

North River Collaborative Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report



**North River Collaborative
Paul Tzovolos, Jr., Executive Director
198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
781-878-6056**

www.northrivercollaborative.org

December 2023

Approved by the NRC Board of Directors December 15, 2023

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December 08, 2023

Dear Members of the Board of
Colleagues,

Directors, School Committees, and

As the new Executive Director of the North River Collaborative (NRC), I am honored to present to you the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report. The report summarizes the highlights of the past school year in which the collaborative focused its efforts on our core mission of providing high-quality, cost-effective educational programs and services for students, districts, partner organizations, and communities.

In this report, you will find:

- Information on the programs and services provided by the collaborative;
- Discussion of the cost-effectiveness of these programs and services;
- Discussion of the progress made toward achieving the objectives and purpose set forth in the collaborative agreement; and
- Audited financial statements and the independent auditor's report.

Being new to the Collaborative and having had some time to reflect on the contents of this report, it is also important to me to highlight the most important resource that we are so fortunate to have, our people. I hope that the information and pictures contained in this report illustrate the amazing contribution our students make to the joy and sense of accomplishment for our team members. Our staff is dedicated to the highest expectations for the education, evaluation, and transportation of our students and the administrative team never hesitates to tackle a problem or area of need for our organization. I have truly been fortunate to join this amazing team and I look forward to engaging in the DESE Planning for Success Model as we craft a new North River Collaborative Student Success Plan over the coming fiscal year.

From a financial perspective, NRC continues to be a fiscally healthy organization as you will see in the audited financial statement. NRC maintains a fund balance just short of the maximum allowable by statute which is sufficient to support the collaborative's needs. Our capital reserve fund continues to support maintenance and improvements for all our programs and strengthens our position for potential future expansion.

On behalf of the entire NRC staff, I would like to thank member district administrators and staff for their input and involvement with the collaborative. The continued success of the collaborative depends on this participation as educational collaboratives exist to "bring school districts together to form partnerships that maximize efficiency by sharing costs and expertise" in order to enhance instructional practices and the lives of students, families, and our community.

Sincerely,



Paul Tzovolos, Jr.
Executive Director

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Section 1: Governance and General Information

The North River Collaborative (NRC) is governed by the superintendents of the member districts: Abington, Avon, Bridgewater-Raynham, East Bridgewater, Hanover, Holbrook, Rockland, Stoughton, West Bridgewater, and Whitman-Hanson. Each member district annually appoints its superintendent of schools to form the NRC Board who is vested with the authority given it by Chapter 40, Section 4E of the General Laws, and all acts amendatory or supplementary thereof, to take necessary action to oversee the operation of the collaborative. In addition, there are regular advisory meetings of the special education directors/director of student services and the assistant superintendents/curriculum coordinators throughout the year to provide input and feedback about the programs and services as well as information about emerging needs in the districts. The tables below list the members of each of these groups for the 2023 fiscal year. The North River Collaborative is grateful for their service.

Board of Directors

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peter Schafer, Abington• Christine Godino, Avon• Ryan Powers, Bridgewater-Raynham• Elizabeth Legault, East Bridgewater• Matthew Ferron, Hanover | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Julie Hamilton, Holbrook• Alan Cron, Rockland• Thomas Raab, Stoughton• Mark Bodwell, West Bridgewater• Jeffrey Szymaniak, Whitman-Hanson |
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Special Needs Advisory Committee

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• James Robbins, Abington• Jennifer Meek, Avon• Paul Tzovolos, Bridgewater-Raynham• John Phelan, East Bridgewater• Michael Oates, Hanover | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Robert Compton, Holbrook• Linda Maniglia, Rockland• Carolan Sampson, Stoughton• Kathy Marble, West Bridgewater• Michael Loesche, Whitman-Hanson |
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North River Collaborative Administrative Team

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarice Doliber, Executive Director• Marc Wright, Director of Business Services• Diane Baxter, Technology Director• Nancy Verseckes, District Services Coordinator/
Assistant Executive Director• Andrew Manning, Principal, North River School• Deni Howley, Behavioral Health Initiative
Coordinator | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beth Litchfield - Social Work Internship
Coordinator• Ryan Morgan, Principal, Independence
Academy• Kate Stevens, Learning Center Program
Coordinator• Eileen Millett, Transportation Director• Kimberly Beck, Professional Development
Coordinator |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

2019-2023 Strategic Plan

Mission

The North River Collaborative cooperatively develops and delivers high-quality and cost-effective programs and services for students, school districts, partner organizations, and communities.

Vision

The North River Collaborative (NRC) provides innovative, flexible, and diverse educational programs that engage and motivate students to reach their potential.

Guiding Beliefs

We believe that...

- Programs, services, and facilities should be of the highest quality and responsive to the changing needs of students.
- All students should be provided with the opportunity and support to reach their potential for academic achievement and independent living.
- All students should be challenged to learn in a caring, inclusive, and flexible environment that appreciates diversity, values life-long learning, and prepares students to be successful.
- Achieving equity is a continuous process of assessment, reflection, and continuous improvement.
- High-quality professional development combined with educator evaluations is essential for improving education practice and maximizing student achievement.
- Supporting the social and emotional well-being and self-determination of our students is essential.
- Through collegiality and shared commitment, we accomplish more collectively than separately.
- To facilitate the educational process, we need to support families.
- A variety of opinions will stimulate innovative and creative ideas leading to effective solutions.
- Student assessment and program evaluation are essential to continuous improvement.

Strategic Objectives

Objective 1: Evaluate and enhance existing programs and services.

Objective 2: Establish responsive, strategically designed programs and services.

Objective 3: Expand and enhance a coordinated and state-of-the-art student transportation system.

Objective 4: Secure and adapt facilities and operations to support high-quality programs and services.

Serving Students & Districts

Serving Students FY23

Students Served in NRC Programs*	
Multiple Disabilities	28
Autism/developmental Disabilities	19
Social and Emotional Disabilities-North River School	58
Substance Abuse and Dependence - Independence Academy	90
Sub-Total	195**
Students Served in NRC Services*	
Therapy and Other Related Services	580
Social Work Interns	300
Behavioral Health Initiative	202
Transportation	452
Sub-Total	1,534
Total	1,729**

*Each category represents the total number of students serviced in the program for the year

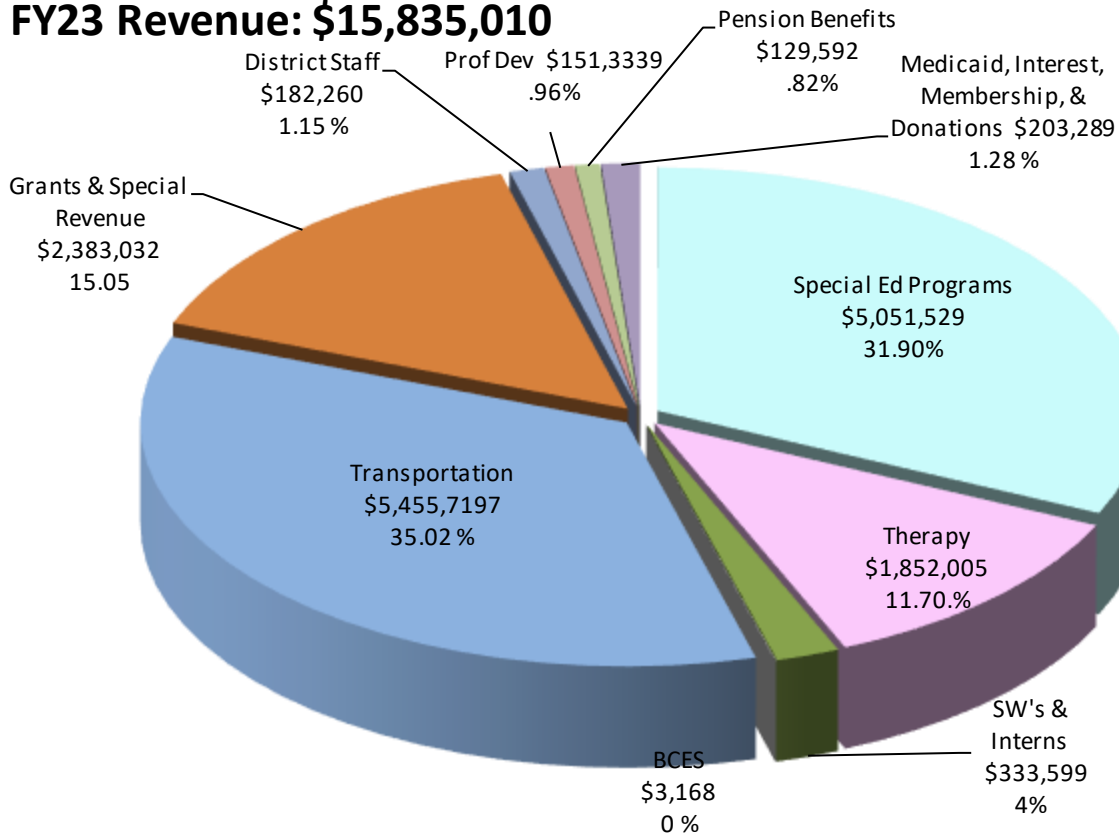
** The totals & subtotals may include a duplicated headcount due to students participating in multiple services

Serving Districts FY23

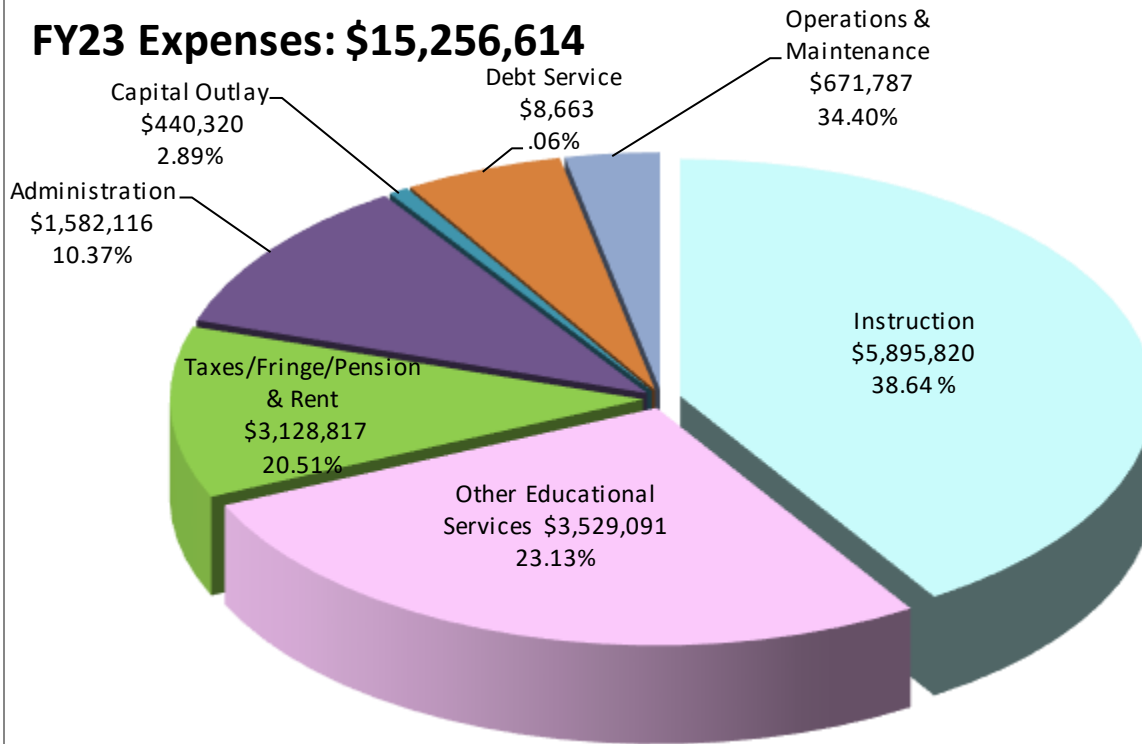
Transportation	25
Municipal Medicaid	17
Grant Writing	40
Behavioral Health	5
Professional Development (PD)	97

Financial Information

FY23 Revenue: \$15,835,010



FY23 Expenses: \$15,256,614



Section 2: Programs and Services

The North River Collaborative offers the following programs and services (described on subsequent pages) in accordance with its Collaborative Agreement:

- Day School Placements (North River School) and other services for students with disabilities (Learning Center Programs)
- Alternative School Programs for At-risk Students (Independence Academy)
- Behavior Consultation and Education Services
- Therapy Services
- Vision Services
- Social Work Internship Program
- Family Services
- Professional Development
- Transportation Services
- Collaborative Grant Applications
- General Education Supports and Services
- Psychoeducational Evaluations
- Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement

The programs/services listed above are not all-inclusive. The NRC Board of Directors, acting at the request of the NRC Executive Director and/or member districts may consider and approve other programs/services to be provided by the collaborative so long as such programs/services are in the best interest of the members and are not inconsistent with M.G.L. c. 40, sect. 4E and 603 CMR sect. 50, et seq, as amended from time to time.

North River School

North River School provides middle and high school students with a highly structured and therapeutic environment while ensuring the 21st century skills they will require post-graduation are taught and developed. NRS addresses the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of students individually in alignment with the most current and best practices. In addition to traditional academic subjects, students also participate in daily living and transitional skills classes such as a culinary internship, the Innovation Studio, and social-emotional learning.

The NRS curriculum is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and is modified as needed to meet individual student needs, providing added supports throughout the day to facilitate success. Instruction is delivered in a small group format within a therapeutic milieu with counseling services and behavioral consultation. A strong home-school relationship is a critical and essential part of the program's success, and one that is fostered through regular, two-way communication.

The goal of the North River High School is to assist students in developing the behavioral, social-emotional, and academic skills needed to successfully return to their sending schools. Students receive academic credits toward graduation from their own school districts by completing the course of studies provided at the North River School. Vocational exploratory opportunities, including off-site internships, are offered. The Innovation Studio is a technology-based class that incorporates the most current tools and technology such as 3D printing, graphic design, desktop publishing, and model building. In addition, students in this class are introduced to small business operations through the design and printing jobs that community agencies and groups hire NRS students to complete under the direction of the class instructor. The Culinary Exploration/Food Service continuum of classes teaches students culinary and food service skills as well as addresses food safety, nutrition, work habits, and entrepreneurial skills.

Internships in the community are also offered to upperclassmen in good academic standing with support from a job coach as needed. Students, with prior agreement from their district's TEAM, also have the opportunity to participate in their district's academic and extra-curricular activities. It is the goal of NRS to incorporate flexibility and creativity when addressing the needs of students.

The North River Middle School (NRMS) is a Massachusetts DESE approved public special education day program. The NRMS's mission is to assist students in developing appropriate behaviors and improved academic skills which will allow them to achieve success in transitioning to high school and/or returning to their sending school.

North River Middle School serves students in grades 5 through 8 in classrooms designed for small-group instruction, with an integrated therapeutic milieu, counseling services, and a behavior management system with guidance from a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. A strong home-school relationship is encouraged as an essential part of the school's success. North River Middle School has a dedicated School Adjustment Counselor as well as a therapy dog, Bodie.

The NRMS teachers work with students to earn academic credit toward promotion to high school. Core curriculum academics focus on preparing students for success on MCAS tests and overall educational achievement. The NRMS schedule includes life skills development, health and wellness education, social-emotional learning, and vocational exploration.

Both the NRHS and the NRMS have a well-developed, successful summer program that helps students prevent regression of social, emotional, and academic skills during the summer break.

North River Middle/High School

525 Beech Street, Rockland, MA 02370

Phone: 781-871-8320 (Ext. 116)

Andrew Manning, Program Coordinator/Principal

Learning Center Programs

The **Learning Center for Students with Multiple Disabilities** serves students ages 3 to 22. This program is designed to meet the academic, medical, and therapeutic needs of students with disabilities in multiple areas. Communication, self-care, mobility, and vocational and leisure skill development are addressed throughout the day and guided by the teacher, classroom staff, and an extensive therapy and vision support team. Program nurses oversee promotion of overall student health. This program offers a summer program as well as community field trips. Classroom locations within public schools allow students access to inclusive opportunities in order to help facilitate academic and social skill development.

The **Learning Center for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder** serves students ages 3 to 22. This program is within a structured ABA-based program where students are provided with the behavioral, social-emotional, and academic support to meet their unique needs. Communication, self-care, mobility, and vocational and leisure skill development are addressed throughout the day and guided by the teacher, classroom staff, and an extensive therapy and behavior support team. This program offers a summer program as well as community field trips. Classroom locations within public schools allow students access to inclusive opportunities in order to help facilitate academic and social skill development.

Learning Centers for Students with Multiple Disabilities

Learning Centers for Students with Autism & Developmental Disabilities

Kate Stevens- Program Coordinator

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 103)

- **Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Early Childhood I)**
Bryantville Elementary School (Room 192)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 (extension 16692)
- **Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Early Childhood II)**
Bryantville Elementary School (Room 190)



29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 (extension 16690)

- **Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Intermediate)**

Bryantville Elementary School (Room 193)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 (extension 2693)

- **Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Elementary)**

Richardson Olmsted School (Rooms 128, 126)
101 Lothrop Street, North Easton, MA 02356
Phone: 508-230-3205 (extension 5126 and 5128)

- **Learning Center Autism & Developmental Disabilities (Elementary)**

Bryantville Elementary School (Room 191)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 (extension 16691)

- **Learning Center Autism & Developmental Disabilities Middle School/High School**

East Bridgewater High School (Room 129),
43 Plymouth Street, East Bridgewater, MA 02333
Phone: 508-378-8214 (extension 1290)

- **Learning Center Autism & Developmental Disabilities High School**

West Bridgewater High School (Room 216),
155 West Center Street, West Bridgewater, MA 02379
Phone: 508-894-1220 (extension 1216)

Independence Academy: Recovery High School

Independence Academy (IA) provides programming serving students ages 14-20 from the southeast region of Massachusetts who have been identified as “high-risk” due to their use of substances. Our students are mostly referred to us by their schools when their use of substances is starting to impact their school day. However, the application process can also be initiated by families, substance use treatment programs, youth-serving state agencies, juvenile justice agencies, and others who are concerned about a student’s use of substances. In many cases, our students also have other social/emotional and/or mental health challenges that are present as well. Therefore, we have created a continuum of services utilizing a holistic approach that assesses students in 13 domains of their life. Through specially designed SEL instruction, an emphasis on health and wellness, individual and group counseling, and a customized approach to academics we engage students in a process of healthy growth and development. Although students can remain enrolled in our programs through graduation, our goal is to facilitate a healthy transition for each student that is aligned with their personal vision.

Programs:

The Upper Course – This is a 10-day program and the first step every student takes when enrolling at our school. The focus is on Awareness and Assessment. Through a uniquely designed model that provides a mix of individual and small group work, students are assessed in the 13 areas of healthy adolescent growth and development. The goal of the program is to provide adolescents a safe space to be open and honest about their use of substances and to build awareness around what health growth and development looks in relation to the 13 domains. Students who successfully complete the 10-day program and find our model beneficial can apply to our 45-day program. The enrollment is limited to 6 students and students are admitted on a rolling basis.

45-Day School-Based Intervention – This program provides students with a “deep dive” into the 13 domains of healthy growth and development with the end goal of developing a personalized, individual growth and development plan. The focus of this program is Acceptance and Alignment. Working with a team of experts in the fields of adolescent development, mental health, substance use, and trauma, students have an active role

in developing their own growth plan. Daily wellness, SEL curriculum and instruction, small group and individual counseling and customized academics help align each student's day to their own growth and development goals. At the conclusion of this program students have a comprehensive plan in place that is specific to their own needs and provides a blueprint for continued movement towards healthy growth and development. Students who successfully complete this program can apply to the Recovery High School.

The Recovery High School – The Recovery High School is a trauma-informed, alternative setting that provides students actively engaged in recovery, a full academic program to work towards the completion of their high school education. Students enrolling in the RHS have successfully completed the Upper Course and the 45-day program. They have a full understanding and deep awareness of their own unique needs, have developed a comprehensive individualized growth and development plan and aligned their work with their vision and goals for themselves. Students at the RHS are committed to the process of healthy growth and development. The focus of the RHS is Action and Accountability. Students are expected to be deliberate in their actions towards achieving their goals that they have developed for themselves. The RHS provides a full, rigorous academic program leading to high school graduation as well as numerous service components that support a students' transition out of high school. Some of those components include an on-site recovery counselor (LICSW), a personal development coach, health and wellness curriculum and activities, and a comprehensive summer program. Existing partnerships with community service agencies allow for program enhancements and provide unique opportunities for students enrolled in the RHS. Our small population allows us to provide an education that is individualized to best meet student needs while taking into consideration their strengths, abilities, and interests. Our carefully designed space and high-interest curriculum encourages students to be highly motivated, accept the challenge of an academically rigorous program, work independently, to take risks, and be vulnerable. Students are encouraged to seek educational opportunities outside of the traditional school day (i.e., independent study, internships, etc.). The academic counselor at Independence Academy works closely with each student's sending school district staff to ensure that each student meets the local graduation requirements for their respective district. As a result, students are awarded a diploma from their sending school district upon completion of all requirements. Students can remain enrolled in the RHS for as long as they remain engaged in the process.

Independence Academy is one of five recovery high schools located in MA and is not a special education placement. It is important to consult the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Administrative Advisory on Special Education for more information on how students on IEPs are enrolled and serviced when attending Recovery High Schools. The Recovery High Schools are alternative schools that are focused on engaging students who are struggling with substance use in a process of healthy growth and development in order to improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed live and to reach their full potential. All of Independence Academy's programs are voluntary.

Completing its eleventh full academic year in 2023, Independence Academy has enrolled hundreds of students from over 40 different communities.

Independence Academy

460R Belmont Street, Brockton, MA 02301

Phone: 508-510-4091

Ryan Morgan – Program Coordinator/Principal



Summer Work and Learning Program

The North River Collaborative's Summer Work and Learning Program provides an innovative summer program offering a broad range of transition services for students with intellectual impairments, developmental disabilities, behavioral challenges, and autism. The program is differentiated for students ages 14-17 and 18-22 who may attend one or more summers. The program is located at Rogers Middle School and

select community-based job sites. A broad range of transition services are tied to academic support and remediation for students through hands-on instruction and opportunities for daily work experiences such as horticulture, building maintenance, shipping, and receiving, office practices, and food service.

Students participate each day in a variety of activities offering instruction in life skills for independent living including: daily living skills (e.g., managing money, use of household tools/appliances, time management, health and safety, basic meal preparation, health and fitness leisure/recreation activities, community experiences), social thinking skills, job exploration (e.g., training opportunities and job placement, developing/maintaining appropriate work skills and behavior), and functional academics.

Summer Work and Learning

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 101)

Nancy Verseckes – District Services Coordinator and Philip Buckley – SWL Coordinator

Behavior Consultation and Education Services

The North River Collaborative's Behavior Consultation and Education Services (BCES) includes extensive training and ongoing support in developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders (ASD), applied behavior analysis treatment and intervention approaches, and community and school-based support services. BCES staff members have experience in service delivery to students with ASD, other disabilities, and typical students experiencing difficulties with behaviors that interfere with learning and social relationships. In addition to responsibilities of assessments and program design, Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) provide supervision and training to behavior service providers working in students' homes and to our classroom staff on a regular basis.

With input from other professionals, BCBAs focus on facilitating the development of each student's skills in the area of communication, academics, social-emotional, receptive, and expressive language, leisure/play, adaptive behavior, and activities of daily living. A strong emphasis is placed on the use of research-based applied behavior analysis (ABA) principles and strategies including discrete trial instruction (DTI) and incidental teaching within the natural environment. Strategies and techniques incorporated may include visual supports, social stories, and behavior support plans. When needed, home-based services provide parents and other caregivers training in techniques to teach, promote, and manage skills and behaviors at home and in the community.

One BCBA is certified to teach the Safety-Care™ Behavioral Safety program for North River staff, providing the skills and competencies necessary to effectively prevent, minimize, and manage behavioral challenges with dignity, safety, and the possibility of change.

Behavior Consultation and Education Services

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 120)

Nancy Verseckes – Coordinator

Therapy Services

The North River Collaborative provides **occupational, physical, and speech therapy services** within 38 school buildings in nine school districts. Services are also provided within North River Collaborative Learning Center for Students with Multiple Disabilities, Learning Center for Students with Autism and Developmental Disabilities programs and the North River School. The collaborative's therapy staff is dedicated to excellence in student service, committed to facilitating and supporting optimal curriculum access and participation, and provides high-quality consultation services to parents and educational staff in order to maximize student success. At each location, therapists are integral members of a multidisciplinary team that facilitates student progress through a coordination of services. More than 17 licensed physical, occupational, and speech therapists, most with advanced degrees and certifications participate in monthly meetings and ongoing professional development activities to enhance knowledge and maintain an evidence-based practice. Therapists provide each student with service guided by the current developments in therapeutic, rehabilitative, and educational best practices.

Therapy Services

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 120)

Nancy Verseckes – Coordinator



Services for Students with Visual Impairments

Teachers of the Visually Impaired

The North River Collaborative employs a teacher of the visually impaired to provide program-based consultative and direct services to students with visual impairments. The collaborative also works with member/non-member district towns to provide itinerant vision services and assessments to students with visual impairments who are attending district schools.

Teachers of the visually impaired provide functional vision assessments, learning media assessments, technology assessments and instruction, consultation to staff and parent/guardians, Braille instruction, compensatory skill development (e.g., large print, optical devices, etc.), life skills (e.g., daily living skills, social interaction skills, recreation, and leisure addressed through the expanded core curriculum), and production and ordering of materials. Additionally, teachers of the visually impaired may support schools and families in accessing educational resources through a variety of agencies such as the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and American Printing House.

Orientation and Mobility

The North River Collaborative provides consultative and direct services to students with visual impairments from certified orientation and mobility instructors. The collaborative works with member/non-member school districts to provide itinerant orientation and mobility services to students with visual impairments who are attending district schools.

Services provided by the orientation and mobility instructor may include functional travel assessments, consultation to staff and parents/guardians, travel instruction in school and community settings, compensatory skill development (e.g., low vision aids, use of other senses, and spatial relationships), and

life skills training (e.g., daily living skills, social interaction skills, recreation, and leisure) through the expanded core curriculum.

Vision Services

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 120)
Nancy Verseckes – Coordinator



Social Work Internship Program

The North River Collaborative’s Social Work Internship Program provides school-based social work services to help students and their families face a complexity of challenges in order to foster competency in all areas central to children’s lives – academic, social-emotional, and behavioral. The consultation process establishes and implements interventions to meet students’ needs. Services include individual and group counseling, crisis interventions, whole-class presentations, lessons, and consultations with parents and teachers. These services enhance teacher effectiveness related to social-emotional development of children and facilitate a functional “bridge” relationship between home and school. The interns attend Bridgewater State University, Simmons University, or Boston College.

Social Work Internship Program

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 302)
Beth Litchfield – Coordinator



Behavioral Health Initiative

The North River Collaborative Behavioral Health Initiative offers on-site behavioral health consultation to districts, professional development on social and emotional learning strategies, and facilitates development of student support teams. Contracted school social workers and

wrap-around service support for students and their families are also available to districts. We currently have school social workers in 3 elementary schools, one middle school and two high schools.

Behavioral Health Initiative

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 301)
Deni Howley – Coordinator

Psychological Services

Psychoeducational Evaluations

The North River Collaborative employs a school psychologist to provide psychoeducational evaluations to both member and non-member districts.

Board Certified Behavioral Analyst

The North River Collaborative employs a Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) who provides and supports the implementation of behavioral and safety plans within the North River Collaborative Learning Center for Students with Multiple Disabilities, Learning Center for Students with Autism and Developmental Disabilities, and the North River School. The BCBA also provides Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) to member and non-member districts.

Psychological and Behavioral Services

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 120) Nancy Verseckes – Coordinator

Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement

School-based Medicaid billing has become a way for cities and towns to recoup dollars for funds spent on special education programs if a student is receiving special education services and is eligible for Mass Health. Direct services claiming provides school districts an opportunity to be reimbursed for furnishing medically necessary services to eligible Mass Health students pursuant to an eligible IEP. The North River Collaborative is familiar with both school and town governance and aware of confidentiality and privacy issues, including HIPAA and FERPA, as well as the necessary recordkeeping required by districts, towns, and the Office of Medicaid. An annual cost report reconciles 12 months of direct service and administrative cost.

Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 105)
Marc Wright – Director of Business and Finance

Professional Development

NRC is committed to providing high-quality professional development programs based on current research and best practices that focus on improving the learning of all students. The collaborative’s decisions about the selection/identification of programs and courses, audience, scheduling, duration, and implementation factors are driven by research-based standards for professional learning, such as those identified by the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education.

Professional development offerings for the North River Collaborative and district staff are determined based on ongoing and newly identified needs of our member districts, the needs of low-incidence educational staff, state, and federal mandates, emerging issues, and current educational best practice. Curriculum coordinators from each member district and the collaborative's program coordinators work to collaboratively plan programs that address collective needs. Programs are designed to focus on knowledge and skill development to impact student learning. When educators from many school districts participate in professional development training together, they have the opportunity to share with and learn from one another, often discovering a synergy that results in understanding, growth, and solutions that were unanticipated.

Professional development training and support are provided to the North River Collaborative and district educators in order to:

- Continue to improve educational practice and maximize student achievement;
- Support supervision and evaluation to improve instruction;
- Improve curriculum and content knowledge and address pedagogy with a specific emphasis on differentiation, practices regarding assessment, and instructional technology integration;
- Address the issues of mental health, behavioral issues, and student safety;
- Address the individual needs of students including students with disabilities and English Language Learners; and
- Provide programs locally that are convenient for district staff to attend.

North River Collaborative

198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 102)

Kim Beck – Coordinator

Southeast Transportation Network

The Southeast Transportation Network served 452 students in 25 school districts in FY23, transporting to 49 different programs, most of which are from the North River Collaborative, Pilgrim Area Collaborative, and South Shore Educational Collaborative regions. Given the fiscal challenges and the growing concern for student safety, the North River Collaborative is coordinating this program to obtain cost-effective, quality transportation for students with special needs who attend public and private special education programs in the greater Boston/Southeastern Massachusetts region. Through the Network, the North River Collaborative began providing transportation with the opening of school in September 2007. In-service

training is provided for all staff on topics such as: disability awareness, first aid/CPR, behavior management, defensive driving, securing wheelchairs, vehicle evacuation, and winter driving.

Southeast Transportation Network

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370

Beaver Brook School, One Ralph Hamlin Way, Abington, MA 02351

Jones School, 137 Walnut Street, Stoughton, MA 02072

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 126)

Eileen Millett– Transportation Director



Section 3: Progress Toward Achieving NRC's Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of the collaborative is to provide intensive educational programs and services for students with disabilities, professional development to educators, related services to students with disabilities in member and non-member districts, and other high-quality, cost-effective services to meet the changing needs of member districts. The North River Collaborative has been successful in achieving this purpose as outlined below.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the North River Collaborative Agreement are to:

1. Provide programs for students with low-incidence disabilities in the least restrictive environment;
2. Offer a variety of quality professional development opportunities to general and special education teachers and administrators, and related service providers;
3. Provide programs and services in a cost-effective manner;
4. Explore and pursue grant and other funding to support identified needs of the districts; and
5. Offer cooperative programs and/or services to help districts maximize cost efficiency and program effectiveness through a collaborative effort.

Objective 1: Provide programs for students with low-incidence disabilities in the least restrictive environment



Objective 5: Offer cooperative programs and/or services to help districts maximize cost efficiency and program effectiveness through a collaborative effort

The North River Collaborative provides programs and services for students with low-incidence disabilities in the least restrictive environment including social-emotional, multiple disabilities, autism, English learners, behavioral health, and substance abuse.

- The Learning Center programs are provided in age-appropriate public-school buildings with inclusion opportunities provided, whenever feasible.
- The North River School is an alternative setting for middle and high school students who have difficulty functioning successfully in public schools due to behavioral, social, emotional, and/or psychological challenges. The staff work closely with school districts to align curriculum with that of sending districts to allow students to transition back to local schools when appropriate.
- Independence Academy is an alternative setting for students struggling with substance use. The staff work closely with school districts to align curriculum with that of sending districts to allow students to transition back to local schools when appropriate.
- For transition-age students, the North River Collaborative provides supports for students within community-based job sites through the Summer Work and Learning program.
- The North River Collaborative provides services in member and non-member school districts that allow students to remain in their local community schools while receiving essential services to enhance access to the curriculum. In this way, instead of students leaving their districts, the services are brought to them and the educators that support their learning. These services include

occupational, physical, and speech therapy; behavior consultation; vision services including orientation and mobility, teacher of the visually impaired, Braille-trained aides; and social work services.

- The North River Collaborative also provides cooperative services to school districts including Municipal Medicaid reimbursement and special education transportation.

Each of these programs strives for continuous improvement in meeting student or district needs. This section includes a discussion of the progress of the North River Collaborative through program enhancements made throughout the school year.

NRC Programs

North River School

Program Enhancements

- North River School graduated 10 seniors on June 7th from 6 different districts
- New Program Coordinator Andrew Manning started in July 2022
- New Culinary Instructor Venessa Mitsis joined us in the fall of 2022
- Addition of SEL standards in classrooms and SEL class for all 9th graders
- Established an incentive-based basketball team that plays other local collaboratives
- Instituted a Student Advisory Council to help with problem solving and planning
- Scheduled Wednesday internships where students were able to choose a career focused class in a variety of content areas including culinary, photography, STEAM and Innovation
- Handed out holiday care packages to all students and families with everything to make a thanksgiving meal including fresh turkey
- Staff participated in 3 trainings and PLC groups focused on Diversity Equity and Inclusion
- Staff participated in ALICE training
- All staff certified in Safety Care
- All staff certified in CPR
- Facilities improvements including new septic line and pavement resealing, new rugs in staff offices and common area



Learning Centers

Program Enhancements

- Due to a significant increase in enrollment in the Learning Center Early Childhood program, an additional Early Childhood program was opened. The Early Childhood II classroom location adjoins the Early Childhood I classroom at Bryantville Elementary School.
- Learning Center teachers and therapy staff collaborated to implement monthly thematic units based on the Unique Learning System (ULS) curriculum. The ULS is an online curriculum correlated to the Massachusetts Curriculum Standards. The ULS provides thematic lessons across all domains that are age appropriate and leveled to meet the needs of students with special needs who are accessing the curriculum standards at a variety of different access points. The Everyday Speech curriculum was added to the Learning Center Middle and High School programs to support acquisition of pragmatic language skills and appropriate pro-social peer interactions.

Additionally, a variety of program enhancements were secured for Learning Center programs. These included:

- Switch accessible toys and materials for students in the Multiple Disability programs to encourage independent leisure activities and environmental control
- Additional iPads with Touch Chat for classroom use along with a variety of augmentative communication enhancement tools: Step-by-Steps, Put-Em-Arounds, E-tran board
- Touch screen Smart Board and Touch screen computer
- Gross motor developmental positioning equipment: walkers and gait trainers and Sit-to-Stand standing unit
- Professional development trainings included: CPR recertification (nursing staff); curriculum development through curriculum mapping using the Unique Learning System, American Sign Language full day refresher training provided by Marianne Molinari, and staff Wellness and Yoga. Learning Center staff also participated in a full day training provided by Children's Hospital on the topic Child Abuse and Neglect. Additionally, Katie Cullen, NRC Board Certified Behavior Analyst, provided multiple Safety Care trainings, including initial and recertification to Learning Center staff.



Independence Academy

Program Enhancements

- Independence Academy continued to offer short-term programming (10 and 45 day programs) to districts at no cost due to DPH grant funding. Over 90 students were served from 27 different districts.
- The Upper Course, a short-term intervention for youth suspended out of school for substance related offenses enrolled 74 students.
- 100% of 12th graders attending IA's 45-day Program, and Recovery High School graduated from high school.
- IA is in the middle of a multi-year evaluation conducted by DESE and a team of consultants through the Collaborative for Educational Services.
- IA was able to run a full summer program which included kayaking trips, hiking, a ropes course, aquarium, and the annual Six Flags trip.
- Community lunches continue to be a hit with students serving as “guest chefs” for the school on a monthly basis.
- IA updated their logo, signage, and website
- Brand new fitness center was created through available grant funding
- IA maintained a strong partnership with Harvard Medical School, Mass General Hospital, and the Recovery Research Institute in an effort to conduct research on the impact social relationships have on adolescent substance use. The results of the study conducted at IA were published in two peer-reviewed journals *Addiction Research & Theory* and *Addiction Behavior Reports*.



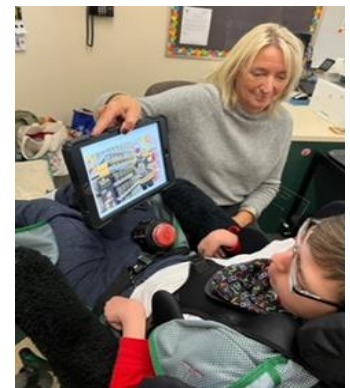
Therapy Services

Program Enhancements



- The OTs and PTs continue to work collaboratively on school teams using input from school teams to develop goals and treatment strategies to maximize student participation in the school setting.
- District based therapists participate in school wide initiatives including Best Buddies. School buildings that host our classrooms are also invited to participate in thematic/holiday activities that supports social inclusion and provides opportunities for skill building in a natural and exciting context.
- The OT & PT teams continue to use the *Teacher Report form of School Function & Participation* that has been developed by team members, in order to guide their evaluations to ensure educational necessity. Both teams have also consistently included a similar *Parent Report Form* for preschoolers as they transition into the school setting.

- The OT team updated its inventory of Standardized testing and informal assessments including the most up-to-date edition of the *Sensory Processing Measure* and the *Schoodles: Pediatric Fine Motor Assessment*.
- The Learning Center Teams are continuing to utilize and collaborate within shared drives that have been created to support information sharing remotely. They are also used to share materials, analyze data, and organize timelines.
- OT and PT staff have been provided with online professional development membership to support access to continuing education (OccupationalTherapy.com; PhysicalTherapy.com) approved by state and national organizations. The feedback has been very positive with therapists appreciating the variety of topics as well as the ability to access from home amidst busy work and home schedules. Staff have collectively completed upwards of 200 hours of continuing education.
- Speech-Language Pathologists continued to perform a significant number of Assistive Technology (AT) and Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) evaluations across member districts. They are also working within districts to provide consultations and staff training and continue to enhance and update the devices and software available for student trials.
- OTs, PTs and SLPs developed Plan of Care and record forms to comply with state licensing requirements and support the School Based Medicaid Program documentation.
- NRC therapists supervised university students who completed fieldwork experiences, including an OT student [Regis College] and have supported shadowing opportunities for younger students who are interested in pursuing a career in related services.



Behavior Consult and Educational Services (BCES)

Program Enhancements

The Learning Center teams use Safety-Care® Crisis Prevention Training Safety within the programs to ensure student and staff safety. NRC provided 8 initial/recertification trainings for our staff this year and our BCBA has once again been certified as a trainer.

School Psychology

Program Enhancements

The North River Collaborative has two licensed school psychologists who have been vital support to both member and non-member districts as well as within our NRC Classroom Programs. This team completed upwards of 130 psychoeducation evaluations during the 2022-2023 school year.

Social Work Internship Program

Program Enhancements

- During 2022-2023, North River's MSW Intern Program placed 11 interns across 4 districts within 10 schools serving students in grade pre-K-12th. The interns represented Bridgewater State University, Fordham University, and Simmons University. Interns were in placement from late September through mid-May, completing a 34-week commitment to their placements resulting in 472-720 hours of field work per intern.
 - Clinical Social work field placements are designed to provide the opportunity for students to acquire and grow in social work competencies. Each intern received two hours a week of group and individual supervision by a LICSW and was formally evaluated two times per academic year based on integration of their knowledge, skills, and value/ethics relating to the competencies and their practice.
 - The program focuses on the integration of classroom learning into the field to include the exploration of the social worker's role, professional identity, client and family engagement, assessment, intervention, and treatment evaluation while developing solid, ethical practice skills and boundaries and the application of critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.
 - All school staff, including principals, assistant principals, school psychologists, guidance, nurses, behaviorists, and teachers continued to be a crucial link in determining intern, student, and program success by welcoming, guiding, and supporting the interns and their learning.
 - Interns received close to 300 referrals for individual and group counseling services. In addition, interns provided over 3,000 individual, group, in-class, crisis, check-ins, and supportive interventions, as well as parent-teacher collaborations and outside collateral contacts.
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Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement

The North River Collaborative coordinates the school-based Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement Program for member and non-member school districts. Since the collaborative began providing this service in 1994, more than \$35 million has been returned to the participating cities and towns. In FY23, approximately \$2,107,246 million dollars were returned to 17 districts.

The North River Collaborative uses an internet-based Medicaid billing enhancement that reduces the burden on districts' administrative and direct care staff and provides the potential to increase Medicaid reimbursement. The software allows easy access for direct care providers to assess student history and to keep up to date with student caseloads. Additionally, administrative staff can monitor services and ensure reimbursement is maximized.

North River Collaborative:

- Coordinates enrollment agreements
- Helps obtain parental permission
- Reconciles paid and unpaid claims
- Trains and works closely with district staff
- Identifies eligible students
- Submit electronic claims
- Verifies amounts paid to towns
- Endures program compliance

- Assists districts with the selection of program participants
- Prepares and submits quarterly administrative claims and end of year cost reports

Southeast Transportation Network

Program Enhancements

The network provided special education transportation to 452 students (356 out of the Rockland and Abington Offices and 196 out of the Stoughton Office) in FY23.

- The Network's newest addition of an enhanced Camera/GPS system has been quite impressive and very helpful to both the Collaborative as well as the districts when it comes to issues on vans with students or staff. The enhanced GPS system also allows improved monitoring and route planning.
- The Network services over 25 school districts.
- All staff are CPR certified throughout the year as needed.
- This year we sold 6 vehicles to member districts and auctioned 3 vehicles all because of a lack of drivers.
- North River Collaborative negotiated another three-year contract with the Teamsters Union which will end in 2025.
- Offered a \$1,500 sign-on bonus for drivers to with the hopes of increasing staffing.
- Driver employed for 2022-2023 school year-68.
- Monitors employed for the 2022-2023 school year-19.



Objective 2: Offer a variety of quality professional development opportunities to general and special education teachers and administrators, and related service providers

Professional Development Program Offerings

A wide variety of professional development offerings were scheduled during FY23. Ninety-seven districts were served which includes North River Collaborative staff and member districts for a total of 472 participants.

Administration, Leadership, & Evaluation

- Administrative Seminar: Legal Issues for Special Education for School and District Administrators
- Educator Evaluation Training for Administrators
- Mentoring for Success Trainings
- Tiered Academic Intervention
- Vision of the Graduate/ NEASC Training

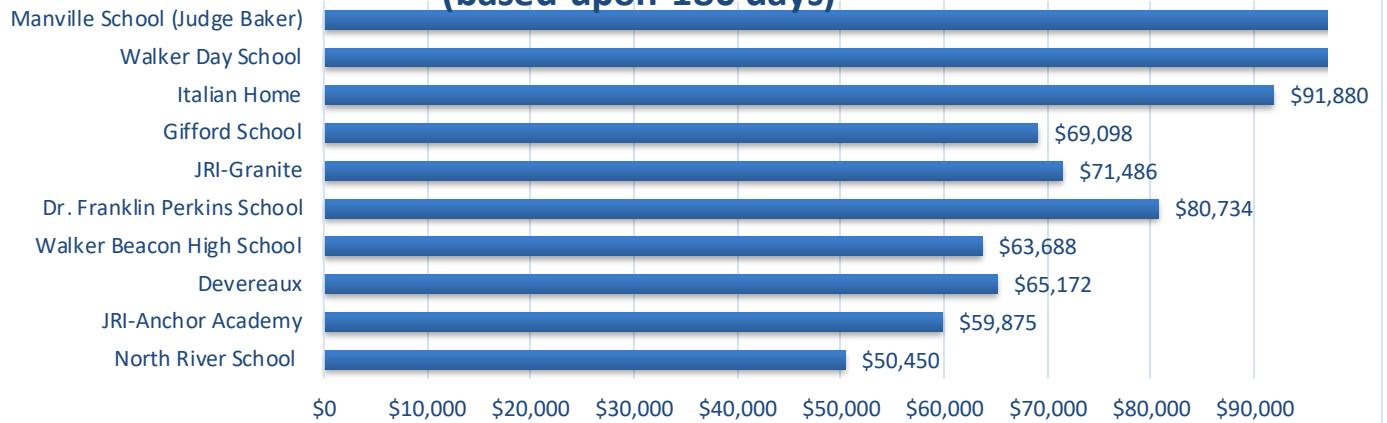
Instructional Strategies, Pedagogy & Curriculum

**Objective 3: Provide programs and services
in a cost-effective manner.**

Tuition comparisons below represent programs in the geographic region of the North River Collaborative that member districts typically use when out-of-district placements are needed. The daily rate for private schools is multiplied by 180 days to establish an equivalent tuition across programs regardless of days of operation. Additionally, there are savings to districts in transportation to program locations that are closer to their city/town which are not reflected in the charts below.

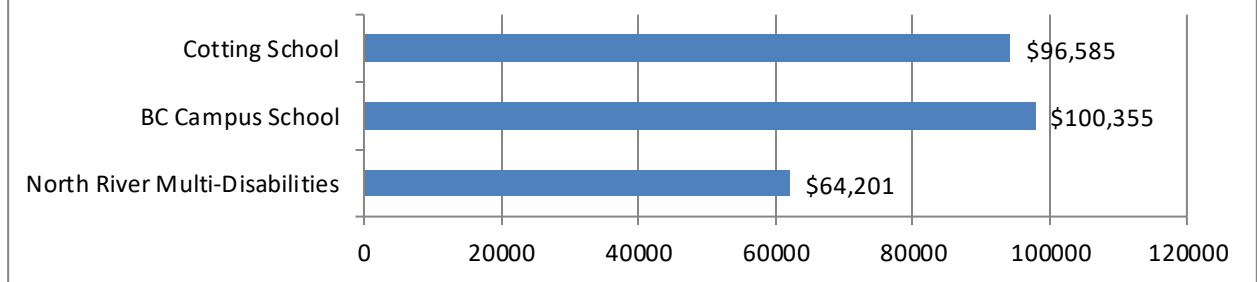
North River School -FY23 NRS Day Rate Tuition Comparison

FY23 NRS Day Rate Tuition Comparison (based upon 180 days)



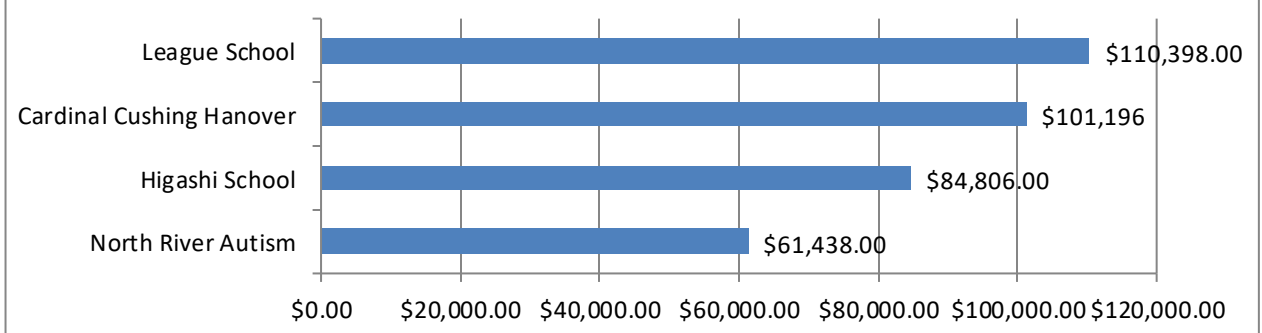
Learning Center for Students with Multiple Disabilities

Multi-Disabilities FY23 Tuition Comparison (based on 180 days)



Learning Center for Students with Autism

Autism FY23 Tuition Comparison (based on 180 days)



Independence Academy

Independence Academy allows multiple school districts to provide a comprehensive recovery high school alternative program to at-risk students with substance abuse and dependence diagnoses. This school is a

regional program and allows school districts to access services that would not otherwise be available to their students. Funding for this program is provided through shared contributions of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the local school districts. DESE provides approximately \$500,000 annually to each recovery high school and the school districts' tuition contribution is equal to the state average per pupil expenditure as determined by DESE.

Summer Work and Learning Program

North River's Summer Work and Learning Program allows multiple school districts to provide a comprehensive summer program to students with disabilities. A broad range of transition services are tied to academic support and remediation for students through hands-on instruction and opportunities for work experiences, such as animal services, horticulture, building maintenance, shipping and receiving, office practices, and food service. If each district provided this program individually, the range of job sites would need to be narrower, student choice would be reduced, and options would be limited. By bringing these students into one regional program, the ability to place a student in a job site that matches his/her interest and skill level is greatly enhanced.

Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement

The North River Collaborative coordinates the school-based municipal Medicaid reimbursement program for member districts and many non-member school districts. Since the Collaborative began providing this service in 1994, tens of millions of dollars have been returned to the participating cities and towns. In FY23, approximately \$2,107,246 million dollars were returned to 17 districts.

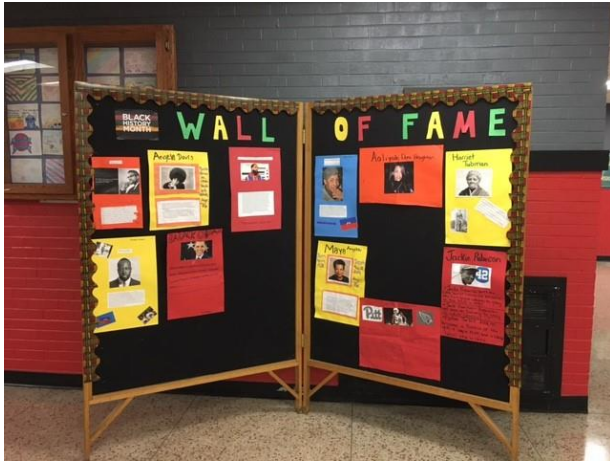
Southeast Transportation Network

The North River Collaborative's Southeast Transportation Network provides transportation for special needs and other students as a cost-effective service for districts. In most cases, the collaborative's prices are given to districts on individual routes, and the districts choose to contract for only the routes which are cost-effective when compared with prices from other providers. In other cases, North River has provided entire portions of districts' transportation programs such as all in-district special education services or all preschool services. Thus, consolidated administrative and other supports are provided for the districts, resulting in efficiencies within their administration. In addition, the Network allows for an opportunity to maximize ridership on vehicles resulting in an economy of scale and savings to participating districts. North River's enrollment has continued to increase each year since inception in 2007 with a few exceptions, providing solid market driven evidence that school districts find its transportation safe, cost-efficient and highly reliable.

General Education Supports and Services

The North River Collaborative offered the following general education supports and services which are described in other sections of this document:

Social Work Internship Program. North River’s Social Work Internship Program provides school districts with low-cost counseling services for students who are at-risk. By pooling resources to provide LICSW supervision of school-based graduate level interns, the schools can offer counseling to students who would otherwise not be able to receive it. Coordination and interface with colleges and universities, families, and school staff are all included in the program.



Professional Development. Professional



development offered through the collaborative is cost-effective for districts.

- High-quality programs are offered that would be cost prohibitive for districts to offer individually. NRC programs allow districts to share the expense and enroll the number of staff they need to send, which helps to control cost.
- Specific needs of local districts are addressed through the design and selection of programs.
- Grant funding supports professional development for district and NRC staff.
- District capacity is expanded by the collaborative organizing appropriate and responsive training that is easily accessible for their staff members, usually at a lower rate than other public offerings.

Objective 4: Explore and pursue grant and other funding to support identified needs of the districts

The following chart details the grant funding received by the North River Collaborative on behalf of school districts in FY22 and FY23.

Funded Grants and Contracts

Grants on Behalf of Districts:	FY22	FY23
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Recovery High School (Independence Academy)	\$510,468	\$510,468
IA-45 Day Program	\$356,250	\$412,469
Title III Consortium Grant	\$80,944	\$80,000
Total Grants for Districts	\$947,662	\$1,002,937
Grants to Support NRC Programs:		
Safe and Supportive Schools Grant	N/A	NA
Special Education Improvement Grant	N/A	NA
Total Grants to Support NRC Programs:	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Grants	\$947,662	\$1,002,937

Collaborative Grant Applications

The North River Collaborative has a history of successfully implementing major federal/state programs to expand the capacity of member school districts at no cost. NRC has spearheaded the procurement of grant and foundation funding through agencies such as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, and other public/private foundations, and organizations. During FY23, the total amount awarded on behalf of districts and to support NRC programs was **\$1,002,937**. Districts received the following grant funded supports and services:

- Transportation and extended day/year programming for students in recovery.
- Tutoring, professional development, and parent support for English language learners.