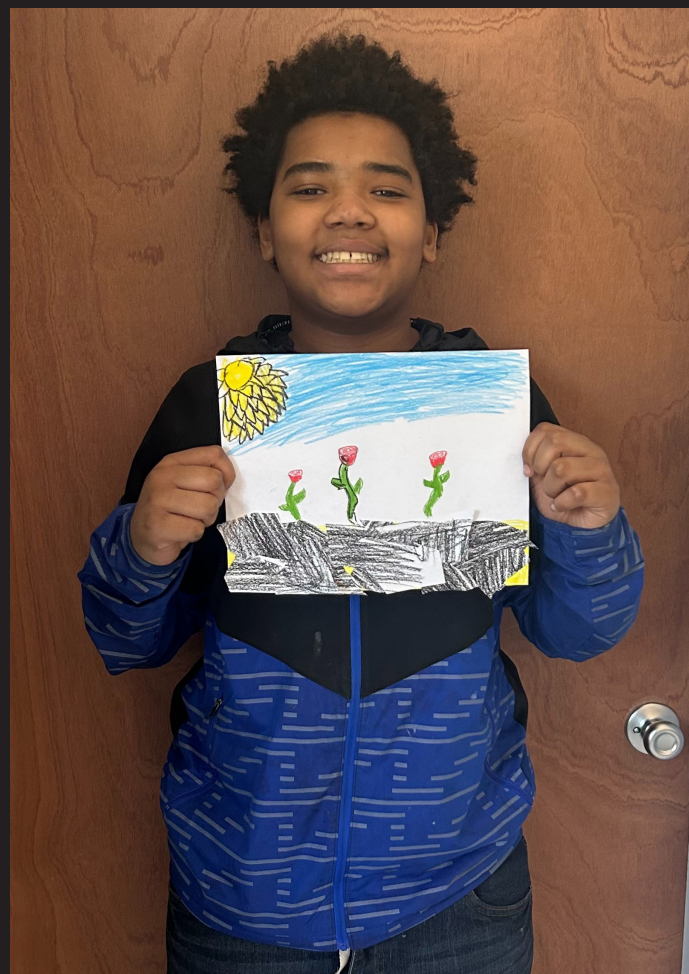


LEARNING

FOR

LIFE



Southeastern Massachusetts
Educational Collaborative

FY2023
ANNUAL REPORT

To Whom It May Concern:

Attached, you will find the FY23 annual report for the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC), covering the period of July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. 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 FY23 Independent Audited Financial Statements are attached and the relevant figures are incorporated into this annual report.

During FY23, we continued our efforts to recover from the pandemic by prioritizing the recruitment of new personnel in order to return our level of services to pre-pandemic levels and beyond. We were fortunate to add several new therapists to our team allowing us to expand our district-based staffing services and filled many direct care vacancies to allow our current roster of adult consumers to return to full program schedules. However, despite the support of our Board of Directors to increase our starting salaries and provide recruitment and retention benefits, we continue to see the impacts of the ongoing national workforce crisis which has impacted our ability to further expand our capacity to accept many of our newly referred students and adults.

After many attempts through the public procurement process over several years, toward the end of the reported fiscal year we were finally able to identify a facility to purchase in order to expand our social/emotional programs for elementary and middle school students. The purchase and occupancy of the building is anticipated to be finalized during the first quarter of FY24.

An evolving state, local and federal fiscal climate resulted in rapidly changing revenue projections throughout the year and uncertain fiscal information coming from our state contracting and governing agencies made FY23 a challenging year for budgeting. 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. SMEC continues to advocate statewide, along other Educational Collaboratives, for designated funding for Collaborative facilities, workforce stability and program enhancement and we look forward to a return to fiscal clarity in FY24.

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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General Information

The Southeastern MA Educational Collaborative (SMEC) is a public Educational Collaborative established in 1975 pursuant to the provisions of MGL Ch. 40, Section 4E. SMEC's administrative offices are located at 25 Russells Mills Road in Dartmouth. The Collaborative provides services to ten member school districts and several non-member districts from throughout Southeastern Massachusetts in addition to providing adult services through state contracts.

SMEC Governance

SMEC membership during FY23 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 2022-2023 school year as follows:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2022-2023

Jonathan Teves, Acushnet*
Michelle Smith, Vice Chairman, Marion
Tiffini Reedy, Mattapoisett
Anne Fernandes, Rochester
Donna McKenna, Fairhaven
Christopher Oliver, Chairman, Dartmouth
Christopher Cotter, New Bedford
Rosemarie Bowman, Old Rochester Regional
Sara Rodrigues, Fall River
Michael Shea, Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School

LEADERSHIP

In addition to the Board of Directors, the 2022-2023 SMEC leadership team also included the following:

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Catherine Cooper, Executive Director
Christopher Haraden, Director of Business Services
Kimberly Wilmot, Director of Student Services
Sean Mitchell, SAIL Program Director
Sherri Tetrault, Director of Communication and PD
Sharon Donovan, ADH Program Director
Audrey Rodrigues, Human Resources Manager
Charles Farrell, Payroll Manager

TREASURER

John Nunes

*Term ended April 2023.

2022-2023 STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

Kimberli Bettencourt: Acushnet

Elizabeth Townson: Dartmouth

Tanya Dawson: Fairhaven

Lori Obenchain: Fall River

Craig Davidson: Marion, Mattapoisett, Rochester and Old Rochester Regional

Matthew Kravitz: New Bedford

Erin Ptaszenski: Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical HS

SMEC Mission, Guiding Principles and Objectives

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

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

- ✓ 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.

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.**

**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.

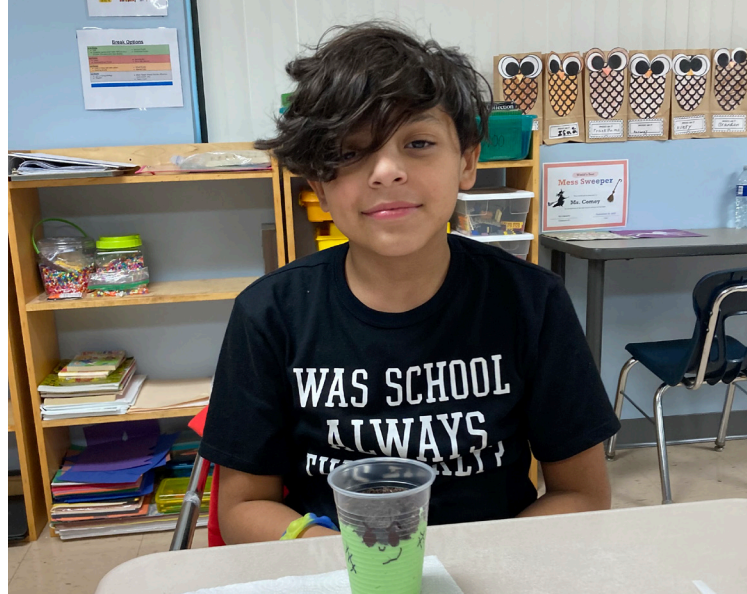
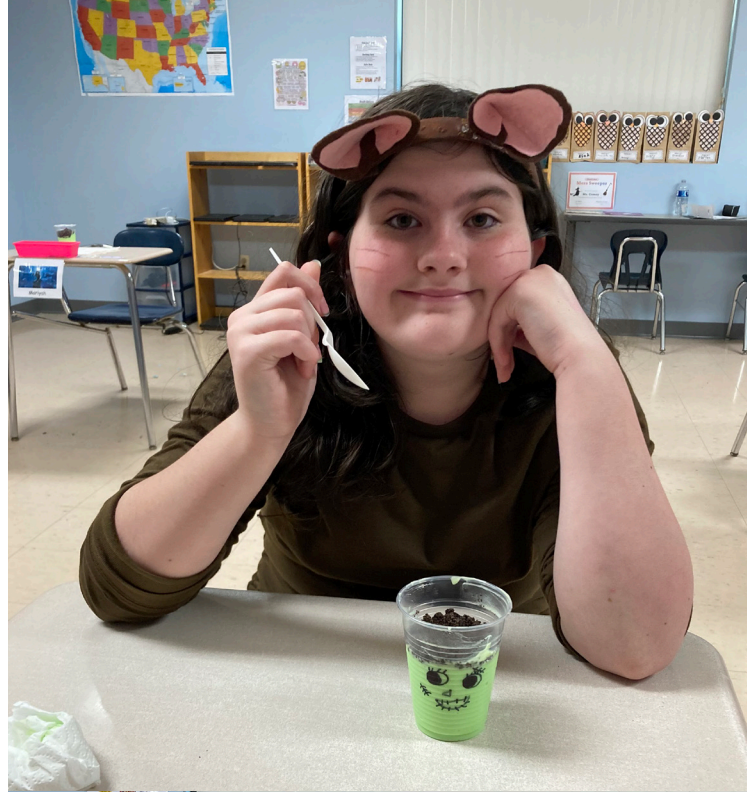


PROGRESS

We have seen an increased amount of stress and anxiety amongst students, consumers, families and staff following the Covid-19 pandemic. Our FY23 professional development offerings focused on providing everyone with tools to manage stress and anxiety while prioritizing teaching and learning. In addition to providing in-service training for our own staff on managing their own stress and working with students following trauma, as well as CPR/First Aid, Mandated Reporting, Civil Rights, Safety Care non-violent crisis intervention, RBT and Cultural Proficiency, SMEC provided a wide variety of professional development opportunities to 362 faculty and staff from more than 80 school districts, charter schools, private schools and other Collaboratives throughout Massachusetts during the year. In addition, our own training consultants provided onsite staff training and consultation for many additional district educators.

Courses offered for outside educators during FY23 included Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) instruction including SEI 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, Scaffolding Instruction for English Language and All Learners, Reducing Behavior, Anxiety and Stress while Increasing Student Engagement, Instruction to Students with Diverse Learning Styles, IEP Writing Strategies, Parapro Math Preparation, Educator Mentoring, Using Graphic Organizers, Adaptive Approaches and Creative Journaling for Art Instruction, Building Relationships with ELLs, Social Emotional Learning, and Executive Functioning.

In addition to staff training, SMEC also offered virtual sessions for parents and guardians on topics such as Nurturing Resilience in Teens and Strategies to Help Children Develop Executive Functioning Skills. We also held several in-person family engagement events throughout the year in conjunction with our parent's group, the Friends of SMEC, including a wellness walkathon, holiday sing-along, student art show and dance fundraiser auction.



SMEC is a participant in the Southeast Collaborative Regional Organization (SCRO) and collaborated with other SCRO members to provide a spring conference for 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. MOEC represents and advocates for the 24 Educational Collaboratives statewide and SMEC's Executive Director sits on the MOEC Board of Directors and chairs its Legislative Committee.

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. 129 individuals representing 15 different districts took the Parapro test in-person at SMEC during FY23.

All SMEC programs continued to operate fully in-person during FY23. 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. The nationwide workforce crisis has made it difficult to expand our services during the past year, however we continue to prioritize the needs of our districts, staff, students and adult consumers.

FY23 General Statistics

Years in Service	47
Employees	215 ¹
Member Districts	10
Districts Served in 2022-2023	107 ²
Program Facility Sites	10
Students Served in SMEC School Programs and District Services in FY23	712 ³
Adult (Age 22+) Consumers Served FY23	149

FY23 Revenue

Tuition and Services Member	\$4,669,678
Tuition and Services Non-Member	\$749,047
DDS Contracts	\$2,484,142
MCB Contracts	\$185,350
MassHealth/Medicaid	\$1,775,035
DESE CACFP	\$104,692
Professional Development	\$87,175
Intergovernmental/ Intergovernmental on Behalf	\$1,268,542
Investment Income	\$3,002
Miscellaneous ⁴	\$35,107
Total FY23 Revenue	\$11,596,048⁵

Adult Service Expenditures

FY23 Amount Expended on Services for Students/Consumers Age 22+	
SAIL Program (Expenses Funded by DDS/MCB Contracts)	\$1,954,041
ADH Program (Expenses Funded by Medicaid/MA Health and CACFP)	\$1,209,657
FY23 Total Adult Service Expenses	\$3,157,698

¹ Includes full and part-time employees on payroll during FY23. 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 revenues not otherwise designated.

⁵ Based on FY23 Independently Audited Financial Statements-Governmental Funds Statement of Revenues.

Cost Savings to School Districts

Average FY23 MA Private Ch. 766 Day School Special Education Daily Tuition Rate	\$438.90/Day ⁷
FY23 SMEC Daily Tuition 180 Day Standard School Day Program	\$289/Day
Average Local Private Agency Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT, TVI)	\$100-\$165+/hour
FY23 SMEC Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT)	\$81/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 FY23 tuition of \$438.90 per day versus the standardized FY23 SMEC program tuition of \$289 per day for all of our 180 day/school day programs indicates significant average annual savings of \$26,982 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 time has been reduced and is primarily targeted toward meeting new and increased 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 Extracted from FY23 Independently Audited Financial Statements-Governmental Funds Statement of Expenditures.

⁷ www.mass.gov/osdFY23; average of private day school FY23 daily tuition rates using day program data only.

⁸ FY23 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 day program average daily rates x 180 days. Does not account for circuit breaker reimbursement.

FY23 Program Descriptions

SMEC PRIMARY LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The SMEC Primary Language Program, located at the Rochester Memorial School, serves students in grades PK-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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. 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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. 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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. 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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. 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 K-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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. School year and part-time summer programming options are available. SMEC plans to expand services in early FY24 up through grade 8.

THERAPEUTIC LEARNING PROGRAM

The TLP program, located at the Quinn Elementary School in Dartmouth, serves students in grades K-5 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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. 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. Instruction in art and yoga are provided. 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 PK-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, TVI 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 operates separately from the services provided through SMEC's SAIL program but on the same campus. 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.

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. In FY23, our professional development courses were offered in both virtual and in-person training formats. In FY23, 362 educators from over 80 public school districts, private schools, and Educational Collaboratives took part in SMEC PD activities.

PARAPRO ASSESSMENT

129 paraprofessionals or aspiring paraprofessionals sat for the Parapro examination at SMEC between July 2022 and June 2023. Many also participated in our Parapro prep course focusing on math skills during FY23.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION

In 2022-2023, SMEC offered special education transportation services to our member school districts. Cost benefit to district varies based on route and competitive bidding quotes from private vendors. During FY23, due to staffing and vehicle capacity limits, SMEC's transportation services were primarily limited to students attending SMEC programs or SMEC member districts' in-house programs.



Summary

This annual report summarizes the activities of the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. The Covid-19 pandemic, resulting workforce crisis and other effects on our schools and businesses has brought unprecedented challenges to our students, staff and families. Our team has risen to the challenge and has put forth tremendous effort to ensure that we can safely conduct high quality in-person services, teaching and learning.

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 FY24 and beyond, including the acquisition of a new facility, that will allow us to strengthen and expand our 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 visit our website or Facebook page in order to truly see and hear about the great work that is done here.



SMEC
Learning for Life

Southeastern Massachusetts
Educational Collaborative

smecollaborative.org