

Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives



2024 - 2025 Annual Report



Partnerships in Public Education



2024 - 2025 Board of Directors

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www.nsedu.org

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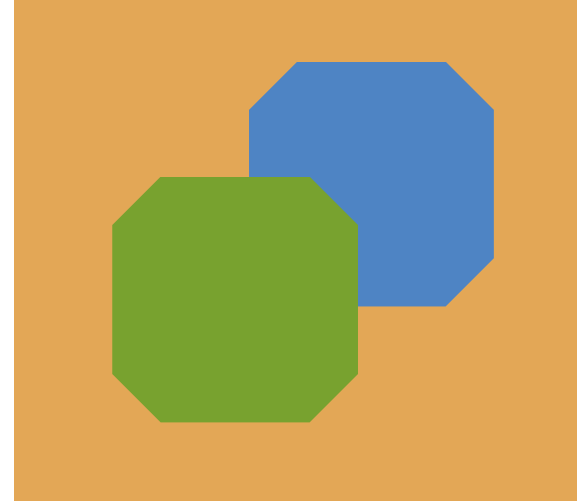
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www.moecnet.org

Executive Director

Joanne Haley Sullivan, M.Ed.
Massachusetts Organization of Educational
Collaboratives
www.moecnet.org

Our Board of Directors is
comprised of Executive
Directors from our member
Collaboratives. These
members have been elected by
their peers to help lead the
organization.

Regional Liaison Representatives



Greater Boston

Pamela T. Girouard, M.S. SLP-CCC
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www.crestcollaborative.org

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Cape Cod Collaborative
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Pilgrim Area Collaborative

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Southern Worcester County Educational Collaborative
www.swcec.org

West

Todd H. Gazda, Ed.D., JD
Collaborative for Educational Services
www.collaborative.org

MOEC Regional Liaisons facilitate communication to and from MOEC Board Meetings. They advocate on behalf of their region when needs and priorities are being discussed. They serve as an ambassador between collaboratives in the region and DESE and they coordinate the dissemination of information to districts by working in partnership with DESE as well as other public entities and organizations.



Member Collaboratives

West

Collaborative for Educational Services (CES)	www.collaborative.org
Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC)	www.lpvec.org

Central

Assabet Valley Collaborative (AVC)	www.avcollaborative.org
CAPS Educational Collaborative	www.capsed.net
Central Massachusetts Collaborative (CMC)	www.cmassc.org
Keystone Collaborative	www.keystone.org
Southern Worcester County Educational Collaborative (SWCEC)	www.swcec.org

Greater Boston

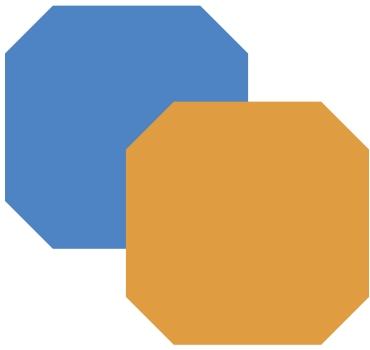
ACCEPT Collaborative	www.accept.org
CASE Collaborative	www.casecollaborative.org
LABBB Collaborative	www.labbb.com
Shore Educational Collaborative	www.shorecollaborative.org
The Education Cooperative (TEC)	www.tec-coop.org

North

CREST Collaborative	www.crestcollaborative.org
Northshore Education Consortium (NEC)	www.nsedu.org
SEEM Collaborative	www.seemcollaborative.org
Valley Collaborative	www.valleycollaborative.org

South

Bi-County Collaborative (BICO)	www.bicounty.org
Cape Cod Collaborative (CCC)	www.capecodcollaborative.org
North River Collaborative (NRC)	www.northrivercollaborative.org
Pilgrim Area Collaborative (PAC)	www.pilgrimac.org
READS Collaborative	www.readscollab.org
South Coast Educational Collaborative (SCEC)	www.scecoll.org
Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC)	www.smecollaborative.org
South Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC)	www.ssec.org

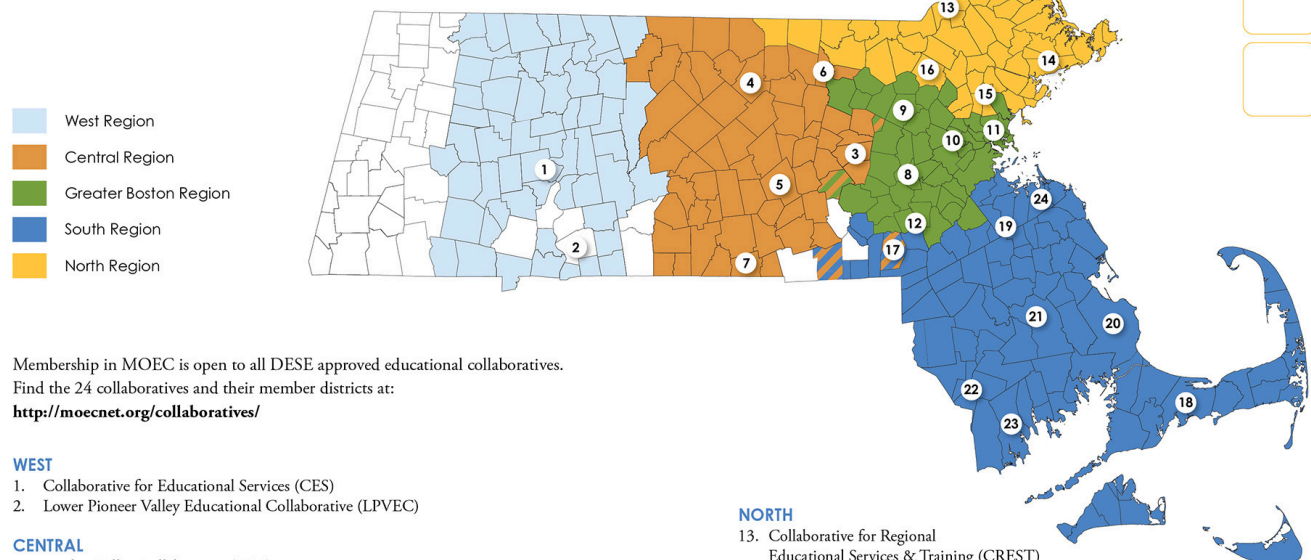


The 24 Collaboratives are organized into five regions across the state. The regions work together with one another to:

1. **Identify** regional needs and priorities for educational services;
2. **Develop** policies to coordinate the delivery of services to school districts in a manner that responds to regional needs and priorities; and
3. **Work in partnership** with the department of elementary and secondary education and other regional entities to coordinate the dissemination of information and support to districts.

Massachusetts

COLLABORATIVES



Membership in MOEC is open to all DESE approved educational collaboratives. Find the 24 collaboratives and their member districts at:

<http://moecnet.org/collaboratives/>

WEST

1. Collaborative for Educational Services (CES)
2. Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC)

CENTRAL

3. Assabet Valley Collaborative (AVC)
4. CAPS Collaborative
5. Central Massachusetts Collaborative (CMC)
6. Keystone Educational Collaborative
7. Southern Worcester County Educational Collaborative (SWCEC)

GREATER BOSTON

8. ACCEPT Education Collaborative
9. CASE Collaborative
10. LABBB Collaborative
11. Shore Educational Collaborative
12. The Education Cooperative (TEC)

NORTH

13. Collaborative for Regional Educational Services & Training (CREST)
14. Northshore Education Consortium (NEC)
15. SEEM Collaborative
16. Valley Collaborative

SOUTH

17. Bi-County Collaborative (BICO)
18. Cape Cod Collaborative
19. North River Collaborative (NRC)
20. Pilgrim Area Collaborative (PAC)
21. READS Collaborative
22. South Coast Educational Collaborative (SCEC)
23. Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC)
24. South Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC)

A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am proud to present the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives' Annual Report, highlighting the incredible work and accomplishments of the past year.

In 2024–25, MOEC's member collaboratives served nearly 30,000 students across more than 300 school districts throughout the Commonwealth. From public special education and general education services to transportation and professional development, our programs continued to meet the evolving needs of students, families, and districts with steadfast commitment and innovation.

While we celebrate our achievements, we also recognize the growing challenges facing special education in Massachusetts. The increasing complexity of student needs has placed tremendous strain on our staffing, infrastructure, and resources. Many of our collaborative school buildings urgently require funding for critical upgrades to ensure they remain safe, accessible, and equipped to serve all students effectively.

This year, our focus centered on three strategic priorities: launching a public campaign to raise the profile of collaboratives in recognition of their work throughout the 50 years of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); using data to demonstrate the value and cost-effectiveness of educational collaboratives; and completing a statewide assessment of collaborative facilities and advocating for essential infrastructure improvements. These goals have been powerful opportunities to highlight the essential role collaboratives play in delivering equitable, high-quality education to students with disabilities across Massachusetts.

Since our founding in the 1970s, educational collaboratives have built a strong legacy of supporting districts and improving outcomes for students throughout the Commonwealth. That work continues today, driven by the unwavering dedication of our members, committees, and representatives on statewide commissions.

This year, we extend our deepest gratitude and best wishes to Donna Flaherty, Executive Director of ACCEPT Collaborative, and Paul Hilton, Executive Director of Cape Cod Collaborative, as they retire, as well as Todd Gazda, Executive Director of the Collaborative for Educational Services as he moves on to a new position.. Their leadership and contributions to MOEC have been immeasurable.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support. We look forward to building on this year's progress as we work together to ensure that every child in Massachusetts has access to a high-quality education.

Sincerely,

Joanne Haley Sullivan
Executive Director
Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives



About MOEC

The **Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC)** is the professional association representing the Commonwealth's 24 educational collaboratives. As the collective voice of its members, MOEC works to promote awareness, understanding, and appreciation of educational collaboratives at the state and local levels.

MOEC serves as a visible and effective advocate for regional approaches to educational service delivery and is the Commonwealth's primary champion of the essential role that collaboratives play in supporting public education. Through advocacy, professional development, and strategic information sharing, MOEC strengthens the capacity of educational collaboratives to serve students, families, school districts, and communities across Massachusetts.

Educational Collaboratives in Massachusetts

Established through state legislation in 1974, educational collaboratives were created to enable school districts to join forces in meeting the increasing need for special education services. Subsequent legislation in 2012 further refined the governance and operational structures of collaboratives, ensuring strong oversight and transparency.

Over the decades, educational collaboratives have evolved into comprehensive service agencies that provide a wide range of programs to meet the diverse and changing needs of students and school districts. By fostering cooperation and resource sharing among districts, collaboratives enhance educational opportunities, drive innovation, and deliver cost-effective solutions across the Commonwealth.

Collaboratives are uniquely positioned to respond to emerging challenges and support some of the state's most vulnerable students. They lead efforts to develop forward-thinking programs, offer high-quality professional learning, and serve as trusted partners in public education.

Collaborative Programs and Services

- Advanced placement programs
- Afterschool programs
- Arts programs
- Career and Technical Education
- Cooperative purchasing
- Early childhood services
- English Learner Education
- Health and safety initiatives
- Mental health support
- Professional Development for Educators
- Recovery High Schools
- School Based Medicaid Claiming Services
- Student data privacy initiatives
- Therapeutic services
- Transportation (general and special education)
- Virtual learning platforms
- Wrap around family support services

Collaborative Special Educational programs serve students with the following needs:

- Autism Spectrum
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- Emotional and Behavioral Health Needs
- Multiple Disabilities/Complex Health
- Post-High School Transition
- Post-22 services
- Substance Use Disorders
- Vision

Collaborative special education services:

- Applied Behavior Analysis
- Assistive Technology
- Home/Hospital Tutoring
- Mental Health Services
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Orientation & Mobility
- Parent Training
- Physical Therapy
- Program Evaluation & Consultation
- Speech & Language Therapy
- Student Assessments including Extended Evaluations
- Transitional & Vocational Services
- Vision

Educational collaboratives continue to be instrumental in creating equitable, innovative, and efficient educational experiences for students across Massachusetts. Through their comprehensive offerings, educational collaboratives play an indispensable role in meeting the diverse needs of students and communities across Massachusetts.





National and Statewide Partnerships

MOEC gives voice to regional needs and concerns through partnerships with districts, schools, community organizations, higher education, and state leadership. Through these partnerships, we expand educational capacity and share information and resources statewide.

Our organization is recognized as a leading convener in the state's educational community, and we are proud of our longstanding and valued relationships with:

- Association of Educational Service Agencies
- Chambers of Commerce
- Coalition for Special Education Funding
- Massachusetts Association of Pupil Transportation
- Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials
- Massachusetts Association of School Committees
- Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
- Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association
- Massachusetts Partnerships for Youth
- Office of the Child Advocate
- Special Education Transportation Task Force

Job Alike Groups

MOEC provides ongoing opportunities for leaders in a variety of roles within their organization to meet with role-alike colleagues to discuss pressing issues and support one another in their success. The groups provide opportunities to enrich members' subject matter expertise and expand their knowledge and expertise in their roles.

Groups include:

- Business Leaders
- Diversity Equity and Inclusion Leaders
- English Learners Leaders
- Executive Director
- Human Resources Leaders
- In-Home Services Leaders
- Professional Development Leaders
- Nurse Leaders Job Alike Group
- Special Education Program Leaders
- Technology Leaders and Data Specialists
- Transportation Leaders



Three overarching goals for 2024-2025:



Goal 1: Promote Public Awareness and Knowledge About Educational Collaboratives

Goal 2: Use of Data

Goal 3: Advocacy for Facility and Other Needs of Collaboratives





Goal 1: Promote Public Awareness and Knowledge About Educational Collaboratives

Celebrating 50 Years of IDEA

In 1975, Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act later known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Since its passage, special education in Massachusetts has blossomed into a true collaborative effort — and in each classroom, success stories emerge every school day.

This year, MOEC is celebrating the 50th anniversary of special education with a series of feature stories in collaboration with John Guilfoil Public Relations to provide press releases, social media posts, and Boston25 feature segments that help to tell the untold stories of collaboratives. These stories, found on our website, educate the public about what collaboratives do and how they have evolved to serve the needs of our most vulnerable students over the past five decades.

The following pages highlight excerpts from these stories, each offering a unique window into the people, programs, and partnerships that define the experiences of students in collaborative schools. From innovative classroom practices to community-based learning opportunities, these features illustrate the creativity, dedication, and impact of collaboratives in supporting students with diverse needs. Together, they celebrate the progress made since the passage of IDEA and affirm our commitment to ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive.

MOEC Celebrates 50 Years of Special Education —

Part 1: 'It's Mary's world; we're just living in it'



In the family services room at the Kevin O'Grady School in Beverly, 9-year-old Mary Beth Perry wore a pink sweater and a purple bow in her hair. Her nurse, Jill, asked what kind of music she wanted to hear.

Using her hand to nudge a switch affixed to her wheelchair, Mary triggered her electronic “talker” device to communicate. “That’s the one I want,” a pre-recorded voice answered. Mary smiled, selecting Christmas music — not the Grinch, but some tunes from a Charlie Brown Christmas special. Smooth and jazzy.

“Mary’s having a good day today,” her mother Shannon Perry said. “Actually, it’s been a good week.” For the Perry family, a good day is something to appreciate — as not every day, nor every week, has been good. Some have been incredibly difficult.

That is where the Kevin O'Grady School, part of the Northshore Education Consortium (NEC), has played a big role in Mary and her family’s life. The special education collaborative has helped give them the tools and resources they needed to experience more good days and weeks than bad.

The school serves students ages 3 to 22 with moderate to severe special needs, including complex medical needs, physical disabilities, multiple disabilities, visual or hearing impairment, autism, and intellectual disabilities. The school meets the needs of students who are medically fragile and those with severe behavioral issues.

More than 50 years ago, Mary’s school, and the services and support it provides, did not exist, and Mary’s life would likely have been drastically different. A half-century ago, a

federal law was passed mandating that children with special needs, like Mary, receive an education like every other child.

Parents and guardians of these children finally had public school options — opportunities beyond private homecare and institutionalization.

Mary's mother described her daughter's situation as "medically complex." Mary relies on a wheelchair. She is non-verbal, non-ambulatory, and has severe cerebral palsy. She requires a gastronomy tube for nutrition and has a tracheostomy. "Mary's situation is so medically complex that she has a nurse with her at all times, wherever she goes in the building,"

"I think people have preconceived notions. What could Mary be learning?" As a student, the answer to that question changes with each new unit. But Mary is learning and loving the school experience. "School is Mary's favorite place. At school, Mary is an enthusiastic learner and works on communication skills throughout her day, using a switch," said Program Director Couillard. "This device enables her to engage more fully in classroom activities and groups, as well as advocate for herself. Whether it is requesting a turn during activities, making choices, answering simple questions, or interacting with her teachers and peers, learning to use her switch to communicate empowers her to participate in her world."

"Over the past 50 years, it has become a core value in Massachusetts that all students, including those with complex or low incidence disabilities, deserve a free and appropriate public education, and deserve to be in classrooms and settings where they feel fully included. Mary is a shining example in our school and one of the hundreds of students finding their way in life with the help of our state's collaboratives."

- Francine H. Rosenberg, NEC Executive Director

"It's Mary's world," her mother said. "We're just living in it. She shows us what she needs and when she needs it. Once you let those parameters go, you can find more joy on the path that you're on, rather than the path you expected. We could not be happier with the Kevin O'Grady School. Everybody is so motivated and they all do a very hard job with an amazing attitude."

Part 2: North River Collaborative Student Finds Guidance, Education and a Career After Rocky Start

In 2007, Bridgewater eighth grader Chris Poh, 14, was caught bringing a knife to school. His subsequent discipline and removal from school could have put his educational success and prospects in serious jeopardy. However, through what he learned at the North River



Collaborative in the years following, the incident launched a new beginning and provided him with the vital tools he has used throughout his life to control the temper and anger issues he has dealt with since he was young. “I was angry all the time,” Poh, now 33 recalled. “Constant outbursts and temper tantrums, you know, childish stuff.”

While trying to fit in at his old school, one day he brought a rusted antique World War II-era folding knife to school. He had no plans to use it. He didn’t threaten anyone. But he did show it off to other students and it was quickly reported to school officials. The knife discovery wasn’t his first disciplinary scrape. He had been acting out, throwing tantrums, having difficulty with executive functioning and being unable to

control a burning rage he felt building inside. As a result, Poh was enrolled at the North River School (NRS), a Rockland-based program run by the North River Collaborative, which specializes in helping students with behavioral issues.

Fourteen years after graduating from the NRC, Poh is now the head custodian of his alma mater, a job he is truly proud of and passionate about. Every day he gets to maintain and care for the school that gave so much to him at such a crucial crossroad in his young life.

A History of Helping

North River Collaborative, founded in 1976, serves as an extension of school districts in southeastern Massachusetts. Using an embedded therapeutic approach, NRS helps students process academic, social and behavioral situations, and use alternative strategies rather than engaging in behaviors that would impact their learning or future success. It provides vital clinical and academic support for students so they can return to their district. Students receive academic credits toward local graduation through the NRS course of studies.

“Our students have mental health challenges that have prevented them from accessing education in their mainstream school,” said Executive Director Paul Tzovolos. “Most students have average to high average cognitive and academic skills but may have gaps in their education due to periods of crisis or absence from school. Many are also involved with state agencies or have experienced hospitalizations due to mental health crises.”

Relationship-Driven Education

Above all else, Poh valued the close relationship he forged with his counselor. “He and I developed a pretty good relationship. Whenever I needed to leave class, he would relate to me and offer a lot of wisdom. If taken properly, that can really put a kid on a trajectory for success,” Poh said. “They really do bring in people who care about kids. I felt like all the people working here had a real genuine nature. I felt that every day I went to school.”

Locking Up at Night

After graduating from North River School in 2011, Poh went on to earn the rank of E-4 Specialist in the National Guard. Following discharge, he returned to NRC as an assistant custodian and thanks to the skills he developed is now the head custodian. “The educators here helped me find a wedge that I can use to separate my feelings from my actions.” Poh is convinced he was destined for tragedy had he not found North River.

“Sometimes it still blows my mind, I was just a little student here and now, I’m locking the building up at night. I’m so grateful to this school and its staff for all the relationships I’ve built. I truly feel that God placed North River in front of me as an option. This was not my last chance, but it was my best chance.”

-Chris Poh, NRC Head Custodian

Part 3: Pilgrim Area Collaborative Graduates Return as Staff Members, Connect with Students

They can really relate to the kids.

After all, they were them, once upon a time. As students initially diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, Elijah Whyte and Daniel McMahon did not always feel comfortable in conventional public schools. After struggling to thrive in their school districts, they each transferred to the Pilgrim Academy, where they excelled and earned their diplomas.

Pilgrim Academy, located in Plymouth, is the Pilgrim Area Collaborative's small, therapeutic school for students in grades 5-12 experiencing significant social, emotional and/or behavioral difficulties.

Today, Whyte and McMahon walk the halls of their alma mater as educators, not just former students. Now, every day, they work with students like Zachary Joseph Boyer, 16, of Whitman. Zach, who also has a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), has grown to appreciate the empathy exhibited by these Pilgrim Academy staffers.

At Pilgrim, Whyte and McMahon's autism diagnoses became assets. The two staff can often more easily connect with their current students, many of whom are working to overcome the same obstacles. "I don't even consider my autism as a disability," said Zach, a sophomore.

"My brain is just working in Windows, and everybody else is on MacOS. We all take in the same information, I just process it differently."

'Back Then'

"Back then, in school, I often felt like my head started filling up," Whyte recalled from his early educational experiences. "There were so many students, moving fast in the crowded halls. I'd get very sensitive — too sensitive. The hallways were always crammed with people; there was a constant flow. I'd get uncomfortable in my clothing. It was just too much to handle. Eventually, I just stopped going to school."



“Once I got here [Pilgrim Academy], I kept coming,” Whyte said. The smaller class sizes helped to relieve the onsets of academic discomfort. The close attention he received helped him absorb lessons and learn on-pace with his classmates. Whyte earned his diploma in 2023. Now he’s helping young students strive for the same success.

McMahon, now 25, recalled from his days before Pilgrim Academy, “I’d find myself in the middle of a lesson, unable to focus for an extended period of time. The other kids were getting it, but I wasn’t.” In 2010, he arrived at the Pilgrim Academy and graduated in 2017. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Wheaton College. McMahon is proud he can now help those whom he calls his “fellow neurodivergent.” “I just let them know that they are not alone in their struggle,” he said. “It is so easy to see yourself in these kids,” he said. “I’ve learned to encourage their little quirky behaviors. That’s what makes me special. That’s what makes us special.”

Full Circle

After graduating, both Whyte and McMahon returned to the school to work as education support professionals. At any given time, approximately 40 students are enrolled in the Pilgrim Academy’s ASD program, with 25 staff members. That small family feeling made a deep impression on McMahon. “To be around other neurodivergent people, that sense of community, it mattered.”

“Watching these two with kids is just amazing because they relate so much with the students. The addition of two former students to the staff personifies the special education success story. There’s nothing more satisfying than watching your students grow and return. We’ve come full circle. I’m so proud of them both.”

-Dympna M. Thomas, Executive Director, Pilgrim Area Collaborative

Part 4: Adam's as Old as Special Education

Happy 50th birthday to both Adam Howland and to modern Special Education.

Adam lives in an apartment with longtime roommate Michael Wnek. The two, who both have Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities, are cared for by residential and community staff of the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC) in Dartmouth.

Before modern special education becoming federal law in 1975, people like Adam had far fewer opportunities and options. *“More than 50 years ago, before IDEA, the only option for someone with Adam's needs would likely have been institutionalization,” said SMEC Executive Director Catherine Cooper.* “Today we have the ability to assist Adam with all his individual living skills, allowing him to live on his own as an adult in his fifties. Our support staff helps with grocery shopping, preparing meals, laundry, employment services and social activities. And during the day, Adam comes to our day program.”

Adam doesn't speak much, but he communicates effectively, shifting his tone and utilizing simple, pronounced gestures. Those who love him have no trouble interpreting Adam's likes and dislikes, yes's and no's. “He lets you know what he's thinking,” said his sister Heather Hooley. “He'll wind up like he's throwing a javelin, or you'll see joy on his face.”

Adam lives his best life. And although he has a devoted family standing behind him, the services he has received through SMEC for over 35 years have made a significant difference, and help Adam to live, work and thrive independently.

Prior to 1975, wealthy families hired private health care workers or sent their children with special needs to specialized private institutions. Poor and middle-class families often struggled, and their



children became wards of the state, institutionalized by the state, or were forced to lead cloistered, unproductive lives.

Adam's late mother, Elaine Howland, was a staunch advocate for kids like Adam, ahead of her time. Howland wanted more for her son, and SMEC helped her achieve that goal.

SMEC's mission is to provide high-quality programs and services for all children and adults who need specialized instruction or support. Their innovative programs target clients' entire lifetimes, rather than just their first two decades of life.

Services After Age 22

At age 50, Adam may not be the typical special education student in Massachusetts. Technically, he aged out of special education at age 22. But thanks to SMEC's Supporting Adults for Inclusive Living (SAIL) and Adult Day Health programs (ADH), he's still receiving services 28 years later. Adam is one of about 150 adult individuals receiving services from SMEC. The collaborative serves in total, an average of 750 people each year across all ages.

"For clients later in life like Adam, we're not focusing as much on their academics," said Executive Director Cooper. "We're focusing on their quality of life. We want them to live as independently as possible, have full social lives, and be engaged in their community."

Through SAIL, Adam receives help with daily tasks like preparing meals and personal hygiene. Adam attends the SMEC community day program for structured activities, like arts and crafts and fitness. The staff take clients bowling, to restaurants, and to community events. They teach social skill development, money management, etc. SMEC helped Adam with finding employment and gave him skills that helped him at work.

"Educational collaboratives are deeply rooted in their communities and are uniquely positioned to support individuals, some even throughout their entire lifespan. Stories like Adam's are a powerful reminder of why we do this work — to ensure that every person, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to live a full and meaningful life."

-Joanne Haley Sullivan, Executive Director, MOEC

Part 5: Collaboratives Unite to Host Third Annual Special Olympics Game Day



"Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." With those words, Valley Collaborative student Keegan Graham led participants to recite the Special Olympics Athlete Oath. And with that, the St. John's Preparatory stadium erupted with cheers and applause.

Four special education collaboratives — Andover-based CREST, Billerica-based Valley, Stoneham-based SEEM and Beverly-based Northshore Educational Consortium — joined forces for a third year to host a heartwarming and inspiring Special Olympics Collaborative Game Day event.

The annual event celebrates the athletic abilities, determination, and joyful spirit, fostering an inclusive community and provides a memorable day of achievement and camaraderie. Students competed in a variety of athletic events designed to be inclusive and accessible for all ability levels, including track and field races, throwing events, and adaptive obstacle courses. The day emphasized participation, personal bests, and the joy of sportsmanship.

"We are incredibly excited to bring this Special Olympics event to our students," said Jae Handler, a CREST Speech Language Pathologist and Special Olympics Coordinator. "This day is about empowering our students, building confidence, and giving them a platform to shine."

Bill Bryant, Director of Programs at CREST, spearheaded this initiative: a collaborative Special Olympics Game Day. “Three years later, the event has become a highlight, fostering growth and improving the experience for all participants across the four collaboratives,” Bryant said. Volunteers from the community, school staff, and families have been integral to the event's success, providing encouragement, assistance, and creating a vibrant, supportive atmosphere.

"What a wonderful experience it was for our students to participate in this Special Olympics event. Students with disabilities don't always have opportunities to be part of larger community activities. They had the opportunity to compete in fun sporting events, adapted to their skill levels, with students from other schools. They received medals, carried banners, had people cheering for them, and participated in a parade of athletes led by police officers carrying torches. The smiles on the faces of students and staff were priceless! This was a day that they will remember!"

-Francine H. Rosenberg, Executive Director, Northshore Education Consortium

Every student won a gold medal. Every student earned a chance to stand on the three first-place medal pedestals. Aiden Russell, a senior at Valley Collaborative, held his gold medal between two fingers, feeling the raised Special Olympics symbol. He gave his best on the field, and like his fellow student-athletes, beamed with pride in the late spring sunshine.

"As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of modern special education, this partnership reflects the deep commitment of collaboratives to ensure that students of all abilities have access to meaningful opportunities for growth, connection, and achievement. We commend these four collaboratives for their leadership and heart — and for helping every student experience the joy of belonging."

-Joanne Haley Sullivan, Executive Director, MOEC

Part 6: CREST Students Experience the Great Outdoors at Camp Stepping Stone

Everett Chase smiles on the way to camp, smiles when camp staffers help him change into his swimming trunks, smiles as he enters the water, and smiles as he floats on the surface of Stiles Pond.

For Everett, who's nonverbal, the beaming smile communicates pure joy; the unmistakable expression indicates temporary relief from the constant symptoms of cerebral palsy and Menkes Syndrome that he lives with every day.

“In the morning, he wakes up, and we tell him he’s going to camp. You can see the excitement. You can see that he knows where he’s going. And none of this would be possible without the wonderful staff at Camp Stepping Stone.”

—Michele Chase, Everett’s mother

One-of-a-Kind Camp

Camp Stepping Stone is operated by staff from the Andover-based CREST Collaborative to augment its extended school year (ESY) program. At this day camp on the Stiles Pond waterfront in Boxford, hundreds of CREST Collaborative students, with diagnoses ranging from significant health impairments to emotional and behavioral challenges, get the opportunity to have a full summer camp experience. For many of the students, the camp serves as their introduction to the outdoors. Extending the collaborative’s services over the summer months helps to prevent substantial regression during a typical summer vacation.

“Our number one goal for students coming out to camp for the first time is building rapport and making students feel safe in a new setting,” said John Cummings Jr, CREST Teacher and Camp Counselor. We utilize our ESY program to build relationships with our students outside of the traditional school setting. It allows them to see teachers and staff in a different way, where we can engage in fun activities as well as traditional academics. It is hard to put a true value on the work done during ESY.”

“Each and every summer, when a camper begins to feel more capable — no matter their physical, emotional, developmental or learning challenges — their lives are changed.

Campers' outdoor experiences, whether swimming, boating or entering cabins of learning, become shared, successful outdoor experiences that remain a highlight of their educational careers."

–Helen Deranian, Camp Director

Summer Transformations



Every summer, Cummings encounters new surprises throughout the ESY camp experience. He remembers an 18-year-old student who had never gone fishing. “We had to coax him to come out onto the dock and give it a try,” Cummings recalled. “He was initially hesitant and didn't even want to put a worm on the hook, but he was able to do it. He caught a small sunfish, and if you had seen his reaction and face, you would have thought he had hooked a 500lb tuna! He was so excited and was asking the staff to take a picture so he could show his family.”

“Several students attended that would have otherwise remained in unsafe situations in the community and engaged in unsafe behaviors and or decisions,” Cummings said. “This camp has allowed them to remain on the right track for their education and life. Some of these students have gone on to become full-time firefighters, become Marines, and enroll in college.”

"Collaboratives keep their students excelling through the summer. Camp Stepping Stone is one of the innovative ways our hard working special education collaboratives succeed at their goal to keep student achievement progressing beyond the typical school year and into the next."

–Joanne Haley Sullivan, Executive Director, MOEC

Goal 2: Use of Data

Cost Savings Data

In FY24, MOEC worked with Harvard Graduate School to conduct a report examining the financial aspects of special education in Massachusetts, specifically comparing the costs of membership in educational collaboratives versus costs for non-member districts, versus costs for private special education schools. MOEC has continued with the methodology to determine how collaborative costs across the state compare with other comparable programs, including private special education schools.

The data shows a clear pattern where being part of a collaborative tends to be more affordable compared to non-membership or private schooling. In FY24, on an annual basis, collaborative members on average saved \$12,158 compared to non-members, and \$30,115 compared to paying for private schooling. In FY25, collaborative members on average saved \$12,094 compared to non-members, and \$33,709 compared to for private schooling.

Comparative data for FY24 and FY25 180 day tuitions

Fiscal Year	Tuition – Collaborative Member	Tuition – Collaborative Non-Member	Cost Saving
FY24	\$59,808	\$71,966	\$12,158
FY25	\$61,516	\$73,610	\$12,094

Fiscal Year	Tuition – Collaborative Member	Tuition - Private Special Education Schools	Cost Saving
FY24	\$59,808	\$89,924	\$30,115
FY25	\$61,516	\$95,225	\$33,709

Facilities Data

In FY25, MOEC contracted with the consulting firm TMS Solutions to conduct a comprehensive analysis of facility conditions across the 24 educational collaboratives' special education school sites. These facilities serve students with complex emotional, behavioral, medical, and neurological needs, requiring both specialized services and high-quality learning environments. This analysis informs stakeholders about the current state of collaborative-owned and leased facilities and to guide decisions on infrastructure investments, space utilization, and expansion potential.

Overview of Facilities

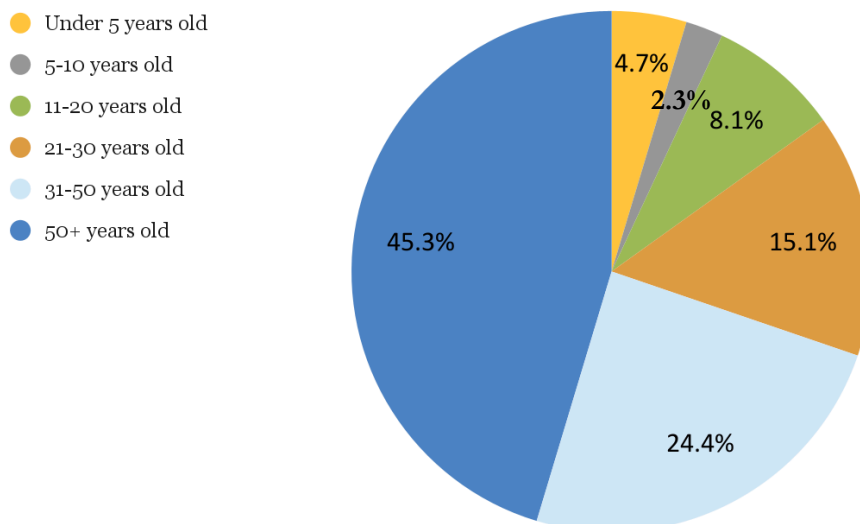
Total Facilities:

- 23 owned by collaboratives
- 66 rented or leased facilities
- 18 facilities are shared with school districts

Facility Age:

This data below represents the ages of the collaborative school facilities. It provides insight into how long each facility has been in use, helping to identify patterns related to infrastructure aging, potential maintenance needs, and capital improvement priorities. Understanding the age distribution of these facilities is essential for planning renovations, allocating resources effectively, and ensuring safe, functional environments that support student learning. As can be seen, 45% are over 50 years old which is considered to be beyond their useful life.

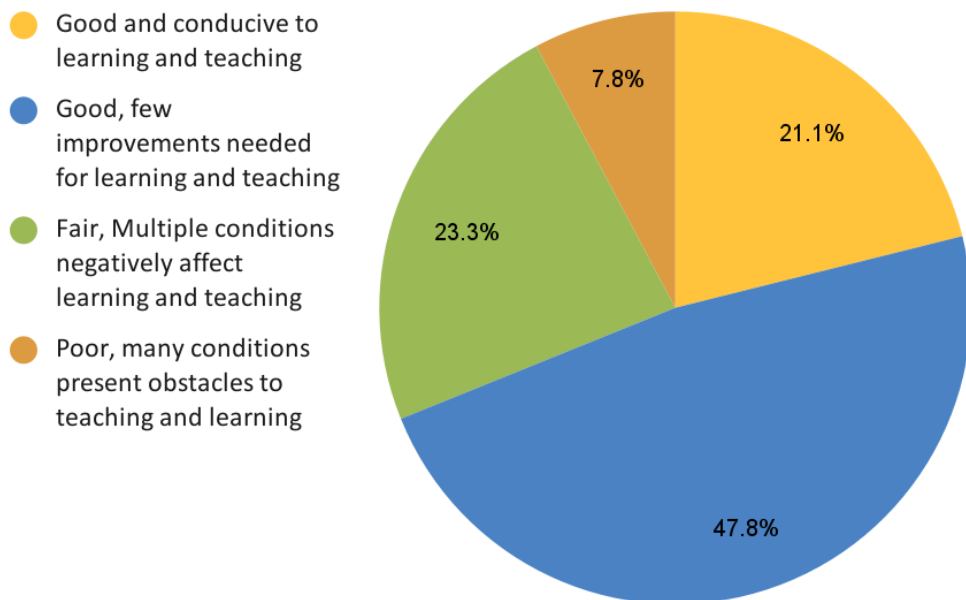
Age of Collaborative School Facilities



Condition and Repairs Needed

Approximately 30% of collaborative facilities are rated as being in poor or fair condition, with multiple deficiencies that impede teaching and learning. These results reflect similar challenges faced by public education facilities across the Commonwealth. However, educational collaboratives operate at a distinct disadvantage: there is no state funding mechanism to support capital improvements. Instead, collaboratives must rely entirely on tuition revenue from member school districts to maintain, upgrade, or expand their buildings—placing additional financial pressure on districts and contributing to inequities across the state. Detailed data on facility conditions, including exterior and system repairs, high-cost repairs, and upgrades for accessibility and safety, are provided below.

Collaborative Facility Conditions



Exterior and System Repairs:

- 30% of collaboratives report moderate to major repairs needed for exterior systems (e.g., foundations)
- Approximately 15% need infrastructure replacement
- Over 300 individual projects identified for moderate, major, or full replacement repairs

High-Cost Repairs:

- Over 20% of collaboratives report high-cost needs in:
 - Windows and doors (building envelope)
 - Heating and cooling systems (HVAC)
 - Plumbing and structural systems

Upgrades for Accessibility and Safety (needed in up to 16% of facilities):

- Accessibility improvements
- Fire suppression systems
- General safety enhancements
- Technology and internet infrastructure

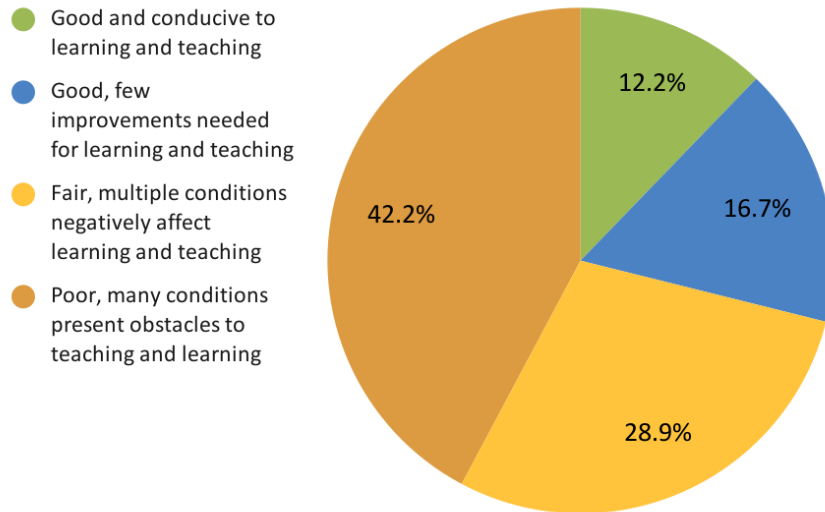
Space Quality and Sufficiency

Data gathered on space quality and sufficiency in educational collaborative facilities reveal consistent challenges. While the majority of collaboratives report facilities that are “Good,” a significant number (24- 30%) are rated “Fair” or “Poor,” indicating there are conditions and space limitations that hinder teaching and learning. These findings highlight that many collaboratives lack the facilities needed to fully support their programs, reducing their ability to provide optimal learning environments for students.

Quality of Current Space (relative to program needs)	
Good and conducive to learning and teaching	25%
Good with few improvements needed	50%
Fair with multiple conditions negatively affect teaching and learning	20%
Poor with significant obstacles to learning and teaching	4%

Sufficiency of Current Space (relative to program needs)	
Good and conducive to learning and teaching	21%
Good with few improvements needed	48%
Fair with multiple conditions negatively affect teaching and learning	23%
Poor with significant obstacles to learning and teaching	8%

Sufficient Space for Future Expansion



As demand for collaborative services continues to rise—especially for students with complex needs—this shortage of appropriate, expandable space has become a critical challenge in meeting the needs of students across Massachusetts. Currently, 42% of collaborative programs report insufficient space to expand and meet the needs of additional students, with existing facility conditions posing substantial barriers to growth. Only 12% of programs have space that is adequate and suitable for future expansion.

Student Data: Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity*

3967 Total Students

	<u>Collaboratives</u>	<u>Massachusetts</u>
Black or African America	9.5%	10.2%
Asian	3.8%	7.5%
Hispanic	23%	25.9%
Native American or Alaskan Native	0.3%	0.2%
White	58.1%	51.5%
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	5.3%	4.6%

*as reported on the DESE website, May 2025

Goal 3: Advocacy

MOEC's advocacy efforts are grounded in a commitment to equity—for students, families, and districts. We work to ensure that Educational Collaboratives have fair access to the resources needed to deliver high-quality instruction, curriculum, staffing, and facilities across the Commonwealth.

State-Level Advocacy: A Voice for Collaboratives

MOEC serves as the leading advocate for Educational Collaboratives at the state, regional, and local levels. Representing 24 Collaboratives that serve over 300 school districts and 30,000 students, MOEC works to elevate awareness of their essential role and secure policy and funding solutions that reflect their value.

“As the unified voice of Collaboratives, we ensure that the unique needs of our programs and students are reflected in Massachusetts education policy.”

Staffing Flexibility: Removing Barriers to Service

A long-standing ethics restriction currently prevents employees of a public school district from holding part-time or stipend positions at a Collaborative if that district is a member. This limits hiring capacity and access to qualified professionals.

MOEC Supports **H.3386 / S.2193: An Act relative to educational collaboratives**, filed by Representative Christopher Markey and Senator Jacob Oliveira. This legislation would lift the restriction while maintaining ethical safeguards—helping Collaboratives address critical staffing shortages and better serve students with IEPs.



Facilities Advocacy: Equity in Learning Environments

Educational Collaboratives provide services with efficiency and fiscal responsibility through shared staffing and infrastructure. Yet many buildings—some built as early as 1917—urgently require modernization. Without a dedicated capital funding stream, facilities upgrades and repairs are often delayed.

In 2024-25, MOEC led a comprehensive effort to highlight the importance of equitable access to safe, educationally appropriate learning environments for students with disabilities. We filed legislation, submitted testimony to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means and to the FY25 Supplemental Budget Conference Committee.

Persistent Barriers to Facilities Investment

- Limited Financing Access: Without collateral, loans are difficult to obtain; private lending terms are often prohibitive.
- Excluded from Federal Relief: ARPA and ESSER largely overlooked Collaboratives.
- Local Budgets Bear the Burden: Despite serving students from dozens of districts, facilities costs fall mostly on collaborative member districts.
- Collaboratives are ineligible for MSBA Funding

FY25 Supplemental Budget for Facilities Assessment

To illustrate the urgent need for Capital Funding, MOEC conducted a statewide Collaborative facilities assessment in Fall 2024. The results, outlined earlier in this report, confirmed widespread infrastructure challenges.

As a meaningful first step toward possible long-term, equitable capital funding for specialized school facilities. The state legislature appropriated \$500,000 to fund a capital needs assessment of Educational Collaboratives and approved private special education schools. We are grateful to Senators Julian Cyr and Patrick O'Connor for their sponsorship of this line item.

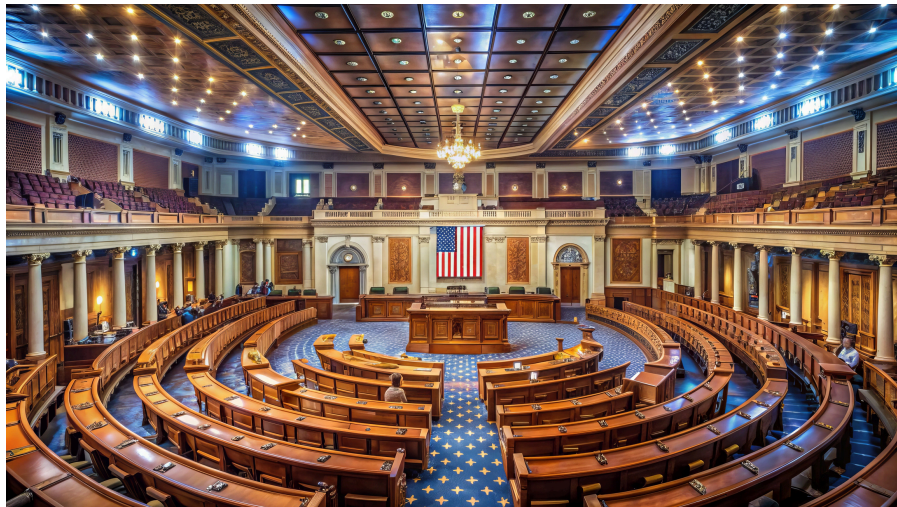
The State Assessment Will Include:

- A comprehensive review of current and projected facility needs;
- An analysis of existing funding options and systemic barriers;
- Recommendations for a sustainable capital funding mechanism.

Toward a Sustainable Funding Model

MOEC supports **H.691 / S.430: An Act relative to the long-term fiscal health and sustainability of special education in the Commonwealth. Key Provision – Section 7**, filed by Representative Adam Scanlon and Senator Jacob Oliveria. This would provide a consistent, equitable capital funding pathway for Collaborative schools.

“The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shall, subject to appropriation, provide funding to Educational Collaboratives for a portion of per-pupil facilities costs and reimburse sending districts. Beginning in FY26, this funding shall be no less than \$4,320 per student, adjusted annually by the foundation inflation index.”



Federal Advocacy

MOEC works in partnership with the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESAs)—our national organization for Advocacy and Professional Development—to ensure Massachusetts’ federal delegation is informed about the role and needs of Educational Collaboratives.

2024–25 Federal Advocacy Topics:

- **Full funding of IDEA**
- **School-Based Medicaid** access and reimbursement
- **E-Rate** and connectivity supports

Our federal engagement ensures that Collaboratives—often left out of traditional funding structures—are not overlooked in federal education policy.

Collaboration with DESE

MOEC maintains ongoing engagement with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to ensure that the Collaborative perspective informs policy, program development, and regulation. Through regular dialogue, MOEC ensures that DESE understands the unique operational needs and strengths of Collaboratives.

Topics of Collaboration Include:

- Implementation of revised **Time Out regulations**
- Exploration of **capital funding pathways**
- Support for **district implementation** of new statewide initiatives



2024 - 2025

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2024 - 2025

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Coalition for Special Education Funding

Joanne Haley Sullivan

**Mass. Chiefs of Police Emergency Management
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Special Education Advisory Council

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Special Education Transportation Advisory Group

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