

Dignity Centered Programming

Building Sustainable Federal Setting IV Services
for Students with Complex Behavioral and Emotional
Needs

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SESSION OVERVIEW

1. Our Why

Dignity & belonging as the foundation

2. The Physical Environment

Designing spaces that heal and engage

3. Curriculum & Instruction

Rigorous academics with therapeutic support

4. Financial Sustainability

Cost modeling and regional revenue strategies

5. Staffing & Recruitment

Building interdisciplinary teams

6. Regulatory Navigation

Compliance, cooperative arrangements & MN law

VISTA EDUCATIONAL CENTER

VISTA

Valuing Individual Student Talents & Abilities

10

Partner Districts Served

34

Regional Students Enrolled

2024

Program Launch Year

VISTA Elementary • VISTA Secondary • VISTA Autism Center (Fall 2026)



OUR WHY

Dignity & Belonging as the Foundation

Students with the most complex needs are often the ones most excluded from a sense of school belonging — we set out to change that.

Federal Setting IV students have historically been educated in isolated, compliance-driven environments. We asked: what if we built something different?

Dignity is not a program feature. It is the lens through which every decision — from room design to discipline protocol — must pass.



"Every child deserves to be seen, known, and valued — not despite their challenges, but as a whole person."

FEDERAL SETTING IV

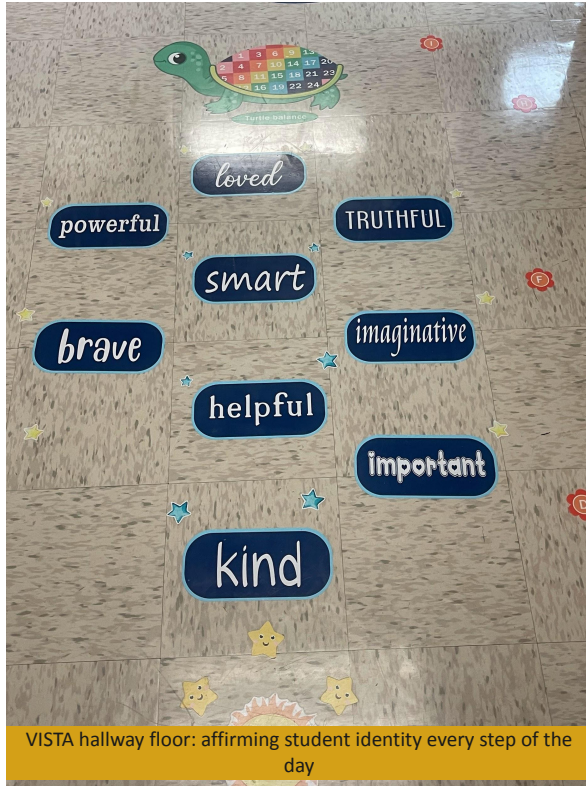
The Most Intensive Placement

- Served outside general education $\geq 60\%$ of the day
- Designed for students with significant behavioral and emotional needs
- Requires highly specialized staff, therapeutic environments, and individualized supports
- Governed by IDEA and MN special education rules
- Can become a setting of first-choice excellence — not last resort



VISTA Options Room — therapeutic space designed for safety, regulation, and relationship-building.

DESIGNING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



Safety by Design

Clear sightlines, calm color palettes, reduced sensory overload. Safety embedded, not imposed. Standardized classroom furniture arriving June 2026.

Therapeutic Spaces

Options Room: therapeutic meeting space, safe for regulation and reset, area for restorative practices, relationship-building, and individual support.

Academic Zones

High-expectation learning environments that signal: 'You are a student here.' Structured teaching strategies, work stations, visual schedules.

Dignity by Default

Affirming words on hallway floors, student identity visible throughout the building. Every design choice asks: does this honor our students?

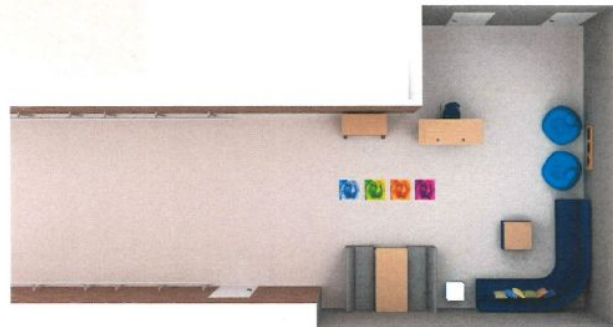
Standardized Classroom Furniture Furniture Arrival: by June 15, 2026











CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Our Curriculum Tools:

Wit & Wisdom

ELA — grade-level, standards-aligned

EdEL / OATECA

Language arts & functional skills

TeachTown

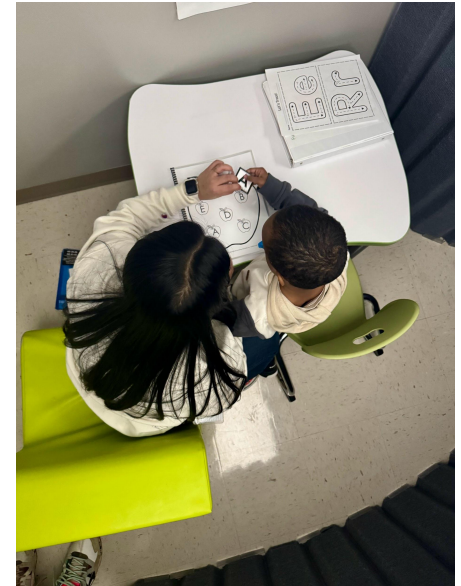
Specialized software for behavioral & academic goals

IXL Math

Adaptive, individualized math practice

Our Instructional Approach:

- Trauma-informed, dignity-centered instruction in every classroom
- Embedded SEL — not a separate block but woven into every transition and lesson
- Consistent routines, predictable environments, and rigorous data tracking
- Collaborative partnerships: District 916, Change Inc., Teach to Heal



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY MODEL

10

Partner Districts

34

Tuition Students

24

VISTA Secondary Capacity

Revenue Streams

District Special Ed Aid

Base IDEA funding per enrolled student

Tuition-Based Placements

10 regional districts pay tuition to place students

Cooperative Arrangements

Shared costs with partner LEAs (e.g., District 916)

Key Cost Considerations

- Low student-to-staff ratios (intensive support model)
- Licensed mental health staff on-site (Change, Inc. partnership)
- Crisis prevention training: Ukeru — trauma-informed, restraint-free
- Therapeutic materials, sensory supplies, furniture (new June 2026)
- MEAndMine student wellness & self-regulation systems
- Continuous professional development investment

STAFFING STRUCTURE & RECRUITMENT

VISTA Team Structure:

Administration & Building Support

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Special Education Coordinator
- Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)
- Behavior Intervention Teacher

Classroom & Student Support

- Classroom Teachers
- Licensed Mental Health Practitioners (Change, Inc.)
- Social Worker
- Paraeducators



VISTA Staff Appreciation — a culture of commitment and belonging

Recruitment: University EBD partnerships • Grow-your-own paraeducator pipelines • H-1B visa pathways • Mission-centered culture

REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE NAVIGATION

IDEA & MN Special Education Rules

- IEP team-driven placement decisions
- Prior written notice and parent participation
- Annual evaluation and review cycles
- Least restrictive environment documentation

Tuition Billing Arrangements

- Joint powers agreements with sending LEAs
- Tuition rate structures and billing processes
- MDE notification and approval requirements

Licensure & Staffing Standards

- MN Board of Teaching EBD/ASD licensure
- Mental health practitioners
- Paraeducator training hour requirements
- Crisis certification: Ukeru (restraint-free) and CPI

Discipline & Restrictive Procedures

- MN restrictive procedures law compliance
- Parent notification and documentation
- Positive behavior support plans (PBSP)
- Restrictive procedures committee oversight

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What You Can Take Back to Your District

- 1 Dignity and belonging are design requirements — not aspirations.
- 2 Physical environment, curriculum, staffing, and finance must work as an integrated system.
- 3 Tuition-based regional placements create the financial sustainability to serve your own students well.
- 4 Compliance is the floor, not the ceiling. The best programs exceed minimums through a values-driven culture.
- 5 Start with 'why' and build outward: the why attracts the right staff, earns family trust, and sustains the work.

Questions Welcome

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Valuing Individual Student Talents and Abilities