

# CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent

## **Memorandum**

To: Members of the School Committee  
From: Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Date: August 6, 2018  
Re: Chelmsford Public Schools: 2017/18 Year in Review

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As I reflect on my third year leading the Chelmsford Public Schools, I am deeply grateful for the encouragement and support I have received from students, parents, staff, and community members; I feel privileged to work with you as superintendent. I do not take the opportunity to lead this district lightly. Your support for our students is truly remarkable, and I look forward to working with you and the greater Chelmsford community as we build on past successes in the district and work to make the Chelmsford Public Schools the best public school system in the state.

We have accomplished much over this past year. I am very proud of our work, and I thank you for guiding and supporting me and the staff of the Chelmsford Public Schools as we strive to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. I feel encouraged every day when I walk through schools, attend events, and witness firsthand the dedication to meeting student needs shown by our teachers, paraprofessionals, building administrators, and support staff. Following are some highlights of our work this year.

### **Construction of 22 Modular Classrooms**

In October 2016, the school department requested an appropriation from town meeting representatives of \$7.9 million to fund the construction of modular classrooms at the Byam, Center, Harrington, and South Row Elementary Schools. The modular classrooms provide much-needed space at the elementary level as enrollment increases and will supply the additional classroom space needed for full-day kindergarten. Significant time and resources went into the planning, preparation, and construction of 22 modular classrooms during the summer of 2017. Six new modular classrooms were added at the Byam, Harrington, and South Row Elementary Schools and four at Center Elementary School. These remarkable new classrooms house fourth-grade students and staff. In the end, the project was delivered on time and \$1 million under budget.

### **Implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten**

The FY18 budget included funding to hire teachers and support staff to fully implement full-day kindergarten, a long-desired program in the Chelmsford Public Schools. During the summer of 2017, district administrators and teachers planned for the launch of the program. As the 2017/18 school year began, the full-day kindergarten programming seamlessly joined the elementary-level offerings for students. Anecdotal evidence from parents and staff overwhelmingly supports the move from a half-day to full-day kindergarten model. This would not have been possible without widespread community support.

### **Strategic Plan Adoption: Chelmsford Public Schools 2017–2020**

The Chelmsford Public School District provides an exceptional education to the students entrusted to our care. The district effectively uses the resources appropriated annually by town meeting to serve the needs of an ever-diversifying student population. Overall, our students' academic achievement and accolades make it clear that the town of Chelmsford is receiving a positive return on its investment in public education. Chelmsford's students are also heavily involved in athletics, community service, and fine and performing arts, thereby fulfilling the roles of productive and valued members of our community.

The Strategic Plan was a year-long culmination of work performed by our district's schools and administrators reviewing progress on prior initiatives and identifying the emerging needs of our students. The Strategic Plan document outlines the mission, vision, and values of the Chelmsford Public Schools. It also highlights three strategic objectives to serve as the foundation of our work:

- ✓ Every student achieving academically
- ✓ Every student supported in a positive, prosocial learning environment
- ✓ Aligned financial and facility resources in support of the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan guides our district's work through 2020 and maintains our collective commitment to the district's guiding core PRIDE values. The mission of the Chelmsford Public Schools is to educate, engage, prepare, and empower well-rounded and knowledgeable learners who **PERSEVERE** through challenges, demonstrate **RESPECT** and **INTEGRITY** in their words and actions, are **DEDICATED** to their community, and display **EMPATHY** as global citizens while discovering and pursuing their full potential. Chelmsford employs a caring, compassionate and dedicated staff who truly have the best interests of our students in mind at all times. I am fortunate and proud to be leading the district at this exciting time in education.

### **Ratification of the Teachers and Nurses Collective Bargaining Agreement**

In August 2017, the School Committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford Teachers and Nurses bargaining unit covering the period from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2019.

### **Ratification of the Professional Support Staff Collective Bargaining Agreement**

In August 2017, the School Committee ratified a two-year contract with the Chelmsford Professional Support Staff bargaining unit covering the period from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2019.

### **Ratification of the Building Custodians Collective Bargaining Agreement**

In March 2018, the School Committee ratified an initial (first-time) three-year contract with the Chelmsford Building Custodians bargaining unit covering the period from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2020.

### **FY2017 Massachusetts DESE Financial Audit**

Every year, each school district in Massachusetts must submit an external audit of their end-of-year financial report to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Powers & Sullivan, LLC performed the district's external financial audit for the year ending June 30, 2017. As noted in the audit report, the auditors had no financial findings or financial reporting recommendations. This outcome is desirable and significant, given the number of financial audits and reviews of the Chelmsford Public Schools conducted in prior fiscal years, each with findings and recommendations for improvement of financial practices.

### **FY2018 Budget Administration**

School Committee members received regular reports on the district's finances throughout FY2018, including the local operating budget, grant funds, and revolving funds. Consolidating the town and school district accounting systems in MUNIS involved a significant amount of work, but the new consolidated financial system has eliminated the reconciliation aspects of operating two financial systems and streamlined the district's financial reporting.

After reviewing the FY2018 budget, I am pleased to report that in just three years, the district has made great strides in stabilizing its finances. By implementing strict financial practices, it has accrued several reserve fund balances for future budget needs. At the end of FY2018, the district was able to:

- reserve approximately \$2 million in the special education circuit breaker revolving fund to pay for future unanticipated/unfunded special education

student tuition and/or transportation costs (as a reminder, in the fall of 2015, the school department had to request a supplemental appropriation from the town of \$500,000 to cover unanticipated special education tuition costs as no reserve fund balance was available).

- carry over approximately \$450,000 in food service/school nutrition funds. Given the annual revenue and expenses for the school nutrition program, this is a significant achievement, as many school districts find themselves operating their food service programs at a deficit.
- set aside approximately \$1.35 million in school choice funds as a reserve for future spending by the School Committee on educational programs, services to augment current program offerings in the schools, or a contingency in the event of an unanticipated budget shortfall.

### **FY2018 Capital Expenditures**

In December, the School Committee approved the request for \$1.75 million for building and technology capital projects in the schools. The building capital projects include the reconstruction and repaving of the rear parking lot, sidewalks, and curbs at Chelmsford High School (\$1,062,351) and the reconstruction and repaving of the front parking lot, sidewalks, and curbs at Parker Middle School (\$190,000). Technology capital projects include a continuation of outfitting district classrooms for the twenty-first century with overhead projectors and interactive televisions or whiteboards (\$75,000), a network infrastructure upgrade at Center and Harrington Elementary Schools and McCarthy Middle School (\$376,220), and upgrades to the existing security camera system at Parker Middle School (\$45,000).

### **FY2018 Budget Presentation and Review**

In February, the central office presented the FY2019 general fund operating budget to the School Committee, including net school spending compliance and comparable community analysis (academic performance, demographic, and financial). We highlighted the assumptions that underlie the FY2019 budget, including normal step and lane increases, special education tuition increases, regular education student transportation increases, funding to reinstate a full-time curriculum coordinator for English, two assistant principal positions to support the elementary schools, and funding to support a new elementary-level therapeutic program. The School Committee held public input sessions and reviewed district-level budget detail and a staff salary book that cross-walked salaries to the main budget document.

At the April town meeting, representatives once again asked thoughtful questions, received straightforward answers, and approved (138-4-2) the FY2019 funding request of \$59 million to support the Chelmsford Public Schools. As with the previous fall town

meeting, this was another step toward rebuilding trust in the financial processes and practices of the Chelmsford Public Schools.

### **Appointment of Harrington Elementary School Principal**

In the spring of 2017, former Harrington Principal Michael LaCava informed us that he was leaving the district to pursue a position as K-12 Director of Performing Arts with the Wellesley Public Schools. Principal Michael LaCava had served at the Harrington School for seven years. We did not identify a permanent replacement for Principal LaCava at Harrington School for the 2017/18 school year during the formal search process that spring. Therefore, we changed direction and sought a candidate to serve as the acting principal of Harrington for the 2017/18 school year and planned to conduct a full search for a permanent replacement in the winter/spring of 2018. Mrs. Patricia Tobin served as the principal of Harrington School for the 2017/18 school year.

After a full search conducted during the spring of 2018 for a permanent principal, I selected Mr. Robert J. Asselin to serve as the next principal of Harrington Elementary School. In addition to the Interview Committee's strong approval of Mr. Asselin's combination of experience and qualifications for the position, his personal and professional references praised his work ethic, his collaborative and inclusive management style, his focus on educating the whole child (keeping students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs at the center of decision-making), and his communication practices with students, parents, and staff. I am very excited that we were able to attract an experienced educator to this important position and look forward to working with Mr. Asselin and the Harrington community this year.

### **Appointment of Coordinator of English 5-12**

The School Committee approved the restoration of the coordinator of English position in the FY2019 budget process. Due to budget issues, the district had eliminated the position during the 2014/15 school year. Since that time, the social studies coordinator for the district had been performing the work of both the English and social studies coordinators. Late this spring Ms. Abbey Dick was appointed to serve as the coordinator of English 5-12 for the Chelmsford Public Schools.

Abbey previously served as director of humanities in the Malden Public Schools. In that role, Abbey oversaw curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development for English, social studies, and several other departments in the district. Before that, she had taught grades 6-12 ELA, including co-teaching Advanced Placement language and literature. Abbey has also worked as a literacy specialist at DESE, where she learned about data analysis, assessment writing, grant evaluation, curriculum units, and the diverse needs of Massachusetts school districts. Although she enjoyed state-level education policy and learned many things, she missed working in a district and came back to the public schools as an English teacher and then administrator. Abbey is very

excited to join us in Chelmsford. During her interview process she referred to this position as her “dream job.”

**Dual-Enrollment Programming: Partnership with Middlesex Community College**

We formed an exciting partnership with Middlesex Community College to provide opportunities for Chelmsford High School students to earn college credits while working toward their high school diploma requirements. Work in preparation for the launch of this new dual-enrollment program was initiated last winter and will enable CHS students to earn high school and college credit in the following courses during the 2018/19 school year: Sociology, Exploring Early Childhood III, and Biotechnology I. Additional dual-enrollment courses and opportunities will follow as the program is implemented and expanded.

As I reflect on this past year, I see that we have accomplished much as we worked together. In addition to the developments already listed, we have taken steps to rebuild both the school community's and the greater Chelmsford community's confidence in the school department administration. I have worked closely with Town Manager Cohen and the members of his financial team to provide accurate and timely information on our budget to Chelmsford's boards. We closed the books on FY2018 with a positive fund balance, transferred the unexpended local budget appropriation to the circuit breaker revolving fund to help offset future unanticipated special education tuition costs, and set aside remaining school choice funds as a reserve for School Committee use. Much more work lies ahead, but I strongly feel we are continuing to move in the right direction. I am excited about our staff's past accomplishments in the district and look forward to a successful 2018/19 school year.