
Overview of Participant Program Objectives and Measurements

Report to the Legislature

January 2026

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Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary.....	1
II. Legislation	1
III. Introduction	2
IV. Program Objectives Measurement and Planning.....	2
Strategic Plan	2
Report Objectives.....	4
VII. Conclusion.....	11

I. Executive Summary

The Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (the Department) is committed to administering effective programs that better support Minnesotans. Over the course of its transition year, the Department has focused on building out its programs by adding staff as needed and establishing new, integrated structures as the agency continues to evolve.

This year, the Department also focused on completing a strategic plan that provides overall guidance for the organization, while continuing to provide frameworks for programs, policies, and practices. The strategic plan includes five strategic priority areas:

1. Grow a strong agency culture
2. Integrate cross-agency service coordination
3. Modernize technology, systems and data practices
4. Adapt and implement a whole family approach
5. Cultivate dynamic and effective partnerships.

Over the course of the year, the Department has focused on developing service areas to strengthen coordination of disability, mental health, family navigation, and housing both within the agency and with legacy partner agencies. Each administration within the Department has also focused on its operational and programmatic goals to ensure coordination, integration, streamlining and impact.

II. Legislation

[Minnesota Statutes Sec. 142A.03](#)

(d) The commissioner must develop program objectives and performance measures for evaluating progress toward achieving the objectives. The commissioner must identify the objectives, performance measures, and current status of achieving the measures in a biennial report to the chairs and ranking minority members of relevant legislative committees and divisions. The report is due no later than January 15 each even-numbered year. The report must include, when possible, the following objectives:

- (1) centering and including the lived experiences of children and youth, including those with disabilities and mental illness and their families, in all aspects of the department's work;
- (2) increasing the effectiveness of the department's programs in addressing the needs of children and youth facing racial, economic, or geographic inequities;
- (3) increasing coordination and reducing inefficiencies among the department's programs and the funding sources that support the programs;
- (4) increasing the alignment and coordination of family access to child care and early learning programs and improving systems of support for early childhood and learning providers and services;
- (5) improving the connection between the department's programs and the kindergarten through grade 12 and higher education systems; and
- (6) minimizing and streamlining the effort required of youth and families to receive services to which the youth and families are entitled.

III. Introduction

This report is due to the legislature in 2026 and every even-numbered year thereafter. This report is mandated by [Minnesota Statutes 142A.03 Subd. 2\(d\)](#) and requests the Commissioner of Department of Children, Youth, and Families provide an update on program objectives, performance measures, and status of achieving the measures to date. The Department collected programmatic information from agency leaders as part of the transition to the new agency.

This report provides the Legislature with information on the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families, including program objectives and performance measures. The Department was launched on July 1, 2024, bringing together staff from four state agencies – the Departments of Education, Human Services, Health, and Public Safety – throughout state fiscal year 2025. The final group of staff joined the agency in late June 2025.

This transition year focused on moving staff, programs, funding, and IT Systems to the new agency as we established policies and structures to support the growing agency. The Department has not yet operated for a full year with its complete complement of staff, programs and authorities. The agency continues to develop its structures and programs to ensure it can deliver strong, efficient and impactful programs and services to Minnesotans.

In state fiscal year 2025, the agency worked to develop a strategic plan to create a guide for staff as they came into the agency, helping prioritize and focus the work. This report highlights the agency’s work to develop its strategic plan, establish the new agency’s strategic plan, define program objectives, and establish performance measures and planning processes.

IV. Program Objectives Measurement and Planning

Strategic Plan

In fall 2024, the Department began creating its first [strategic plan](#) to set a clear direction for the agency’s future. Working with Wilder Research, the Department gathered broad input from staff, community partners, counties, and Tribal Nations to ensure the plan reflects real needs and aligns with Minnesota’s statewide goals. The result is a mission that puts children, youth, families, and communities at the center—and a vision of an equitable Minnesota where every family can thrive.

The Department worked closely with the Children’s Cabinet and Minnesota Management and Budget’s (MMB) Implementation Office to develop the strategic plan maximizing work done during the transition year (July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025) so that it would be responsive to both community needs and strong accountability to improved outcomes for children, youth and families in Minnesota.

The Department used a highly inclusive process to shape the plan.

- Nearly 300 people joined staff and community engagement sessions, and 250 more shared feedback through a survey.
- Additional county and Tribal sessions ensured local and sovereign government perspectives were incorporated.
- This work built on the Department’s planning year (FY2024), which included engagement at more than 200 community events and with 2,800 participants statewide.

The plan is grounded in shared values such as equity, cultural responsiveness, clear communication, strong partnerships, and data-driven improvement.

The plan was finalized in August 2025 after the final staff had transitioned to the new agency. The new agency is focused on five strategic priority areas to further support its establishment.

Strategic priorities:

1. **Grow a strong agency culture:** The Department will strengthen its workforce by supporting continuous learning, improving collaboration across teams, and reinforcing shared accountability. The goal is to build a unified agency with the skills and capacity to serve families well.
2. **Integrate cross-agency service coordination:** The agency will break down internal and external silos, so families experience services as a single, coordinated system. This includes shared practices, better data connections, and closer collaboration with partners.
3. **Modernize technology, systems, and data practices:** The Department will upgrade outdated systems, streamline processes, and improve data quality. This work will reduce administrative burden and allow staff to focus more time on supporting children, youth, and families.
4. **Adapt and implement a whole family approach:** The Department will embed a holistic, strengths-based approach across programs. This includes elevating lived experience, expanding trauma-informed practices, and aligning procurement, budgeting, and policy work around whole-family needs.
5. **Cultivate dynamic and effective partnerships:** The Department will deepen long-term partnerships with Tribes, counties, community organizations, providers, and families. These relationships will guide decision-making and fuel shared progress.

With the strategic plan now complete, the Department has begun putting it into action. The agency is aligning division and administration work plans with the five strategic priorities, launching new systems to monitor progress, and continuing engagement with staff, Tribal Nations, counties, providers, and community partners. These early implementation steps will ensure the plan drives real, measurable improvements in how Minnesota supports children, youth, and families.

The Department shares this plan as it is a key step in establishing many program and agency objectives to better support children and families.

Report Objectives

1. Centering experiences of children and youth, including those with disabilities and mental illness and their families

During community engagement efforts throughout the planning and transition years, the community expressed particular concern about the need to coordinate both within the Department and with agencies of origin to ensure children and youth with disabilities and mental health challenges were better served.

Transformation Office

During the second half of the transition year, the Department created the Transformation Office. Within this office, the chief transformation officer built a team of program managers focused on both agency and interagency coordination.

The Family Programs Team focuses on program elements that span multiple administrations, including children’s mental health, children’s disability services and family navigation. They provide cross-agency connectivity and collaboration on each of these issues, as well as interagency connection with other state agencies similarly focused in these areas. Over the course of the last year, this team has been working within the Department as well as with partners at the Department of Human Services (DHS), Direct Care and Treatment (DCT), Olmstead Implementation Office, and the Children’s Cabinet on issues impacting children with disabilities, mental health challenges, housing and family navigation.

- The Department is currently working on making contributions to the newest version of the state’s Olmstead Plan to better support inclusion of children and youth in the plan.
- The Department is working closely with the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness on its Crossroads to Justice plan to support goals related to housing for youth exiting foster care.
- The Department is working closely with the Children’s Cabinet to support a statewide Children’s Mental Health Plan.

Youth Services Office

The Youth Services Office is focused on preventing youth from entering the juvenile justice system by ensuring they have access to mental health, therapeutic, and engagement programs within their communities. To measure progress, the office is developing a juvenile justice–mental health continuum of care model.

This initiative is supported by a \$830,000 federal grant. A project coordinator contract is currently under final review by the Department. In November of 2025, the office released a Request for Proposals to award three subgrants to local jurisdictions, helping them develop their own local continuum of care models. Each selected jurisdiction will receive up to two hundred thousand dollars, with the subawards running from the beginning of January through the end of June 2026.

2. Addressing needs of children and youth facing racial, economic, or geographic inequities

Within each of the Department's administrations, programs are focused on ensuring that all children, youth, and families have equitable access to the resources and services needed to thrive, regardless of race, economic status or zip code.

Child Support

Child support programs play a key role in promoting economic stability and advancing equity for children and families. The Department is focused on making the system more accessible, fair and responsive through the following efforts:

- **Reducing barriers to access:** Expand outreach in underserved communities, offer multilingual services, simplify applications, and use community-based partnerships so families in marginalized areas can more easily establish and enforce support orders.
- **Making child support orders more equitable:** Local child support agencies base orders on realistic income, expand alternative compliance options, and reduce punitive practices that disproportionately impact low-income and historically marginalized parents. Policy changes—including updates to child support guidelines, greater flexibility in consumer credit reporting, reforms to driver's license suspension procedures, and the elimination of interest on child support arrears—help remove longstanding barriers and support more consistent, sustainable child support for children and families.
- **Providing integrated family-centered services:** The Paths to Parenthood initiative has been developing learning materials for youth and young adults to learn about the emotional, financial and legal realities of parenting and reflect on how parenthood fits in with their life plan. The first curriculum, which is designed for young people affected by trauma, has been developed, piloted and evaluated and materials will soon be available publicly. The second curriculum designed for Indigenous youth adults is ready to be piloted in community settings.

Child Safety and Permanency

Child safety and permanency programs are focused on reducing disparities, and ensuring children can safely remain with or return to their families whenever possible. Key efforts include:

- **Reducing racial disproportionality in child welfare** by strengthening protections for African American and other overrepresented children based on race, ethnicity, culture, low-income socioeconomic status, and disability status by preventing unnecessary family separations, promoting reunification, building culturally competent systems, and holding agencies accountable.
 - **Performance Measure:** Implementation of the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPCWDA).
 - **Status:** Ongoing; statewide implementation January 2027; Phase-in agencies (Hennepin and Ramsey Counties) began implementation in January 2025.
- **Increase agency and Child Safety and Permanency Administration staff** to support the expansion of ongoing community engagement efforts to better understand the needs of children, youth and families in the African American community in preparation of statewide implementation of MAAFPCWDA.

- **Performance Measure:** Added five additional staff to the African American Child and Family Well-being Unit in 2025.
- **Status:** Complete.
- **Increase funding to deliver essential services to Indian children and families,** including placement prevention, family reunification, crisis intervention, foster and adoptive placement resources, and court advocacy, primarily supporting program staff salaries, cultural services, and training initiatives.
 - **Performance Measure:** Two Request for Proposals (RFPs) for urban primary and special focus funding were completed, as mandated by the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act, which provides annual state funding through four-year grant contracts. Staff updated and amended over 30 contracts, enabling Tribal agencies and Indian organizations to receive increased funding.
 - **Status:** Ongoing.

Youth Services Office

- **Support local jurisdictions in developing action plans** to support the raise in the minimum age of delinquency from 10 to 13, effective August 2026. This change in law disproportionately impacts BIPOC youth and their families, as well as rural jurisdictions and Tribal communities where resources and services may be more limited than in urban areas.
 - **Performance Measure:** Local jurisdictions are engaged in providing feedback, contributing to action plans, and receiving technical assistance in responding to this change in law.
 - **Status:** Ongoing; the Minnesota Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, which lives within the Department’s Youth Services Office has dedicated \$100,000 in federal Title II funds to launch a Juvenile Raising the Age of Delinquency Statewide (JRADS) Planning Project. A project coordinator contract is under final Department review. Volunteer law students have conducted research on other states throughout the country that have implemented similar legislation and produced a report of promising response strategies. This JRADS project supplements a state-level planning project coordinated by MMB consultants, supported by the Department and the Children’s Cabinet.
 - This JRADS project supplements a state-level planning project coordinated by MAD consultants, supported by the Department and the Children’s Cabinet.

Office of Restorative Practice

- Addressing needs of children and youth facing racial, economic, or geographic inequities by investing in community-rooted restorative practices, administering state grant funds, offering culturally responsive technical assistance, and strengthening relationships with program partners, practitioners, and families through intentional community engagement.

Office of Economic Opportunity

- Addressing needs of children and youth facing racial, economic, or geographic inequities by administering state and federal grant funds, providing technical assistance, and connecting with program partners and participants through community engagement.

Early Learning Services

- **Expand access to Minnesota’s public pre-kindergarten program** and ensure the limited access is given to children who disproportionately experience barriers to accessing high quality early learning opportunities.
 - **Performance Measure:** Implement expansion of the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program from 7,160 seats to 12,360 seats in FY25 and the requirement that all children meet statutorily defined criteria ([Sec. 142D.08 MN Statutes](#)), including qualifies as low-income, is an English language learner, is American Indian, has experienced homelessness in the last 24 months, was identified as having a potential risk factor that may influence learning through health and developmental screening, is in foster care, kinship care, or is in need of child protection services, has a parent who is a migrant or seasonal agricultural laborer, has a parent who is incarcerated, or is defined as at-risk by the school district.
 - **Status:** Completed.

3. Increasing coordination and reducing inefficiencies

Office of Grants and Contracts

The Department’s Office of Grants and Contracts is working on a variety of strategies with the objectives of improved coordination, efficiency, consistency and grantee support. Grantmaking is a significant way the Department partners with communities. Three of the originating agencies – the Department of Public Safety (DPS), Department of Education (MDE) and DHS – issue grants. Each agency brought unique processes, tools, systems, documents and staffing models. The Department is moving toward procuring a grant management system. This system will create a consistent grantee experience across programs and include a grantee portal. It will also increase compliance controls and program integrity. The Office of Grants and Contracts is simultaneously developing training, templates, procedures and job aids to increase knowledge levels and reduce inefficiencies.

- **Implement an agency-wide grant management system** with development of training, templates, and job aids.
 - **Performance Measure:** New grants management system is used by all divisions (user adoption); Department templates are fully adopted; staff attend trainings and training is tracked; users are surveyed to identify ways in which tools can be improved.
 - **Status:** In progress.

SNAP Quality Assurance [QA] Project - Application Process Timeliness (APT) Corrective Action Plan

The SNAP QA team contacted the Department’s Office of Continuous Improvement (OCI) regarding two related struggles they were experiencing. First, was the effectiveness of [their SNAP Management Evaluation Review Guide for Counties and Tribal Nations](#), especially the portion of the guide instructing users on how to perform root cause analysis. Second, was the quality of their corrective action plan response to Federal Nutrition Services (FNS), addressing Minnesota's Application Process Timeliness performance, specifically expedited applications. A project was chartered with two objectives:

- **Improve the review guide** with a more effective approach to root cause analysis.
 - **Performance Measure:** Update review guide to be a more user-friendly method for identifying the root cause of problems.

- **Status:** Completed; the SNAP QA team updated the review guide. This new approach was tested with Mahnomens County staff and the DCYF SNAP QA team, and it worked well.
- **Submit a SNAP Corrective Action Plan** for federal approval.
 - **Performance Measure:** Acceptance of SNAP Corrective Action Plan submitted to FNS.
 - **Status:** Completed. The SNAP QA team revised the Corrective Action Plan requested by FNS, adding clearer evidence to support the SNAP QA team’s findings and proposed actions. The updated plan was submitted to FNS and was approved.

Early Learning Services Project

The Early Learning Services (ELS) team approached OCI with obstacles related to all three of the application processes they manage:

- Early Learning Scholarships
- Head Start
- Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

Transferring to the new Department surfaced pain points around roles, responsibilities and knowledge gaps and the ELS team partnered OCI to prioritize their improvement efforts. A project focused on the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten application process was undertaken with the objective of creating a detailed process map that would highlight process inefficiencies and create recommendations for reducing or eliminating them. ELS was particularly interested in identifying where they experienced missed or duplicative hand-offs, where there were gaps in the process manual, and where they might apply automation to their process.

- **Create a detailed process map and document/implement recommendations for reducing process waste.**
 - **Performance Measure:** Process documentation completed and reduction of processing time for application consolidation from several hours to less than 10 minutes.
 - **Status:** Completed; process documentation completed, processing time reduced as planned from several hours to less than 10 minutes. Both outcomes, process mapping and efficiency gains due to the use of improved programming, benefited ELS staff as well as the populations they serve.

In a follow-up to this project, OCI assisted ELS with a knowledge transfer effort. A long-time staff member, steeped in the intricacies of ELS processes, was soon to retire. OCI assisted ELS in mapping their areas of expertise and prioritizing them for documentation. This knowledge transfer enabled the Department to retain the valuable expertise this employee gained over multiple years, so the program area does not lose that historical process and program knowledge with their retirement.

4. Increasing access to child care and early learning programs and supporting early childhood and learning providers and services.

Over the past 18 months, the Early Childhood Administration has focused on integrating two divisions from MDE (Early Learning Programs) and DHS (Child Care Services). Bringing together staff, units and teams to create stronger cohesion and synergy has been the goal. The following activities and goals reflect the administration’s work.

Priority 1: Early Childhood Administration Strategic Framework

- **Build an infrastructure allowing for tailored opportunities** that remove barriers by implementing programs and resources for children, families, communities and the early childhood workforce that contribute to the growth, learning and development of all children so they can thrive.
 - **Performance Measure:** Create theory of change for eight identified components of the ECE ecosystem
 - **Status:** In progress.

Priority 2: Maintain and build the supply of child care

- **All Minnesota families have access to child care** so business and community can thrive.
 - **Performance Measure:** [Child Care Access / One Minnesota Plan](#) -- Increase the proportion of families with access to child care by 20 percent.
 - **Status:** In progress.

Priority 3: Launch Great Start Scholarships

- **Increase affordable access to high-quality early care and learning for children** from birth to kindergarten entry.
 - **Performance Measure:** To the extent funding for this program is appropriated by the legislature, implement by July 1, 2028 in accordance with [Minnesota Statutes 2025, Section 142A.44](#).
 - **Status:** Paused; implementation funding has not been appropriated; a report on implementation status is due to the legislature by July 1, 2026.

Priority 4: Early Learning Scholarships

- **Set early learning scholarship award amounts to the 75th percentile** of the market rate survey and **expand age eligibility** for early learning scholarships.
 - **Performance Measure:** Implement by July 1, 2024, and January 1, 2025, respectively.
 - **Status:** Completed.

5. Improving the connection between Department programs and the kindergarten through grade 12 and higher education systems.

The Department continues to maintain strong connection with the agencies from which programs transitioned into the new agency. The Department works closely with MDE to ensure program coordination and connection.

The core of this partnership is the integration of Early Childhood (EC) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) into the MDE-led statewide K-12 support system, COMPASS.

Priority 1: System Integration- Embed Early Childhood General Education (EC) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) into K-12 support structure

- **Formalize the connection** by integrating EC/ECSE support into the statewide K-12 continuous improvement framework, COMPASS.
 - **Performance Measure:** Establish and hire COMPASS EC/ECSE Leads to ensure early childhood priorities are represented in the MDE-coordinated content teams.

- **Status:** In progress. COMPASS was expanded to officially include EC/ECSE beginning July 1, 2025. EC/ECSE Leads were hired (Summer of 2025). Efforts are ongoing to refine the organizational structure and the Department's role.

Priority 2: Workforce Alignment- Bridge Leadership Professional Development

- **Align professional development for early childhood leaders with K-12 systems** by using the Minnesota Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MnMTSS) framework and address the dual roles of many early childhood leaders over both early childhood general and special education. The Department is supporting this effort by contributing staff support and funding.
 - **Performance Measure:** Develop and implement the Empowering Early Childhood Educators Asynchronous Courses (vendor WestEd selected for Pre-Module 1), developed in partnership with MDE.
 - **Status:** In progress. The Department staff time is supporting the Request for Proposals process for the asynchronous courses. Pre-Module 1 is targeted for launch in October or November 2026.

Priority 3: Data Strategy Community Engagement

- **Gain an understanding of what Department data partners need** to tell the story and drive action in their communities, including collaboration opportunities with K-12 and higher education data. Review available state data, gather feedback on the utility and limitations of current data products, and identify opportunities for improvement in data accessibility and use.
 - **Performance Measure:** Complete five data summits with data partners to promote awareness of existing data, validation of what existing data access is working well, and identify opportunities for data-driven improvement. Inform modernization of the Early Childhood Integrated Data System, including integrations with K-12 and higher education data. Create a learning agenda as a component of the Department's data strategy.
 - **Status:** Complete. Five engagements conducted from December 2025 – March 2026.

As the Department continues to establish itself as a new agency, the Early Childhood Administration will continue to work closely with MDE and the Office of Higher Education.

6. Minimizing and streamlining the effort required of youth and families to receive services to which the youth and families are entitled.

The Department's strategic plan focuses on integration and coordination among services. It also focuses on Whole Family Systems approaches.

Whole Family Approach

The Department is taking a whole family approach to work to fulfill its goals by approaching practice, program, and policy decision making in a way that recognizes and addresses the needs of children and the adults in their lives simultaneously.

The Vision for Policy and Equity Workstream, established during the Department's planning year, adapted a framework from Ascend at the Aspen Institute to help Department employees answer the

question, “What do people need to thrive?” While the Department influences many elements of family well-being, its scope is broader, offering a holistic perspective on human needs. Children, youth, and families do not come in parts. When you serve one member, you impact the entire family unit.

Using a whole family approach is a strategic priority in the Department’s strategic plan and is incorporated in the planning of the administrations within the Department. To engage all staff, a set of training modules were developed in March 2026 to provide leaders and staff with resources to broaden their understanding of the tenets of the whole family approach. More information about the approach can be found here. [Whole Family Approach | Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

Child Safety and Permanency Administration

- In partnership with youth with lived expertise, **increase the percentage of students who use their Education and Training Voucher (ETV) award** and the percentage of students with ETV awards who stay in school.
 - **Performance Measure:** The ETV advisory board, comprised of six members with lived experience, has met eight times to guide the work of the ETV program.
 - **Status:** Ongoing.
 - Over 70% of ETV students had accessed their ETV funds as of March 31, 2025.
 - Only four students withdrew from school during the fall semester.
 - The Department tracks the ratio of credits earned to credits attempted as an indicator of student success. In the fall 2024 semester, the completion rate for ETV students was 89%.

Youth Services Office

- **Prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system** by ensuring youth have access to mental health and other therapeutic or engagement programming in their community.
 - **Performance Measure:** Development of a juvenile justice-mental health continuum of care model.
 - **Status:** Ongoing; \$830,000 federal grant secured. Project coordinator contract under final Department. RFP released Nov. 17, 2025, for three subawards to support local jurisdictions in developing a local continuum of care model. Each of the three jurisdictions selected will receive up to \$200,000, subaward terms will be Jan. 1, 2026, to June 30, 2026.

VII. Conclusion

This report represents a starting place for the Department’s further exploration of program impact. While we have been focused on the transition and establishing the agency, the Department will continue to establish program objectives and measures that better address the impact of the agency and its programs.