



**DENDROS
GROUP**

2642 University Ave W
Saint Paul, MN 55114

Olmstead Plan Public Comment Meeting Report - Education

April 11, 2026 - 1 pm - 3 pm

Meeting Summary

The April 11th education public comment meeting was hosted by Dendros Group virtually via Zoom. The goal of the conversation was to gather public comment on the draft Olmstead Plan education goals. There were eight participants.

Meeting Agenda

Facilitation Team:

- James Poteet (Dendros Inclusion Consultant)
- Rich Pennington (Dendros Inclusion Consultant)

Schedule:

- 1:00 pm - 1:20 pm: Welcome
- 1:20 pm - 2:00 pm: Presentation on Draft Olmstead Plan and Education Draft Goals
- 2:00 pm - 2:50 pm: Public Comment in Facilitated Breakout Rooms
- 2:50 pm - 3:00 pm: Closing, Evaluation and Further Engagement Opportunities

Registration & Attendance

12 people registered for the meeting. Eight people attended and participated in public comment.

The participants identified as follows:

Perspectives

- Six are persons with disabilities
- Three are parents/caregivers of someone with a disability
- Five work in a disability-related field
- One is a service provider

MN County or Tribal Nation of Residence

- One in Carver County
- One in Dakota County
- One in Hennepin County
- Two in Ramsey County
- One in Wright County
- Two did not disclose

Age Group

- Two 35-44
- Three 45-54
- One 55-64
- One 65+
- One did not disclose

Gender

- One Man
- Four Women
- One Woman, Nonbinary, Transgender
- Two did not disclose

Race and/or Ethnicity

- One Hispanic or Latino/a/x/e
- Five White
- Two did not disclose

Military/Armed Forces Status

- Eight are not a member of the military/armed forces

Experience in the Following Settings

- Five in classrooms only (or primarily) for people with disabilities
- One in day programs only for people with disabilities
- One indicated experience as the only deaf student in mainstreamed setting with American Sign Language (ASL)/Pidgin Sign English (PSE) interpreter access

Participant questions from registration:

The registrants were asked, “Do you have any questions about the Olmstead Plan or the process that you'd like covered in the presentation?” The following questions were asked:

- How would the draft help deaf child access to mode of communication while restraint and seclusion?

Goals Overview

The following are the draft goals presented to the participants of this public comment meeting.

Education Goal 1: More students with disabilities will learn in integrated classrooms.

- Measurable goal: By January 1, 2027, at least 65.3% of students with disabilities will be taught in the most integrated setting.

Education Goal 2: Schools will better engage families of students with disabilities.

- Measurable goal: By February 1, 2027, at least 72% of families of children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) will report that schools facilitate engagement.

Education Goal 3: Fewer students with disabilities will be suspended and expelled.

- Measurable goal: By February 1, 2027, 3.55% of school districts and charter schools will be identified as disproportionately disciplining students with disabilities. That is about 17 school districts and charter schools.

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

- Measurable goal: By 2029, 40% or fewer of early care and education staff will report they need additional support or training around behavior management.

Education Goal 5: Fewer students with disabilities will experience maltreatment at school.

- Measurable goal: By June 30, 2027, the number of students with disabilities identified and confirmed as victims of maltreatment will decline by at least two students (to 26 students or fewer). This would be a decrease of at least 0.001% of the total number of students with disabilities.

Education Data Goal 1: Adolescent students with disabilities released from correctional facilities will have an opportunity to continue their education.

- Focus: The DOC wants to write a goal about students with disabilities' progress in high school after they leave correctional facilities. The goal will be about: school attendance, behavioral incidents, progress toward graduation.

Education Data Goal 2: Incarcerated adults with disabilities will have access to education supports before release.

- Focus: The DOC wants to write a goal about incarcerated individuals with disabilities and education. The goal will focus on coordinated education and reintegration planning before release.

Summary

Overview

The following discussion questions were presented to the participants of this public comment meeting.

1. What would make these goals more effective to improve the lives of Minnesotans with disabilities?
2. What would make these goals more effective to better integrate Minnesotans with disabilities in community life?
3. What's missing from these goals?

Participants shared consistent concerns about the state's draft education goals. The most fundamental critique was that the goals overemphasize physical integration into mainstream classrooms while neglecting instructional adaptation, communication access, and individual learning needs. Multiple participants argued that for some disability groups—particularly Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students—integrated settings can be actively harmful, and segregated, language-rich environments would be ideal. A recurring request was for explicit disclaimers on relevant goals recognizing that integration does not fit all disability groups, along with data disaggregation by specific disability category rather than lumping everyone under “disabled.”

Another major theme was the absence of accountability and specificity. Participants noted that key terms like “family engagement” remain undefined, that schools routinely violate federal law by failing to present genuine placement options, and that IEPs are manipulated based on resource constraints rather than centering student needs. Feedback called for redefining engagement as “collaborative partnership,” adding mechanisms to ensure family input is documented and acted upon, and requiring monitoring authority to prevent maltreatment.

On systemic reform, participants argued that the state will keep failing until it integrates teacher training (ending the separate preparation of general and special educators), invests heavily in support staff (counselors, restorative practice specialists, behavior intervention experts), and expands goals beyond early care to include all grade levels through transition. Several recommendations focused on root causes rather than consequences: addressing communication barriers as the primary driver of behavioral issues, treating behavior as communication, and adopting developmental approaches instead of purely behavioral ones.

Specific practical proposals included a standardized one-page Learner Profile for every student with a disability, peer-to-peer parent support groups within schools, and wraparound services for formerly incarcerated students and adults. Overall, participants called for raising the ambition of every goal above existing legal minimums, with clear metrics, enforceable timelines, and genuine partnership with families and disability communities.

Findings by Goal

Goal 1: More students with disabilities will learn in integrated classrooms.

Add a required one page Learner Profile to (Individualized Education Programs) IEPs to shift focus from physical integration to instructional adaptation.

Multiple participants argued the current goal overemphasizes physical setting while ignoring how teaching must adapt to individual learning needs. One participant stated the physical environment “has nothing to do with the need for the integration” and called this “a huge gap in our educational system.”

The same participant provided a concrete example: “My son, specifically, he is a gestalt language learner... But that knowledge of what it means to be a gestalt language learner is really lacking in our system.”

Frustrated by this gap, the participant created a one-page learning profile for her son: “A one-pager that said, here’s how he learns. So, adapt the way that you teach. Then you can truly integrate him.” They argue that “it has nothing to do with the physical space, but everything to do with how we teach.”

The participant noted that the information already exists in the (Individualized Education Program) IEP but is “buried in page 8 of 25 of the IEP. So no one gets to it.” The proposed solution is to “elevate it into just one pager” so that when a student joins classmates, “the teacher knows exactly how they need to communicate so they can integrate him into that group.”

The participant proposed a specific measurable target: “100% of all students [in Minnesota] with disabilities have a learning profile completed and documented” as a standardized one-page document. Another participant supported this, noting that existing tools like the Disability Hub’s [Charting the Life Course One Page Profile](#), is a fantastic resource.” The same participant emphasized that introducing a template “takes probably a few months.”

Revise teacher training and licensure to prepare all educators for integrated classrooms.

Participants identified the segregated teacher preparation system as a root barrier. One participant relayed a PACER Center (a nonprofit organization that improves educational opportunities and enhances the quality of life for children and young adults with disabilities and their families) colleague’s view that “We’re doomed to keep failing at this goal until we integrate teacher training,” noting that “As long as we train some teachers to teach

non-disabled students and other teachers to teach disabled students, integrating our classrooms will always be a burden.”

The participant recommended piloting: “A change in our curricula for teacher training programs at one of the universities.” Another participant added that “General education teachers need training on inclusion, what successful inclusion means, as well as strategies and frameworks.”

Add a disclaimer recognizing that integration may be harmful for Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students.

Multiple participants from the ASL (American Sign Language) discussion group stated that integrated settings are not appropriate for all disability groups. One participant said “Integrated education is harmful to the population of Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans” because “segregation is what is ideal to make sure that they have effective access.”

Another noted that “Different disabled groups experience different impacts under this goal. To be clear, disabled students traditionally segregated include those with developmental or intellectual disabilities, blindness, or are wheelchair users - those specific groups do not have communication access barriers, unlike Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students. This goal is not a fit for disabled students who have communication access needs, especially when their disabilities are auditory-related. This goal is spread out thin trying to be ‘one size fits all,’ and that is a real problem. Everyone is different. This goal is poorly written, misleading and would cause more harm than good.”

Participants requested, “Some type of disclaimer that notifies the educational team that this goal does not apply to all disability groups.” The participants additionally indicated that the term “disabled” does not specifically address Deaf, DeafBlind, or hard of hearing students, and that only mainstream integration is being promoted without ensuring equitable access.

Require data disaggregation and placement choice.

Participants reported that schools are violating federal law by failing to present placement options. One participant stated school districts “do not comply with the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) law, which mandates districts to share with families about placement options” because “they are pushing and striving for mainstream integration only.”

Another participant noted the draft goal “makes it sound like there is no choice” and “makes it sound like it’s not healthy to be with other disabled people.” Participants called for data collection on “Deaf individuals specifically, rather than having the information just for all different disability groups.” The participants also indicated the educational system is “very focused on putting people in the same place and same level” rather than what works best for the student.

Goal 2: Schools will better engage families of students with disabilities.

Define “family engagement” explicitly and raise the goal to “collaborative partnership.”

Multiple participants noted the term “engagement” is undefined. One participant asked, “How do you define engagement? Family engagement, what does that look like?” noting that families already have legal rights under IDEA as “equal partners.” Another participant agreed that engagement “is very undefined and could look very different” and proposed aiming higher: “Not just engagement, but actually establishing an effective, collaborative, true partnership with parents and families.” The same participant explained that without partnership, “Schools act on the basis of fear. They’re fearful of a lawsuit,” which limits honest conversation.

Add accountability mechanisms for family input and IEP fidelity.

Participants reported that schools manipulate IEPs based on resource constraints. One participant stated that when families request specific services, “the school may try to change the IEP goals” because “the school knows that they are accountable to meet IEP goals” but has limited resources. Another participant called for metrics that “include how involved the family is in getting their feedback heard and documented.” The notes similarly indicate that accountability is needed to ensure families receive the resources and services listed in the IEP.

Capitalize on parent expertise and peer support.

One participant recommended, “Capitalizing on the lived experience partnership, the lived experience partner being the parents of kids with disabilities, and capitalizing on their... expertise as the expert in their children.” The same participant suggested “peer-to-peer support groups at... schools” beyond existing structures like the Special Education Advisory Council, noting that peer support has “no power dynamic.”

Raise the goal’s ambition above existing legal requirements.

One participant noted that family inclusion in IEPs is already required by law, stating, “By law, you are required to provide IEPs, and families automatically should be included.” The participant therefore called for “something a little bit more ambitious, with evaluating the effectiveness” and asked, “What are we exactly measuring here?” The participants also indicated the goal should evaluate whether people are receiving the services listed.

Goal 3: Fewer students with disabilities will be suspended and expelled.

Specify legal requirements for distinguishing disability manifestation from behavior.

One participant stated that “Pretty much all instances where a child with a disability is suspended or expelled, it is a manifestation of their disability at the core of it.” The participant

called for specificity on the legal requirements under this goal and “when [schools] can and cannot expel students.” The participant linked this to draft goal 4, noting the need for “training staff to identify when behaviors are a manifestation of the disability and when they are not.”

Address communication barriers as root causes of behavior for Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students.

One participant noted this goal “doesn’t fit Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing folks” because “most often, the frustrations are expressed, and the behavior arises because of frustrations with communication.” The participant recommended shifting “to [remove] focus on the behavior [that results in suspension and expulsion, and instead] focus on... the needs that caused the behaviors.” The participant estimates that close to all behavioral issues in [the Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing] population stem from communication issues.

Invest in support staff rather than punitive responses.

Further feedback stated that the state is doomed to keep failing at this goal until it pours significant funding into staffing every school for support staff for all students, including counselors, attendance interventionists, positive behavior intervention experts, restorative practice specialists, and other support roles.

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

Expand the goal beyond early care to include all grade levels through transition.

One participant expressed strong concern that the goal is “limited to early care, when behavioral management is relevant throughout the entire school life.” The participant noted that “data tells you... students start having bigger issues in middle school and high school” and called the limitation “discriminatory towards middle school and high school students, and... transition program students.” The participant added changes “need to start now.”

Add parent training and lifespan planning alongside staff training.

One participant recommended to “add training and expose parents to resources for the lifespan of their child” beginning in early years, noting, “We wish parents knew about transition for their child with a disability when they enter the educational system.” The participant also called for incorporating “developmental approaches” into staff training because “currently, there is very little done around developmental approaches, everything being around behaviors.” The participant added that “seeing behavior as communication is a huge paradigm shift” needed for both staff and parents.

Address communication access as the root cause of behavioral issues, not just train behavior tools.

One participant stated that for Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students, “behaviors usually pop up because of communication.” The participant estimated that “if communication access is set up in an ECE, early childhood setting, that will resolve 95% of behavioral issues.” The participant criticized the goal for focusing on the “after-effect and consequences rather than addressing root causes” and called for recognition “that communication is vital.” The participant also noted the absence of “any statewide plan to actually support that need.”

Add a disclaimer for Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students.

As with Goal 1, participants requested a disclaimer for Goal 4 “that notifies the educational team that this goal does not apply to all disability groups... something specifically about Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing having special consideration.” The notes also indicate that integrated settings are harmful for this population and that segregated settings (e.g., a Deaf school) provide language-rich environments where students can flourish.

Goal 5: Fewer students with disabilities will experience maltreatment at school.

Define monitoring authority and accountability for maltreatment prevention.

One participant asked, “What is the authority that is overseeing that maltreatment doesn’t happen? How is that being monitored, measured? What do we do about it?” The participant noted that proposals to “bring back seclusion” border on maltreatment. The participant also raised the specific concern of “a non-speaking child who is experiencing maltreatment and cannot communicate that,” asking, “[How can] that person be able to communicate?”

Goal 6: Fewer students with disabilities will experience restrictive procedures.

No feedback was provided for this goal.

Education Data Goal 1: Adolescent students with disabilities released from correctional facilities will have an opportunity to continue their education.

Define specific support system elements for reintegration.

One participant asked, “What are the support systems that are in place currently for teenagers coming from the [correctional] system, reintegrating into the educational system?” The participant specifically inquired about “restorative practices,” “trauma-informed practices,” and “the level of training of the staff who [are] supporting those kids.” The participant also asked, “Is there a mentoring program that could be implemented?” and stated, “It’s not a matter of if we can do it, it’s a matter of how we do it.”

Education Data Goal 2: Incarcerated adults with disabilities will have access to education supports before release.

Implement wraparound services and holistic support models.

One participant, drawing on experience working at a community college with formerly incarcerated adults, asked, “What are the support systems that they have in place?” and recommended “that concierge type of holistic approach that really provides wraparound services that would support a student not only academically, but outside of the classroom environment.” The participant cited [Minneapolis College's College in Prison program](#) as an example to examine.

Additional Themes

Require disaggregation and differentiation of disability categories.

One participant stated that “Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind” is “a category that’s missing” from the goals. The participant noted that “‘disability’ does not cover all disabled groups” and that “Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing folks have specific unique needs and the system needs to be re-designed/shifted to address this.” The participant concluded that “one-size-fits-all does not work.”

Add a disclaimer recognizing that integrated education is harmful for Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing students.

One participant stated directly, “Integrated education is harmful to the population of Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans.” The participant explained that “the intention of making sure that people feel they belong, making sure that people feel integrated, included, is actually doing the complete opposite as intended” because “the way the system is set up” creates barriers and “leads to further isolation in educational settings.” The participant argued that “segregation is what is ideal to make sure that they have effective access” and called for “a disclaimer on the educational part that speaks to Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing, disabled students” with a “commitment to promoting an environment that is most accessible for them.”

Disappointment that the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) was not present during the public comment portion.

One participant stated: “I am disappointed that MDE is not a part of this conversation today. I cannot be more clear about this. Minnesota Department of Education needs to, hands down, commit to promoting this environment.”

Participant Exit Survey

Participants were invited to complete an exit survey. Four out of the eight attendees responded to the survey.

Evaluation Metric 1: This meeting was a valuable use of my time.

- One participant strongly agrees
- Three participants agree

Evaluation Metric 2: I was able to participate fully in this meeting.

- Three participants strongly agree
- One participant neither agrees or disagrees

Evaluation Metric 3: What would have improved your experience today?

- None. It was a great discussion. Thank you!
- Not sure at this time.
- I didn't select strongly agreed because I am not confident that my feedback will make it into the final draft due to historical practices of erasing inconvenient input. Unsure if my time was worth it