

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent

Memorandum

To: Members of the School Committee
From: Jay Lang, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: June 12, 2026
Re: Chelmsford Public Schools: 2025/26 Year in Review

As I reflect on my eleventh 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 students' needs displayed by our teachers, paraeducators, administrators, and support staff. Following are some highlights of our collective work this year:

FY2025 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). Clifton Larson Allen, LLP (CLA) performed the district's external financial audit for the year ending June 30, 2025. As noted in the audit report, the auditors had no financial findings or financial reporting recommendations.

FY2026 Budget Administration

School Committee members received regular reports on the district's finances throughout FY2026, including the local operating budget, grant funds, and revolving funds. After reviewing the FY2026 budget, I am pleased to report the district continues 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 FY2026, the district can:

- reserve approximately \$ 4.1 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, when I arrived eleven 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 \$ 840,000 in a 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 \$ 3.8 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 FY2026 and FY2027 capital improvement projects.
- set aside approximately \$ 3.1 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 to serve as a contingency in the event of an unanticipated budget shortfall. School choice funds are earmarked annually to support the 1:1 student Chromebook initiative.

FY2027 Budget Presentation and Review

In February, the administration presented the FY2027 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 FY2027 budget, including normal step and lane 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. The budget presented and reviewed was in-line with Town Manager Cohen's recommended budget increase of \$ 2.5 million, \$ 75.65 million to \$ 78.15 million, to support the Chelmsford Public Schools.

At the April 27, 2026 town meeting, representatives once again asked thoughtful questions, received straightforward answers, and approved (near unanimously: 128 - 1 - 2) the FY2027 funding request of \$78.15 million to support CPS.

Parker Middle School Feasibility Study

The Parker Middle School Building Project was the most significant operational undertaking for Chelmsford Public Schools (CPS) during the 2025/26 school year. Conducted in collaboration with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the year was defined by the completion of the "Feasibility & Long-Range Study" phase and critical decisions regarding the school's future physical and educational structure.

Major Milestones and Timeline

- Designer Selection (September 2025): Following a selection process that narrowed six firms down to two, the district officially appointed Ai3 Architects as the project designer on September 9, 2025.
- Educational Visioning (September – October 2025): The district held a series of visioning sessions involving parents, teachers, and students to define the "Educational Program." These sessions focused on connecting design features to desired learning experiences, such as interdisciplinary learning and flexible groupings.
- Site Selection (Early 2026): While three locations were originally considered – the current Parker site, Graniteville Fields, and McCarthy Middle School fields – the district ultimately moved forward with plans to build on the current Parker Middle School site.
- PDP Submission (January 2026): The School Committee approved the Preliminary Design Program (PDP) narrative on January 6, 2026, leading to a massive 1,500-page submission to the MSBA on January 22, 2026.
- Grade Configuration Vote (April 2026): After months of analysis and public forums, the School Committee moved toward a final vote in April 2026 to determine the grade configuration (Grades 4-6) for the May submission to the MSBA.

Major Initiatives and Educational Visioning

The project is driven by a need to resolve structural overcrowding at Parker and projected enrollment increases at the elementary and middle school levels of the district in future years. Major initiatives include:

- The "Neighborhood" Model: The proposed design shifts away from traditional departmental models toward "grade-level neighborhoods." This initiative aims to create "small school" atmospheres within a larger building to foster collaborative learning, peer interaction, and integrated special education support.
- Grade 4 Realignment: A central initiative explored was the potential to move 4th grade from elementary schools to the new middle school. This would alleviate significant overcrowding across all four elementary schools and provide 4th graders with more sophisticated technology and collaborative spaces.
- STEAM Integration: The educational plan prioritizes the creation of dedicated spaces for STEM/STEAM and maker space activities, which are currently restricted by facility constraints. This includes a shift toward Media Arts by redesigning library and technology courses into a single media studies course.
- Specialized Program Inclusion: The design initiatives ensure that all Special Education services, including SAIL (autism), PAVE (life skills), and STRIVE (therapeutic) programs, are delivered in non-stigmatizing, accessible environments integrated within the grade-level clusters.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration and Administrative Governance

As school districts across the Commonwealth grapple with the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI), Chelmsford differentiated itself through a structured, policy-first approach that prioritized administrator and school committee member literacy and ethical frameworks before broad classroom implementation.

The technical foundation for AI integration was established through the work of the ICTS team supported by the administration and school committee prioritizing work on policies addressing artificial intelligence. A multi-month process of collaborative research, administrator training, and public deliberation ensured that leaders and policymakers understood the nuances of generative AI before establishing rules for students.

1. Administrative Intensive (August 13, 2025): Two sessions focused on AI literacy, roles, and ethical considerations. Administrators utilized tools like ChatGPT, NotebookLM, and Napkin.ai in simulation exercises. The second session, "Redefining Assessment with Ethical AI Practices," challenged leaders to envision "authentic assessment" models that rely on human critical thinking rather than rote output.
2. School Board Workshop (November 3, 2025): Titled "Generative AI for School Boards," this session focused on debunking myths about AI and exploring the evolution of the technology. Committee members practiced using key tools to understand the user experience.
3. Policy Development Workshop (March 31, 2026): This workshop focused on the creation of a formal vision and guiding principles. It involved a comprehensive review of state-level documentation from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the analysis of established policies from early-adopter districts.

To ensure any new policies or procedures are not merely bureaucratic hurdles, the district invested heavily in educator training. On November 4, 2025, the district held a "Day of AI" for all staff. The "Day of AI" featured a keynote titled "Learn, Experience, Innovate: The Opportunity for Education in an AI World." Breakout sessions were tailored by grade level and subject area, focusing on:

1. Instructional Planning: Best practices for using AI to generate lesson plans and differentiate materials for varying learner profiles.
2. Academic Integrity: Hands-on practice with tools to understand how they can be used for both "academic dishonesty" and "authentic inquiry".
3. Micro-Credentialing: The district offered advanced courses for educators wanting to specialize in the field, such as "Leading GenAI Adoption and Policy".

A specialized teacher cohort, consisting of 12 educators including Technology Integration Specialists, participated in full-day workshops focused on embedding AI into

the curriculum and using it to enhance family communication. This group served as the internal "alpha testers" for AI tools before their wider rollout to the student body. The Chelmsford Public Schools' seeks to integrate artificial intelligence without compromising human-centered educational values.

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, 2023/24, 2024/25, and 2025/26 school years to monitor the implementation of Years 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the strategic plan priority areas. The School Committee received updates throughout the school year from the subcommittees focused on each of the five priority areas (academic achievement, equity, social emotional learning, human capital, and operations and facilities) as well as mid-year and end-of-year strategic plan updates from DMGroup.

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 FY2027, expanded programming, such as the Dual Enrollment and Innovation Pathways Programs at Chelmsford High School, and continued an emphasis on equitable and inclusive practices in our school system.

In addition to the developments already listed, we have taken steps to continue to build confidence in the school administration and school system. 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 FY2026 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 2026/27 school year.