SMEC Spotlight Winter 2026

From the desk of Catherine Cooper, SMEC Executive Director

Spring has finally sprung! After a record-setting winter with lots of cold days, snow and weather cancellations, we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. My daffodils have started to come up and I look forward to seeing them bloom. Soon, the leaves will be back on the trees, everything will start to turn green and we will hopefully see some more consistently nice warm weather so that we can get outside and enjoy the fresh air.

This issue of the Spotlight covers the activities of some of our programs from January through March. We are highlighting a few different SMEC programs in each issue of the Spotlight. We hope that you enjoy taking a look at what fun and productive activities our students and adult consumers have been doing.

Many of you are aware that I have notified the Board of Directors of my intent to retire in August after two decades at the helm of SMEC and 37 years in special education.

I have been so blessed to be a part of this amazing team and to lead such an incredible organization of dedicated and talented staff who provide the very best services to our students and adults every day. My retirement will be bittersweet, but I plan to stay connected to SMEC and look forward to meeting and collaborating with my successor once the search committee and Board of Directors choose the new Executive Director this spring.

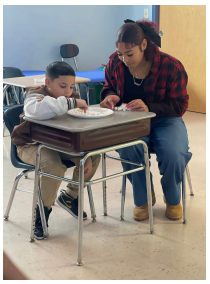
We would like to thank all of the volunteers and the Friends of SMEC Board for hosting another great Fundraiser Dance on March 6th. The dance was very well attended, everyone loved the Country and Western theme, lots of folks won great raffle prizes and the proceeds will be used by the Friends of SMEC to help support our student and adult program activities. We are beyond grateful for the support.

Catherine

What's Inside This Issue



ECP Begins Music Class



TLC Celebrates Black History Month

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ALC 1 Explores 3D Printing

In Mr. McDonald's ALC 1 classroom, students are doing inspiring work with 3D printing technology that highlights creativity, growth, and real-world problem-solving. School Adjustment Counselor Bill Sylvia, working alongside Mr. McDonald and his team, has also been helping support students in this process, assisting them as they develop tools and strategies that can strengthen their success both in and out of the classroom. Rather than simply creating objects, students are designing and making tools that can help support self-regulation, organization, and success both at home and at school. From calming tools to personalized organizers and visual supports, each project is created with purpose and reflects the individual needs and ideas of the students.

What makes this work especially exciting is the way students are using innovation to make a meaningful difference in their own daily lives. They are learning to recognize challenges, think through solutions, and turn their ideas into practical tools they can truly use. Along the way, they are building confidence, independence, perseverance, and pride in what they create. With the support of caring adults like Mr. McDonald, Mr. Silvia, and the broader ALC 1 team, students are being encouraged not only to learn new skills, but also to see themselves as capable problem-solvers.

The work happening in ALC 1 is a wonderful example of student-centered learning at its best. By combining technology with creativity and life skills, Mr. McDonald is helping students discover that they are capable, resourceful, and full of potential. The collaboration with Bill Silvia and the rest of the team further strengthens this work, ensuring that students receive both the educational and emotional support they need to thrive. It is exciting to see students not only engaged in their learning, but also empowered to create tools and strategies that can support their growth far beyond the classroom.







TSP Students Prepare for the Friends of SMEC Benefit Gala

Students in the Transitional Services Program volunteered their time to help get ready for the annual Friends of SMEC Benefit Gala. They collaborated to design and create country themed centerpieces that were displayed on the tables during the event. The students also helped set up the space, making sure everything was prepared for the evening. Their teamwork and dedication made a positive impact and showed their pride in supporting the SMEC community.







Shaping Behaviors

Throughout all programs at SMEC, shaping procedures are utilized to help increase the skills of our students.

Shaping is an ABA teaching technique used to build a new behavior by systematically reinforcing "successive approximations" or small steps in order to get to a larger, more complex skill.

Shaping procedures can be used to increase communication, participation, classroom independence, academic skills, vocational skills, and even social interactions.

These procedures can look very different across our programs: from shaping the time of circle at ECP, increasing social and play skills at PLP, or increasing vocational jobs with employees at Cafe 56.







SAIL Attends AHA Night

On the second Thursday evening of every month, the SAIL evening program attends AHA night in New Bedford. AHA (Art, History, and Architecture) events offer the local community an opportunity to celebrate the art and culture of downtown New Bedford.

The consumers enjoy stopping by local organizations and businesses across downtown New Bedford to celebrate history, creativity, and diversity while attending AHA Nights.



Individuals in the SAIL program have attended AHA activities at the Pilgrim United Church of Christ and explored creativity by completing themed art projects.

Each month there is a different theme activity offered for everyone to stop by and participate. Pictured, the consumers of the evening program enjoyed using a variety of materials to create bird feeders. AHA New Bedford promotes cultural experiences by hosting musical performances, art markets, block parties, and more.

TSP Students Make a Splash

TSP Transitional students enjoy their weekly trip to the YMCA. Students focus on increasing their pool safety awareness and swimming skills and have a great time using the pool.



ECP Begins Music Class

Miss. Sady's preschool classroom at the Early Childhood Program (ECP) was so excited to start music class. It was such a special moment for our students and staff. The children were smiling, clapping, and eager to participate from the moment music began. For many of our students, this was their first structured music experience in school, and their excitement filled the room.

We are so happy to welcome Ms. Sara as our music teacher. During class, students are enjoying sing-along songs that help build language and communication skills while also encouraging turn-taking and social interaction.

Ms. Sara will also be leading instrument exploration, giving students opportunities to try different instruments, listen to new sounds, and practice requesting and sharing. These hands-on experiences are especially meaningful for our learners, as they support sensory exploration and fine motor development.

In addition, students were able to participate in movement and rhythm activities, which help build coordination, body awareness, and imitation skills. Whether they are clapping to the beat, marching, or dancing along, students were engaged and having so much fun.

We all look forward to many more musical moments ahead!





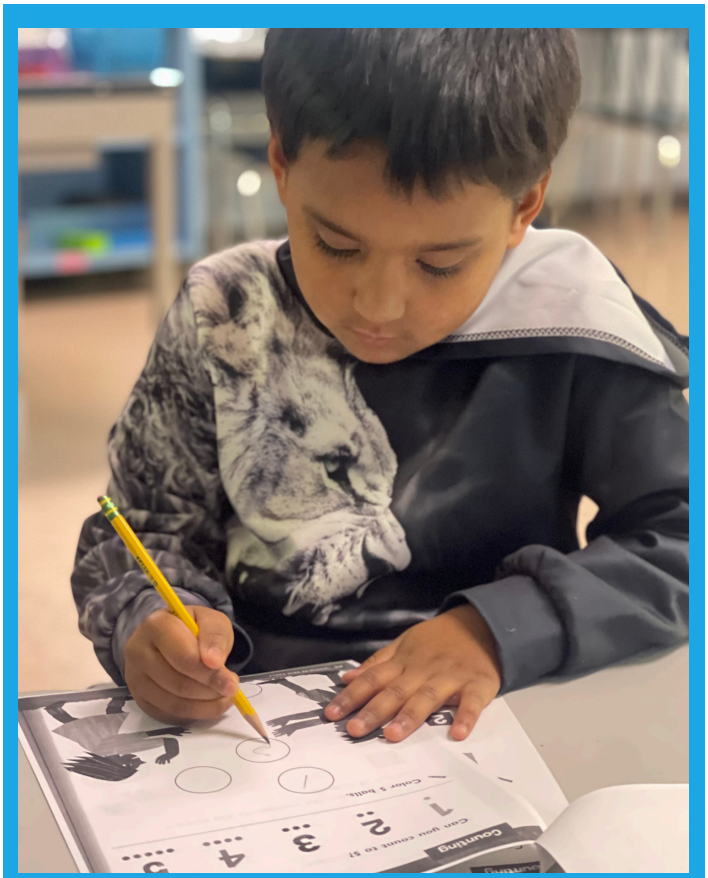
TLC Celebrates Black History Month

At TLC, Ms. Scannell's K-2 class welcomed the new year by celebrating Black History Month. Students explored important vocabulary such as segregation and peaceful communities while learning about influential figures including Jesse Owens, Bessie Coleman, Ruby Bridges, and others. Through these lessons, students discussed the ideas of acceptance and perseverance — two important values in our classroom.

Across all subject areas, students are making strong progress in reading and writing. In math, they have become "Equation Detectives," solving three-number problems using addition and subtraction to find the correct answers.

Our classroom has also continued participating in the mentor program with TSP and ALC II. Transitional and high school students visit and serve as positive role models, and they have been doing a nice job supporting and interacting with our class. Kindness remains a focus in our classroom, and students are currently engaged in a peace project that will continue into the spring. Students also take part in STEM activities using blocks to design, build, and experiment with creative structures while exploring concepts like balance, support, and problem-solving.





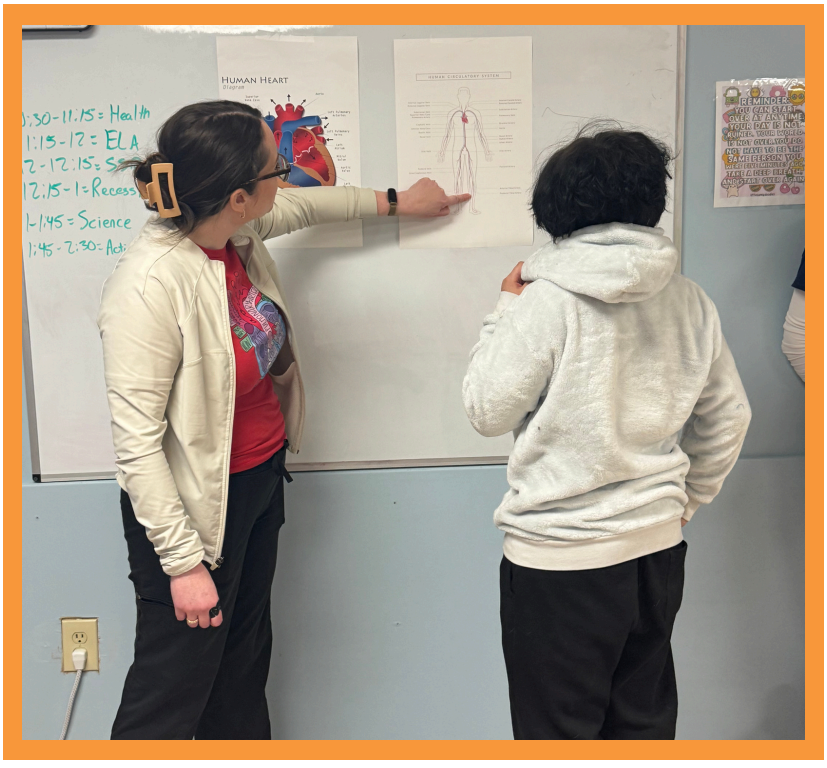
TLC Students Explore the Heart

Nurse Azevedo teaches students in Mr. Bell's class at TLC about the heart and how it works during health class.











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