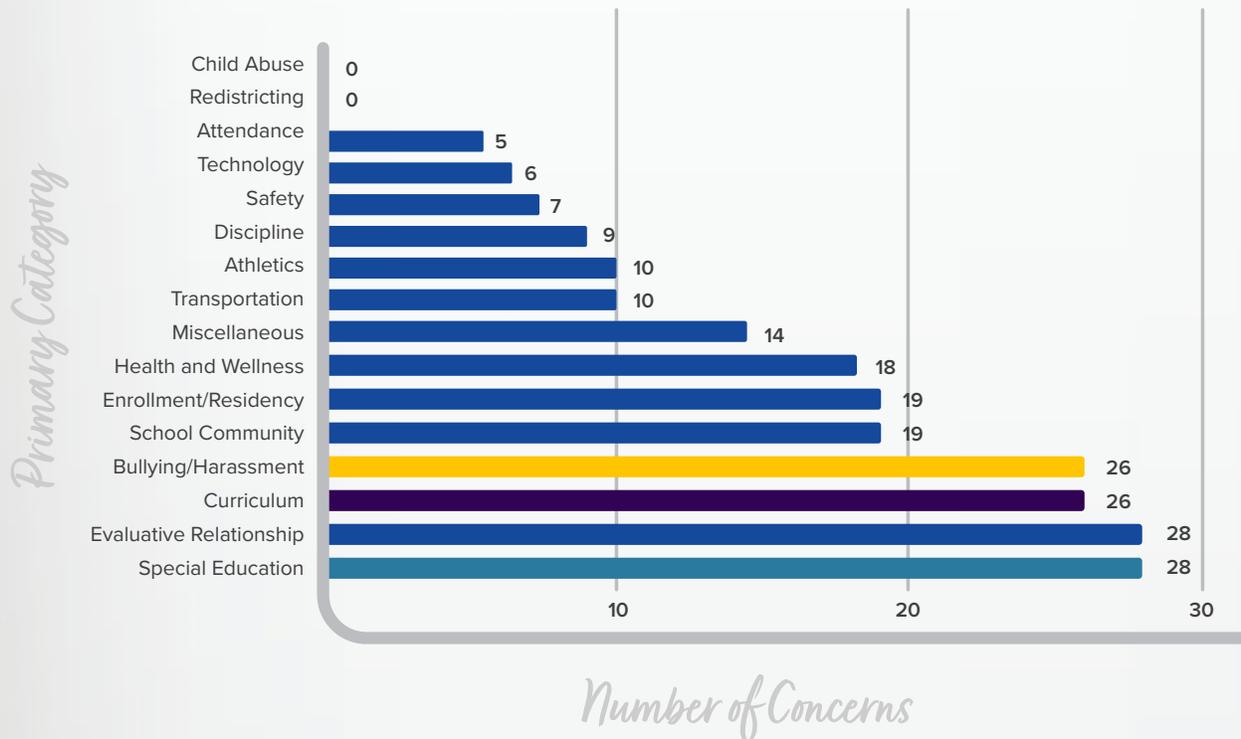


There were an **equal** number of **elementary** and **high school** concerns (55)



When a specific grade level was given, most of the high school concerns were related to **12th grade** concerns

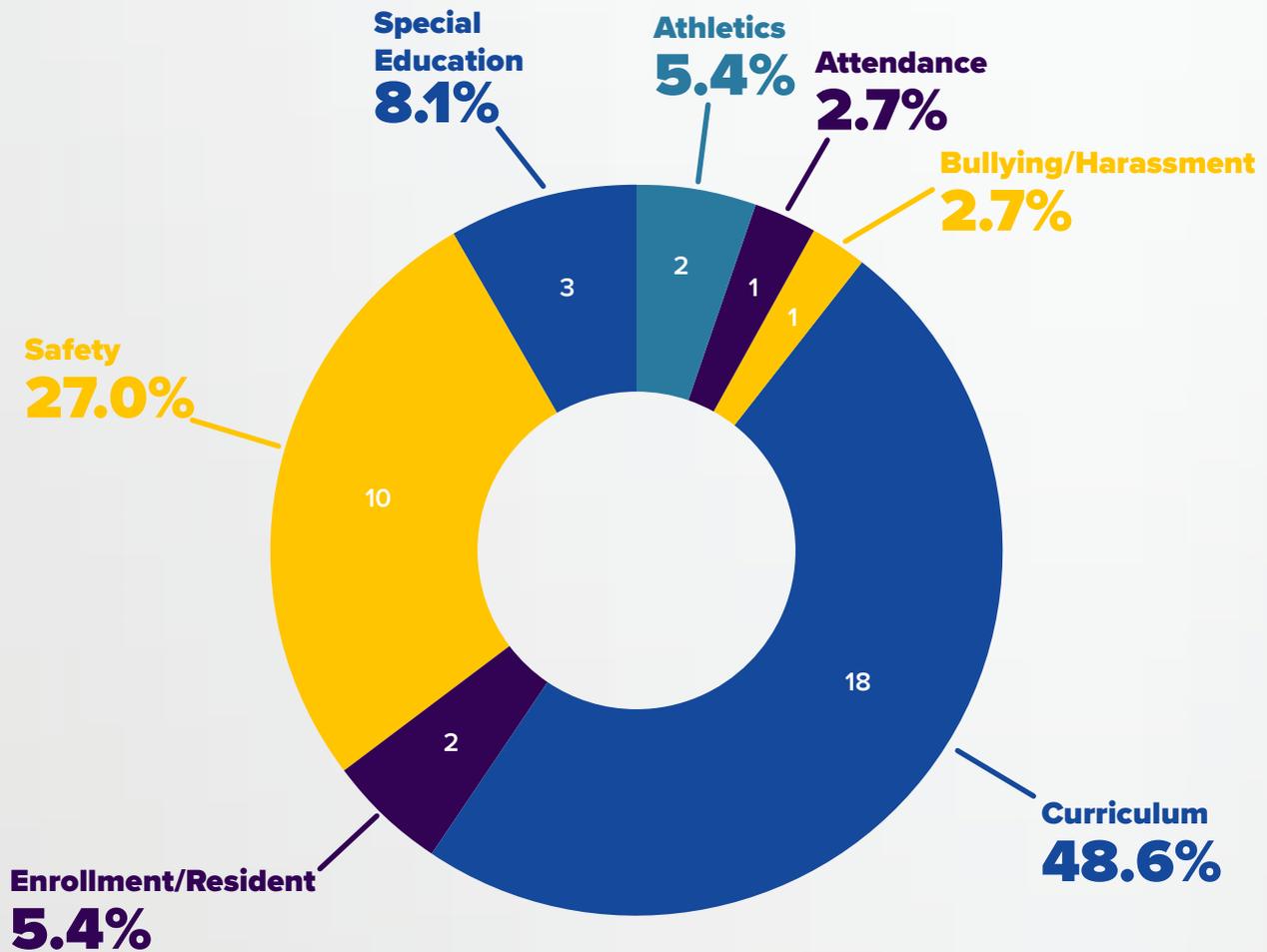
TOP CATEGORIES OF CONCERN



The top Categories of concerns **without concerns about Covid-19** voiced from the **266 total** were in regards to:

- **Special Education**
- **Evaluative Relationships**
- **Curriculum**
- **Bullying/Harassment**

COVID-19 CONCERNS



The 37 Covid-19 Concerns focused on

- Curriculum - distance learning and grading
- Safety - concerns about the safety of returning to school or work

2020 Learnings

STUDENTS

CATEGORY	TAKEAWAYS
Bullying/Harassment (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness regarding use of Regulation #400-48 Bullying-Harassment-Intimidation Complaint Process for Students Increased awareness of perceived inequities from student perspective
Covid-19 - Distance Learning (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heightened anxiety with distance learning. Concerns shared with staff at school level and staff provided additional supports

PARENTS

CATEGORY	TAKEAWAYS
Special Education (23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided resources about IEP processes and navigated to the best point of contact Coached to develop talking points for visitors to utilize when working with their child's education team, and assisted with effective communication Reminder sent to staff regarding approved abbreviations 2 positive compliments shared by parents regarding staff and procedures
Bullying/Harassment (19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of policy and regulations for consistency of resolution procedures Navigated for school level assistance or online reporting Utilized option of Ombuds sharing anonymous concerns with staff

2020 Learnings

EMPLOYEES

CATEGORY	TAKEAWAYS
Covid-19 - Safety and Status (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety during Covid-19 with concerns for safety, job status, and return to school • Information shared about consistent location for resources (Inside FCPS- staff only) • Navigated employees to additional staff resources, Human Resources, Employee Assistance Plan (EAP), Negotiated agreements, etc
Evaluative Relationships (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coached for effective communication tips and discussed options for additional resources • Shared input for proposed future changes, employees wanted to be heard

COMMUNITY

CATEGORY	TAKEAWAYS
School/Community (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listened to feedback, shared process to give public comment with Board of Education and shared input regarding offensive flag displayed • Provided guidance to processes regarding partnerships and possible employment
Athletics (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared information regarding new fingerprinting procedures • Provided guidance regarding athletics and use of athletic fields during Covid-19



2020-2021

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

GOALS



Promote awareness within FCPS

Promote awareness with outside organizations



Create additional resource materials

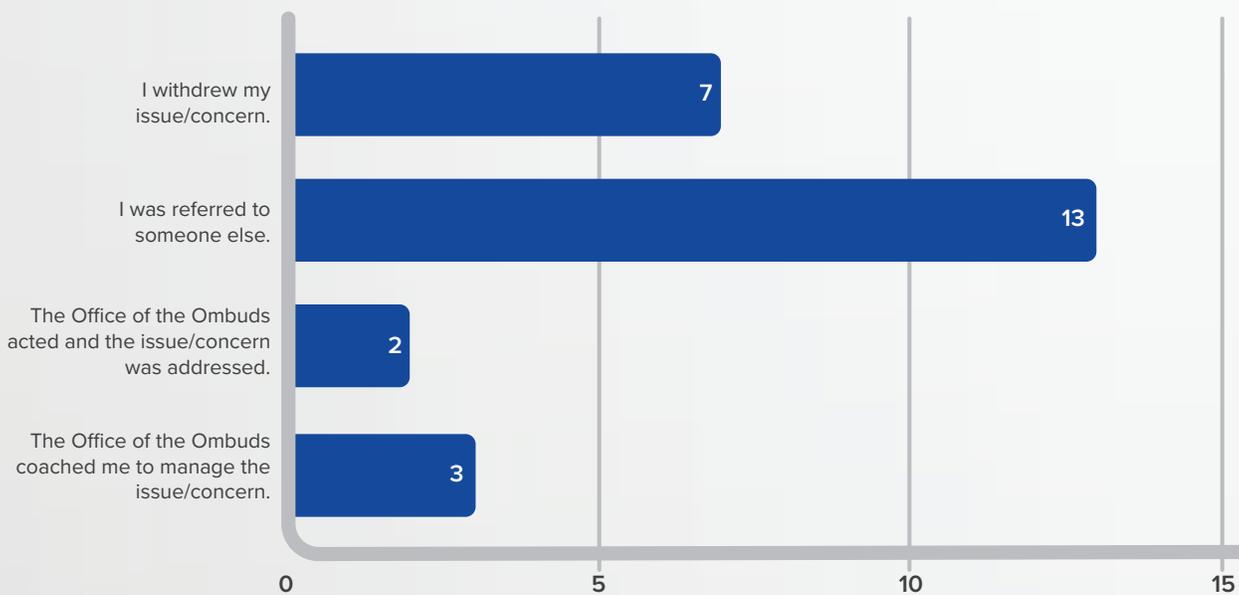
Continue to **build and strengthen** relationships



Office of the Ombuds process **improvement**

SURVEY RESULTS

What was the result of your communication with the office of the ombuds? (Check all that apply)



If you did not have the option to correspond with the office of the ombuds about your issue/concern, what option would you have taken?



Comments shared

FROM ANONYMOUS SURVEY

"The situation was greatly improved immediately after the office of the ombuds contacted the school. I am very pleased with how quickly I was helped and how the issue was resolved. Thank you!"

"Thanks for coming out and sharing how you work with families and staff."

"I am very grateful for the service. I believe it gave me a fresh perspective and some avenues to solve."

"Thank you so much for your time today. It gave me great things to think about and next steps. I was honestly ready to just withdraw my son and switch to home school because I was feeling deflated and defeated."

"I was really grateful for the timely response and her efforts to understand the situation I was facing. I also appreciate her reassuring me that I had options. Thankfully the situation resolved itself and my daughter is excited to attend school with the FCPS system this Fall. This is my first year having my children attend FCPS."

"My communication was very last minute but my concerns were acknowledged and acted upon right away."

"Thank you for helping the parents of Frederick County. We need your help."

"I am so appreciative to have this resource as it was my first time having to address an issue with the school board & staff. THANK YOU!"

