

LEARNING
FOR Life



FY20 Annual Report



Southeastern Massachusetts
Educational Collaborative

25 Russells Mills Rd
Dartmouth MA 02748
T: (508) 998-5599
F: (508) 998-5959
www.smecollaborative.org

Attached, you will find the FY20 annual report for the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC), covering the period of July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020. This report contains all of the regulatory reporting requirements of MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E, including summarized information about the programs and services offered by the Collaborative during the prior fiscal year, a discussion of the cost effectiveness of each program and service offered by SMEC, information regarding our governance and administration and a discussion of the progress made toward reaching our agency's stated goals and objectives. In addition, our FY20 Audited Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's report are attached and incorporated into this annual report.

During the period covered by the FY20 annual report, the Covid-19 pandemic shook the world and changed our way of living and providing education and support. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency and closed all schools beginning on March 16, 2020. School buildings would remain closed for the remainder of the school year and all instruction would be provided remotely, whether through online virtual learning activities or by paper and pencil activities delivered to students' homes. As an Educational Collaborative serving some of the state's most vulnerable student and adult populations, SMEC was quick to create lessons, resources and services that could be delivered remotely, despite a great deal of uncertainty, ever changing expectations and regulations, and many obstacles in our path. Within the first week we had provided our families with resources for food, technology, learning materials and information and shared many of our remote learning resources with area school districts. Our staff pulled together to share best practices and to develop a plan for each of our programs to deliver services to the greatest extent possible under the circumstances. As the spring progressed and it became apparent that this model would stay in place until June, we expanded our synchronous instruction, and, in some cases, in-home services, to ensure that our students and adult consumers were safe, connected, and progressing rather than regressing.

During this year like no other, SMEC continued to implement the goals that had been developed through a prior Strategic Planning process that set forth our path of growth and advancement for a five year period. We also initiated a new Strategic Planning cycle with focus groups, brainstorming activities, a SWOT analysis and satisfaction surveys. Despite the challenges created by the Covid-19 shut down, we were able to complete the framework of a Strategic Plan to become effective in FY21. We are excited to move forward during FY21 and beyond as we work on implementing a new set of goals and continually improving our programs and services.

We encourage anyone reading this report to use the data contained herein as a brief overview of SMEC and an idea of where our agency may be heading in the future. This report provides a synopsis and fulfills a legislative requirement but much more information can be found by visiting our website or by contacting any of our program locations or our administrative office(s) to request more information or to set up a personal tour or visit. We'd love to show you around and answer any questions you may have. The best way to get to know SMEC is to speak to those who choose to be part of it. We are proud of our agency and look forward to sharing it with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine S. Cooper".

Catherine S. Cooper, M.Ed., JD
Executive Director



Contents

Governance	4
Mission	5
Objectives.....	6
Progress	7
Financials	10
Programs	12
Summary	15



SMEC Governance

SMEC membership during FY20 was comprised of the school districts of Acushnet, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Marion, Mattapoisett, New Bedford, Rochester, Old Rochester Regional and Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School. Each of these school committees appointed a member to serve on the SMEC Board for the 2019-2020 school year as follows:

Board of Directors 2019-2020

Sarah Gomes, Acushnet
Michelle Smith, Vice Chairman, Marion
Carole Clifford, Mattapoisett
Anne Fernandes, Rochester
Donna McKenna, Fairhaven
Christopher Oliver, Chairman, Dartmouth
Christopher Cotter, New Bedford
Suzanne Tseki, Old Rochester Regional
Michael Shea, Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School

Leadership

In addition to the Board of Directors, the 2019-2020 SMEC leadership team also included the following:

SMEC Administrative Team

Catherine Cooper, Executive Director
Christopher Haraden, Director of Business Services
Michelle Goettlich, Student Services Director
Nelson Cordeiro, SAIL Program Director
Sherri Tetrault, Director of Communication and PD
Sean Mitchell, Asst. SAIL Program Director
Audrey Rodrigues, Human Resources Manager
Kimberly Wilmot, Asst. Student Services Director
Sharon Donovan, ADH Program Director
Jen Houde, Asst. ADH Program Director

Treasurer

John Nunes

2019-2020 Steering Committee Members

The SMEC steering committee is comprised of the special education directors from each member district and serves in an advisory capacity to the Administrative Team:

Kimberli Bettencourt, Acushnet
Elizabeth Townson, Dartmouth
Diane Sullivan, Fairhaven
Michael Nelson, Marion, Mattapoisett, Rochester and Old Rochester Regional
Sandra Ford, New Bedford
Erin Ptaszewski, Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical HS

SMEC Mission, Guiding Principles and Objectives

SMEC's mission statement, principles and objectives are identified in our Articles of Agreement.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC) provides high quality programs and services for all children and adults who need specialized instruction or support. SMEC utilizes a team approach to meet the needs of the whole individual in order to achieve greater personal independence and success.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- We believe that all people have strengths, abilities and gifts and must be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their level of need.
- We ensure that support and services are guided by an individual's evolving needs, goals and preferences.
- We assist each individual to participate and contribute meaningfully to their community through school, work, community service and recreation.
- We believe that all individuals have the ability to learn within a safe, nurturing environment and with the appropriate support.
- We will safeguard each individual's right to privacy, dignity and respect.
- We believe that parents/guardians and families are important advocates and teachers.
- We believe that through collaboration and teamwork we strengthen the resources of school districts and adult agencies to provide the very best programs and services for students and adults.
- We have high expectations for the success of our students, staff, consumers, parents and the community.
- We believe that an effective organization is diverse in perspective, culture and experience.



***As indicated in the Collaborative's Articles of Agreement,
the Objectives of the Collaborative shall be:***

To develop and administer, as directed by the Collaborative Board of Directors, programs, supports and services which best serve the interests of the Collaborative and its Member Committees;

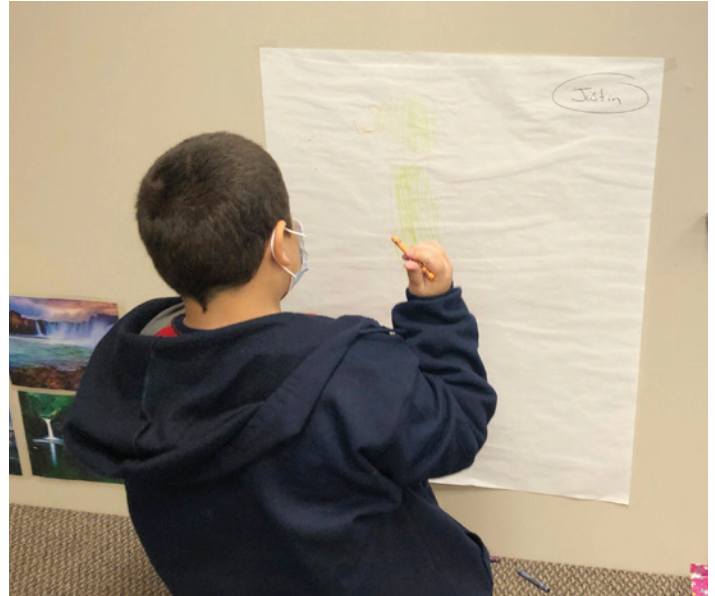
To provide a vehicle for Member Committees to identify and resolve issues of a common and regional nature; and

To provide professional development opportunities for educators, parents and related services personnel.

Progress Toward Meeting Our Mission and Objectives

SMEC provides programs and services for individuals with special needs ages three to adult. Our programs have a strong focus on community integration and independence. Student services and programs are available at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels. Students who transition into adult services at age twenty-two and who are eligible to receive adult service funding through DDS, MA Health, MRC or MCB have the option to choose SMEC as their adult service provider. Over 95% of our eligible students in this category choose to stay with SMEC when they turn twenty-two.





Offering high quality programs requires us to continually examine our facilities to ensure that they meet the needs of our students, consumers and staff. Our student services programs are primarily housed in public school classrooms and we have been fortunate to have a multitude of modern, high quality and spacious classrooms from which to choose. Expansion of our programs requires us to continually search for appropriate space and we have issued several RFPs in that effort.

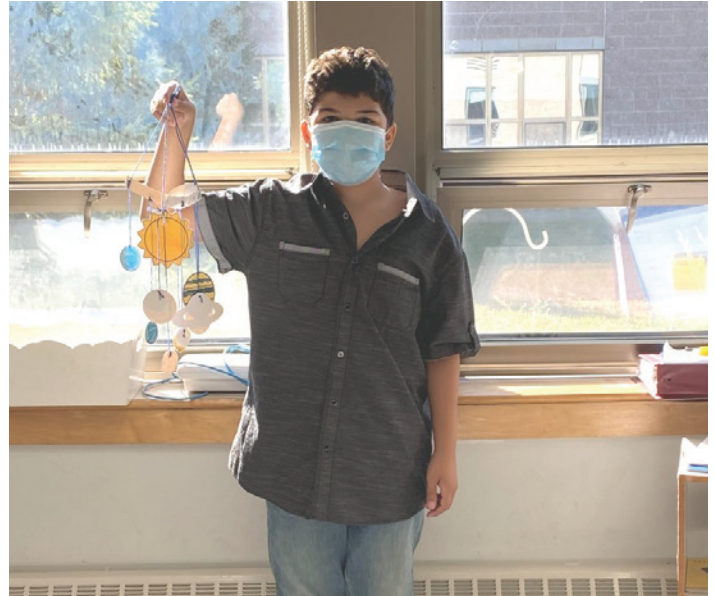
During FY20, the Fall River Public Schools petitioned the SMEC Board of Directors for membership. After receiving approval from the SMEC Board, the Fall River School Committee and all current Collaborative member districts, the SMEC Articles of Agreement were amended, approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and signed by Commissioner Riley effective July 1, 2020.

Our FY20 professional development offerings primarily focused on assisting teachers, school staff and adult service staff to instruct and assist all learners. In addition to providing in-service training for our own staff on CPR/First Aid, Mandated Reporting, Civil Rights, CPI and PMT non-violent crisis intervention, RBT and Cultural Proficiency/Recognizing Implicit Bias, SMEC provided a wide variety of professional development opportunities to 395 faculty and staff from 29 school districts throughout Southeastern Massachusetts during the year. In addition, we sent our own training consultants to go out into districts

to provide onsite staff training for many additional district educators on the topics of Leading Educational Access Project (LEAP), Executive Functioning and De-Escalation.

Courses offered for outside educators at SMEC's training site included Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) instruction including endorsement courses for both regular and vocational educators as well as workshops leading to PDPs in SEI required for DESE relicensure, an Overview of Student Disabilities, Transition Planning, Initial and Refresher courses in CPI Non-Violent Crisis Prevention, Mindfulness in the Classroom, Restorative Circles of Justice, the Great Paraprofessional, IEP Writing Strategies, Educator Mentoring, Social Emotional Learning, and a content specific workshop for Fine Arts teachers. In addition, when schools closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we offered instruction in Teletherapy, Google Classroom Instruction and Effective Online Schooling.

In addition to staff training, SMEC also offered workshops for parents and guardians on topics such as Mindfulness, Relaxation Techniques, Transition Planning, Financial Planning, and tips for using various online learning platforms, as well as an online SAT math preparation course held in the spring for high school students. We also held several family engagement events throughout the year including movie nights, a family appreciation spaghetti dinner and a wellness walkathon.



SMEC is a participant in the Southeast Collaborative Regional Organization (SCRO) and collaborated with other SCRO members to provide training and resources to districts from throughout the southeastern part of the state and also cohosted the Special Education Symposium, a two-day annual event focusing on student mental health in December, 2019. The SCRO serves as the MA Organization of Educational Collaborative's (MOEC's) regional group representing the eight Educational Collaboratives in the southeastern part of the state.

SMEC is one of only two regional sites in Massachusetts authorized to administer the Parapro examination through the Educational Testing Service. Employment as a paraprofessional in Title One schools and most other public school districts in Massachusetts requires either a minimum of an Associate's Degree/Equivalent or a passing score on the Parapro assessment. SMEC offers both the test administration and an optional Parapro test preparation workshop. 94 individuals took the Parapro test through SMEC during FY20 prior to the shutdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through implementation of our objectives over the course of the year, in addition to focusing on ensuring that our programs are located in suitable facilities, we also prioritized goals addressing the strengthening of our student and adult services, quality staff retention, increasing parent engagement and public awareness of SMEC and its services, addressing

internal organizational and developmental issues including improving overall communication, increasing our resource development capacity and maintaining strong leadership, governance and financial capacity. The unprecedented school shut down in March of 2020 shifted our priorities during the last third of the 2019-2020 school year to ensure that our students were receiving the most robust remote learning opportunities possible to prevent regression, enhance academic achievement and maintain a social connection to their peers and teaching staff.

Other infrastructure improvements, such as acquiring and maintaining a safe and reliable van pool, updating our technology infrastructure and attracting and retaining high quality staff, are ongoing priorities and built into the administrative decision making process for all programs. The Collaborative maintains ongoing communication with our districts and local state agencies to ensure that we are targeting our efforts to meet their ever changing needs as well as ensuring compliance and readiness for all DESE and other state agency mandates.

FY20 General Statistics

Years in Service:	44
Employees:	224 ¹
Member Districts:	9
Districts Served in 2019-2020:	32 ²
Program Sites:	10
Students Served in or by SMEC School Programs or Services in FY20:	356 ³
Adult (Age 22+) Consumers Served FY20:	149

FY20 Revenue

Tuition and Services Member:	\$4,218,121
Tuition and Services Non-Member:	\$ 587,629
DDS Contracts:	\$3,646,108
MCB Contracts:	\$ 147,225
MassHealth/Medicaid:	\$ 908,953
DESE CACFP:	\$ 41,665
Professional Development:	\$ 91,255
Grants:	\$ 0
Investment Income:	\$ 1,504
Self Pay:	\$ 905
Miscellaneous:	\$ 8,538
TOTAL FY20 REVENUE	\$9,651,903⁴

Adult Service Expenditures

FY20 Amount Expended on Services for Students/Consumers Age 22+	
SAIL Program (DDS/MCB Contracts):	\$3,367,605
ADH Program (Medicaid/MA Health):	\$1,085,245
FY20 TOTAL ADULT SERVICE EXPENSES:	\$4,452,850⁵

¹ Includes full and part-time employees as of 1/1/20.

² Based on LEA student programmatic responsibility for services as well as professional development provided to district staff.

³ Includes all SMEC program and district based services. Does not include students receiving transportation services only.

⁴ Based on FY20 Independently Audited Financial Statements. Does not include MTRS intergovernmental on behalf payments.

⁵ FY20 Independent Audit Report; exclusive of administrative and overhead cost.

Cost Savings to School Districts:

Average FY20 MA Private Ch. 766 Day School Special Education Daily Tuition Rate:	\$378.47/Day ⁶
FY20 SMEC Daily Tuition 180 Day Standard School Day Program:	\$249/Day
Average Local Private Agency Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT):	\$85-\$125+/hour
FY20 SMEC Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT):	\$73/hour ⁷

Cost savings to districts are realized by sharing resources regionally, utilizing district owned facilities to house Collaborative programs when possible, sharing agency administrative and indirect costs between the Collaborative's adult services departments and student services departments and having district representatives guide our program and service development. Exact savings figures are difficult to quantify, however a comparison of the average private day school tuition of \$378.47 per day versus the standardized FY20 SMEC program tuition of \$249 per day for all of our 180 day/school day programs indicates significant average annual savings of \$23,304.60 per student as does a comparison of a range of contractual service costs offered by private agencies in the geographic area against the cost to districts to access the same therapeutic services through SMEC. If SMEC programs and services were not available, districts would undoubtedly be forced to utilize these higher cost private programs and services. Our programs serve students with low incidence special needs from multiple districts allowing the districts to share the costs of operating a high quality specialized program for several students instead of each district funding and operating an in-district program for one or two students. In addition, services provided by the Collaborative have a value added component in that we provide services specifically tailored to the needs and requests of our districts and students thereby

reducing costs for certain amenities that may be included in the services offered by private providers but not necessarily required to provide a high quality program or targeted services to address specific district and students' needs.

Further cost savings are realized by operating programs within our local cities and towns thereby significantly reducing special education transportation costs and length of student trips. Cost savings varies based on route and competitive bidding quotes from private vendors. Similarly, utilizing surplus district classroom space to house collaborative programs reduces program overhead, which lowers tuition costs for all districts utilizing the program while providing a modest source of revenue for the host district.

Lastly, offering professional development on a regional basis allows districts to offer high quality professional development to their faculty and staff that might not be possible if each district, particularly the smaller districts, were required to fund and arrange courses or workshops on an individual basis. Particularly at a time when district professional development funding has been reduced and is primarily targeted toward meeting a host of new and additional state and federal mandates, targeted professional development for lower incidence or specialty staff would likely not occur if it weren't done on a regional basis through the Collaborative.

⁶ www.mass.gov/osdFY20 data for private day school placements listed as "day" programs in FY20; average of private day school FY20 daily tuition rates.

⁷ FY20 SMEC member rate for hourly therapy services. Does not include contractual staffing FTEs which are staff specific.

⁸ No direct program comparison is asserted. Cost savings calculated by difference in average daily rates x 180 days.

FY20 Program Descriptions



SMEC Primary Language Program

The SMEC Primary Language Program, located at the Rochester Memorial School, serves students in grades 1-6 with significant language delays and autism spectrum disorders. Staffed by a special education teacher(s), speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, consulting BCBA and paraprofessionals, the program offers intensive, language based programming with a small staff/student ratio and opportunity for inclusive activities within the host building. School year and part-time summer programming options are available.

SMEC Integrated Services Program II

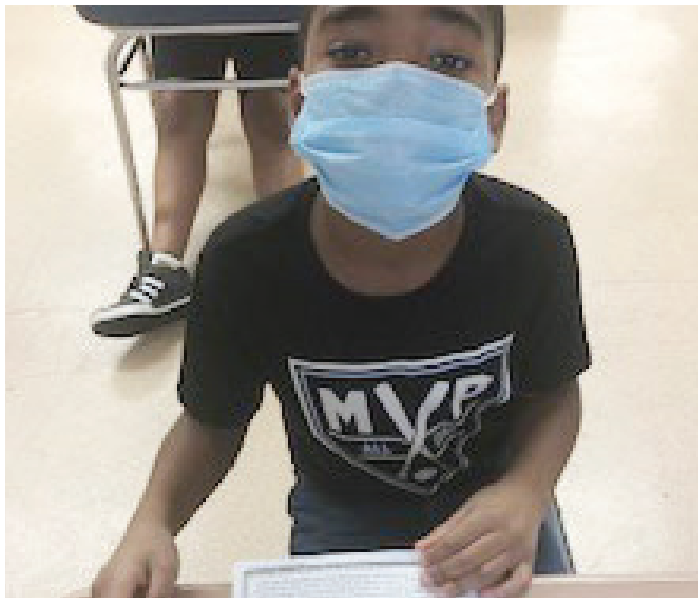
The SMEC Integrated Services Program, with classrooms in FY20 located at the Old Rochester Regional High School in Mattapoisett and Dartmouth High School in Dartmouth, serves students in grades 9-12 with significant social and language delays and autism spectrum disorders. It provides a continuum of services for students who have been deemed by their IEP teams to require a substantially separate classroom with a small staff/student ratio at the high school level. Services are provided by a special education teacher, paraprofessionals, an occupational therapist, physical therapist, BCBA consultant, school adjustment counselor and a speech language pathologist. School year and part-time summer programming options are available.

SMEC Alternative Learning Classroom I

The SMEC ALC I program, located at the Ford Middle School in Acushnet, serves students in grades 5-8 with social/emotional, behavioral and learning disabilities. Students are served in a substantially separate classroom with a small student/staff ratio and inclusion opportunities. Services are provided by a special education teacher, reading specialist, paraprofessional, speech pathologist, occupational and physical therapists as needed and licensed mental health counselor. School year and part-time summer programming options are available.

SMEC Alternative Learning Classroom II

The SMEC ALC II program is located at Dartmouth High School, serving students in grades 9-12 with social/emotional, behavioral and learning disabilities. Students are served in a substantially separate classroom with a small student/staff ratio and inclusion opportunities. Services are provided by a special education teacher, paraprofessionals, a licensed mental health counselor, speech pathologist, occupational therapist and physical therapists as needed as well as a consulting BCBA and employment development coordinator.



Therapeutic Learning Center

The Therapeutic Learning Center (TLC) is a DESE licensed public day school program in New Bedford. Serving students in grades 1-5 with significant social/emotional disabilities and trauma backgrounds, the TLC offers a therapeutic milieu with a high staff to student ratio and specialized support. Services are provided by licensed special education teachers, paraprofessionals, a licensed school adjustment counselor, a BCBA, school nurse, OT, PT and SLP. School year and part-time summer programming options are available.

Transitional Services

SMEC offers transitional services to students ages 18-21 with developmental disabilities. Student services include job development, employment skills training and support, life skills/ADL instruction, social/community skills development and case management. Instruction is community based with classroom and kitchen space available at the historic Tripp School building in Fairhaven. Staffing includes special education teachers, paraprofessionals, a speech pathologist, occupational and physical therapists, job developer, job coaches and transitional/vocational specialist. Services are available on a full-time, part-time or extended day/extended year basis. Job coaching is available seven days per week, year round.

The Multidisciplinary Learning Center

SMEC's Multidisciplinary Learning Center is an elementary program serving students in grades 1-5 with significant physical or intellectual disabilities and/or medical fragility. An experienced special education teacher, CNA Paraprofessionals and an RN create a safe, supportive learning environment for students with multi-disabilities. Therapeutic services are provided by an OT, PT and SLP. The MLC program offers a 180 day program with a part-time 5 week summer component. The program is located in a public elementary school building in Mattapoisett and accepts referrals from all school districts.

Supporting Adults for Inclusive Living (SAIL) program

SMEC's SAIL program serves individuals over the age of 22 who have been deemed eligible for adult service funding through the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the MA Commission for the Blind (MCB). SMEC is a qualified state provider for employment support, residential support, community day support and individual support services. SAIL services operate year round. Funding for the SAIL program is primarily provided through state contracts with DDS and MCB. Biannual licensure and compliance audits are conducted by DDS.



SMEC Adult Day Health (ADH) Program

SMEC's ADH program provides a continuum of services for individuals over the age of 22 who require daily supervision, activities and case management. The ADH program supplements the services provided through SMEC's SAIL program. The ADH program operates year-round and is currently funded through Medicaid/MassHealth and licensed by the Department of Public Health (DPH) with reimbursement for hot lunches provided through the DESE's CACFP program.

Ancillary Services

SMEC provides specialized staffing and therapeutic services to school districts throughout our region. SMEC's speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, PTAs, COTAs, SLPAs, BCBA and ELL teachers provide therapeutic, evaluation and consultation services to students and staff in member and non-member districts, vocational and charter schools throughout the region on a contractual basis. In addition, our vocational specialist offers transitional/vocational assessment services to students referred for evaluation by their LEA.

Professional Development

SMEC offers a variety of professional development activities for educators from member and non-member districts throughout the year. SMEC is one of the few DESE qualified providers of Sheltered English Immersion endorsement classes for all teachers, including vocational teachers, and administrators.

While the Covid shut down reduced the number of PD activities we were able to offer in the spring, we did offer some sessions online during May and June of 2020. In FY20, 395 educators from 29 public school districts, private schools and Educational Collaboratives took part in SMEC PD activities.

Transitional/Vocational Assessments

SMEC's Transitional/Vocational Specialist utilizes the McCarron-Dial Evaluation System along with companion assessments to provide a comprehensive transitional/vocational evaluation for students ages 15-21. Students are referred for such evaluations by the LEA based on Team recommendations.

Parapro Assessment

94 paraprofessionals or aspiring paraprofessionals sat for the Parapro examination at SMEC between July and mid-March in FY20.

Special Education Transportation

In 2019-2020, SMEC offered special education transportation services to member school districts. Cost benefit to district varies based on route and competitive bidding quotes from private vendors. During FY20, SMEC's transportation services were primarily limited to students attending SMEC programs or SMEC member districts' in-house programs.



This annual report summarizes the activities of the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting school and business closures brought unprecedented challenges to our students, staff and families. Our team rose to the challenge and put forth tremendous effort to ensure that teaching and learning continued even while we were apart.

We are very proud to serve the communities in the Southeastern corner of the Commonwealth and to be able to partner with a wonderful group of school districts and state agencies to ensure that a wide array of high quality services is available to meet the needs of all individuals and we are looking forward to many changes in FY21 and beyond that will allow us to return to in-person services and instruction so that we can provide the very best in programs and support. We welcome and encourage the readers of this report to contact us or set up a virtual visit in order to truly see and hear about the great work that is done here.

