



The New England Center  
for Children®  
*Autism Education and Research*

# ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2024



# MISSION



**OUR MISSION IS TO CREATE A GLOBAL NETWORK OF EDUCATORS, RESEARCHERS, AND PROGRAMS SO THAT THOSE LIVING WITH AUTISM MAY LIVE FULLER LIVES.**



The New England Center  
for Children®  
*Autism Education and Research*

## **THANK YOU** *for your support.*

The New England Center for Children® (NECC®) is grateful for the many parents, families, staff, friends, foundations, and businesses who make up the NECC community. Thanks to your generosity, thousands of children around the world are gaining the skills they need to grow and learn.

From our school and residential program in Southborough and the 66 partner classrooms across New England, to the Mohammed bin Rashid Center for Special Education in Abu Dhabi and our clinics throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council, fiscal year 2024\* was a year of growth and achievement. We couldn't have done it without you!

*\*2024 Fiscal Year was July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024.*



**ACE**®

# LEADERSHIP

Jessica Sassi, PhD, BCBA-D, LABA  
*President and CEO*

Michael S. Downey, MBA, CPA  
*Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer*

Darryl T. Agostinelli  
*Chief Technology Officer*

Jared Bouzan, MEd  
*Chief Development Officer*

Joe Garbiel  
*Chief Human Resource Officer*

Kristin Buchanan, MEd, BCBA  
*Executive Director of Gulf Consulting*

Nicole Ciotti, MS, BCBA  
*Executive Director, ACE® ABA Software System*

Amy Geckeler, MS, BCBA  
*Executive Director of Global Consulting*

Heather Morrison, MS, BCBA, LABA  
*Executive Director, Southborough*

Pam Olsen, PhD, BCBA  
*Executive Director, MRC-NECC (Abu Dhabi)*



## *In Memory of* **CATHY WELCH**

January 27, 1958 – April 24, 2024

*In April 2024, NECC lost one of the cornerstones of its community with the passing of Cathy Welch. Her dedication helped shape NECC into what it is today, including her vital role in establishing MRC-NECC in the UAE as well as consulting programs across the globe. Cathy's warmth and leadership left a lasting impact on the countless families she supported. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she was instrumental in maintaining uninterrupted services for NECC students and securing key resources for students and staff. Cathy's legacy of kindness and impact will endure, and she is deeply missed by the entire NECC community.*

# VISION



**OUR VISION IS A WORLD WHERE AUTISM IS NOT A BARRIER TO HAPPINESS, GROWTH, AND INDEPENDENCE.**



# NECC'S NEW LEADER

Jessica Sassi, PhD, BCBA-D, LABA, officially assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer of NECC in August 2024, succeeding founder L. Vincent Strully, Jr., who led the organization for 48 years. Strully now serves as an executive advisor and Board member.

Dr. Sassi brings over 20 years of experience in autism education and applied behavior analysis. During her 17 years at NECC, she held various leadership positions, including program specialist, clinical director, executive advisor, and executive director of NECC's Southborough campus.

"I'm proud to be part of an organization that offers premier educational and clinical services to children with autism, and I'm committed to holding us to the highest standards," Dr. Sassi said. "NECC's commitment to staff professional development and forming the next generation of educators and clinicians is key to achieving an inclusive world where everyone thrives."

In May, Dr. Sassi was appointed to the MA Commission on Autism, which is responsible for investigating the range of services necessary for individuals with autism to achieve their full potential.



*One of iHeart Radio's  
CEOs You Should Know*



*ABAI Philadelphia*



*Sworn in to the Massachusetts  
Commission on Autism*



*Staff Appreciation Lunch*

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jessica Sassi  
*President and CEO*

Elizabeth Wetherbee Klein  
*Chair*

Laura Dudley  
*Vice Chair*

Stella R. Adu-Gyamfi

David Castellani

Neal J. Faulkner

Katherine E. Foster

Harry M. Hutson, Jr.

John Y. Kim

Lisel Macenka

Ben Niedermeyer

Thomas Pacheco

Rabbi Jonah Pesner

Stuart M. Rose

Daniel Saul

L. Vincent Strully, Jr.  
*Executive Advisor and NECC Founder*

James C. Burling  
*Emeritus*

Governor Michael S. Dukakis  
*Emeritus*



# NEW LEADERSHIP OF NECC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

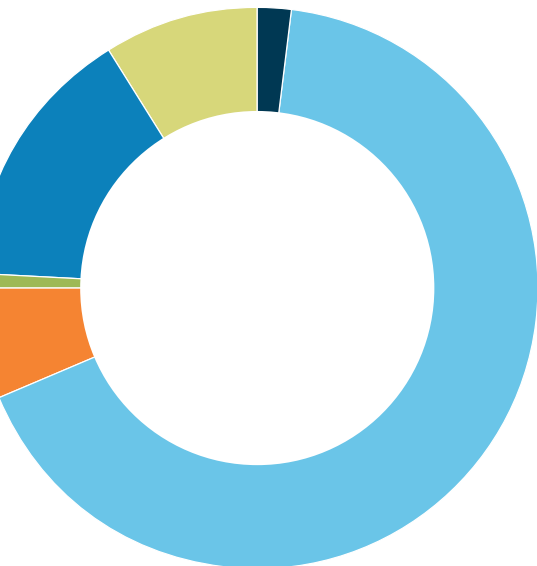
At the Annual Meeting in September, Elizabeth Wetherbee Klein was elected Chair of the Board of Directors and Laura Dudley, PhD, BCBA-D, LABA, was elected Vice Chair. Klein, a Southborough resident and marketing consultant, has been on NECC's Board since 2018 and has held leadership roles in various local and national organizations. Dr. Dudley, an assistant clinical professor at Northeastern University, has over 20 years of experience working with children with autism and co-created NECC's ACE® ABA Software System.

Additionally, NECC welcomed two new Board members: David Castellani, a seasoned technology leader and operating partner at Brewer Lane Ventures, and Thomas Pacheco, chief financial officer of VulcanForms with expertise in financial strategy and mergers.



# COMMUNITY AND FUNDRAISING EVENTS

This fiscal year, NECC hosted four community fundraising events and fielded teams for both the ASICS Falmouth Road Race and the Bank of America Boston Marathon®. Team NECC charity runners raised record amounts while this year's NECC 5K Walk/Run for Autism broke both fundraising and attendance numbers; in addition to our Southborough participants, we had teams participating in the NECC 5K from Cape Cod, New Hampshire, and Abu Dhabi!



- **FALMOUTH ROAD RACE**  
August 20, 2023 | **\$37,877**
- **CHILDREN OF PROMISE GALA**  
November 10, 2023 | **\$1,234,575**
- **BOSTON MARATHON**  
April 15, 2024 | **\$118,356**
- **6<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ART SHOW**  
April 25, 2024 | **\$16,365**
- **18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NECC 5K RUN/WALK FOR AUTISM**  
May 11, 2024 | **\$280,860**
- **CARLOS PLACIDO DUNKIN' GOLF CLASSIC**  
June 3, 2024 | **\$164,190**



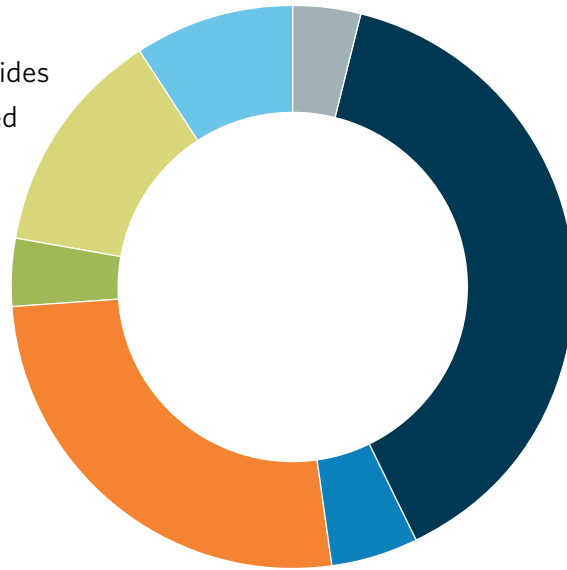
**\$2.18**  
**MILLION**  
**5,543 GIFTS | 2,898 DONORS**

## ANNUAL FUND

Supporters of NECC's Annual Fund include **current and former parents, NECC employees, corporations, foundations, local businesses, and friends**. Together, they contributed more than \$2 million, and we are grateful for every gift.

# FINANCIALS

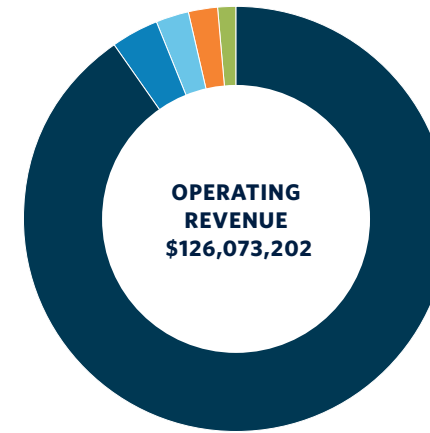
Every dollar raised through the Annual Fund provides funding for expenses beyond those covered by tuition. These include student activities, community outings, specialized technology and equipment, vocational opportunities, staff training and conference attendance, as well as our DEI initiatives.



## FY24 ANNUAL FUND ALLOCATION

- **4% | VOCATIONAL**  
Transportation, supplies
- **39% | STUDENT ACTIVITIES**  
Field day, apple picking/farm trips, dances, team-specific celebrations, community outings
- **5% | INDIVIDUAL STUDENT NEEDS**  
Specialized furniture for student/staff safety, student clothing, protective equipment for staff
- **26% | STAFF SUPPORT**  
Parent and friend-sponsored events (staff appreciation), healthy option vending machines, small reinforcers through team budgets, staff benefits and activities such as free exercise classes
- **4% | DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES**  
Consultation to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts throughout NECC
- **13% | RESEARCH AND STAFF TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**  
Conferences, staff salaries related to research, including Infant Sibling Research Project
- **9% | STUDENT EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS**  
Fitness equipment at schools and residences, playground equipment and other outdoor activity expenditures, swimsuits, art and music supplies, minor capital improvements to school and residences

## FY24 CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENT



- **TUITION | \$113,998,402**  
Day, residential, adult, day care, partner classrooms, international
- **CONSULTING | \$4,656,319**
- **ACE® TECHNOLOGY | \$3,212,744**
- **FUNDRAISING | \$2,574,105**  
Grants, events, in-kind donations and contributions, charity runners
- **OTHER | \$1,631,632**



- **PROGRAM SERVICES | \$115,595,538**  
Day, residential, adult, day care, partner classrooms, international
- **ADMINISTRATIVE | \$10,852,388**
- **FUNDRAISING, MARKETING, AND PR | \$1,411,542**



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

A.C. Dispensing Equipment, Inc.  
AAFCPAs Inc.  
Adobe  
Allen & Major Associates, Inc.  
Apex Entertainment Marlborough  
Apres Management  
Autism Speaks  
Avidia Bank  
Bay State Federal Savings Charitable Foundation  
Beacon Hill Consulting Group LLC  
Biena Snacks  
BJ's Charitable Foundation  
BJ's Wholesale Club, Inc.  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA  
BlueTriton  
Boston Harbor Wealth Advisors, LLC  
Branded Management Group, Inc.  
Brandon Properties  
Brown & Brown of Massachusetts, LLC  
Cadete Enterprises, Inc.  
Cafua Management Company  
Carrington Charitable Foundation  
Central Mass Asthma & Allergy Care  
Central One Federal Credit Union  
Centreville Bank  
CHUBB Insurance  
City Wide Facility Solutions Boston  
Colgate-Palmolive  
Comcast Business  
Constance O. Putnam Foundation  
Coretelligent  
Crunchtime  
DN Van Lines, Inc.  
Duva Distributors  
Epsilon  
Erland Construction, Inc.  
Ernst & Young  
Falconi Brothers, Inc.  
Fitts Insurance Agency, Inc.  
General Mills  
GoGo Squeez  
Greenwood Industries, Inc.  
Haba Wealth Management  
Hamilton, Brook, Smith & Renyolds, P.C.  
High Quality  
Kearney, Donovan & McGee, LLC  
Kimberly-Clark Corporation  
KPMG, LLP  
Leyton Orient F.C.  
Lisa, Poloski & Anasoulis LLP

M&T Bank  
Marcovich, Mansour & Associates, Inc.  
Metro Walls  
Mr. Handyman Central MetroWest  
My Little Buddy's Boat  
National DCP, LLC  
NCR VOYIX  
Nestle  
New England Wireless Association  
NEXT for AUTISM  
Novartis  
Operating Engineers Local 4  
Outshine Properties  
PepsiCo  
Pharmavite  
Polar Beverage  
Priority Fire and Security, Inc.  
Proficio Capital Partners  
Putnam Foundation  
Puttshack Natick  
Reliant Medical Group  
Robell Research  
Roche Bros.  
Rockland Trust Investment Management Group  
Rotary Club of Southborough  
Saxon Partners, LLC  
Simbe Robotics  
Simmons University  
State Street Corporation  
StonehamBank  
Sullivan Group Insurance  
Supersmile®  
SVN Parsons Commercial Group  
Taylor Freezer of New England, Inc.  
TBC Corporation  
The Cafaro Group  
The Clorox Company  
The Coates Group  
The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company  
The Norfolk & Dedham Group  
The VIYU Foundation  
Thurston Foods  
UKG  
UnitedHealth Group  
Vanasse & Associates  
Viyu  
Workday Inc.  
Zebra Technologies



## PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL

Three years ago, Scott Schmadeke was introduced to NECC through his neighbor, Kevin Coleman. Coleman, vice president of Ross Mortgage Company and a member of NECC's President's Council, encouraged Schmadeke to take a tour.

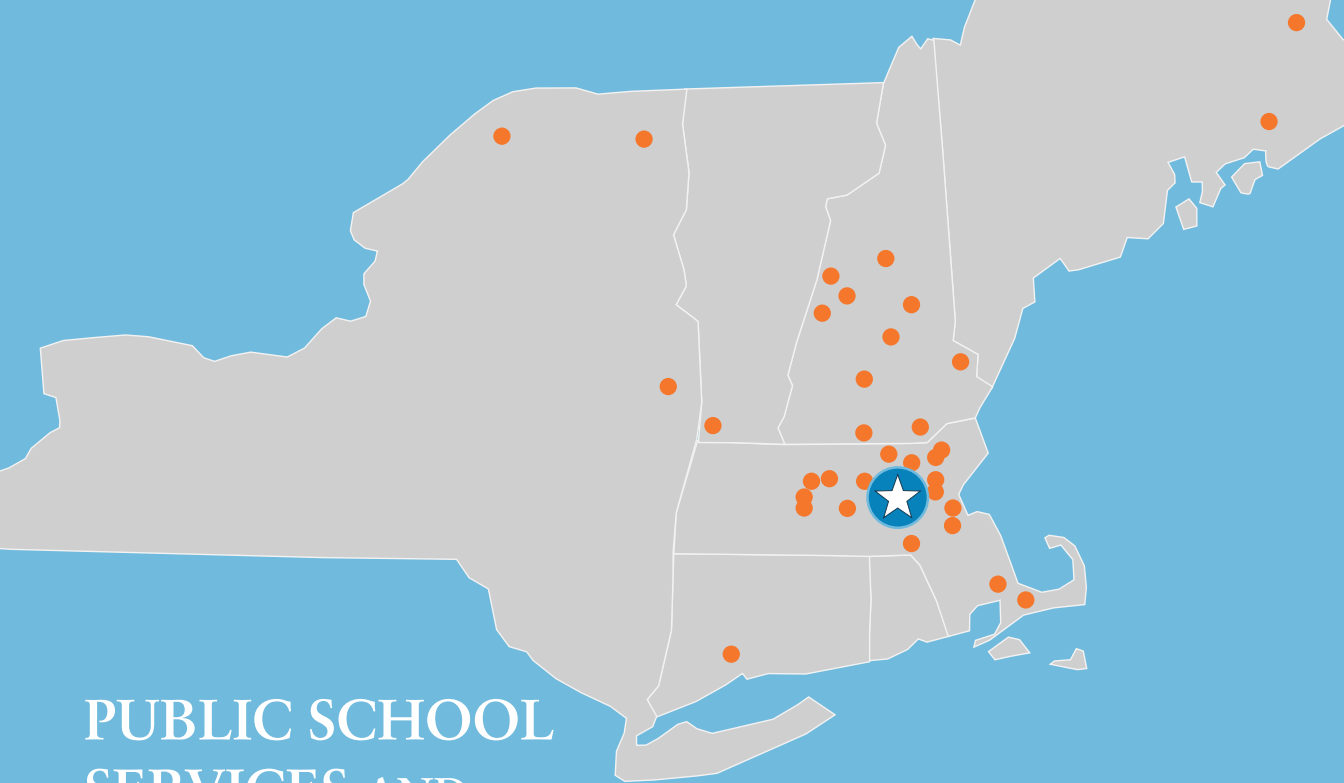
"Once you enter the doors, walk the halls, and understand the mission and purpose of NECC, you cannot resist being part of supporting the organization. That's how it all began," Schmadeke explained.

Schmadeke, senior vice president of operations for BJ's Wholesale Club, immediately joined Coleman on the President's Council. "My goal in joining the President's Council was to make an impact and become a catalyst to create more support for autism and NECC," Schmadeke said.

NECC's President's Council is a working group of business leaders whose purpose is to identify supporters who will extend NECC's philanthropic circle, secure new corporate and community partners, and amplify NECC's mission. President's Council members focus on three areas of opportunity: revenue generation, brand building, and community engagement.

Over the last few years, Council members have made a significant impact in all areas of the organization. Schmadeke's employer, BJ's Wholesale Club, has become a valuable community partner for NECC through donations of goods and supplies and event sponsorships, including as the presenting sponsor of the NECC 5K Walk/Run for Autism in May.





## PUBLIC SCHOOL SERVICES AND CONSULTING

**66** Model classrooms across New England

**316** Students enrolled in partner and cooperative classrooms

**500+** Students NECC consults to in the U.S.



## INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

It was a big year for NECC's programs in Abu Dhabi, UAE. After years of maintaining a student census of 230 Emirati children, the Mohammed bin Rashid Center for Special Education operated by The New England Center for Children (MRC-NECC) expanded to 264 students, many in the new Early Years Program (age 2.5 to 7 years). The expansion also brought 70 new team members.

Shortly thereafter, MRC-NECC was recognized by the Emirati government with the prestigious Nafis Award in recognition of our efforts to recruit and hire Emirati citizens, particularly in the education sector.

NECC's Global Consulting opened a new clinic in Masdar City (Abu Dhabi). The NECC Clinic-Abu Dhabi, which offers session-based ABA, speech and language and occupational therapy services in both English and Arabic, supports clients through school-, home-, and center-based programs. The clinic also provides vocational training for teens and young adults, with job opportunities in the community.

While NECC has been providing services in the region for decades, this new home represents important growth and the opportunity to impact many more individuals with autism. The clinic staff includes eight board-certified behavior analysts, three speech therapists, and an occupational therapist, with plans to expand.

NECC has been helping children with autism in the Middle East for more than 25 years. In addition to the NECC Clinic-Abu Dhabi, we operate a clinic in Dubai Healthcare City and a consulting practice throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).



# NECC AROUND THE GLOBE

15

Number of MRC-NECC staff who earned their Master of Science in Education (non-licensure program), the first international cohort to complete the Simmons University program through NECC

13,095

Learners served by the ACE® ABA Software System in 11 countries

264

Number of students enrolled at MRC-NECC in Abu Dhabi

112

Individuals served across clinics and global consulting

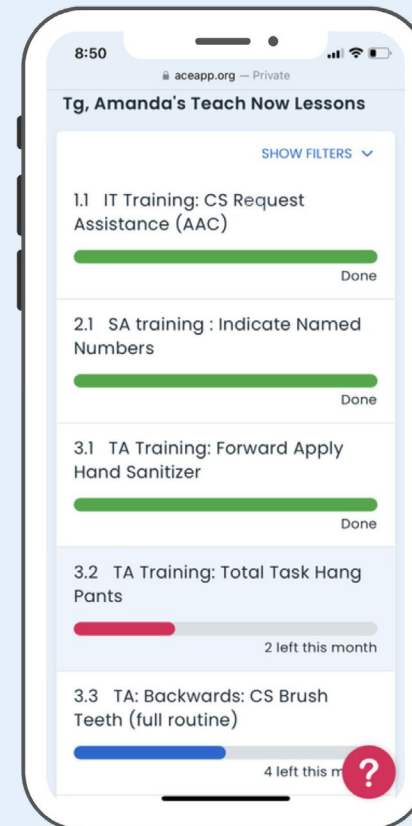
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Countries where NECC has onsite programs (United States, Qatar, and the UAE)

## ACE® IMPROVEMENTS

In the past year, the ACE® ABA Software System introduced significant updates, focusing on improving the user experience for educators and behavior analysts. Two major tools, Teach Now and the Behavior module, underwent important upgrades to streamline workflows and enhance data collection capabilities.

The Teach Now feature, a vital tool for teachers, was revamped to simplify data entry and lesson management. This included reducing the number of screens needed to complete tasks and improving visibility of key information. As a result, teachers can now make informed decisions faster, leading to improved educational outcomes. User adoption increased, with over 92% of accounts now utilizing the updated platform.



Similarly, the Behavior module received a user-friendly redesign, allowing ACE users to better manage and track student behavior through visualization tools and workflows. One of the tables helps users collect and assess data across hours and staff more effectively. Feedback on these changes has been positive regarding the new hourly table and the addition of the percentage change on the main dashboard. Currently, over 71% of accounts utilize the Behavior Module.

These updates have not only increased the overall usage of ACE's tools but have also made a meaningful difference in how educators and specialists engage with their students' progress. Customer feedback highlights a deep appreciation for the new features, with many noting how much easier the systems are to use.

This combination of technical improvements and user satisfaction shows ACE's commitment to continuous innovation in support of educators and students alike.

# EFS PARENT WORKSHOPS

At NECC, students aren't the only ones who receive support. The Enrollment and Family Support (EFS) team regularly hosts information sessions designed for parents and guardians of current students, which are led by NECC clinicians and tailored to caregivers' needs. Topics covered in these sessions are curated based on direct feedback from families and range from external communications to specialized areas such as reading progress reports, feeding, and toileting.

"Our goal is to continue to offer opportunities for families to learn from experts at NECC about specific topics that they may encounter along their journey as a parent of a child with autism," said Kyla McHaffie, MS, BCBA, LABA, director of EFS. "It is a great opportunity to meet other families, share experiences, and learn from one another."

This year, EFS also collaborated with Aline Atallah, MSc, BCBA, from MRC-NECC to offer Family Wellness Workshops, which were designed to equip caregivers with essential tools to care for their child while also taking care of themselves. From mindfulness exercises to personalized routines, the goal was for caregivers to learn new self-care strategies to integrate into their daily lives.

EFS plans to continue expanding these resources, fostering community and resilience among caregivers.

# EFS PARENT ACTIVITIES

In addition to organizing trainings and workshops to support parents and caregivers, EFS also coordinates volunteer opportunities for them to remain engaged and involved with NECC. The Parents/Caregivers Organization meets three times a year with EFS and coordinates staff appreciation events and treats.



**13**

workshops focused on ABA, wellness, & special topics



**10**

family swim sessions



**60**

families involved



**114**

staff welcome bags



**105**

tins of chocolate



**2**

ice cream truck visits for students & staff



# ON-SITE HEARING TESTS

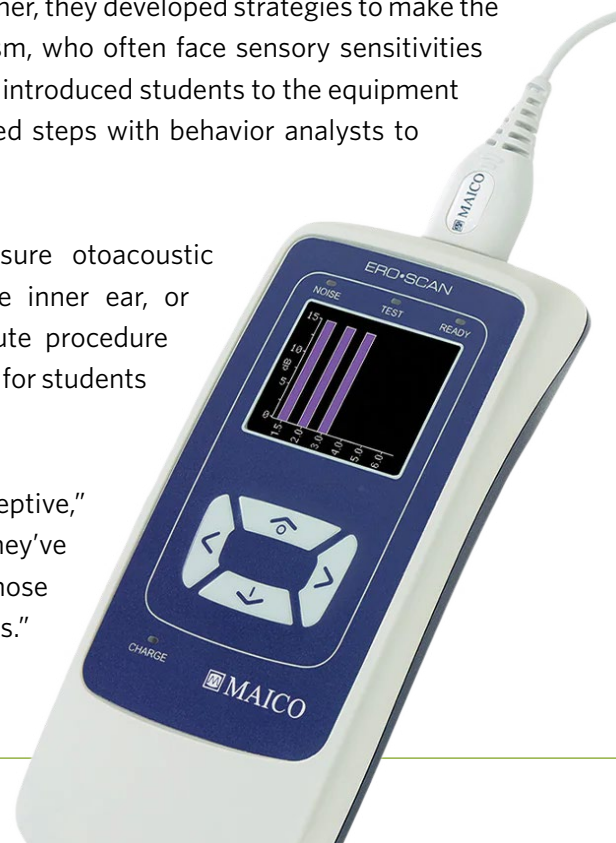
For children with autism, medical procedures like hearing screenings can be challenging. In Massachusetts, these screenings are mandatory for all students, previously requiring a day-long trip to Boston for NECC staff and students. To reduce the stress of this process, the Speech and Language Department now performs these screenings onsite at NECC Southborough using a less invasive test.

“Screening onsite reduces travel, uses fewer staff resources, and improves the student’s experience with a simple medical procedure,” explained Beth Bellone, MS, CCC-SLP, BCBA, LABA, director of speech and language services.

Bellone highlighted the importance of collaboration between nurses, speech pathologists, and behavior analysts. Together, they developed strategies to make the process smoother for students with autism, who often face sensory sensitivities and communication challenges. The team introduced students to the equipment visually and, for some, created customized steps with behavior analysts to increase comfort.

The screenings use a device to measure otoacoustic emissions (OAEs) to test how well the inner ear, or cochlea, functions. This quick, two-minute procedure allows NECC to reserve hospital visits only for students needing further evaluation.

“Our students have been incredibly receptive,” Bellone said. “With minimal training, they’ve shown patience and participation, even those who typically struggle with medical settings.”



# FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Professional development is a cornerstone of staff growth and engagement. Not only does NECC offer staff free and discounted on-site graduate programs and opportunities to get involved in research, but we also provide a wide range of trainings to help staff enhance their skills, stay invested in their roles, and positively impact students.

Our Professional Development Department provides comprehensive training across multiple areas, including a 64-hour orientation for new staff, diversity and inclusion sessions, special topics for professional credits, and ongoing skill-building refreshers. Leadership development is also emphasized as a way to cultivate the next generation of educators and researchers.

This past year, eight of the nine continuing education lessons offered were also available for credit for educators with a professional license, and more than 80% of current direct-care staff participated in the special topic sessions. In addition, hundreds of staff presented research at conferences across the globe, including ABAI, APBA, BABAT, and the inaugural Profound Autism Summit in Boston.



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH A GLOBAL REACH

**2,052** Individuals trained through ABA+/RBT (*cumulative*)

**1,816** Master's degrees awarded through our on-site graduate programs (*cumulative*)

**333** Articles published (*cumulative*)

**2,662** Research presentations (*cumulative*)

**22** Countries presented in (*cumulative*)

**135** Staff attended BABAT in October 2023

**17** Attended APBA in March 2024

**32** Attended ABAI in May 2024

**30** Live CE events during the 23-24 Academic Year

**3** DEI trainings promoting inclusive leadership

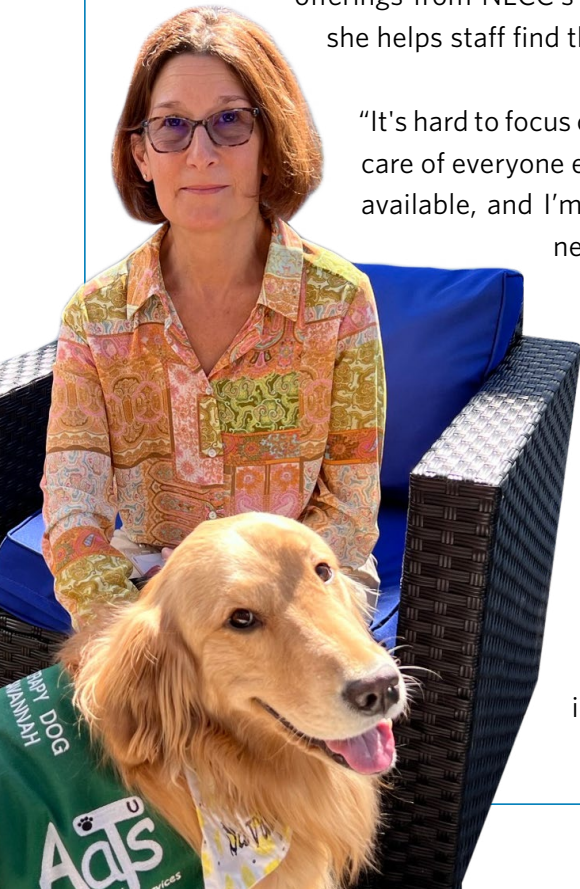
# SUPPORTING PERSONAL GROWTH

Nurturing personal growth is a core value, and investing in our employees' well-being is key to retention. During the last year, NECC offered a robust schedule of activities to ensure that all team members felt supported, appreciated, connected, and recharged.

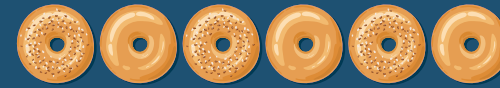
Recognizing the growing need for structured wellness support, NECC hired a Total Reward Specialist, Robin Brandes, who is available as a wellness coach and resource for supervisors and direct-care staff. Her role complements numerous offerings from NECC's employee assistance program (CompEAP) and she helps staff find the support they need.

"It's hard to focus on your own wellbeing when you're trying to take care of everyone else," said Brandes. "We have so many resources available, and I'm here to help guide staff to the resources they need to take care of themselves."

Since her arrival, Brandes has focused on the holistic well-being of staff, bringing monthly chair massages and farmer's market visits, as well as on-site fitness and yoga classes. She has also encouraged staff to take advantage of the financial well-being resources available to them and works with NECC's seven employee-led Employee Resource Groups that play a pivotal role in creating opportunities for improved community among staff.



## STAFF EVENTS BY THE NUMBERS



**1,728 BAGELS**  
ACROSS 4 BAGEL DAYS

**700** SNOW CONES SERVED  
ACROSS 2 DAYS OF  
KONA ICE TRUCK ONSITE



**1,200 TICKETS**  
TO SPORTS AND  
ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS

**104**  
FITNESS CLASSES  
FOR STAFF 

**411** STAFF AND GUESTS  
WHO ATTENDED  
THE TWO MENDON  
TWIN DRIVE-IN  
MOVIE NIGHTS

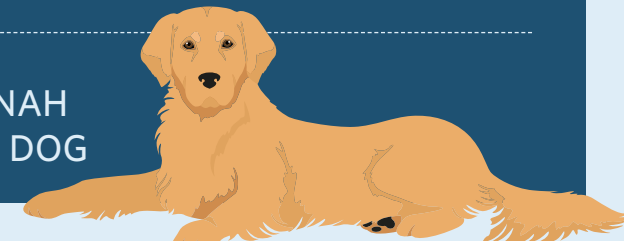


**8 EVENTS**  
HOSTED BY ERGS TO FOSTER  
COMMUNITY AND INCLUSIVITY



**157** STAFF RECOGNIZED AT  
QUARTERLY LUNCHEON

**4 VISITS** FROM SAVANNAH  
THE THERAPY DOG



# Thank You

TO THE MANY SUPPORTERS OF NECC WHO ALLOW US TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT TO OUR INSPIRATIONAL STUDENTS.



The New England Center  
for Children®  
*Autism Education and Research*

**ACE**®  
ABA Software System

**ABAplus**®  
Online learning from  
The New England Center for Children®