

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent

Memorandum

To: Members of the School Committee
From: Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: October 2, 2015
Re: Superintendent's Entry Plan – 2015/16 Focus Areas

Introduction

Over the past two months as I have transitioned from Lowell to Chelmsford, I have met many staff, parents, students and community members truly interested in supporting the work of the school system to provide the best education possible for our students. The Chelmsford school community has welcomed me to the district and I am honored and feel privileged to work with you in the coming years as Superintendent.

I do not take the opportunity to lead this district lightly, it is an opportunity that I simply could not allow to pass when presented, as I feel my experience and skills align with the needs of the district at this time. At the start of my career I had the opportunity to teach at Chelmsford High School in the Business Department. I am glad to be back and again work in this district along with an outstanding group of committed and dedicated educators.

I trust you will find my management style to be one of collaboration, grounded in open and honest communication. A school district's success rests largely on the collective leadership of the school committee, superintendent, and building principals charged with carrying out clearly articulated goals, objectives and outcomes based upon the beliefs and values of the greater school community. The importance of supporting teachers who work hard to foster the growth and development of their students while implementing ever increasing mandates and demands cannot be overstated; it is truly the work of teachers that makes the difference for students. It takes a collective effort and relentless pursuit of excellence, assessment of one's practice, and continual learning to advance a school and school system over time. I look forward to working with you and the greater Chelmsford community as we build upon past successes in the district and make the Chelmsford Public Schools the best public school system in the state.

It is important to note and be mindful of the significant turnover in administration that has occurred in the past few months. We are fortunate to have hired Michelle Cresta as our Director of Business and Finance. Michelle began her work in the district this past July and is experienced in town and school finance. We are also very fortunate that Carol Fredette agreed to return from retirement to help us administer the special education programs for our students this year and to help us advertise and recruit for a permanent replacement to fill this critical role in the district. Therefore, half of the administrative team is new to the district for the 2015/16 school year as Carol, Michelle and I join Linda

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Hirsch, Anne-Marie Fiore and Ken Storlazzi who have been in their roles in the district for a period of time.

Entry Plan – Phase 1 – Listening and Learning

The entry plan outlined below is provided to communicate the process I will use to guide me in developing an understanding of the Chelmsford Public Schools including its strengths and challenge areas requiring improvement. I intend to accomplish this goal in a systematic manner and to keep the school committee, parents and staff informed of my findings along the way. The first five months (August – December, 2015) of my tenure in the district will be a time for me to listen and learn about the values, norms, and expectations of the community. This listening and learning exercise will include individual interviews with school committee members, administrators, teachers, and support staff. I will meet with parents individually and in groups (i.e. Council of Schools, individual PTOs) as well as with students to understand their wants and desires for the district. I may conduct focus groups and/or surveys to collect feedback from stakeholder groups to obtain a broad perspective on the district. I will also review relevant documents to provide data to assess the current state of district programs. Below is a list of documents I plan to review and analyze in Phase 1:

- District strategic plan: 2012 - 2017
- District improvement plan
- School improvement plans
- Annual town reports
- Policy and procedures manuals
- Employee handbook
- Staff (individual) evaluation reports
- District and school professional development plans
- Elementary, middle and high school student handbooks
- Budget documents, presentations and reports
- Student enrollment projections and trends
- Student performance and demographic data
- School committee meeting agendas and minutes
- Collective bargaining agreements
- Non-affiliated (individual) employment contracts
- Building capital, maintenance and technology plans
- Emergency incident/management plans

Entry Plan – Phase 2 – Analyzing Data & Sharing Information

The next three months (January – March, 2016) of my work will be with district and school administrators, analyzing the results of the interviews and information gathering from the evidence collected in Phase 1 to identify significant trends and themes

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in the data. A draft report of my findings will be developed and shared with key stakeholders to gain initial feedback. A final report will be shared with the community at-large and will identify the strengths of the district as well as the areas requiring improvement.

Entry Plan – Phase 3 – Establishing a Plan of Action

The final phase of the entry plan will be to formulate a plan of action for the district given the information and findings derived from Phases 1 and 2 of the planning process to assist the district in moving forward with a shared vision for student learning in the Chelmsford Public Schools. A focus of our work in each phase will be to think and act strategically to concentrate our efforts on high-yield initiatives focused on teaching and learning and building capacity among staff to improve each student's academic, social, and emotional being.

To that end, I have identified three (3) focus areas for my work during the 2015/16 school year to parallel the entry planning initiative outlined above. The three focus areas are as follows:

- 1) A comprehensive review and assessment of the District's 5-Year Plan initiated in 2012. The 2015/16 school year marks year 4 of the plan implementation and a review to determine the effectiveness of the plan, the level of cohesiveness between the outlined mission, vision, and theory of action with the identified strategic objectives and initiatives is warranted. The culmination of this review and assessment will be a report provided next summer in anticipation of the 2016/17 school year and adoption of a new strategic plan to provide a roadmap to guide the work of the district in its next phase of growth and development.
- 2) A comprehensive assessment of the district's school facilities to identify school building repair projects both required and desired in the coming years. Work will focus on creating the desired vision for the district, setting goals and values for the study, conducting and analyzing long-range student enrollment projections, and evaluating the existing conditions in the 8 primary school buildings in the district. The assessment will incorporate discussions regarding desired educational programming, grade level configurations, school feeder patterns, and a number of planning options to be reviewed and evaluated by school staff, community members, and the school committee. The result of the comprehensive facilities assessment will be ten-year capital plan with immediate, short and long-term priorities identified and prioritized with baseline repair cost estimates and new building construction cost estimates.

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- 3) A review and response to the various findings and recommendations from the recent Melanson and Heath report, Powers and Sullivan financial audits, and the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) report. This will include a review of compliance with current school committee policy and/or procedure manuals as well as review and refinement of current procedure manuals in the various departments of the central administration office.

To assist me as I begin my tenure as superintendent in the Chelmsford Public Schools, I will be participating in the New Superintendent's Induction Program sponsored through the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). I am pleased to report that my assigned coach, Karla Brooks Baehr, Ed.D., is an individual with whom I have worked with in the past and greatly respect for her many contributions to education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Dr. Baehr retired in 2011 from DESE as Deputy Commissioner of Accountability, Assistance and Partnerships. I had the pleasure of working with Dr. Baehr when she was superintendent in Lowell. Dr. Baehr also previously served as superintendent in Wellesley and interim superintendent in Lexington and Franklin. Dr. Baehr will be present from time to time at school committee, leadership, and school meetings to view my interactions with school committee members and district staff.