

Building Resilience for the Future: Navigating Challenges and Shaping Success



2024-2025
ANNUAL REPORT

Keystone Educational Collaborative

2 Shaker Road, Suite D215

Shirley, MA 01464



www.keystonecollaborative.org

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

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.

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.

"The best way to predict the future is to build it"

-Peter Drucker-

Dear Friends and Families,

As Keystone Educational Collaborative proudly concludes its 49th year as an educational institution dedicated to supporting students and families, we reflect with gratitude on the journey that has brought us here. For nearly five decades, Keystone has remained steadfast in its mission to provide exceptional specialized programming that meets the evolving therapeutic and educational needs of the students we serve. This continued success has been made possible through the unwavering support of our twelve member districts, our devoted families, and our community partners, all working together to ensure every student has the opportunity to grow and thrive.

As we close this remarkable chapter and look toward our 50th year, the organization has taken significant steps in laying the path for the future. Among the most exciting milestones is the opening of our second stand-alone building, owned by the Collaborative and its member districts, which represents both our collective investment in students' futures and our commitment to expanding access to high-quality educational opportunities. This achievement stands as a symbol of progress, stability, and a shared vision for continued growth.

The challenges of recent years have underscored the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and resilience within the educational landscape. As technology and societal shifts continue to influence how our students learn and connect, Keystone remains dedicated to developing the therapeutic and educational tools needed to meet these changes head-on. Our staff's passion and professionalism, coupled with the strength of our partnerships, have allowed us to continue serving our most vulnerable learners with care and innovation.

As we reflect on our past and plan for our future, our focus remains clear: to nurture each child's potential and support every family that places their trust in us. The spirit of the Keystone community, including our families, friends, districts, and staff, continues to be the foundation of everything we do.

We hope this year's annual report captures not only the essence of our work but also the vision that guides us forward. Together, we will continue to grow, evolve, and inspire as we move into our 50th year and beyond, stronger, more united, and more committed 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
Ms. Kim Russo
Ashburnham-Westminster
Regional School District



Superintendent Dr. Adam Renda
Ayer-Shirley Regional
School District



Superintendent Dr. Steven Meyer
Clinton Public School



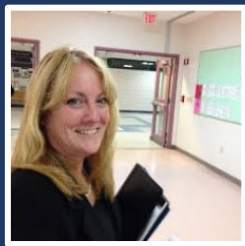
School Committee Member
Ms. Rosemary Reynolds
Fitchburg School District



Superintendent Dr. Mark Pellegrino
Gardner Public Schools



Superintendent Ms. Robin Desmond
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 Ms. Colleen Mucha
Quabbin Regional School District



Superintendent Richard Meagher
West Boylston Public Schools



Superintendent
Dr. Marc Gosselin
Winchendon Public Schools

Keystone Educational Collaborative

Special Education Advisory Board

Ashburnham-Westminster RSD	Ms. Jennifer Ramsdell
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. Corey Rogers
North Middlesex RSD	Ms. Erin Upton
Quabbin RSD	Mr. Jill Langlois
West Boylston Public Schools	Ms. Sherri Traina
Winchendon Public Schools	Ms. Charlotte King

Keystone Educational Collaborative

Executive Board Sub-Committees

Budget

Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham
Superintendent Dr. Steven Meyer
Superintendent Dr. Mark Pellegrino

Personnel

Superintendent Ms. Colleen Mucha
Superintendent Dr. Mark Pellegrino

Governance

Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham
Superintendent Dr. Adam Renda

Space

Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham
School Committee Member, Ms. Rosemary Reynolds

Warrant Committee

Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Burnham
School Committee Member, Ms. Kimberly Russo
Superintendent Dr. Adam Renda

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
Assist. Program Administrator

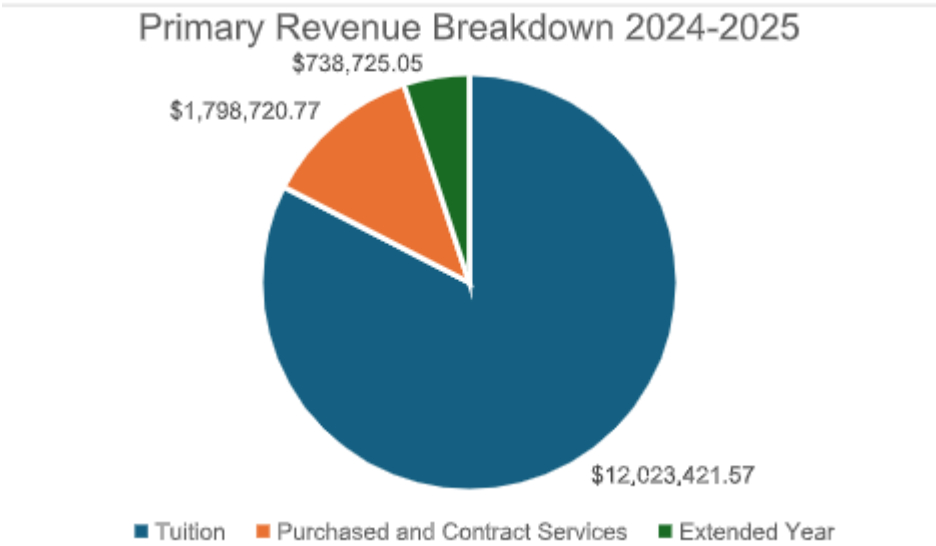
Ms. Kerry McCann

Keystone Academy Program
Administrator

Mr. Rick Booth

FINANCIAL AND ENROLLMENT DATA

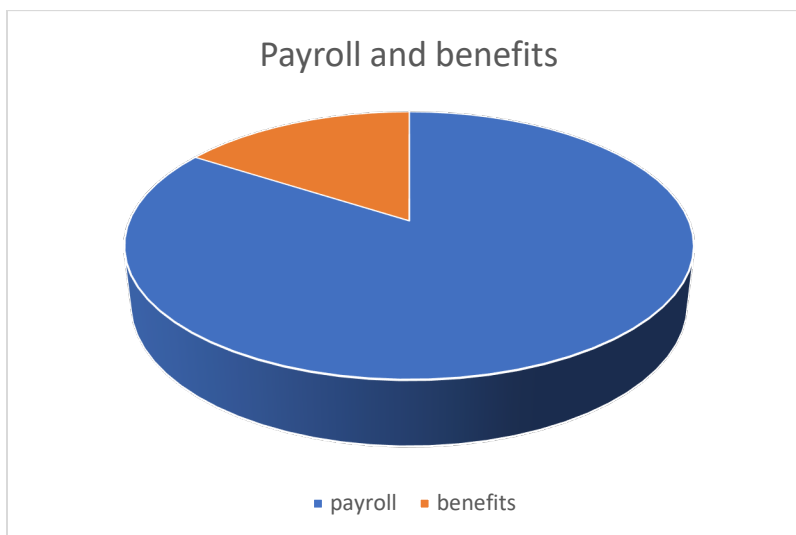
Over 97% of the Collaborative’s revenue comes from the student programs described elsewhere and the contract service staff we provide to our districts. The graphical display represents the organization percentage breakdown of the primary revenue sources. The Collaborative provides group purchasing opportunities 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 17% increase over the previous year, which was slightly short of projections.



Primary Revenues 2023-2024		Primary Revenues 2024-2025	
Tuition	\$10,808,503	Tuition	\$12,023,422
Purchased & Contract Services	\$1,387,999	Purchased & Contract Services	\$1,798,721
Extended Year	\$631,868	Extended Year	\$738, 725
TOTAL	\$12,828,365	TOTAL	\$14,560,868

EXPENSES

In a marked change from last year, the Collaborative was only short on projected revenues by 1.9%, or about \$245,000. Part of the reason for the improvement was the Collaborative's ability to recruit and maintain staffing sufficient to support the students enrolled. The improved employment statistics meant there was no related effect on accepting new referrals. Operational expenses ran about \$237,000 below projections.



OPERATIONAL OCCUPANCY

To address ongoing space needs, the Collaborative purchased a second building during the fiscal year. Most of the year was spent getting the RFPs and contracts set up to renovate the building to our requirements, which will occur over the next year. Expenditures related to these activities will be capitalized once the building is completed, but the effect on our cash position is being monitored. We were able to use some of the space to temporarily house students from our program effected by the flooding in Leominster in the fall of 2023. This was the first building requiring the Collaborative to incur debt for purchase and renovation. The purchase price was \$1,950,000 requiring a reduction in our Capital Reserve of \$411,280 to meet the deposit and closing requirements. The remainder of the \$5,377,000 loan, \$3,427,000, is expected to be spent doing renovations during the 2024/2025 school year. Debt service beyond monthly interest payments will begin once the building is completed and we take occupancy. This is expected to occur in December 2024. We continue to expect reductions on lease and rental agreements to help defray the debt service costs.

STAFFING INFRASTRUCTURE

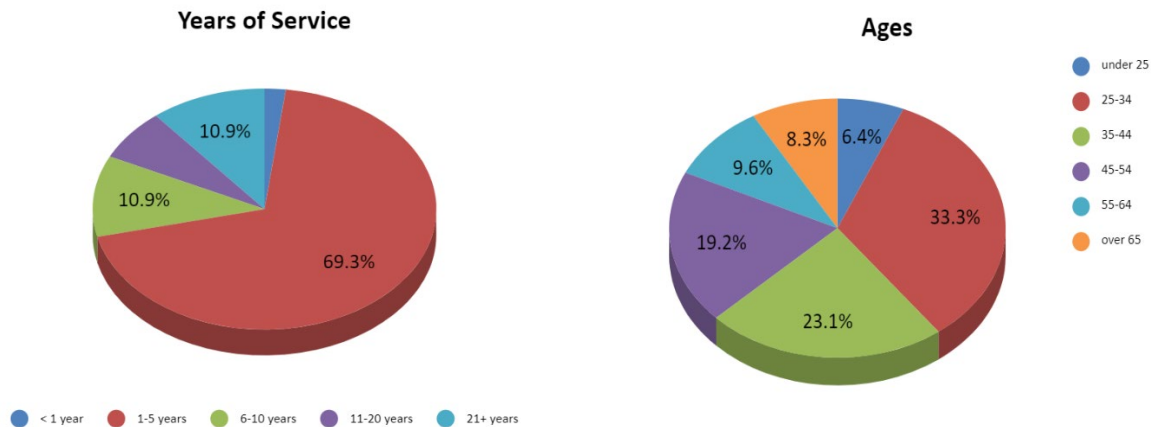
The collaborative remains steadfast in recognizing that the essence of the program lies in the caliber of our staff and their influence on our students. To this end, the collaborative consistently assigns organizational roles that directly impact student outcomes. As indicated in the graphical representation 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.

Administrative/Support staff	10%	16
Psychologist/BCBAs/Counselors	10%	16
Teachers	24%	33
Paraprofessionals	45%	70
Allied Health (PT, OT, SLP)	19%	25
		157



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	2%	4
1-5 years	70%	104
6-10 years	11%	17
11-20 years	7%	11
21+ years	11%	17
		157

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).

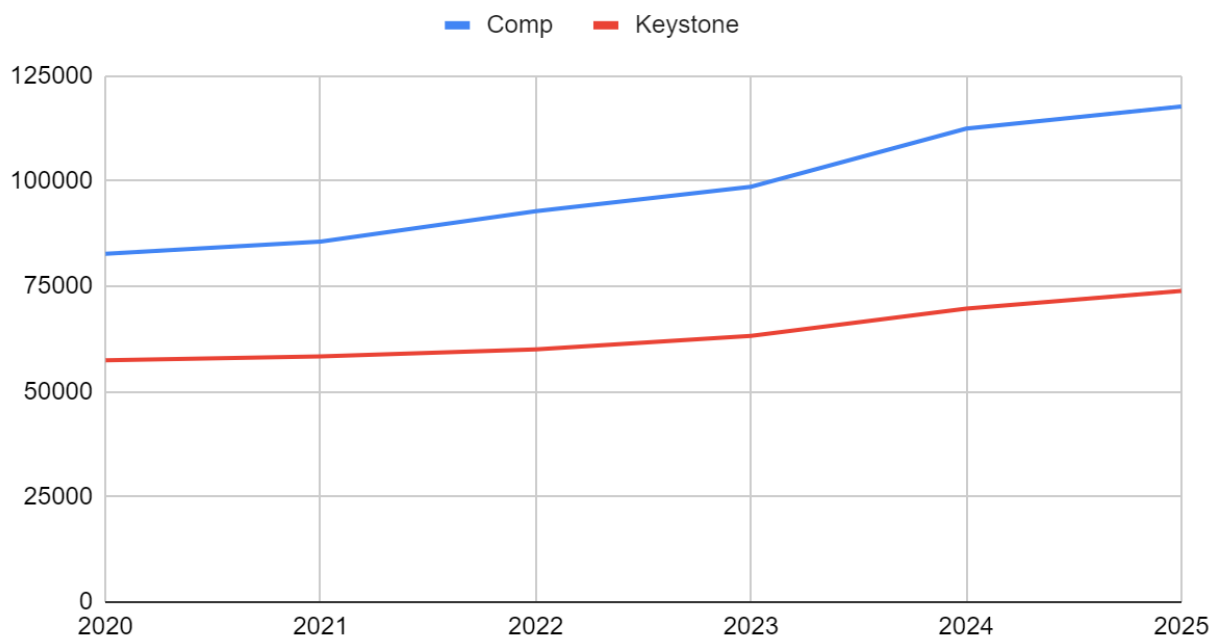
Before making these comparisons, the collaborative collaborates with the Special Education Advisory Board to ensure that the comparisons are equitable and accurately reflect private schools that districts might have considered if our collaborative programs were not available. The following graphical 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

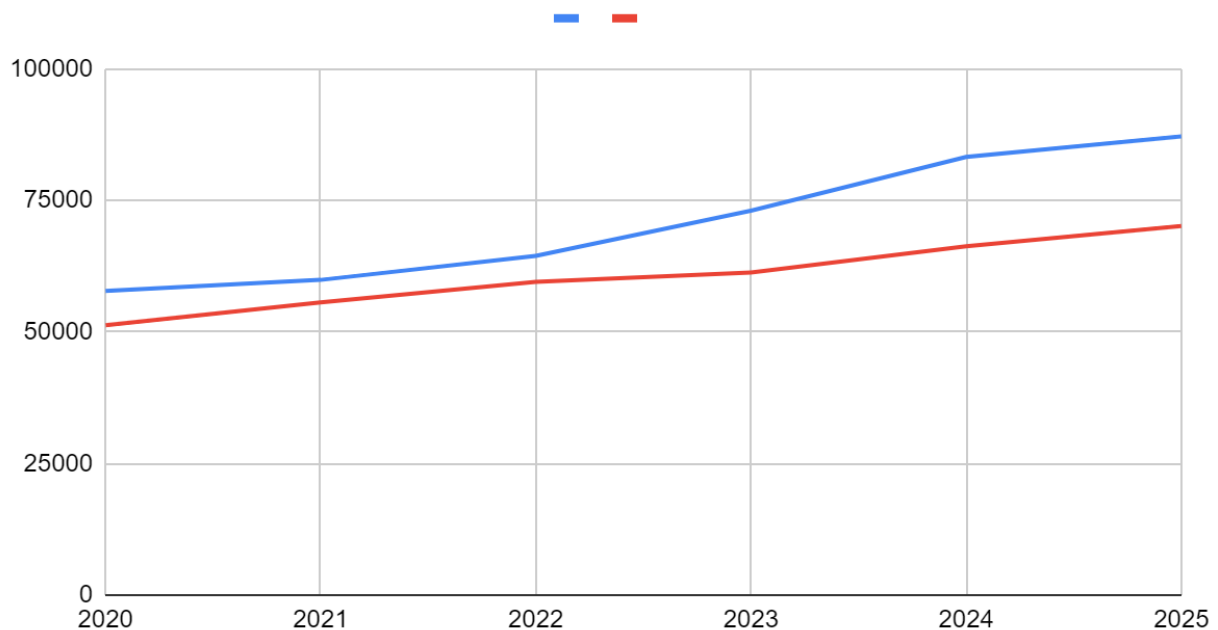
Comp and Keystone Key



Annual average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius \$117,740 per annual year (180). Keystone Educational Collaborative supplies annual savings of \$43,810.

KEYSTONE EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM Cost Analysis

Comp and Keystone Elementry

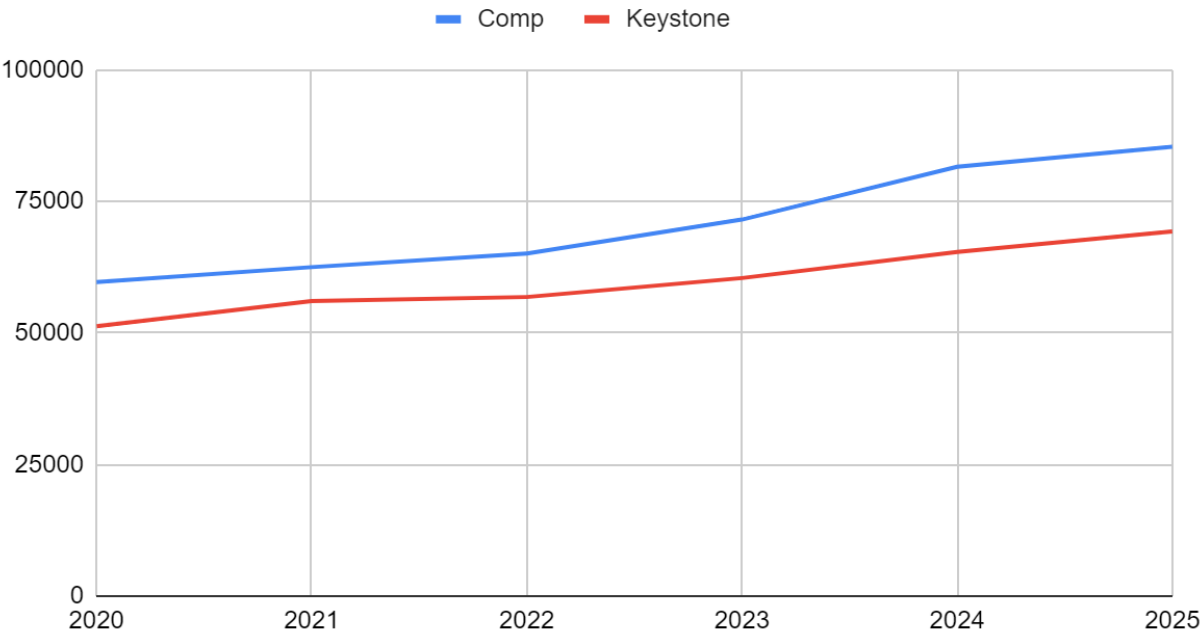


Annual average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius is \$87,185 per annual year (180). Keystone Educational Collaborative supplies savings of \$17,029.00.

KEYSTONE ACADEMY PROGRAM

Cost Analysis

Comp and Keystone Academy



Annual average rate for MAAPS comparable programs within a 1 hr. radius is \$85,400.00.
Keystone Educational Collaborative supplies annual savings of \$16,090.00.

FINANCIAL AND ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

MEMBER DISTRICTS

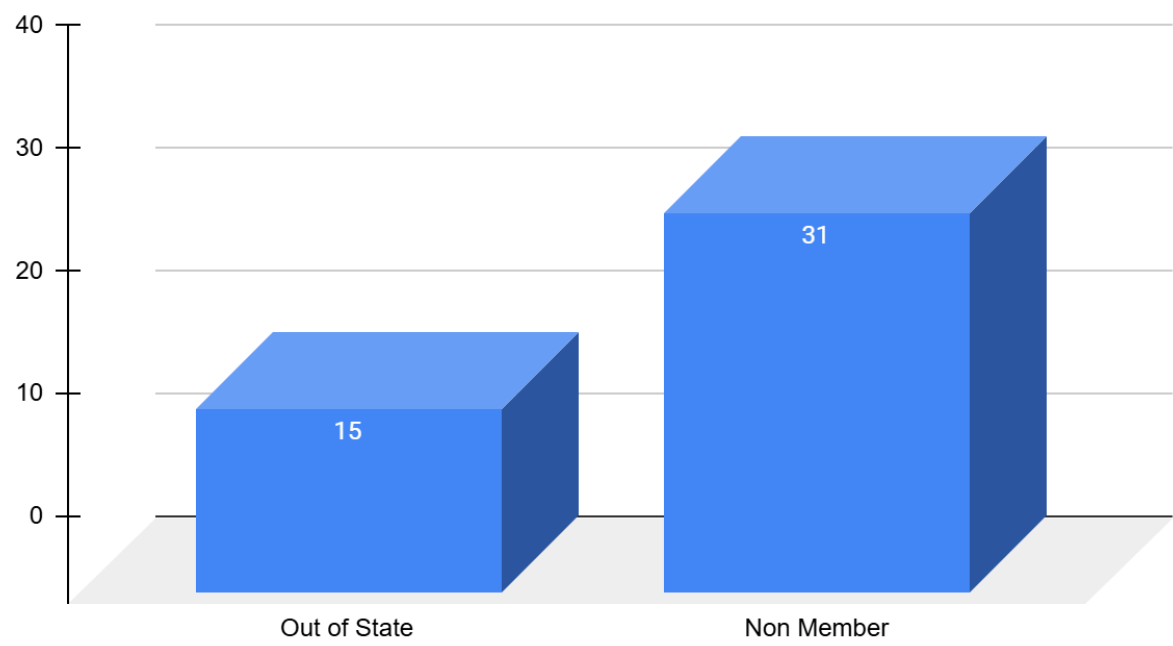
One of the core missions of the Collaborative is to provide our member districts with programs that enhance and reinforce their educational offerings, specifically tailored to address the intensive therapeutic and educational needs of students with disabilities. Currently, we serve a student population where approximately 88% come from our twelve member districts, underscoring the strong integration and alignment of our highly specialized programs within their educational systems. Eleven of the twelve member districts have effectively incorporated these programs, demonstrating that our specialized program design meets the requirements and aspirations of our members and significantly strengthens their educational offerings.

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.

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 12% 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.

Out of State vs Non Member 24-25

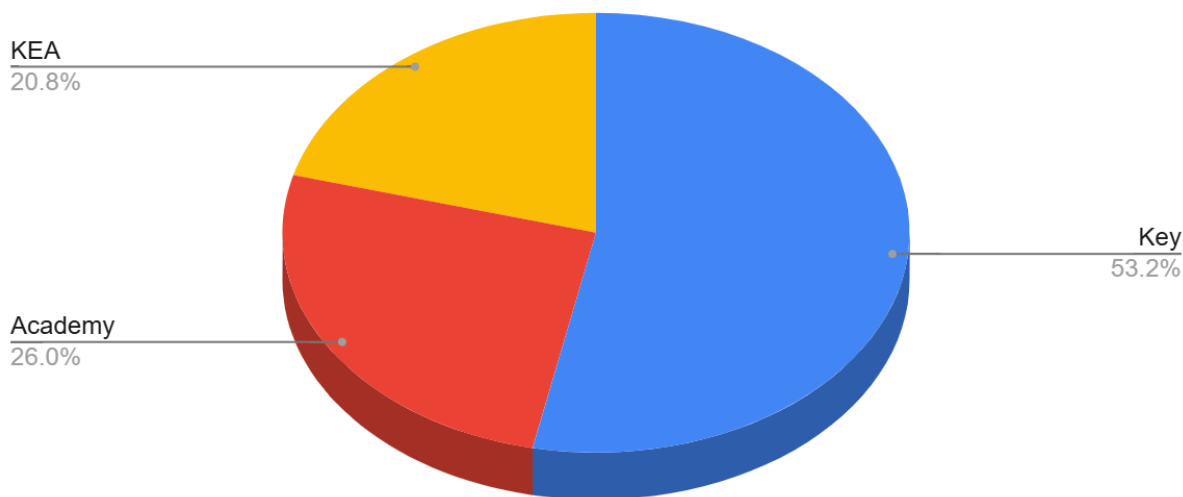


PROGRAM BREAKDOWN

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.

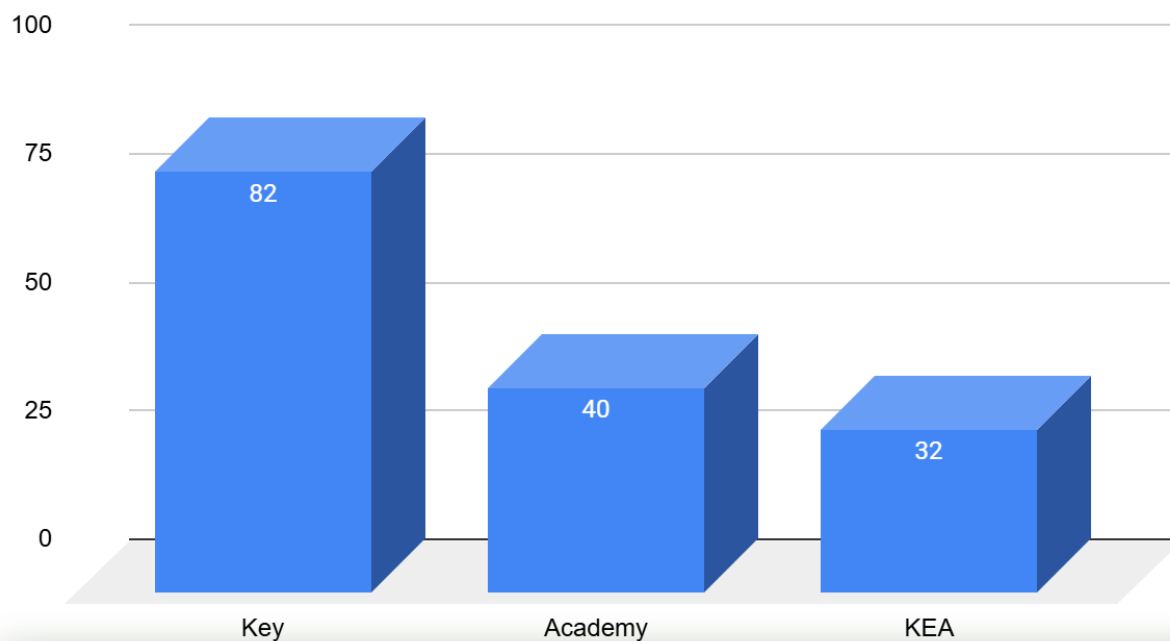
Program Breakdown 24-25



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	\$ 4,860,830.00
Non-Member	\$ 1,313,137.00
Total Tuition	\$ 6,173,967.00
Budgeted Tuition	\$5,988,298.00
Difference	185,669.00

KEYSTONE ACADEMY PROGRAM

Tuition	
Member	\$ 2,073,800.00
Non-Member	\$ 846,492.00
Total Tuition	\$ 2,920,292.00
Budgeted Tuition	\$ 2,980,322.00
Difference	-\$60,030.00

KEYSTONE ELEMENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM

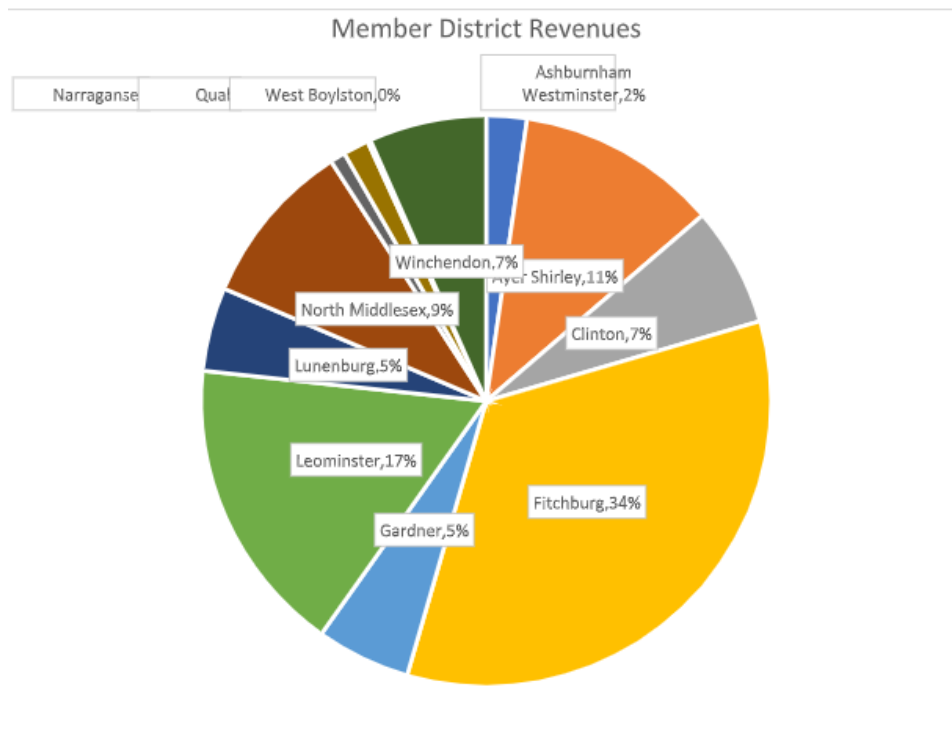
Tuition	
Member	\$ 1,773,945.00
Non-Member	\$ 1,063,285.00
Total Tuition	\$ 2,837,230.00
Budgeted Tuition	\$ 3,577,979.00
Difference	-\$740,749.00

EXTENDED EVALUATION

Total Tuition	
Member	\$438,956
Non-Member	\$ 120,528
Total Tuition	\$ 559,484

TUITION REVENUE

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

Financial Position

The 2025 financial position statement for Keystone Educational Collaborative reflects strategic fiscal management amid significant capital investments and stable operational performance. Total assets amounted to approximately \$10.8 million, demonstrating the Collaborative's commitment to enhancing its physical and educational infrastructure. A key long-term liability is the \$5.2 million OPEB obligation, highlighting a proactive approach to securing employee post-employment benefits to support workforce stability. Additionally, the acquisition and renovation of property at 135 and 143 Joslin Street, backed by a loan exceeding \$6 million, underscores the capital investment strategy focused on creating a strong foundation for student services.

Despite these investments, the Collaborative's net position as of June 30, 2025, was negative \$3,233,219, primarily due to the increase in long-term liabilities including property debt and OPEB obligations. This reflects a net swing of approximately \$6,635,000 from 2024 as it is the first appearance of both liabilities on the Collaborative's financial statements. This reflects the organization's capital-intensive growth phase rather than operational weakness. Tuition and service fee revenues exceeded budget by \$418,864, showing strong operational revenue generation. Expenditures were slightly over budget by \$59,000, representing improved expense control compared to the prior year.

The capital assets valued at over \$9 million and a positive fund balance support operational flexibility and ongoing service delivery. The Collaborative's financial strategy, especially in its 50th year, emphasizes facility ownership and investment in long-term employee benefits to build equity and stability. While this results in short-term negative net position, it positions the Collaborative for sustainable growth by avoiding lease uncertainties and maintaining quality educational services. Historical net position gains and strong revenue management reinforce the Collaborative's overall financial resilience and its ability to continue fulfilling its mission and supporting member districts effectively.

Key summarized financials include:

- Total assets: approx. \$10.8 million
- OPEB liability: \$5.2 million
- Property loans for 135 and 143 Joslin Street: over \$6 million
- Tuition/service revenue surplus: \$418,864
- Expenditure over budget: \$59,000
- Net position: negative \$3,233,219 at June 30, 2025
- Capital assets: over \$9 million

This comprehensive financial position demonstrates a capital-intensive yet balanced approach designed to support Keystone Educational Collaborative's mission and provide a strong foundation for future growth and service excellence.



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.

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 2024-2025 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.



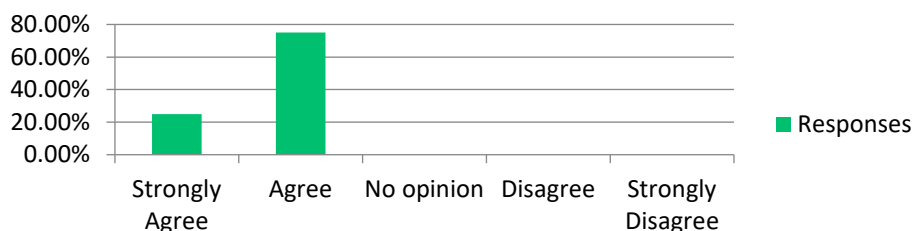


SURVEY QUESTIONS

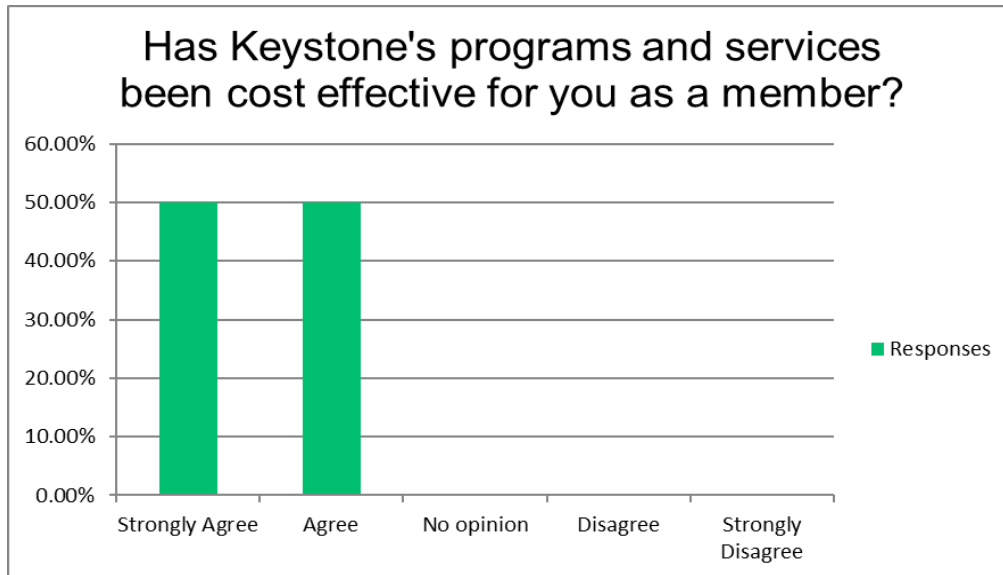
The summary results of this annual survey indicate that in 2024-2025 there was a high level of satisfaction with our special education programs and services and equally important, the collaborative continues to be a caring, responsive and effective organization that meets the demands of districts for efficient, effective and as a local educational option for quality services.

QUESTION 1:

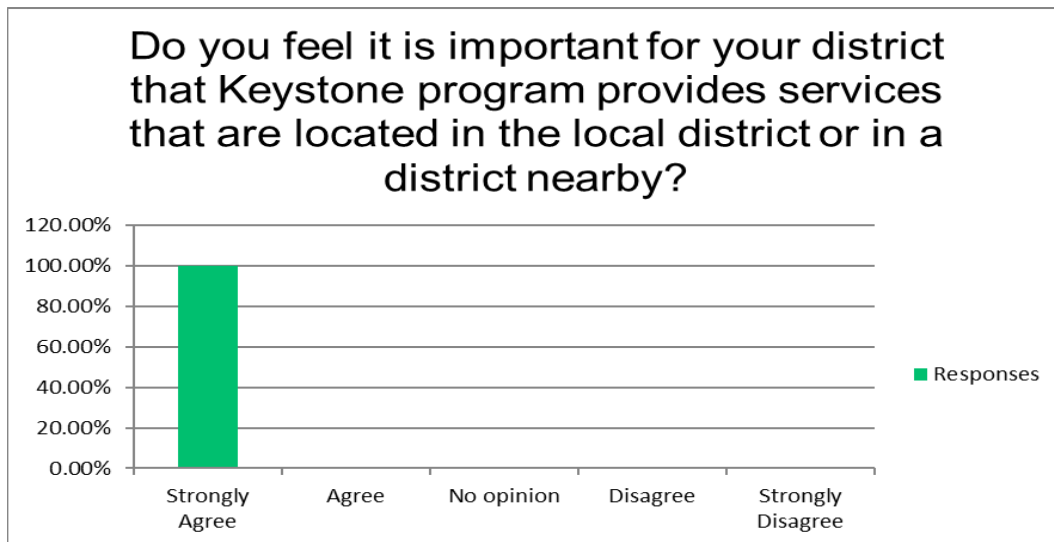
Has Keystone's current programs and services been effective in meeting the needs of the students that we serve?



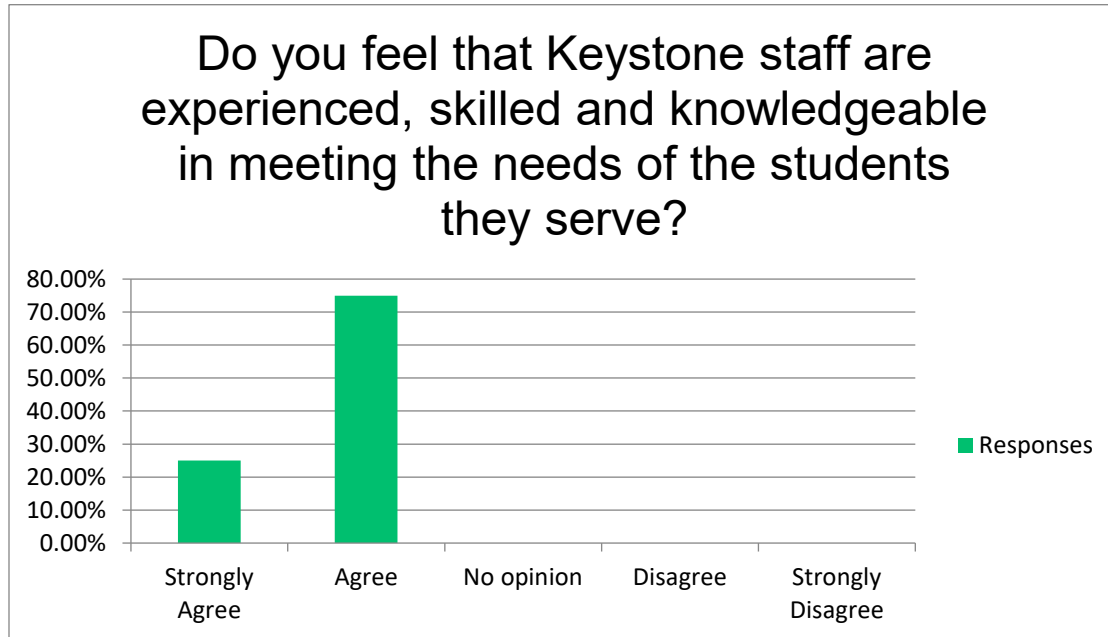
QUESTION 2:



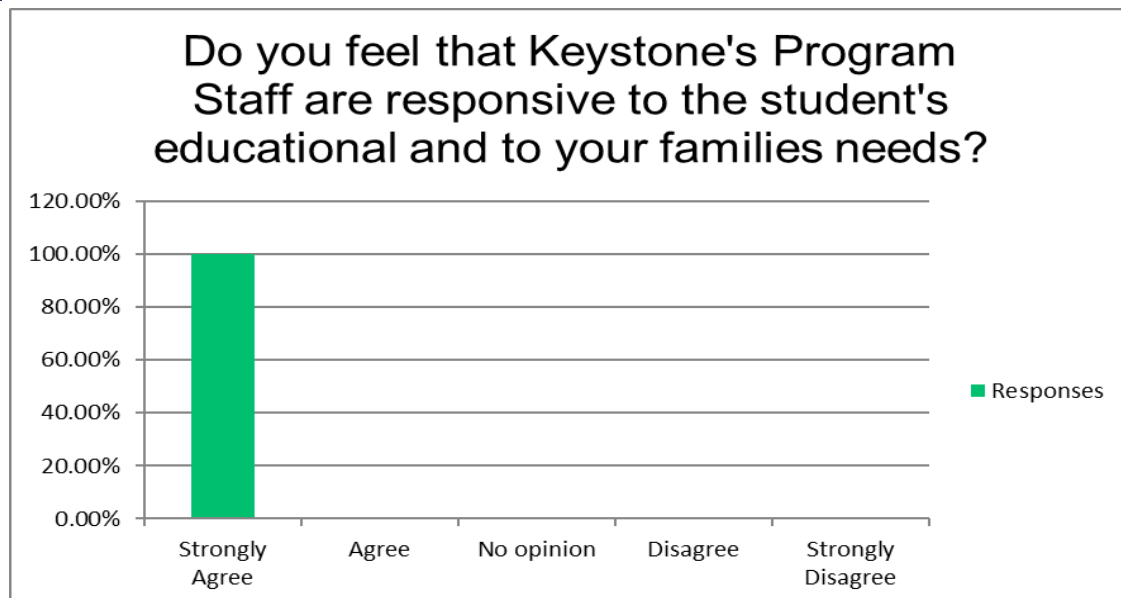
QUESTION 3:



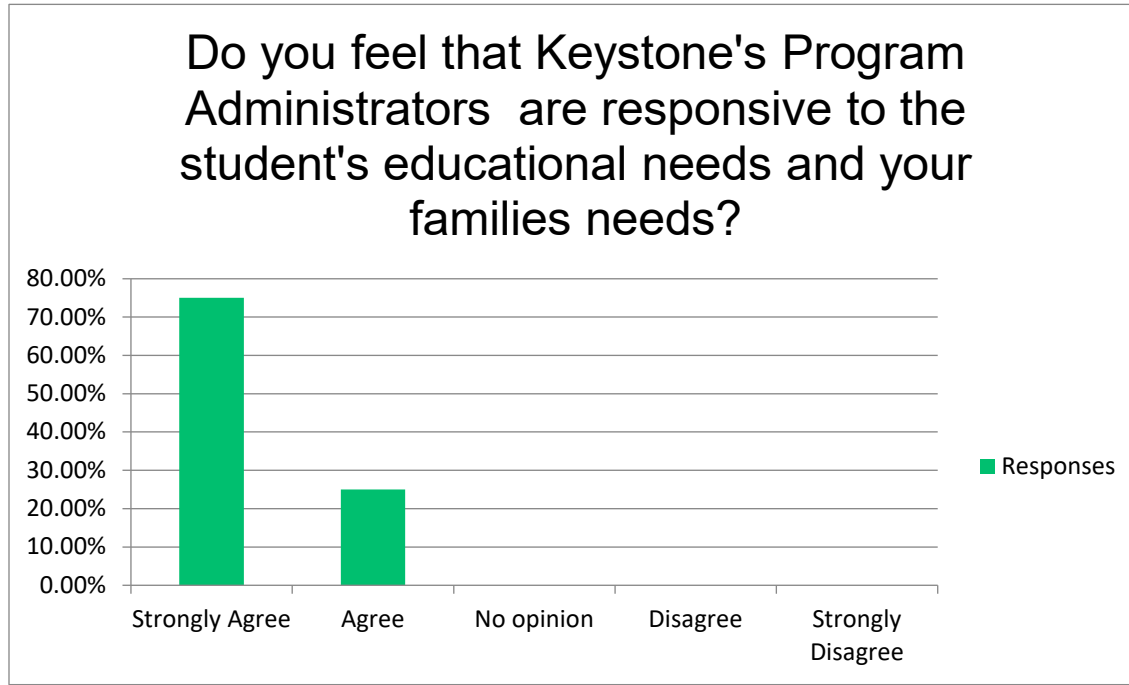
QUESTION 4:



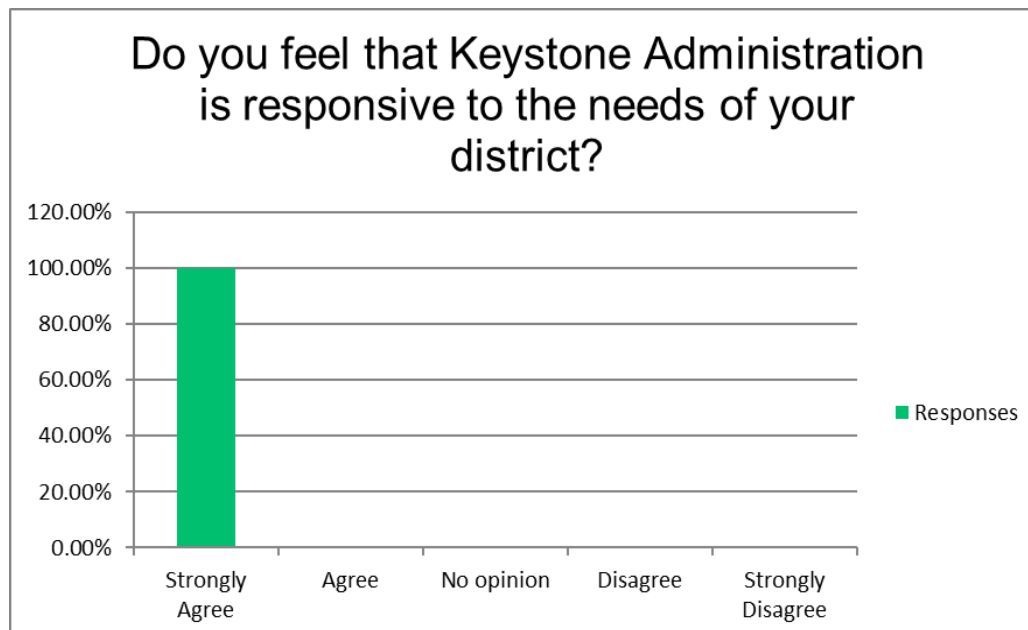
QUESTION 5:



QUESTION 6:



QUESTION 7:

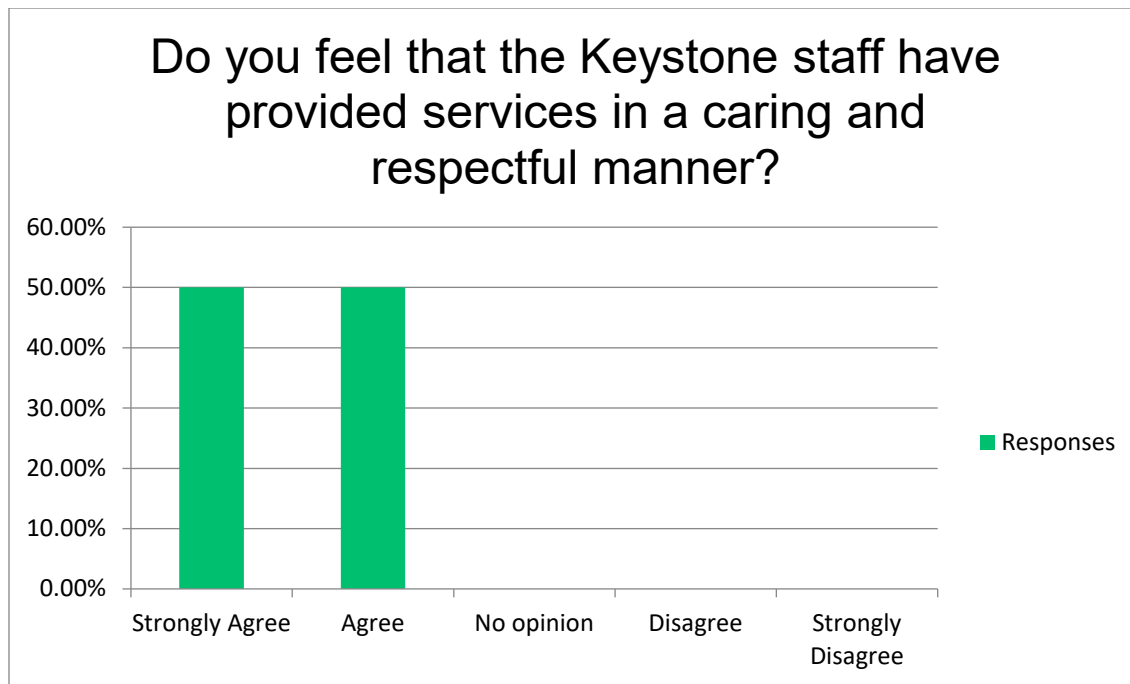


QUESTION 8:

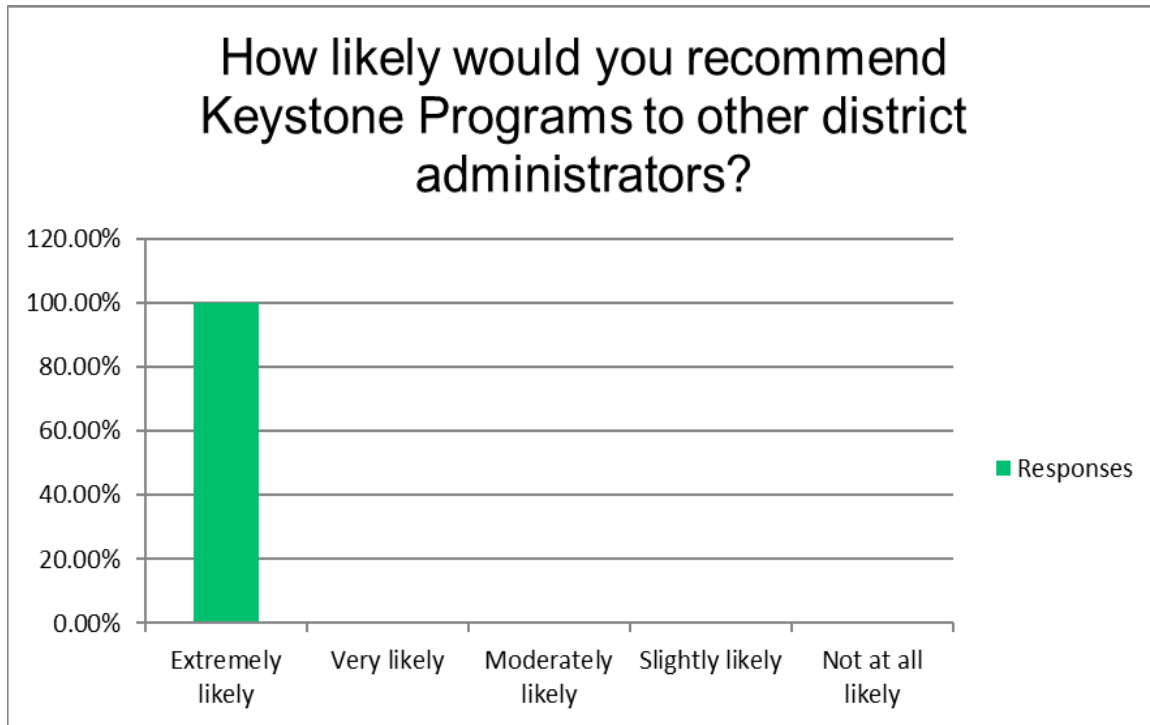
What would you suggest that our Keystone's Program Administrators could do differently to strengthen your program needs?

- 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.

QUESTION 12:

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

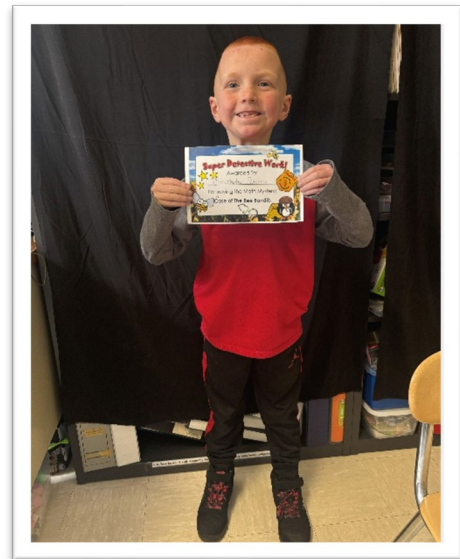
- School psychologist for use of testing.
- I'm very happy with the support Keystone provides, nothing additional I can think of right now.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

During the **2024-2025** 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 support 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 Elementary/Middle School 2024-2025

Total referrals	62
Not a fit for program:	15
Accepted but selected other placement:	3
Never toured program and placed elsewhere:	13
Referral closed out by district:	8

Placement Referrals for 2024-2025

Students enrolled:	6
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Extended Evaluation Referrals for 2024-2025

Students enrolled:	17
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Transitions from Placement 2024-2025

Transition to Other Keystone Program:	3
Transition back to in-district public school	8

Transitions from Extended Evaluation 2024-2025

Transition to long-term placement at Keystone:	16
Transition back to in-district public school:	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 now located in Fitchburg, MA on Electric Ave and was previously located within the former Squannacook Elementary building in Townsend in the beginning of the year. 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, and 7th grade. This model provides 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.

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 with 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

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 Academy program is located in Leominster, MA. 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 Academy Program and works collaboratively with the Member District Administrative team and the Executive Director of the collaborative.



Neve

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.

Total referrals	72
Not a fit for program:	33
Accepted but selected other placement:	3
toured program and placed elsewhere:	10
Referral closed out by district:	9

Placement Referrals for 2024-2025

Students enrolled:	7
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Extended Evaluation Referrals for 2024-2025

Students enrolled:	10
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Transitions from Placement 2024-2025

Graduated:	6
Transition to Other Keystone Program:	2
Transition back to in-district public school	4

Transitions from Extended Evaluation 2024-2025

Transition to long-term placement at Keystone:	4
Transition back to in-district public school:	3

Student withdrew during Ext Evaluation:	2
Student moved out of catchment area during Extended Evaluation:	1

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. Students on or near grade-level skills participate in a novel-based curriculum. Struggling readers continue to benefit from the Lexia program as well as have access to a Reading Specialist that is housed part time within the program.

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. Simultaneously 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 membership 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.

Functional Life Skills

To prepare students for post-high school pursuits, Keystone Academy provides instruction to ensure 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.



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.

KEY Program

Philosophy

Our philosophy is to ensure that your child experiences a year full of success through specialized instruction designed to foster growth in key areas:

- Develop self-advocacy skills to communicate effectively and at their highest level of complexity.
- Cultivation of self-reliance skills to support independence to the greatest extent possible.
- Academic achievement in literacy and mathematics, presented in a way that challenges while remaining attainable.
- Building the endurance and positive attitude necessary to engage in meaningful and productive work.

Mission Statement

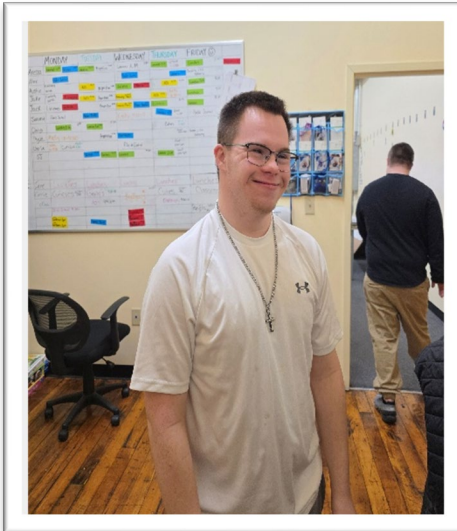
The mission of Key Programs is to partner with parents, professionals from sending school districts, and community members to nurture confident, capable, and self-motivated learners who are prepared to transition to a less restrictive school setting. Our programming and instruction are guided by three core principles: safety, respect, and effective learning.

Key Programs promote, support, and celebrate the pursuit of learning and critical thinking as lifelong endeavors, challenging students to acquire the skills necessary to meet the evolving technical, social, and economic demands of the world. Additionally, we are committed to fostering individuals who respect and honor the diversity of race, color, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or cognitive challenges.

Student Population

The KEY Program continues to provide specialized services to students with special needs, in a public day school setting. These students often face significant challenges that hinder their ability to function independently and make effective progress in a general education environment. Referrals to our classrooms are made through the child-study process, where it is determined that a more intensive educational setting is necessary for the student to achieve meaningful progress.

Students present with a wide range of academic, social, and behavioral challenges. While some students are academically competitive, the majority face significant delays in cognition, self-regulation skills, motor skills, as well as expressive and receptive language. Additionally, some students have significant medical needs that require ongoing nursing support throughout the school day. A high level of adult supervision and assistance is essential to ensure their safety and to support the implementation of their educational goals and objectives.



Standard diagnoses include:

- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Developmental Delay
- Down Syndrome
- Intellectual Disability
- Rare Genetic Disorders (Chromosomal disorders, GRIN1-NDD, IQSec2, etc.)
- Multiple Disabilities (Autism/ADHD/Sensory Processing, Autism/ODD, Autism/Cerebral Palsy/ADHD)

Program Staffing

Each classroom is staffed with a certified teacher and an appropriate number of paraprofessionals to maintain a low student-to-adult ratio (2:1). The staff supporting the KEY programs are professionally licensed, highly qualified, CPI certified and deeply committed to our students and their families. Additionally, the KEY program features dedicated job coaches who assist students in developing vocational skills essential for life after graduation.

DESE licensed staff

- 2 Administrator
- 12 Teachers

Professionally licensed staff

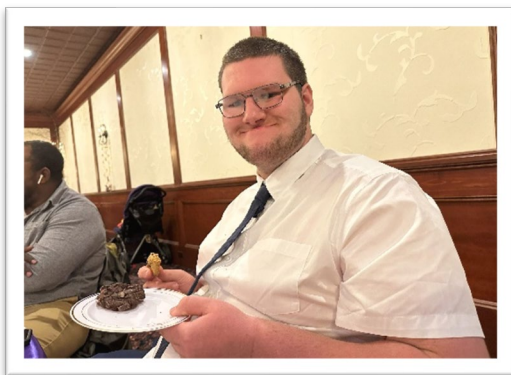
- 8 Therapists, 4 SLPs, 1 OT, 1 PT, 2 TVI
- 3 Therapy Assistant, 2 COTAs, 1 PTA
- 6 (1 RN & 5 LPN)
- 1 Rehabilitation Counselor
- 2 BCBA

Highly Qualified Support Staff

- 19 Registered Behavioral Technicians (RBT's)
- 26 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 receiving the referral package (which includes all relevant testing and IEP), a KEY Program Administrator will contact the district. If the student is deemed an appropriate fit, an observation will be scheduled at the student's current educational setting, and an appointment will be arranged for the parent/guardian to visit the KEY Program and participate in an intake interview. The final decision regarding enrollment is made by the referring school personnel, the KEY Program staff, and the student's current team, and the parents/guardians. All students must have a current IEP and provide immunization records before starting at the KEY Program.



Placement Referrals for 2024-2025

Total Referrals:	40
Students enrolled:	8
Extended evaluation students enrolled:	6
Extended evaluation transition to long term placement at Keystone:	5
Transitioned to a more restrictive environment:	1
Accepted but selected other placement	1
Never toured program and placed elsewhere:	5
Not a fit for program	16
Programs were full (waiting list)	3
Referral closed out by district	1

Transitions from Placement 2024-2025

Transition to another Keystone Program	1
Transition to a more restrictive environment	6
Graduated/Transition to adult services:	4

Moved Out-of-Catchment Area:	1
Student returned to District:	4
Student passed away:	1

Program Services

Individualized academic and behavioral programming

The KEY Program is an intensive language-based program that integrates applied behavior analysis (ABA) with an interprofessional, collaborative approach to support children with special needs. Each classroom employs a variety of instructional techniques, including discrete trials, small group sessions, hands-on activities, and multi-sensory learning experiences, all enhanced by behavioral modification and positive behavioral supports. Daily living skills, such as safety, self-awareness, and independence, are woven into the daily routine, fostering these essential skills in real-world contexts.

Instruction in the KEY Program is highly individualized to meet each student's needs, as outlined in their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and is delivered in a low student-to-teacher ration (2:1) setting. Students engage in the MCAS process with modifications and adaptations suited for their unique needs, participating either through computer-based testing or the MCAS-Alt Portfolio. Possible MCAS modifications include shorter testing sessions with frequent breaks, small group settings, direction reading by a test administrator, tracking support for test items, and scribing. For students unable to participate in standard paper-and pencil tests, the MCAS Alt Portfolio Assessment provides a structured alternative to demonstrate their learning and progress.

Related Services

Related services encompass developmental, corrective, and other supportive services essential for students with disabilities to thrive in their educational setting. These services include speech-language pathology and audiology, physical and occupational therapy, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes.

The KEY Program employs an integrated therapy model for delivering therapeutic services to students. This approach, similar to “push-in” therapy, enhances collaboration with teachers, adding structure to both the process and professional relationships. Through this model, therapy support is delivered directly in the classroom, aligning with the student's instructional environment. By providing therapy in a less restrictive setting, the model allows students to generalize their skills beyond traditional pull-out therapy and offers broader benefits to both students and teaching staff.

Additional related services include school health and nursing services, social work, and parent counseling and training. All Keystone related service providers are fully licensed to practice in Massachusetts and serve as essential members of each student's educational team. Services are provided in accordance with each student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Behavior management and social emotional learning

Each classroom teaching team meets weekly to discuss student progress toward educational goals and positive behavioral developments. Classroom data is analyzed and reviewed to determine if any adjustments are needed in a student's academic instruction or behavioral protocols.

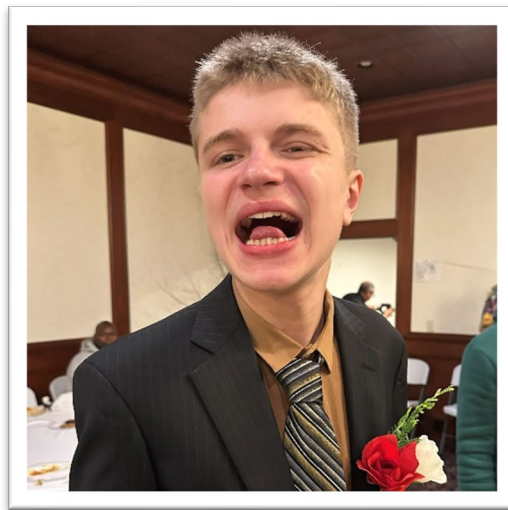
Behavior management within the KEY programs is individualized, with positive expectations and reinforcement strategies tailored to each child to encourage future positive behaviors. A variety of reinforcement methods are used, including token economies, self-monitoring systems, and specific contingency plans.

Individual behavior support plans are developed and implemented for each student, with ongoing data reviews conducted by program staff and the in-program board certified behavior analyst (BCBA).

Community based instruction:

The KEY programs provide vocational training activities designed to foster a positive work ethic, job skills, and work endurance. These activities include a mail run and delivery service between program sites, along with community-based opportunities at locations such as Gardner's Spot, Growing Places, AIS, Harvard Alpaca Farm, Tiny's Restaurant, Ginny's, Oliver's Café, Cutie Patooties, Cutiques furniture boutique, Pit Stop Barber Shop, Ayer Police Station, First Concern, Custom Billing, and Bright Eyes.

Students also engage with the local community to enhance safety skills, community awareness, social interaction, and career exploration.



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, 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 are enrolled and require the services provided by our programs and meet the acceptance criteria. 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 2023-2024 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 2024-2025 school year, a total of 159 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 2024-2025		
Ashburnham/Westminster	1 semester courses	
	1 full-year courses	\$825.00
Ayer/Shirley	29 semester courses	\$7,975.00
Clinton	52 semester courses	\$14,300.00
Gardner	50 semester courses	\$13,750.00
West Boylston	29 semester courses	
	2 full-year courses	\$9,075.00
		\$45,925.00

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

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 offering 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 2023-2024 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, and administrators. 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.

Strategic Goal 1: Program Development and Student Support

Objective:

- Expand and strengthen programming that addresses the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional well-being of students.
- Strengthen specialized education and mental health supports across programs.
- Develop a full continuum of services for medically fragile and high-need students.
- Use program outcome data to guide decisions and ensure continuous improvement.

Measures of Success:

- Increased capacity in therapeutic and specialized programs.
- Documented improvement in student growth measures and functional outcomes.

- Annual program evaluation reports reflecting district satisfaction and need alignment.

The Collaborative has continued to enhance programs serving students with complex academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. The Mental Health Study Committee, composed of district representatives, a consulting psychiatrist, a school psychologist, a Department of Mental Health liaison, and Collaborative staff, conducted an extensive review of available supports and system gaps within member districts. Those findings initially led to the creation of the Transition Specialist and Integration Specialist positions, which were approved and incorporated into the FY 2020 budget.

While the establishment of these positions provided valuable insight and coordination for students transitioning between programs or back to their home districts, implementation revealed a more immediate need within the day-to-day instructional and clinical framework. Specifically, data showed heightened demand for additional counseling capacity and targeted literacy interventions within programs prior to expanding transitional services externally. In response, the Collaborative prioritized internal program development by increasing access to counseling, therapeutic consultation, and reading specialist support to ensure that foundational academic and emotional needs were adequately addressed early in a student's placement.

The organization's continued collaboration with district and community providers also strengthened its understanding of the regional mental health landscape. Through its previous partnership with the INTERFACE Referral Service at William James College, the Collaborative and participating districts demonstrated the value of coordinated referral systems. While INTERFACE was later discontinued as more towns and districts built internal resources, the initiative established a crucial framework that continues to inform new partnerships, including emerging collaborations with other vendor-based and community mental health supports.

Further structural progress has been achieved in developing a comprehensive continuum of services responsive to student needs through the acquisition of the Fitchburg facility and, more recently, the Leominster Joslin property. These strategic facility investments have expanded classroom space, enhanced accessibility, and created opportunities for more cohesive integration of therapeutic, academic, and transitional services across grade levels and program types. Together, these efforts ensure that students are supported holistically—academically, socially, and emotionally—through all phases of their educational journey.

Strategic Goal 2: Facilities and Capital Planning

Objective:

- Ensure facilities and infrastructure support program quality, expansion, and safety.
- Complete a three-year facilities review and capital plan for Central Office and Public Day Programs.
- Explore purchasing or leasing new spaces to support growth, including relocation of ED/BD programs.

- Implement facility upgrades that enhance accessibility, technology integration, and learning environments.

Measures of Success:

- Approved multi-year facilities plan by the Executive Board.
- Site enhancements or relocations aligned with capital priorities.
- Improved health and safety standards across classrooms and offices.

The Collaborative has made major advancements in facilities, expanding its capacity to support students, staff, and programs. In October 2021, the Collaborative purchased its Fitchburg facility, consolidating multiple previous sites and optimizing program space, technology infrastructure, and accessibility. This strategic investment allowed more students to be served at a central, modern location, improving resource allocation and facilitating larger-scale educational and therapeutic services.

Further progress came with the recent acquisition of the Leominster Joslin property, formerly known as Apple Hill Farm. With this addition, the Collaborative now operates two permanent program sites, supporting both alternative education programs and extended vocational, academic, and therapeutic services. These property investments, combined with ongoing capital planning and partnerships, have enabled the Collaborative to consolidate programs, maximize occupancy expenditures, and build a strong foundation for future growth in alignment with member district needs.

Efforts continue to focus on evaluating future facility ownership, expansion, and adaptive renovation opportunities. These strategic actions support both immediate program needs and the long-term vision of delivering quality, cost-effective, and accessible services for students and families across the districts.

Strategic Goal 3: Workforce Recruitment, Retention, and Professional Growth

Objective:

- Build a highly skilled, supported, and collaborative workforce.
- Strengthen recruitment strategies to attract high-quality professional and paraprofessional staff.
- Provide relevant, research-based professional development aligned with district priorities.
- Establish a coordinated inter-district professional learning network and advisory committee.

Measures of Success:

- Reduction in turnover rates for key professional roles.
- Annual participation metrics in staff and inter-district PD sessions.
- Positive trends in staff satisfaction and professional growth surveys.

The Collaborative recognizes the critical importance of recruiting and retaining a highly skilled workforce to effectively serve its students and member districts. A key component of this effort has been the utilization of a part-time Human Resources (HR) assistant who has significantly contributed to both organizational and member district hiring processes. This HR assistant has played a valuable role in sourcing and screening quality candidates for Keystone's diverse educational and clinical positions, thereby improving the timeliness and quality of staff recruitment.

Beyond supporting the Collaborative's own recruitment needs, the HR assistant has acted as a resource for member districts, assisting them in identifying and acquiring internal personnel aligned with district-specific requirements. This shared service model has fostered stronger collaboration within the network and helped address regional workforce challenges more efficiently.

Keystone's broader recruitment strategy includes reclassification of paraprofessional roles to Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs), supporting professional development to achieve Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) certification with a 90% pass rate, and hiring doctoral-level specialists to provide consistent, evidence-based care. Partnerships with higher education institutions further strengthen pipelines for new educators and clinicians.

Despite statewide specialty staff shortages, Keystone's combination of targeted recruitment, professional growth opportunities, mentorship, supportive culture, and the strategic HR assistant position sustains a resilient, engaged workforce committed to advancing student success.

Strategic Goal 4: Marketing, Branding, and Communication

Objective:

- Increase organizational visibility and stakeholder engagement through strategic communication.
- Refine the Keystone brand message to reflect excellence and regional collaboration.
- Develop and implement a targeted marketing and communication plan.

Measures of Success:

- Completion and launch of strategic branding and communication plan.
- Increased digital engagement and external partnership inquiries.
- Consistent district and stakeholder feedback reflecting improved awareness of services.

The Collaborative has successfully established a clear and compelling brand identity that aligns with its mission to unite communities and empower student growth. The focus now is on maintaining the integrity and consistency of this brand and mission while adapting to evolving educational landscapes and stakeholder expectations.

Efforts to sustain and evolve the brand include maintaining authentic, transparent communication that reflects Keystone’s core values and achievements, ensuring consistent messaging across digital platforms, print materials, and community engagement efforts. Maintaining a cohesive visual identity and tone reinforces recognition and trust among member districts, families, and partners.

The Collaborative continues to refine its marketing strategies by leveraging emerging digital tools and storytelling techniques that highlight student successes, community impact, and program innovations. Regular evaluation of engagement metrics and stakeholder feedback informs ongoing adjustments to keep the brand relevant and responsive to new challenges and opportunities.

By balancing brand preservation with thoughtful evolution, Keystone positions itself as a trusted, innovative leader in collaborative education, prepared to meet future needs while honoring its foundational mission and vision.

Strategic Goal 5: Financial and Organizational Sustainability

Objective:

- Maintain fiscal health and operational excellence to ensure long-term viability.
- Align financial management with strategic and capital planning priorities.
- Diversify revenue through grants, tuition-based programs, and partnerships.
- Strengthen internal systems, technology, and data use to improve efficiency and accountability.

Measures of Success:

- Balanced annual operating budget with maintained reserves.
- Documented growth in alternative funding sources.
- Annual review of strategic and fiscal alignment outcomes by the Executive Board.

The Collaborative is committed to ongoing evaluation and strategic planning for long-term capital projects following the significant acquisitions of two school facilities—in Fitchburg and Leominster—as well as the central office facility. These acquisitions represent key milestones in Keystone’s goal to secure permanent spaces that support expanded academic, therapeutic, and administrative functions. By owning these properties, the Collaborative enhances its control over program environments, operational stability, and future growth potential. Continuous assessment of facility needs, renovation opportunities, and capital financing options will guide decision-making to ensure sustainable, cost-effective infrastructure that meets evolving district and student requirements.



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

Keystone Educational Collaborative
2 Shaker Road, Suite D215

Shirley, MA 01464



www.keystonecollaborative.org

