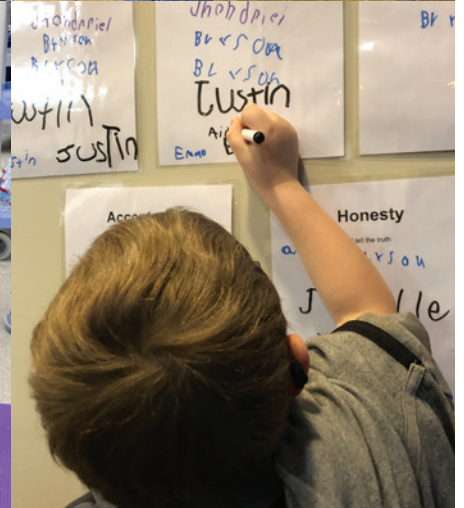


LEARNING
FOR **Life**





Southeastern Massachusetts
Educational Collaborative

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Attached, you will find the FY21 annual report for the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC), covering the period of July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. 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 FY21 Audited Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's report are attached and incorporated into this annual report.

During the period covered by the FY21 annual report, the Covid-19 pandemic had changed our way of living and providing education and support. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker had declared a state of emergency and closed all schools beginning on March 16, 2020. School buildings would remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year and all instruction would be provided remotely that first spring. 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. By July of 2020, we were one of the first to reopen our doors for our students and adult clients. Over the summer of 2020, we started gradually with a hybrid program, increasing our in-person instructional schedule to nearly full time by the start of the 2020-2021 school year and offering entirely in-person services by the spring of 2021.

Evolving state, local and federal operating guidance along with uncertain and rapidly changing revenue projections and fiscal information coming from our state contracting and governing agencies made FY21 a year of significant financial challenge. Balancing the needs of our students, consumers and staff with the realities and ambiguities of the information coming from our contracted revenue streams created a difficult business climate for a self-sustaining organization such as ours. Some tough decisions were made, but these mitigation measures allowed us to come out stronger on the other side and we look forward to a return to stability and fiscal clarity in FY22.

Despite the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic, in late 2020 we were able to complete the framework of a Strategic Plan which became effective during FY21. We are excited to move forward during FY22 and beyond as we continue to work on implementing a new set of strategic goals and continuing with our ongoing quest to enhance and expand 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,

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



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SMEC Governance

SMEC membership during FY21 was comprised of the school districts of Acushnet, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Fall River, 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 2020-2021 school year as follows:

SMEC Governance

Board of Directors 2020-2021

Jonathan Teves, 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
Thomas Khoury, Fall River
Michael Shea, Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School

Leadership

In addition to the Board of Directors, the 2020-2021 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
Kimberly Wilmot, Director of Therapeutic Services
Sherri Tetrault, Director of Communication and PD
Sean Mitchell, Asst. SAIL Program Director
Audrey Rodrigues, Human Resources Manager
Nelson Cordeiro, SAIL Program Director
Sharon Donovan, ADH Program Director
Jennifer Houde, ADH Asst. Director

Treasurer

John Nunes

2020-2021 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
Jennifer Castanhinha, Fairhaven
Michael Losche, Fall River
Craig Davidson, Marion, Mattapoisett, Rochester and Old Rochester Regional
Sandra Ford, New Bedford
Erin Ptaszenski, 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.

FY21 Objectives



*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 or MCB have the option to choose SMEC as their adult service provider. Over 90% 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.

In July of 2020, the Fall River Public Schools joined the SMEC membership after we received approval on revisions to our Articles of Agreement signed by DESE Commissioner Riley. The Fall River School Committee appointed a member to sit on the SMEC Board of Directors for FY21.

Operating schools and human services under a pandemic increased the amount of stress and anxiety amongst students, consumers, families and staff. Our FY21 professional development offerings primarily focused on assisting teachers, school staff and adult service staff to get back to in-person instruction, and to teach and assist everyone with tools to manage stress and anxiety while getting back to teaching and learning. In addition to providing in-service training for our own staff on Covid protocols/procedures, Suicide Prevention, 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 367 faculty and staff from 84 school districts, charter schools, and other Collaboratives throughout Massachusetts during the year, as well as staff from several private schools. In addition, our own training consultants provided onsite staff training and consultation for many additional district educators.

Courses offered for outside educators during FY21 included Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) instruction including endorsement courses for regular and vocational educators and administrators as well as workshops leading to PDPs in SEI as required for DESE re-licensure, an Overview of Student Disabilities, Reducing Anxiety and the Neuroscience of Anxiety, Instruction to Students with Diverse Learning Styles, IEP Writing Strategies, Parapro Preparation, Educator Mentoring, Social Emotional Learning, and Executive Functioning.

In addition to staff training, SMEC also offered workshops for parents and guardians on topics such as Social Security/Benefit Planning, Turning Adversity into Strength, Managing Challenging Behavior and tips for using various online learning platforms such as Google Classroom. We also held several family engagement events throughout the year including a wellness walkathon and virtual auction.



SMEC is a participant in the Southeast Collaborative Regional Organization (SCRO) and collaborated with other SCRO members to provide virtual training and resources to districts from throughout the southeastern part of the state. 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. 122 individuals representing 21 different districts took the Parapro test in-person at SMEC during FY21.

The Covid-19 pandemic shifted our priorities during the at the start of FY21 to reopening in-person programs and services over the summer and at the beginning of the school year to ensure that our students and consumers were receiving the most robust learning opportunities and services while maintaining student, consumer and staff safety. Through implementation of evolving and program specific Covid-19 safety protocols, we reopened all programs to in-person

instruction in July of 2020 while we focused on goals addressing personal health and safety as well as the strengthening of our student and adult services, quality staff recruitment and retention, increasing parent engagement and public awareness of SMEC and its services, ensuring that our programs are located in suitable facilities, addressing internal organizational and developmental issues including improving overall communication, increasing our resource development capacity and maintaining strong leadership, governance and financial capacity.

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.

FY21 General Statistics

Years in Service:	45
Employees:	204 ¹
Member Districts:	10
Districts Served in 2020-2021:	91 ²
Program Facility Sites:	10
Students Served in or by SMEC School Programs or Services in FY21:	397 ³
Adult (Age 22+) Consumers Served FY21:	156

FY21 Revenue

Tuition and Services Member:	\$4,172,916
Tuition and Services Non-Member:	\$431,360
DDS Contracts:	\$2,632,814
MCB Contracts:	\$147,284
MassHealth/Medicaid:	\$927,729
DESE CACFP:	\$36,611
Professional Development:	\$99,662
Intergovernmental/ Intergovernmental On Behalf	\$2,984,327
Investment Income:	\$574
Miscellaneous :	\$42,132
TOTAL FY21 REVENUE	\$11,475,409⁵

Adult Service Expenditures

FY21 Amount Expended on Services for Students/Consumers Age 22+	
SAIL Program (DDS/MCB Contracts):	\$2,654,198
ADH Program (Medicaid/MA Health):	\$1,083,630
FY21 TOTAL ADULT SERVICE EXPENSES:	\$3,737,828⁶

¹ Includes full and part-time employees on payroll during FY21. Does not include 1099/outside contractors.

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 Includes grants, self-pays, donations, insurance claim payments and other revenues not otherwise mentioned.

⁵ Based on FY21 Independently Audited Financial Statements. Includes MTRS intergovernmental on behalf payments.

Cost Savings to School Districts:

Average FY21 MA Private Ch. 766 Day School Special Education Daily Tuition Rate:	\$413.60/Day ⁷
FY21 SMEC Daily Tuition 180 Day Standard School Day Program:	\$259/Day
Average Local Private Agency Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT):	\$90-\$125+/hour
FY21 SMEC Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT):	\$75/hour ⁸

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 FY21 tuition of \$413.60 per day versus the standardized FY21 SMEC program tuition of \$259 per day for all of our 180 day/school day programs indicates significant average annual savings of \$27,828 per student⁹ 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 FY21 Independent Audit Report; exclusive of administrative and overhead cost.

⁷ www.mass.gov/osdFY21 data for private day school placements listed as "day" programs in FY21; average of private day school FY21 daily tuition rates.

⁸ FY21 SMEC member rate for hourly therapy services. Does not include contractual staffing FTEs which are staff specific.

⁹ No direct program comparison is asserted. Cost savings calculated by difference in average daily rates x 180 days.

FY21 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 I

The SMEC Integrated Services Program I, located at the Elizabeth Hastings Middle School in Fairhaven, serves students in grades 5-8 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 Integrated Services Program II

The SMEC Integrated Services Program II, located at the Old Rochester Regional High School in Mattapoisett, 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 1-8 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. Due to the pandemic, in FY21, our professional development courses were primarily offered in a virtual format with some limited in person training necessary for CPI and CPR/First Aid. In FY21, 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

122 paraprofessionals or aspiring paraprofessionals sat for the Parapro examination at SMEC between July and June in FY21.

Special Education Transportation

In 2020-2021, 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 FY21, 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, 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting effects on our schools and businesses brought unprecedented challenges to our students, staff and families. Our team rose to the challenge and put forth tremendous effort to ensure that we could safely resume in-person services, teaching and learning beginning in July of 2020 and continuing successfully throughout the year.

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.

