



FAIRHAVEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES  
February 11, 2026

FAIRHAVEN TOWN CLERK  
RCUD 2026 MAR 5 AM 10:16

MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicole Pacheco, Erik Andersen, Stephanie Pickup, Kelly Ochoa, Donna McKenna

MEMBERS ABSENT: Brian Monroe

STAFF PRESENT: Superintendent Tara Kohler, Assistant Superintendent Mark Balestracci, School Business Manager Nicole Potter

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Pacheco at 6:30 pm.

***Approval of Minutes:***

A motion was made by Mrs. Pickup to approve the January 14, 2026 Regular Session Minutes, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (5-0).

A motion was made by Ms. McKenna to approve the January 14, 2026 Executive Session Minutes for content only, seconded by Mrs. Pickup, approved (5-0).

***Report of the Student Advisory Committee:***

Student Advisory Committee member Vishva Patel reported there will be a Civics Fair at Fairhaven High School tomorrow, February 12, 2026. They are really excited about the 9th grade project where the student connected with students from our sister school in Japan.

***Reports & Recommendations of the Superintendent:***

***Receive Updated Budget Timeline:***

Superintendent Kohler made the Committee aware of the upcoming joint meeting with the Finance Committee on March 5, 2026.

***Receive Presentation Regarding FY27 Budget:***

Superintendent Kohler presented and explained the FY27 draft budget to the Committee (attachment A). She went over historical data dating back to 2015, comparing required Net School Spending (NSS) with Town Meeting appropriations and the percentage above or below the required level. She noted that when appropriations are significantly above the requirement the District operates more stable. She also stated that the state average is approximately 25 percent above NSS, while Fairhaven has historically operated much closer to the minimum. Superintendent Kohler then discussed the impact of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA), which has provided additional state funding in recent years. The Governor's current proposal includes \$75 per student; the District is advocating for \$150 per student, consistent with last year's level. The Superintendent then reviewed the proposed FY27 budget figures. The required NSS amount is \$26,511,443. The Town Administrator's current working proposal for Fairhaven Public Schools is \$26,105,176, which is approximately \$406,000 below the required NSS level. Even with a potential override, the proposed budget would remain approximately \$400,000 below the District's requested budget of \$26.9 million and only marginally above the NSS requirement. The Superintendent noted that the District has not been funded below NSS since 2015. She stated she will not expend significant effort pursuing an override that may not succeed, particularly given that prior override attempts focused on school funding have failed. She stated her intention to prepare the District for reductions while continuing to advocate for appropriate funding. She reminded the Committee that if the Town fails to meet NSS, the State will require the shortfall to be repaid in the next fiscal year. Committee members asked whether other municipal departments are subject to similar mandated spending requirements. It was stated that, to their knowledge, other departments do not face a comparable state imposed minimum funding mandate. Committee members stated they are frustrated that the schools appear to bear the primary impact of a proposed override and stated the

importance of strong schools to property values, community vitality, and long-term fiscal health. The Superintendent also noted that reductions could negatively affect ongoing tuition negotiations with Acushnet and potentially impact accreditation reporting requirements. Superintendent Kohler presented preliminary recommendations to address the proposed funding level, including the reduction of three elementary positions, four middle school positions, and one District wide counselor position, which is currently vacant. She indicated that the Middle School could shift toward a Junior High model, with teachers potentially instructing across grade levels, while maintaining class sizes of approximately 25–28 students. She stated the District could implement these changes while continuing to support students effectively. The High School is not currently targeted for reductions, but could change. She mentioned that additional reductions may include Professional Development and other non personnel items. The Committee members also discussed the implications of repeated budget uncertainty, including staff morale, recruitment, and staff retention. They also expressed concern that ongoing financial instability could deter prospective educators and negatively affect the District's ability to attract and retain high quality staff. Superintendent Kohler acknowledged these concerns but reaffirmed her commitment to maintaining a strong, mission driven culture despite these challenges. She also reminded the Committee the State is currently reviewing potential changes to the Chapter 70 formula.

*FAME Update:*

Superintendent Kohler told the Committee that FAME (the Fairhaven Association for Music Education) is being resurrected to help support the Marching Band program. They are trying to help provide financial support including hiring individuals for specific services. Superintendent Kohler noted that all new support staff will be vetted through her office following the strict hiring guidelines.

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a donation in the amount of \$2,600 from FAME for the Marching Band Staff of the Color Guard, Music Writing, Drill Writing, and Percussion, seconded by Mrs. Pickup, approved (5-0).

*Upcoming Events:*

The next School Committee Meeting will be held February 25, 2026.

*New Business:*

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to receive a grant amount of \$50,000 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the FY2026: Support Implementing of Updated Regulations Regarding Time-Out Practices, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (5-0).

A motion was made by Ms. McKenna to establish a Leroy L. Wood Gift Account, seconded by Mrs. Pickup, approved (5-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a \$500 donation from the Fairhaven Road Race Inc. for Fairhaven Unified Sports, seconded by Mrs. Pacheco, approved (5-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a \$500 donation from the Special Olympics for Leroy L. Wood School, seconded by Mr. Andersen, approved (5-0).

*Committee Liaison Report:*

Ms. Ochoa provided an update on the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC) Annual Report and FY26 first quarter summary (attachment B).

*Unfinished Business:*

*Update on Acushnet Tuition Agreement:*

Superintendent Kohler updated the Committee stating legal counsel confirmed that our current agreement allows anyone who is registered in the typical process before the contract expires, to attend Fairhaven High School and

***Questions from Individual Committee Members:***

Mrs. Pickup noted she will be at the Fairhaven High School Civics Fair on February 12, 2026.

***Any Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours Prior to the Posting of this Meeting:***

Superintendent Kohler told the Committee that the Capital Planning Committee will be recommending \$700,000 for the SMEC roof as well as \$75,000 for engineering for the Fairhaven High School bathroom project.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting, seconded by, roll call vote, approved (5-0).

Adjourned at 7:26 pm.

Sheri Souza

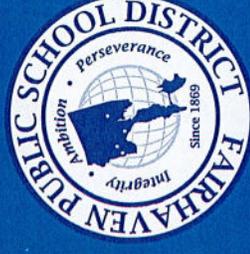
Secretary to the Fairhaven School Committee

Approved, March 4, 2026

# Fairhaven Public Schools

**FY27 Budget Update**

**February 11, 2026**

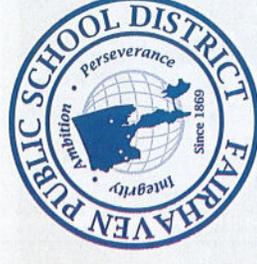


# Chapter 70 and the Foundation Budget

Chapter 70 is Massachusetts' primary state aid program to towns and municipalities to fund public education

Ensures every district can meet a minimum foundation spending level

Funding shared between the state and local communities



# Local Contribution

Required minimum amount the municipality must fund

Based on community income and property wealth

Calculated annually by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education



# Correlation Between NSS and Town Meeting Approved Budget

Year	Required Net School Spending	TM Approved School Department Budget	Difference Between TM Approved Budget and Required NSS
2015	18,754,655	18,348,083	(406,572)
2016	19,025,420	18,737,194	(288,226)
2017	19,026,410	19,385,787	359,377
2018	19,138,449	19,783,472	645,023
2019	19,508,512	20,383,354	874,842
2020	20,489,575	21,302,516	812,941
2021	20,980,114	21,546,426	566,312
2022	20,975,457	22,179,843	1,204,386
2023	22,300,571	22,910,638	610,067
2024	23,768,493	23,753,641	(14,852)
2025	24,687,013	24,820,213	133,200
2026	25,896,938	25,656,166	(240,772)

0.5%

-0.1%

2.8%

5.0%

7.5%

4.9%

5.0%

12.2%

5.0%

2.3%

3.8%

# Current FY 27 Net School Spending Requirement

The Current FY27 Net School Spending requirement for FPS from DESE is **\$26,511,443**

Current Proposed FY27 Budget for FPS from the Town of Fairhaven is **\$26,105,176** (***does not reflect an override***)

Current Proposed FY27 Budget for FPS from the Town of Fairhaven **with the override** is **\$26,531,685**



# Correlation Between NSS and Town Meeting Approved Budget

## \*Inclusive of FY27 TA Recommendations

Year	Required Net School Spending	TM Approved School Department Budget	Difference Between TM Approved Budget and Required NSS	
2015	18,754,655	18,348,083	(406,572)	0.5
2016	19,025,420	18,737,194	(288,226)	-0.1
2017	19,026,410	19,385,787	359,377	2.8
2018	19,138,449	19,783,472	645,023	5.0
2019	19,508,512	20,383,354	874,842	7.5
2020	20,489,575	21,302,516	812,941	4.9
2021	20,980,114	21,546,426	566,312	5.0
2022	20,975,457	22,179,843	1,204,386	12.2
2023	22,300,571	22,910,638	610,067	5.0
2024	23,768,493	23,753,641	(14,852)	2.3
2025	24,687,013	24,820,213	133,200	3.8
2026	25,896,938	25,656,166	(240,772)	
2027	26,511,443	26,105,176	(406,267)	Without override
2027	26,511,443	26,531,685	20,242	With override

# Impacts for Each Proposed Budget

Current Town Proposed Budget Amount of **\$26,105,176**

**Impacts/Cuts:**

3 Elementary Positions

4 EHMS Positions

District-Wide Counselor



# Other Budget Variables to Consider

Chapter 70 Aid and SOA totals are preliminary estimates from the Governor's Proposed Budget (as of 1/22/2026)

Increases to Ch. 70 Aid and/or SOA totals could improve the FY27 budget outlook



# Next Steps in FY27 Budget Process

Monitor State Budget as it evolves

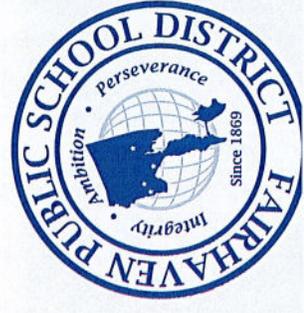
Advocate for increase in SOA funding from the current Governor's proposal of \$75 per student to at least \$150 per student

Work with the Leadership Team to...

Evaluate Class Size

Review Resource Allocation

Continue evaluating potential impacts and prioritization of cuts



# Questions from the Committee?



# LEARNIN fo LIF



## FY2025 Annual Report



To Whom It May Concern:

Attached, you will find the FY25 annual report of the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC), covering the period of July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025. 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 FY25 Independent Audited Financial Statements are complete, and the relevant figures are embedded in this annual report.

During FY25, we continued to prioritize the recruitment of new personnel in order to expand our level of services. We have been fortunate to add several new educators and therapists to our team allowing us to expand our school-age programs and district-based staffing services. Our Board of Directors has been extremely supportive and approved our recommendation to increase our starting salaries and provide additional recruitment and retention benefits for both our school and adult service programs. Despite these advancements, we continue to see the impacts of the ongoing national workforce crisis, which has impacted our ability to further expand our capacity as quickly as we would like. We are hopeful that our recent hiring trend will continue to move in a positive direction.

During this past year, we have been able to further develop our new intensive Early Childhood Program and finalize plans to expand our Multidisciplinary Learning Center to the high school level in early FY26.

Balancing the needs of our students, consumers and staff with the realities and ambiguities of the information coming from our contracted revenue streams creates a difficult business climate for a self-sustaining organization such as ours. SMEC continues to advocate statewide, along with other Educational Collaboratives, for designated funding for Collaborative facilities, workforce development, regulatory relief and program enhancement and we look forward to a return to fiscal and regulatory stability in FY26 and beyond.

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 10 member school districts and several non-member districts throughout Southeastern Massachusetts in addition to providing adult services through state contracts.

## GOVERNANCE

SMEC membership during FY25 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 2024-2025 school year as follows:

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2024-2025

Melissa Cordeira, Acushnet	Michelle Smith, <i>Vice Chair</i> , Marion
Jack LeBrun, Mattapoisett	Anne Fernandes, Rochester
Brendalee Smith, Fairhaven*	Christopher Oliver, <i>Chair</i> , Dartmouth
Christopher Cotter, New Bedford	Rosemarie Bowman, Old Rochester Regional
Collin Dias, Fall River	
Michael Shea, Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School	

### LEADERSHIP

In addition to the Board of Directors, the 2024-2025 SMEC leadership team also included the following:

### ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

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

\* Term ended April 7, 2025.

## TREASURER

John Nunes

## 2024-2025 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

Laurie Dionisio: Dartmouth

Tanya Dawson: Fairhaven

Lori Obenchain: Fall River

Jaime Curley: Marion, Mattapoisett, Rochester and Old Rochester Regional

Paul Bottome: New Bedford

Erin Ptaszenski: Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical HS

# Mission Statement

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

*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.*

# 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.*

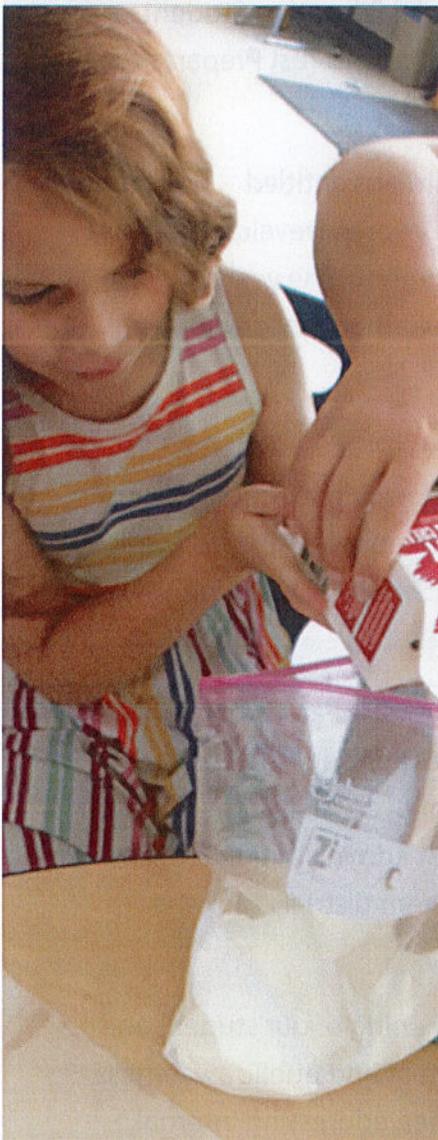


## Progress

### TOWARD MEETING OUR MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

SMEC provides programs and services for individuals with special needs ages 3 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 22 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 SMEC as their adult service provider upon turning 22.

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 housed in both public school classrooms and separate public day school buildings. Our adult service programs are located in two leased buildings in Dartmouth. Expansion of our programs requires us to continually search for appropriate space and we have issued several RFPs in that effort in recent years. SMEC was able to identify, through an RFP, a building in Dartmouth to expand our TLC social/emotional public day school program, complete the purchase of the property and relocate the program to the new site at the very beginning of FY24. By moving the TLC public day program to the new, larger facility, we were able to



repurpose the Collaborative's smaller building in New Bedford and acquire an additional DESE public day school license to open a new intensive early childhood program at the very end of FY24 and have expanded enrollment during FY25.

Our FY25 professional development offerings focused on providing educators with the tools that they need to teach all learners as well as implementation of the new Massachusetts IEP process and form. In addition to providing in-service training for our own staff on Reducing Anxiety and Challenging Behavior in the Classroom, Self-Care, and Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries, as well as our annual trainings in CPR/First Aid, Mandated Reporting, Civil Rights, Safety Care non-violent crisis intervention, RBT, suicide prevention and cultural proficiency, SMEC provided a wide variety of professional development opportunities to 976 faculty and staff from more than 158 school districts, charter schools, private schools and other Collaboratives throughout Massachusetts during the year. Our own staff members also provided onsite staff training and consultation for many additional district educators.

Courses and workshops offered for outside educators during FY25 included Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) instruction including SEI endorsement courses for regular and vocational educators and administrators, as well as Building Relationships with English Language Learners, Supporting Special Education Students to be Successful, IEP Writing Strategies, Implementing the New Massachusetts IEP, Parapro Test Preparation, and Educator Mentoring.

In addition to staff training, SMEC also offered virtual sessions for parents and guardians entitled Understanding the New Massachusetts IEP form and Powerful Strategies to Help Children Develop Executive Functioning Skills. We also held several in-person family engagement events throughout the year in conjunction with our parents' group, the Friends of SMEC, including a wellness walkathon, holiday movie and sing-along, student community art show and dance fundraiser auction.

SMEC is a member of the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC). MOEC represents and advocates for the 24 Educational Collaboratives statewide. SMEC's Executive Director sits on the MOEC Board of Directors and chairs its Legislative Committee. SMEC is also a member of the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers (ADDP) and the Massachusetts Adult Day Service Association (MADSA).

SMEC is one of the very few regional sites in Massachusetts authorized to administer the Parapro examination through the Educational Testing Service. Employment as a paraprofessional in Title I 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. 178 individuals from at least 15 different districts took the Parapro test in-person at SMEC during FY25.

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 couple of years, however we continue to prioritize the needs of our districts, staff, students and adult consumers.

## FY25 GENERAL STATISTICS

Years in Service	50
Employees	228 <sup>1</sup>
Member Districts	10
Districts Served in 2024-2025	157 <sup>2</sup>
Program Facility Sites	10
Students Served in SMEC School Programs and District Services in FY25	961 <sup>3</sup>
Adult (Age 22+) Consumers Served FY25	179

## FY25 REVENUE

Tuition and Services Member	\$6,076,435
Tuition and Services Non-Member	\$1,094,414
DDS Contracts	\$3,303,752
MCB Contracts	\$217,314
MassHealth/Medicaid	\$2,487,473
DESE CACFP	\$124,002

<sup>1</sup> Includes full- and part-time employees on payroll during FY25. Does not include 1099/outside contractors.

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

<sup>3</sup> Includes all SMEC program and district-based services. Does not include students receiving transportation services only.

Professional Development	\$266,505
Intergovernmental/ Intergovernmental on Behal	\$1,604,361
Investment Income	\$6,814
Miscellaneous and Governmental <sup>4</sup>	129,430
<b>Total FY25 Revenue</b>	<b>\$15,310,508<sup>5</sup></b>

## ADULT SERVICE OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURES<sup>6</sup>

### FY25 AMOUNT EXPENDED ON SERVICES FOR STUDENTS/CONSUMERS AGE 22+

SAIL Program (Expenses Funded by DDS/MCB Contracts)	\$2,091,768
ADH Program (Expenses Funded by Medicaid/MA Health and CACFP)	\$1,605,148
<b>FY25 Total Adult Service Expense</b>	<b>\$3,696,916<sup>6</sup></b>

## COST SAVINGS TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

### AVERAGE FY25 MA PRIVATE CH. 766 DAY SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

Daily Tuition Rate	\$525.64/Day <sup>7</sup>
FY25 SMEC Daily Member Tuition 180 Day Standard School Day Program	\$319/Day
Average Local Private Agency Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT, TVI)	\$120-\$185+/hour
FY25 SMEC Member Therapy Fee (SLP, OT, PT)	\$89/hour <sup>8</sup>

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 FY25 tuition of \$525.64 per day versus the standardized FY25 SMEC program tuition of \$319 per day for all of our 180-day/school-day programs

<sup>4</sup> Includes grants, self-pays, donations, insurance claim payments, e-rate reimbursement and revenues not otherwise designated.

<sup>5</sup> Based on FY25 Independently Audited Financial Statements-Governmental Funds Statement of Revenues.

<sup>6</sup> Extracted from FY25 Independently Audited Financial Statements-Governmental Funds Statement of Expenditures.

<sup>7</sup> [www.mass.gov/osdFY25](http://www.mass.gov/osdFY25); average of private day school FY25 daily tuition rates using day program data only.

<sup>8</sup> FY25 SMEC member rate for hourly therapy services. Does not include contractual staffing FTEs which are staff specific.

indicates significant average annual savings of \$37,195.20 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 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.



# FY25 Program Descriptions

## SMEC PRIMAR 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-8 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.

### 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.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

Opened in April 2024, the ECP is an intensive early childhood center serving students with developmental and language delays in grades PK-K on a full-day/ full-week school year basis. Providing an intensive, therapy rich environment with specialized teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, clinicians and board-certified behavioral analysts, our ECP program is located in a SMEC-owned building in the far north end of New Bedford.

### 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.

### 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

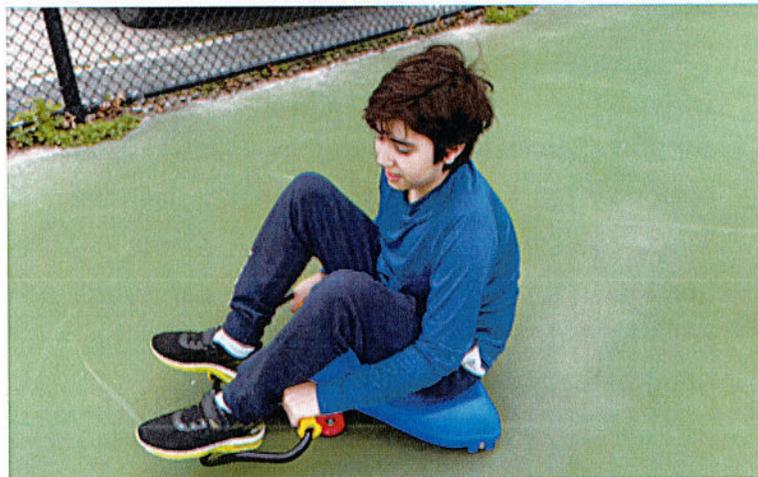
services are provided by an OT, PT, TVI and SLP. The MLC program offers a 180-day program with a part-time five-week summer component. The program is located in a public elementary school building in Mattapoisett and accepts referrals from all school districts. Plans to expand to the high school level are in place for the start of the 2025-2026 school year.

### 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 DA 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

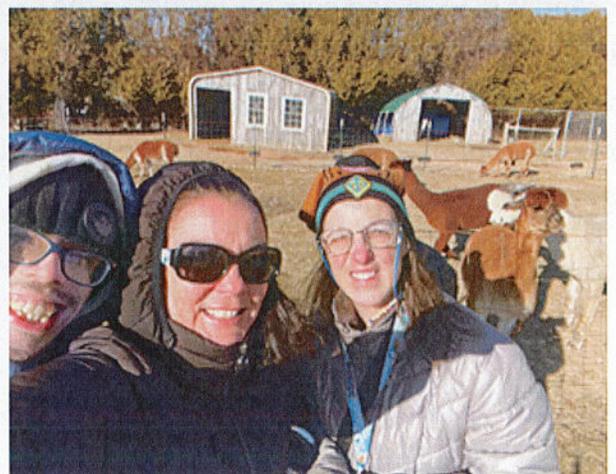
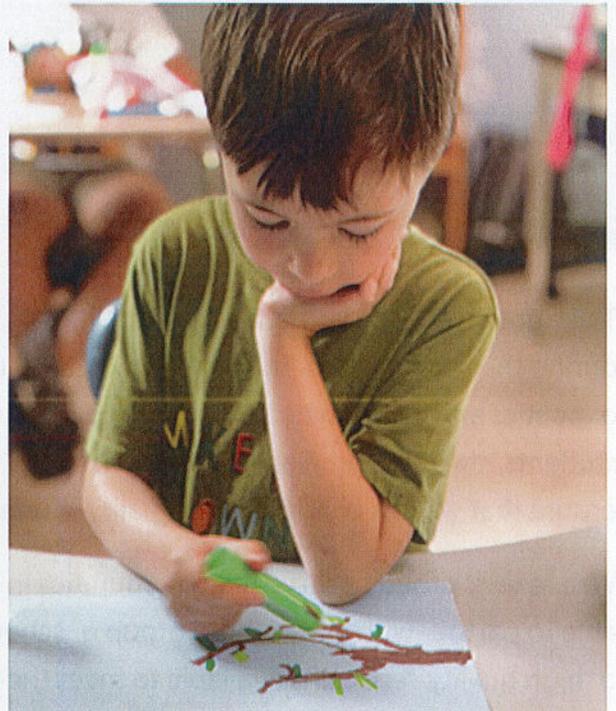
SMEC offers a variety of professional development activities for educators from member and non-member districts throughout the year. SMEC is one of the few DESE qualified providers of Sheltered English Immersion endorsement classes for all teachers, including vocational teachers, and administrators. In FY25, our professional development courses were offered in both virtual and in-person training formats. In FY25, 976 educators from over 158 public school districts, private schools, and Educational Collaboratives took part in SMEC professional development activities.

## PARAPRO ASSESSMENT

178 paraproessionals or aspiring paraproessionals sat for the Parapro examination at SMEC between July 2024 and June 2025. Many also participated in our Parapro prep course focusing on math and literacy skills during FY25.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION

In 2024-2025, 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 FY25, 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

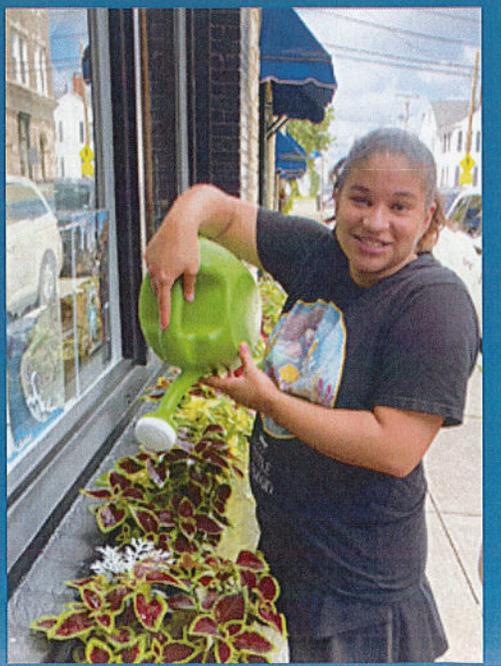
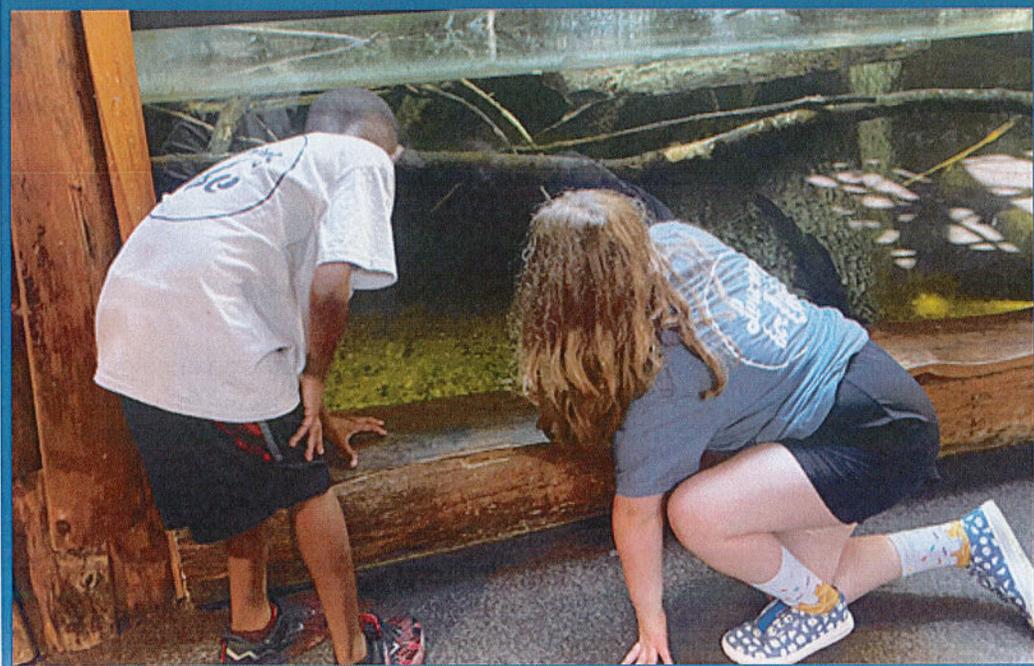
This annual report summarizes the activities of the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. The ongoing work force crisis, as well as the current impacts of politics and social media on our schools and businesses, has brought unprecedented challenges to our students, staff and families. Our team has risen to the challenge and has put forth tremendous effort to ensure that we can conduct high-quality, student-centered 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. We are looking forward to many changes in FY26 and beyond, including the expansion of our multi-disability program to the high school level, that will allow us to strengthen and expand our services and instruction so that we can provide the very best in programs and support across all grade and age levels. 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.



# Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative

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SMEC Quarterly Report  
FY26 First Quarter Summary

During the first quarter of FY26, the following topics have been discussed and/or acted upon during the September and November 2025 SMEC Board meetings:

- 1) At the September meeting, the Board voted to appoint certain members to officer positions- Christopher Oliver, Dartmouth to the Chairman position, Michelle Smith-Marion to the Vice Chair position, and John Nunes as Treasurer. The Board also appointed 3 members to sign the Collaborative's payroll and payables warrants.
- 2) In September, the Board approved multiple recommended policy revisions to the SMEC Employee Handbook including amendments to the small necessities leave, vacation leave, tuition reimbursement, attendance and punctuality policy and salary administration policies.
- 3) In September, the Board approved updates to the FY26 Spending Plan and Revenue projections, which we do at just about every Board meeting. At that time, the approved FY26 Spending Plan totaled \$14,022,942
- 4) Also at the September meeting, the Board voted to adjust SMEC's para salary scale to aid in recruitment and retention efforts.
- 5) At the November 2025 Board meeting, Laura Stone, CPA, from the Collaborative's independent accounting firm, CBIZ, LLC, attended the meeting to present SMEC's FY25 financial statements. The Collaborative board voted to accept the results of the independent audit and management letter and to maintain the FY25 unreserved operating surplus in the SMEC Collaborative Fund (our excess and deficiency fund), as well as to make deposits into the SMEC OPEB Trust and Capital Reserve accounts.
- 6) Also in November, the Board voted to approve the content of SMEC's FY25 Annual report (copies of the final version are attached to share).
- 7) In both September and November, the Board approved all staff actions (appointments, resignations, transfers, etc.) that had occurred between meetings and the minutes of the preceding meetings.
- 8) The Board approved the renewal of the Collaborative's lease with the Fairhaven Public Schools for the historic Tripp School building located at 56 Bridge Street in Fairhaven for a new five (5) year term. The Board also approved the renewal of the Collaborative's lease with Four Kings Realty for the two buildings on Russells Mills Road in Dartmouth for a new ten (10) year term.
- 9) The Board approved the FY26 meeting calendar.
- 10) The Director updated the Board members on the progress of reviewing the proposed changes to the SMEC Capital Reserve policy with the member school committees. As of December 31, 2025, 7 of the 10 member committees have voted in favor of amending the plan as proposed.
- 11) The Board reviewed the DESE training requirements and Board member responsibilities documents.
- 12) The Board entered into Executive Session at both the September and November meetings to discuss an ongoing legal matter.
- 13) The Board welcomed new representatives from the Fairhaven and Acushnet school committees, Kelly Ochoa and Ebony McGlynn, respectively.
- 14) The next meeting is scheduled for January 27<sup>th</sup> by Zoom.