

# *Building Resilience for the Future: Navigating Challenges and Shaping Success*



2022-2023  
ANNUAL REPORT

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## Keystone Educational Collaborative

2 Shaker Road, Suite D215

Shirley, MA 01464



[www.keystonecollaborative.org](http://www.keystonecollaborative.org)

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# OUR MISSION

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The mission of Keystone Educational Collaborative is to unite our communities together to strengthen each individual students' growth for the future.

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# OUR VISION

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The focus of Keystone Educational Collaborative is to ***lock-in the foundation of our students' future with the tools of today*** by developing and providing high quality, cost effective, educationally related programs for special needs students, professional development and other services that strengthen and enhance the educational offerings of our member districts.

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# OUR PRINCIPLES

- We believe our programs and services should be of the highest quality and should continue to be responsive to the changing needs of our member districts.
- We believe that our students should be provided with the highest level of quality programs and services that will allow each of them opportunities to reach their highest potential and demonstrate ongoing, measurable progress and independence.
- We believe that all students should be challenged to learn in a caring, inclusive environment that respects diversity and values life-long learning.
- We believe all students should be provided educational programs and services in the least restrictive environment and we work closely with each district to return students to their home district whenever it is appropriate.
- We believe high quality; ongoing and relevant professional development is essential for growth and the success of the educational process.
- We recognize the need to involve and support families to facilitate the educational process.
- We believe student assessment and program evaluation are essential for continuous improvement.
- We recognize the need to support the social and emotional well-being of our students.
- We embrace collegiality and a sense of shared commitment and recognize that we accomplish more collectively than separately.
- We recognize and celebrate the unique contributions and accomplishments of everyone in our collaborative community.
- We encourage and accept a diversity of opinions to stimulate innovative and creative ideas and effective solutions.

*"It's your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself that determines how your life's story will develop."*

*-Dieter F. Uchtdorf-*

Dear Friends and Families,

Keystone Educational Collaborative has always been synonymous with a commitment to providing exceptional specialized programs that support our students' evolving therapeutic and educational needs. Throughout the years, we have been fortunate to have the unwavering support of our twelve member districts, our dedicated families, and our communities, all of whom have joined hands in fostering a continuous learning journey for our students. While our commitment to quality programming remains steadfast, we understand the importance of adapting to the ever-changing landscape to ensure a bright educational future for our students.

As representatives of the educational community in your respective areas, we have consistently strived to nurture each child's unique abilities and inspire them to reach their fullest potential. Our mission for the future is firmly rooted in keeping your children's growth and development at the forefront. As an organization, we recognize that self-reflection is key to progress, and we have taken deliberate steps to align our efforts with our vision for the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the critical roles played by the entire educational community and underscored the resilience we all possess when it comes to securing our students' futures. We acknowledge the undeniable challenges of the past year, which have impacted our students, families, members, and staff. However, the Keystone community has demonstrated remarkable resilience in continuing to serve and challenge our most vulnerable students. With our primary mission ever more vital, we are committed to carrying forward the torch and developing the necessary therapeutic and educational tools for the future, starting today.

As a member of this dedicated team within the organization, I eagerly anticipate guiding Keystone into the future, unlocking your child's untapped potential along the way.

I hope that this year's annual report serves as a testament to the fabric of our organization and the excellence of our collaborative programming. It also provides insights into the directions we are charting for the future. None of these endeavors would have been possible without the steadfast support and dedication of our families, friends, member districts, communities, and our passionate staff, all integral parts of the Keystone Educational Community.

As we continue on the long journey out of the challenges posed by COVID-19, we remain committed to ensuring the best possible educational experience for our students and strengthening our bonds within the educational community. Together, we will navigate these uncharted waters and emerge stronger, more resilient, and more dedicated than ever to the success of our exceptional students.

Thank you for your continued support and unwavering commitment to our shared mission.

Sincerely,  
John J. Demanche,  
M. Ed, BCBA, LABA  
Executive Director



# KEYSTONE EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVE

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS



School Committee Member  
Ellen Holmes  
Ashburnham-Westminster  
Regional School District



Superintendent Dr. Adam Renda  
Ayer-Shirley Regional  
School District



Superintendent Dr. Steven Meyer  
Clinton Public School



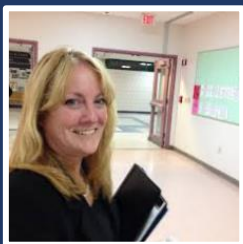
Superintendent Dr. Robert Jokela  
Fitchburg School District



Superintendent Dr. Mark Pellegrino  
Gardner Public Schools



Superintendent Paula Deacon  
Leominster Public Schools



Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham  
Lunenburg Public Schools



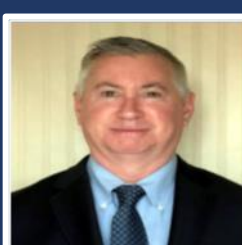
Superintendent Dr. C. Casavant  
Narragansett Regional School  
District



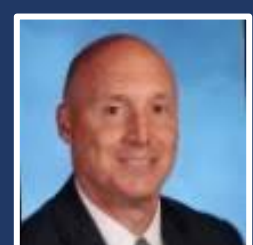
Superintendent Brad Morgan  
North Middlesex Regional School  
District



Superintendent Dr. Sheila Muir  
Quabbin Regional School District



Superintendent Richard Meagher  
West Boylston Public Schools



Superintendent Thad King  
Winchendon Public Schools

# Keystone Educational Collaborative

## Special Education Advisory Board

Ashburnham-Westminster RSD	Ms. Justine Muir
Ayer Shirley RSD	Ms. Tara Bozek
Clinton Public Schools	Ms. Loretta Braverman
Fitchburg Public Schools	Ms. Alicia Berrospe
Gardner Public Schools	Ms. Joyce West
Leominster Public Schools	Ms. Laura VanDorn
Lunenburg Public Schools	Ms. Julianna Hanscom
Narragansett RSD	Mr. Matt Holloway
North Middlesex RSD	Mr. Brad Brooks
Quabbin RSD	Ms. Kristin Campione
West Boylston Public Schools	Ms. Sherri Traina
Winchendon Public Schools	Ms. Nicole Heroux



## Keystone Educational Collaborative Executive Board Sub-Committees

Budget	<p>Superintendent Mr. Thad King</p> <p>Superintendent Dr. Steven Meyer</p> <p>Superintendent Dr. Mark Pellegrino</p>
Personnel	<p>Superintendent Dr. Sheila Muir</p> <p>Superintendent Dr. Mark Pellegrino</p>
Governance	<p>Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham</p> <p>Superintendent Mr. Robert Jokela</p>
Space	<p>Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham</p> <p>School Committee Member, Ms. Ellen Holmes</p> <p>Superintendent Mr. Robert Jokela</p>
Warrant Committee	<p>Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham</p> <p>School Committee Member, Ms. Ellen Holmes</p> <p>Superintendent Mr. Thad King</p>

# Keystone Education Administration

Executive Director

Mr. John J Demanche

Business Manager

Ms. Terri Burchfield

KEY Program Administrator

Ms. Megan Ritter

KEY Program Administrator

Ms. Amy Foley

Keystone Elementary/Middle  
School Program Administrator

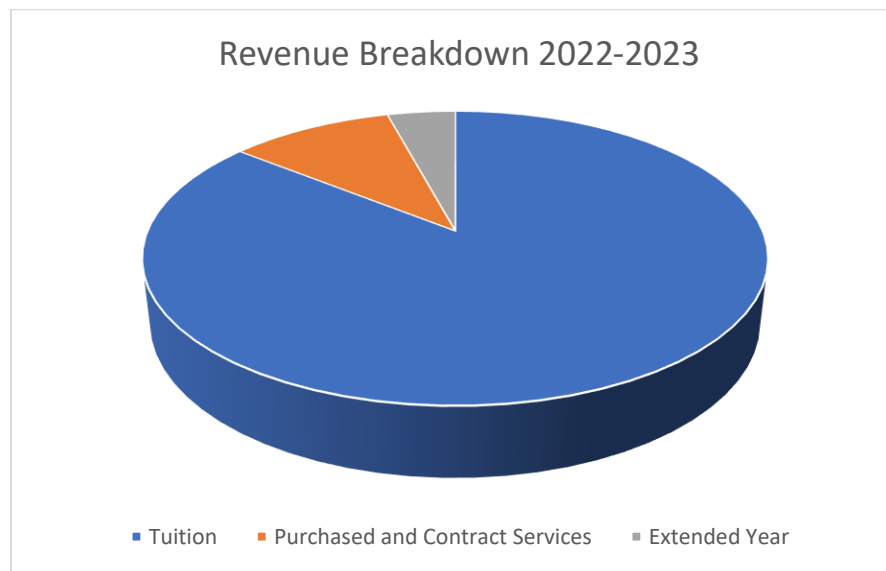
Ms. Julie Bragg

Keystone Academy Program  
Administrator

Mr. Gary MacCallum

# FINANCIAL AND ENROLLMENT DATA

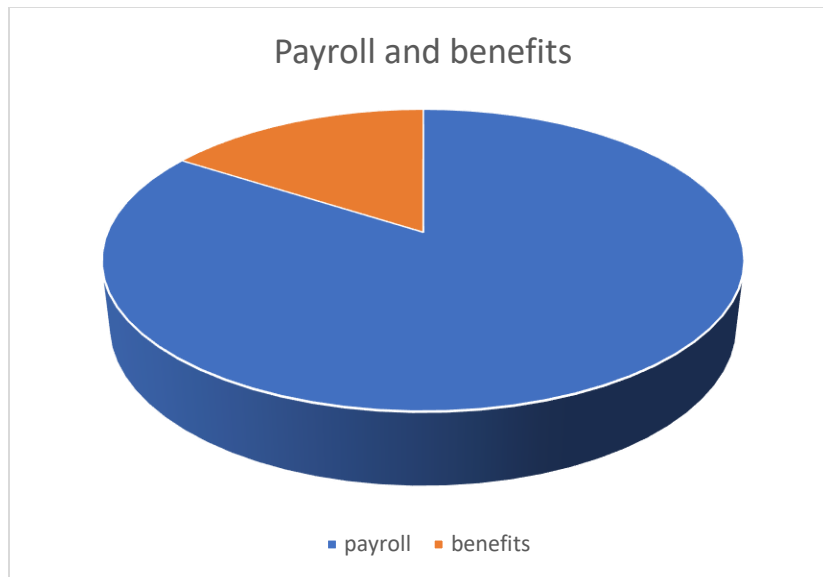
97% of the Collaborative's revenue comes from the student programs described elsewhere and the contract service staff we provide to our districts. The graphical display represents the organization percentage breakdown of the primary revenue sources. The Collaborative provides group purchasing opportunities that make up the remaining revenue stream, but the nature of such transactions is considered revenue neutral, meaning expenses are covered, but no additional income is derived so is not considered when measuring the results of operations. The Collaborative saw a 7% increase over the previous year, which was short of projections.



Primary Revenues 2021-2022		Primary Revenues 2022-2023	
Tuition	\$9,041,377	Tuition	\$9,375,532
Purchased & Contract Services	\$701,708	Purchased & Contract Services	\$1,101,828
Extended Year	\$459,040	Extended Year	\$458,629
TOTAL	\$10,202,125	TOTAL	\$10,935,989

## EXPENSES

The Collaborative was short 9% on revenue projections or about \$1,100,000. Much of this was related to being unable to maintain the full complement of staff needed to support the additional students projected and being referred. The expenses related to personnel costs were reduced by over \$900,000. Expenses related to the new building were over projections, but total savings over budgeted expenses were about \$760,000 resulting in an overall loss to the Collaborative of about \$340,000. 88% of all expenses were related to personnel costs.



## OPERATIONAL OCCUPANCY

The Collaborative has spent a lot of time and resources ensuring the building purchased in Fitchburg provides the best setting possible for our students. As we look ahead to the potential to lose more classroom space to districts addressing their own space needs, we end the year in the process of obtaining a second physical site and preparing that building for student use. While this creates some challenges at short term budgeting, the long-term benefits are considerable. The Collaborative finds space a challenge when addressing referrals, and given the projected enrollments, believe both capital projects will only enhance our ability to meet the needs of students in our area. We are looking at reducing rental expense from \$546,000 to below \$300,000 and using the remaining funds to support the capital purchase and renovation costs. Currently, the Collaborative has students in Ayer, Shirley, Fitchburg, Leominster and Townsend.

# STAFFING INFRASTRUCTURE

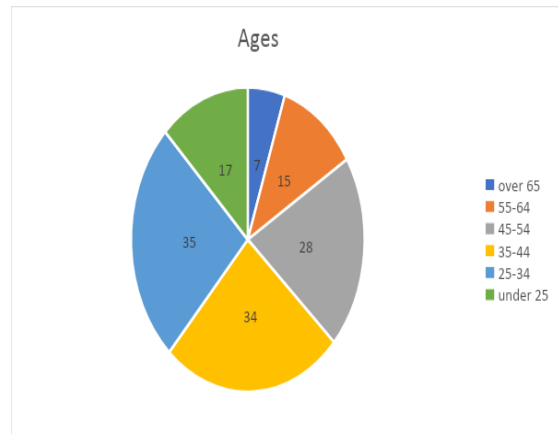
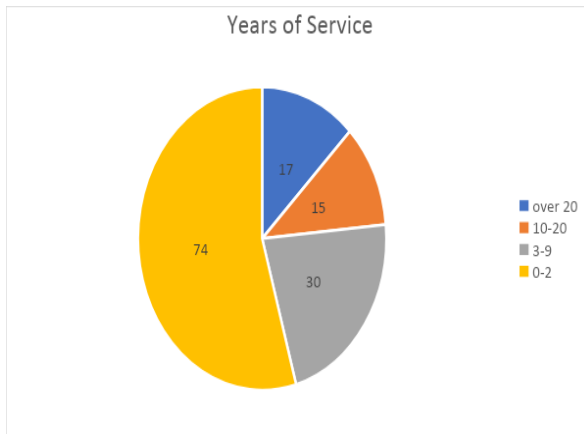
The collaborative remains steadfast in recognizing that the essence of the program lies in the caliber of our staff and their influence on our students. To this end, the collaborative consistently assigns organizational roles that directly impact student outcomes. As indicated in the graphical representation below, an impressive 93% of our staff positions involve daily, direct interaction with the student population we serve, with the remaining staffing percentage focused on providing crucial ancillary services. It's worth noting that this figure includes the reclassification of ten paraprofessional positions to highly trained Registered Behavior Technicians, thereby enhancing the classroom support that is in high demand.

Administrative/Support staff	7%	11
Psychologist/BCBAs/Counselors	7%	11
Teachers	24%	36
Paraprofessionals	43%	65
Allied Health (PT, OT, SLP)	19%	29
		152



# STAFFING TENURE

The collaborative's deliberate investment in our students, particularly in the form of human capital, has not only shown a correlation with positive student outcomes but has also run parallel to employee tenure. According to the graphical representation, approximately 32% of our employees have demonstrated their commitment by dedicating over five years of service to upholding the mission and philosophy of our program.



Employee Tenure		
< 1 year	34%	52
1-5 years	32%	49
5-10 years	9%	14
10-20 years	14%	21
20+ years	11%	16
		152

# EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The collaborative maintains its well-earned reputation for delivering high-quality and cost-effective programs and services to our member districts. As part of our commitment to transparency and alignment with our mission, we provide an annual cost comparison survey to our Board of Directors. This survey serves to demonstrate that we remain on course with our mission.

Additionally, the collaborative conducts an annual satisfaction survey among our Special Education Administrators to ensure that our vision of cost-effectiveness is harmoniously balanced with our mission of providing quality programming. This annual survey gathers feedback from our members to gauge their satisfaction with our programs and to assess how effectively the collaborative has been in meeting the needs of our districts and families.

## COST COMPARISON

The special education programs offered by the collaborative continue to demonstrate exceptional cost-effectiveness when compared to private special education programs catering to students with similar special educational needs. Annually, the collaborative conducts a comprehensive cost analysis, comparing our programs with similar private special education options located within a one-hour radius of north-central Massachusetts (where possible).

Before making these comparisons, the collaborative collaborates with the Special Education Advisory Board to ensure that the comparisons are equitable and accurately reflect private schools that districts might have considered if our collaborative programs were not available. The following graphical representation provides a breakdown of the daily and annual rates for each of the programs within our organization. The selection of comparison programs is based on factors such as a similar student population, educational and therapeutic methodologies, and historical comparisons.

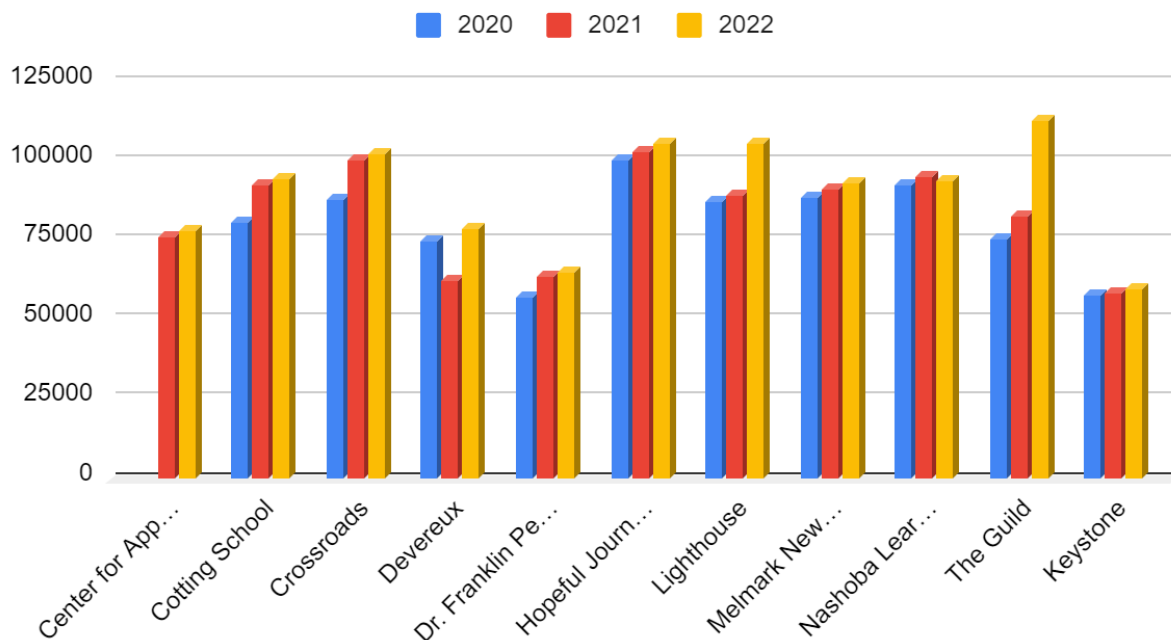
The final graphical display illustrates the overall cost benefits that both our member and non-member districts enjoy when they refer students to the collaborative.



# KEY PROGRAM

## Cost Analysis

KEY Program Annual Rate Comparison

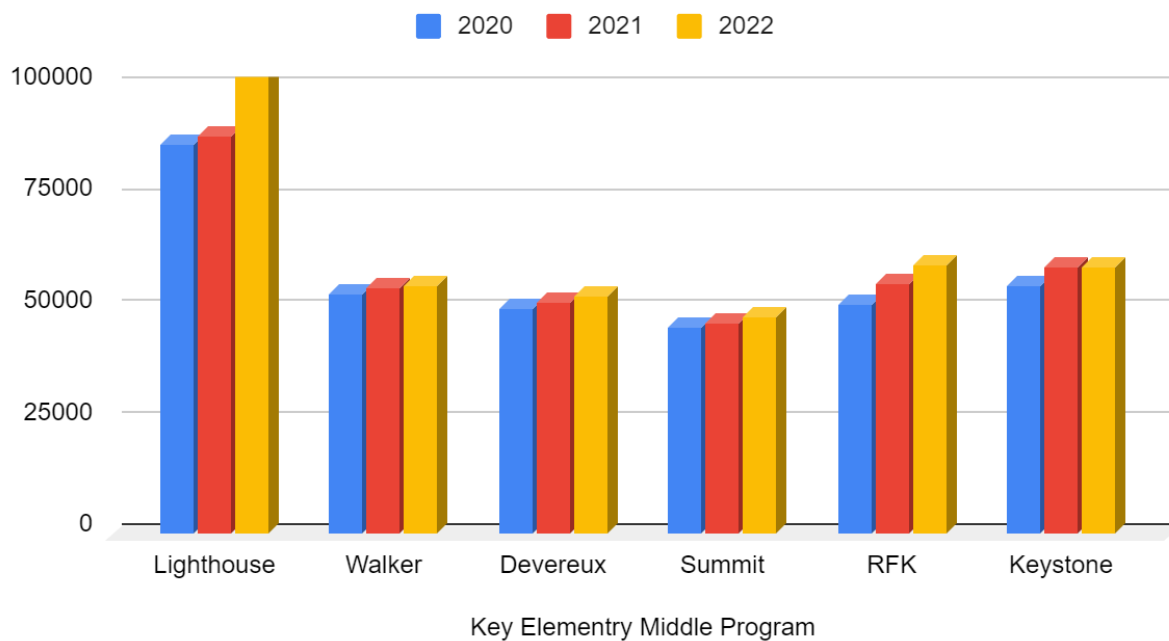


Daily average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius is \$515.93 per day. Keystone Educational Collaborative supplies an annual savings of \$26,653.

Daily average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius is \$92,878.00 per annual year (180).

# KEYSTONE EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM Cost Analysis

## Key Elementry Middle Program

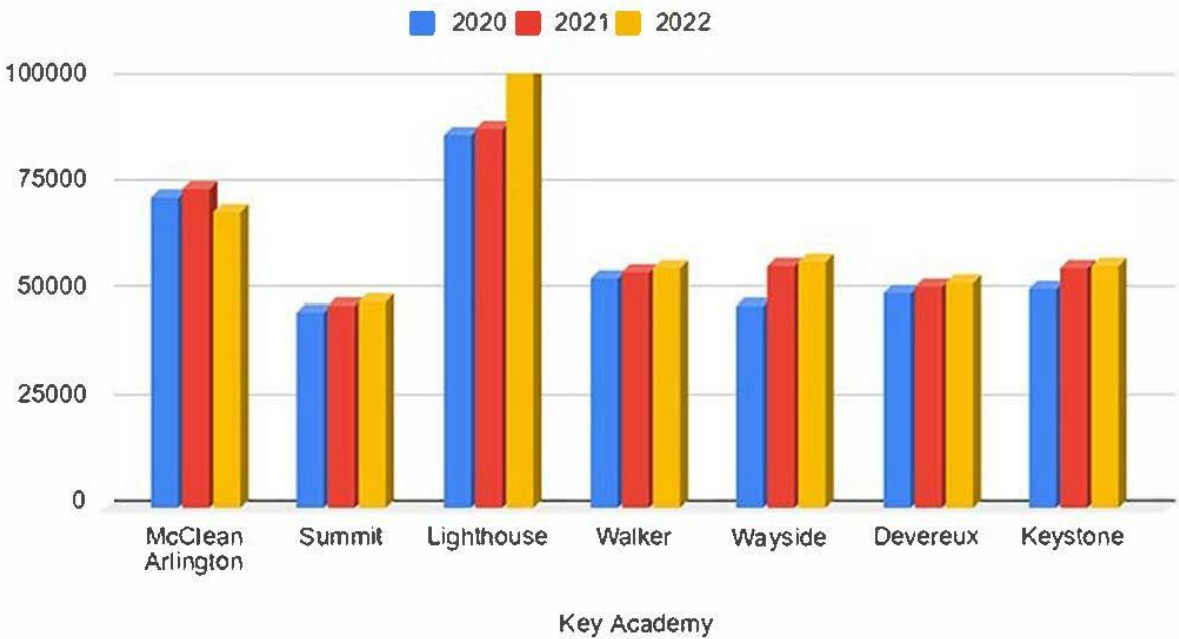


Daily average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius is \$359.26 per day. Keystone Educational Collaborative supplies a savings of \$3,172.

# KEYSTONE ACADEMY PROGRAM

## Cost Analysis

Key Academy Rate Comparison



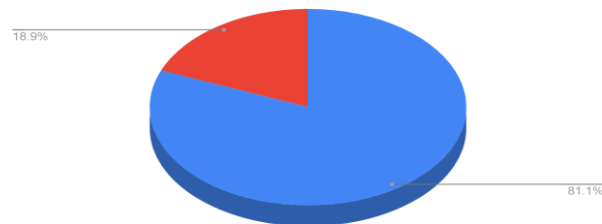
Daily average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius is **\$361.67** **per day**. Keystone Educational Collaborative supplies an annual savings of **\$4641.00**

# FINANCIAL AND ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

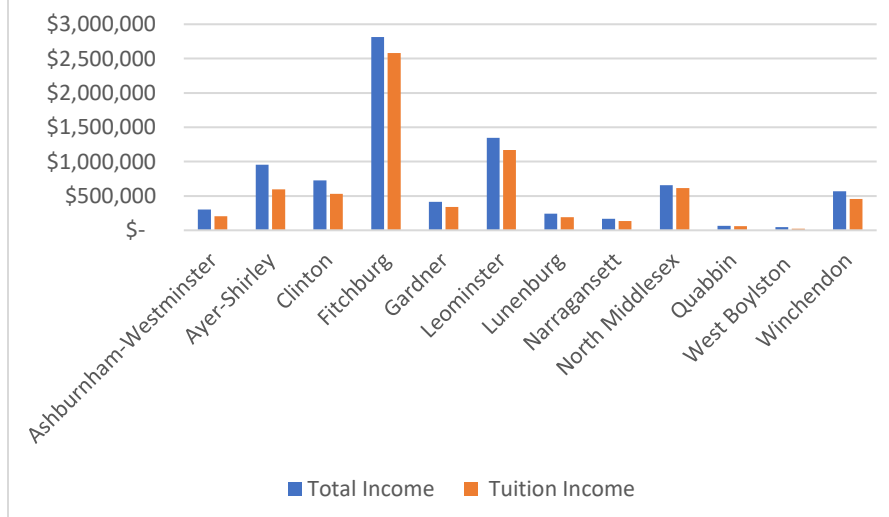
## MEMBER DISTRICTS

One of the core missions of the collaborative is to provide our member districts with programs that enhance and reinforce their own educational offerings, specifically tailored to address the intensive therapeutic and educational requirements of students with disabilities. The visual representation below illustrates how all twelve of our member districts have effectively integrated our highly specialized programs into their educational landscape. This data serves as evidence that our current specialized program design aligns seamlessly with the requirements and aspirations of our member districts, thereby enhancing their educational offerings.

Member Districts vs Non Members



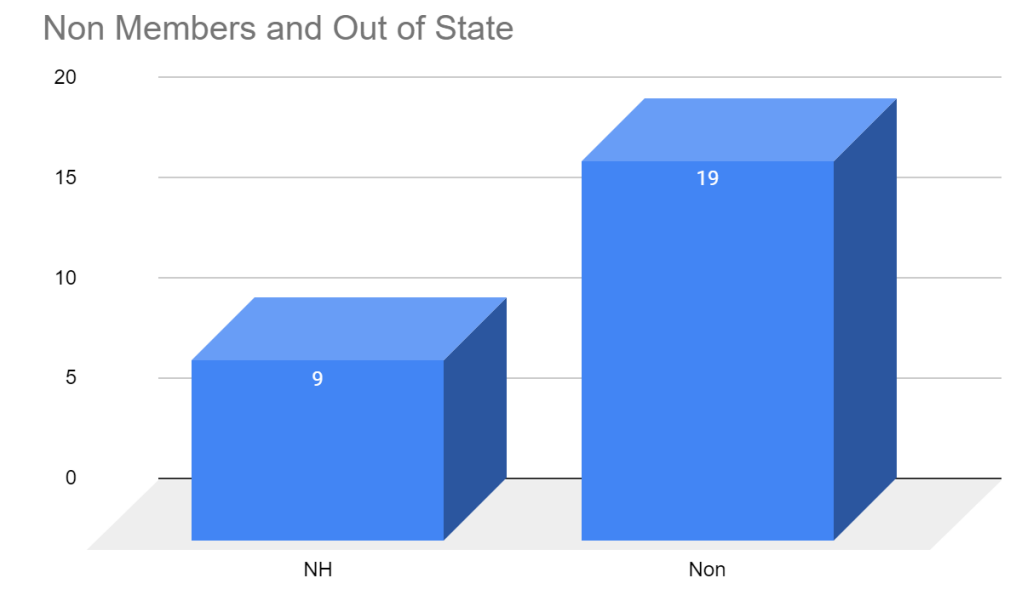
Member district revenue



# NON-MEMBER DISTRICTS

Our specialized programming is meticulously designed to cater to the intensive therapeutic and educational requirements of students with disabilities, and it has remained a central focus for both our member districts and the collaborative as a whole. While our members play a significant role within our organization, as a collaborative, we steadfastly endeavor to create the least restrictive environment for all students with specialized needs. The previous visual representation illustrates that a remarkable 81% of our educational and therapeutic programs have been specifically designated to serve our member districts and their respective communities.

Irrespective of town boundaries, the needs of our students have consistently been the focal point of this collaborative's mission. Therefore, we, as a collaborative, are unwavering in our commitment to supporting students and families from neighboring non-member districts. In the past year, the collaborative has been able to provide assistance to nearly a quarter of our population comprising non-members and out-of-state students, with the goal of enabling these students to remain closer to their own communities.

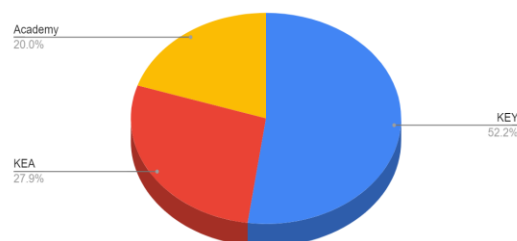


# PROGRAM BREAKDOWN

Our specialized programming is crafted in response to the specific needs of our member districts, offering support for students with a diverse array of disabilities. The visual representation below provides an overview of the distribution of disabilities that we have accommodated within our programs and the corresponding distribution of students in those programs that we have identified.

Moving forward, the collaborative remains committed to ongoing analysis and support for our member districts in discerning the most suitable disability categories, with the aim of better identifying and addressing future programmatic needs.

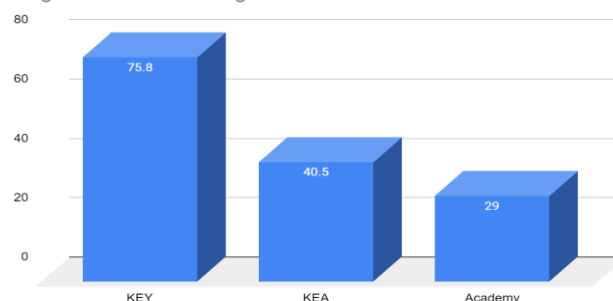
Program Breakdown 2022



# PROGRAM ANALYSIS

The breakdown of our program offerings and the accompanying graphical display of the average student census provide essential insights into the diverse range of educational services we provide and the extent to which they meet the needs of our student population. These visual representations enable us to tailor our programs effectively, ensuring they align with best practices and cater to the unique requirements of our students. Additionally, they help us track and analyze the average student enrollment within each designated program, guiding our efforts to continuously enhance the quality and accessibility of our educational services.

Program Census Average





*"The future influences the present just as much as the past."*





# REVENUE BREAKDOWN

## KEY PROGRAM

Tuition	
Member	\$ 3,745,815.00
Non-Member	\$ 1,133,389.22
Total Tuition	\$ 4,879,204.22
Budgeted Tuition	\$5,247,647.00
Difference	- \$368,442.78

## KEYSTONE ACADEMY PROGRAM

Tuition	
Member	\$ 1,323,981.99
Non-Member	\$ 565,840.80
Total Tuition	\$ 1,889,822.79
Budgeted Tuition	\$ 2,478,070.00
Difference	-\$588,247.21

## KEYSTONE ELEMENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM

Tuition	
Member	\$ 1,831,529.48
Non-Member	\$ 774,975.22
Total Tuition	\$ 2,606,504.70
Budgeted Tuition	\$ 2,942,093.00
Difference	-\$335,588.30

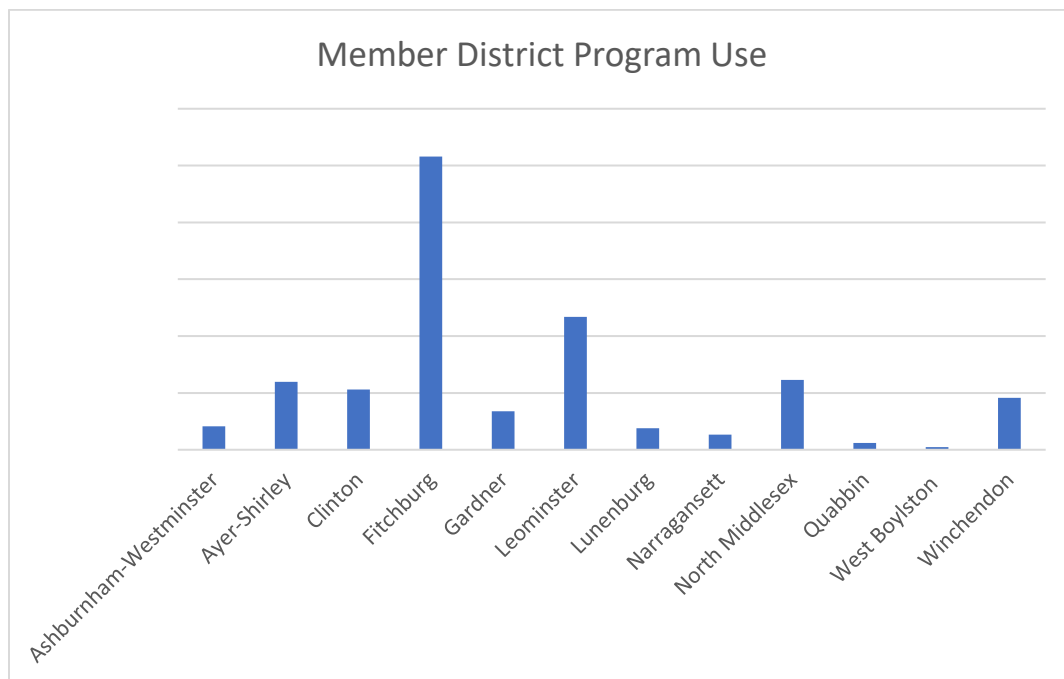
## EXTENDED EVALUATION

Tuition	
Member	\$ 178,330.00
Non-Member	\$ 85,570.00
Total Tuition	\$ 263,900.00

# TUITION REVENUE

Total Tuition	
Member	\$ 6,901,326.47
Non-Member	\$ 2,474,205.24
Total	\$ 9,375,531.71
Budgeted Tuition	\$ 10,667,810.00
Difference	-\$1, 292,278.29

The variance between the budgeted and actual tuition revenue is attributed to both staff and space availability for those programs where some student referrals could not be accommodated. Several key licensed positions were affected by leaves and vacancies which are no longer issues. To address space concerns, the Collaborative continues to purchase and develop program sites.



# FINANCIAL POSITION

The net effect of all the revenues and savings in expenditures is a loss of \$340,504. As stated elsewhere, tuition and service revenues were below projections by about \$1,100,000 due to space and staffing issues. Savings were recognized through salaries and benefit costs for positions that were not filled. Because of the inability to hire staff with the appropriate licenses, the Collaborative was unable to accommodate all student referrals. Again, this is not anticipated to be an issue in the new year.

As the enrollments have been increasing, the Collaborative has been aggressively pursuing more permanent options for classroom space. The Collaborative has spent some of the Capital Reserve Fund renovating our building in Fitchburg and are anticipating the purchase of a second building for programming when the new year begins. Additionally, the Collaborative has taken steps to obtain a mortgage and renovation loan to prepare the new building for students. Plans are for that building to be operational in the 2024-2025 school year.

At the end of June 2023, the Collaborative funds were:

Capital Reserve	\$ 662,355
Capital Assets	\$ 1,379,017
Unrestricted	\$2,513,950
Total net position	\$3,376,225



# SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY RESULTS

In our ongoing commitment to provide high-quality services and programs, the collaborative conducts an annual satisfaction survey among our member district Special Education Administrators every September. The reference tool has been expanded from previous surveys to ensure accuracy in measuring satisfaction not only from direct service providers but also in terms of administrative support provided by the collaborative to its members. Since collaboration is a cornerstone of our work, feedback from Special Education Administrators is invaluable in gauging our overall effectiveness as an organization.

Out of the twelve Special Education Administrators in our member districts, five were able to respond to the survey, and the results are outlined below. We acknowledge that the current environment, with its focus on school reopening plans, has made it challenging for some of our members to respond promptly, and their feedback will be accommodated in an alternative format.

Before delving into the survey findings, the collaborative would like to address the recommendations provided in last year's survey.

## Recommendations:

- Psychologists hire to share with the districts
- More vocational options at HS level.

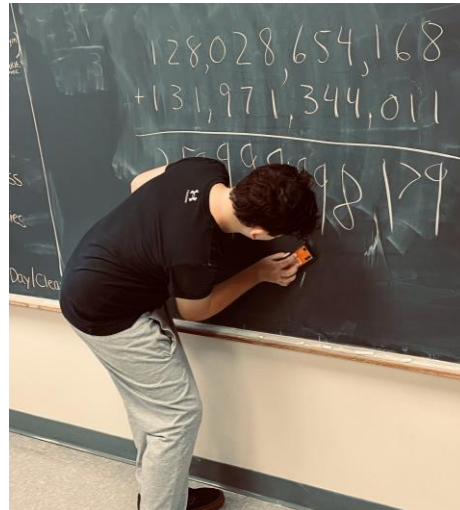
The collaborative fully embraced the comprehensive program recommendation and recognized the imperative for member districts. As a result, the collaborative undertook various initiatives during the 2022-2023 school year. Although the pandemic posed some limitations, the collaborative provided valuable support to districts by conducting evaluations of special educational services and reviewing multi-tiered support protocols. Leveraging the evaluation outcomes, the collaborative continued to offer training and support for multi-tiered support and best practice protocols for students with special education needs and programs.

Regarding the suggestion to expand vocational opportunities within the collaborative, we made significant strides. We welcomed an additional wood shop teacher, a Rehabilitation Counselor, and a Transition Specialist to bring their vocational expertise and assessment knowledge to our team. This enhancement enables us to better guide students toward future vocational opportunities. Currently, approximately 75% of working-age students are engaged in activities beyond regular school hours, including

volunteer work, job sampling, and other vocational opportunities that expose them to future career prospects.

Furthermore, the collaborative joined the Autism Higher Education Foundation and initiated the PLAT program (Paralegal Assistant Training Program). We are actively supporting the Fitchburg Court House and will soon extend our services to the Ayer/Shirley Court House, providing students with opportunities within the court system. We have one student already enrolled in the program, and we are exploring options to include students with varying disability demographics.

Regrettably, we have encountered challenges in meeting the demand for specialized services such as school psychologists. This predicament is exacerbated by a longstanding shortage of qualified candidates, which has been further compounded by the ongoing pandemic. Throughout the school year, we managed to assist some of our members in cases where the collaborative's school psychologist provided support in the evaluation and analysis of data collected by the district teams.

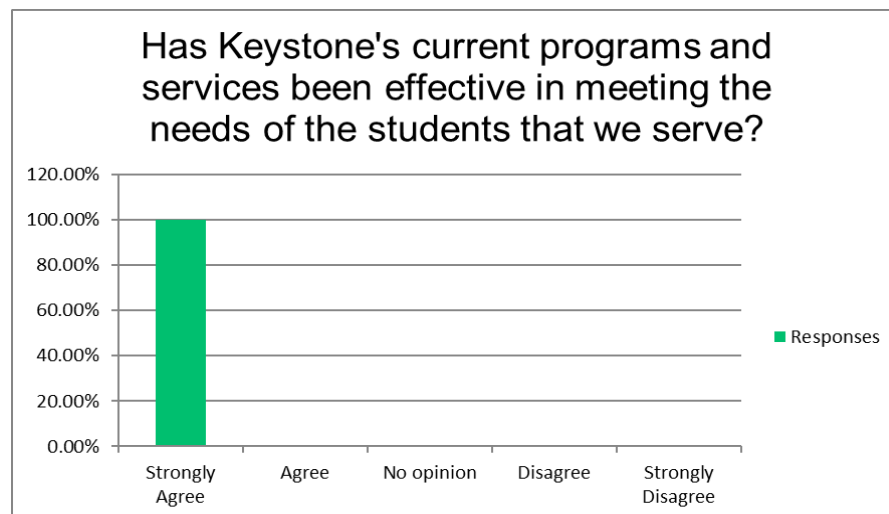




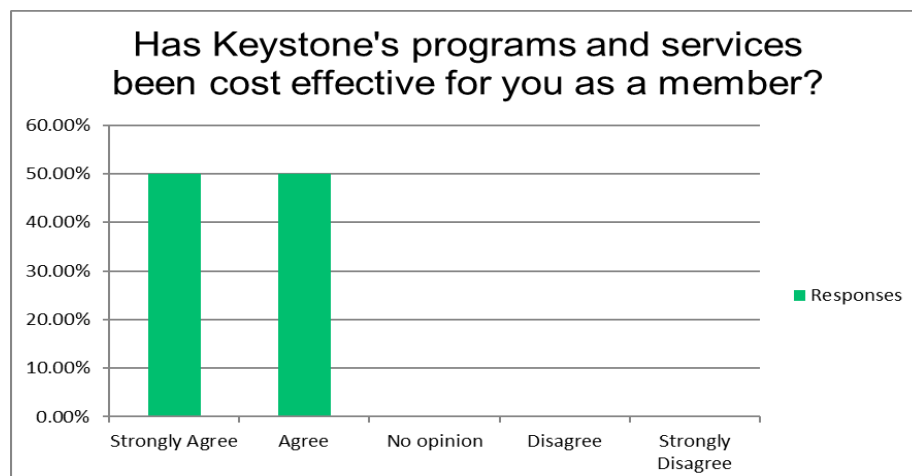
# SURVEY QUESTIONS

The summary results of this annual survey indicate that in 2022-2023 there was a high level of satisfaction with our special education programs and services and equally important, the collaborative continues to be a caring, responsive and effective organization that meets the demands of districts for efficient, effective and as a local educational option for quality services.

## QUESTION 1:

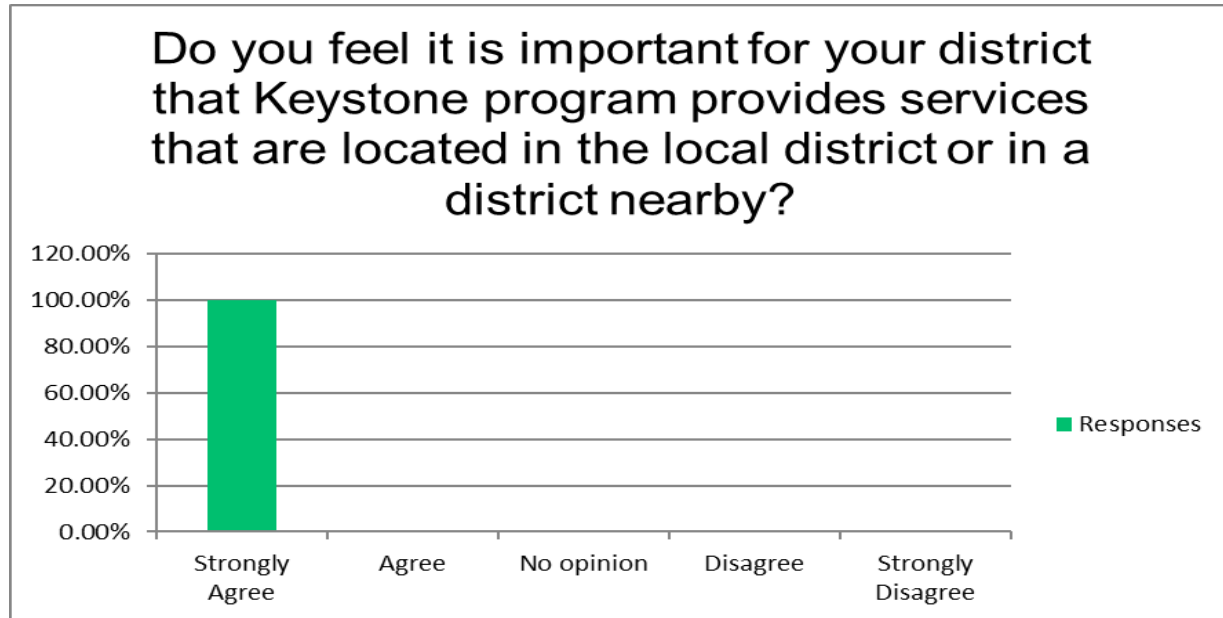


## QUESTION 2:

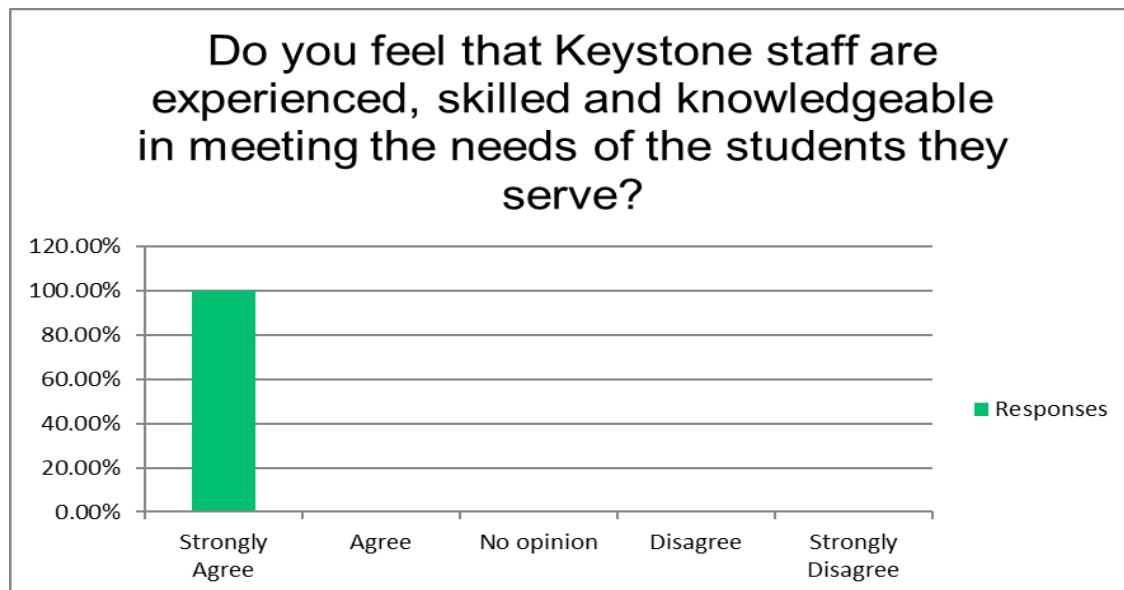




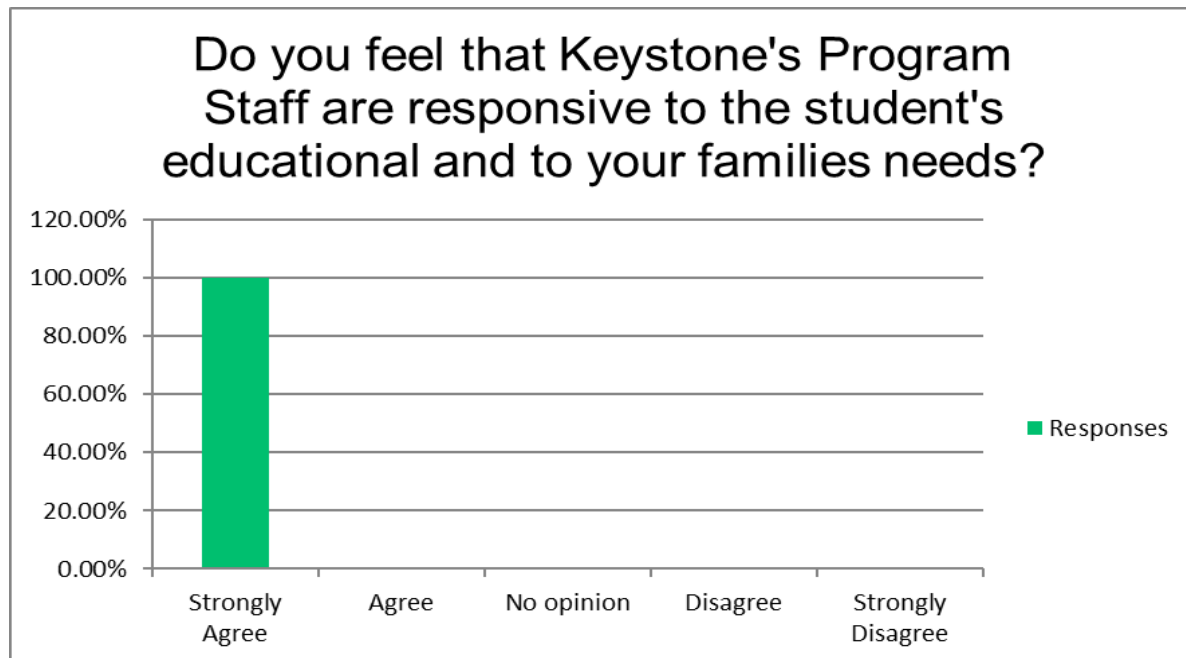
## QUESTION 3:



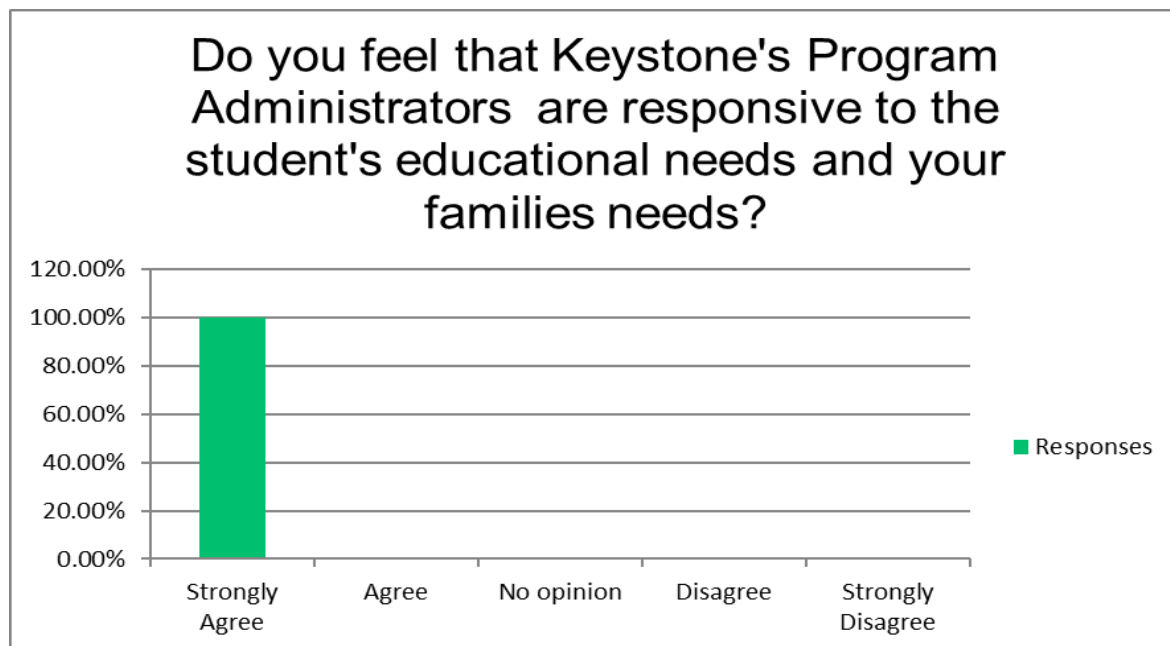
## QUESTION 4:



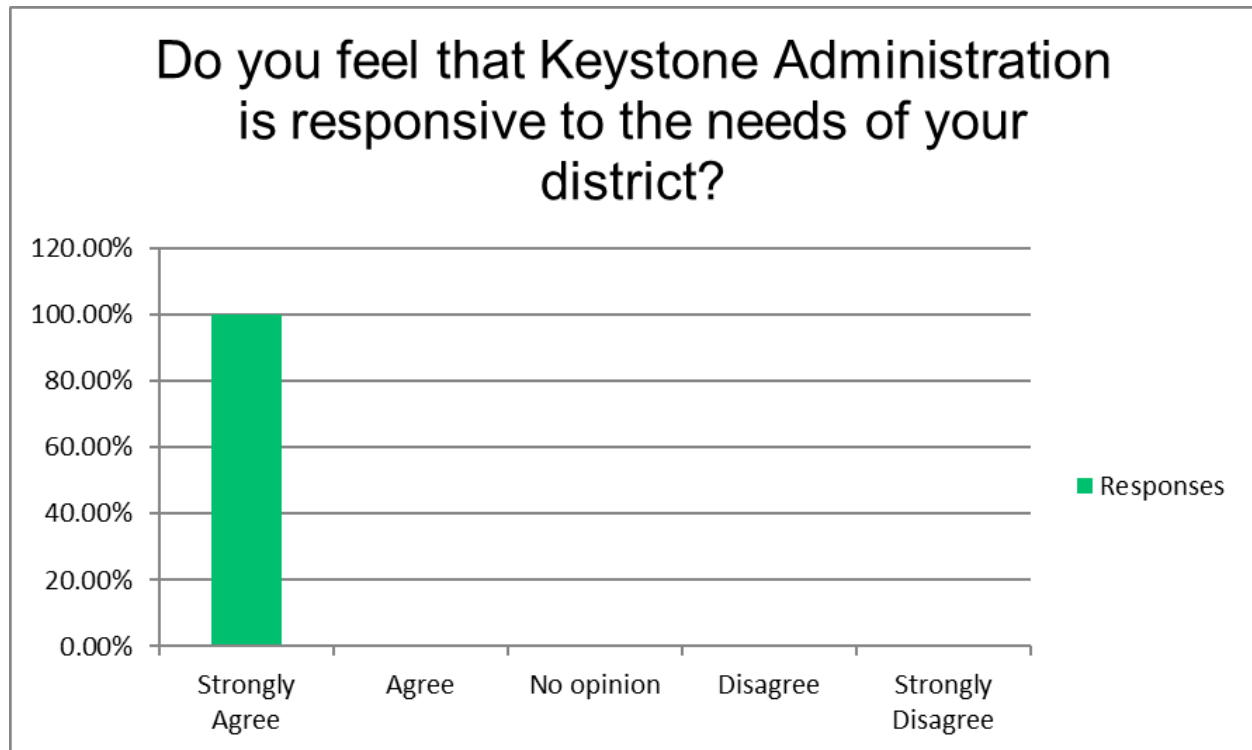
## QUESTION 5:



## QUESTION 6:



## QUESTION 7:

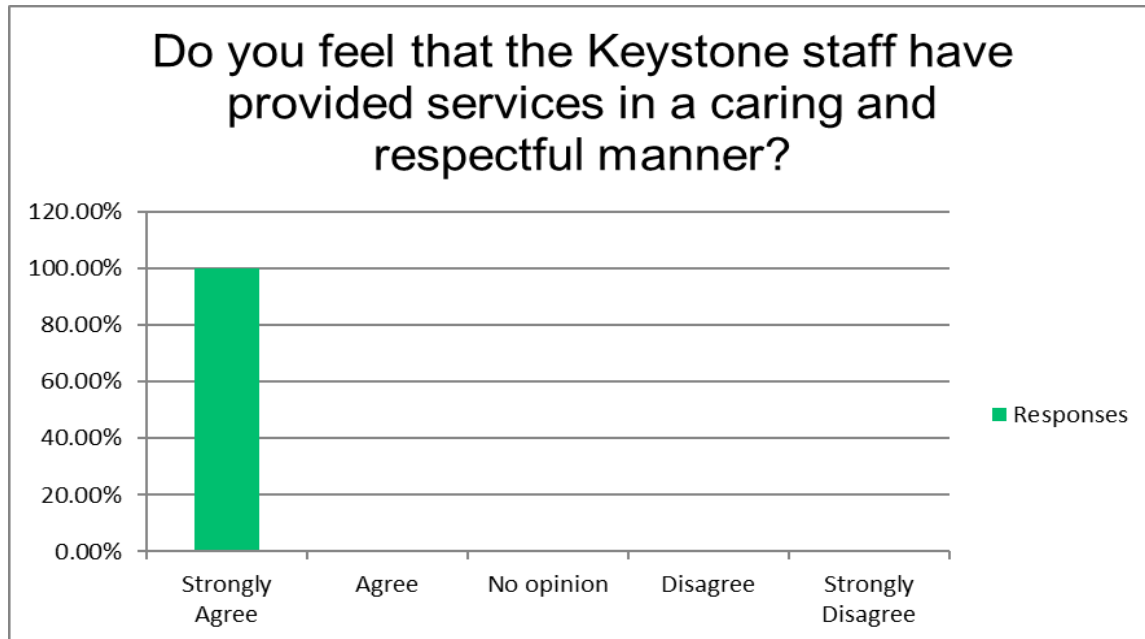


## QUESTION 8:

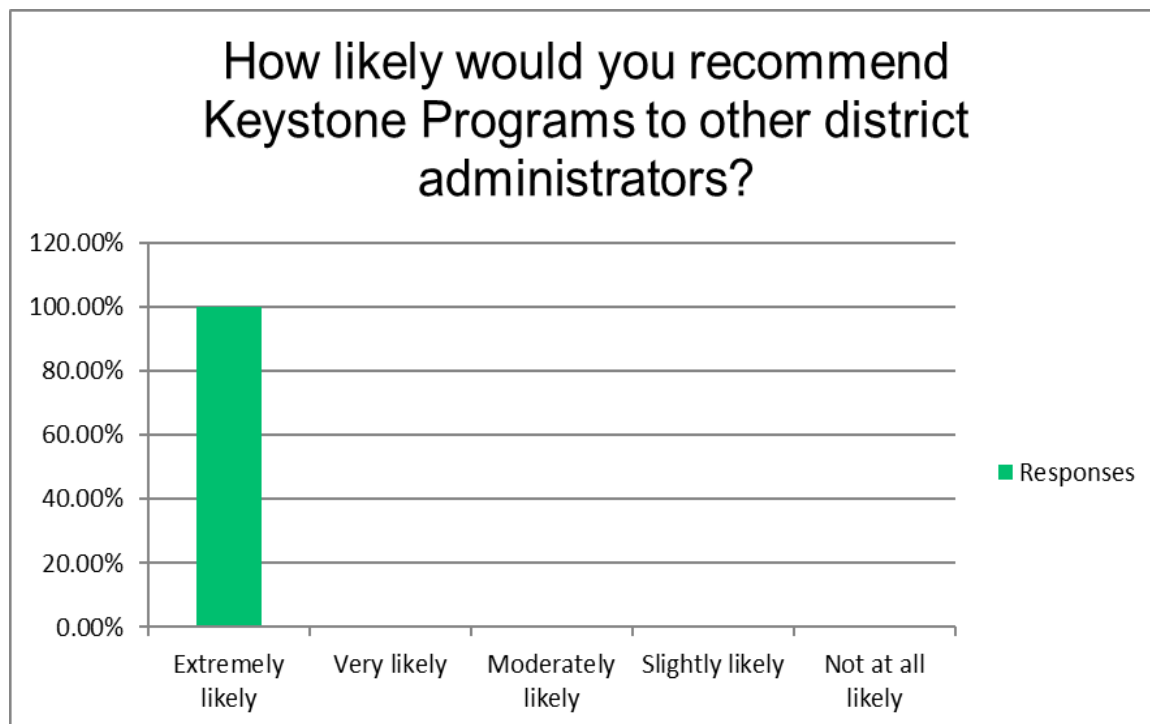
What would you suggest that our Keystone's Program Administrators could do differently to strengthen your program needs?

- I feel continuing with timely responses and transparency are key.
- Nothing that I can think of-everyone is always responsive and helpful!

## QUESTION 9:



## QUESTION 10:



## QUESTION 11:

Are you currently pleased with the new changes that the collaborative has made, and the new services projected in the upcoming year? Please comment.

- We are very pleased.
- I'm not sure of any new changes.

## QUESTION 12:

Can you suggest any services, supports or resources that would strengthen Keystone any further?

- School psychologist for use of testing.
- I'm very happy with the support Keystone provides, nothing additional I can think of right now.

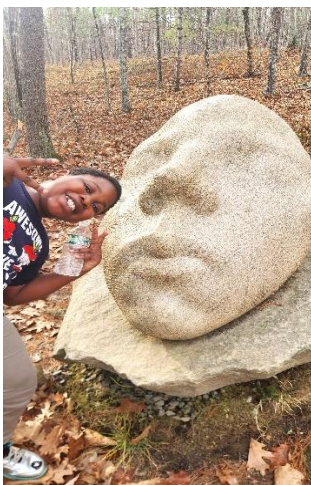


# PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

During the **2022-2023** academic year, the collaborative offered four unique programs designed to meet the needs of a specific student population, which complement and augment the educational programs and services of the member districts in a cost-effective manner.

- Keystone Alternative Elementary- Middle School (gr. K-7), is a Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approved Public Day Programs. The program provides therapeutic and educational programming for students with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral obstacles, and complex mental health issues. Students within this program have been identified as needing special education services.
- Keystone Academy (gr. 7-12) is also a Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approved Public Day Programs. This specialized program provides therapeutic and educational and vocational programming for students with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral obstacles, and complex mental health issues. Students within this program have been identified as needing special education services.
- Key Program: ICAN, PREP PROGRAM & Learning for Life  
The Key Program serves students who are aged 5-22 who are educated within public school settings and are substantially separate from member districts programming but have access to the least restrictive environment. The program serves students who have more complex, low incidence, cognitive, communication, related services, behavioral, academic, medical, and self-help needs that districts are unable to meet within the individual district. All the students in the Key Program have been found eligible for special education services.
- Extended Year Services: All three of the collaborative's specialized Special Education Programs offer extended year services and programming that are appropriate for the specific student's needs.

- **Extended Evaluation Program:** The collaborative provides extended evaluation services to students who were referred by school districts. Students in the program attend either Keystone Academy or Keystone Elementary and Middle School and receive therapeutic and educational services as part of the school program. In addition, students in the Extended Evaluation Program received evaluation and assessment services as identified by the student's educational team and as requested by the sending district. During the extended evaluation period, the collaborative provides weekly updates to the sending district as well as the student's family regarding social, emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning within the new school environment. Students who completed the program received an evaluation package designed to help the district determine the appropriate placement and supports for that student. Students referred to the program may have previously been found in need of special education services, but others have not been found to need such services. While in the program, students are typically provided with educational evaluations, psychological, and behavioral evaluations and other assessments as determined by the referring team. Students attending the Extended Evaluation program are provided with evaluations designed to answer those referral questions brought forth by the sending district. Such evaluations might include assessment in the following areas: academic, behavioral, social/emotional, cognitive, speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, executive functioning, attention, and/or adaptive behavior. The overall goal for the Extended Evaluation Programs is to prepare students to return to the least restrictive environments and to provide districts with recommendations on how to provide services in such a setting.





# Keystone Alternative Elementary-Middle School Program

## Philosophy

We believe that every child can learn and acquire the social skills required for success in school and in the community. We further believe that each child is unique, and that each child has the potential to make progress academically and emotionally.

## Mission Statement

The mission of the KEA Program is to help each child discover his or her strengths, improve coping mechanisms and develop social and academic skills. The goal of the program is to provide each student with the behavioral and academic skills required to return to a less restrictive educational setting.

## Student Population

The KEA Program's strengths are in its small size and high staff/student ratio. Students are placed in multi-age classrooms according to their developmental needs and academic skills. Students are referred to the program because they demonstrate challenging emotional and/or behavioral concerns. Students also present with learning and psychological challenges including but not limited to ADD/ADHD, Learning Disabilities, PTSD, PDD, OCD and Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

## Referrals

Referrals are made to the Program through the Special Education Directors of the sending school districts. Students may be placed within the Program on a long-term basis or for an Extended Evaluation Assessment.

## Referrals for Keystone Alternative School 2022-2023

Total referrals	63
Not a fit for program:	10
Accepted but selected other placement:	30
Waitlist:	12

## Placement Referrals for 2022-2023

Students enrolled:	6
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## Extended Evaluation Referrals for 2022-2023

Students enrolled:	5
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## Transitions from Placement 2022-2023

Transition to Other Keystone Program:	8
Transitions to a more restrictive environment:	2
Transition back to in-district public school	5
Transition to lateral program	

## Transitions from Extended Evaluation 2022-2023

Transition to long-term placement at Keystone:	4
Transition to Other Keystone Program:	0
Transition back to in-district public school:	0
Transitions to a more restrictive environment:	1

## Program Staffing

Each classroom is staffed with a certified licensed teacher and an appropriate number (average = 2) of teacher assistants to allow for a low ratio of students to adults. The program staff includes several related service providers: Three School Counselors, Occupational Therapist, Speech and Language Therapist, and BCBA. These individuals

provide individual and/or group therapy to each student, as well as consultation to staff based on student need and IEP service delivery. The clinician acts as a liaison to the sending school districts and is available to provide support to parents and guardians.

The Keystone Elementary program is located within the former Squannacook Elementary building in Townsend. We have an onsite Licensed Practical Nurse available to our students who is overseen by the collaborative Registered Nurse. Program Supervisor has overall administrative operational responsibilities for the Keystone Elementary- Middle School Program and works collaboratively with the Member District Administrative team and the Executive Director of the collaborative.

## Academic

Our elementary-middle school classes are taught in self-contained classrooms, which are K-8th grade students. All subject areas and specials are taught by the classroom teacher except for health and fitness classes. The middle school program comprises students in grades 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. This model provides a homeroom as a base classroom and include a rotating schedule for ELA, Math and Science. This model helps to prepare students to move from a self-contained classroom model to a model that helps students navigate more transitions and challenges of subject specific classrooms. These students continue to receive therapeutic support to meet the demands of a less restrictive middle school program.

All students are taught per their IEP and at their individual instruction level. The curriculum of the KEA Program is aligned with the MA Curriculum Frameworks with appropriate modifications and/or adaptations to meet the needs of individual students. Related services such as speech or occupational therapy are provided according to each student's IEP. Our students also participate in the MCAS process with appropriate modifications and/or adaptations for each student.

## Behavior Management Social Emotional Learning

Behavior Management at KEA Program is based on respect for everyone, setting appropriate and consistent limits, and reasonable and positive expectations. Students will be given as much positive reinforcement as possible to promote prosocial behaviors. A variety of positive reinforcement strategies are employed. Students receive reinforcement and awards on both individual and group levels.

Each class has a daily behavior chart point system, which enables the student to earn points or stickers for appropriate behaviors in the areas of academics, behaviors and adult and peer interactions. If the student has achieved 80% of possible points or stickers for the day, he or she may choose a prize/activity.

If needed, individual behavioral support plans are developed by each child's team in consultation with the Program Supervisor and/or counselor. The services of contracted Behavioral Psychologists are available on an as needed basis. Behavioral support plans and data are reviewed and updated routinely by the program staff.

## Community Based Instruction

We are continuing to safely develop plans to provide community-based instruction for all our students. This initiative will allow the students to learn and perform skills, from the beginning, in the natural setting and will eliminate the need for a student to have to generalize the skill from only one setting, or with one person, in the real-life setting.

We have been utilizing the trails and state forest land abutting the school property. We are working with DCR and they have provided some on site educational programming to our students. We have been fortunate to work closely with the Townsend Police Department and the Resource Officer, Mark Francis. He visits our program frequently and talks with the students and joins in some of our activities. He has coordinated with the Fire Department and other community members to have demonstrations of department vehicles and services including a police dog.

As part of our planning and development of CBI, we have been in contact with nearby state parks regarding various educational programming that they may be able to offer our students. We are excited to have our students take part in activities such as: snowshoe making, snowshoe hikes, nature walks, tree and animal identification, etc.



# Keystone Academy

The Keystone Program strives to educate students to possess the social skills required for success in school and in the community while creating a learning environment where students can feel comfortable and confident so they can be the best version of themselves.

Keystone offers a 180-day school program in addition to a five-week extended school year program.

## Description

Our *Keystone Academy* is an educational program that supports students between grades 7-12, who present with significant social, emotional, and learning disabilities. These disabilities affect overall ability for academic success or ability to participate within the educational community available within their home districts. The *Keystone Academy* is a substantially separate school that focuses on the *whole child approach* regardless of the disability category. We acknowledge that some of our children today carry a larger emotional burden than students of the past, and that to navigate life's many challenges they may need more specialized support and guidance than was historically provided the goal of this full day program is to assist children in developing healthy relationships, skills to self-regulate their emotions, communication skills to advocate for themselves and their needs, working toward their full academic potential.

Within our trauma-sensitive community, Keystone focuses on the areas of *safety*, *respect* and *effective learning* as a foundation to participate in the daily routines and expectations of student life.

## Philosophy

We believe at the Keystone Academy that we need to focus on the whole child approach regardless of the disability category. We acknowledge that some of our children today carry a larger emotional burden than students of the past, and that to navigate life's many challenges we may need to supply them more specialized support and guidance than what was historically provided. The goal of this full day program is to assist children in developing healthy relationships, skills to self-regulate their emotions, communication skills to advocate for themselves and their needs, working toward their full academic potential.

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Keystone Academy is to provide an educational experience for students with special needs that fosters academic growth, social responsibility, and emotional health. Keystone orients its programming and instruction around the three areas of safety, respect, and effective learning.

## Student Population

Students are referred to Keystone Academy because of being unsuccessful in general education, or as a step-down from a more restrictive setting. Students present with a variety of academic, social and behavioral challenges and/or emotional impairments requiring instruction in an adult-intensive, highly structured setting with small class sizes and consistent support, encouragement and praise. Typical conditions seen in the school population include but are not limited to general and specific learning disabilities, attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder, suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar, oppositional defiant disorder, autism spectrum disorder or a combination of these.

## Program Staffing

Keystone Academy initial staff professional development plan was to continue to increase student engagement and time on learning through further development of Universal Design Learning skills, utilization of classroom staff in more directed instruction of students and providing more opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of concepts and applications.

Again, with the onset of school closure, staff professional development shifted focus to selection and orientation on the use of programs and learning tools that would effectively deliver remote learning experiences. In order to continue to provide individualized remote learning plans, the Keystone Academy staff became proficient in using Google classrooms, Zoom, IXL, Discovery Education, ck-12, Read-works, Kurzweil, and project-based learning. Additionally, staff assembled learning packets to offer students and families.

# Referrals

Referrals are made to the Program through the Special Education Directors of the sending school districts. Students may be placed within the Program on a long-term basis or for an Extended Evaluation Assessment.

Keystone Referrals		Enrolled	Not Enrolled	Extended Evaluation Referrals	Enrolled	Not Enrolled
High School	26	8	5- referral withheld by district 7 – declined tour 4 – other program 1- moved 1- more secure	15	5	2- referral withheld by district 8- other program
Middle School	11	3	5- no tour 3- other program	6	3	3- other program

Out of 18 students who left the Academy during the 2022-23 Academic Year:

# Of students	Disposition
1	Received a Certificate of Completion
1	Graduated with a diploma and a Certificate in HVAC from Leominster CTEi.
4	Students transitioned successfully to their home district school
4	Students were hospitalized and then were relocated within the group care system.
3	Students transferred to a more restrictive setting.
2	Transition to home district's alternative school.
1	On the run for 6 months and relocate in group care.
1	Transferred to another collaborative.
1	Moved out of area.

## Extended Evaluation

Extended Evaluation: Program students enrolled in the Evaluation Program are assigned to Keystone Academy classrooms and participate in daily school programs to facilitate assessment while with their peers. The full-time School Psychologist/Lead Clinician continued to be pivotal in evaluating all students enrolled in the Extended Evaluations and continued defining the assessment process and oversight of the written reports.

## Program Services

### Individualized Academic and Behavioral Programming

Keystone Academy adheres to the delivery of services accommodations and modifications described in a student IEP.

The Academy's tier one behavior system: students are monitored under a generalized reinforcement system. The middle school utilizes a daily point earning system as a gauge for students to determine success. Students earn points for success in the areas of effective learning, respect, and school safety. Point sheets are tabulated daily and converted into "school dollars" to be spent at a school store or saved up for a higher value reward.

Keystone Academy high school community utilizes a Level System as the fundamental structure to promote behavioral, social, and academic growth. The six (6) levels are sets of clear standards for an effective student. This system is instrumental in assisting students in setting and meeting goals, and in allowing students to monitor their own progress on a day-to-day basis in school.

### Daily Literacy Instruction

Keystone Academy continues to devote daily instructional time for the enhancement of skills in the areas of listening, reading comprehension, speaking, and writing. Student on or near grade-level skills participate in a novel-based curriculum. Struggling readers continue to benefit from the Lexia. This program provides the additional skill building in the areas of word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge and reading comprehension.

Academically, the Academy works closely with the referring districts to assure our high school students are taking and succeeding in the required course work and requirements to receive a district high school diploma.



## Technologically and Standards Based Academic Curriculum

With the move to our new location, Keystone Academy was able to acquire existing technology equipment (interactive whiteboards, computer network), increase access to online learning and bring technology into the classroom. This allowed the program to deliver standards-based curriculum with a wider variety of strategies and programming.

With the school closure as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the collaborative joined the state and the nation in supporting educators to develop and assemble high-quality educational materials to provide students with effective remote learning resources. Simultaneous with selecting educational platforms and programs, came training and implementation of distance learning strategies while working with families and caretakers to create manageable routines in the home that assured safety and well-being, materials and equipment and predictable on a weekly basis.

Technologically and standards based academic curriculum is offered throughout the year.

## Clinical Services

Two full-time School Counselors provide therapeutic clinical/mental health services through individual counseling, social skills groups, mediation, and conflict-resolution/problem solving skills. All students receive a 1:1 session as well as a social skills group weekly based on student need and IEP service delivery. Social Skill groups are co-facilitated by the two School Counselors.

Keystone Academy continued to benefit from ongoing psychiatric consultation.

- Student centered clinical reviews increased our knowledge and understanding of nature of an individual student and how to develop a clinically informed intervention plan.
- Professional Development and Program development consultation.

## Crisis Intervention

All staff are trained and certified in CPI Nonviolent Crisis Intervention. The program supports a hands-off policy unless indicated. Staff focus on identifying students' baseline character/traits, escalation cycles and disability-indicated features as a means to intervene early and de-escalate students early.

## Health and Wellness Awareness Education

In addition to health classes being offered, Keystone Academy also offers a variety of opportunities for physical education. In seasonally good weather, Keystone Academy visits local parks for hiking and exploration.

We have an outdoor area with a basketball hoop for movement breaks and pick-up games. Through memberships at the local YMCA and affiliation with the Boys and Girls Club of Fitchburg and Leominster we have sites in colder weather to offer sports, exercise and workouts.

After a two-year lapse, we again were able to partner with Making Opportunity Count (MOC) whose staff provide health education classes that are important to youth in our care.



## Functional Life Skills

To prepare students for post-high school pursuits, Keystone Academy provides instruction to assure a successful transition to college, career/trade training, world of work and/or independent living. Curriculum in Career Education and Math is geared to acquisition of financial literacy, including personal finance and budgeting skills. Development of student mastery in the area of activities of daily living are supported through cooking opportunities, meal planning and preparation; community exploration through field trips to local establishments, restaurants, reading a bus schedule planning a local trip utilizing public transportation.

## Vocational Skills Development

This year the Career Education Teacher position was enhanced to Transition Specialist (requiring the DESE approved Transitional Specialist endorsement). In addition to the classes, there is a greater emphasis on career exploration, job search and application, the development of positive work attitudes and work-related employability skills. More time is spent in the community exploring jobs and resources available for post high school pursuits.



## Expansion in Program Services

This year a half-time BCBA has been added to consult with staff and oversee development of behavior support plans for Tier II and III students.

## Career Skills/Transitional Services

We were able to renew our relationship with Leominster Center for Technical Education Innovation; our students were able to resume shop classes. With the support and instruction of CTEi instructors helped an Academy student graduate with certificate in HVAC.

The purchase of a new precision router has increased skill and learning opportunities in the wood shop classes. Students are producing more personal projects as well as creating furniture and classroom items for the Collaborative classroom and therapy areas.

# KEY Program

## Philosophy

Our philosophy is that your child will experience a year full of success in the following ways:

Through specialized instruction, all children will experience growth across the following areas:

- Self-advocacy skills necessary to communicate effectively and at their highest level of complexity
- Self-reliance skills necessary to be as independent as possible.
- Academic skills, including literacy and mathematics that challenge in an attainable manner.
- Endurance and attitude necessary to participate in meaningful, productive work.

## Mission Statement

It is the mission of Key Programs, to partner with parents, professionals from sending school districts, and members of the community, to develop confident, capable, and self-motivated learners who are ready to return to a less restrictive school setting. The Key Program orients its programming and instruction around the three focuses of safety, respect, and effective learning.

The Key Programs promotes, supports, and celebrates the ideals of learning and critical thinking as lifelong pursuits and challenges students to acquire the skills necessary to meet the changing technical, social, and economic demands of our world. Further, it is the mission of the Key Programs to develop individuals who will respect the diversity of race, color, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or mental challenges.

# Student Population

The KEY Program continue to provide specialized services to students with special needs, in a public day school setting. Students present with profound deficits that impact their ability to function independently and make effective progress in the general education setting. All referrals made to these classrooms come through the child-study process where it was determined that the student required a more intensive educational setting, to make effective progress.

Students present with a variety of academic, social, and behavioral challenges. As some students are academically competitive, a large majority of students present with significant delays in cognition, self-regulation skills, motor skill deficits, as well as expressive and receptive language delays. In addition, some students present with significant medical needs that require direct nursing support throughout the school day. Students require a high level of adult supervision and assistance to keep them safe and implement all their educational goals and objectives.

Standard diagnoses include:

- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Developmental Delay
- Down Syndrome
- Intellectual Disability
- Rare Genetic Disorders (Charge Syndrome, Wolf Hirschhorn Syndrome, Fragile X etc.)
- Multiple Disabilities (Autism/ADHD/Sensory Processing, Autism/Spina, Bifida/Intellectual, Autism/ODD)



## Program Staffing

Each classroom is staffed with a certified teacher and an appropriate number of paraprofessionals to allow for a low ratio of students to adults (2:1). The staff that support the KEY programs are professionally licensed, highly qualified, CPI certified and endlessly committed to our students and their families. Additionally, the KEY program has dedicated job coaches who assist the students in gaining vocational skills needed for life after graduation.

### DESE licensed staff

- 2 Administrator
- 12 Teachers

### Professionally licensed staff

- 9 Therapists, 4 SLPs, 2 OTs, 2 PTs, 1 TVI
- 3 Therapy Assistant, 2 COTAs, 1 PTA
- 1 Family Support Coordinator
- 4 (1 RN & 3 LPN); plus 6 agency nurses
- 1 Rehabilitation Counselor
- 2 BCBA

### Highly Qualified Support Staff

- 40 Paraprofessionals
- 2 Job Coaches
- 1 Program Secretary

## Referrals

Referrals to the school are made by Directors of Special Education, Educational Team Leaders (ETL) or Out-of-District Coordinators from the student's home school district's Special Education Department. Upon receipt of the referral package (including all testing and IEP), a KEY Program Administrator will contact the district. If the student appears to be appropriate for the school, an appointment will be made to observe the student in his/her current educational setting, as well as an appointment for the student's parent/guardian to visit the KEY Program and participate in an intake interview. The referring school personnel, the KEY Program staff, and the student's current Team members, together with the parents/guardians, make the final placement decision



regarding enrollment. All students must have a current IEP and provide immunization records before starting at the KEY Program.

## Placement Referrals for 2022-2023

Students enrolled:	26
Accepted but selected other placement	24
Not a fit for program	13
Programs were full (waiting list)	6

## Transitions from Placement 2022-2023

Back to district:	5
Transition to another Keystone Program	0
Transition to another Collaborative Program	0
Transition to a more restrictive environment	2
Graduated/Transition to adult services:	6
Moved Out-of-State	3

# Program Services

## Individualized academic and behavioral programming

The KEY Program is an intensive language based program that utilizes applied behavior analysis (ABA) in conjunction with an interprofessional collaborative practice. Each classroom utilizes various instructional techniques including discrete trials, small groups, hands-on and multi-sensory learning experiences, behavioral modification, and positive behavioral supports suitable for children with special needs. Daily living skills are incorporated within the context of the daily routine to teach safety, self-awareness, and independence. All students receive instruction that is individualized, aligning with their Individualized Education Plans, in a low student to teacher ratio environment (2:1).

Students in the KEY Programs participate in the MCAS process with appropriate modifications and/or adaptations for each student, either in a computer-based format or via the MCAS-Alt Portfolio. Possible modifications to MCAS computer-based testing include shorter periods with frequent breaks, small group administration, test administrator reading directions, and tracking for test items and scribing. Students who are unable to participate in a traditional pencil-to-paper test are expected to complete an MCAS Alt Portfolio Assessment.

## Related Services

Related services refers to developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that are required for a student with a disability to succeed in education; services include speech-language pathology and audiology services, physical and occupational therapy, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes.

The KEY Program currently utilizes an integrated therapy model to deliver therapeutic services to students. Integrated therapy incorporates the same therapy approach as “push-in” but adds additional structure to the relationships with teachers and overall process. In this service delivery model, supports are provided in the classroom, where the student is receiving instruction. Therapy is provided in a less restrictive setting and does not remove the student from the classroom or instruction. It also helps students to generalize their skills beyond the pull-out therapy setting and provides generalized benefits for all students and their teaching staff.

Related services also include school health services and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling as well as training.

Keystone related services providers are fully licensed to practice in the state of Massachusetts and are integral members of the educational teams. Related services are provided per each student’s IEP.

## Behavior management and social emotional learning

Each classroom teaching team meets weekly to discuss student progress toward educational targets as well as positive behavioral changes. Classroom data is analyzed and reviewed to determine if any adjustments need to be made to a student’s academic instruction or behavioral protocol.

Behavior management within the KEY programs is tailored to the individual child, with positive expectations put in place along with reinforcement to shape future behavior. A variety of reinforcement strategies are employed, including token economies, self-monitoring systems, and various contingencies.

Individual behavior support plans are developed and utilized for each student, and data is reviewed routinely by the program staff and the in-program board certified behavior analyst (BCBA).



## Community based instruction:

The KEY programs offer vocational training activities that support the development of a positive work attitude, job skills and work endurance. These activities include a mail run service between program sites, as well as community-based opportunities at locations including Tiny's Restaurant, Nashoba Park Assisted Living, Cell Treats at Phoenix Park, the Perkins School Laundry, Ayer Police Station, Pit Stop Barber Shop, and Spanish American Club.

Additionally, students access the local community to develop greater safety skills, community awareness, social exposure and career awareness.



# COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM SERVICES

## Services and Supports

In alignment with our mission to continuously address the evolving needs of our member districts, the collaborative has extended its support through a range of services designed to complement and fortify district programs and resources. Our commitment to assisting districts has resulted in cost-effective and flexible long-term and short-term related services, the provision of extended year services, the coordination of a virtual learning initiative utilizing the Edgenuity platform, the implementation of home supports using telepresence learning robots (BEAM robots), fiscal management of the Footsteps to Brilliance early literacy innovation zone, offering cost savings through cooperative purchasing agreements for INTERFACE mental health referral services, cooperative procurement and management of Tobi Boardmaker, and the delivery of ongoing, high-quality professional development opportunities.

### Staff Training and Consultation

The collaborative's staff members continue to be recognized and sought after for their expertise across various disciplines by local school districts. Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, our staff has officially provided valuable support to our member districts in several key areas. This support includes consultation and evaluations for district staff in verbal de-escalation and physical management techniques, guidance in working with paraprofessionals, and the utilization of the ACES Curriculum tool for task analysis and data collection, offering a curriculum that allows staff to become Registered Behavioral Technicians. We have also offered support and consultation to district experts on AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) needs, educational-based adaptive equipment, and family-based support and training.

Furthermore, the collaborative has extended clinical and academic consultation services to member districts, facilitated by our Board Certified Behavior Analysts and School Psychologists, addressing both individual student needs and larger program reviews. Additionally, we have provided mentoring services to districts with newly acquired BCBA's, SLP-CF's (Speech-Language Pathologists in their Clinical Fellowship Year), and PTA supervision.

### Extended Year Services

Many of the students served by the collaborative necessitate extended year services to meet their educational needs. To optimize efficiency and offer a wider range of activities, the collaborative organizes a five-week summer program that brings together students from our KEY programs and those from our member districts. Students in our Academy Program and KEA Programs attend summer sessions at our Fitchburg and Townsend

facilities, respectively. These programs operate from Monday through Thursday, offering continuous academic instruction, related services, and a blend of enjoyable yet functional activities.

The collaborative's Extended Year Services are available to any student from our districts who require the services provided by our programs and meet the acceptance criteria. This includes students whether or not they attend the collaborative program during the regular school year. The rates for the Extended Year Program are based on daily rates, prorated for shorter days, and are highly competitive with private schools and other service providers.

## Related Services

The collaborative remains committed to delivering related services to our member districts, covering a broad spectrum of areas that include physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, vision and orientation and mobility services, BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst), and psychological/educational evaluation services. Our dedicated related service staff, working within local districts, play a vital role in supplementing district-related service providers, addressing short-term needs, and, in certain cases, fulfilling all therapy service requirements mandated by the district.

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, our collaborative-related service providers have been actively engaged in various districts, including Ayer-Shirley, Leominster, Gardner, Fitchburg, Narragansett, Clinton, and Winchendon, extending their support and expertise to meet the diverse needs of our member districts.

## Virtual Education

The collaborative continues to oversee the coordination of the Edgenuity Virtual Learning platform for districts engaged in the regional virtual learning initiative. This encompasses handling billing with Edgenuity, which is based on district usage, and facilitating meetings and training sessions with the designated district administrators. Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, a total of xxx students capitalized on Edgenuity courses.

Participating in the collaborative-sponsored cooperative purchasing agreement with Edgenuity has enabled districts to offer a wider array of courses that they might not have had the individual capacity to provide. This has allowed them to retain students who might have considered leaving the district due to unique academic requirements, such as student-athletes participating at a level requiring them to be absent for portions of the regular school calendar. Furthermore, districts have had the opportunity to provide their staff with valuable experience in teaching within a virtual learning environment, equipping them with the necessary skills to manage larger cohorts of students engaged in virtual education.

## Edgenuity: Number of Students in attendance per semester

Edgenuity 2022-2023		
Ashburnham/Westminster	1 semester courses 8 full-year courses	\$4,675.00
Ayer/Shirley	128 semester courses	\$35,175.00
Clinton	28 semester courses	\$7,525.00
Gardner	62 semester courses	\$14,375.00
West Boylston	34 semester courses 1 full-year courses	\$9,400.00
		\$71,150.00

## Footsteps to Brilliance/North Central Early Literacy Innovation Zone

Over the course of the 2022-2023 school year the collaborative, continued our work with a number of member and non-member districts located along the Rt. 2 corridor and with the United Way/Community Foundation of North Central MA to support an Early Literacy Innovation Zone using the Footsteps to Brilliance (F2B) early literacy application. The collaborative continued to act as the fiscal agent on behalf of participating districts and enabled those districts to access grant funding from the United Way/Community Foundation. This funding from the United Way/Community Foundation paid for half of the cost for a five-year contract to provide the F2B application to the districts and their respective communities. Districts that participated in the funding through the collaborative included Clinton, Gardner, Narragansett, Winchendon, Lunenburg and Leominster. The collaborative was pleased to act on behalf of these districts to reach children and families in pre-k through grade 3 living in those communities and continues to look forward on analyzing the data collected to guide our members on the effectiveness of these programs.

The Early Literacy Innovation Zone is an innovative approach to increasing early literacy skills on a regional basis and could serve as a model for other regions across the country. This five-year project involved a commitment from districts and the United Way/Community Foundation of North Central to utilize an easy to access, multilingual, and effective technology application to improve reading skills in young children. By partnering with the United Way/Community Foundation the collaborative was able to save participating districts almost \$2,500,000 on the cost of F2B licenses over the course of the five-year United Way grant.

# PROGRESS TOWARD MEETING THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AGREEMENT

Improving the academic achievement of all students in the least restrictive environment:

The collaborative remains committed to delivering programs that feature a robust curriculum and instructional practices tailored to meet the distinct needs of each student, all while adhering to the comprehensive requirements outlined in an individual student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP). Our collaborative services are administered by appropriately licensed and highly trained staff, always with a focus on providing education within the least restrictive environment, as determined by the student's dedicated IEP team.

Our KEY programs are strategically situated within public school settings, ensuring that all students have opportunities for interaction within the least restrictive environment, which may include participation in general education settings, depending on the specific needs of the student. Students in the KEA programs benefit from educational and counseling services that equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate their return to less restrictive educational settings, whenever that is a viable option. Keystone students actively participate in MCAS or MCAS Alternative Assessments, with tailored accommodations determined by their educational teams.

In our ongoing commitment to excellence, the collaborative continues to develop strategies related to behavior management, transition support, and integration efforts, all aimed at ensuring that Keystone students can fully and effectively benefit from educational services within less restrictive settings. Furthermore, the collaborative maintains its unwavering support for the North Central MA Early Literacy Innovation Zone, facilitating access to early literacy applications, including the Footsteps to Brilliance program, for all children and families within the participating districts.

To develop and offer a variety of quality professional development opportunities to general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals,



school administrators and related service providers that are designed to enhance instructional practices:

Every year, the collaborative tailors its Professional Development offerings to meet the specific needs of our member districts and the collaborative's own staff. These needs are identified through input from the Advisory Board, comprised of Special Education Administrators, our internal staff, and our Board of Directors, which includes Superintendents.

In the previous year, the collaborative provided a range of valuable training sessions, including two legal trainings led by an experienced and highly respected school attorney. We also conducted training on effective strategies for addressing anxiety in educational settings, offered insights into the ACES curriculum package, and conducted numerous restraint training sessions for our staff. These trainings were facilitated by one of our four CPI certified instructors. The collaborative maintains its commitment to being both responsive and proactive in addressing the specialized training requirements of our member districts.

Furthermore, we maintain an active partnership with the Federation for Children with Special Needs' Recruitment and Training Support Center (RTSC), specifically the LEA Special Education Surrogate Parent Recruitment Training Project. This partnership enables Keystone staff and personnel from our member districts to benefit from discounted rates when attending RTSC training programs.

Moreover, the collaborative is a proud member of the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC), consistently sharing information with member districts about professional development opportunities offered by various other collaboratives in the region. Many of these opportunities are the result of joint planning efforts within MOEC regional committees.



To provide other educationally related programs, supports and services to our member districts and surrounding communities that are of high quality and cost effective, as directed by the Keystone Board of Directors:

The collaborative remains flexible and responsive in meeting the needs of our districts by providing high quality professional development offerings that are local, are cost effective and are presented by knowledgeable and respected experts. We have been able to meet the needs for both short- and long-term related service providers of our districts and provide licensed, skilled and experienced physical therapists, teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility therapists, speech pathologists, and BCBA's.

The collaborative remains committed to offering a range of educationally related programs, support services, and public day programs, catering to the diverse needs of our students. These programs include The KEA Programs, which serve students with social-emotional and learning disabilities, as well as substantially separate programs within public schools, such as the KEY Program, designed for students on the autism spectrum or those with significant intellectual or developmental disabilities. We continue to provide extended year services across our programs, ensuring ongoing support and educational opportunities.

In response to the complex needs of students with significant mental health challenges, the Board approved the creation of two new positions for the 2022-2023 school year. These include a Transition Specialist who collaborates with districts to facilitate successful transitions of students to and from appropriate placements, and an Integration Specialist who works with collaborative classroom teachers in the KEY Program and district staff to integrate students with significant developmental and behavioral issues into general education classrooms.

Our collaborative maintains its flexibility and responsiveness to the evolving needs of our member districts. We offer high-quality professional development programs that are locally accessible, cost-effective, and led by knowledgeable and respected experts. This approach allows us to effectively address the short- and long-term requirements of our member districts by providing licensed, skilled, and experienced professionals, including physical therapists, teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility therapists, speech pathologists, and BCBA's.

# PROGRESS TOWARD STRATEGIC PLAN

The Collaborative Strategic Plan is a strategic roadmap that positions our organization to create new growth opportunities, maintain financial stability, and remain highly responsive to the needs of our students, their families, and our member districts. This plan serves as a guiding blueprint to ensure that the collaborative continues to function as a dynamic and adaptable entity, dedicated to addressing the unique requirements of our member districts.

The planning process involved a strong commitment from the Executive Board and administrative team, who were dedicated to providing ample opportunities for stakeholders and public school districts to contribute to the plan's design. This inclusive approach encompassed focus group sessions with the Executive Board, Advisory Board, Keystone staff, administrators, and the Steering Committee. These sessions allowed for individual, small group, and large group participation, yielding both qualitative and quantitative data. This diverse input culminated in the approval of five Strategic Target Goal Areas by the Executive Board.

## 1. Program Development and Strengthening

- a. Strengthen S/E and mental health supports/programs
- b. Create a continuum of supports for medically fragile students

## 2. Facilities

- a. New location for ED/BD programs
- b. Review 3-year space options for Central Office and Public Day Programs
- c. Explore purchasing or leasing facilities, Capital Planning

## 3. Marketing and Branding

- a. Further development of the Keystone Brand
- b. Development of strategic marketing plan
- c. Update the Keystone website

## 4. Staff Development

- a. Seek and retain high quality staff
- b. Provide high quality, research-based professional development

## 5. Inter-district Professional Development

- a. High quality, research-based PD
- b. Create collaborative PD Coordinator position
- c. Create on-going inter-district PD Advisory Committee



## Goal 1:

With the growing need for mental health services the collaborative established a Mental Health study committee. This committee included district staff, a consulting psychiatrist, a school psychologist, a representative from the Department of Mental Health, and collaborative personnel involved in our extended evaluations and alternative programs. In the 2018-2019 school year, the MH study group presented its recommendations to the Board. In the spring of 2019, the Board approved the inclusion of Transition Specialist and Integration Specialist positions in the FY 2020 budget, with job descriptions crafted based on the group's input.

Recognizing the capabilities of the INTERFACE Referral Service at William James College in providing support to families within our districts, the MH study group collaborated with them. Keystone entered into an agreement with INTERFACE, along with four districts – Leominster, Ayer/Shirley, Fitchburg, and Winchendon, to offer referral support to these districts and the communities they serve. By providing regional support for INTERFACE outreach in these communities, the collaborative has helped save each participating district substantial resources.

Regular quarterly assessments were conducted over the two-year project, demonstrating a direct and significant investment in the well-being of students within our members' communities and beyond. However, with the increased demand for mental health support during the pandemic and the potential strain on resources like Interface, new opportunities have emerged to enhance the current system through other service providers, such as Care Solace. The collaborative is committed to working with member districts to expand the range of vendors available to meet their specific needs.

One of the central goals of the collaborative is to create a continuum of services for our medically fragile population. Substantial progress has been made through the acquisition of a building in Fitchburg, MA. This has allowed for the design of specialized classrooms and the allocation of resources to cater to the unique needs of these students. Additionally, the collaborative has facilitated the procurement of cutting-edge technology, including a robotic gait trainer, to assist medically fragile students with mobility limitations and motor skill development challenges stemming from their disabilities.



<https://www.telegram.com/story/news/local/the-item/2022/10/13/keystone-educational-collaborative-robot-teaches-students-how-walk/8237052001/>

## Goal 2:



*If you build it, they will come...*

During the 2019-2020 academic year, the collaborative conducted a comprehensive analysis to address the growing demand for students entering high school-level grades and their evolving requirements for academic and vocational exposure, especially those with cognitive impairments. The data highlighted a disparity between the increasing number of internal students within our Key Program, "Learning for Life Program," which primarily focused on entry to mid-level academic and life skills, and the escalating referrals of mild to moderately cognitively impaired students in need of a robust academic program and vocational exposure. Responding to this, the Board of Directors approved the conversion of a Shirley location program into the "PREP" Program, tailored to support these students' needs. Formal requests and licensure were submitted and subsequently approved by the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education on July 20, 2020.

Moving forward to the 2021-2022 school year, the collaborative achieved a significant milestone by acquiring its first property within one of our member districts, located in Fitchburg, MA. This single-level, 24,000-square-foot structure provided an excellent opportunity for the KEY Program to expand and grow. This move allowed the collaborative to optimize financial and human capital resources by consolidating the previous six sites into three, with over 75% of the student population now situated at the new site. This expansion not only enables us to support a larger student body but also



offers the potential for more extensive and long-term educational and therapeutic care for some of the most significantly impacted students.

The collaborative, with the support of the Board, remains committed to strategically planning for its long-term future. This entails ongoing analysis to determine the feasibility of procuring an additional educational site. We are currently evaluating various options, including leasing within our member districts, remodeling existing spaces, or securing long-term commercial leases within the community. The current state of the health pandemic has increased the accessibility of commercial and specialty properties, providing the collaborative and its members with unique ownership opportunities. Based on our budgetary considerations, the majority of our lease expenditures are associated with member sites. By consolidating two similar programs under one roof (Keystone Programs), we could potentially allocate 78% of the lease revenue toward a permanent location. This strategic move aims to deliver a cost-effective, high-quality program that can support more students and families. In the upcoming fiscal year, the collaborative will diligently work on exploring and implementing these strategic options.

### **Goal 3:**

With the transition of leadership from the former Executive Director, an opportunity arose for the new Executive Director, John Demanche, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of all available data and thoroughly assess the program and its various components. After an extensive examination of the data and notes, the previous rebranding team reconvened to propose a fresh identity, "Keystone Educational Collaborative." In March 2020, the Executive Board approved the adoption of this new name. A formal request for amending the agreement was submitted and subsequently endorsed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in July 2020.

The approval of Keystone Educational Collaborative's mission and name has not only redefined the program but also set its course for the future. This transformation provided the collaborative with the opportunity to embrace change, revamp program names to better reflect their functions rather than merely categorizing them based on the disabilities they serve and redesign their websites for improved user-friendliness. These changes are advantageous not only for the organization but also for its members and the families it serves.

All formal applications were submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and received approval by July 2020. The new website was officially launched on August 1, marking the inception of the organization's journey as Keystone Educational Collaborative.

## Mission:

"To unify our communities and empower each child's individual growth for the future by establishing a strong educational foundation with the tools of today."

## Goals 4 & 5:

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, as the organization underwent significant structural changes, an extensive analysis was conducted on staff development and district professional development opportunities while maintaining a commitment to "quality and cost-effective" practices. The findings from this analysis emphasized the need for the creation of a robust internal infrastructure to consistently support the program and its members along a unified continuum of content.

During the year, the collaborative assembled a team of experts to bolster support for our members on both district and program levels, with a vision to further address district needs in the upcoming years. The following key additions were made:

**Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA):** These clinical experts, strategically hired at various levels including teachers, consultants, and paraprofessionals meeting BACB requirements, have not only enhanced support for our internal students but have also become a resource for our members for program review and individual consultation. The team has developed a BACB-approved course sequence, which has successfully prepared our paraprofessionals, with a remarkable 90% exam pass rate. This content is accessible to our members to empower their staff, and a secondary course is in development for non-licensed teachers. This initiative has contributed to staff retention and professional growth while ensuring high-quality support for our students and their families.

**Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT):** The collaborative enlisted a doctoral-level Physical Therapist to oversee both internal and contracted services. This move aims to establish best clinical practices in the field of physical therapy for students in an educational setting. The collaborative recognized variations in therapy service providers based on changing licensure requirements and sought to provide a consistent methodological approach to treatment to our member districts. Additionally, the DPT will be certified as a MOVE Curriculum instructor, offering an empirically based curriculum to support students with physical disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

**School Psychologist:** An internal school psychologist role was introduced to assist with student referrals for Extended Evaluations and re-evaluations for students in the program. This resource has been instrumental in providing educational and social-emotional support for our students and districts, aligning with best practices in educational research. This school psychologist has also taken the lead in implementing the SEI curriculum acquired by the collaborative, a research-based and CASEL-approved program known as Positive Actions. Furthermore, they have provided

consistency and methodological support for our counselors in collaboration with Dr. Wilkins, the collaborative's contracted psychiatrist. This structured foundation is being further developed as the Transition Program Coordinator role evolves to better serve students when they are ready to be reintegrated into their sending districts and communities.

The collaborative is immensely grateful for the support of member districts in securing these highly specialized positions. In return, the collaborative is committed to expanding member exposure to high-quality professional development and support. Looking ahead, the collaborative is currently collaborating with TUFTS University to design a capstone program for their new doctoral program in Occupational Therapy. This program aims to deliver a more comprehensive curriculum and occupational therapy staff aligned with current research-based best practices suitable for educational environments. Additionally, the collaborative has expanded its capacity for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and speech-language pathology (SLP) evaluations to meet the growing needs of students with disabilities in these areas.

Furthermore, the collaborative continues its partnership with Fitchburg State University, serving as an educational site for teachers seeking licensure in Severe Disabilities. This collaboration aims to retain high-quality educators within our member communities.

The ongoing health pandemic has highlighted numerous shortages within our member districts, particularly in specialized disciplines. The collaborative remains dedicated to addressing these shortages and providing the necessary services to support our communities in these areas.



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY

Keystone Collaborative, a venerable educational resource with over four decades of service to our communities, member districts, students, and families, understands the importance of adapting and evolving in an ever-changing world. As an educational institution, embracing change is not a choice but a necessity; obsolescence is not an option.

Having been a part of this organization for four years, I can proudly say that, even in the face of challenges posed by a global health pandemic, we remain resolute in our mission. We are committed to consistently providing high-quality education while continuously adjusting to meet the evolving needs of the students we serve.

Keystone Educational Collaborative's primary focus remains unwavering in its dedication to enhancing the academic, social, emotional, and self-help skills of our students, enabling them to lead meaningful and productive lives within their own communities. We honor the foundations laid by our predecessors and pledge to adapt and restructure to better support our students as we navigate the future. Our unwavering dedication to excellence and our students' success drives us to redefine and fortify the foundation upon which we build the future.

John Demanche, M. Ed, BCBA, LABA,  
Executive Director

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## Keystone Educational Collaborative

2 Shaker Road, Suite D215

Shirley, MA 01464



[www.keystonecollaborative.org](http://www.keystonecollaborative.org)

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**KEYSTONE**  
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