

Incorporating Public Comments: Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

In spring 2026, the Olmstead Implementation Office (OIO), in partnership with the Dendros Group, Inclusion Consultants, and state staff, held a public comment period. This included:

- Virtual meetings
- An online survey in multiple languages
- Individual interviews
- Submissions from organizations
- Email comments

This document includes themes from all public comment. Agency teams were asked to address how feedback was incorporated into their goals and strategies in the Olmstead Plan.

For more information about this feedback, please review the crisis services and education public comment summary report.

Crisis Services Goal 1

Crisis Services Goal 1: Fewer children and teens in foster care will experience institutional Placements

Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) did not update their goal or strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

No change was made based on these specific strategy suggestions. DCYF agrees with many of the concerns raised, including the need for earlier access to services, stronger community-based supports, and reduced administrative barriers.

Many of the suggested strategies would require new funding, legislation, Medicaid or waiver policy changes, provider reimbursement changes, expanded service capacity, or action by other agencies outside DCYF's direct authority. For example, strategies related to mobile crisis capacity, waiver capacity, provider reimbursement, crisis beds, and fast-track funding mechanisms would require cross-agency action and resources beyond this goal.

Within DCYF's purview, the goal continues to focus on the areas where the agency has influence: policy guidance, workforce training, cross-system coordination, technical assistance, child welfare data, and collaboration with counties, Tribes, juvenile justice partners, and other state agencies. DCYF will use the public comments to inform future cross-agency conversations and longer-term planning, but the specific suggestions were not added as new strategies at this time because they would require review to determine authority, funding, implementation steps, and responsible agencies.

General feedback themes for all crisis goals

These themes were general for all crisis goals not just the DCYF crisis goals.

Feedback theme: Intersectionality

Community members said the state must address disparities based on other identities held by people with disabilities. These identities can include race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, language, and more.

DCYF updated their goals or strategies based on this feedback. The agency shared:

We added language to clarify how this goal addresses intersectionality. The goal now more explicitly recognizes that children with disabilities may also experience disparities related to race, ethnicity, culture, language, poverty, and involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

We also clarified that this goal aligns with related efforts to reduce unnecessary family separation, address disproportionality, improve permanency outcomes, and support children in family and community-based settings whenever possible. This includes alignment with the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act and the federal Family First Prevention Services Act.

Feedback theme: The Olmstead Plan crisis goals should address crisis prevention

DCYF did not update their goals or strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

No change was made to the goal or strategies because the existing language already centers prevention and early support. The goal states that DCYF will focus on prevention by cross-training the workforce so staff better understand the full range of supports available for children and families. This is intended to help connect families to services earlier and reduce the likelihood that a child will need an institutional setting. The goal also acknowledges that families of children in institutional settings often report they were unable to access the right supports early enough, which is the concern this strategy is designed to address.

In addition, this goal connects to DCYF's early care and education goal, which focuses on equipping the workforce to support early inclusion for children with disabilities. Early inclusion is an important prevention strategy because it helps children build positive relationships, participate in community settings, and avoid later exclusion, instability, or crisis. The early care and education goal supports this by strengthening training, coaching, consultation, and other supports for the adults who care for and teach young children.

Feedback theme: The shortage of well-trained staff negatively affects crisis prevention and services

DCYF did not make updates to the goals and strategies based off this specific feedback. The agency shared:

No change was made because the existing goal and strategies address staff training and workforce knowledge within DCYF's purview. We agree that staffing shortages and staff recruitment affect crisis prevention and services. For this goal, DCYF focused on the levers most directly connected to its role, including child welfare workforce training, guidance, technical assistance, and cross-system coordination. Broader workforce recruitment, staffing levels, and provider capacity are shared system issues that would require coordinated strategies with other agencies and workforce initiatives.

Within DCYF's role and in collaboration with other agencies, the strategies focus on strengthening the knowledge, coordination, and preparedness of the workforce that supports children and families. This includes cross-training, so staff better understand the full array of children's mental health, disability, child welfare, and community-based supports. It also includes collaborative training strategies to support juvenile justice facilities and frontline staff in responding to mental health crises and statewide training on topics like trauma-informed care and suicide prevention. These efforts are intended to help staff feel more prepared and better equipped to connect children and families to appropriate supports.

Education Goal 4

Education Goal 4: more staff will be equipped to support children with disabilities in early care and education (ECE)

Feedback theme: There is a need for a student-centered goal

The DCYF team updated their goal and strategy based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

We clarified the goal. It emphasizes that in early childhood, supporting the adults who care for and teach children is one of the primary ways to support children. This goal focuses on equipping early care and education staff with the training, coaching, consultation, and

resources they need to support each child's strengths, needs, culture, disability, development, and family context.

We also kept a strategy focused on improving data. DCYF has identified a need to begin gathering better data on attendance and inclusion of children with disabilities in early care and education programs. This will provide a baseline to help DCYF develop more child-centered measures, goals, and strategies in the future.

Feedback theme: Concerns about the need for more staff training

DCYF did not update their goal or strategy based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

Staff training is already the focus of this goal.

Feedback theme: The goal does not address staffing issues adequately

DCYF did not update their goal or strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

While this goal does not directly address broader staffing issues such as wages or workforce supply, it supports staffing stability by increasing training, coaching, consultation, and other supports for early childhood staff. These supports are intended to help staff feel more prepared, reduce burnout, and improve retention.

DCYF also supports other efforts that address early childhood workforce challenges, including programs related to compensation and benefits. More information about DCYF's programs to support Early Care and Early Learning can be found at [DCYF's Programs Directory](#).

Strategy Ideas for Education Goal 4

There were many specific strategy ideas shared with DCYF about Education Goal 4. Some ideas included communications access, training and capacity, and funding needs.

DCYF updated some of their strategies based on specific strategy ideas shared during public comment. The agency shared:

We made several clarifying edits to strengthen the strategies and better reflect the public feedback.

First, we added clarification about attendance data and future measurement. Public comments asked for outcome measures that better reflect the actual experiences of children with disabilities, including informal suspensions and expulsions. DCYF does not currently have reliable data to measure informal suspension or expulsion across ECE settings. However, the goal now more clearly explains that DCYF is working to study attendance and inclusion in ECE

programs, including disaggregation by disability, to support stronger child outcome measures in the future.

Second, in response to comments that the strategy could create more administrative burden, we clarified the purpose of the framework to align training and supports across ECE programs. The framework is intended to reduce duplication and overlap across training systems while improving staff access to consistent, high-quality training, coaching, and practical supports that help staff meet children's individual needs in early childhood settings.

Third, in response to feedback about increasing staff training on ableism and disability justice, we clarified an existing goal strategy related to the Center for Inclusive Child Care's Early Childhood Leadership Development Program. The clarification states that anti-ableism and disability training are core components of the work to better equip staff to support children with disabilities.

Finally, in response to feedback that the goal should focus on understanding and supporting children's behavior rather than only "behavior management," we added a commitment that DCYF will review programming and coaching approaches. This creates a clearer expectation that training and coaching should help staff understand children's needs and support their participation, rather than pathologizing or correcting children.

DCYF did not update strategies based on other specific strategy ideas shared during public comment. The agency shared:

No change was made in response to the specific recommendation to fund early childhood programs to prevent future issues. DCYF agrees that early childhood investments are an important prevention strategy. We would like to provide additional context about current funding already administered through DCYF. This funding includes child care assistance, early learning scholarships, workforce compensation supports, educator scholarships and retention bonuses, child care access grants, and regional grants for child care programs.

The Olmstead goal builds on these existing investments by focusing specifically on training, coaching, consultation, and data improvements to build early care and education providers skills and capacity to strengthen inclusion of children with disabilities in early care and education settings.

DCYF recognizes and agrees with the comments about the importance of communication access in early childhood. For young children who are Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing, or blind or low vision, early identification and connection to supports can be critical for language development, communication, family connection, and participation in early learning settings.

There are existing state and community supports that help families access information, resources, and connection related to the Deaf, Deafblind, and hard of hearing communities,

Deaf culture, DeafBlind supports, and communication access. Through DHS, funding supports a contract for Deaf Mentor Family Services, which is designed for children and families from birth to age 6. Through MDH, a contract provides unbiased parent-to-parent support to families with children who are Deaf, Deafblind, or hard of hearing. Families may also be connected to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Guide Program, the Minnesota DeafBlind Project, and DeafBlind Services Minnesota.

Service coordination is also a required component of Part C early intervention services. Part C providers can share information, resources, and connections with families based on the needs of the child and the priorities identified by the family. Help Me Grow serves as a referral pathway, while Help Me Connect is a directory families can use to locate services and supports.

For these reasons, DCYF did not add a separate strategy to this goal. The current strategies continue to focus on strengthening workforce supports, so young children with disabilities, including children with communication access needs, can participate more fully in early care and education settings.

General feedback themes for all education goals

These themes were general for all education goals not just the DCYF education goal.

Feedback theme: Schools need more and better resources to support students.

DCYF updated their strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

We clarified the strategies to better describe how this goal equips early care and education staff to meet the needs of children with disabilities. The feedback reinforced the importance of strengthening the early childhood workforce, so children with disabilities can be included and participate meaningfully.

Feedback theme: Goals are not ambitious enough

DCYF did not update their goal or strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

The reporting of the overall target goal will be every three years as each study concludes. This is an appropriate cadence for the intent of the goal. Training and coaching to change staff behavior takes time and is not an intervention that will have immediate outcomes.

Additionally, it is possible that with gained knowledge, more of the early childhood workforce will report that they need additional support and training. This would be a positive result in that the numbers may increase initially but decrease in the long-term.

Feedback theme: Teachers and school staff need better training about disability

DCYF updated their strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

This feedback aligns with the intent of the goal and strategies included in the draft. We clarified how the existing strategy to invest in expanding the Center for Inclusive Child Care's Early Childhood Leadership Development Program includes a focus on anti-ableism and disability training.

Feedback theme: Teachers and school staff need more support and resources

DCYF did not update their goal or strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

This already aligns with the focus of our goal which is to provide more support and resources to the early care and education workforce to ensure meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities.

Feedback theme: The goals need more focus on accountability and enforcement

DCYF did not update their goal or strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

Early care and education programs already include accountability for child health and safety, supervision, staffing, training, inspections, correction when programs are not in compliance, and public information for families.

These accountability systems apply to all children in care, including children with disabilities. Even when disability is not named in every requirement, these standards help support safer and more responsive environments for children with disabilities.

DCYF also supports early learning accountability and quality improvement through Parent Aware, Minnesota's quality rating and improvement system. Parent Aware provides Star Ratings and incentives for programs to go beyond basic licensing requirements through additional training, coaching, and professional development.

For these reasons, DCYF did not add a separate enforcement strategy to this Olmstead goal. The goal is focused on increasing access to training, coaching, consultation, and supports that help early care and education providers better include and support children with disabilities, while building on accountability systems that are already in place.

Feedback theme: The plan should address the diversity of student needs

DCYF updated their strategies based on this specific feedback. The agency shared:

Added clarification to the strategy about creating a framework to align training and supports across ECE programs. This framework will help staff better meet the diverse needs of children in these settings.