

# 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 12, 2016  
Re: Chelmsford Public Schools: 2015-2016 Year in Review

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As I reflect upon my first 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 who have helped make my transition to Chelmsford as smooth as possible. The Chelmsford school community has welcomed me to the district, and 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 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 this 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, attending events and witnessing 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.

### **Appointment of New Principal of the Center Elementary School**

The 2015-2016 school year was a busy one in the Chelmsford Public Schools. One of the most important matters needing my attention when I arrived in August of 2015 was the selection of a new principal of the Center Elementary School to replace Mr. Christopher Raymond, who resigned from his position at the end of the 2014/15 school year to pursue new employment in the North Andover Public Schools. Mr. Raymond was well liked and respected at Center School, and finding an equally qualified replacement was imperative to ensuring a smooth start to the 2015-2016 school year at Center School.

I was pleased with the number of staff and parents who volunteered their time over the summer to help screen and interview principal candidates. It was a great first experience for me, as a newcomer, to have the guidance and support of the Center School community through this important process. After a comprehensive

advertisement and review process, I chose Ms. Kelly Rogers to serve as the principal of Center Elementary School. I have been impressed with her collaborative and inclusive management style, her focus on educating the whole child (keeping students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs at the center of decision-making), and the way she communicates with students, parents, and staff.

### **Comprehensive Facilities Assessment Study**

In September of 2015, I briefed the school committee on my thoughts about hiring a firm to help us do a comprehensive review of our school buildings. Before defining and implementing the educational programs our community will need in the coming years, we must understand how our existing school facilities help or hinder our efforts. The school committee supported the engagement of a firm to analyze our long-term student enrollment projections, assess current building conditions, and develop educational program and master plan options for us to consider. A key deliverable of the assessment is a 10-year capital plan. The capital plan will guide us as we prepare and submit a statement of interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority for funding consideration from the Commonwealth for a school building project.

In the fall of 2015, the Chelmsford School Committee approved the issuance of a request for proposals (RFP) for a comprehensive facilities assessment. In December 2015, the school committee approved the recommendation to award a contract in the amount of \$193,827 to Dore and Whittier Architects to conduct the comprehensive facilities assessment. Another contract (\$6,173) was approved for the New England School Development Council to conduct a long-range student enrollment projection. This projection will serve as the foundation for calculating the district's upcoming space needs.

This past spring, we held four community visioning sessions to seek input from key community stakeholders on our facility planning work. Over the summer a number of short-term options for implementing full-day kindergarten were proposed to the school committee for consideration. Ultimately, we will select and incorporate a short-term solution into the final report and master plan options presented to the school committee in September. This is a significant undertaking for the district and staff involved, so it is imperative to seek consensus first on a long-term vision for school buildings and facilities in the district.

### **In-District Substitute Teacher Absence System: Aesop**

For the start of the 2015-2016 school year, the district transitioned from contracting with Kelly Services for day-to-day and long-term substitute staff to an in-house model, Aesop Absence Management System, for filling daily staff absences. We reported to the school committee throughout the year on the daily fill-rates of open positions. Building staff reported more efficient filling of openings, better quality control over the substitute teacher pool of candidates for daily openings, and better reporting

functionality than in the past. The change resulted in approximately \$104,000 savings over the FY16 budgeted appropriation for substitute services.

### **Ability to Report School Transportation Concerns Online**

Every day we receive a significant number of telephone calls and emails from parents about school transportation issues (e.g., late buses, no-show buses, requests for route adjustments/changes). Response times to concerns and inquiries were hindered by Chelmsford Public Schools staff routing these communications to the appropriate individual(s) at the contracted transportation company for a response. To allow more timely responses, we developed a web application so parents can submit their transportation concerns and issues online on the Chelmsford Public Schools website. When completed and submitted, the form is automatically forwarded to the appropriate individual(s) at the contracted transportation company and to Chelmsford Public Schools staff for a response. This online form submission also allows for better tracking of concerns and issues. Feedback from parents on the new form has been very complimentary.

### **Massachusetts Association of School Building Officials (MASBO) Financial Review**

In June 2015, the school department received the results of the Financial Operations Review conducted by MASBO during the 2014-2015 school year. In the fall of 2015, the school committee received a summary of the report's recommendations along with recommended actions to be taken by business office staff. Over the course of the year, Director of Business and Finance Michelle Cresta and her staff evaluated each recommendation and incorporated the identified best practices into their work to improve operating efficiencies in the Chelmsford Public Schools.

### **MUNIS Conversion**

Both school and town staff invested significant time and energy into merging the school department's financial accounts and business functions with the town's MUNIS accounting system. Previously, the town and school department utilized independent MUNIS accounting systems. The consolidation is intended to provide more accurate and efficient financial operations and reporting. The yearlong conversion started with the creation of a new school department chart of accounts in the town's MUNIS system. A crosswalk of the old and new accounts was established to aid in historical research and reporting. New user accounts were established in the town's MUNIS system, new workflows were established for school department processes, new salary tables and withholding schedules were created, and all school department payroll records and accruals were imported into the town's MUNIS system. The FY2017 school department budget was posted in the town's MUNIS system and school staff payroll was added in July 2016. Beginning in FY2017, all financial accounting and reporting will be performed in the town's MUNIS system.

### **Superintendent's Entry Plan**

In October 2015, I presented the school committee with an entry plan and focus areas for my work in the 2015-2016 school year. I met with many parents, students, staff, and community members truly interested in bettering the Chelmsford Public Schools. I reviewed existing district documents, including the strategic plan, individual school improvement plans, departmental goals, policy and procedure manuals, collective bargaining agreements, capital plans, budget documents, audits, and corrective action plans. I worked closely with the administrative team to analyze the information in these documents, identifying the district's strengths and opportunity areas. Over the next six months we will develop district goals, objectives, and outcomes to guide our work in the coming years.

### **Standards-Based Report Cards**

After three years of preparation, the elementary schools transitioned to standards-based report cards. All teachers at each grade level measure student learning against a set of academic criteria, or standards. The standards-based report card committee vertically aligned the standards across the grade levels and identified all the benchmarks for each term. The purpose of standards-based report cards is to clearly and objectively communicate how a child is doing in school. It specifies how a child is performing based on each standard and indicates which areas need additional attention. Teacher training and outreach sessions were held in all schools to help parents with the change.

### **Approval of Fall Town Meeting Articles**

In October 2015, the school department requested an additional appropriation from town meeting representatives of \$500,000 to cover unbudgeted special education tuition costs in FY2016 and \$200,000 to fund the comprehensive facilities assessment (discussed on page 2). Town meeting representatives graciously approved both requests, thereby increasing the FY2016 school department budget from \$52.4 million to \$52.9 million. They authorized \$200,000 to fund the contracts with Dore and Whittier Architects and the New England School Development Council for the comprehensive facilities assessment and long-range student enrollment projection, respectively.

I firmly believe the fall town meeting was an important first step in beginning to rebuild confidence with Chelmsford residents. Town meeting representatives asked good questions, received straightforward answers, and nearly unanimously (129-7) approved the request for an additional \$500,000 appropriation to cover unbudgeted special education tuition costs.

### **Department and School Presentations to School Committee**

In the fall of 2015, we implemented a new format to spotlight the work underway throughout the system. The first school committee meeting of each month included a presentation by one district school that highlighted work on the various school improvement initiatives, school improvement plans, and extracurricular activities unique to each school. The second school committee meeting of each month included a

presentation from one academic department on initiatives in that department, accomplishments and/or progress toward attaining academic goals, and progress toward reaching the goals and objectives outlined in the district's five-year strategic plan. Feedback on the new meeting format from school staff, parents, and community members was positive; people appreciated the extra attention and time given to coverage of the work underway in Chelmsford's departments and schools.

#### **Ratified Food Service Association Agreement**

In November 2015, the school committee ratified a one-year contract with the Chelmsford Food Service Association to bring its contract into line with all other employment agreements in the school department. Negotiations are in progress for successor agreements for all school department contracts that began July 1, 2016.

#### **MASC Working Sessions: School Committee Governance and Goal Setting**

Also in November 2015, the school committee invited Dorothy Presser from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) to review communication and operating protocols with the school committee and new central administration team members. I appreciate the members of the school committee taking this proactive step to invite the MASC to work with us as we develop expectations and operating norms for our important relationship. Proper and timely communication is critical to our collective work, and occasionally the processes and systems that underlie our communication as well as roles and responsibilities need to be examined. I look forward to continuing our work with Ms. Presser and the MASC when she returns to the district and facilitates the next working session on goal setting.

#### **FY2017 Capital Expenditures**

In November, the school committee approved the request for \$1.6 million for building and technology capital projects. The building capital projects include fire alarm upgrades at various schools, a plumbing upgrade at Byam Elementary School, new doors and hardware at South Row Elementary School, asbestos removal at various schools, and replacing the rooftop HVAC units at central office. Technology capital projects include a continuation of outfitting district classrooms for the twenty-first century with overhead projectors and interactive whiteboards, upgrades to existing security camera systems, additional keyless entry points at schools, and replacement of outdated PA/intercom systems in the schools.

#### **MOU between Chelmsford Police, Schools, and Middlesex DA's Office**

A new memorandum of understanding (MOU) was executed in November between the Chelmsford Public Schools, Chelmsford Police Department, and Middlesex District Attorney's Office that clarified roles and responsibilities of each entity and coordinates the sharing of information to better promote safe and nurturing school environments. The relationship and information sharing between the three entities is critical to safeguarding staff and students.

Since my arrival in the district, I have strived to establish and foster relationships with town administrators, including our first responders. Police Chief Spinney and Fire Chief Ryan have been a tremendous resource to me and members of my administrative team throughout the year. An example of the collaboration is the work that was performed last summer to allow the Chelmsford Police Department to view each of the external/internal video surveillance cameras located at each school in the district. In the event of an emergency, the Chelmsford Police Department can now view live video feeds from the school surveillance system from their dispatch and/or command center.

### **Custodial Cleaning and Management Services Contract**

In January 2016, I briefed the school committee on the options available for consideration when the five-year contract with Aramark ended on June 30, 2016. After much discussion, the school committee authorized the advertisement of an RFP for a hybrid model of custodial cleaning services. Under this model, a custodian employed by the school department will provide daytime services and one of three vendors will provide nighttime cleaning services. The school committee also approved the advertisement for a director of facility services to administer the overall program.

The district received an excellent response to the RFP from multiple vendors and ultimately awarded contracts to three vendors. Advanced Maintenance Solutions, Inc. received a one-year contract with two option years to provide nighttime custodial cleaning services at the elementary schools (Byam, Center, Harrington, South Row, and Westlands) and in the central administration office. S.J. Services, Inc. was awarded a one-year contract with two option years to provide nighttime custodial cleaning services at the middle schools (Parker and McCarthy). Dynamic Janitorial Cleaning, Inc. received a one-year contract with two option years to provide nighttime custodial cleaning services at Chelmsford High School. The awarding of these contracts resulted in a savings of \$75,000 from the original FY2017 budget figure for contracted custodial cleaning services. Contract administration and oversight by our new director of facility services will be an essential element of the success of this new program.

### **Review of Contracted Legal Services**

Also in January, the school committee authorized the advertisement of an RFP for contracted general counsel and special education legal services. The committee has been represented by the same general and special education legal counsel for more than 15 years. The school committee received a number of proposals for consideration in response to the RFP. Committee members are currently screening and interviewing firms for consideration in an effort to monitor and review services the district is receiving to ensure operating efficiencies within a financially responsible framework.

### **Online Payment System for School Nutrition Program**

The food services program launched an online payment system in January to allow parents to complete financial transactions online. This was done in response to parents' continuing concerns about sending their children to school with cash or checks and

making sure the funds are properly recorded and used for their intended purpose. Another benefit is that parents can monitor their child's account balance and receive low-balance alerts. As with the online reporting of student transportation concerns described earlier, the district is responding to the desires of parents and the community.

#### **Establishment of Assistant Business Manager Position**

Also in January, the school committee approved the establishment of an assistant school business administrator position in the Business Office. This position would provide additional support to allow more timely improvements in the development and implementation of financial processes and procedures related to special revenue and revolving funds, student activity funds, community education funds, and state and federal grant funds. This position will be sustained solely through the use of grant and revolving funds, resulting in no financial impact on the local operating budget.

#### **Review of the School Calendar and Homework Policy**

In the winter months, the school committee began reviewing the school calendar and current school committee policies pertaining to the issuance of homework, scheduling of testing, and excused absences for religious reasons. Public input sessions were held to allow members of the community, both town and school, to provide input on the topic. Ultimately, the school committee revised its current policy after having heard from community, parents, and staff members, and the administration is now charged with communicating and implementing the policy changes with students, parents, and staff. A significant amount of time and energy went into this inclusive review in an effort to be sensitive to the changing cultural demographic of our community.

#### **FY2017 Budget Presentation and Review**

In February, the central office presented the FY2017 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 FY2017 budget, including normal step and lane increases, special education transportation and tuition increases, revised contracted custodial cleaning services, and a reserve for to-be-negotiated salary increases. The school committee held public input sessions and reviewed district-level budget detail and a staff salary book that cross-walked staff salaries to the main budget document.

At the April town meeting, town meeting representatives once again asked thoughtful questions, received straightforward answers, and nearly unanimously (137-2-1) approved the FY2017 funding request of \$54.5 million to support the Chelmsford Public Schools. As with the previous fall town meeting, this was another step in rebuilding trust in the financial processes and practices of the Chelmsford Public Schools.

### **Appointment of Director of Student Support Services**

During the spring, the district advertised for director of student support services, a position that would have the primary responsibility for administering the district's special education programming. We were fortunate to have Carol Fredette come out of retirement to chair the search committee. Amy Reese was chosen to serve as the district's next director of student support services. Ms. Reese began her career as a middle/high school teacher in Bennington, VT. She was then employed as an elementary and middle school special education teacher in the Lawrence Public Schools for 8 years. After Lawrence, Ms. Reese worked in the Dracut Public Schools, first as an elementary school special education teacher for 8 years and then as the high school team chairperson in Dracut. She held that position for 2 years before being promoted again in Dracut to assistant director of special education. For the past 4 years she has served as out-of-district coordinator, interim director of student services, and then assistant director of student services in Andover Public Schools.

We are very fortunate to have attracted an experienced, well-rounded candidate to serve Chelmsford. Ms. Reese's elementary, middle, and high school special education teaching experience, combined with her administrative experience as team chairperson, out-of-district coordinator, and assistant director of student support services, will prove invaluable to Chelmsford's student support services department.

### **Appointment of Director of Business and Finance**

In July of 2015, Michelle Cresta joined the Chelmsford Public Schools as director of business and finance. Michelle helped stabilize the district's finances over the 2015-2016 school year; however, in spring she decided to leave Chelmsford for a similar position in Triton Regional School District. After advertising, screening, and interviewing candidates to replace Ms. Cresta, Ms. Joanna Johnson-Collins, who had joined the district in March as the assistant school business administrator, was selected to fill the position. Ms. Johnson-Collins has more than 20 years of private sector financial planning and analysis experience and 6 years of public school business administration experience. Ms. Johnson-Collins has significant experience in fund accounting, oversight and administration of grants and revolving funds, budget preparation, monitoring, and reporting. Given the number of changes and transitions in the business office in recent years, we were fortunate to be able to move Ms. Johnson-Collins into this new role.

### **Appointment of Director of Personnel and Professional Learning**

In April, I sought the permission of the school committee to advertise the position of director of personnel and professional learning. This position replaces the current director of human resources position. One of the priority areas for the 2016-2017 school year is a renewed focus on recruitment, retention, and development of staff in the district. To that end, I significantly revamped and expanded the requirements of the director of human resources position to include advancing the professional development and growth of our staff. The director of personnel and professional



learning will also play a pivotal role in helping district teachers and administrators implement the teacher evaluation system.

After a thorough review and screening process, I chose Dr. Cheryl Kirkpatrick to serve the district in this important role. Dr. Kirkpatrick began her career as a teacher in the Swampscott Public Schools, where she taught history for 8 years. She spent the next 7 years of her career working in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University developing teacher quality and leadership through advising, teaching, and supervising teacher candidates. Dr. Kirkpatrick also co-taught graduate-level courses at Harvard on various school leadership topics, including leadership in education, school reform, middle school methods, and seminars for experienced teachers. After leaving Harvard, for the next 4 years she worked as a researcher and senior advisor for personnel development and strategy in the Boston Public Schools' Office of Human Capital. Most recently, she spent 3 years working in the Lowell Public Schools as coordinator of leadership support and development.

I am very excited about the opportunity to work with Dr. Kirkpatrick in this new role we are establishing in the Chelmsford Public Schools. I know she will be an excellent support to teachers and administrators on personnel matters. In particular she brings a wealth of knowledge and practical experience in the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system, staff induction, and mentoring programs.

**Appointment of Director of Information, Communication, and Technology Services**

I also sought the permission of the school committee to advertise the position of director of information, communication, and technology services. This job will focus on supporting instructional technology in an effort to ensure that all students, teachers, administrators, and support staff have access to and become proficient users of technology and that technology becomes fully integrated into the twenty-first century teaching and learning environment in the Chelmsford Public Schools.

At the conclusion of the interview, review, and screening process, I chose William Silver to serve the district in this important capacity. Mr. Silver began his career in the Methuen Public Schools as a mathematics and computer teacher, later serving for 8 years as an instructional technology specialist in Methuen. For the past 4 years Mr. Silver has served as director of information, communication, and technology services in the Lowell Public Schools, overseeing large-scale deployments of technology and curricula initiatives at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. He has a unique understanding of the network infrastructure required to successfully implement curricula initiatives in schools and classrooms. Mr. Silver is a thoughtful leader with exceptional communication skills who works to develop a collaborative solutions-based approach to supporting the needs of staff and students.

As I reflect on this past year, I see that we have accomplished much as we worked together. In addition to the developments listed above, 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 the various boards in town. We closed the books on FY2016 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 FY2016 and anticipated FY2017 school choice funds as a reserve for school committee use. There is much more work ahead, but I strongly feel we are moving in the right direction. I am excited about the new administrative team taking shape and look forward to a successful 2016–2017 school year.