Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Services in Public Schools

Topic Selection Background Information — November 2025

Program Overview	Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by differences in an individual's social interaction, communication, and behavior. Public schools must provide special education services to eligible students with disabilities, including ASD. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is responsible for ensuring that schools comply with state and federal requirements regarding special education.
Original Evaluation Questions	To what extent does Minnesota provide appropriate supports to individuals living with ASD and their families? How well do state agencies coordinate with each other, school districts, and providers to deliver services? How effectively do state agencies ensure that ASD service providers meet applicable requirements?
Revised Questions	To what extent are appropriate special education services available to students with ASD in Minnesota public schools? How well does MDE coordinate with and oversee school districts to ensure appropriate services are available and provided?
State Resources *High*	In Fiscal Year 2024, Minnesota public schools spent more than $400 million on special education services for students whose "primary disability" was ASD. In this same fiscal year, the state appropriated roughly $2.3 billion and received about $21 million from the federal government for all special education services.
State Control *Medium*	Federal law ensures that students with a disability, including ASD, "have available to them a free appropriate public education" structured to meet their needs. To receive federal funding, states must fulfill certain requirements for the provision and oversight of special education services. State law also requires schools to provide special education and expands requirements in some instances.
Impact *High*	People with ASD can have a range of abilities. Special education supports students through individualized plans and services designed to meet their specific educational needs. Of the students receiving special education services in Minnesota in 2025, the second largest group (nearly 30,000 students or 17 percent) were those whose "primary disability" was ASD.
Timeliness *Medium*	The number of students using special education services has grown. Since 2015, the number of students with a "primary disability" of ASD using special education has increased by 71 percent.
Feasibility *Medium*	If we narrow the evaluation to focus on ASD services in public schools, as proposed, the evaluation is more feasible. OLA could conduct an evaluation using standard research methods. However, OLA would likely need to limit the scope of review to a sample of school districts.
Balance *High*	OLA last evaluated special education in 2013, but it has never specifically evaluated how students with ASD are supported by these services.
Discussion	Special education helps ensure that students with ASD can learn in a manner that meets their needs. Given the increase in students determined to have ASD who use special education services, this evaluation could provide useful information about these services.

DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) Investigations

Topic Selection Background Information — November 2025

Program Overview	The Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) is responsible for identifying and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse in public programs that DHS administers, including Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare. DHS OIG reviews complaints from the public and analyzes health care data to identify potential fraud, waste, and abuse; it then conducts investigations based on these complaints and analysis. When DHS OIG finds credible indicators of fraud, it may take administrative actions, such as withholding payments, or refer cases to criminal investigative agencies.
Original Evaluation Questions	How well does DHS OIG manage and respond to complaints? To what extent does DHS OIG conduct efficient, effective investigations? To what extent does DHS OIG take appropriate action based on the findings of its investigations?
State Resources *Medium*	DHS OIG budgeted roughly $43 million in Fiscal Year 2026 for all of its activities; a portion of that total will be dedicated to investigations.
State Control *Medium*	Minnesota operates certain programs under DHS OIG's purview, such as Medical Assistance, Minnesota's Medicaid program, in partnership with the federal government. DHS OIG may establish standards and processes to protect programs but must follow federal laws and guidance when doing so.
Impact *High*	DHS OIG is responsible for ensuring the integrity of spending in public programs worth billions. For instance, the state spent $6.5 billion on Medical Assistance in Fiscal Year 2023, serving a monthly average of 1.4 million Minnesotans. DHS OIG reported completing 630 provider investigations in calendar year 2023 and supported counties with the completion of more than 10,700 recipient investigations in Fiscal Year 2024.
Timeliness *Medium*	Widespread concerns about fraud in public programs make this a timely topic, but recent activities may complicate an evaluation. In June 2025, certain responsibilities previously held by DHS OIG transferred to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. It is unclear what impact, if any, the transfer may have on DHS OIG activities. In addition, the federal U.S. Health and Human Services OIG has been auditing DHS's management of Medical Assistance; there is potential for the scope of their activities to overlap with an OLA evaluation.
Feasibility *Medium-High*	We can complete this evaluation using standard techniques, although we will likely need to scope the evaluation to focus on investigations within a limited number of public programs.
Balance *Medium*	OLA last reviewed DHS OIG investigations in its 2020 report, *DHS Oversight of Personal Care Assistance.*
Discussion	DHS OIG performs an important function in protecting tax dollars. Given widespread recent concern about waste, fraud, and abuse in Minnesota public programs, it may be useful to provide an independent assessment of DHS OIG's processes.

Enterprise Talent Development

Topic Selection Background Information November 2025

Program Overview	Minnesota Management and Budget's (MMB's) Enterprise Talent Development (ETD) provides training and resources to state and other public employees. ETD provides required training for new state supervisors and managers and required annual training for state employees on topics such as respectful workplace policies. It also provides other training and resources on a variety of topics, including leadership development, team collaboration, and retirement planning.
Evaluation Questions	To what extent does ETD provide appropriate and effective training for state employees? What standards, if any, does ETD use to develop and/or approve training?
State Resources *Low*	MMB collects fees from agencies whose employees participate in ETD trainings. In Fiscal Year 2024, MMB's Enterprise Employee Resources unit, which includes ETD but is also tasked with other responsibilities related to statewide human resources management, spent just over $10 million.
State Control *High*	Statutes direct MMB to develop and implement training, including required training on certain topics, and training polices applicable to state executive branch employees.
Impact *Medium*	ETD offers training to over 57,000 state employees. Local government employees may also participate in ETD training.
Timeliness *Medium*	Concerns were raised during the 2025 legislative session about the appropriateness of an article that could be accessed through two of ETD's training courses; MMB reported that it reviewed ETD's training programs and completed changes in July 2025. MMB also reported implementing a new review and approval process for training content.
Feasibility *High*	OLA could complete this evaluation using standard evaluation techniques such as interviews, surveys, and document reviews.
Balance *High*	OLA has never evaluated ETD. OLA completed a review of best practices for state employee training in 1995.
Discussion	We are not aware of persistent concerns about the appropriateness of ETD training and MMB has taken steps to address recent concerns, but the proposed evaluation is feasible and could be informative.

Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR)

Topic Selection Background Information November 2025

Program Overview	The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) makes funding recommendations to the Legislature regarding environmental and natural resources projects. These projects are primarily funded with Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) dollars, which must be used to protect, conserve, preserve, or enhance the state's natural resources. LCCMR bases its funding recommendations on its assessments of project proposals from the Department of Natural Resources, the University of Minnesota, and other applicants.
Original Evaluation Questions	To what extent has LCCMR made recommendations to fund projects in line with the constitutional purpose of ENRTF?
State Resources *Medium*	The Legislature appropriated $4 million to LCCMR for administration for the 2026–2027 biennium. While administrative costs are relatively low, the Legislature appropriated over $103 million from ENRTF for Fiscal Year 2026 based on LCCMR recommendations.
State Control *High*	State law establishes LCCMR and prescribes the commission's membership and duties. Statutes specify that LCCMR has 17 members, 10 of whom are legislators.
Impact *Medium*	Based on LCCMR recommendations, the Legislature funds projects that provide educational and recreation opportunities, support efforts to improve air and water quality, and provide other benefits to Minnesotans throughout the state.
Timeliness *Medium*	There was discussion at commission meetings last winter about funding recommendations for baseball fields, splash pads, or other project elements that may not meet ENTRF criteria; commission members came to agreement on the appropriate use of ENRTF funds.
Feasibility *Medium*	OLA could complete this evaluation using standard evaluation techniques. However, due to the broad nature of the ENRTF's constitutional purpose, it may be difficult to answer the proposed research question conclusively. In addition, LCCMR is a legislative branch agency, so OLA may not have the same level of independence as when evaluating entities and programs in the executive and judicial branches.
Balance *High*	OLA has never evaluated LCCMR.
Discussion	While the evaluation is feasible, it may not produce conclusive answers.

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Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Worksite Safety Inspections

Topic Selection Background Information November 2025

Program Overview	The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) conducts road and other transportation infrastructure projects across the state. MnDOT has developed safety procedures to protect both workers and the public at MnDOT worksites. These safety procedures include various types of worksite safety inspections and reviews, such as evaluating potential hazards at worksites.
Original Evaluation Questions	How, if at all, have the number of safety inspections at worksites changed in recent years? To the extent there have been changes, what are the reasons? How well does MnDOT ensure safety inspectors have relevant qualifications and experience? What changes have occurred, if any, in the number of accidents at worksites in recent years?
Revised Questions	How many safety inspections and accidents have occurred in recent years? To what extent do MnDOT procedures align with best practices for worksite safety? To what extent have MnDOT safety inspection procedures and practices changed in recent years and if they have, why? How well does MnDOT ensure staff or contractors who perform safety inspections have relevant qualifications and experience?
State Resources *Unclear*	It is unclear how much MnDOT has spent on worksite safety inspections, as these inspections are not a separate budget item.
State Control *Medium*	MnDOT generally develops its own policies and procedures (including safety inspection policies and procedures) that must comply with relevant state and federal laws.
Impact *Medium*	In Fiscal Year 2024, MnDOT employed more than 5,100 full time equivalent staff, some of whom work onsite at MnDOT construction worksites. MnDOT also hires contractors who work at worksites. MnDOT's construction sites can also present safety risks to the public.
Timeliness *Medium*	In September 2025, MnDOT paused statewide construction work for a statewide "stand down" in response to the deaths of two construction workers at MnDOT worksites. The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry announced that the Minnesota Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MNOSHA) was investigating the accidents. It is unclear if MNOSHA's work would affect an OLA evaluation.
Feasibility *Medium*	OLA could complete the evaluation using standard evaluation techniques. While MnDOT has established safety procedures, these are a collection of activities performed by various contractors and staff across MnDOT departments, not a single "inspection" procedure. We would likely need to focus on safety inspection processes or procedures for specific MnDOT roles or projects.
Balance *Medium*	OLA most recently evaluated aspects of MnDOT projects and contracting in 2019 and 2021, but has never examined MnDOT's worksite safety inspections.
Discussion	OLA may be able to provide information to help legislators and the public understand how workplace safety is managed in Minnesota and how it might be improved, but some of this information may overlap with findings from MNOSHA's investigation.

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

Nonemergency Medical Transportation

Topic Selection Background Information — November 2025

Program Overview	Medical Assistance pays for or provides nonemergency transportation to and from medical appointments and procedures. The type of transportation available varies based on location in the state and the medical needs of the recipient. The Department of Humans Services (DHS) and counties and tribes have shared responsibility for ensuring that recipients receive needed transportation.
Evaluation Questions	To what extent have Medical Assistance recipients received appropriate nonemergency medical transportation (NEMT)? To what extent has DHS established adequate requirements for NEMT? How well has DHS overseen NEMT, including identifying and investigating potential fraud, waste, or abuse?
State Resources *High*	DHS reported that the state spent about $146 million on NEMT in Fiscal Year 2025.
State Control *Medium-High*	Federal law requires states to provide NEMT to Medicaid recipients (Medical Assistance is Minnesota's Medicaid program). However, states have wide latitude to design and administer these services.
Impact *High*	Obtaining transportation is essential for some Medical Assistance recipients to access the health care they need. In Fiscal Year 2025, NEMT provided about 3.3 million rides to more than 114,000 individuals.
Timeliness *Low*	The 2025 Legislature passed a law that significantly restructures NEMT; changes will be implemented for fee-for-service recipients in 2026 and managed care recipients in 2027. Any findings and recommendations from an evaluation of the current system would quickly become irrelevant, and it is too soon to evaluate changes.
Feasibility *Medium*	The combination of state and county responsibilities makes the evaluation challenging to scope narrowly, but key data appear to be available. Our 2011 report was limited to evaluating transportation for fee-for-service recipients; including managed-care recipients would significantly increase the evaluation's scope.
Balance *Medium*	OLA last evaluated NEMT in 2011.
Discussion	NEMT has been an area of ongoing legislative interest, but its recent restructuring would make it difficult for OLA to provide useful recommendations.

State Oversight of Long-Term Care Insurance

Topic Selection Background Information — November 2025

Program Overview	Long-term care insurance provides coverage for the costs of care for individuals who cannot care for themselves due to prolonged illness or disability. It may cover services such as at-home, assisted living, or nursing facility care. The Minnesota Department of Commerce (Commerce) is responsible for reviewing and approving long-term care insurance policies offered for sale in the state, as well as reviewing and approving proposed rate increases.
Evaluation Questions	Does Minnesota have adequate laws in place to protect against unreasonable increases in rates for long-term care insurance? To what extent has Commerce provided sufficient oversight of the rates providers are charging?
State Resources *Low*	Expenditures for Commerce's Insurance Division in Fiscal Year 2024 were about $10.6 million. That amount included spending for all of the department's insurance regulatory activities, so the expenditures for long-term care activities would be just a portion of that figure.
State Control *Medium-High*	Both state and federal laws govern insurance companies, but review and approval of rates is a state function.
Impact *High*	According to data from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, there were about 200,000 Minnesotans covered by long-term care insurance policies at the end of 2022.
Timeliness *Medium*	Long-term care insurance—and specifically fast-increasing premiums—has been a topic of interest for at least a decade. Commerce published special reports on long-term care insurance in 2015 and 2016 in response to legislative concerns. That said, there is no particular advantage to addressing this topic this year.
Feasibility *Medium*	We could evaluate Commerce's oversight of long-term care insurance using standard techniques. Depending on how the project is scoped, we may need to retain an external consultant with actuarial expertise.
Balance *Medium*	OLA has never evaluated long-term care insurance and last completed a program evaluation at Commerce in 2022.
Discussion	Ratepayers in states across the nation have complained about large increases in their long-term care insurance premiums. However, the fact that these concerns are widespread suggests that the underlying issues may be systemic, and not related to any individual state's regulatory activities. Therefore, a program evaluation may not address these concerns.

State Regulation of Nursing Home Care

Topic Selection Background Information November 2025

Program Overview	Multiple state agencies are responsible for regulating and promoting quality of care at Minnesota nursing homes. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) licenses and inspects nursing homes. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) administers Medical Assistance reimbursements for nursing home care and is responsible for monitoring Medical Assistance spending on resident care.
Evaluation Questions	How well do MDH and DHS work with each other and with the federal government to ensure adequate care is provided by nursing homes? To what extent are there gaps or duplication in state agency responsibilities for regulating nursing home care? To what extent are state efforts to promote quality care effective?
State Resources *High*	In Fiscal Year 2023, Minnesota spent over $400 million in state Medical Assistance funds on nursing facilities. Additional state funding supports the work of state agencies to regulate nursing home care.
State Control *Medium*	State laws establish state agency responsibilities for regulating nursing home care. Most nursing homes in Minnesota participate in federal Medicaid (Medical Assistance) or Medicare programs; the state is responsible for certifying that these nursing homes meet federal requirements related to quality of care.
Impact *High*	Minnesota currently has more than 300 nursing homes with the licensed capacity to serve more than 20,000 residents. Residents of these facilities can be among the state's most vulnerable adults; they depend on the nursing care they receive on a daily basis.
Timeliness *High*	Legislators and other stakeholders have recently raised concerns about quality of care in nursing homes and whether state agencies are adequately ensuring that public funds are directed to residents' needs. Particular concerns have been raised about changes in ownership, and whether some new owners are providing quality care.
Feasibility *Medium*	OLA could complete this evaluation using standard evaluation techniques. However, this project could be large, complex, and involve multiple agencies; we may need to scope the evaluation to include only certain aspects of regulation.
Balance *Low*	OLA has done multiple evaluations related to MDH and DHS in recent years. Most notably, OLA is currently evaluating MDH's licensing of assisted living facilities; the same MDH division is also responsible for nursing home licensing.
Discussion	An evaluation could address important and ongoing concerns about how the state cares for some of its most vulnerable residents.

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Taxpayers' Transportation Accountability Act

Topic Selection Background Information November 2025

Program Overview	The Taxpayers' Transportation Accountability Act (TTAA) requires the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to estimate the costs of certain state highway transportation projects before entering into private contracts. For projects estimated to cost more than $250,000, MnDOT must determine that department staff could not do the work at a lower price before entering into private contracts. In Fiscal Year 2024, MnDOT outsourced all TTAA-governed projects—including 20 projects MnDOT estimated that department staff could have completed at a lower cost—primarily citing lack of staff availability.
Evaluation Questions	To what extent has MnDOT complied with contracting requirements in the TTAA? To what extent are the factors MnDOT uses to evaluate costs of performing work itself versus contracting out for a project appropriate and consistent? How effective has TTAA been at achieving its policy goals? How has the budgeting process affected MnDOT's ability to capitalize on potential savings?
State Resources *Medium*	In Fiscal Year 2024, MnDOT reported that it executed 113 private transportation contracts subject to TTAA requirements, which totaled over $71 million.
State Control *High*	MnDOT is responsible for improving state roads and managing transportation contracts. State law establishes the TTAA and the requirements for private transportation contracts.
Impact *Medium*	The state's trunk highway system has a significant impact on those who use the state's roads. State-managed roads comprise less than 10 percent of Minnesota's roads but carry approximately 60 percent of total traffic volume.
Timeliness *Medium*	While there is no urgent reason for an evaluation that we are aware of, the state's highway system continues to age and become increasingly expensive to maintain.
Feasibility *High*	OLA could evaluate MnDOT's compliance with the TTAA using standard evaluation techniques, including document reviews, surveys, data analysis, and interviews.
Balance *Medium*	OLA most recently evaluated aspects of MnDOT projects in 2019 and 2021 but has never examined the department's compliance with the TTAA.
Discussion	Since the TTAA took effect in 2009, MnDOT has executed 994 contracts subject to its requirements. MnDOT plans to invest significantly in the state's highway system in the coming years, so now may be an appropriate time to evaluate MnDOT's compliance with the TTAA.

Waiver Reimagine

Topic Selection Background Information — November 2025

Program Overview	Since 2017, the Legislature has directed the Department of Human Services (DHS) to make significant changes to Minnesota's disability waiver programs through the Waiver Reimagine project. Disability waiver programs cover services and support for eligible individuals. In 2021, DHS completed the first phase of Waiver Reimagine, which included simplifying the menu of services offered through disability waiver programs. The second phase of Waiver Reimagine includes condensing four waiver programs into two. DHS has announced it is delaying implementation of the second phase until January 1, 2027.
Original Evaluation Questions	How well does Waiver Reimagine meet its goals of simplifying services, increasing flexibility, and ensuring equitable access to supports? What are projected costs for direct services and program administration; how do these costs compare to current programs? How will Waiver Reimagine address any disparities in access to services across geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts? To what extent has Waiver Reimagine established transparent decision-making and conflict-resolution processes?
Revised Questions	To what extent has DHS established transparent decision-making and conflict-resolution processes for Waiver Reimagine? To what extent has DHS's project implementation aligned with the goals of Waiver Reimagine to simplify services, increase flexibility, and ensure equitable access to supports? What cost benefits or access changes does DHS anticipate?
State Resources *Low*	DHS staff told us that the Legislature appropriated more than $16 million for administration of Waiver Reimagine for fiscal years 2020–2025, an average of $3 million per year. While these costs have been relatively low, disability waiver payments themselves have been high. The state spent about $5.1 billion for disability waiver services in 2024; about half of which came from state funds.
State Control *Medium*	Disability waiver program services are funded primarily through Medicaid. Minnesota has the authority to design its disability waiver programs, but the federal government must approve these programs prior to providing federal Medicaid funds.
Impact *High*	Disability waivers covered services for more than 74,000 Minnesotans in 2024. Waiver Reimagine requires changes to Minnesota's disability waiver programs that may impact whether and how individuals' services are covered.
Timeliness *Low*	Waiver Reimagine is an ongoing project within DHS. It may be more informative to conduct a program evaluation after DHS has completed the project.
Feasibility *Low*	OLA could not evaluate whether Waiver Reimagine has met its goals because the project is still ongoing. OLA could conduct a more limited evaluation of DHS's decision-making on the Waiver Reimagine project using standard evaluation methods.
Balance *Medium*	OLA has not evaluated Waiver Reimagine. OLA evaluated the financial oversight of DHS's home- and community-based services programs (which include the disability waiver programs) in 2017.
Discussion	Waiver Reimagine could reshape Minnesota's disability waiver programs, which cover services for tens of thousands of individuals with disabilities. The project started more than eight years ago, and it may be valuable for OLA to evaluate DHS's progress. However, OLA would not be able to assess whether Waiver Reimagine has met its goals until after the project is fully implemented.

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