Seclusion Working Group

December 17th, 2025

Compiled Recommendations

Mandatory Staff Training, Staff Supports, and Culture Shift

Member	Recommendations

Nicole Woodward, Dave Haveman, Kate Hulse	• Require the IEP team to include a mental health professional or practitioner (school psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, licensed school nurse or other licensed mental health provider serving the district). The team must consider contraindications and alternative restrictive procedures to use during an emergency before adding seclusion to a student's IEP/IFSP/BSP.
	• Mandatory annual staff training for all special education staff and related services providers:
	  ○ MN Statute 125A.0942
	  ○ Effects of trauma on the brain and brain state-dependent functioning
	  ○ Effective practices for post-restrictive procedures team debriefing meetings

Melissa Winship	• Require annual, standardized, and evidence-based training for all staff on prevention, and safe crisis management. Training must include modules on the neurobiology of stress and trauma, effective de-escalation, and legal compliance.
Kate Heiser, Erin Sandsmark	• 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. *Also listed in Funding.* • Mandate training on ableism for schools to increase understanding that what is perceived as "behavior" is often part of the person's disability

	• 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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.
Greta Kjos	• Any action should include solving for the issues with data collection and monitoring the impact on students and staff including police/EMS calls, student/ teacher injuries, expulsion/ suspensions, physical holds, home-based or level 4 placements, and whether there is disproportionate impact on students of color and with disabilities. • Shift from culture of violation/repercussion regarding seclusion/ restraint to one of culture to one that encourages safety with kindness and compassion alongside the use of PBIS and de-escalation strategies. Create a culture of collaboration, de-escalation and learning debriefs vs a punitive approach to schools struggling with student behavior. This staff mindset shift flows to the student culture and becomes rooted in what Ukeru calls comfort over control. • Designated and trained de-escalation mentor response teams who work with schools side-by-side and onsite on PBIS, de-escalation strategies and reduction in use of seclusion. Ukeru, for example, offers this mentoring/ coaching in a train-the-trainer model. Schools are either identified as schools in need of assistance (e.g. improper use of seclusion, increased seclusion/ restraints happening, etc) or it is requested by the school themselves. The response teams could act as a mobile crisis team who assists onsite during crisis and/or after a crisis to debrief and work collaboratively to improve skills and procedures. The response teams

	could be embedded in the school staff as well. Prioritize the schools currently using seclusion with options being available to all schools. • Ongoing staff training (including de-escalation, bias-awareness, team-based crisis response) with priority being current schools using seclusion rooms (50 school districts). This training is inclusive of all staff in the building from teachers to custodians to build a culture of regulation and skills for de-escalation. • State-wide training standards on de-escalation, use of alternatives over seclusion, awareness of response teams to ensure consistent and equitable, and non discriminatory practices.
Additional Recommendations?	

Data Collection, Monitoring, and Accountability

Member	Recommendations
Nicole Woodward, Dave Haveman, Kate Hulse	• Seclusion data (frequency, duration, etc.) must be explicitly reviewed by the IEP team no less than annually or whenever requested by the parent/guardian or the district. • Continuation of quarterly district-based Restrictive Procedures Oversight Committee meeting requirements Implement an accountability structure similar to the Accountability, Rationale, & Context (ARC) report that is required annually based on Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)/Minnesota Alternate Assessment rates. MDE, in consultation with Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE) would set an annual seclusion rate threshold at which they would like districts to be below. They would pull data from Stepwell (just like they do for MTAS from the TestWes), compile a data visualization, and send to districts to analyze. If a district is routinely and significantly above the threshold OR their use data is not improving at an acceptable rate, then MDE could allocate additional resources to that building to address needs and provide targeted support. • Incorporate restraint and seclusion data into the disproportionality calculation and accountability system.

Melissa Winship	• Mandate a standardized, disaggregated data collection system for all seclusion incidents, and require a systemic review process to identify patterns of misuse and implement Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) for high-usage schools.
Jessica Heiser and Erin Sandsmark	• 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. • 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.
Greta Kjos	• Any action should include solving for the issues with data collection and monitoring the impact on students and staff including police/EMS calls, student/ teacher injuries, expulsion/ suspensions, physical holds, home-based or level 4 placements, and whether there is disproportionate impact on students of color and with disabilities. • Oversight and data collection to increase appropriate use of seclusion, eliminate improper use of seclusion and improve the use of de-escalation strategies. Require an annual review and setting of strategic targets for training and improvement in identified areas of need.
Additional Recommendations?	

Alternatives to seclusion

Member	Recommendations
Nicole Woodward, Dave Haveman, Kate Hulse	• Continuum of crisis intervention strategies (e.g., CPI and Ukeru)
Melissa Winship	• Mandate that districts select and implement at least one vetted, evidence-based alternative to seclusion focused on proactive behavioral support and early de-escalation.

Jessica Heiser and Erin Sandsmark	• 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. • 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.
Greta Kjos	• Evidence-based Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports from organizations like Ukeru and others. Attention should be paid to the culture of the organization chosen as well as the implementing practice to ensure alignment with goals. • Prevention and early intervention through more school-linked mental health services, multi-tiered levels of support and school staff (counselors, psychologists, social workers) Also.listed.in.Funding.
Additional Recommendations?	

Funding

Member	Recommendations
Nicole Woodward, Dave Haveman, Kate Hulse	• Funding and support for increasing layered supports • The focus needs to be on building systems and supports that diminish - or eventually eliminate - the need for seclusion. This requires fair and sustainable funding, training, technical support, and resources to ensure equitable opportunities for improvement statewide; with emphasis on greater Minnesota where lack of resources and funding

	create unique barriers. Direct funding mechanisms should be utilized whenever possible.
Melissa Winship	• Allocate specific, sustained funding to districts to cover costs associated with implementing new alternatives, including dedicated time and resources (e.g., substitute coverage, stipends) for high-quality staff training.
Jessica Heiser and Erin Sandsmark	• 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. Also.listed.in.Mandatory.Staff.Training?.staff.supports?and.culture.shift. • 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
Greta Kjos	• Prevention and early intervention through more school-linked mental health services, multi-tiered levels of support and school staff (counselors, psychologists, social workers). Also.listed.in.Alternatives.to.Seclusion.
Additional Recommendations?	

Use of Seclusion – Timeline

Member	Recommendations
Nicole Woodward, Dave Haveman, Kate Hulse	• Our position is that setting a timeline is arbitrary. Rather, the focus needs to be on building systems and supports that diminish - or eventually eliminate - the need for seclusion. This requires fair and sustainable funding, training, technical support, and resources to ensure equitable opportunities for improvement statewide; with emphasis on greater Minnesota where lack of resources and funding create unique barriers. Direct funding mechanisms should be utilized whenever possible. We recommend leveraging the resources available through the regional service cooperatives and exploring interagency partnerships to enhance technical assistance (CAREI, NAMI, MN School-Based Behavior Analysts, etc.) • Limit seclusion to be permitted for students receiving setting 3 or setting 4-level services only. This would prohibit use for the vast majority of students across the state. • The use of seclusion as a restrictive procedure for children in grades 1 through 6 must be explicitly agreed to: (1) by all parents or guardians with legal decision-making authority regarding the child; (2) through informed written consent which is separate from any other consent obtained - through the individualized education program or individualized family service plan; (3) in the parents' or guardians' primary language, following the district's language access plan under section 123B.32, and with all necessary interpretation and cultural supports to ensure adequate understanding of said consent. A parent or guardian's failure to respond to a request for consent must not be considered consent to the use of seclusion.
Jessica Heiser and Erin Sandsmark	• Eliminate the use of Seclusion by 2026 per MDE recommendations. • Continue the ban on PreK-3rd Seclusions as is. • 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.

	• 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.
Greta Kjos	• Reducing or banning the use of seclusion without providing tools, supports, and training can lead to reactive measures including increased restraints, increased calls to law enforcement and/or EMS, more suspensions, home-based and level 4 placements, increased trauma and the continued disproportionate impact on BIPOC and disabled students, as well as staff and students feeling unsafe. Any successful policy toward reducing or banning the use of seclusion must be paired with investments in prevention, de-escalation, and support structures. At the core is building a culture of regulation, de-escalation and inclusion in our schools and that takes investment in time and money. • According to Ukero, they have seen the best outcomes when seclusion remains an option while alternatives are implemented. It is NAMI MN's position that investments need to be made in evidence-based alternatives and implemented as an additional tool, with accountability to staff for necessary shifts in new tools/ strategies and culture. Seclusion should remain available during implementation while the goal is to ultimately eliminate the need for seclusion.
Additional Recommendations?	