



District of Columbia

Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education

# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT



# om.buds.man

/ˈæmbədzmən/

noun

An “entrusted person”  
or “grievance representative.”

Our Office utilizes an “activist” ombudsman model.

We believe it is our responsibility to adopt a proactive posture to the challenges and inequities facing our city’s most vulnerable families and schools.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This year's annual report will look different from our reports in past years – we will report out on our SY2017-18 activities and we will also offer reflections on the first five year tenure of the Office since its re-establishment<sup>1</sup> in 2014.

## What You Will See In Our Data:

- Our Office received 941 contacts via phone, email, or referrals in SY2017-18, which is the largest number of contacts from public education stakeholders in our Office's five year history.
- Of the 941 contacts, 472 of those calls and emails were accepted as cases.
- The trends of cases and issues we saw in SY2017-18 are similar to what we have seen in past years. *Disability—Special Education, Engagement—School Environment, and Access* are the three categories where we continue to receive the greatest number of complaints. We have continued to receive the most contacts and cases from stakeholders in Wards 7 and 8. Contacts from families and schools in these Wards continue to account for almost half of the total contacts and cases we receive.
- In SY2017-18 the percentage of Pre-K cases involving school access issues increased greatly over past years, with access issues accounting for half of the total Pre-K cases we received this past year.



# OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

## ANNUAL REPORT 2018

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>I. THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION</b>	<b>3</b>
A. Staff	3
B. Our Mission	3
C. What is an Ombudsman	3
D. How We Serve	3
<b>II. 2018 OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE DATA</b>	<b>4</b>
A. What We've Done	4
B. Data and Trends	4
C. Overall Data	5-6
D. Special Education Data	7-8
E. School Environment Data	9-10
F. Access Data	11-12
G. Grade Band Data	13-15
<b>III. REFLECTIONS OF THE TERM</b>	<b>16</b>
A. Timeline of Our Work	16-17
B. 5 Year Data Comparison	18-19
<b>IV. CONCLUSION - LOOKING FORWARD AND APPENDIX</b>	<b>20</b>
A. Work Summary for School Year 2017-2018	21
B. Categories & Contributing Factors	22-23



## Section I: The Office of Ombudsman for Public Education

### Staff

Joyanna Smith,  
Ombudsman for Public Education (2014-August 2018)  
Ryvell D. Fitzpatrick,  
Assistant Ombudsman for Public Education  
Beryl Trauth-Jurman,  
Assistant Ombudsman for Public Education  
Khadijah Williams,  
Legislative Affairs Specialist

### Fellows

Hela Baer, Wendy Bonilla, Kimberly Ellis, and Beverly Auman

### Our Mission

The DC Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (Office) seeks to provide equitable access to education for all students within District of Columbia public schools (both DC Public Schools and public charter schools), and to support student achievement and educational outcomes.

### What is an Ombudsman?

The word “ombudsman” is derived from a Swedish word meaning an “entrusted person” or “grievance representative.” The word has come to denote a trusted agent who looks after the interests of a particular group. In the United States, numerous public ombudsman Offices have been created through legislative, executive, or judicial authorization, as independent agencies that monitor the delivery of services for certain populations.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education is one of the few Offices of its type in the country; it is an independent and neutral Office, not under the auspices of any school district. As established by law<sup>2</sup>, the Ombudsman for Public Education’s mission is to be a “single Office” that coordinates “transparency and accountability,” helping DC families to address issues and concerns that arise for their children in the public education system.

### How We Serve

We envision an educational system where all parents, families, educators and students are fully engaged in the public school systems. We work to achieve this goal by assisting concerned parties to ensure that the education systems in our city work for students, families, and schools regardless of a stakeholder’s race, class, income, disability status or ward of residence.

Our Office operates as an “activist” ombudsman Office which means that, in addition to addressing issues that are brought to our attention, we also use the data from those issues to influence systemic reform. These services include facilitated conversations, technical assistance to schools, mediations and record reviews, as well as referral services and information on individual rights. We use the data and feedback gathered from our casework with families and LEAs to provide guidance and recommendations to local and national educational leaders.

We partner with families and schools to help them resolve issues and create a forum through which they have voice in addressing their own issues and larger inequities facing many families. We believe that by highlighting the systemic issues in our schools, we can create a barrier-free system where students have the opportunity to benefit fully from their education.



2. Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007. Retrieved from :<https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/17-9.html>.



## Section II: 2018 Ombudsman's Office Data

### What We've Done

In the SY2017-18 our Office continued to improve our partnership with parents and schools in resolving issues through: (1) our case prioritization process implemented in SY2015-16, (2) increased Quickbase functionality, and (3) external program evaluation, while also expanding our work by introducing ourselves as a resource to school administrators as well as LEAs. We have expanded the way we serve families and schools by utilizing the data and feedback we have collected from families to collaborate with policy-makers in the areas of family empowerment and educational equity.

As part of this effort, the Office participated in several local and national engagements in SY2017-18. At *The Atlantic Live Education Summit*, the Office offered insight on how to best engage families. A representative of the Office served on a panel as part of a training for superior court judges on the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, the Office collaborated with a host of decision-makers and elected officials on topics ranging from school discipline policies to early discussions regarding the lack of fidelity in the implementation of a citywide Response to Intervention system. In a March 2018 opinion editorial published in the *Washington City Paper*, the former Ombudsman discussed the realities of school choice in Washington DC and its impact on DC families – she had personal insight into this process as she navigated the school choice process as a parent for her child.

Over the last five years, the Office has assisted the individual families and schools that contacted our Office while also finding ways to improve educational outcomes for every student in the city. To this end, the Office advocated for legislation to help reduce student suspension rates (the Student Fair Access to School Act of 2017, now law) and provided insight on school climate. In this work the Office became a national model for supporting families, as evidenced by our collaboration with emerging education ombudsman Offices around the country, sharing our Office's structure, goals, and methods for completing our work. The following report highlights not only the Office's nationally recognized work and accomplishments from the past school year but also looks at the successes and growth of the Office over the last five school years.

### Data and Trends

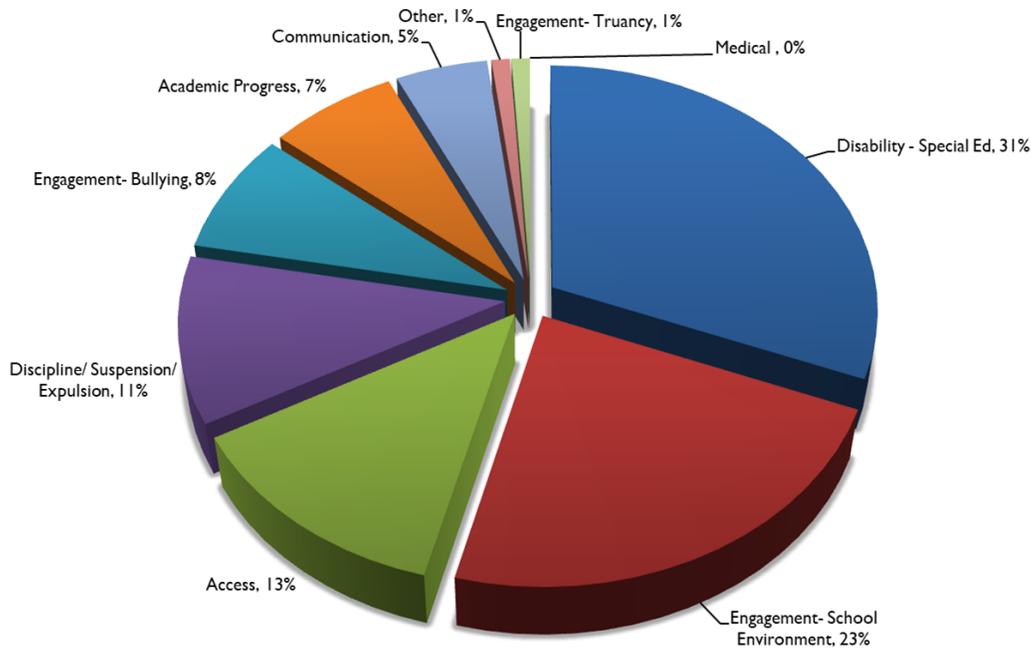
In SY2017-18, we received 941 contacts and handled 472 cases. The 941 contacts that we received during SY2017-18 marked a 26% increase over the contacts received in SY2016-17, and the 472 concerns accepted for intake represented a nearly 30% increase over SY2016-17. Although SY2016-17 saw a decrease in the number of cases the Office handled, the increase in the number of stakeholders that we were able to serve in SY2017-18 is attributable to having four fulltime staff members, which has given us the ability scale our workload more effectively.



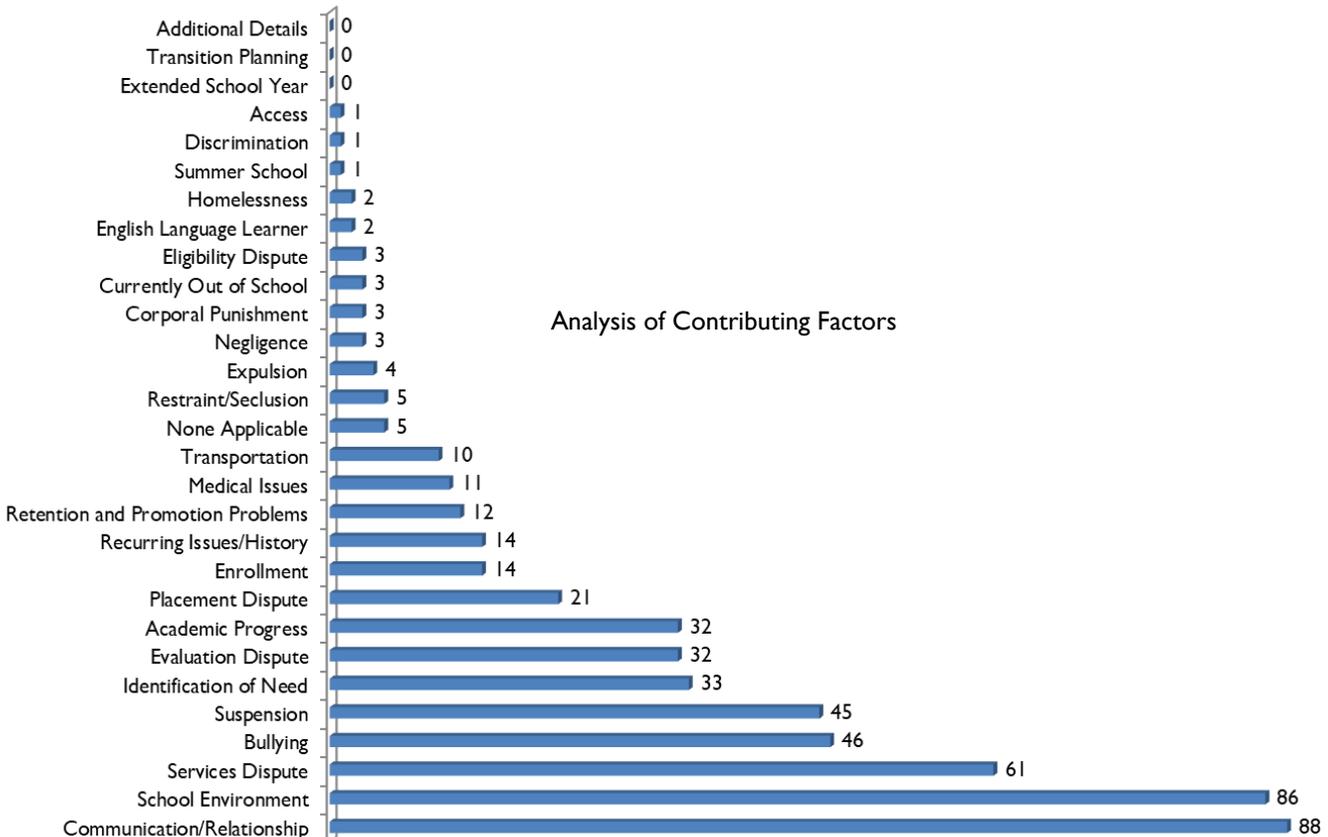
## Overall Data

In SY2017-18, we received 941 total contacts from stakeholders, which include families, students, community organizations, and District agencies. Stakeholders can contact our Office to request assistance in several ways: via phone, email, in-person, or by referral. The most common contact method is by phone. Over 60% of stakeholders seeking assistance contacted us through our intake line. As we manage and record cases, we place each case into primary and secondary categories based on the type of issues the client is facing. The next few sections analyze the categories of which we received the most cases.

Total Cases Analyzed by Primary Category

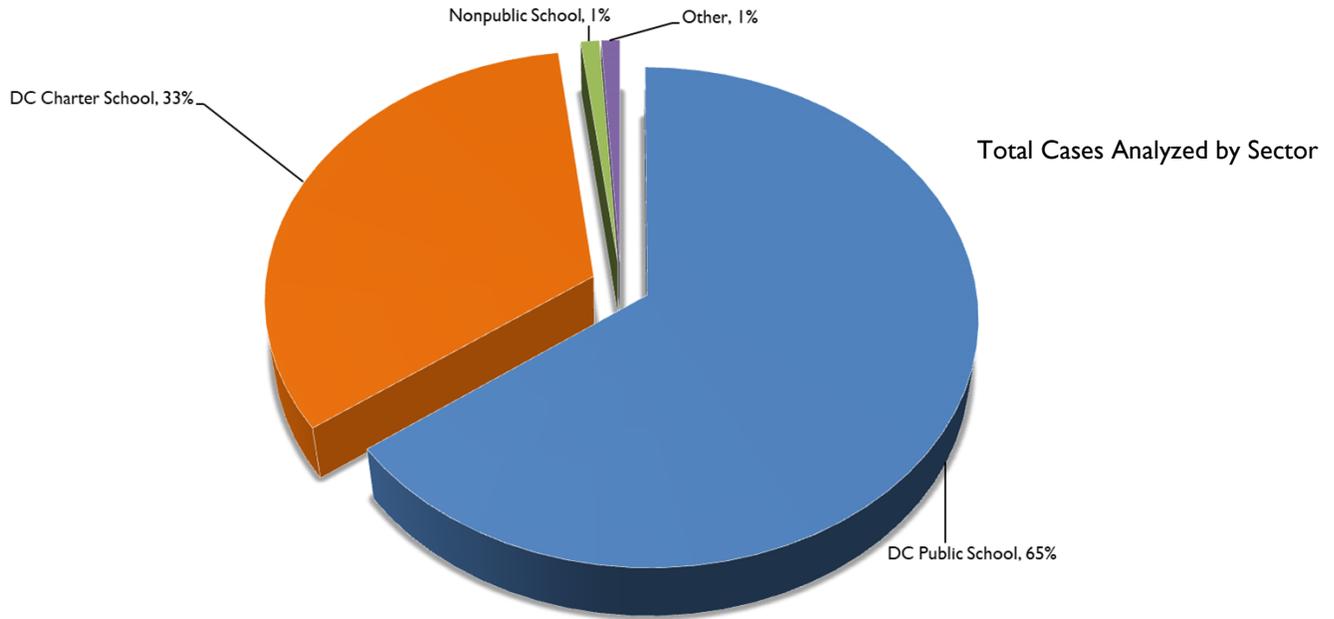


Analysis of Contributing Factors

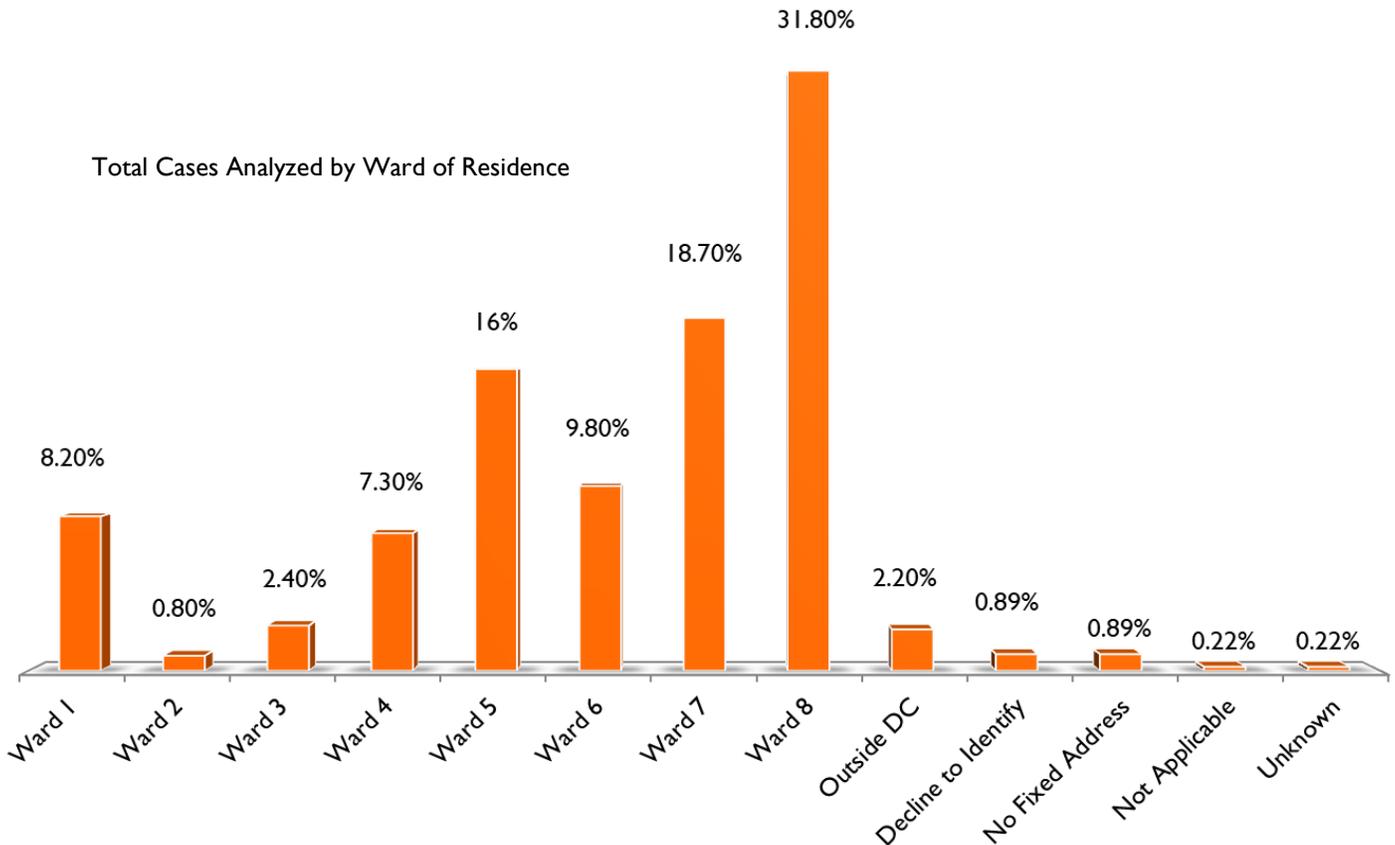


## Overall Data

Of the 472 contacts that were accepted as cases, 294 cases involved the traditional public school system, representing 65% of our cases, while 148 cases involved charter schools, representing 33% of our cases. The remaining 2% of cases involved non-public schools.

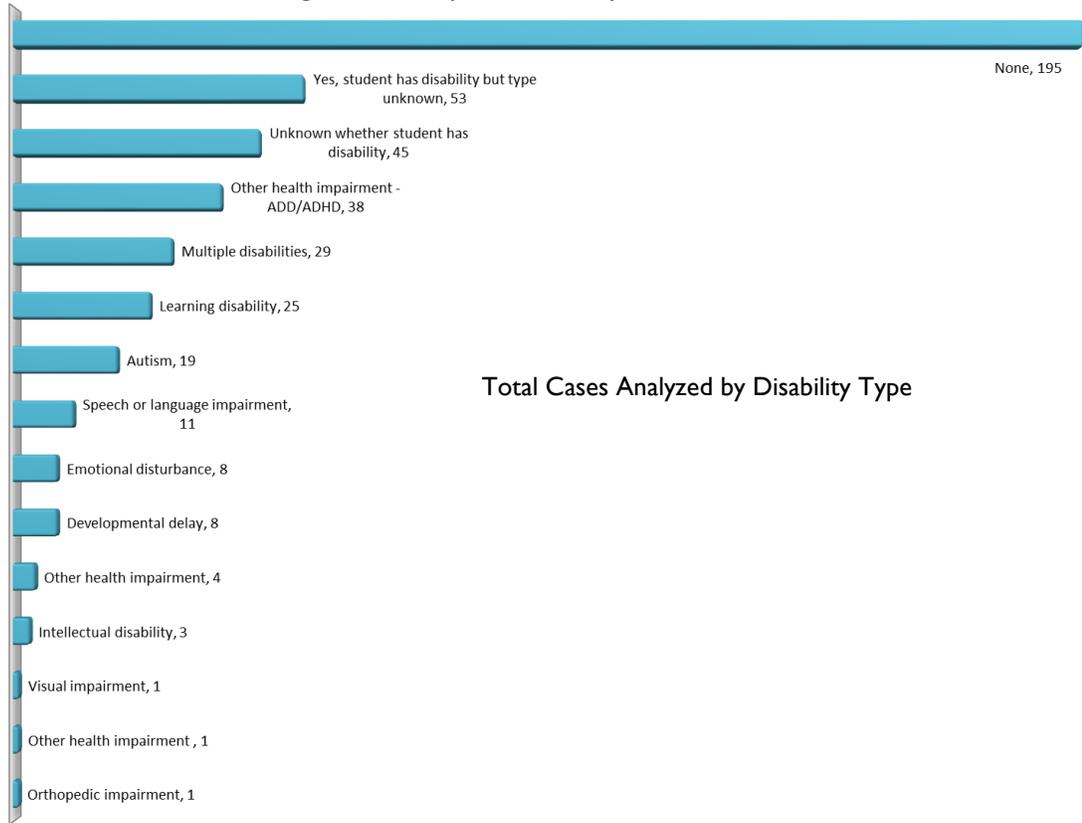


In SY2017-18, we had contacts and opened cases for stakeholders in all eight wards. The largest number of contacts and cases came from stakeholders in Ward 8, with 143 cases, representing 31% of our total cases for the past school year. The majority of cases we worked on came from Wards 8, 7 and 5. The cases from these three wards combined accounted for roughly 87% of our total cases for the year. The fewest number of contacts and cases came from stakeholders in Wards 2 and 3 with only 15 cases (3%) between them.

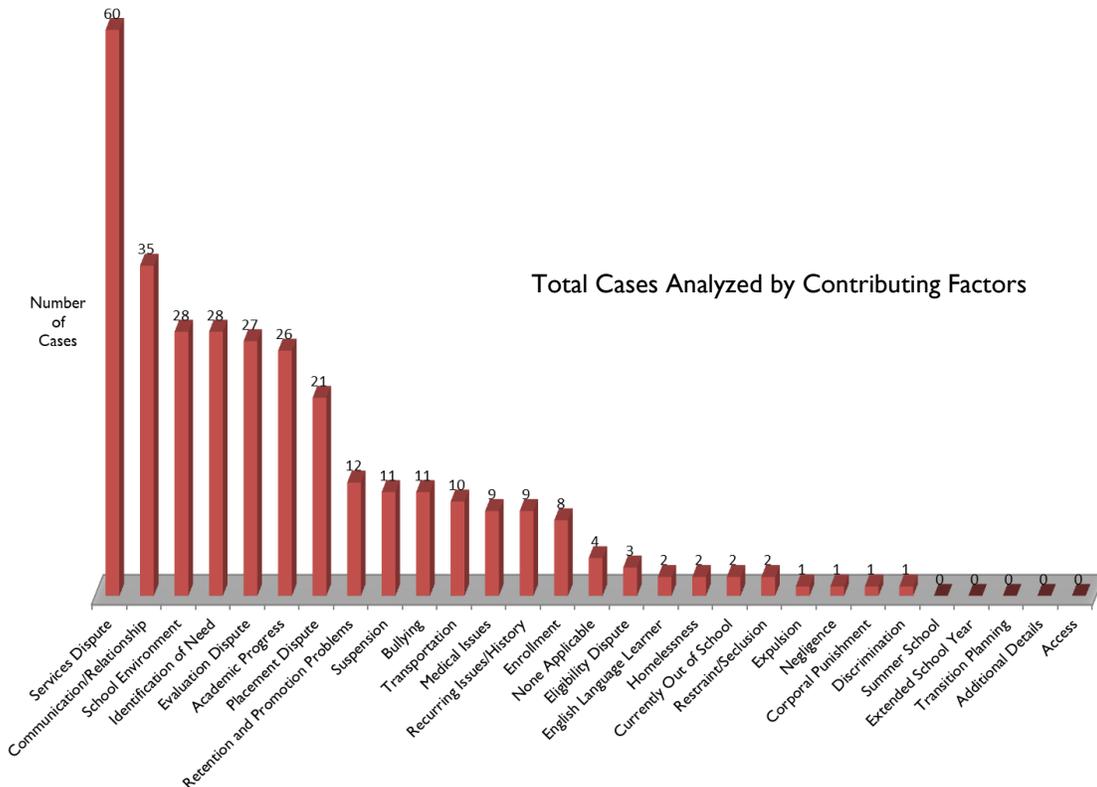


## Special Education Data

In SY2017-18, we managed 472 cases; 136 of those cases had a primary category of *Disability – Special Education* and 34 of our cases had *Disability – Special Education* as a secondary category. *Disability – Special Education* cases are cases that focus on Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to a student’s diagnosed or suspected disability.

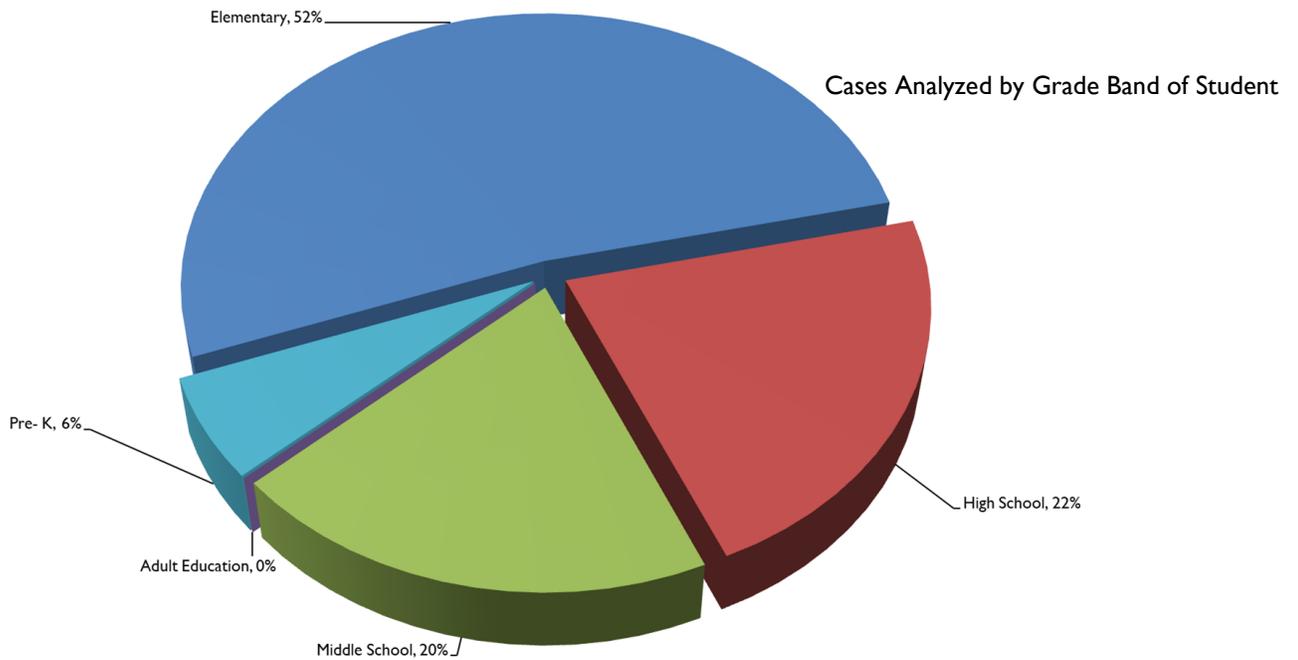


Within the *Disability – Special Education* primary category 43% of the cases involve a dispute of services. Communication/ Relationship (See Appendix II) was a contributing factor in 25% of the *Disability – Special Education* cases while school environment, evaluation dispute, academic progress, and the need for identification of disability were contributing factors in 20% of the cases each.

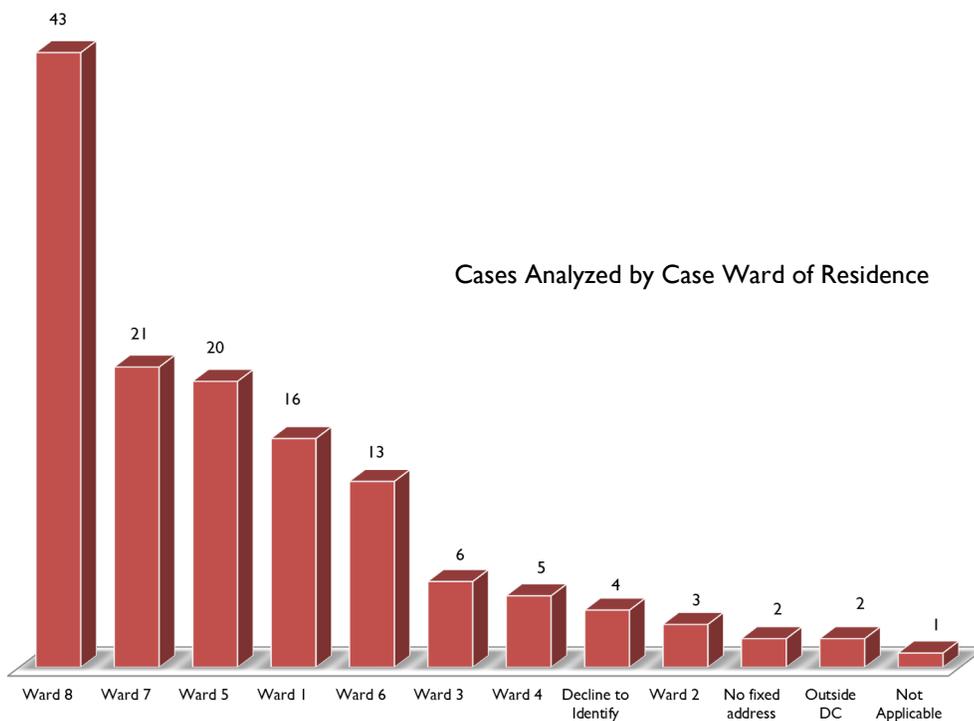


## Special Education Data

Over half of the cases within the *Disability – Special Education* primary category involved an elementary school. 22% of these cases involved high school students, 20% involved middle school students, and 6% involved students in pre-kindergarten.



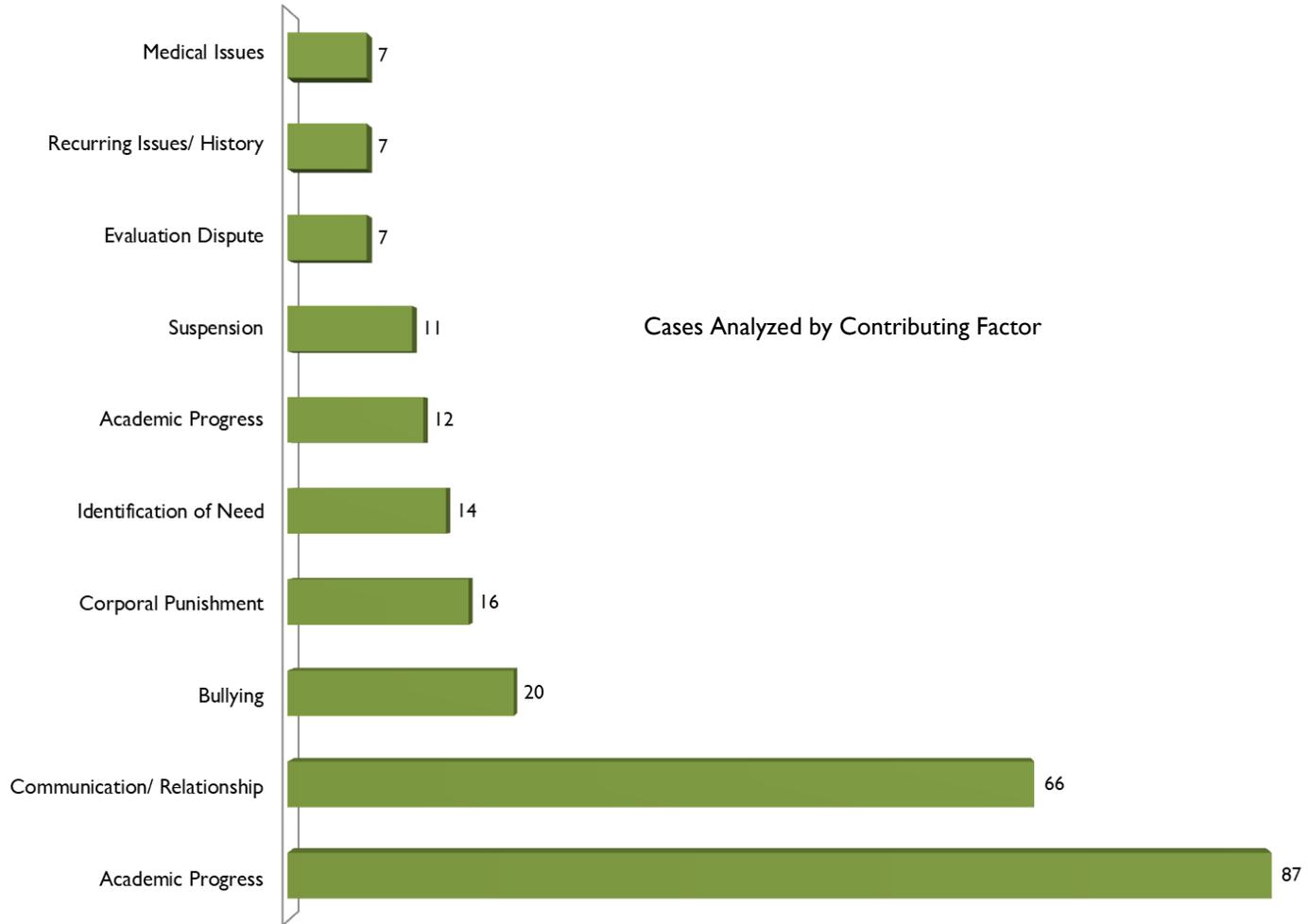
About half of these cases involved students who live east of the Anacostia River, in Wards 7 and 8 which are the poorest two wards in the city. 15% involved students who reside in Ward 5 and 12% involved students who reside in Ward 1. Only 11% of these cases within this category came from Wards 2, 3, and 4 combined. The complaints the Office received with a *Disability – Special Education* as the primary category came from each ward in a number proportionate to the overall number of cases that came from each ward. The only exception to this is Ward 1 who made up 12% of the special education cases but only 8% of the overall number of cases.



Our data does not indicate whether or not students living in Wards 7 and 8 have higher rates of disabilities as compared to other wards, but the number of complaints does suggest that these students may not be receiving appropriate special education services at the same rate as students in other wards.

## School Environment Data

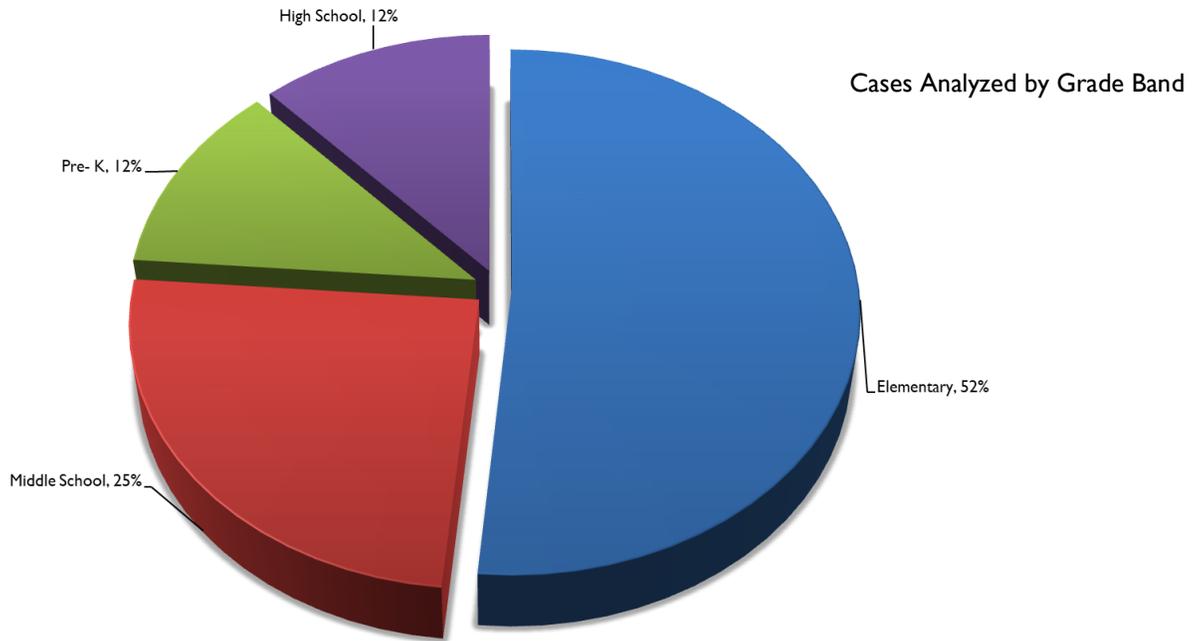
Cases are categorized as *Engagement – School Environment* when the case focuses on issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to the safety, behavior, environmental issues, or actions of other students or staff taken against the student that signal a need for intervention or support from the school. This category also includes bullying and corporal punishment. In SY2017-18, our Office managed 103 cases with *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary category and thirty-four cases as a secondary category. 22% of all of our cases had *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary category. The following analysis focuses on those cases.



Of the 137 cases with *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary or secondary category, 64% of them also have issues relating to the academic progress of the student; 48% of the cases have issues regarding communication or the relationship between the school and families; 15% relate to bullying, 12% relate to corporal punishment; and 10% of the cases involve contributing issues related to an unmet need that result in a student's inability to fully access their education.

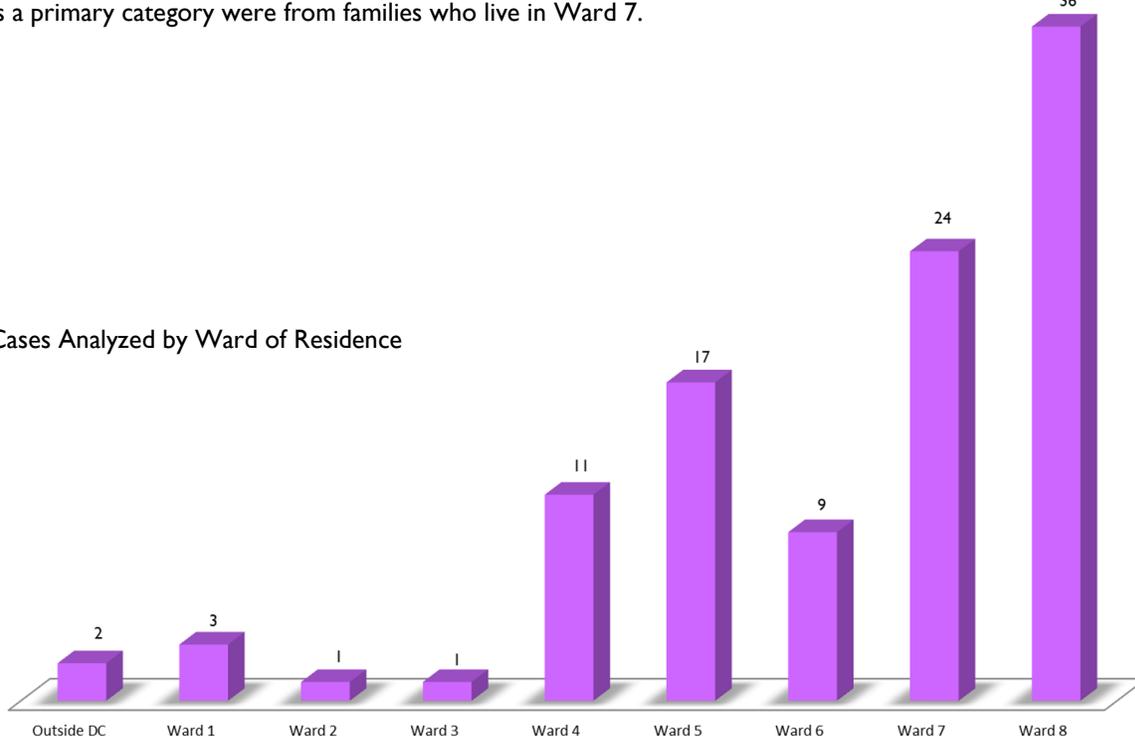
## School Environment Data

52% of the cases with *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary category involved students in elementary school. High schools and Pre-Ks each accounted for 12% of the cases in this category while middle schools were involved in 25% of the cases. This ratio is disproportionately high when compared to the number of overall cases (52%) that involved students in elementary school. 25% of cases with *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary category involved middle schools while Pre-K and high schools were involved in 12% of the cases each.



Thirty-six of the cases with *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary category came from Ward 8. This percentage, 41%, is slightly higher than the percentage (30%) of cases overall that came from families who live in Ward 8. 27% of the cases with *Engagement – School Environment* as a primary category were from families who live in Ward 7.

Cases Analyzed by Ward of Residence

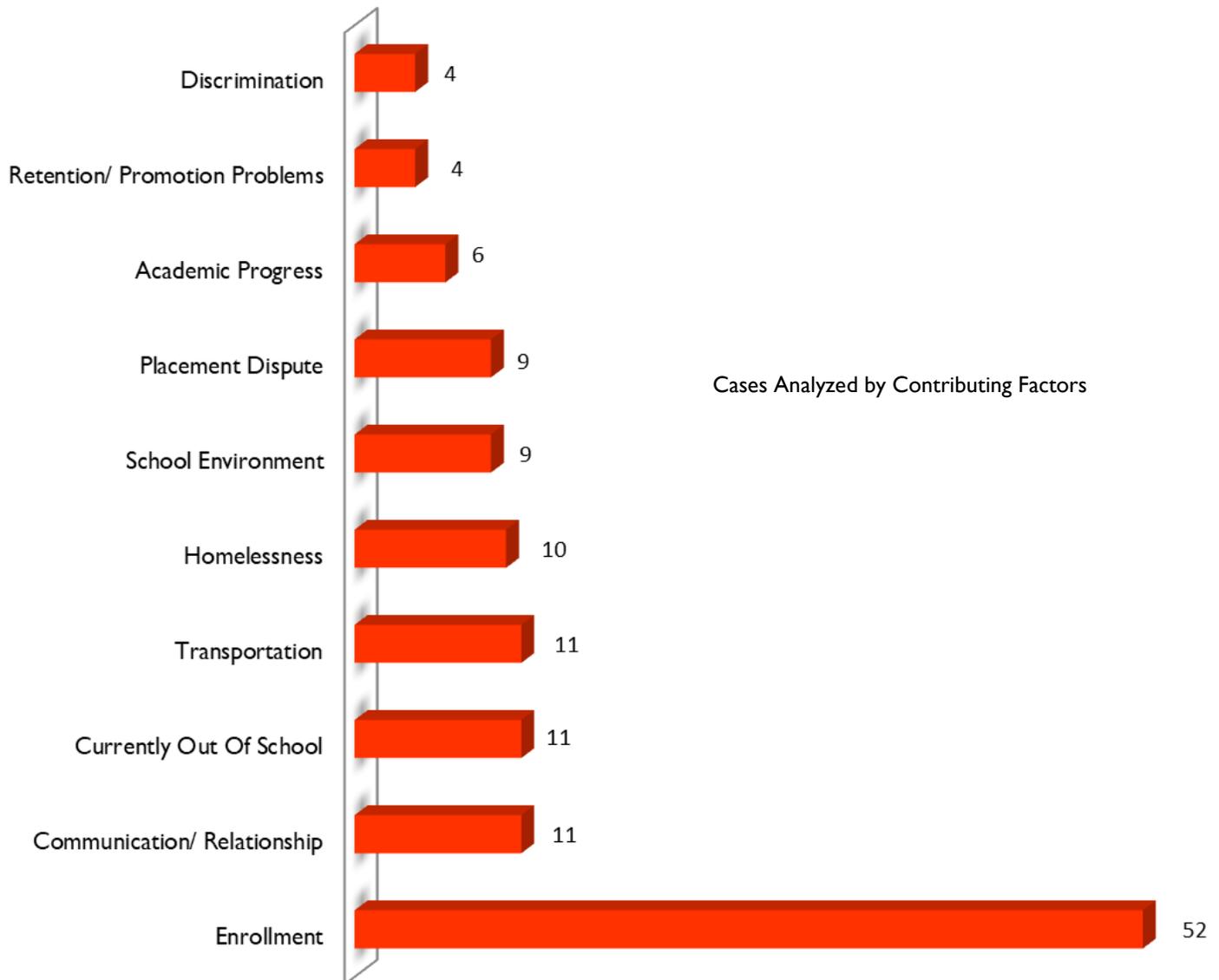


Together, 68% of the *Engagement – School Environment* cases came from families who live east of the Anacostia River, which is disproportionately high compared to the 48% of our overall cases that came from the same area. This again may suggest that families in Wards 7 and 8 are not receiving needed services at the same rate as families living in other wards of the city.

## Access Data

Cases have Access as a primary or secondary category if the case involves issues preventing a student from accessing their education unrelated to the curriculum, or due to procedural difficulties or gaps. In SY2017-18, this Office handled fifty-seven cases with Access as a primary category and twenty-two had Access as a secondary category. Cases listing Access as the primary category accounted for roughly one quarter of our overall cases.

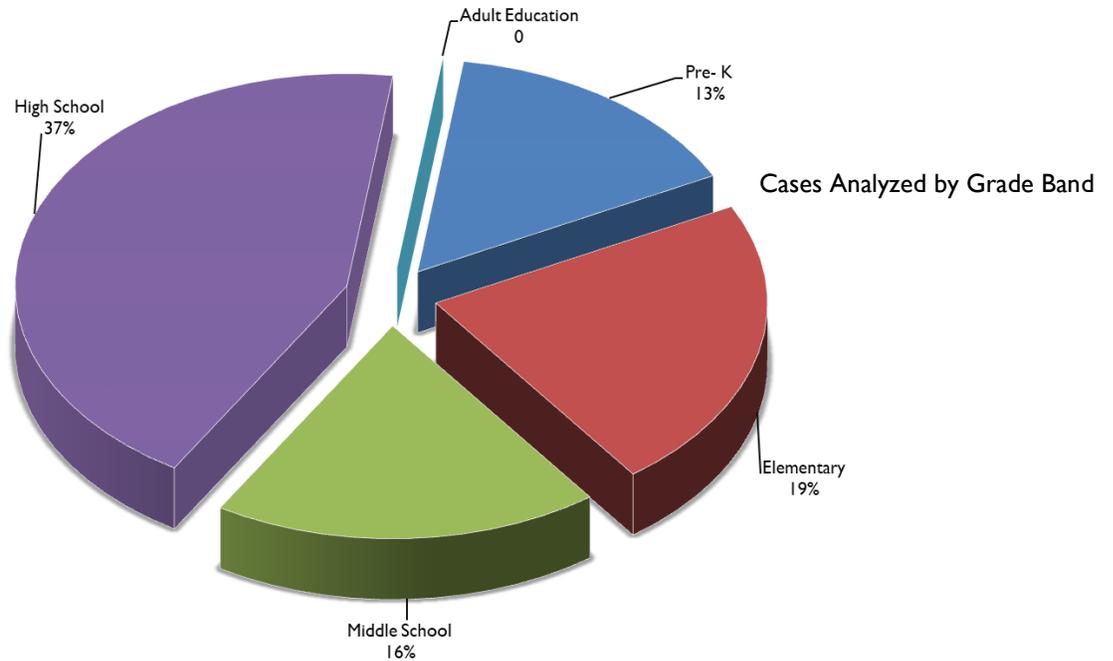
66% of the cases with Access as a primary or secondary category involved families experiencing challenges with enrollment into a public school in the District of Columbia. 14% of the cases with access as a primary or secondary category involve issues with the communication or relationship between families and schools; 14% of the cases had issues with transportation; 145 of the cases involved students who were out of school at the time of the complaint.



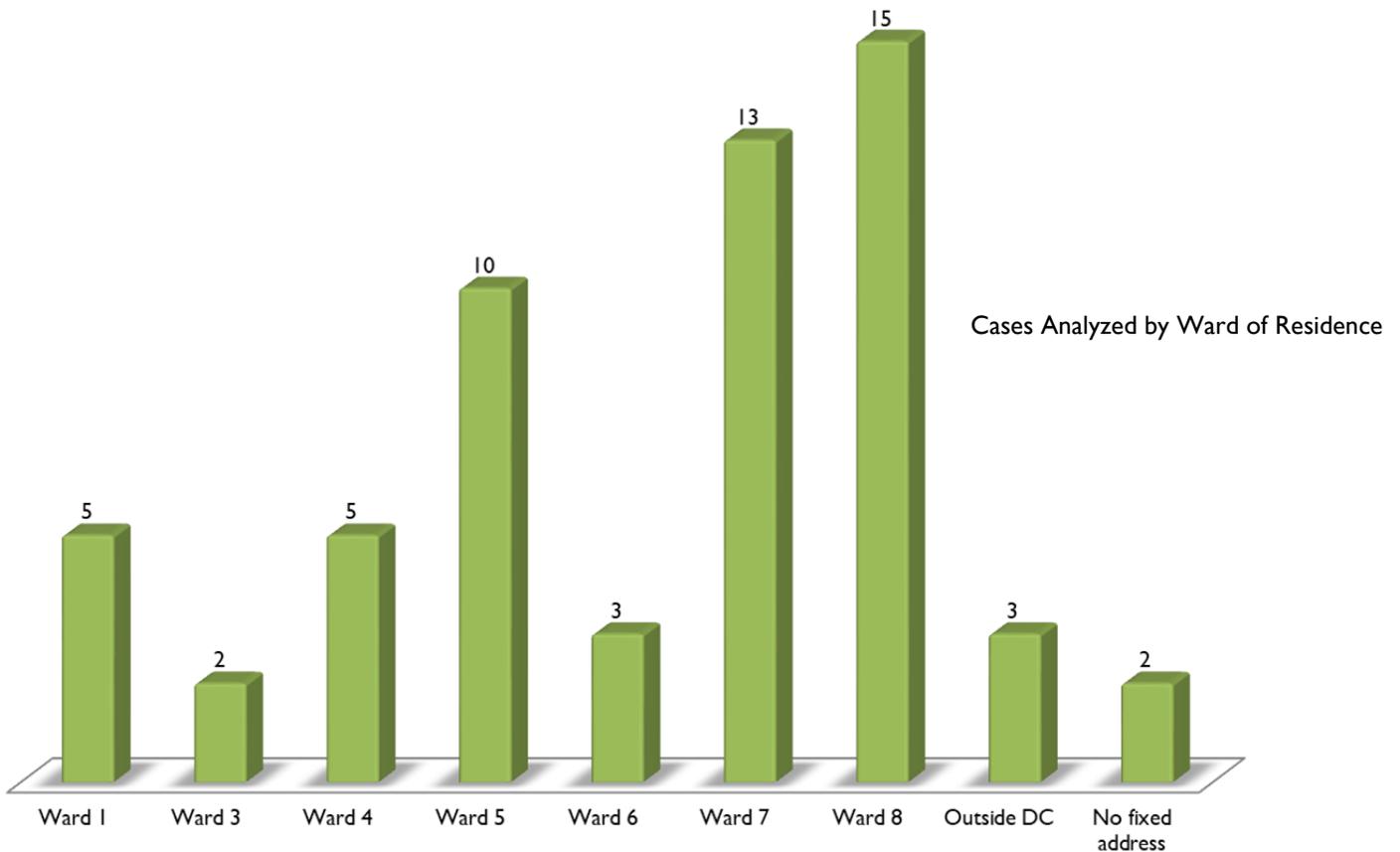
One third of the cases with Access as a primary category involved students from high school. 16% of these cases came from students in middle school and 19% came from students in elementary school.

## Access Data

It is of particular interest that 13% of Access cases involved students in Pre-K. These cases make up half of the total number of complaints received from families about Pre-K students. This suggests that school access presents a particular challenge for families with students in Pre-K grades. It is possible that this is due in part to the fact that Pre-K education is not mandatory in the District of Columbia.



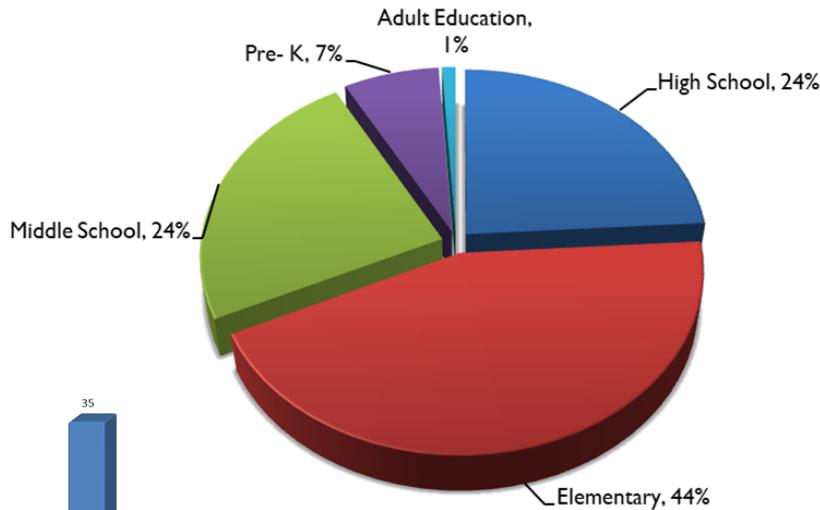
26% of the cases with Access as a primary category came from families who reside in Ward 8 and 23% came from families who reside in Ward 7. 17% came from families who reside in Ward 5. These percentages are proportionate to the overall number of our cases that came from families who reside in these wards.



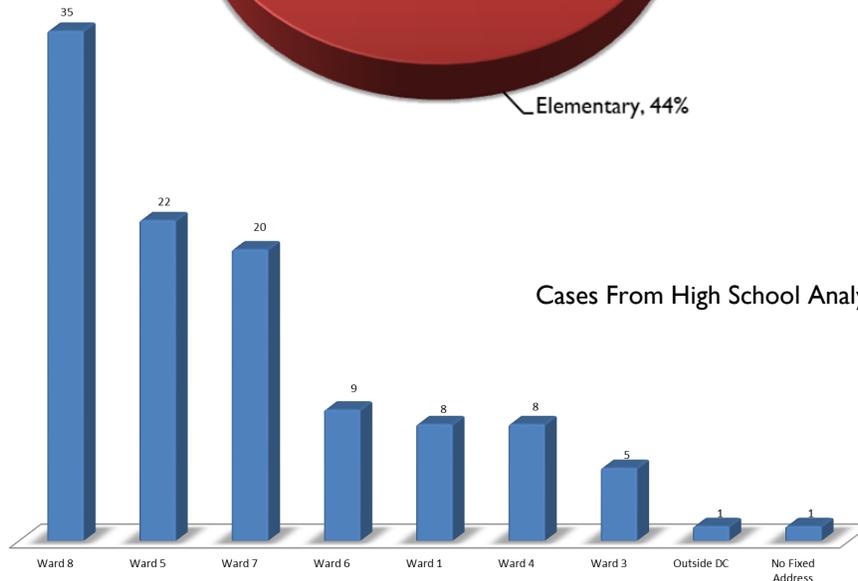
## Grade Band Data

The largest percentage of our Office's cases in SY2017-18 came from students who were enrolled in elementary school. 44% of our cases involved elementary schools, while high and middle schools each represented 24% of our cases respectively. 7% of our cases involved Pre-K students and one percent came from students currently or seeking enrollment in adult education programs.

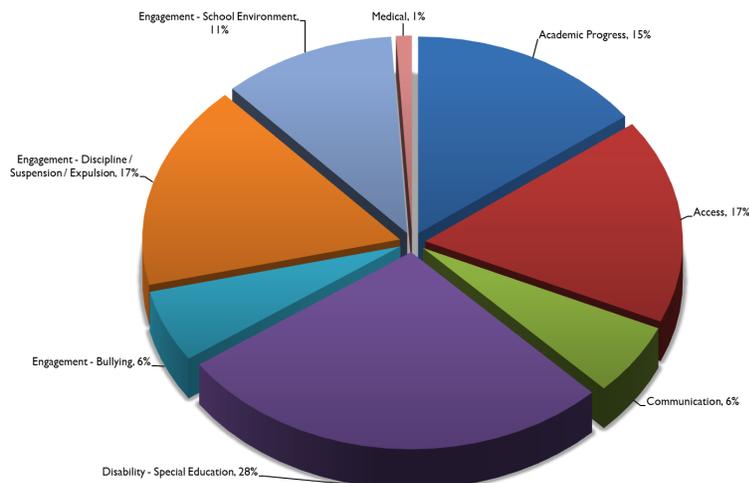
Total Cases Analyzed by Grade Band



Cases From High School Analyzed by Ward

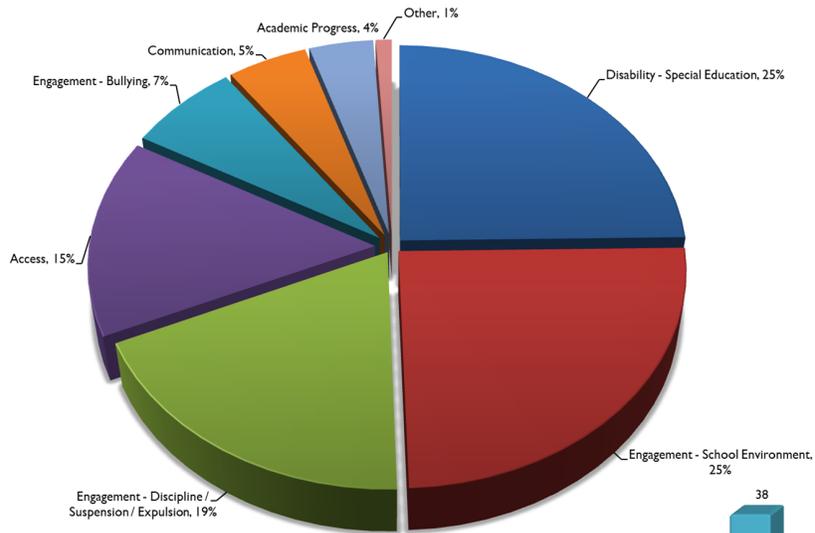


Cases From High School Analyzed by Category

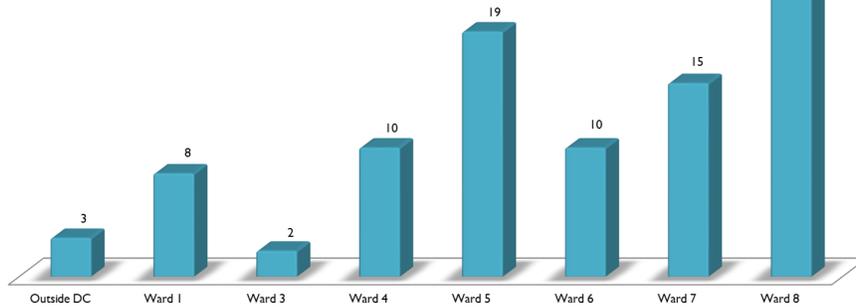


# Grade Band Data

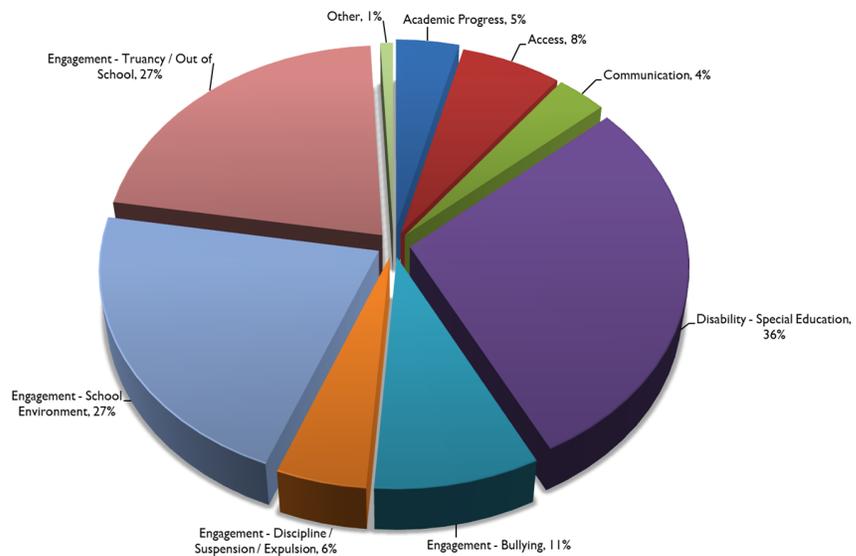
## Cases From Middle School Analyzed by Category



## Cases From Middle School Analyzed by Ward

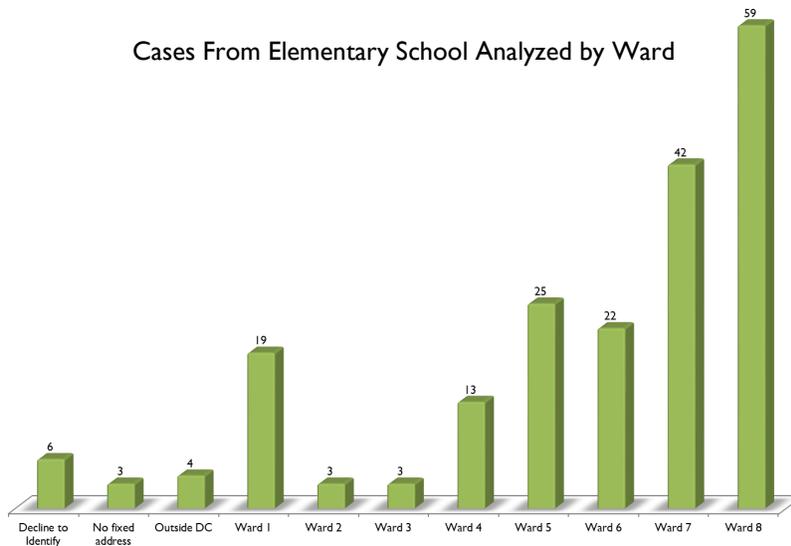


## Cases From Elementary School Analyzed by Category

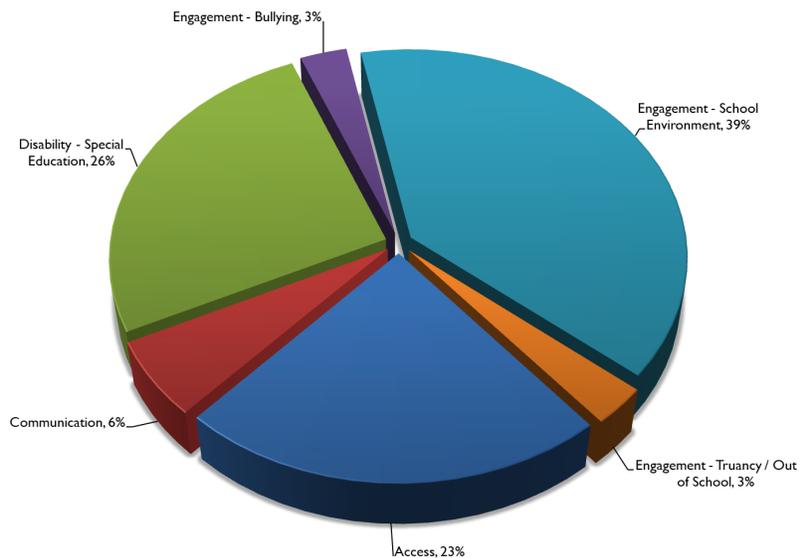


## Grade Band Data

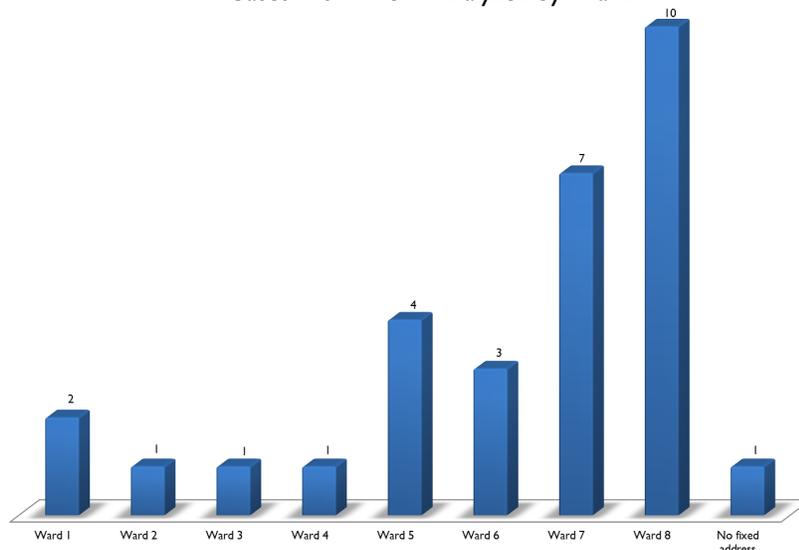
### Cases From Elementary School Analyzed by Ward



### Cases From Pre-K Analyzed by Category



### Cases From Pre-K Analyzed by Ward





## Section III: Reflections of the Term

### TIMELINE OF OUR WORK

#### Year 1

##### **SY 2013-14: Office Infancy**

**150 Cases**

##### **Office Infrastructure:**

The Office began with one full-time employee - the Ombudsman. The Office developed an intake process, and with a limited budget, utilized Google Drive for case management. We secured funding for an additional fulltime Associate Ombudsman during this year as well.

##### **Outreach:**

We introduced key partners to our Office: Advocates for Justice and Education, Children's Law Center, Ward Education Councils, and the Capitol Hill Public School Parents Organization; we established our Office's utility by orienting the District to our services.

##### **Policy Influence:**

We began publishing the data and feedback we received from families through our casework by releasing of our first annual report within months of the Office opening. In it we proposed general systemic recommendations based on trends from the families we had served.

#### Year 2

##### **SY 2014-15: Establishing the Office**

**469 Cases**

##### **Office Infrastructure:**

In addition to the Ombudsman, the Office added an Assistant Ombudsman and two fellows.

##### **Casework Service Enhancement:**

We worked to prioritize the quality of services that we were able to deliver to families and we aligned our procedures with the standards of the United States Ombudsman Association and International Ombudsman Association.

##### **Outreach:**

We worked to increase the reach of our Office by translating brochures into the most common languages spoken in Washington DC, other than English. We also diversified our outreach strategy and disseminated informational materials to all DC Public Libraries and most DPR facilities. We also created our Office's first set of written processes and procedures.

##### **Policy Influence:**

We refined our data analysis in order to make more topical recommendations on school discipline, school safety, special education, and engagement in our second annual report. We were able to use our report findings to recommend changes to DCPS' discipline regulations. We were also invited to participate in broader policy discussions that related to the issues raised in our second report with a variety of organizations including: the Washington Bar Association, Every Student, Every Day Coalition, and the Latin American Youth Center.

#### Year 3

##### **SY 2015-16: Growth Mindset**

**478 Cases**

##### **Office Infrastructure:**

The Ombudsman and Assistant Ombudsman were joined by a Program Associate who was shared with the Office of the Student Advocate and four fellows. During this school year, however, the Assistant Ombudsman transitioned out of the Office.

##### **Branching out:**

We continued to see an increase in cases in our third year. We expanded our focus on diversifying our outreach efforts by developing more partnerships with government agencies and community organizations in addition to maintaining our focus on cases.

### **Year 3** (continued)

#### **SY 2015-16: Growth Mindset 478 Cases**

##### **Program Quality Enhancements:**

In order to continue improving our services and understanding of our own work, we partnered with the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinic to conduct an evaluation of our Office. This group interviewed over fifty stakeholders about our Office and found that there was a strong desire for us to engage in more systemic advocacy. The Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinic also helped us to design a Special Education Mediation system that we now use to assist families and schools as an alternative to formal proceedings.

##### **Outreach Enhancements:**

We worked to improve our outreach to charter schools, which has led to increased collaboration, particularly on questions of law and policy compliance.

### **Year 4**

#### **SY 2016-17: Operating a National Model 380 Cases**

##### **Office Infrastructure:**

This year began with only the Ombudsman and a Program Associate who was shared with the Office of the Student Advocate. As the year progressed, the Office replaced the former Assistant Ombudsman and added another Assistant Ombudsman. The temporary decrease in staff members as well as the Office's choice to refine the types of cases it handled and to streamline procedures to improve customer services resulted in fewer cases for FY2016-17 than FY2015-16 or FY2014-15.

##### **Policy Leadership:**

As a well-established Office, we began consulting with and supporting emerging education Ombudsman offices across the country, including the new offices in Charlotte, NC and in Pasadena, CA. Members of our staff were invited to speak at three national conferences to discuss the race and equity barriers that our students face in accessing public education. We also worked to improve the policy analysis in our annual report. We utilized this increased analysis to push for changes to policies for discipline, special education, response to intervention, and school climate.

##### **Focus on Excellent Customer Service:**

We began answering our phones live throughout the day, in an effort to address stakeholder concerns more quickly. This shift to answering our phones live resulted in a 23% increase in total calls to the Office. We were also able to decrease the time spent resolving complaints for stakeholders by half during this year.

### **Year 5**

#### **SY 2017-18: Individual Stories for Systemic Impact 472 Cases**

##### **Office Infrastructure:**

In this school year the Office was fully staffed with four fulltime staff members and the support of two part-time fellows.

##### **Policy Mobilizing:**

This past year we made an effort to engage communities in different ways. We began advertising our services on Metro rail and on buses; continuing our impact through a publication in the *Washington City Paper* on school choice and school quality; and serving on a panel in a judicial training for all DC Superior Court judges on the school-to-prison pipeline.

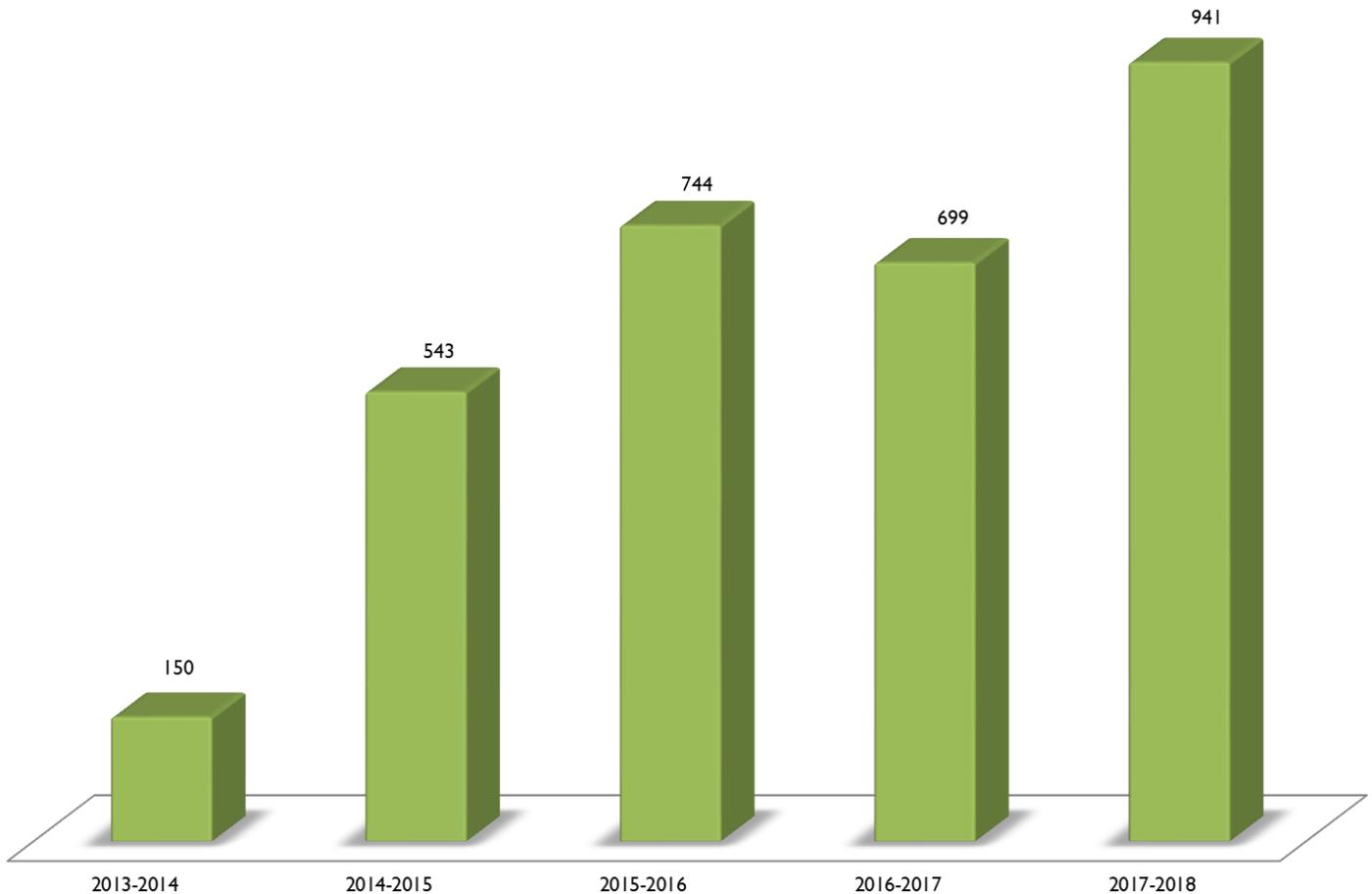
##### **Increasing Recognition of Our Value:**

As our work has grown, our Office has also grown from one to four fulltime employees which has allowed us to serve all stakeholders more efficiently. This past year we received more than two dozen cases and contacts from DCPS, charter LEAs, and schools.

## FIVE YEAR DATA

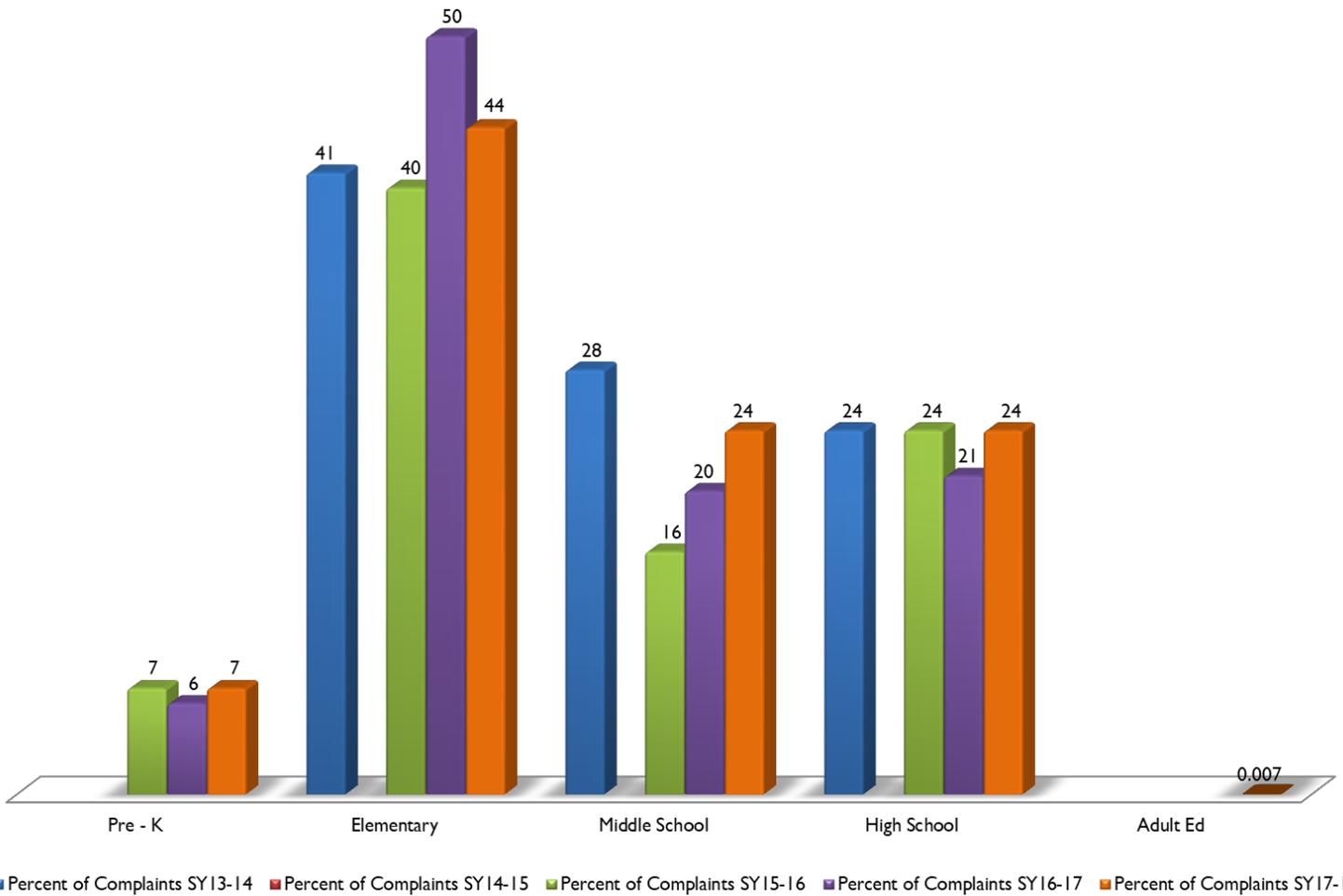
In the past five years, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education has managed over 2,000 cases. In our first year, with only one full time staff person, the Office processed over 150 complaints. In our fifth, and most recent school year (SY2017-18), with a staff of four fulltime employees and two fellows, our Office processed and managed over 470 cases. From SY2013-14 to SY2017-18, number of cases increased by 214%.

5 Year Comparison - Total Number of Contacts

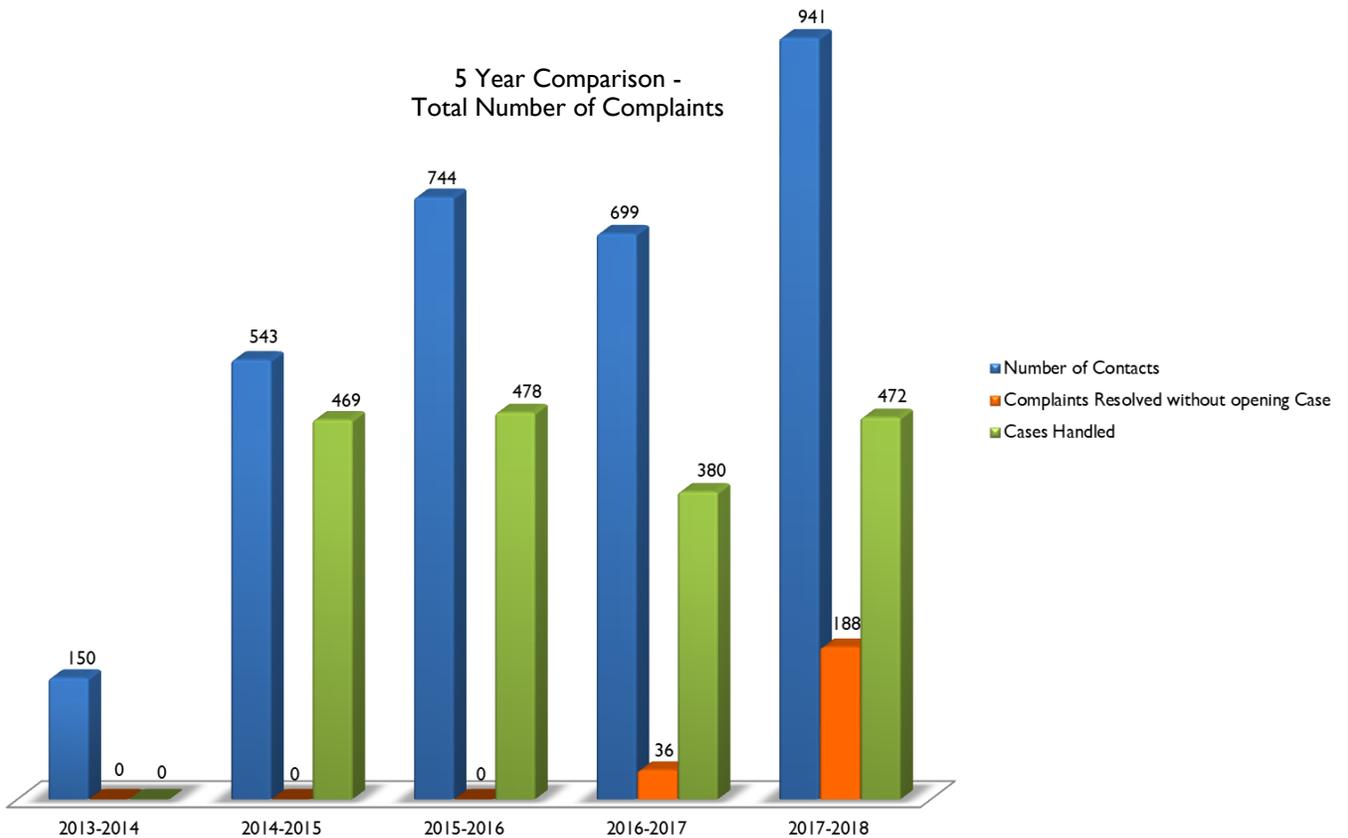


With the exception of SY2017-18, the percentage of cases that we received from each grade band, i.e. elementary, middle, and high school has remained constant. For school years 2013-14 through 2015-16, the percentage of cases we received that regarded elementary schools remained around 40% while the percentage of cases we received that regarded middle school or high schools were about 20% respectively, for each year. For SY2016-17, the number of elementary school cases increased to half of our total cases for the year while middle and high school cases remained the same as the previous years. For SY2017-18, the number of cases we received involving high schools and middle schools slightly increased while the number of cases from elementary schools slightly decreased.

### 5 Year Comparison - Complaints Analyzed by Grade Band



### 5 Year Comparison - Total Number of Complaints





## Section IV: Conclusion - Looking Forward and Appendix

Since the re-establishment of our Office, we have grown tremendously; our staff has increased from one to four; our yearly caseload has increased by 200%; and our total yearly contacts have gone from around 150 contacts per year to around 950 contacts per year. One of the primary tenets of our work is focused on assisting families in resolving issues at the school level. Over time and through the refinement of our practice, we have come to understand the role our Office also plays in shaping policies and practices that impact families' access to quality public education, and create barriers to educational attainment. As we learn through practice, we offer systemic insights and recommendations to make vital policy changes possible at the school and citywide levels. Furthermore, we have also realized a need to increase our interactions with schools, LEAs, and education leaders in a more proactive way by providing technical assistance and opportunities for relationship building and professional development. But, what does this mean moving forward? For the upcoming school year, and for the tenure ahead, we look to explore the following:

### Partnering with Local Non-Profits to Provide Technical Support to Schools and LEAs on the Implementation of McKinney Vento

Our cases suggest that students experiencing homelessness continue to face problems in accessing their education. Students experiencing homelessness that we have worked with have difficulty enrolling in school, and once in school, experience difficulty traveling to school. Parents have reached out to us in frustration with a process that retains children back a grade for situations beyond their control. Our Office would like to explore potential partnerships with local nonprofit organizations to provide assistance to LEAs.

### Convening Stakeholders To Discuss Ways to Address Persistent Achievement and Opportunity Gaps Through Coordination, Collaboration, and/or Policy and Procedural Changes to Impact the Educational Outcomes of DC students

In our 2016-17 annual report, we introduced an equity framework adapted from Portland's citywide equity plan. Such a plan encourages a citywide approach to addressing the achievement gap through the coordination of policies, procedures, and goals for both education and related sectors, such as health, housing, and jobs. Our Office would like to continue to explore the work the previous work we did in the area of equity, which might include the creation of additional recommendations and next step efforts. The Office will utilize partnerships with local and national stakeholders to provide guidance for such a plan.

### Exploring the Feasibility of a Citywide Response to Intervention Framework

In our 2016-17 annual report we described the academic problems that students experience due to inconsistently applied RTI. Our Office will leverage our relationships with local partners to survey the success of RTI implementations in the District. We will compare local RTI efforts to those of school districts across the nation to assess the feasibility of a floor of academic support protections, such as a plan to provide for universal screening and tiered supports and to provide support to students who do not qualify for special education. The Office would like to partner with local stakeholders in determining feasibility and explore funding options, such as an amendment to the definition of "at-risk" under the at-risk funding formula.

### Strengthening Relationships with Families and LEAs to Provide a Wider Impact to Families and Students

Since our re-establishment, we have worked to streamline our processes to ensure families and LEAs who contacted us received timely resolutions to the issues they faced. We use the data we collect through our practice to develop recommendations to inform local policy makers and leaders about what issues and barriers parents face in acquiring quality access to education. In the next term, the Office will continue to improve our internal processes by increasing our percentage of our calls answered live, decreasing resolution time, and increasing the media through which families and schools can access and utilize our resources. Students and families can only be successful if LEAs are successful. To that end, we aim to increase our supports to LEAs by offering technical support on relevant issues, by developing more school facing resources, and by strengthening our working relationships with individual LEAs.



## Appendix I

“Within 120 days of the end of each school year, submit to the State Board of Education and make publicly available, a report summarizing the work of the Ombudsman during the previous school year, including an analysis of the types, and number of complaints.<sup>3</sup>”

### Work Summary for SY2017-18

Contacts Received:  
(phone calls, emails, in person, third party communications)  
**941**

Complaints Addressed Without Opening a Case:  
**188**

Complaints Handled as Cases:  
**472**

Complaints Pending as of August 1, 2018  
**22**

Cases Examined and Resolved Informally:  
(providing information, coaching, providing solutions, etc.)  
**330 (70%)**

Cases Examined and Resolved Through Formal Processes:  
**62 (13%)**

Cases Dismissed as "Unfounded":  
**16 (3%)**

Cases where Recommendations were Made:  
**71 (15%)**

3. 3-A DCMR § 38-351. Retrieved from: <https://beta.code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/titles/38/chapters/3A/>

## Appendix II

### CATERGORIES & CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Categories are broad definitions that signal what is the primary reason that a student is unable to access their education. The definitions for categories used are below:

- Academic Progress: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education related to grades, credits, transcripts, and curriculum that impact learning or perception of learning.
- Access: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education unrelated to the curriculum, or due to procedural difficulties or gaps.
- Communication: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to real or perceived breakdowns in productive communication.
- Disability - Special Education: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to a student's diagnosed or suspected disability.
- Engagement - School Environment: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to the safety, behavior, and environment issues, or actions of students or staff against the student that signal a need for intervention or support from the school. This category also includes bullying and corporal punishment:
- Bullying: School Environment issues in which a member of the school community is bullying a student. This includes the legal definition, a family member's impressions, and sexual assault.
- Medical: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to medical, mental, or physical illness that signal a need for intervention or support from the school.
- Discipline - Expulsion/Suspension: Issues regarding a student who has been temporarily or permanently placed out of school due to a behavior or disciplinary infraction.
- Other: Issues preventing a student from accessing their education due to issues unrelated to any of the other issues.



## Appendix II

Contributing factors are observed barriers that hinder access to learning. Issues may stem from a lack of understanding, improper school implementation, or insufficient school training in supporting students. Contributing factors also provide more specificity. These contributing factors allow our Office to provide greater precision in communicating policy issues. This precision can better equip stakeholders to target interventions and policies around common pressure points that are often invisible at the policy level.

- **Academic Progress:** Contributing issues related to concerns about a student's academic progress.
- **Identification of Need:** Contributing issues related to an unmet need that result in a student's inability to fully access their education.
- **Bullying:** Contributing issues related to perceptions of bullying that have not been adequately addressed.
- **Communication/Relationship:** Contributing issues related to problems with communication or a damaged relationship between the school and the family.
- **Negligence:** Contributing issues related to a failure to implement a process appropriately.
- **Corporal Punishment:** Contributing issues related to perceptions of student mistreatment by school staff.
- **Placement Dispute:** Contributing issues related to disagreements about location of special education services.
- **Currently Out of School:** Contributing issue that result in the student not being enrolled in school.
- **Recurring Issues/History:** Contributing issues related to mistrust between the school and family due to prior unsuccessful interactions or engagement.
- **Discrimination:** Contributing issues related to perceptions of differential treatment based on a protected class as defined in DC's discrimination law that result in or contribute to an impaired ability for a student to access their education.
- **Restraint/Seclusion:** Contributing issues related to concerns about how a behavioral problem a student with an IEP or 504 plan is addressed by school staff.
- **Eligibility Dispute:** Contributing issues related to concerns about the criteria used to determine whether or not a student qualifies for specialized services.
- **Access:** Contributing procedures that hinder a student's ability to access their education.
- **Retention and Promotion Problems:** Contributing issues include challenges related to graduating on time, being promoted to the next grade, and receiving the right supports in order to be ready for the next grade level.
- **English Language Learner:** Contributing issues include challenges related to not being able to access one's learning due to a language barrier or failure to provide translation services to students.
- **School Environment:** Contributing issues include challenges related to the climate of the school, school safety, condition of the school, and types of engagement between families and school employees.
- **Enrollment:** Contributing issues include challenges related to enrollment into a (typically) in-boundary school.
- **Services Dispute:** Contributing issues include challenges related to the provision or quality of special education services of a student with a diagnosed disability and IEP.
- **Evaluation Dispute:** Contributing issues include challenges related to an evaluation decision made by the IEP team after evaluations have been completed following an evaluation request, delays in evaluations, or denial of an evaluation request.
- **Summer School:** Contributing issues related to challenges in accessing summer school programming.
- **Expulsion:** Contributing issues related to challenges that occur during or after what can be considered an expulsion process, or the risk of expulsion.
- **Suspension:** Contributing issues related to challenges that occur during or after what can be considered a suspension process, or the risk of suspension.
- **Extended School Year:** Contributing issues related accessing additional special education services, typically over the summer.
- **Transition Planning:** Contributing issues related to developing and implementing a plan for a student with an IEP to be prepared for life after completing secondary education.
- **Homelessness:** Contributing issues related to a family's status as homeless.
- **Transportation:** Contributing issues related to getting to and from school.
- **None Applicable:** None of the listed contributing factors apply to the case.
- **Medical Issues:** Contributing issues related to a medical need, which interferes with the student's ability to access their education.

DC Office of the  
**Ombudsman**  
for Public Education

