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Loudoun County Public Schools, Legislative, Audit and Policy Committee (LA&P) Meetings, Tuesday, August 19, 2025

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[00:00:00] But seeing as there are no registered speakers this evening, we will move on to our first item, which is 3.01 approval of the June 17th, 2025 draft minutes. As a point of privilege, I'd like to acknowledge that I inadvertently made a mistake when reviewing the meeting minutes this summer and would like to propose an amendment at this time.

[00:00:23] I move that the following language be added to Section 6, new business, strike none and replace it with Ms. Donahue proposed bringing policy 2520, participation by the public forward as new business. Second.

[00:00:42] Thank you. I wasn't here, so I'm like, I listen. Second. Yeah, thanks. The amendment has been properly moved and seconded. It was made by me and seconded by Ms. Chernoff. All those in favor, please say aye.

[00:00:59] Aye. i i'm seeing none opposed and with miss donahue absent for the vote the motion passes that said as chair the order of business is solely at my discretion and even though i hope to put it on the agenda this month i did not find it feasible for several several factors we are hearing reports tonight that are typically scheduled for august we did not have a fulsome preliminary discussion about the audit plan at our last meeting in June and we are unfortunately always constrained to one

[00:01:33] hour due to some scheduling conflicts this remains an important issue and will appear on the agenda at a future meeting next we will move on to our action item 4.01 the office of the auditor general's draft fiscal year 26 audit plan the purpose of the audit plan is to improve transparency the internal audit function and to keep the audit committee and others are the legislative audit and policy committee and other invested parties informed about audit management the draft audit plan has identified potential audits

[00:02:09] mr. Ahmad woods our Auditor General will be presenting mr. Woods the floor is yours miss Chandler point of order do we also need to approve the amended minutes yes thank you so much clarification in that case please hold we will go back would you like to make a motion I would I move that the minutes from the June 17th 2025 meeting as amended be approved thank you miss Chernoff the I second the motion so the motion has been properly made and by Miss Chernoff and seconded by Miss Chandler all those in favor please say aye aye aye

[00:02:48] seeing none opposed the motion passes to with Miss Chernoff and Miss Chandler in support and Ms. Donahue absent for the vote. That said now we will go back Mr. Woods the floor is yours. Thank you Madam Chair. Today I'm presenting the audit universe. There are 15 potential audits that are up for approval. I am suggesting that the committee approve five but also I'm also recommending that they do not consider number nine compliance with ID and equity as I believe

[00:03:28] there's currently an external review of our special education programs and so number nine I am not suggesting that we consider all other potential audits are at the discretion of the committee and I'm here to answer any questions if you have any.

[00:03:49] Oh and I'm also suggesting that we approve no more than five. Thank you. Thank you Mr. Woods. found this listed just to start to be very engaging and would be happy to see almost every considered that said I find that I am interested in supporting so I sort of started with three health safety and crisis response evaluation hiring and

[00:04:24] onboarding process if efficiency and facilities equity and infrastructure maintenance I know that is an issue that's near and dear to my constituency and I would be happy to have some reflection on that issue that said I'll be interested in hearing from our committee members today sure sure thank you Ms. Chandler I agree with you on the facilities and infrastructure I think that that is really important and you know we definitely have these

[00:05:03] conversations throughout the budget process and I know we all hear from our different schools and and bring those kinds of onesie twosie requests back and forth so to have a more fulsome picture of what that looks like I think I definitely support that things that are of interest to me number one I think government governance and risk management is of interest to me just given being on the board for 18 months and you know kind of now truly understanding how all those processes work seeing an audit there and knowing that we could kind of maybe shift some of those things might be helpful uh additionally did you say staffing and retention miss chandler or did

[00:05:37] you say onboarding okay um i feel like uh onboarding was also one of my top five but i staffing and retention is higher than that for me just in terms of looking at the numbers i know we are seeing some positive trends I talked to Ms. Bolan this week about where we were last year versus this year and we're seeing some positive trends but I want to make sure that we're evaluating what those programs are and what is producing those outcomes for us so those are really the ones that are at the top of my list if I were

to add another like extra in there would be professional learning and development I know that department is seeing some new leadership and some

[00:06:15] revamp and they're really focusing on teacher voice and more more teacher voice in the professional learning process much guided by the instructional framework so I think that that would be timely as we sort of align all of our practices to that framework I would love to see some of that but I agree with Miss Chandler I think this is a really fulsome list I think it's a great list for us to jump off from and continue to use but that is my two cents or ten for that matter Mr. Woods can I make a comment just for the committee's FY

[00:06:54] anytime we want to revisit the audit universe or add additional audits throughout the year or anytime the committee sees fit we can do so and so just because we approve certain audits today doesn't mean the audit plan is static we can update it at any time at a later date thank you for that clarification and then just for that since today we at least for now appear to be a committee of two could you please help me remember what the process was last year and what the next steps would be yes so because there's been a

[00:07:33] recess since the last time we performed or we reviewed the list which didn't occur last last go-around so we presented the list in May we approved it in June so in consecutive committee meetings we looked at the plan here we had a recess of about six or seven weeks and so if the committee feels more comfortable pushing the vote back to the next committee meeting only because we currently do have audits that we are performing and if you would like to have

[00:08:09] all committee members here that is okay because again the plan is a living document and as long as we have work and approved audits we have things we can do now until the committee feels comfortable approving a sufficient audit plan but I'm also okay with approving it today and there are at least two audits that are still on the schedule for this year that are likely to be carried over to yes we're currently performing three now and two other ones

[00:08:47] are in the pre-planning okay Mr. Knopf would you like to talk about about prioritizing, and then I wouldn't mind if I just could take a second to make sure I captured the ones that you acknowledged. So you said governance and risk management, staffing and retention, the facilities, right? That's two. Professional learning. Okay, so do you have any perspective on holding off? I mean, I will yield to your discretion. I would be willing to meet you

[00:09:24] halfway in terms of the health safety and crisis preparedness one as well as the facilities and infrastructure because we both agreed on that so I don't know if you would like maybe want to for sure I think facilities and infrastructure since both of us feel comfortable with that and then I would be interested in the health safety crisis as well so I could meet you halfway on that if maybe the third one could be staffing and retention instead of hiring and onboarding I think I could do that.

[00:09:55] I'm wondering if it could go together. I mean, that's a lot, but I, you know, I'm wondering if retention and staffing part of the issue is the hiring and onboarding process. So I'm wondering if that's maybe like, okay, tuck it in. But anyway, that was kind of what I was thinking, but I'm also willing to wait until Ms. Donahue is here if you feel like that is what's best for the committee.

[00:10:15] Is there anyone on staff who has a perspective on whether or not it would be possible to combine those two? Or which two again? I'm sorry. The two that are HR related. Yeah it's number seven

and number could a component of that be the hiring and onboarding.

[00:10:31] Sorry for staffing retention and onboarding we could narrow the scope for the onboarding. We have done a form I-9 audit so we would scope that out this audit as we feel comfortable with how form I-9 is a process which is part of the onboarding process and then we can go into other areas of onboarding and so we can narrow the scope on the onboarding process and combine it with the staffing and retention.

[00:11:05] That sounds great to me. I would be agreeable to that as well. Phone rule I know clearly you're not the only one. So just one more question about process.

[00:11:24] We will vote on it here in committee today and then the list of the audit plan will be presented to the school board but I don't really but we it's just presented as an information item it is not. Correct. The final process will be to present the approved audit plan to the full board, whether in working session or as an information, it would be essentially an information item only.

[00:11:50] And we are not necessarily putting them in order of priority? They are not presented in priority. It is at the discretion of the committee as to priority. All right, Ms. Chernoff, let's talk about how we would prioritize them. I think since we are both in agreeance about facilities and because that's so budget-driven that would be number one I agree I mean I'm fine either way so if you wanted to go one and then the health two and then staff retention three I'm I'm fine with that like I said I think these are all ongoing issues that you

[00:12:28] know as we work through will be prevalent I would be willing to put the professional learning and development as number three I think that student facing ultimately as is health safety and crisis preparedness and it affects it impacts our students and it also impacts our educators and so I could see that as being a priority so would that be a fourth then actually I would suggest having that be number three okay and then fourth would be staff retention you

[00:13:04] said no more than five right correct and again we can always add more at a later date not only just approve others on this list if anything were to arise during the school year or throughout the year we can revisit the audits that we perform

[00:13:40] our prioritization of the legislative audit and policy committee is the facilities and infrastructure in the first position number two would be health safety and crisis preparedness number three would be professional learning and development number four staff retention and combining that with the hiring

[00:14:10] onboarding process hiring and onboarding and finally we'll finish up with at number five with governance and risk management is there any more discussion by the committee if it's all right with the chair I'll make a motion sure I move that the committee adopt the proposed OAG draft FY 26 audit plan as just stated by Miss Chandler on the record and send it to the full school board as an information item at the next school board meeting in September thank you

[00:14:48] miss Chernoff the motion was made by Miss Chernoff out excuse me second and seconded by Miss Chandler all those in favor please raise your hand and say aye aye seeing none opposed the motion passes unanimously with Miss Donahue absent for the vote with that we will move on to our discussion items we have two tonight we will begin with item 5.01 the ombuds annual report the ombuds office was created in august of 2022 the office of the ombuds has provided an annual report summarizing the data gathered from

[00:15:24] constituent contacts received during the previous year miss Carrie Williams our ombuds will be presenting Ms. Williams the floor is yours thank you very much and I will take your direction if you would like for me to run through the report and just provide some high-level details as I will be reporting to the full board in October and my slideshow is also captured as well and that's what I would be presenting to the board yep the slideshow is good okay all right so

[00:15:56] Bushra if you could pull up the slideshow for me all right so we can skip through the first couple of slides and just you know making sure that we focused on the core values and the strategic goals and really I think what most of my visitors really speak to is just the time and space to listen so I think that the trust through listening and that really helps improve the communication and the relationships between constituents and the division and my data directly bleeds into goal 4 and the engaged community

[00:16:35] and you'll see that as one of the metrics that are reported out in the strategic plan the next slide I always highlight the four core values and I will speak to the confidentiality being one of the core values that most individuals I think reach out to me separately than being able to work with anybody in the school division to help them work through a problem to address an issue or concern but they like having that confidential space to work through it first and then discuss what options might exist many times they don't know what their options might be and that's why one of the reasons they appreciate the ombuds role that being that impartial neutral resource and and

[00:17:14] having an unbiased view because I don't have a stake in the game they may have tried to work through it with somebody else individually and then they're really just looking for somebody to and they oftentimes say am I crazy does it sound okay like am I am I looking at this appropriately and they really just like that that neutral voice and we're gonna speak later on this evening about independence and how my role is not reporting while I report to and I've evaluated under the chief of staff having that independence to work through issues or concerns to elevate them as I see fit or to approach maybe outside of

[00:17:51] a traditional pattern or pathway to resolve something and think outside of the box if needed and informality many people don't want to go down formal formal pathways but they might feel like that's their only option and so we present all options and try to address things informally, but also make them aware of formal options as needed. So the high level data that we'll talk about today is really looking at July 1, 2024 to June 30th of 2025. And I went, I had a 30 or 29% increase from the year prior to last

[00:18:28] year and that's 476 total contacts but that actually leads to many more meetings or or connections with those individuals so even though I had 476 individuals reach out that led to 544 constituents served and then you know many additional follow-up meetings because it's usually a preliminary conversation I might need to meet with individuals centrally provide back information so one contact might be one meeting it might be 13 or 14 it all

[00:19:04] depends on the situation at hand you'll see an increase year after year of employee cases I'll speak to that a little bit towards the end so I had a substantial increase in employees reaching out to me parent and family contacts remain pretty steady just small growth year after year and community members and students are maintaining slight increases one less student reached out last year than had done the year prior moving on to cases by voting district I provide that for you just so you can see which which districts are

[00:19:41] reaching out at which frequency encourage you know board members to refer individuals to me I can't always follow up with the outcome of that base because of the confidentiality but if especially if it's a multi-pronged concern that involves multiple offices and they don't really know where to start you can refer them to me and we can look at all of the issues and concerns break them down and make sure they have the appropriate pathways and then breaking down the cases by level that's pretty similar to last year as well with elementary being the biggest piece of the pie and with the number of schools and then sometimes I just don't know that information they remain completely anonymous or there's

[00:20:21] not you know a conversation that leads to me knowing or they might if their employees support the whole division so they wouldn't be in a particular category. All right moving on to the parent family community student cases. Most of them are categorized as general concerns.

[00:20:38] I do separate out special ed concerns that's so that I can track if I need an associate ombuds at more volume than I have Dr. Bowers supporting me what I need to focus on somebody who has a special education background in particular actually saw a slight decrease of special ed concerns that came in from the year prior to last year and breaking the primary concerns general concern categories down staff issues were the highest policies and regulations that tends to ebb and flow depending on what policies are up for review during that time and then beyond the special ed concerns were behavior and

[00:21:18] discipline that could be a discipline outcome or it could be concerns about about other students behavior and how that's impacting their children in the classroom and then academic and instructional programming concerns. And I do want to clarify safety and environment is typically on the student side more of physical safety and how they're feeling in the environment versus I did have a question from facilities like oh is this mold or is it like environmental factors.

[00:21:47] And that's that's not typically the types of cases I would categorize in safety and environment. Breaking down the special education cases a little bit more because I do present that to SEAC and to our special ed supervisors they are the highest category there.

[00:22:06] And again we did see a reduction from the year prior were procedural questions compliance concerns did have an uptick on 504 concerns that came in. IEP matters were five issues with staff and then two around policy and so again I just like to pull those out so that I can keep a closer look at those to help determine future staffing needs and the special education staff really likes to see those numbers broken down for our employee cases I break them down by location so I am seeing more school

[00:22:45] based concerns come in then central office concerns and then again I have a a pocket of people I never I don't get that information from them and as the last two years report relationships relationships relationships that tend to be the trend and the theme whether it's in supporting our families or our staff and employees and if you combine the evaluative relationships and the peer and colleague relationships that speaks to increased requests for facilitated discussions and informal mediations and and conflict coaching and I saw an increase in

[00:23:22] that last year and I anticipate more of those requests as we move forward when more people realize like oh there's a person in the county who that's their role services and administrative issues could be a variety of things decisions that were made that they were that the employee was not happy with and wanting to know how they can elevate it escalate it or work through it compensation and benefits career progression and development and then again some of the legal regulatory that might be some policy concerns and then the safety and physical environment there might actually be more about the

[00:24:00] spaces and more facility related on the next slide if you look at the action taken I'm always going to listen and talk about options but many times I'm providing direct information or referring an individual to the appropriate office and then I elevate concerns often so it might be because I've seen a trend or a theme around a particular topic and that would go to an assistant superintendent or a director or it might be an individual concern that I would elevate on behalf of that person anonymously or on their

[00:24:39] behalf because they've asked for an additional sometimes they are not feeling heard so if I am sharing the information on their behalf or engaging in the conversation alongside them sometimes I'd be asked to come into the conversation either as a neutral entity and sometimes I'm asked to come in to just facilitate the discussion and it's really in a neutral space I don't have a role other than to facilitate the agenda or to sit as a third a new silent witness or a neutral third party. Coaching as well and as I said the informal mediations. I do a lot

[00:25:17] of pre-conferencing just like with restorative practices. You might not come to the table for the discussion but those pre-conferences increased and led to 14 facilitated discussions last year. I'm often able to close out my cases in a couple of days. Sometimes that they're more protracted depending on the complexity of the case. How many issues we're trying to address or how many staff are involved to get everybody on the same page.

[00:25:45] So I've kind of combined my observations and looking ahead. My goal is pretty much to maintain the same as continuing to reach out to constituent groups, make sure people are aware of my office and the services that I provide.

[00:26:02] If we maintain those open lines of communication, I have observed and noticed that even in very difficult situations, When the relationship exists, no matter how complex the situation, that it's easier to work through with the open door approach, you know, clear and consistent lines of communication.

[00:26:20] And even when the outcome isn't what they're looking for, the relationship is still able to move forward. I do believe that I see the well there was a 10% increase from our families community et cetera that I continue to see an increase from employees because they really prefer that confidential space to work through their concerns and I also feel like our schools do a great job working with our students and families to get them what they need.

[00:26:49] And then typically if it's a complex situation or if there's a central office component to it and they're not sure who to navigate or who to work what's to navigate it then they reach out to me but they've almost always had some type of an initial attempt at resolving the issue at the school and oftentimes those needs are met. I want to continue my marketing and my outreach to constituent groups I've already been at our back to school for school nutrition for our transportation staff I'll be going to a custodial custodial manager meeting our new teacher Institute so anytime there is a space or a

[00:27:27] a place for me to at least have a table or hand out information please let me know and then I'm also increasing learning opportunities and developed a presentation for lead loud and which was well received and then going into it doesn't have to be a large space I can go into smaller groups I've had requests from departments and directors hey can you work with my team and just do this for a smaller group so anytime there might be a need around professional development I'm happy to support and so that's high level and I'll get a little bit more into the weeds at the presentation to the full board I did

[00:28:02] correct the numbers and they've already been updated and if you have any questions I'm happy to answer at this time thank you so much Ms. Williams Ms. Chernoff would you like to start thank you Ms. Williams this is I always look forward to this presentation I find this incredibly fascinating just the neutrality of it and who's accessing it and you know particularly appreciate the responsiveness to special ed and SEAC. I mean, they really appreciate those numbers and kind of knowing what's going on. Something that continues to stick out to me. And again, this is maybe just because it's a shared responsibility, I think, between you and something that we experience,

[00:28:41] which is when you talk about the provided, that you're providing info and the referral to the appropriate office, I see that that's, you know, the bulk of what you're doing. And really, I see you sort of as a connector so people can resolve some of those issues when that's appropriate. And we, I don't know, I don't want to speak for you, Ms. Chandler, but for me, I feel the same.

[00:28:59] A lot of the emails I get are not really like it's a school board issue. It's more I don't know who to go to or who to talk to. And I think a lot of that is just a symptom of our largeness. We are a big division, and people have lots of varying concerns. We have lots of departments. Things are changing. So I'm just curious if you find that those are easy loops to close, and then once you do that, do those things bounce back to you?

[00:29:24] Or is that pretty much like the departments take it? Because my experience is that once we've connected the people in our staff, they pretty much follow up and resolve it. So just curious your take on that as, you know, we experience it as well. I think it's pretty similar. Oftentimes it's a warm handoff.

[00:29:40] Here's the information. Sometimes, and I get feedback from central staff. They're like, can you let us know that they're coming? Sometimes no, because I've given them the information. they're my role is to empower them to to advocate for themselves and to navigate themselves and give them the tools to do so so oftentimes I will you know provide them the information or connect them with the individual and I don't necessarily know the outcome if it doesn't go well then sometimes they loop right back to me and then you know might be what what's the next level of elevation beyond that or you have exhausted all of your appeal rights there is no further elevation but then

[00:30:18] also letting them know I look for trends and themes in my data so that this concern, if it is replicating itself over and over again, then that's when I would go to Dr. Bergen or Dr. Spence and say, you know, this is more of a systemic trend that I'm seeing in my data, even though the individual outcomes, you know, I wouldn't be able to share the specifics of it, but then I look for those broader themes.

[00:30:43] Yeah, I appreciate that, and I would hope that that would sort of inform our communication and getting that information out to the public with how to navigate. I know we did a lot of work with that with student success talks. There was like a nice flow chart. And, you know, I just, I continue to feel like there's just a lot of people that they know to go to their school level, but if it's bigger than that.

[00:31:00] So I will remember that, you know, to continue to promote your office because I think it's important. Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Chernoff. I wanted to say I appreciate so much the effort that you put into outreach. And especially as I hear your reflection on what you've done in the back-to-school process and what departments you're going to I think it really sends the message that our division cares about our employees at every level and that you're you were there to be a neutral party if a situation comes up that support is needed so I just wanted to say that and

[00:31:38] I know that it's not just for staff it's obviously for everyone that's affiliated with LCPS but I think there's a lot of strength in that and I appreciate the work that you do I wanted to reflect back on something that you said about parents and community related to the safety issue would it be a fair assessment or generalization when it is completely a generalization I know we can't have any more detail but to say that it's more instead of being about safety and security or you know something that's a school-based or a district level safety issue that it's about safety and relationship that it

[00:32:16] might be about how an individual feels about how they are in the class that they're in or how they're being treated with a member of the class whether it be an educator or another student is that fair so for like a personal safety standpoint and whether that would be you know physical or emotional yes some of those are because IMB and it's not necessarily that another student has maybe maybe broken the you know violated the SR&R and that there was this issue it's that my child is not feeling safe in this situation because of and so I

[00:32:55] didn't link it directly to student discipline or behavior but that the concern that was coming to me is really about the safety or how that student was feeling in that classroom or it could be because of some behavior of other students it wasn't that it was directing impacting them but it was impacting their child and how they felt in the classroom or within that school community.

[00:33:18] That is fascinating. Thank you for that clarification. That's definitely something that I'll reflect on. I also wanted to just get a clarification on special education. Do you have any, just, are you able yet to articulate a pattern that could be possible around the decrease by 20% in special education cases?

[00:33:48] I don't believe, you know, I don't have any specific information as to why decrease. I think with additional outreach and more people knowing that I exist, you know, I was a little bit surprised by that because I appreciate the way that we're presenting now in SEAC and in LEAF and in MSAC where it's more not just sit and get informational.

[00:34:16] Like we're actually engaging in smaller groups and repeating ourselves multiple times so that we can have more dialogue around the topics. And not my first year because I didn't have data, but I've been presenting that data to those groups. Typically I involve the special education supervisor and then it doesn't often have to go beyond that, like up to the director, assistant director in those cases.

[00:34:43] I do think that when there's not an IEP involved, maybe that's why I'm seeing an uptick in the 504 is because we're considering more 504 options but now I don't have any hard or fast reasoning why behind that and I know that we're getting additional special education deans so hopefully that will help with you know serving the families at the school level thank you for that I'll be excited to see if there are any identifiable patterns in the future it'll it'll be interesting to see how this trend continues and then my last question

[00:35:17] Does your office use any metric that tracks satisfaction with engagement from the parties that you interact with, regardless of what their relationship is with LCPS?

[00:35:34] But is there anything that's perhaps similar to Let's Talk that gives you a sense of how people are feeling about the office? I do. And like with any customer survey responses, the number, the amount of feedback that comes back is minimal.

[00:35:50] And because I meet people where they are, whether it's via email, through the phone, through Let's Talk, my feedback form is available on my website. It's in my signature line. If they close out through

Let's Talk, they receive that link automatically, as well as that just user number that they can quickly click on.

[00:36:09] And if they are happy with the results, they usually get a 10. And if they're not, I get a one. There's not much in between when it comes to that feedback. And anecdotally, like, I'll get-- information you know from emails and thank yous and then if it if the feedback is not stellar then I always say you know what what could I what more how could I have done and you know I'm sorry that you're not satisfied with the outcome and then try to work through that when I receive it but I don't have enough data to support mathematically to say this is you know because it's very sporadic I think year prior I got seven returned and last year

[00:36:48] was like four so that's why I didn't include it this year because it's just not a large enough number to I think show a true representation that I'm reflecting on what mishernoff said earlier I would say that that also tracks with my experience as a school board member and serving in that sort of bridge capacity to the community I really did think I was finished but I have one more question your new associate ombuds could you give us a little bit of context and perspective on what how much time he's working how

[00:37:20] it's improved your working conditions just how has your role changed and how is he hoping in that in that way thank you yes he he's basically a lifeline because I was always worried that with the increase in the requests for facilitated discussions and the pre-conferencing that can and sometimes I get groups of 7, 10, 12 referred to me that can take weeks to work through and I wanted to make sure there was not an opportunity for things to slip through the cracks or for there to be a delayed response because oftentimes people reach out because they haven't heard back from somebody

[00:38:00] in a timely fashion and I don't want to be one more office that delays that response. So it's been great because then I can reach out if it's just a quick connection or with Dr. Bauer's experience in schools as well as central office and as a teacher he just has a vast knowledge of the division so he is able to look at parent concerns specifically with a broad lens or if it's an employee help you know navigating a concern I stick to a lot of the conflict resolution directly because I have further training with mediation around that topic but he's been great for kind of filling in those spaces in between I don't believe

[00:38:37] the volume yet is where we would need a .25 or a .5. So I would say on average, and we do weekly check-ins because it's nice for me to have somebody to bounce things off 'cause we all ombuds maintain that confidentiality with one another for me to just talk through and use him as a sounding board.

[00:38:58] So we meet weekly and then I assign him cases as needed. He engages in training and professional development as well. So it's going very well. You know, have a slightly bigger bucket of money to support that this year. And so instead of going to an FTE or a part-time ombuds, I think it financially makes the most sense to just have that resource available as needed.

[00:39:21] In the meantime, because we're not a point now, I don't want to be, you know, looking at somebody wondering when the next case is going to come in. But I definitely have a backup. And to be nice if I go to a conference or if I'm ill. Like, I don't want the wheels to fall off if I'm the only person in the division doing this role.

[00:39:39] Thank you. I appreciate that context. Ms. Chernoff, I just wanted to see if you have any follow-up. All right, thank you. With that, thank you for the presentation. You're welcome. And we will move on to our next item. Our next discussion item is 5.02, Staff Who Report to the School Board.

[00:40:01] I'm hoping that the committee will discuss the evaluation process of staff who report to the School Board, specifically the division council auditor general the ombuds and the clerk of the school board this is a conversation that has been ongoing with the superintendent's office and myself and I wanted to really have a conversation with the committee that gave us the opportunity to weigh the current processes and to determine if we find them appropriate and consistent or if there is any appetite for updating the underlying policies and perhaps

[00:40:39] making some changes to this process so with that Dr. Bergen will be presenting Dr. Bergen the floor is yours thank you Ms. Chandler so as a starting point at your request I asked the auditor general and the ombuds to call together some information about what are practices happening in other school divisions in Virginia and you have that information to you in a handout tonight there are not there's not a terribly large number of school divisions in Virginia that have an Auditor General so that information is summarized for you and I'm going to direct you to the information

[00:41:19] and have the Auditor General speak to the information he put together and then beyond those two pages there's some bulleted information that the Ombuds put together for you about some best practices relative to the evaluation process for ombuds in Virginia and other places in the country where they exist again it's an unusually small number across the country that school divisions that are investing the resources and having an office of an ombuds and then I suggest we get through those two and then we can move on to board clerk perhaps if

[00:41:55] that that is all right with you so I'm going to turn to the Auditor General to see if you if he can walk you through the material that he's gathered for you answer your questions. Thank you Dr. Bergen. Mr. Woods. Thank you. And Dr. Bergen is correct. It is a luxury to have an internal audit office. It's usually based on the size of a school district or division if they have those resources to allocate it. When I did the research the city of Alexandria does not have a similar position. They have RACI or equivalent to RACI which they use as their accountability office but they do not have an

[00:42:34] independent internal audit office. So what we have here are four school divisions within the state of Virginia. We have Arlington Public Schools. We have our neighboring county Fairfax. We have our county LCPS to show comparison to the other counties as well as Prince William County and Virginia Beach City public school public schools.

[00:43:00] For this particular office the standards Suggest that to maintain independence that we report functionally to the board or the highest level of governing body and administratively to either the superintendent a CEO or even general counsel or a chief financial officer.

[00:43:28] And this is only in administrative roles only. So approving my leave, office space, so if there's changes in facilities and people need to move around, that will be done on the administrative side. And so the day-to-day workings of the administrative side is usually done by people who are here on a day-to-day basis, which are, again, at the highest office.

[00:43:56] But then the evaluations are done by usually the board for my position and as you'll see here all these four counties it is either the board or the audit committee through the board that performs the

performance evaluation.

[00:44:14] And what I've provided is the policies for each of those counties as well as a note that is directly from either their policy or their charter on how they perform their evaluations in their county. Thank you, Mr. Woods. Would you like to move on to the next staff position or should we have questions as we go?

[00:44:40] I'll defer to you. I'm also just time checking with you on, again, I'll defer to you if you want to take questions as we go or wait until we receive all the information and then go back to questions. Why don't we go through the presentations to at least have the ability to hear all of the information.

[00:44:57] Okay, certainly. all right so that was the first two pages of the handout and then the next set of information again it's a relatively small set of school divisions across the nation that have the resources to have an office of ombuds but we have that information for you also and so I will turn it over to Miss Williams to review the information that she's pulled together for you. All right thank you so when this was presented to me as a question under you know how other divisions operate I think really the International Ombuds Association is the

[00:45:33] presents the criteria and they their stance is that you should report to the highest the highest entity within the organization and I think in your corporate setting that's going to be either the CEO or it might be the president of the corporation not necessarily to the board that supports you know the decision-making and some of the broader discussions of the organization so for appearance and making sure that they they operate independently it's about the reporting line and the structure you should operate

[00:46:11] outside of that so in considering like does it does it make sense to have maybe a dotted line while I do an annual report present an annual report to the board similar to a mob with the daily functions and the administrative roles and budget oversight that's how the policy was written for the evaluation standards and I do feel like my job description and my function is supported by the administrative evaluation that I've gone through over the last three years there are approximately 40 school divisions ombuds offices ebb and flow

[00:46:47] with budget cycles we have collected that data as a group when we meet and And interestingly enough, the four offices that I found that do are supervised by and evaluated by the school boards are in the DMV, Prince William, Frederick County, Montgomery, and Howard.

[00:47:06] And Montgomery operates a little bit differently, though, because that role is more, I think, of a classical ombuds where they're also kind of the board aid and they filter and review, you know, emails, phone calls that come in and then kind of pull cases from that or contacts from that.

[00:47:23] And then he will, if it's an informal process, actually do some investigating and decision making. So I think that role operates a little bit differently. But both in Prince William and Frederick, the full board provides input to the evaluation of those roles.

[00:47:40] Otherwise, in my meetings, it's either the superintendent, chief of staff, or maybe like Fairfax County is the chief experience officer. might be the equity division depending on what cabinet level position they feel aligns with that role thank you okay and then during agenda planning we also talked about pulling together information we could find for you relative to the board clerk so we had a conversation with the VSBA had to ask

[00:48:18] what they were aware of in terms of best practices so that information is summarized for you on the last page of the handout I can share with you anecdotally there's 132 school divisions in Virginia and the vast majority of them the clerk of the board is also the executive assistant to the superintendent so it is a singular individual and they would be evaluated by their superintendent and would be supporting their school board so again it's going to be a very small number that we could look at to determine who do we compare to functionally in Loudoun County the clerk of the school board is

[00:48:56] recommended is hired by is an individual hired by the administration and recommended to the board for you to appoint on an annual basis to serve as clerk to the board and we have no concerns at all about our current structure we're simply bringing this information to you at the request of you Mrs. Chandler for a first conversation with this committee to see if there's an appetite from the committee to have further conversation with the rest of the board as I understand it.

[00:49:24] If we were to consider any of these positions in a change they're all rooted in policy that we would have to start with the policy but not to get ahead of ourselves we wanted to bring you the information about what are some of the best practices from the governing organizations particularly for these two individuals their offices also I think for the viewing public we should acknowledge their offices are fairly new to Loudoun County they're in year number three right and likewise so they were create their offices were created just prior to this board being elected and just prior to this current administration coming to office so it's okay that we review what was done in two years ago if we want to make any changes

[00:50:03] we would talk about it and then we would circle back to policy and then we would operationalize any changes that may be rooted in policy but I'll turn it back to you for questions about the information we presented here today thank you dr. Bergen I will also ask if we could have some additional information about the council's office I would love to have some perspective on what that structure looks like typically in the you know across the nation but also in the northern Virginia region I do I believe that we should plan soon to

[00:50:43] revise our council policy 2230 which I guess the current revision was in 2016 it's time um so um and you know i i think it's worth having a conversation um there is a lot of dotted line structure um especially in mr allen's office and it would be worthwhile um talking about whether or not independence is a key factor um in that office as well and how that would work

[00:51:16] of course with associate counsel and um i would very much like to engage in that conversation thank you so much for pulling together this information it is very helpful to be able to reflect on professional standards and what's typical and i would be curious to hear from my committee member any thoughts thank you madam chair and i am also very grateful for this conversation i think it's important i think it's timely i think it reflects the desire of many of the board members that are you know starting to have questions about these things as far as the clerk and the auditor and the ombuds goes what I would

[00:51:56] like to see is some consistency if they're outside entities I think that there should be evaluation processes that involve the board obviously looking at the different counties for the auditor is we seem to be the only one where the superintendent is the one that evaluates I think I find that curious and I think that may be involved because you report to the committee and you report to us and we're working with you on those audits it would make more sense to kind of shift that if that if that needs to happen in policy then I'm open to that I think ombuds similarly just for clarification right now it is

[00:52:32] superintendent or designee and the chair of the board for ombuds so is that am I no I'm not under you know it's specifically in policy reporting to and supervised and evaluated for budgetary and evaluation purposes day to day leave that type of thing to the chief of staff okay so I might like to see some shifts there as well I don't really see any problem with our clerk process either I think that that is a good practice to be a point you know to be hired and then appointed by the board I agree a thousand percent that 2230 needs to be looked at it really doesn't say anything in my opinion except that we can have

[00:53:11] someone and the fact that it hasn't been revised in so long and I also think that 3130 the evaluation of the superintendent needs to be updated I think that you know it was confirmed in 2021 but it hasn't been revised since 2015 and Loudoun County Public Schools has been through a lot as it relates to the superintendent since 2015 and we do have some clear processes and I understand the confidentiality of the contract of the superintendent and the closed sessions that need to happen in terms of ratings and things like that and i respect those processes but i think the practices and protocols we could be more transparent in that area so i would be open to having those

[00:53:48] conversations as well so i will leave it at that thank you thank you miss Chernoff um i would just come back to really the reason why i wanted to have this conversation consistency is something that matters quite a lot to me which is why i asked for this entire set of employees if um i know things have been done in different ways with different employees in the past we have employees you know your roles are very new as dr bergen said and and so for me it really was an exercise in making sure that we have the right processes in place and the policy

[00:54:27] it appropriately outlines what the board's intentions around those processes should be so thank you for that discussion that will help me as i um decide how to agenda plan for the rest of the fall um with that we are very close to time um mr woods are you able to get through your item in the next four minutes or should we hold that for next month i can try but to be on the safe side we can hold it to the next month all right um thank you i will hold that for the next

[00:55:00] month I appreciate your context and with that I will ask and also thank you for being here mr. Sutton I appreciate the fact that you're here and I would know okay well I know we have other meetings too but with that those items will appear on the next month's agenda and with that I will ask is there any new business Michelle enough this relates exactly to this I know that schedules difficult but i really hate being the reason that we can't do the work in this committee and that it

[00:55:36] backs up to another committee so i would like to work with the chair of prog performance monitoring as well as you miss chandler to see if we can find some wiggle room because it it feels rushed i rush into my other meeting um i'm prepared but it's a lot and you know tonight we're doing some goal setting and stuff for performance monitoring that i really want to be a part of but also these are two really important topics as well that our staff came and sat through our whole meeting so i i always feel badly when we don't get to the work.

[00:56:02] So if we could just kind of work that out with Ms. Donahue and see if we can find some wiggle room, maybe bump it up a half hour. I can try to be flexible and maybe we can figure that out. - Thank you for bringing that forward. That's very thoughtful. And I would be in favor of that as well. With that, this meeting of the Legislative Audit and Policy Committee is now adjourned.

[00:56:26] Thank you for coming out and be safe going home.



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