

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent

Memorandum

To: Members of the School Committee
From: Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: August 14, 2017
Re: Chelmsford Public Schools: 2016/17 Year in Review

As I reflect on my second 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.

Comprehensive Facilities Assessment

In September of 2015, I briefed the school committee on my thoughts about hiring a firm to help us complete 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 hiring 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 was a 10-year capital plan. Another result was the preparation and submission of a statement of interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for funding consideration from the state for a school building project.

In December 2015, the school committee approved the award of 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 serves as the foundation for calculating the district's upcoming space needs.

Through the spring, summer, and fall of 2016, community visioning sessions sought input from key community stakeholders on our facility-planning work and the review of short-term options for implementing full-day kindergarten. The school committee approved a plan to request funding to construct modular classrooms at each elementary school and presented the plan for funding consideration at town meeting in October 2016. Another request made at town meeting was for funding an amendment to the Dore and Whittier contract to refine and select a long-term school construction project to submit to the MSBA.

Approval of Fall Town Meeting Articles

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 will provide much-needed space at the elementary level as enrollment increases and will accommodate the additional classroom space needed for full-day kindergarten. The vote required a two-thirds margin; the measure narrowly passed (93-45-1). A second warrant article sought an additional \$40,000 to fund an amendment to the Dore and Whittier contract to refine the master plan options from the comprehensive facilities assessment and select a priority project to submit to the MSBA through the statement-of-interest (SOI) process. Town meeting graciously approved the request (105-27).

MSBA Statement of Interest

The comprehensive facilities assessment contract with Dore and Whittier was amended to facilitate community input sessions on the five master plan options in January and February, 2017 and to help the school committee choose one option in March 2017 to incorporate into a SOI for submission to the MSBA in April 2017. After a number of public forums as well as information sharing and review, the school committee voted to submit a SOI to the MSBA in April 2017 for a future school construction project (renovation, addition, and/or new school building), with Chelmsford High School as the priority. The high school project will be incorporated into the 10-year capital improvement plan for the Chelmsford Public Schools.

Custodial Cleaning and Management Services Contract

After we issued a request for proposals in the winter of 2016, we awarded contracts to three vendors to implement a hybrid model of custodial cleaning services in the district. Under this model, a custodian employed by the school department provides daytime services and one of three contracted vendors provides nighttime cleaning services in the schools.

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 2016/17 school year was the first year of the new hybrid cleaning model. By all accounts, the implementation was successful. Anecdotal evidence shared throughout the year indicated staff, students and parents were very impressed with the cleanliness of the buildings. The staff at each school also appreciated having a district employee on site during the school day to assist with building management issues.

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, and this presentation format continued in the 2016/17 school year. The first school committee meeting of each month included a presentation by one district school that highlighted work on various planned and ongoing school improvement initiatives 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.

Ratification of the Chelmsford School Administrators' Association Agreement

In December 2016, the school committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford School Administrators' Association covering the period of July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2019.

Ratification of the Food Service Association Agreement

In January 2017, the school committee ratified a three-year contract with the Chelmsford Food Service Association covering the period of July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2019.

FY2016 Massachusetts DESE Financial Audit

On an annual basis, 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 (MA DESE). Powers & Sullivan, LLC performed the district's external financial audit for the year ending June 30, 2016. 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 that were conducted during FY2015, each with findings and recommendations for improvement of financial practices.

FY2017 Budget Administration

The school committee members received regular reports on the district's finances throughout FY2017, 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 financial reporting for the district.

After reviewing the FY2017 budget, I am pleased to report that in just two years, the district has made great strides in stabilizing its finances. By implementing strict financial practices, it has been able to accrue several reserve fund balances for future budget needs. At the end of FY2017, the district was able to:

- carry over approximately \$850,000 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, just two years ago the school department had to request a supplemental appropriation from the town of \$500,000 to cover unanticipated special education tuition costs because no reserve fund balance was available).
- carry over approximately \$300,000 in food service/school nutrition funds. Given the annual revenue and expenses for the school nutrition program, this is not a significant balance, but many school districts find themselves operating their food service programs at a deficit.
- set aside approximately \$1 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 \$1.7 million for building and technology capital projects in the schools. The building capital projects include water fountain replacements at various schools, a plumbing upgrade at Harrington Elementary School, new doors and hardware at McCarthy Middle School, asbestos

removal at various schools, replacing the classroom carpets with VCT (tile) at Center Elementary School, replacing the accordion walls with fixed walls between classrooms at Chelmsford High School, upgrading the lecture hall (seats, lights, sound, etc.) at Chelmsford High School, and kitchen/café upgrades to the freezer and serving lines at Byam Elementary School. Technology capital projects include a continuation of outfitting district classrooms for the twenty-first century with overhead projectors and interactive televisions/whiteboards, a network infrastructure upgrade at Parker Middle School, upgrades to the existing security camera system, and replacement of outdated PA/intercom systems in the schools.

FY2018 Budget Presentation and Review

In March, the central office presented the FY2018 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 FY2018 budget, including normal step and lane increases, special education tuition increases, funding to implement full-day kindergarten, funding to reinstate a full-time student transportation coordinator, 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 salaries to the main budget document.

At the April town meeting, representatives once again asked thoughtful questions, received straightforward answers, and approved (105-34-1) the FY2018 funding request of \$57 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 Elementary School Principals

Earlier this spring two of our elementary school principals informed us that they were leaving the district to pursue other employment at the end of the 2016/17 school year. Principal Michael LaCava had served at the Harrington School for the past seven years. He accepted a position as K-12 Director of Performing Arts with the Wellesley Public Schools. Principal Kelly Rogers had served at the Center School for the past two years. Fortunately, Ms. Rogers will remain in the Chelmsford Public Schools as the Coordinator of Reading, English Language Learners, and Title I.

Dianna Fulreader was appointed to serve as the Center School principal. Ms. Fulreader has served as an elementary school assistant principal for the past six years in Tyngsboro and Groton. In that time, she has actively championed safe and supportive school practices, with a focus on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) through a Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) framework. Dianna's previous 20 years of experience as a social worker and supervisor of social support staff will be a great

asset, both to Center School and the Chelmsford Public Schools in general. Ms. Fulreader sets high expectations for all students and supports teachers in providing relevant and engaging instruction that results in positive outcomes for her students and staff.

We did not identify a permanent replacement for Principal LaCava at Harrington School during the formal search late last spring. This is a very important position for families and staff, and as I indicated at the start of the search process, I would not appoint a permanent replacement unless I was certain it was the right person for the Harrington School community. Several other local principal searches yielded finalist candidates that would not be the correct fit for Harrington. Therefore, we changed direction and sought a candidate to serve as the acting principal of Harrington for the 2017/18 school year, and we plan to conduct a full search for a permanent replacement next winter and spring.

Mrs. Patricia A. Tobin will serve as the principal of Harrington School for the 2017/18 school year. Mrs. Tobin is a high-energy, highly motivated, and versatile educational leader with in-depth experience as a public school teacher and administrator. She has demonstrated experience in effective instructional and organizational leadership, curriculum and professional development, and strategic planning as well as managing and supervising all functions of a school's professional and physical environment. Mrs. Tobin has excellent communication and organizational skills that enable her to establish a forum for setting high standards and positive expectations for staff, students, and the school community.

Over her 36-year career in public school education, Mrs. Tobin worked at the Dutile Elementary School in Billerica Public Schools. She served for 18 years as an elementary school teacher and for the past 18 years as principal of Dutile. Patricia has developed and implemented curricula focused on improving student writing and balanced literacy, and she has led district-wide staff and curriculum development. Since retiring from the principal position at Dutile six years ago, Mrs. Tobin has served as a math coach in Billerica, providing professional development and teacher training to support mathematics instruction in the elementary grades. She has also served as an adjunct faculty member at Fitchburg State University since 2009.

Appointment of Coordinator of Science K-12

The school committee approved the restoration of the coordinator of science position in the FY2018 budget process. Due to budget issues, the district had eliminated the position during the 2014/15 school year. Since that time, the mathematics coordinator for the district had been performing the work of both the science and mathematics coordinators. Late this spring Mr. Jon Morris was appointed to serve as the Coordinator of Science K-12 for the Chelmsford Public Schools. Jon previously served as the Director of STEM for the Melrose Public Schools. Prior to that, he taught physics at Chelmsford

High School for 15 years. Using his education and his teaching experience, Jon has worked closely with teachers to develop and model lessons with a focus on engagement strategies that utilize technology as a support in STEM. Beyond his knowledge of science content, Jon is well versed in the use of assessments to inform teaching practices and engage colleagues in meaningful dialogue about teaching and learning to move students forward. He believes that conversation and cultivating relationships are key to enacting change and creating a sense of community. Jon has worked diligently to foster a shared commitment to high standards and expectations for all students in both districts. We look forward to Jon's return to the Chelmsford Public Schools in his new role.

Harvard University Research Project

The Chelmsford Public Schools completed the first year of a three-year partnership with the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Mathematics education professor Dr. Jon Star and his team worked with four middle and high school teachers on developing multiple methods for solving algebra problems. This summer, teachers from Chelmsford and two other districts attended a week-long summer institute with the Harvard researchers exploring effective ways to teach algebra. Partnerships with Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML) are giving Chelmsford staff and students an opportunity to work on cutting-edge practices and technologies.

UMASS Lowell Teaching Excellence and Achievement International Teachers

UML received a U.S. Department of Education's Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) grant in spring of 2017. The program brings passionate, experienced educators from around the world to share their best practices with American educators and to hone their skills in the United States. With this grant, UML was able to host 22 middle and high school teachers selected from around the globe for professional development, field-based experiences, and cultural exchange. Through a partnership between the Chelmsford Public Schools and UML, our district hosted 11 of the TEA educators in our middle schools and high school. These teachers were placed in several content areas, including world languages, English language arts, history, mathematics, and science.

The educational collaboration, transfer of teaching practices, and forging of new relationships benefited our students and teachers. These educators visited Chelmsford Public Schools for six weeks, from January 27 to March 13, 2017. UML has gotten a second TEA grant, and the Chelmsford Public Schools have been chosen to host a new group of educators from the TEA program for the 2017/18 school year. We are looking forward to this next visit and the collaboration between all educators.

Lowell Sun Regional Knowledge Bowl

The Chelmsford Public Schools were invited to participate in the Kendall M. Wallace Greater Lowell Regional Knowledge Bowl. After April school vacation, a team of seventh- and eighth-grade students from the McCarthy and Parker Middle Schools assembled to prepare for the competition with neighboring Billerica, Dracut, Lowell, Tyngsboro, and Tewksbury. Over two nights, the Chelmsford students shone in the preliminary round and took home a trophy in the finals, beating Billerica and Lowell.

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 FY2017 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 2017/18 school year.