



ACCEPTANCE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We, the Board of Directors of the North River Collaborative, have voted to accept the Annual Report as submitted for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024. We also certify that the representations made in the annual report are accurate and have been disclosed in accordance with Department guidelines.

Joseph F. Burt

Board Chair

12/13/24

Date of Board Vote

North River Collaborative Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report



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

www.northrivercollaborative.org

December 2024

Approved by the NRC Board of Directors December 13, 2024

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December 06, 2024

Dear Members of the Board of Directors, School Committees, and Colleagues,

In my second year as the Executive Director of the North River Collaborative (NRC), I am honored to present to you the Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report. The report summarizes the highlights of the past school year in which the collaborative focused its efforts on our core mission of acting as a leader in cooperatively developing and delivering innovative and cost-effective educational and therapeutic services for students, families, school districts, partner organizations, and communities in order to offer excellent, equitable, and highly relevant education for all.

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.

We as a community are particularly proud of the development of our North River Collaborative Student Success Plan that will guide us through our growth as an organization from the years 2024 to 2029. The building of this document was a long process of gathering input from staff, families, and stakeholders and channeling that input into a document that is representative of all our departments here at North River. Our action items for the school year 2024-2025 are ambitious but attainable and we look forward to seeing our organization flourish under this guiding document. Our administrative team members, our professional staff, and our support staff are all focused on the best for our students as we strive to be leaders in educational practice in our region.

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 the 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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Table of Contents

Section 1: Governance and General Information	1
Governance and Leadership	1
NRC 2024-2029 Student Success Plan	2
Serving Students and Districts – Statistics	4
Financial Information	5
Section 2: Programs and Services	6
North River School	6
Learning Center Programs	7
Independence Academy: Recovery High School	9
Summer Work and Learning Program	10
Therapy Services	11
Social Work Internship Program	11
Behavioral Health Initiative	12
Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement	12
Professional Development	12
Southeast Transportation Network	13
Section 3: Progress Toward Achieving NRC’s Purpose and Objectives	14
Purpose	14
Objectives	14
Objective 1: Provide Programs for Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities and Objective 5: Cooperative Programs and Services	15
North River School	15
Learning Centers	16
Independence Academy	17
Therapy Services	18
Social Work Internship Program	18
Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement	19
Southeast Transportation Network	19

Objective 2: Provide Professional Development Opportunities	21
Professional Development	21
Objective 3: Provide Programs and Services in a Cost-Effective Manner	21
North River School	22
Learning Center Programs	22
Independence Academy	23
Summer Work and Learning Program	23
Municipal Medicaid Reimbursement	23
Southeast Transportation Network	23
General Education Supports and Services	24
Social Work Internship Program	24
Professional Development	24
Objective 4: Explore and Pursue Grants and Other Funding	25
Collaborative Grant Applications	25
NRC Audited Financial Statement	26

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 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

- Peter Schafer, Abington
- Christine Godino, Avon
- Ryan Powers, Bridgewater-Raynham
- Elizabeth Legault, East Bridgewater
- Matthew Ferron, Hanover
- Julie Hamilton, Holbrook
- Alan Cron, Rockland
- Joseph Baeta, Stoughton
- Mark Bodwell, West Bridgewater
- Jeffrey Szymaniak, Whitman-Hanson

Special Needs Advisory Committee

- James Robbins, Abington
- Lori Jodoin, Avon
- Melanie Hart, Bridgewater-Raynham
- John Phelan, East Bridgewater
- Kaitlin Morelli, Hanover
- Robert Compton, Holbrook
- Linda Maniglia, Rockland
- Ed Clarke, Stoughton
- Kathy Marble, West Bridgewater
- Michael Losche, Whitman-Hanson

North River Collaborative Administrative Team

- Paul Tzovolos, Jr., Executive Director
- Ellen George, Director of Business Services
- Kelli O'Brien-McKinnon, Human Resource Coordinator and Executive Assistant to the Executive Director
- Eileen Millett, Director of Transportation
- Susan Hardie, Asst Director of Transportation
- Diane Baxter, Director of Technology
- Marie Grable, Asst. Executive Director
- Andrew Manning, Program Coordinator, North River School
- Meredith Daly, Program Coordinator, District Services
- Ryan Morgan, Program Coordinator, Independence Academy
- Kate Stevens, Program Coordinator, Learning Centers
- Kimberly Beck, Program Coordinator, Professional Development
- Deni Howley, Program Coordinator, Behavioral Health Initiative and Social Work Intern Program
- Deborah Thompson, Coordinator of Outreach and Recruitment

2024-2029 Student Success Plan

Mission

North River Collaborative will act as a leader in cooperatively developing and delivering innovative and cost-effective educational and therapeutic services for students, families, school districts, partner organizations, and communities in order to offer excellent, equitable, and highly relevant education for all.

Vision

North River Collaborative will utilize a culture of accountability, transparency, equity, and continuous improvement to fulfill our mission and remain at the forefront of educational innovation to meet the individual needs of students in our region within the most inclusive setting possible.

Guiding Beliefs

We believe that...

- All students and families deserve equitable access to high-quality educational services that support student success in all domains as well as a life-long success as an independent adult.
- In an educational landscape where the needs of students are at the forefront of decision-making that includes personalized learning, individualized support systems, and a commitment to nurturing the holistic development of each learner at their highest potential.
- 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.
- High-quality professional development combined with a rigorous informal and formal staff evaluation system is essential for improving education practice and maximizing student achievement.
- Providing opportunities for collaboration and inviting feedback from a diverse community of voices will foster growth and innovation and allow us to build and sustain cutting edge programs and services for all students.
- Through collegiality and shared commitment, we as staff will continue to perform at our highest potential and be empowered to operate with agency and grow as individuals serving our organization in the fulfillment of its mission.

Equity Statement

North River Collaborative believes that equity is rooted in reflective practice that permeates all facets of our organization. We actively seek to promote inclusion and the celebration of what makes our community members unique as we continue to maintain our collective dignity, civil rights, and safety. We understand that equitable practices guide us to continue to seek to mutually understand one another and expand the representation of all stakeholders in order to create a more diverse organization.

Strategic Objectives

- Objective 1:** The Collaborative will be responsive to stakeholder feedback as evidenced by the development of existing programs or services and the expansion of these supports to meet the needs of students in the region.
- Objective 2:** The Collaborative will develop comprehensive internal systems and work to reevaluate the physical space needs of our programs to provide high-quality work and learning spaces that foster innovative and efficient practices.
- Objective 3:** The Collaborative will support the agency growth, and well-being of our existing staff while recruiting prospective team members to support our growing programs and services with a focus on building a community rooted in equity and understanding.

Serving Students & Districts

Serving Students	FY24
Students Served in NRC Programs*	
Multiple Disabilities	26
Autism/Developmental Disabilities	17
Social and Emotional Disabilities-North River School	51
Substance Abuse and Dependence - Independence Academy	92
Sub-Total	186**
Students Served in NRC Services*	
Therapy and Other Related Services	625
Social Work Interns	300
Behavioral Health Initiative	215
Transportation	385
Sub-Total	1,525
Total	1,711**

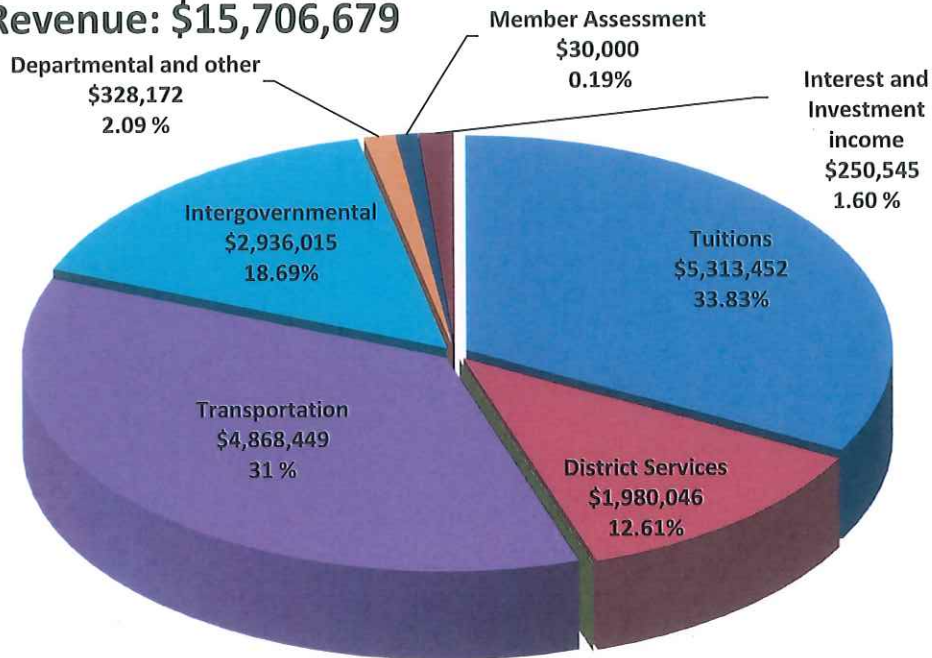
*Each category represents the total number of students serviced in the program for the year

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

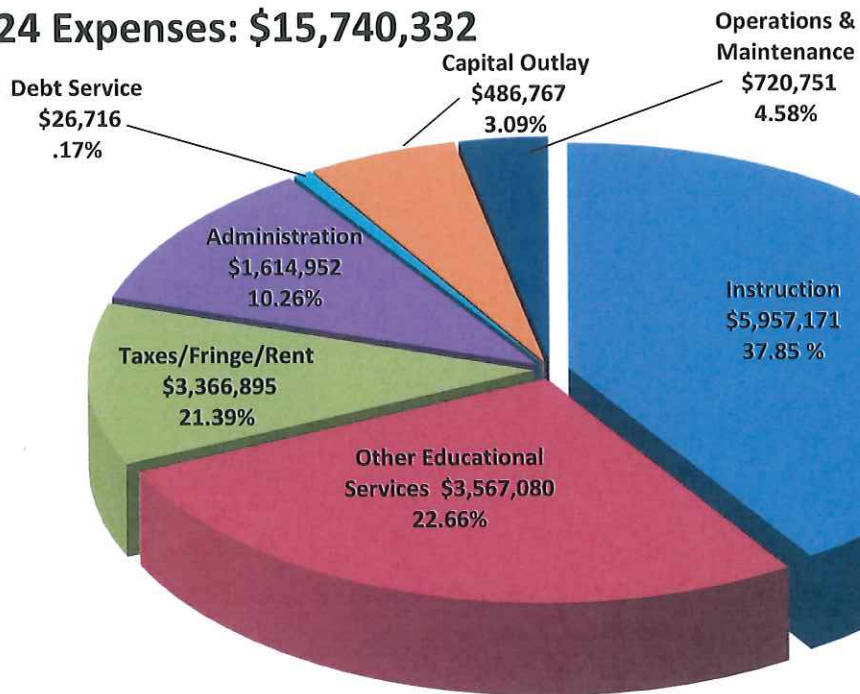
Serving Districts	FY24
Transportation	25
Municipal Medicaid	16
Grant Writing	38
Behavioral Health	2
Professional Development (PD) Participants	472

Financial Information

FY24 Revenue: \$15,706,679



FY24 Expenses: \$15,740,332



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.

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

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 Disorders** 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 and
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 x16692

Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Early Childhood II)

Bryantville Elementary School (Room 190)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 x16690

Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Elementary)

Richardson Olmsted School (Rooms A126)
101 Lothrop Street, North Easton, MA 02356
Phone: 508-230-3227 x5126

Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Middle)

Richardson Olmsted School (Rooms A128)
101 Lothrop Street, North Easton, MA 02356
Phone: 508-230-3227 x5128

Learning Center Multiple Disabilities (Intermediate)

Bryantville Elementary School (Room 194)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 x2693

**Learning Center Autism & Developmental Disabilities
(PreK)**

Bryantville Elementary School (Room 193)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 x16691

Learning Center Autism & Developmental Disabilities (Elementary)

Bryantville Elementary School (Room 191)
29 Gurney Drive, Pembroke, MA 02359
Phone: 781-293-5411 x16691

Learning Center Autism & Developmental Disabilities Middle/High School

East Bridgewater High School (Room 129),
43 Plymouth Street, East Bridgewater, MA 02333
Phone: 508-378-8214 x1290

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 x1216



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 with 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 the 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, 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 life and to reach their full potential. All of the 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



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 Abington High 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

Therapy Services

Occupational, Physical, Behavioral and Psychological

Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 101)
Philip Buckley, SWL Coordinator

North River Collaborative provides direct and consultative **occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy** services across 10 school districts, supporting nearly 625 students. Additionally, services are offered within North River Collaborative's Learning Center Classrooms for students with multiple disabilities, autism, and developmental disabilities, as well as at the North River school.

Students with visual impairments receive support through consultative and direct services from a **Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI)** and an **Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialist**. These services aim to enhance educational accessibility and promote student independence throughout the school day. NRC aims to expand TVI and O&M staffing to enhance the support available within local school districts.

Our **Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)** completed the *Safety-Care* Crisis Prevention Training certification to become a trainer, equipping our Learning Center staff with essential skills to effectively support students who may exhibit unpredictable behaviors. She also provides consultative services to students within Learning Center classrooms and at North River School.

North River Collaborative employs two **School Psychologists** who support local districts by conducting psychoeducational evaluations. This year, the team completed 157 evaluations across seven districts.

Therapy Services

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 120)
Meredith Daly, Program 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, Michigan State University, Fordham, or Boston College.

Social Work Internship Program

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street,
Rockland, MA 02370 Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 302)
Deni Howley, Program 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 one high school.

Behavioral Health Initiative

The Almshouse, 198 Spring Street, Rockland, MA 02370
Phone: 781-878-6056 (Ext. 301)
Deni Howley, Program 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 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)
Ellen George, Director of Business Services

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, Program Coordinator

Southeast Transportation Network

The Southeast Transportation Network served 385 students in 27 school districts in FY24, 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, Director of Transportation



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 4th from 6 different districts
- New Assistant Program Coordinator Abby Horbach started in July 2023
- New Adjustment Counseling Intern Tracie Sweeney joined us spring 2024
- Addition of a Senior College and Career Readiness class and field trips
- Addition of Culinary and Innovation class opportunities for Middle School students
- Continued an incentive-based basketball team that plays other local collaboratives
- Second year handing out holiday care packages to all students and families with everything to make a Thanksgiving meal including fresh turkey
- Staff continued to participate in Professional Development and PLC groups focused on Diversity Equity and Inclusion
- All staff certified in CPI
- All staff recertified in CPR
- Facilities improvements including new HVAC system for the gym and breakroom for transportation.



Learning Center

Program Enhancements

- Due to a significant increase in enrollment in the Learning Center Autism program, an additional classroom was opened. The Autism PreK classroom location adjoins the Autism Elementary program at Bryantville Elementary School.
- Learning Center teachers and therapy staff collaborated to implement monthly thematic units based on the Unique Learning System (ULS) curriculum. 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 is included for the Learning Center Middle and High School programs to support the acquisition of pragmatic language skills and appropriate pro-social peer interactions.
- Learning Center programs continued to benefit from a variety of field trips to enhance curriculum themes and vocational opportunities. Students from the Autism High School program enjoyed vocational opportunities at the Weymouth Wildlife Center, with one job being the care of the center's box turtles. A highlight for our Learning Center students continues to be the Swim with a Special Child program at the Connell Pool in Weymouth. During the 2023 summer session, students enjoyed a miniature pony visit from the Lifting Spirits program.
- Additionally, a variety of program enhancements were secured for Learning Center programs. These included:
 - Switch accessible vocational activities for the older Learning Centers for students with Multiple Disabilities, including switch accessible shredder, washing machine, adapted scissors, measuring cups and a variety of switch accessible leisure and recreational activities.
 - Additional iPads with Touch Chat for classroom use along with a variety of augmentative communication enhancement tools: Step-by-Steps, iPad apps for students with visual impairments, tablet mounts
 - Sensory Learning Kit and materials for students with visual impairments
 - Gross motor developmental positioning equipment: Rifton Activity Chairs
- Professional development training included: CPR recertification, google education platform, DESE new IEP, webinars provided by Perkins School for the Blind (i.e., "Building Concept Development: Accessibility for students with CVI", and staff Wellness and Yoga. Learning Center nursing staff also participated in a full day training for the online SNAP program for medical documentation. Additionally, the NRC Board Certified Behavior Analyst, provided multiple Safety Care training, including initial and recertification to Learning Center staff.



Independence Academy

Program Enhancements

- Independence Academy continued to offer short-term programming (In-school consultation, 10- and 45-day programs) to districts at no cost due to DPH grant funding. Over 90 students were served from 24 different communities.
- The Upper Course, a short-term intervention for youth suspended out of school for substance related offenses, enrolled 60 students.
- 100% of 12th graders attending IA's 45-day Program, and Recovery High School graduated from high school.
- Throughout the school year opportunities for students to engage in regular community service experiences remained a key component. Students volunteered with animal shelters, organizations for disabled individuals, homeless shelters, and children in foster care.
- IA is in the middle of a multi-year evaluation conducted by DESE and a team of consultants through the Collaborative for Educational Services. The purpose of this process is to develop a set of frameworks for the MA Recovery High Schools to be adopted by DESE in the Spring of 2025.
- IA was able to run two different summer programs. One program was for the "long-term" students in the IA group and the other was for the shorter-term students in the 10- and 45-day programs. This allowed us to continue to enroll students throughout the summer. We enrolled 11 new students over the summer.
- The summer program included several community service experiences as well as field trips which included horseback riding, hiking in NH, a ropes course, circus arts, and a summer end cookout at Camp Kiwanee.
- Community lunches continue to be a hit with students serving as "guest chefs" for the school on a monthly basis.
- IA engaged with a consultant from Harvard Medical School, Mass General Hospital, and the Recovery Research Institute in an effort to conduct research on our model of developing recovery capital development and determining efficacy of that model. That work will continue into the 24-25 school year.
- IA was also awarded a two year, \$1.2million extension on the DPH grant that funds the short term programs that are run.
- IA staff presented at two National Conferences. The first in Baltimore at the Joint Meeting on Youth Prevention, Treatment and Recovery and the annual Association of Recovery High Schools conference in San Diego.
- IA also hired a part-time Outreach and Intervention Specialist for the purpose of supporting youth identified as high-risk in their home school in the concepts and model of Independence Academy



Therapy Services

Program Enhancements

- The occupational and physical therapists continued collaborating with school teams, using input from these teams to develop goals and treatment strategies that maximize student participation within each unique grade level and school setting.
- The OT and PT teams continue to utilize our Teacher Report Form of School Function and Participation, which was developed and updated by team members to guide evaluations and ensure educational relevance.
- The occupational therapy team received training in the Visual Skills Appraisal-2 (VSA-2), led by Ellen Bennett, MS, OTR/L, who also contributed to the test's normative data by administering it to local clients.
- Standardized and informal assessments have been updated to the latest versions, including the Beery VMI (Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration, 6th Edition) and the DAYC-2 (Developmental Assessment of Young Children, 2nd Edition).
- Learning Center teams continue to collaborate and utilize shared drives to support remote information sharing, material access, data analysis, and timeline organization. The teams continue to learn new features within this platform to increase efficiency and accuracy.
- OT and PT staff members have again been provided with online professional development memberships (OccupationalTherapy.com, PhysicalTherapy.com) approved by state and national organizations. Feedback has been highly positive, with therapists appreciating the range of topics and the convenience of access from home alongside busy work and personal schedules.
- Speech-Language Pathologists conducted a substantial number of Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication evaluations across member districts. They continue to offer consultations within districts, enhancing and updating devices and software available for student trials.



Social Work Internship Program

Program Enhancements

- During 2023-2024, North River's MSW Intern Program placed 6 interns across 2 districts within 5 schools serving students in grade pre-K-12. The interns represented Bridgewater State University, Boston College, University of Michigan, and Simmons University. Interns were in placement from September through 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 month of group supervision and one hour a week of individual supervision from NRC. Each was formally evaluated two times per academic year based on integration of their knowledge, skills, and value/ethics relating to the 9 Competencies and their practice.
- The 9 Social Work Competencies of their practice include:
 1. Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
 2. Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

3. Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
 4. Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice
 5. Engage in Policy Practice
 6. Engage with Individuals Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
 7. Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
 8. Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
 9. Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
- The MSW Intern program focused 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.

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 \$37 million has been returned to the participating cities and towns. In FY24, approximately \$2,073,677 million dollars were returned to 16 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
- Assists districts with the selection of program participants
- Identifies eligible students
- Submit electronic claims
- Verifies amounts paid to towns
- Endures program compliance
- Prepares and submits quarterly administrative claims and end of year cost reports

Southeast Transportation Network

Program Enhancements

The Southeast Transportation Network provided Special Education transportation to 385 students in FY 24.

The Network's newest addition of an enhanced Camera/GPS system has been proven to be quite impressive and very helpful to both the Collaborative as well as the districts when it comes to observing and resolving any issues that may arise during transport with students or staff.

Transfinder Routing Software was purchased, and staff training was conducted throughout the year. The new routing system software will begin being used July 1, 2024 for the summer routing of FY25.

- The Network services over 25 school districts and delivers students to over 95 different schools.
- All staff are CPR certified throughout the year as needed.
- This past year, because of a lack of drivers, 6 vehicles were sold to member districts and 3 vehicles were auctioned.
- Five caravans were auctioned because of age/mileage/issues.
- Two vehicles were totaled due to accidents.
- During FY24 we continued to offer a \$1,500 sign-on bonus for drivers to assist with the increase in staffing.
- During FY24 we continued to offer a \$1000 referral bonus for current staff when referring someone to transportation.
- Between January 2024 and June of 2024 staff for transportation was increased by 15.
- Drivers employed for 2023-2024 school year-77
- Monitors employed for the 2023-2024 school year-26.



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

- Educator Evaluation Trainings for New Teachers

Special Education & Related Services

- DCAP: Creating an Accessible Document that Supports All Learners
- Effective Inclusive Practice Trainings

English Language Learning

(Some funded through Title III Grant)

- Supporting English Learners in Specialty Subjects and Support Services: Building Academic Language and Competencies of ELLs
- RETELL – SEI Teacher Endorsement Course
- Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Learners with Special Needs
- Incorporating Socio-Emotional Learning for English Learners

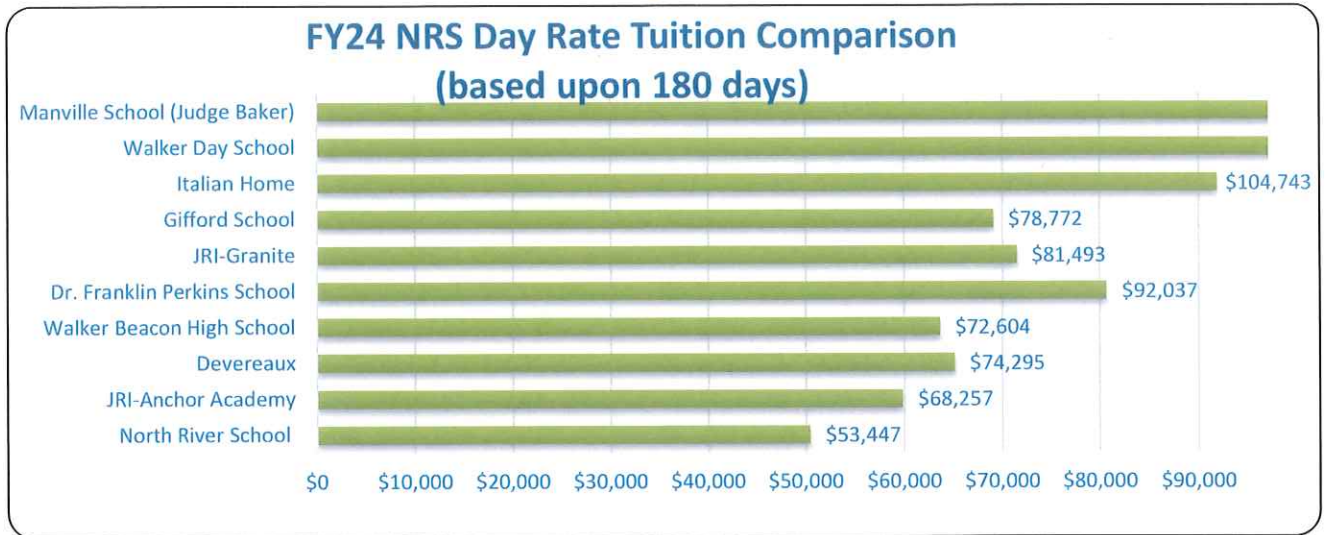
Social-Emotional Support & Behavior Intervention

- Mental Health Issues in the Classroom Training

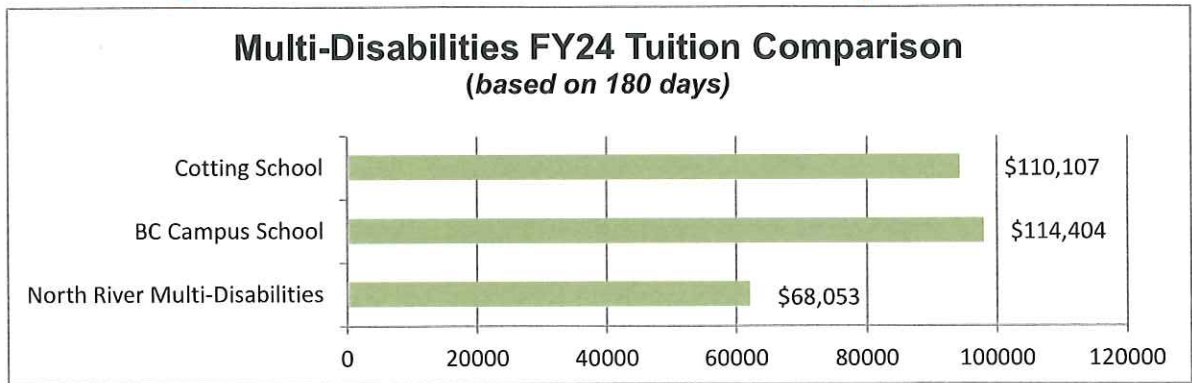
Objective 3: Provide programs and services in a cost-effective manner.

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.

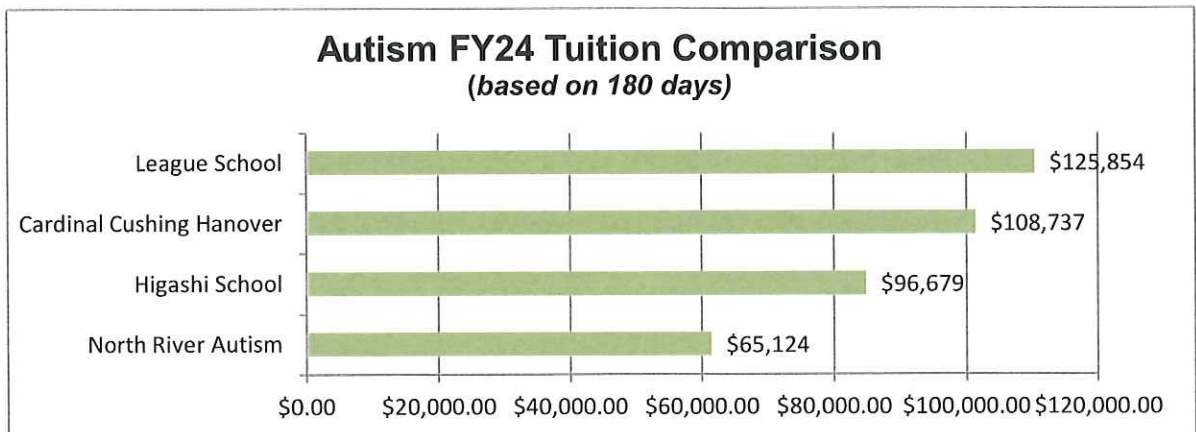
North River School -FY23 NRS Day Rate Tuition Comparison



Learning Center for Students with Multiple Disabilities



Learning Center for Students with Autism



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 FY24, approximately \$2,073,677 million dollars were returned to 16 districts.

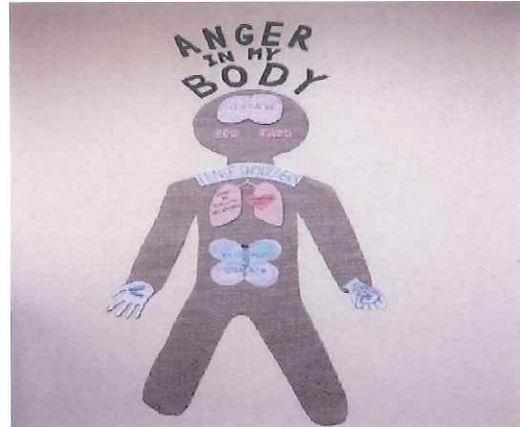
Southeast Transportation Network

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 FY23 and FY24.

Funded Grants and Contracts

Grants on Behalf of Districts:	FY23	FY24
Recovery High School (Independence Academy)	\$510,468	\$540,000
IA-45 Day Program	\$356,250	\$475,000
Title III Consortium Grant	\$80,944	\$112,232
Total Grants for Districts	\$947,662	\$1,127,232
Grants to Support NRC Programs:		
Safe and Supportive Schools Grant	N/A	NA
Special Education Improvement Grant	N/A	NA
Massachusetts Mechanics Association	N/A	\$15,269
Total Grants to Support NRC Programs:	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Grants	\$947,662	\$1,142,501

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 FY24, the total amount awarded on behalf of districts and to support NRC programs was **\$1,142,501**. 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.
- North River School's Innovation Lab and Culinary Program