

## **TEC: Its Past, Present and Future**

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Acts (ESEA)* of the 1960s emphasized equal access to education and established high standards of achievement and accountability for all students. At the time, one important element of that *ESEA* legislation provided federal funding to target students with disabilities. Over time, the *ESEA Acts* have been amended but some of its main tenets are still operational, among them: authorized support of regional centers for education of handicapped children, model centers and services for deaf and blind children, recruitment of personnel and dissemination of information on education of the handicapped.

With this as a backdrop, a group of superintendents from towns such as Norwood, Needham, Weston, Wayland, applied for and received a federal grant in 1968 to establish a regional collaborative for the purpose of educating children with special needs. This was the beginning of The Education Cooperative (TEC).

When Massachusetts Chapter 40 Section 4E was passed in the early 1970s, collaboratives fell under state, not federal, jurisdiction and TEC operated its programs through a fiscal agent structure with Wellesley acting as the fiscal agent.

In 1974, the Board of Education initiated and sponsored a legislative proposal to clarify the governance and fiscal structure of collaboratives. A separate trust fund was to be managed by the collaborative board and a treasurer for each collaborative was to be appointed. The written agreement that formed the basis of the collaborative required the approval of all of the participating school committees as well as the Commissioner of Education. Later in 1974, TEC hired its first Executive Director, Roger Ritch. Three years later, in 1977, yet more legislation required that all educational collaboratives revise their agreements to provide for a separate governing board. In 1980, having established an operating agreement approved by all member school districts and the Commissioner of Education, TEC began operation as an independent collaborative, no longer under the fiscal aegis of Wellesley.

Since its inception and early direction under Roger Ritch, TEC has profited from and thrived under the capable leadership of three others: John Connolly, Ed.D., Nancy Sullivan and, now, Elizabeth McGonagle. TEC's initial mission to provide services for students with special learning challenges and needs continues to be the driving force in its operation. The collaborative, however, has broadened its mission and, today, also provides professional development and licensure training for educators, cooperative purchasing services, and a well-regarded high school internship program. TEC's most recent initiative is the creation of the TEC Connections Academy (TECCA), a DESE-approved Commonwealth Virtual School, scheduled to open in fall of 2014. It is a fully accredited, tuition-free public virtual school that serves students, K-12, across Massachusetts. TEC continues to evolve its mission and practice to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of education.