A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends;

As I write this note, flowers are blooming, the sun is shining, and despite recent national tragedies, we are trying to feel the optimism that comes with springtime.

I am enjoying visiting classrooms again and seeing the unmasked smiles of students and faculty as they learn together! And despite ongoing concerns about Covid, it has been wonderful to resume community based activities that have been on hold or online for the past two years.

For the past few years I have had the pleasure of serving on the Youth at Risk Committee and can report that it was “live” again this spring, held on the campus of Endicott College. Over 500 participants learned from their colleagues and leaders in the field about a range of topics affecting youth in our communities. Several of our employees presented workshops. NEC’s Diversity Team presented their work on “Brave Spaces” in our school communities, and our Recovery High School (RHS) Principal facilitated a panel on “Lessons from the Front Lines.”
The Kevin O’Grady School (KOG) Prime Products students created beautifully themed (“BEE Kind”) centerpieces for conference tables, and artwork from our Northshore Academy students was displayed in the exposition area.

The Express Yourself annual show was also back this year at the Boch Center Wang Theater and a number of RHS students and staff lit up the stage with a stunning performance!

KOG is bringing back the “Walk and Roll” event that, years ago, helped us build our accessible playground. On June 4th (rain date: June 11th) KOG students, families, and staff will WALK or ROLL around the campus 10 times. Friends and family can sponsor them and/or donate. The funds will go to establishing an outdoor memorial for students and staff who have passed away.

Topsfield Vocational Academy’s (TVA) founding principal, Charlie LeBuff, is retiring in August. We will miss his passionate advocacy for students and his unique style, but the strength-based culture he has developed will live on. We are thrilled to be welcoming Lynsey Page as the new Principal this summer. Lynsey was the unanimous first choice of our interview committee. We were impressed by her experience and credentials! She has been an educator for over twenty years working as a high school English teacher and Assistant Principal. But, most of all, we were impressed with Lynsey’s passion, her commitment to students, her warm and engaging personality, and her strength-based philosophy. She clearly shares the core values of the TVA and NEC communities and is eager to help us move forward.

In the next several weeks, I will have the honor of attending graduation ceremonies at four of our schools and seeing first-hand how NEC makes miracles happen for students who were not sure if they would be
To quote one of these soon-to-be graduates:

“*I'm going to be attending UMass Lowell this fall, which is something that I still haven't been able to fathom. Two years ago, I didn't have any hope or even thought I had a chance to further my education, and now I will be attending the college of my choice.*”

Thank you for supporting us as we help our students and families find hope for their futures!!

Francine H. Rosenberg, M.Ed.
Executive Director

Support NEC

Program News

Transitions Programs: SOAR & Embark

Horsing Around

Handle with Care - Working with Glass
Interning at the Service Dog Project is a favorite! Students help care for service rescue animals from dogs to horses! Not only do they help with cleaning and feeding the animals but they also get to spend some quality time socializing and establishing a connection with them. 

Our Soar/Embark student interns at North Shore Glass School assist in readying glass to be fired and fused into ornate light fixtures and decorative items. In this photo, Grant is sanding rough edges from a glass piece that just came out of a kiln.

Lunch at Beau’s Coffee Shop
Students and staff visited Bitty and Beau’s Coffee Shop in Melrose for a delicious lunch and a great time building friendships! Eighty percent of the employees at Bitty and Beau’s are people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. 

"It’s more than a cup of coffee" ~ from Bitty & Beau’s website

Kevin O’Grady School

Partnering with the Danvers Historical Society
Kevin O’Grady School partnered with Danvers Historical Society this year on a variety of new initiatives; some indoors and some outdoors! Pictured above are students, Andrew and Brendin, volunteering at a community-based internship focused on developing not only professional skills but also life skills such as light cleaning, vacuuming, furniture set up/clean up, and mailings. Below are student interns providing a valuable service to local communities, by cleaning up the parks at Choate and Proctor farms in Danvers.
We also partnered with Wicked Rustic Workshops this year. In these photos students Andrew, Alex, Charles, and Andy packaged and assembled craft kits. Wicked Rustic Workshops is a mobile crafting company that specializes in private and public social crafting workshops, corporate events, birthday parties, and fundraisers. This has been an amazing opportunity!
Happy St. Patrick's Day!
For St. Patrick's Day, the Culinary Arts students made a full meal of corned beef and cabbage complete with Lucky Charm treats!!! The students are always cooking up something new with Chef PJ! Check out their daily offerings on Facebook at Northshore Education Cooks!

Break Time with Mookie
Billy and Mookie, the cherished therapy pup at TVA, enjoy a little down time outside with Erin Clasby, Adjustment Counselor!
A few seeds, a lot of smiles & a ton of anticipation
Lettuce Planting Day meant students and staff got their hands in the dirt to plant tiny lettuce seeds while soaking in the sun! The plan is to harvest the lettuce in June for Salad Day! We are happy to share that this gardening program has taught us much and held up well! It all started several years ago with the influence of Backyard Growers out of Gloucester, raised garden beds built by our own TVA Woodshop students, and thanks to the support of our dear friends, John & Mollie Burns and Linzee Coolidge.

Art at Lower - Recycled Beauty
NSA Lower students love art and recently learned about Dale Chihuly, a glass blowing artist. As part of their class, they watched a video on how glass blowing was done, and then they recreated their own art inspired by the artist. The one pictured here was a clear plastic cup colored with sharpies and then melted in a toaster oven as the students watched its transformation. Other recyclables used for the project were water bottles which were turned into flowers and are on display throughout the school!

A Year with Frog & Toad - a huge hit!
The students in 1st - 3rd grades had the opportunity to see the whimsical musical, Frog and Toad at the North Shore Music Theatre. For many of the students, this was the first play they have seen. A great time was had by all!

Guess Who?
Spirit Week is always a hit as NSA Lower! For Character & Famous Person Day. Here is Peter Flister, Paraprofessional, as Kingsley Shacklebolt from Harry Potter, Kaleb as
Northshore Academy Upper

A great season from Hoops to Hoodies
The NSA Upper Academy had another successful basketball season, finishing the season with a 9-4 record. The season culminated with the team receiving hooded sweatshirts generously donated by Atlantic Components, Inc.

Souper-Bowl celebrated its 13th year!
NSA Upper was able to, once again, host its annual Soup-er Bowl offering amazing soups cooked by staff and students! NSA staff, students and families enjoyed sampling and eating a variety of delicious food!

Raising Awareness - the Trevor Project
LGBT+ Awareness Week was a week-long event held at NSA. Students in the NSA Alliance class planned daily announcements with historical facts, gave out PRIDE buttons made by the students, planned and executed a fundraiser that donated $175 to the Trevor Project, and provided educational materials about Pride flags, LGBTQ+ statistics, and other information meant to educate and raise awareness. A huge shout out goes to student Jordan whose ideas and energy helped bring this event to reality.

Diamond Chef Competition
The Upper School hosted its 2nd annual Diamond Chef Cooking Competition during April and May. In Elimination Rounds, over 30 students worked with staff to plan, execute, and serve judges their version of pizza, Latin American cuisine and burgers. The winning team, headed by brand new staff Polly Corbett, served up some amazing recipes that were executed with class. Rumor has it that Principal Dave Mercier was even part of the action and possibly had more fun than the students!
Northshore Recovery High School

Getting to the “Heart of the Matter”
RHS students, alum, and Principal Michelle Lipinski, were featured guests on the podcast, Heart of the Matter with Elizabeth Vargas titled Radical compassion and the power of empathy: in the halls with the students of Northshore Recovery High School which aired on February 22, 2022. Listen HERE

Wild & Free with Express Yourself
Recovery High students and staff were thrilled to, once again, be back on stage at the Boch Wang Center for the 28th performance of the annual Express Yourself show. RHS as been part of this show for many years now and has enjoyed the privilege performing with STOMP!

Connections Program

Our Connections Program: Wrapping Around Districts & Their Students
The pandemic has certainly impacted our children, but youth mental health issues were rising well before that. Our public schools are doing the best they can to support them, but often the challenges are
well beyond the walls of the schools....and families need additional help. Unfortunately, help is even harder to access these days with waitlists for resources in many communities. This is understandably impacting student success in the classroom.

The core of NEC's mission is to respond to the needs of our member districts. Prior to the pandemic, our member districts reported an increasing number of students experiencing mental health challenges and/or out-of-school stressors that were impacting their ability to manage their behavior in school. This, in turn, was impacting their ability to succeed academically. In 2019, with Tower Foundation support, the NEC responded and launched its Connections Wraparound Program; since then the program has doubled in size. In collaboration with our member school districts, the goals of the program are to improve student academic performance and attendance; reduce missed school time due to suspensions; mitigate issues that impact function, and reduce the risk of a student dropping out of school. The Connections Clinicians work with the schools, students, and families to identify what is getting in the way of a student’s success. A thorough assessment is completed, guiding the intervention and providing appropriate support to students and families at home, in school and/or in the community. The program literally “wraps around” the student, their family, and their school to find out what is needed and then to connect the student/family to resources to get those needs met. Sometimes counseling is needed. Sometimes there are food and housing needs. Sometimes connecting the student to more alternative forms of support like art, music therapy, or therapeutic horseback riding (photo above) are just what is needed to help turn the corner.

Further supporting the program's success is the role the Clinicians play and the gap that the program fills. Connections Clinicians are able to serve as impartial liaisons between the school staff and families, encouraging collaboration and providing services that are typically outside the boundaries of what a public school can provide. Additionally, given the significant delays in accessing community based services at this time, the Connections Clinicians often provide support to the student and family in that period of wait time. Given that services are not insurance based, one of the greatest benefits of Connections is that they can be creative and nontraditional. Thus, students have a greater chance of continuing in their home districts with their peers, rather than being referred to an out of district placement in a therapeutic school.
“It is invaluable to have her [Connections clinician] meet students and families in their homes, away from the context of school. She really serves as a bridge between school and home!” – quote from participating district

With the support of the Tower Foundation, the North Shore Community Health Network, our member districts and some incredibly skilled and committed Clinicians, Connections has become a highly esteemed and sought after support to our local schools, their students and their families.

As one grateful parent said, “Jen (Connections Clinician) was great to work with! We felt supported. We appreciated her knowledge and the time to get us the supports that our son needed.”

Donor Support Makes Us Stronger Together

“Side by Side...”

“It’s not where you are in life, it’s who you have by your side that matters.” ~ Unknown

NEC is committed to partnering with our local cities and towns to help kids with complex special needs in the most cost efficient manner.

Over the years, the rising costs of special education made this more challenging resulting in the 2005 establishment of the Friends of NEC which opened the door for us to invite others (like individual donors and private foundations) to support our work! Inviting individuals, foundations, and businesses to support our student needs enables us to keep tuition costs low, while keeping the quality of education high. Simply stated, the generosity of others helps bridge the gap between a cost effective education and what NEC needs to help our kids reach their full potential.
The landscape of philanthropy is changing before our eyes. While tuition will always “keep the doors open” at NEC, philanthropy is the means to providing opportunities like outdoor programming, new vocational initiatives, music and art therapies, and more to our students; plus philanthropy tackles the never ending technology need! Technology is vital for our students. It provides a way for our non-verbal students to communicate with the world around them; it connects our students to their curriculum and it prepares all of our students for their future.

Navigating the shifts in fundraising, the ongoing challenge of the pandemic with all of the associated physical and mental complications, plus the current realization that education delivery has now changed forever, has only reinforced our sense of how critical our Friends are to the health and wellbeing of NEC. So when we say, "thank you," it is with deep appreciation.

Much of what we can offer our students is because of what we have first received from you. Thank you for supporting NEC!

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**GENEROSITY IN ACTION!**

**New England BioLabs further develops our Vocational Program**

With the consistent support of New England BioLabs (NEB), the Vocational Programming at KOG continues to expand year after year, offering our students vital skill development opportunities. Thanks to NEB support, our students operate an onsite Recycle Center, a newly added Copy & Print Center, and now have a Cricut that allows us to manufacture products like the centerpieces for the recent Youth At Risk Conference!
KOG Copy & Print Center
Thanks to a 2021 grant from New England BioLabs, the Kevin O'Grady School now has its own Copy & Print Center. Students are able to work on many skills in our Copy & Print Center including: printing the weekly news for classrooms, helping prep classroom materials for teachers, and assembling books. They have also photocopied flyers for events, like our annual Festivus 5k for Autism and Walk and Roll!

KOG Cricut Machine up and running!
The Cricut Machine is the latest integration into our Vocational Program thanks to our friends at NEB! Pictured above, KOG students are learning to use the highly versatile machine to design, cut out, and create centerpieces for the recent Youth At Risk Conference at Endicott College!

BevCam - Lights, Camera, Action!
Beverly Community Access Media (BevCam) has given their time, their talent, and their equipment to support our growing and highly popular Media Program at the NSA Upper School! Weekly shows are being staged, recorded, and aired giving students well rounded exposure to the world of media production!
Festivus 2021 - 10 years of running!
We have been running for 10 years to support students with autism and have now raised over $170,000!

Thanks to our runners, sponsors, donors and volunteers this was our BEST YEAR YET with the race raising $26,000! ALL of those funds go directly into providing programs and technologies to educate children with autism!

JT Fortin Foundation visits KOG!
George Fortin, Founder of the JT Fortin Foundation, recently paid a visit to the Kevin O’Grady School! The foundation has generously supported our Occupational Therapy Dept. over the last several years, but COVID has impeded a formal thank you to the foundation. This visit was long overdue and meeting George was like reconnecting with a long lost friend! Our staff and students were thrilled to finally thank him personally and show him what his generosity has provided for our students!

George, you and your family make the world a better place!

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Thank you! Your giving matters...
"Every student. Every day. Whatever it takes."

Support NEC

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