

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent

Memorandum

To: Members of the School Committee
From: Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: July 14, 2023
Re: Chelmsford Public Schools: 2022/23 Year in Review

As I reflect on my eighth 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, especially coming out of the pandemic, 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 students' needs displayed by our teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and support staff. Following are some highlights of our collective work this year:

FY2022 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, 2022. 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.

FY2023 Budget Administration

School Committee members received regular reports on the district's finances throughout FY2023, including the local operating budget, grant funds, and revolving funds. After reviewing the FY2023 budget, I am pleased to report the district has continued to make 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 FY2023, the district can:

- 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, eight years ago 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 as no reserve fund balance was available).
- reserve \$ 760,000 in a new special education reserve fund in accordance with MGL Ch. 40 § 13E to offset unanticipated/unfunded special education student tuition and/or transportation costs in future fiscal years.
- carry over approximately \$ 3.3 million 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. A portion of these funds has been allocated to an FY2024 capital improvement project.
- set aside approximately \$ 2.5 million in school choice funds as a reserve for future spending by the School Committee on educational programs and services to augment current program offerings in the schools, or a contingency in the event of an unanticipated budget shortfall. School choice funds are earmarked annually to support the 1:1 student Chromebook initiative.

FY2024 Budget Presentation and Review

In February, the administration presented the FY2024 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 FY2024 budget, including normal step and lane increases, funding to support the second phase implementation of the in-district Language Based Program at the middle school level, and funding to support the expansion of the ASD Program at the elementary level. 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. The budget presented and reviewed was in-line with Town Manager Cohen's recommended budget increase of \$3.2 million, \$ 67.5 million to \$ 70.7 million, to support the Chelmsford Public Schools.

At the April 24, 2023 town meeting, representatives once again asked thoughtful questions, received straightforward answers, and approved (near unanimously: 139 - 2) the FY2024 funding request of \$70.7 million to support CPS.

Diversity and Equity Professional Development

The Chelmsford Public Schools is committed to providing professional development for our school community in the areas of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). As a result, we contracted with the Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement (IDEAS) through the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) to provide professional learning opportunities that support equity and success for all. With the help of a small sub-committee made up of administration and union leadership, we developed a plan for the 2022/23 school year and designated dates for the school committee, administration, and staff through our professional development days to continue the work around DEI at all levels. We had a very successful year working with IDEAS and look forward to continuing to build our capacity on the topic of DEI in future years.

Districtwide Facilities Master Plan & Short/Long Term Facilities Visioning

In July of 2021, the school committee authorized the issuance of an RFP to engage the services of a firm to review the status of and provide updates to our current 10-Year Capital Plan, our MSBA priority project and application for long-term MSBA funding consideration, and to consider short-term program and/or facility enhancements and realignments while our long-term capital project is pending. Dore & Whittier Architects, the author of the original districtwide master plan, was selected to return, update the short- and long-term capital plans, and host community visioning sessions to reassess and recommend a MSBA priority project. Dore & Whittier provided updates to the school committee throughout the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022. After careful consideration and much discussion, the school committee revised the MSBA priority project (from Chelmsford High School to Parker Middle School) and voted in April of 2022 and 2023 to advance Parker Middle School as the MSBA priority project in hopes of building a new middle school in Chelmsford in the years to come. Dore and Whittier also identified a potential short-term facilities enhancement and realignment of the middle school grade levels while our long-term capital project is pending. The potential for merging the McCarthy and Parker Middle School populations and creating a separate grade 5/6 middle school (Parker) and separate grade 7/8 middle school (McCarthy) was identified as a short-term measure to provide more equitable middle school programming in town. In August of 2022, the school committee voted to realign the middle school grade level configuration beginning in the 2022/23 school year; the Parker Middle School will serve all grade 5/6 students and McCarthy Middle School will serve all grade 7/8 students in Chelmsford. A significant amount of planning and preparation for this important transition occurred throughout the 2022/23 school year.

Districtwide Strategic Planning

In November of 2021, the district contracted with District Management Group (DMGroup) to develop a multi-year strategic plan for the Chelmsford Public Schools. DMGroup worked with district administrators and a steering committee to assess our current performance and needs, and to clearly articulate priority areas to be the focus of our improvement efforts in the coming years to continue to advance education in

Chelmsford. DMGroup hosted staff and community sessions to gather input for the plan and presented updates to the steering committee and school committee throughout the process. In June of 2022, a draft strategic plan was presented and final feedback was sought on the identified priority areas. In July of 2022, the final strategic plan that will guide our work in the Chelmsford Public Schools over the next 5-years: 2022/23 – 2026/27 was approved by the school committee. A steering committee met regularly over the 2022/23 school year to monitor the implementation of Year 1 of the strategic plan priority areas.

Special Education Opportunities Review

In September, the district contracted with District Management Group (DMGroup) to develop an understanding of current practice related to special education and intervention in the district, explore alignment of current practice with best practice research in order to raise achievement of students with disabilities, and identify opportunities to align staff practices with best practices and effectively manage staffing in order to create sustained change in schools and classrooms and improve the work life of teachers. In May, the school committee received a report and recommendations detailing the project methodology, data analysis, commendations, and high leverage opportunity areas for CPS to consider implementing to improve supports for students with disabilities. The recommendations will be reviewed and aligned in the “equity” priority area of the Year 2 implementation of the strategic plan.

School Safety and Security Review

In November, the district contracted with the Edward Davis Company to conduct a security site assessment and policy review of all eight (8) CPS schools. The contract included a comprehensive physical security site assessment/threat vulnerability risk assessment of all eight (8) CPS school facilities. The scope included fact gathering and a technical walk through resulting in a report of identified threats relative to each schools’ safety and prioritized recommendations for enhanced day-to-day security. School administration and our district security subcommittee have reviewed the report and are working to incorporate immediate, short- and long-term recommendations to CPS facilities and procedures.

1:1 Technology Initiative

In FY2019, 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 grounded in best instructional practices. Funding to launch the 1:1 Chromebook initiative was approved and the CPS 1:1 Chromebook initiative launched in FY2020.

Funding for the fourth year of implementation of the 1:1 Chromebook initiative was incorporated in the FY2023 budget to provide all incoming 5th grade students at McCarthy and Parker Middle Schools and 9th grade students at Chelmsford High School with a district-provided computer (Chromebook) for use at home and in school. At the start of the 2022/23 school year, all grade 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 students were provided with a district issued computer for use at home and in school.

Ratification of the Chelmsford Schools' Food Service Association Contract

On August 2, 2022, the School Committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford Schools Food Service Association bargaining unit covering the period from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025.

Ratification of the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers – Professional Support Personnel Contract

On November 21, 2022, the School Committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers – Professional Support Personnel bargaining unit covering the period from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025.

Ratification of the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers – Building Custodians Contract

On April 11, 2023, the School Committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers – Building Custodians bargaining unit covering the period from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2026.

Over this past year, we have accomplished much as we worked together. In addition to the aforementioned actions of the past year, we continued to administer and manage the day-to-day operations of the school district, approved capital plans for FY2024, submitted an application for MSBA funding consideration of a future long-term school building project, expanded programming, such as the Innovation Pathways Program at Chelmsford High School, and continued an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusiveness practices in our school system.

In addition to the developments already listed, we have taken steps to continue 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 FY2023 with a positive fund balance and we will 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 staffs' accomplishments in the district this past year and look forward to a successful 2023/24 school year.