

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent

Memorandum

To: Members of the School Committee
From: Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: May 19, 2019
Re: Chelmsford Public Schools: 2018/19 Year in Review

As I reflect on my fourth year leading the Chelmsford Public Schools (CPS), 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 CPS 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 CPS staff 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.

FY2018 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, 2018. 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 CPS conducted in prior fiscal years, each with findings and recommendations for improvement of financial practices.

FY2019 Budget Administration

School Committee members received regular reports on the district's finances throughout FY2019, including the local operating budget, grant funds, and revolving funds. After reviewing the FY2019 budget, I am pleased to report 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 FY2019, the district is able to:

- reserve approximately \$2.5 million in the special education circuit breaker revolving fund to pay for future unanticipated/unfunded special education student tuition and/or transportation costs. (By contrast, in the fall of 2015, the school department had to request a supplemental appropriation of \$500,000 from the town to cover unanticipated special education tuition costs because no reserve fund balance was available.)
- carry over approximately \$600,000 in food service/school nutrition funds. This is a significant achievement, given that many school districts find themselves operating their food service programs at a deficit.
- set aside approximately \$1.6 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. School choice funds will be utilized annually to support the 1:1 Chromebook initiative.

FY2020 Budget Presentation and Review

In February, the central office presented the FY2020 general fund operating budget to the School Committee, including net school spending compliance and comparable community analysis (demographic and financial). We highlighted the assumptions that underlie the FY2020 budget, including normal step and lane increases, a set-aside for contract negotiations with our unions, a net decrease in special education tuition costs, special education student transportation increases, funding to reinstate a full-time curriculum coordinator for world languages and student exchange programs, two additional assistant principal positions to support the elementary schools, an additional integrated preschool classroom at the CHIPs Program, a social worker at Parker Middle School, and a new special education team chairperson to support our intensive special education programs districtwide. 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 2019 town meeting, representatives once again asked thoughtful questions, received straightforward answers, and approved (nearly unanimously) the FY2020 funding request of \$61 million to support CPS.

10-Year Capital Plan

The Facilities Subcommittee of the School Committee met in the summer of 2018 to begin to review the recommendations of the Dore & Whittier (D&W) comprehensive

facilities assessment as it relates to CPS. An initial internal review and prioritization of the D&W recommendations were provided and sorted in the following major categories: Completed, General Maintenance, High Priority (1–3 years), Medium Priority (4–6 years), and Low Priority (7–10 years) action items. Further, a number of items were categorized as “building envelope” and “no action recommended.” The items categorized as building envelope will be taken together for further review and recommendation. Throughout the fall, various elements of the 10-year capital plan were presented to the School Committee and prioritized for consideration. Although the priority of various elements of the approved 10-year capital plan may evolve, the 10-year capital plan provides a roadmap for town and school department investments in the schools.

FY2020 Capital Expenditures

In November, the School Committee approved a prioritized request of \$1.77 million for building and technology capital projects in the schools. The town Capital Planning Committee ultimately recommended \$1 million in school-related capital projects to spring town meeting for consideration, which was approved. The building capital projects approved by town meeting include code compliance upgrades to several school kitchen and food preparation areas (\$285,644), upgrades to kitchen service lines (\$101,706), and expansion of the front parking lot at Harrington Elementary School (\$205,000). Technology capital projects include the first year of a three-year investment in upgrades to the existing security camera and intrusion systems at McCarthy and Parker Middle Schools (\$440,000).

Options-Based (ALICE) Emergency Response Protocol

The district adopted an options-based response protocol to emergency events in the 2018/19 school year. This initiative was a coordinated effort with local first responders, including the Chelmsford Police and Fire departments. Training was provided to all staff at the beginning of the school year on the ALICE options-based response protocols. A number of administrators attended specialized training and were certified as ALICE instructors. Staff and students collaborated to create age-appropriate training videos and materials to assist in the ALICE options-based emergency response implementation. All staff and students practiced the various responses to drill scenarios throughout the school year. All school and district emergency response plans were updated and an external, third-party review of our facilities, emergency plans, and response protocols is in process.

MA DESE Coordinated Program Review

A five-member Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education team conducted a Coordinated Program Review in CPS to evaluate the implementation of selected criteria in the program areas of special education, civil rights, and other

related general education requirements, as well as English learner education. The team had an opportunity to interview staff and parents, to observe classroom facilities, and to review the programs under way in the district. A copy of the Coordinated Program Review report of findings was provided to the School Committee. All district action steps and elements of the Coordinated Program Review have been accepted by MA DESE.

Elementary-Level Therapeutic Program: STRIVE

The establishment of the STRIVE Program was recommended and approved in the FY19 budget to address the need for a continuum of services with regard to students requiring behavioral/therapeutic services at the elementary grade levels of our district. This was identified as a programmatic need within our recently completed MA DESE Coordinated Program Review. The new program, housed at the South Row Elementary School, opened and began enrolling students in the fall of 2018. All staff members, including a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), special education teachers, and paraprofessionals, worked incredibly hard this past summer to develop entry and exit criteria for the program and a structure to support each referred student's academic, social, and emotional health and well-being. The program has been very successful in its first year of operation due largely to the dedication of so many individuals at South Row and throughout the district committed to ensuring that each referred CPS student is successful.

Appointment of Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning and Counseling Services

The coordinator of school guidance, Mr. Thomas Wright, resigned to take on a new challenge in a neighboring district. Considering our districtwide focus (Strategic Plan Goal No. 2) on students' social and emotional health and well-being, I felt it was time to clearly articulate our vision for a coordinated effort to evaluate and provide responsive programming to meet the social and emotional needs of our students and staff. Mr. Wright and Ms. Katie Simes had taken the lead over the past year coordinating social and emotional health initiatives and programming throughout the district, but now we had a new opportunity to embed and support this work.

We created an updated job description for a new position of coordinator of social emotional learning and counseling services to replace the current coordinator of school guidance position. Ms. Laraine Wilson was selected as the new coordinator of social emotional learning and counseling services. She joined the district this past December. Laraine's educational philosophy is child-centered, and she sought to join a school environment where the adults understand themselves to be lifelong learners in an effort to constantly improve their teaching and therapeutic practices. Throughout her career, Laraine has had many opportunities to use data to inform curriculum and instruction decisions. As part of her instructional leadership team work, she has guided the process of using student testing and performance data as well as staff survey feedback to guide instructional choices. Laraine values diversity and believes that all children, staff, and

parents have the right to a safe, nurturing school environment where academic achievement is valued, supported, and celebrated.

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. Ms. Abbey Dick was appointed to serve as the CPS coordinator of English 5-12 for the 2018/19 school year.

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.

Addition of Elementary Level Assistant Principal Positions

The FY2019 budget added 2.0 elementary school assistant principal positions in support of goals I and II of the district's strategic plan. During the 2018/19 school year, two .5 FTE assistant principal positions were added at the Byam, Center, Harrington, and South Row elementary schools. We were able to attract two outstanding candidates to fulfill these new roles in our district.

Ms. Betsy Dolan was appointed as the assistant principal for the Byam and Harrington schools. Previously, she had served as a school counselor at the elementary level in the Ayer-Shirley school district. In this role she handled many administrative duties while supporting the varying needs of students throughout her building. Her approach to working with students, families, staff, and the wider community was highlighted throughout her interview process and through speaking with current supervisors and colleagues. She is seen as a leader in her building and district, where she brings a thoughtful and supportive style.

Mr. Jayson Ramalho was appointed as the assistant principal for the Center and South Row schools. Jayson is a proud South Row alumnus! Prior to his return to South Row, he had been a physical education teacher at Methuen Comprehensive Grammar School since 2011, where he was recognized as their *2018 Teacher of the Year*. Jayson has taken on many leadership roles in his former district. He was a member of their district

evaluation, wellness, professional development, and PBIS teams. Jayson is an active member of the Massachusetts Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (MAHPED). He is currently the VP of adaptive physical education on their executive board. In addition to coaching numerous teams, he is active in the PTO and family events in the school community.

1:1 Technology Initiative

An Information Communication and Technology Services Steering Committee was convened to discuss and plan for a 1:1 Chromebook implementation in the district. The committee's 24 members represented all our stakeholder groups. The committee brought together district and building administrators, teachers, technology integration specialists, technicians, unions, and parents. It was a diverse mix of interested parties, and everyone worked very hard to make sure critical components for the roll-out were addressed.

The committee followed the International Society for Technology in Education ([ISTE](#)) recommended guidelines to address planning a 1:1 implementation. This gave the committee a good starting point to think about all the changes that teachers, students, and parents would experience as this initiative unfolds. Documentation was produced to serve as a guide for the district as we begin this journey. The plan they developed requires constant revisiting based on administrator, teacher, student, and parent feedback. This is both expected and encouraged. We want the CPS 1:1 initiative to be successful, and it will be, because the approach taken is deliberate and founded in the best instructional practices. Funding to launch the 1:1 Chromebook initiative was approved in the FY2020 budget.

Ratification of the Chelmsford School Administrators Association Collective Bargaining Agreement

In March 2019, the School Committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford School Administrators Association bargaining unit, covering the period from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022.

Ratification of the Chelmsford Schools' Food Service Association Contract

In March 2019, the School Committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford Schools' Food Service Association covering the period from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022.

Over this past year, 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 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 will close the books on FY2019 with a positive fund balance, transferring any unexpended local budget appropriation to the circuit breaker revolving fund to help offset future unanticipated special education tuition costs, and we'll set aside remaining school choice funds as a reserve for School Committee use. Much 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 2019/20 school year.