

Erin Sandsmark and Jessica Heiser – Recommendations

Seclusion Working Group

1. Eliminate the use of Seclusion by 2026 per MDE recommendations
2. Continue the ban on PreK-3rd Seclusions as is
3. Continue the ban on PreK-3rd grade seclusions with improved implementation policy and funding for schools to adjust course, and provide support for alternative systems outside of seclusion.
4. Eliminate use of Seclusion in a different time frame, with more time to adopt improved implementation strategies for a shifting system without seclusion, that prioritizes other methods of de-escalation like Ukeru.
5. Create an accessible mechanism for parents and families to report when they think seclusion is being misused that does not require them to go through their school (MDE?). Make sure that every family has that contact information every time seclusion is used.
6. Fund training on de-escalation, co-regulation, and understanding sensory processing needs for ALL staff (not just a single behavior intervention person per school). Everyone who receives the MDE training on how to use seclusion legally should also receive training on how to AVOID USING SECLUSION.
7. Require school districts to publicly document the number seclusions each year in a public-facing manner so parents have visibility to high seclusion use schools. Ensure data includes disaggregation by race and disability.
8. Mandate training on ableism for schools to increase understanding that what is perceived as "behavior" is often part of the person's disability.
9. Broaden the scope of those who receive training in co-regulation and de-escalation strategies. Often there is only a single interventionist per school who has received this training. These strategies are invaluable to everyone in the educational environment and should be offered to lunchroom staff, bus drivers, paras, library personnel, social workers as well as students themselves. Everyone who comes in contact with students should be trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation strategies.

10. Train educators on how to support demand avoidant students. Teach educators what demand avoidance is, how it presents, and how “conventional” strategies often have the opposite of the desired effect.

11. Shift outmoded control and compliance-based strategies and focus on communication and connection instead. Teachers are often rewarded for their ability to “control” their classroom, and punished for their leniency when they prioritize connection over control and communication over compliance. This is an outdated way of thinking that actually causes harm, especially to students with a trauma history.

12. Open an honest dialogue about the harm that is done when school becomes a place where trauma occurs. Even though it may be a painful process, we cannot solve the problems we are not willing to admit exist. We need to talk about what happens when school becomes a place where trauma occurs, how it has happened in the past, and what can be done to prevent it from happening in the future.

13. Encourage educators to explore any strategy that will break the cycle of trauma. We have seen successful de-escalation through humor, through music, through physical exercise, through changing environment, and all of these strategies should be explored.

14. Build bridges between educators and adults with disabilities. As parents and advocates, we have learned that adults with disabilities are often our greatest teachers and can help us gain insight into better understanding and supporting our kids. We are fortunate in Minnesota to have a rich community of adult advocates who are more than willing to share their experiences and expertise. When we passed the ableism bill in 2023, we had hoped that a discussion with adults with disabilities would become part of teacher training for every teacher supporting students with disabilities. That dream has not been realized, and it is a missed opportunity.

15. Consider an audit of outdated practices that escalate rather than de-escalate students with disabilities. Practices such as “whole body listening” or goals for eye contact often increase dysregulation. Practices such as sensory profiles, helping students identify regulation strategies, and allowing unlimited access to breaks increase a student’s ability to regulate and decrease disruptive behavior.

16. Teach children about their nervous system, and what is actually happening to their brains and bodies when they are in fight/fight/freeze/fawn mode. Helping kids understand what they are going through, and helping adults understand what children need to feel safe cannot be over-emphasized. Strategies like teaching “I feel _____. I need _____. _____ helps me.” taught when a child is regulated and utilizing whole communication has proven an effective strategy **as long as the adults honor it.**

17. We often see school districts reducing or eliminating related services in an effort to reduce costs. Speech therapy services and OT services are often the first on the list to be cut in times of difficult budgets, but communication and self-regulation skills are two of the best tools we have to help reduce problem behavior.

18. Engage with families in collaborative problem-solving before behavior occurs. Open and honest conversations about what helps and what hurts can often help teams avoid difficult situations. Once a restricted procedure is used, families and educators often find themselves in an antagonistic position. Time invested in a collaborative relationship before that happens can provide a foundation on which to build during times of stress.