



School District Financial Planning Findings Presentation

Chelmsford Public Schools

September 22nd, 2026



District Management Group | Helping Schools and Students Thrive

Meeting Objectives

1

Share findings from the historical financial review, including specific opportunities for Chelmsford Public Schools.

2

Highlight considerations for the CPS School Committee.



Introductions & Overview of Work

Historical Analysis

Considerations for CPS



District Management Group

Helping Schools and Students Thrive

Our mission is to achieve **systemic improvement in public education** by combining management techniques and education best practices.

**STUDENT
OUTCOMES**

**RESOURCE
ALLOCATION**

**OPERATIONAL
EFFICIENCY**



We believe that a district must focus on meeting all three of these objectives to achieve lasting results for students.



The financial historical planning effort was organized into 3 major phases designed to deliver a finalized report by September.

Financial Planning Project Scope of Work *June 2026 – September 2026*



Over the past four months, DMG collected and analyzed extensive data and research from multiple sources to assess the impact of historical budgets and help position the district for continued success and long-term sustainability.

Methodology

Benchmarking Methodology

DMG conducted a benchmarking analysis using sixteen surrounding districts within the Merrimack Valley due to proximity and similar pressures.

Lowell and Lawrence are excluded given their relative size and unique characteristics.

Comparable districts include:

- Amesbury
- Andover
- Billerica
- Boxford
- Dracut
- Georgetown
- Groton-Dunstable
- Haverhill
- Methuen
- Newburyport
- North Andover
- Pentucket
- Tewksbury
- Tyngsborough
- Westford
- Wilmington



Source: Massachusetts DESE

Quantitative Data Analysis

DMG collected and analyzed financial data over the last 10 years from the district.

- Financial / budgetary data
- Strategic documents
- Staffing data
- Student enrollment data
- *And more*

Engagement of Leaders

Throughout this process, DMG engaged select leaders and stakeholders to better understand Chelmsford's spending and to gather insights into district priorities.

- Focus groups with school building and central office administrators
- Individual interviews with central office leadership
- Individual interviews with CPS School Committee members
- Close collaboration with the district's Supt. and Director of Business & Finance

Agenda

Introductions & Overview of Work

Historical Analysis

Considerations for CPS

DMG will present findings on the following three topics.

Key Findings

Chelmsford Public Schools delivers **strong academic outcomes** while **keeping students in-district** and **spending less** per pupil than other Merrimack Valley districts in Massachusetts, reflecting a culture of **disciplined budgeting, operational creativity, and thoughtful stewardship** of public resources.

1

Chelmsford delivers **academic outcomes in the top 15%** of districts in Massachusetts while **spending in the lowest 15% of districts**.

2

CPS has a **strategic, systematic approach to budgeting and resource management**, which has enabled the district to weather fierce economic conditions.

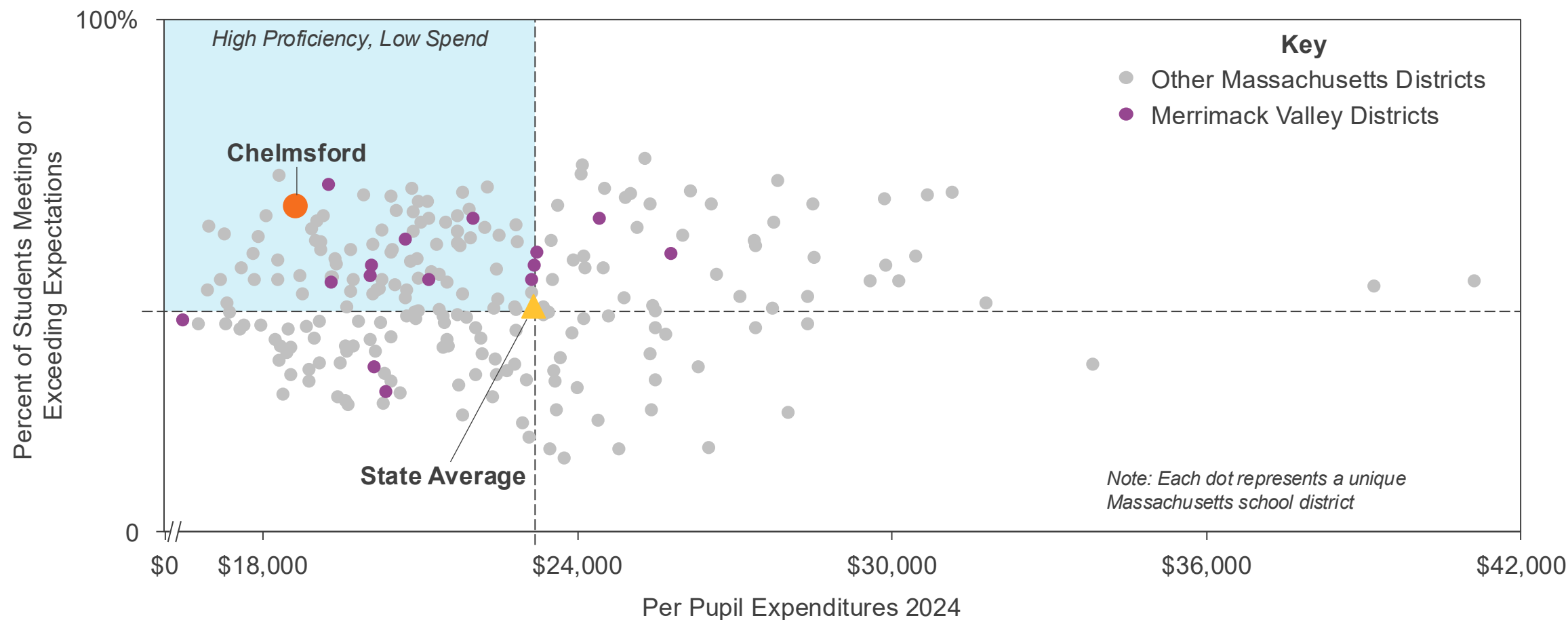
3

CPS is **meeting the evolving needs of students and families**

Chelmsford Public Schools has delivered strong academic outcomes roughly in the top 15% of school districts while spending in the bottom 15% of school districts in Massachusetts.

State of Massachusetts – Proficiency vs. Spending
2024 10th Grade ELA MCAS Results vs. Per Pupil Expenditures

1

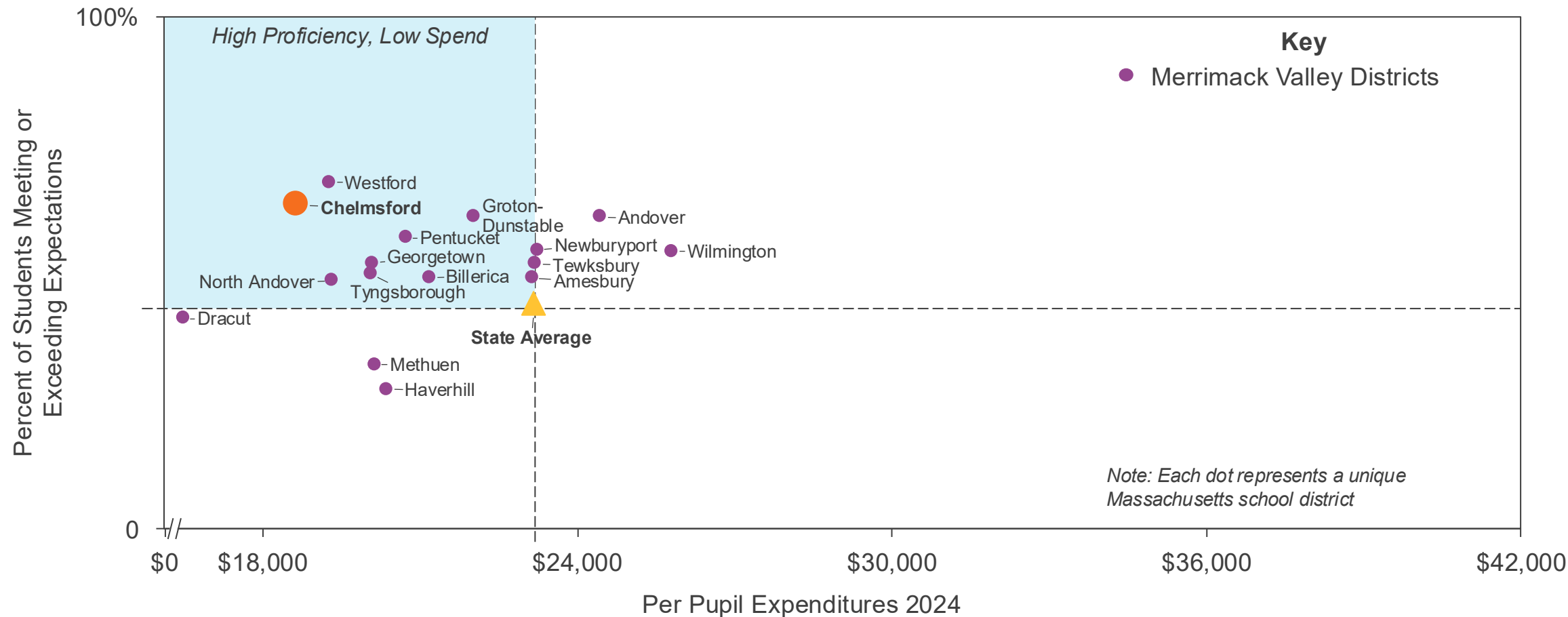


Note: Merrimack Valley districts include Amesbury, Andover, Billerica, Buxford, Dracut, Groton-Dunstable, Georgetown, Haverhill, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover, Pentucket, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, Westford, and Wilmington. Lowell and Lawrence are excluded. | Source: Massachusetts DESE

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Note: Merrimack Valley districts include Amesbury, Andover, Billerica, Boxford, Dracut, Groton-Dunstable, Georgetown, Haverhill, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover, Pentucket, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, Westford, and Wilmington. Lowell and Lawrence are excluded. | Source: Massachusetts DESE

Chelmsford Public Schools excels across a range of academic and student outcomes, including MCAS performance, college readiness, advanced coursework, and social-emotional wellbeing.

Highlighted Student Outcomes

1

Strong MCAS Performance

- CPS students **outperform statewide peers by 10-22 percentage points** and **outperform Merrimack Valley districts by 4-16 percentage points**, in ELA and Math.
- CPS's Student Growth Percentiles are on par with the state median in math and ELA, meaning **students are achieving at higher levels while growing at comparable rates**.

Outstanding College Matriculation

- **76% of CPS graduates enroll in college or university** (2- and 4-year programs), compared to 58% statewide. An additional 9% of students plan to attend college and 10% of students start work, trade school, apprenticeships, or join the military.

Availability of Advanced Coursework

- **Almost all CPS 11th and 12th grade students (98%) complete advanced coursework** and 87% of AP tests students take receive passing grades. Across Merrimack Valley districts and the state, only 69%-70% of students complete advanced coursework and 76%-80% of AP exams are passed.
- Students are also able to **concurrently enroll** at Middlesex Community College or attend Nashoba Valley Technical High School.

Breadth of Extracurriculars

- CPS students are successful in a variety of programs including a highly competitive **music program** (marching band, chorus), theater and other **arts programs**, and a range of **sports**.

Social Emotional Wellbeing

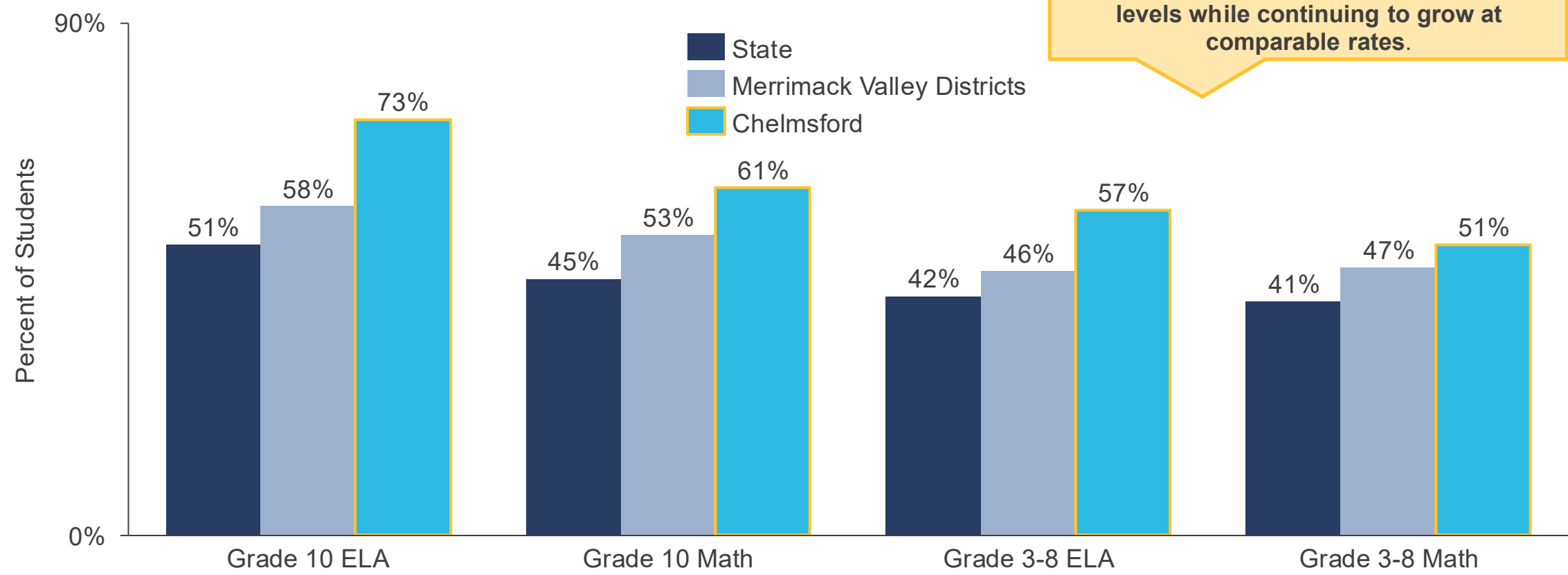
- The vast majority of CPS students (88-89%) report having **positive relationships with staff**. Over two-thirds of students (66-68%) report **feeling a sense of belonging**.

CPS outperforms the state average by 10-22 percentage points on meeting and exceeding expectations rates across ELA and Math in grades 3-8 and grade 10.

MCAS Performance
Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on MCAS

1

CPS's Student Growth Percentiles are on par with the state median in math and ELA, meaning **students are achieving at higher levels while continuing to grow at comparable rates.**

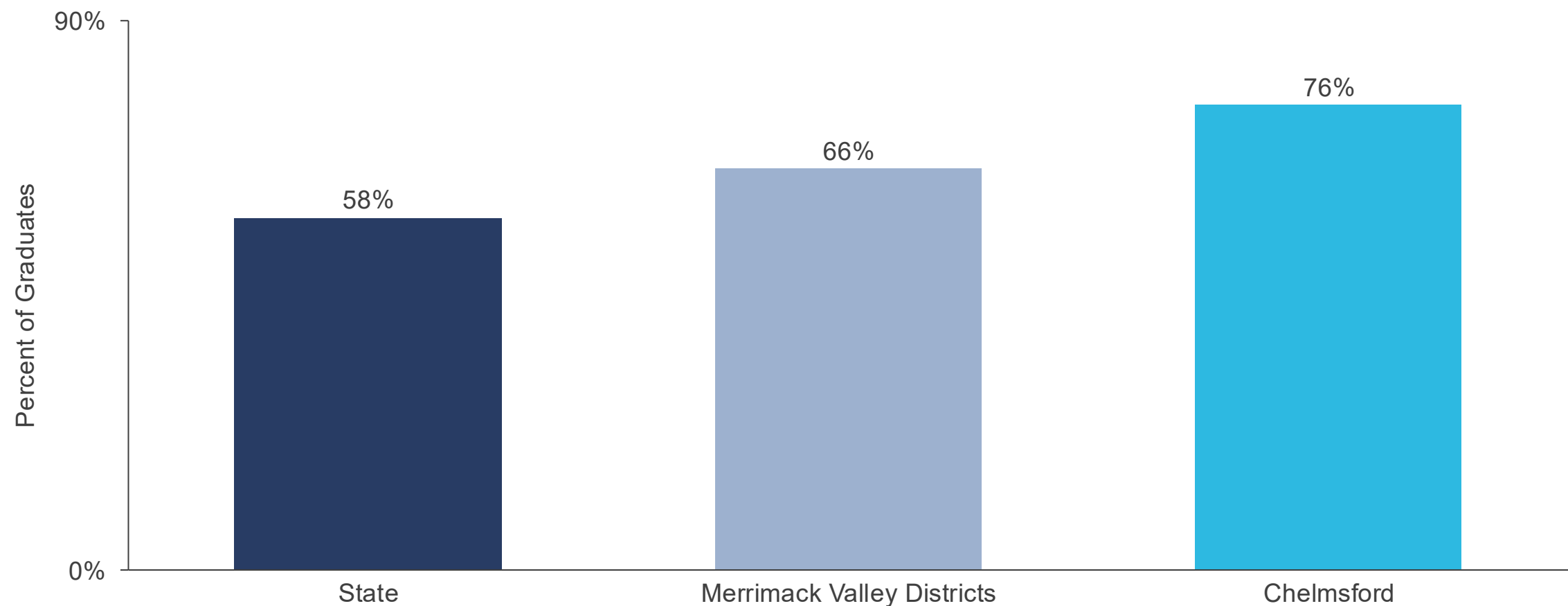


Source: Massachusetts DESE, Chelmsford Public Schools

76% of CPS graduates enroll in college or university (2- and 4-year programs), compared to 58% statewide. An additional 9% of students plan to attend college and 10% of students start work, trade school, apprenticeships, or join the military.

College Matriculation
Percent of Graduates Attending College / University

1

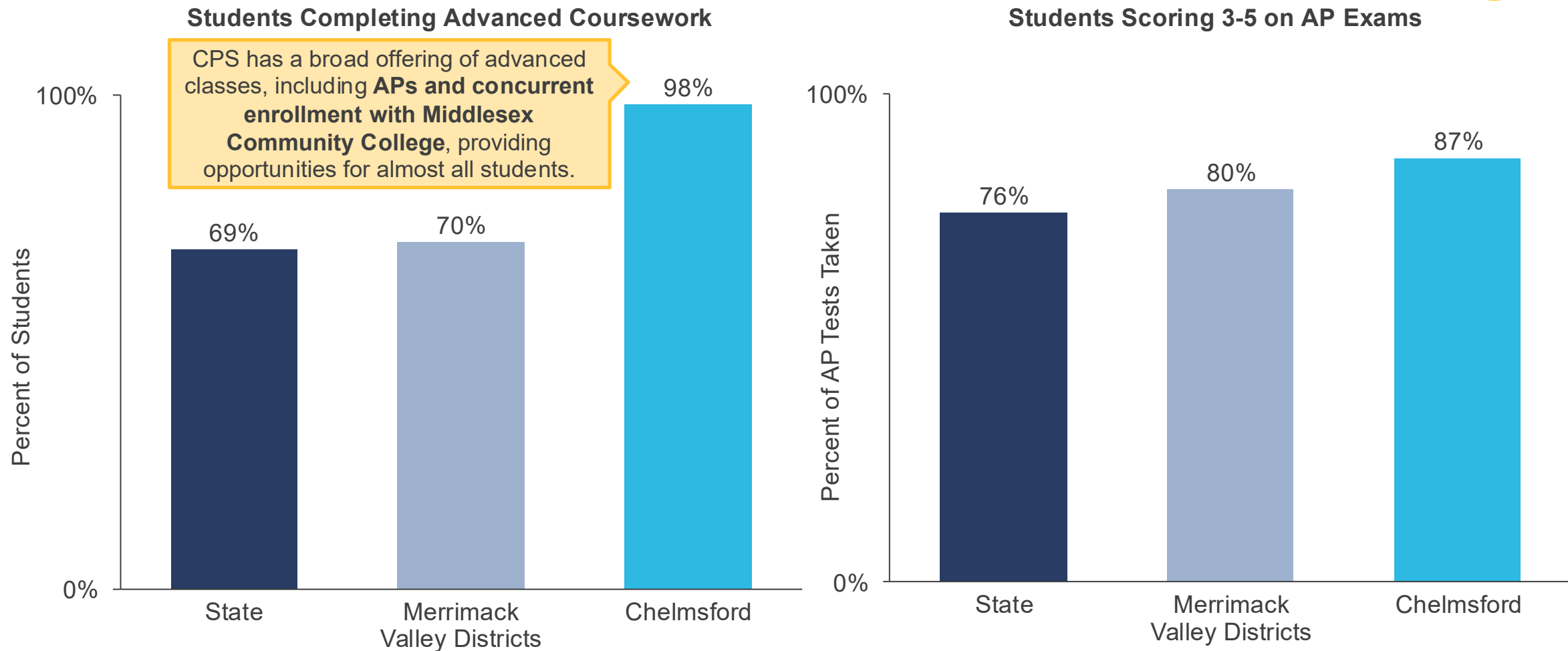


Source: Massachusetts DESE, Chelmsford Public Schools

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Availability of Advanced Coursework

1



Source: Massachusetts DESE

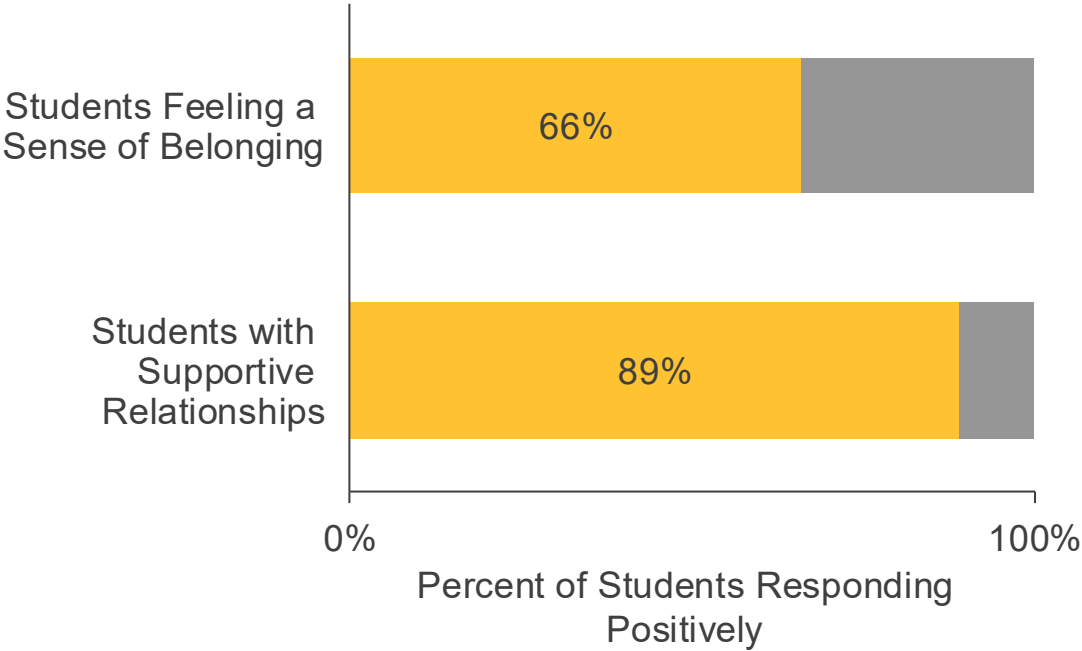
Social emotional learning has been prioritized in CPS’s strategic plan and student survey results are positive.

Social-Emotional Learning Priority Area Outcomes

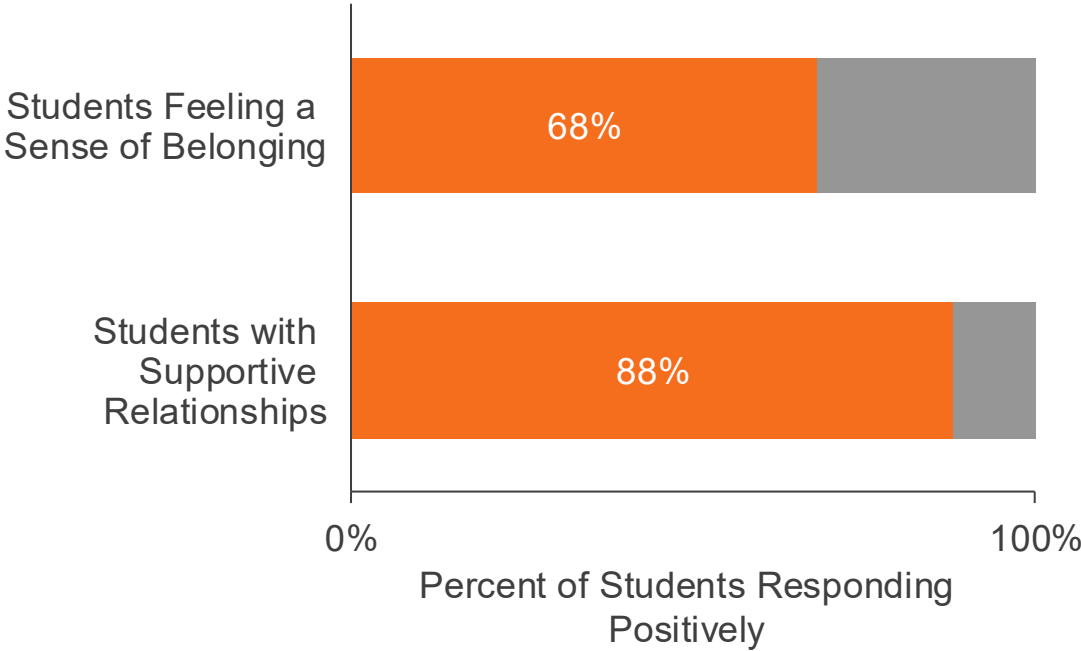
Students Feeling a Sense of Belonging and with Supportive Relationships (2026)

1

SEL Outcomes 3rd – 5th Grade



SEL Outcomes 6th – 12th Grade



Chelmsford performs in the **90th percentile of schools nationally** on the **sense of belonging** and **70th to 80th percentile** on **students with supportive relationships**.

Source: Chelmsford Public Schools, Panorama

CPS has a strategic, systematic approach to budgeting and resource management, which has enabled the district to weather fierce economic conditions.

Resource Management Highlights

2

Statewide Budget Struggles Compared to CPS Discipline

CPS Spends Less Than Merrimack Valley Districts

Methodical and Structured Budgeting Practices Drive Lower Spend

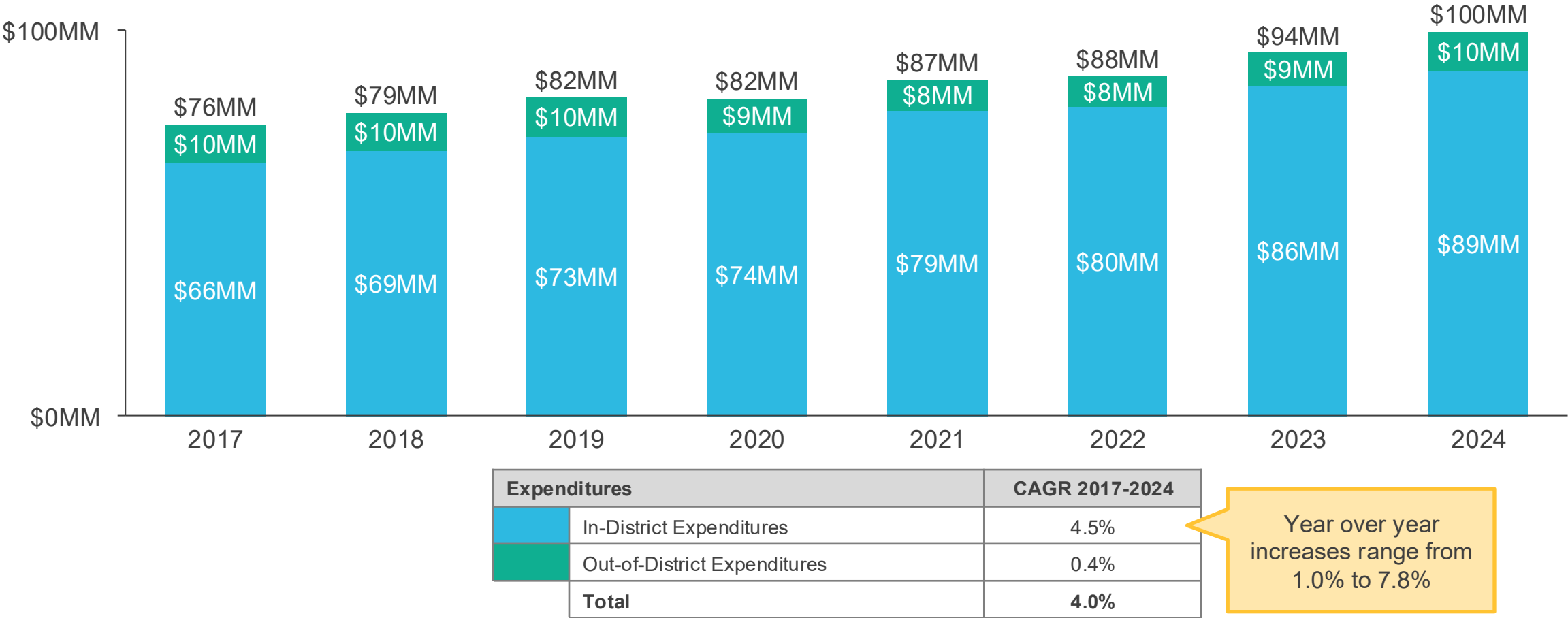
- Across Massachusetts, nearly **1 in 3 municipalities have faced school or general operating budget override votes** in the last 10 years, reflecting widespread district-level financial strain.
- In contrast, the CPS **budget has contained its budget growth to ~3.7% p.a.** (ranging from 1.1% to 5.4%) over the past 10 years, **without need for an override**. On a per-pupil basis, CPS has kept growth lower than state average, given its efficient spending and growing population.
- CPS spends \$18,641 per pupil, compared to \$21,529 in the Merrimack Valley and \$23,159 on average in Massachusetts, putting the district in the **bottom 15% of spenders in the state**.
- The difference is primarily driven by **lower teacher-related expenditures** due to slightly larger class sizes rather than lower salaries.
- Chelmsford is **highly proactive and methodical** in its approach to financial management, which has **stabilized the district's financial situation and maximized the reach** and impact of community resources.

Source: Massachusetts DESE, Massachusetts Department of Revenue Division of Local Services

CPS has contained its expenditure growth to 4% p.a. over the past 10 years. CPS’s per pupil budget have grown almost 2 percentage points lower than state average budgets in the same period (3.7% p.a. vs. 5.5% p.a.).

Chelmsford Public Schools Total Expenditures (2017-2024)

2

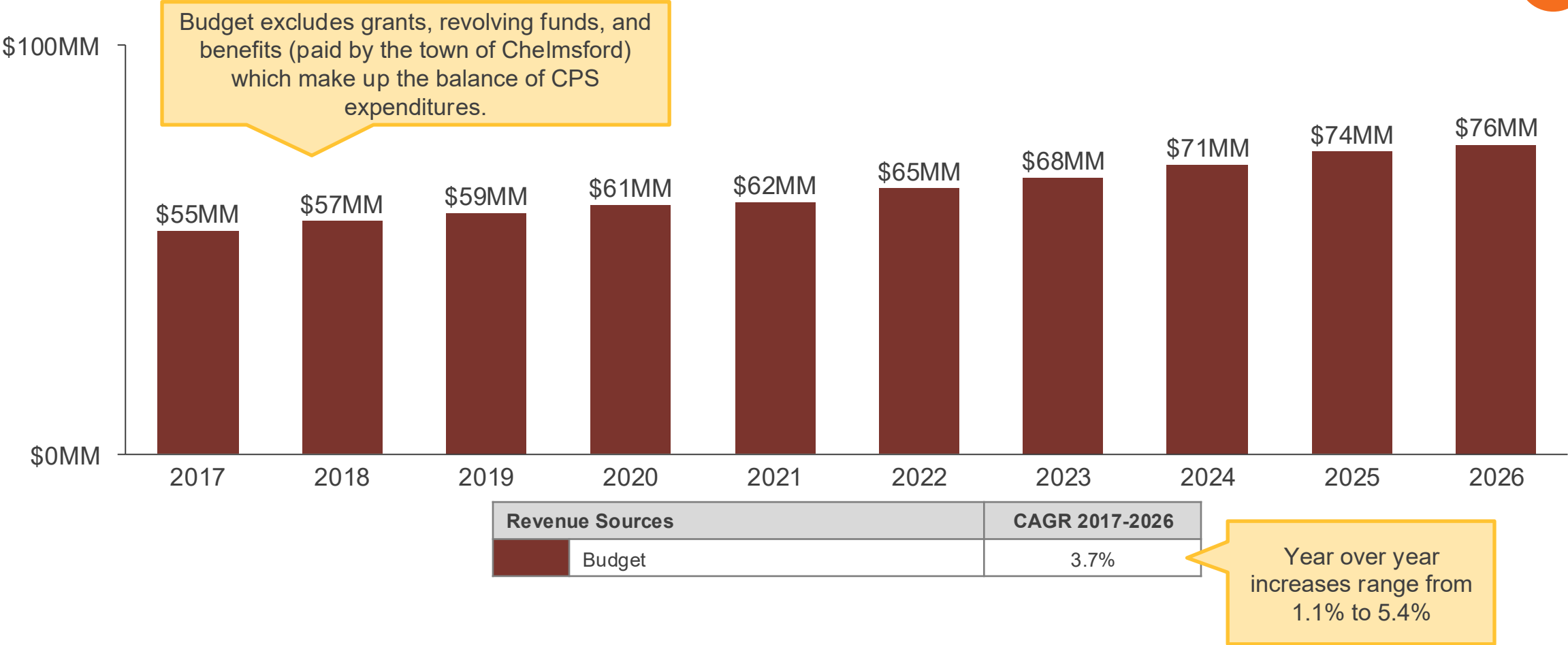


Source: Massachusetts DESE

Chelmsford's school budget has increased 3.7% over the past 10 years.

2

Chelmsford Public Schools Budget (2017-2026)

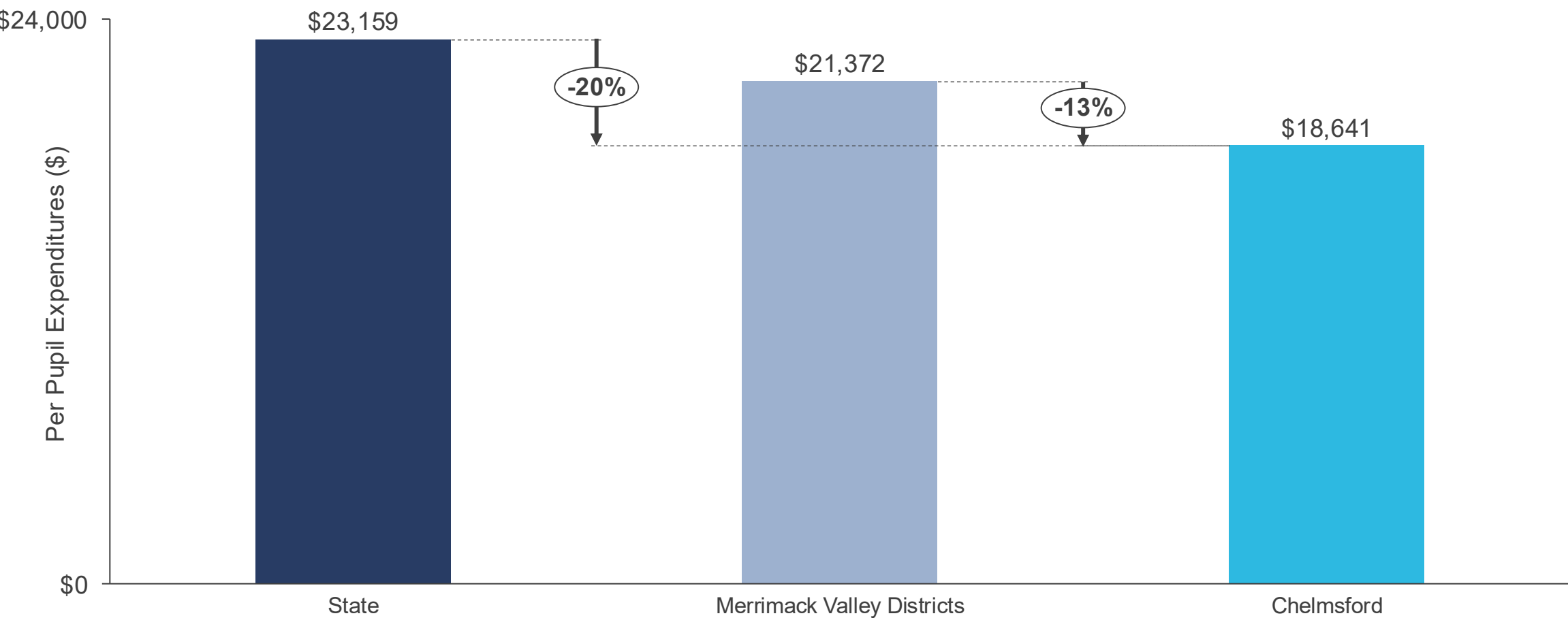


Source: Chelmsford Public Schools

CPS is significantly more efficient than peer districts, spending 13% less per pupil than Merrimack Valley districts and 20% less than the Massachusetts state average.

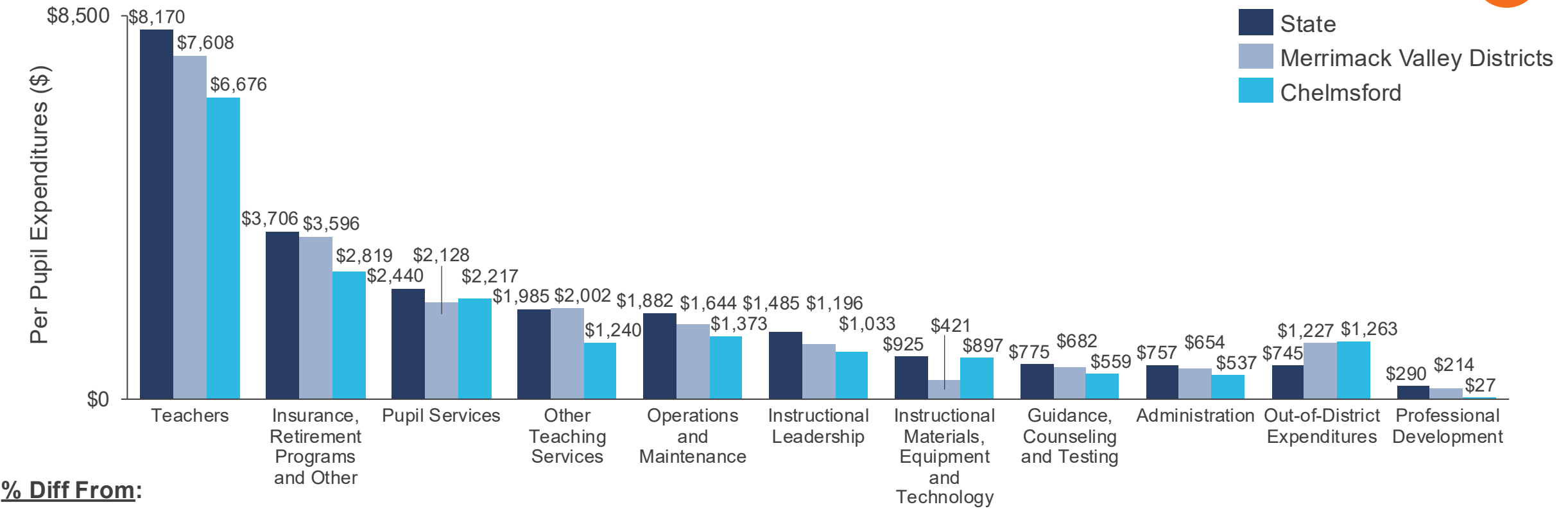
Total Per Pupil Expenditures – FY2024

2



CPS spends less or is right in line with the state and Merrimack Valley districts across most cost categories.

Per Pupil Expenditures by Cost Category – FY2024



% Diff From:

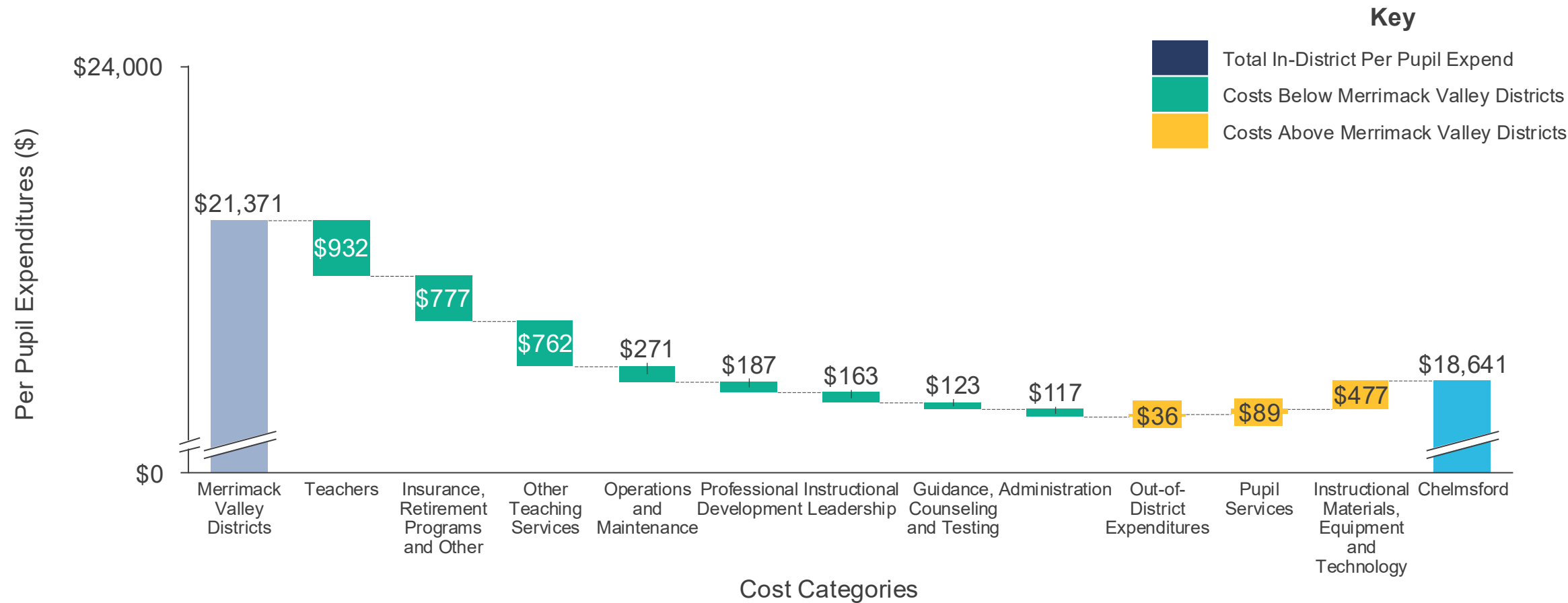
State	-18%	-24%	-9%	-38%	-27%	-30%	-3%	-28%	-29%	70%	-91%
Merrimack Valley	-12%	-22%	4%	-38%	-16%	-14%	113%	-18%	-18%	3%	-87%

Source: Massachusetts DESE

The difference between Chelmsford and Merrimack Valley districts largely comes from spending on teacher salaries, benefits, and other teaching services. Chelmsford consistently spends more than its neighbors on instructional materials, though the district is in line with state averages.

Differences in Total Per Pupil Expenditures –
Chelmsford vs. Merrimack Valley Districts
FY2024

2

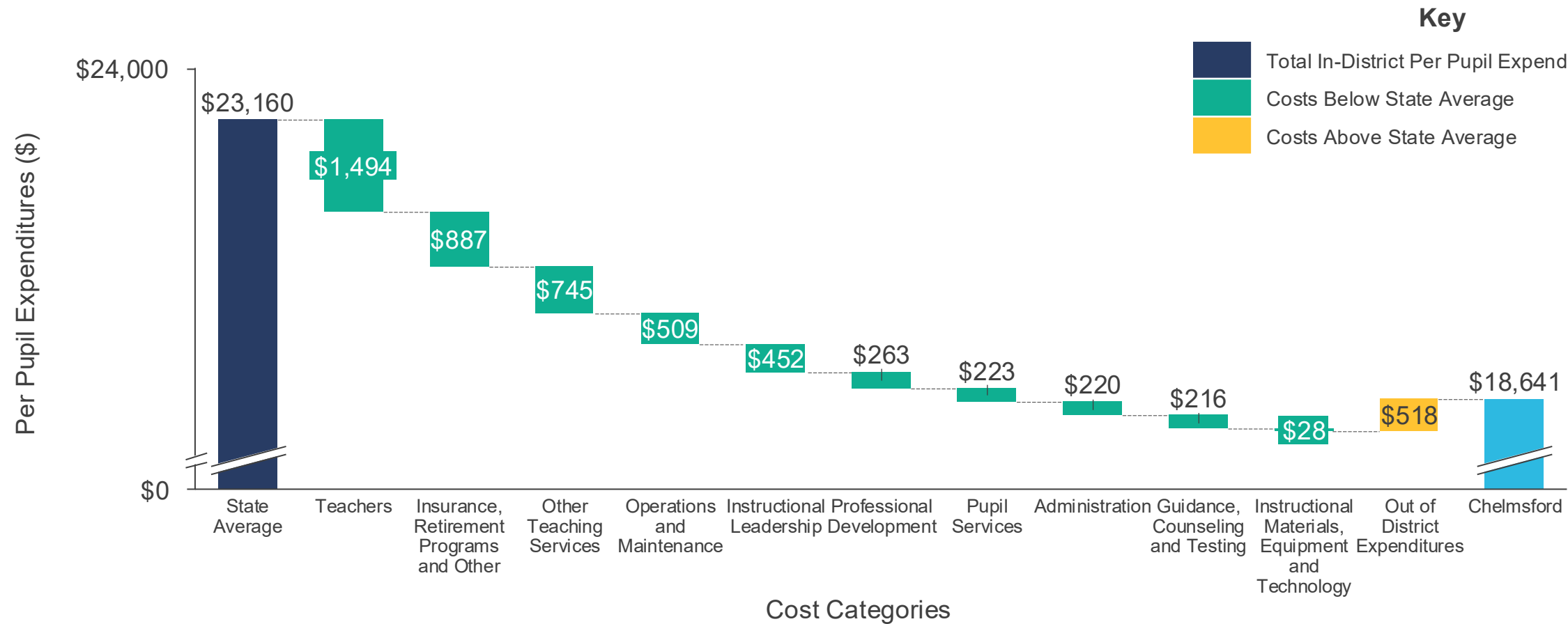


Source: Massachusetts DESE

The difference between Chelmsford and state average expenditures largely comes from spending on teacher salaries, benefits, and other teaching services. The only area Chelmsford spends more per pupil than the state average is in out-of-district expenditures.

Differences in Total Per Pupil Expenditures –
Chelmsford vs. State Average
FY2024

2

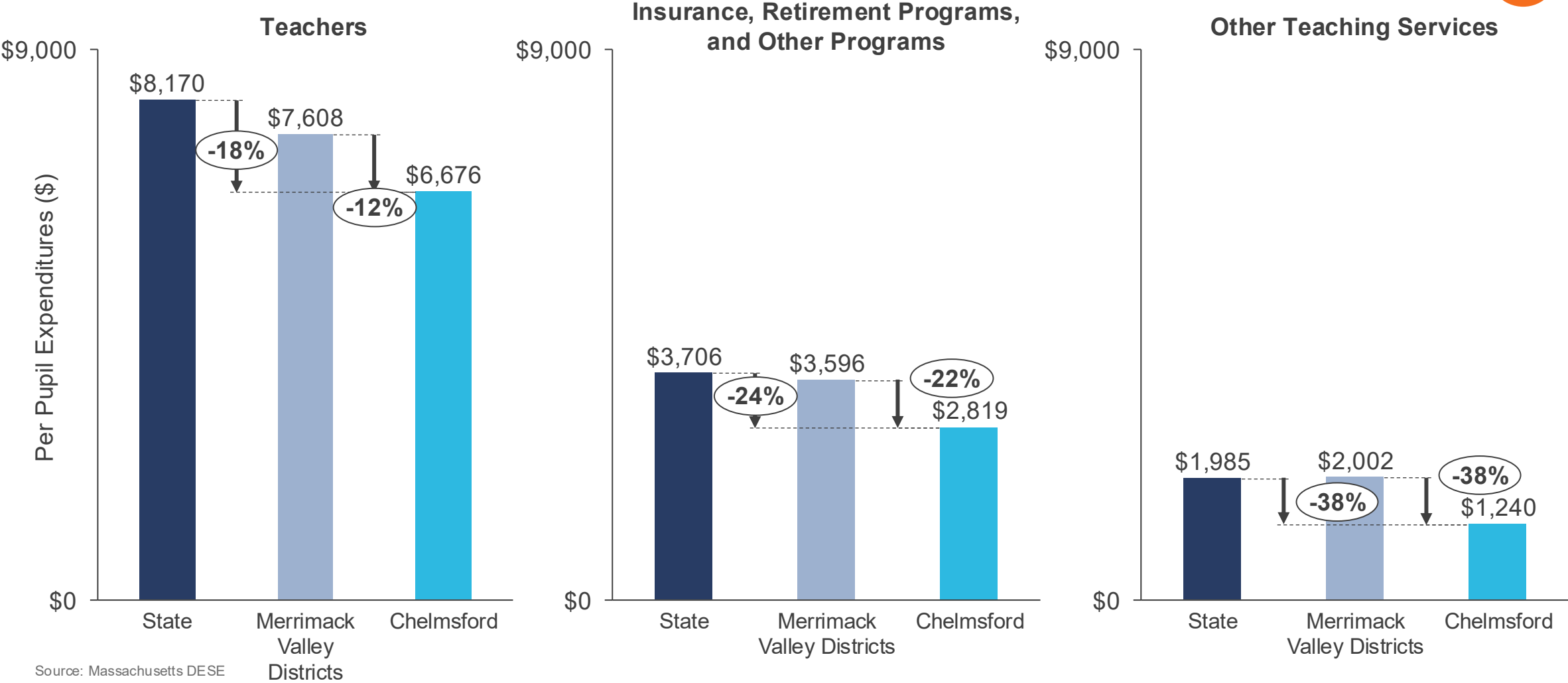


Source: Massachusetts DESE

The district’s cost-efficiency is reflected across a variety of budget categories and is most notable in three connected areas: Teachers; Insurance, Retirement, & Other Programs; and Other Teaching Services.

Per Pupil Expenditures – FY2024

2



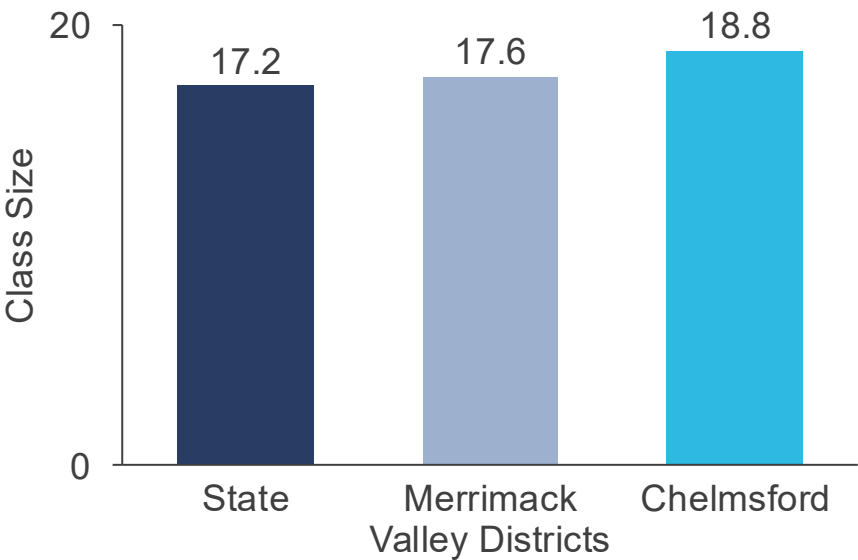
Chelmsford boasts higher than average salaries across its salary schedule for its educators, suggesting that its lower-than-average spending on teachers is due to slightly larger class sizes and its ability to attract early-career educators with potential to build long careers in the district.

Staff Expenditure Detail

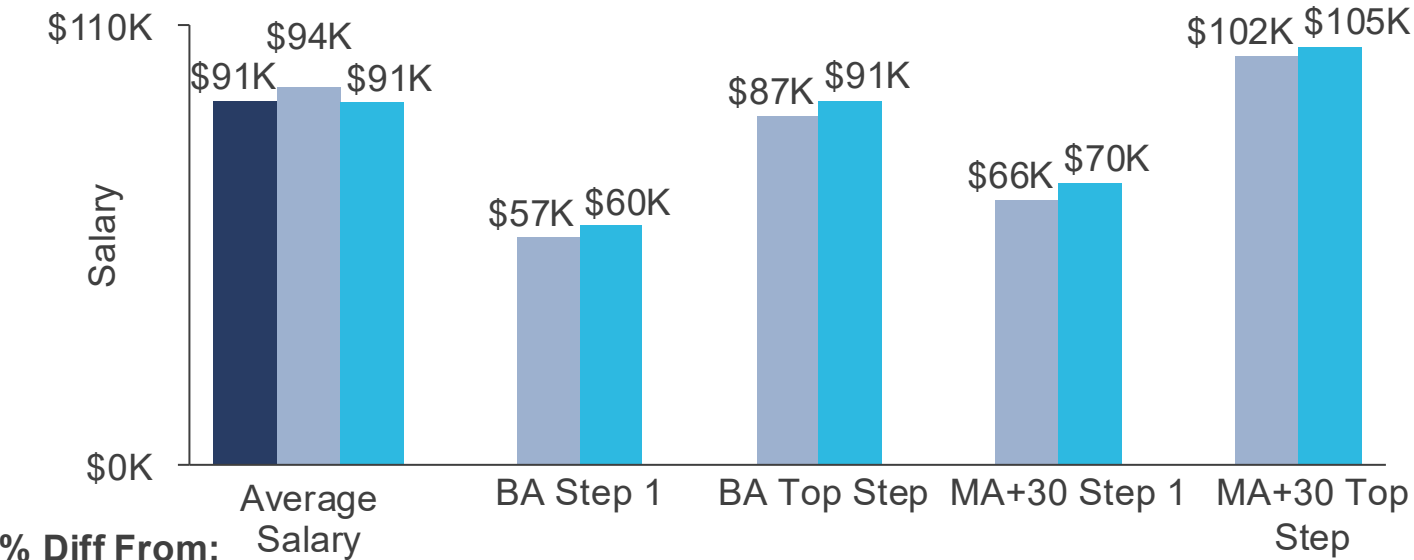
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State Merrimack Valley Districts Chelmsford

Average Class Size



Average Teacher Salary vs. Step Specific Salaries



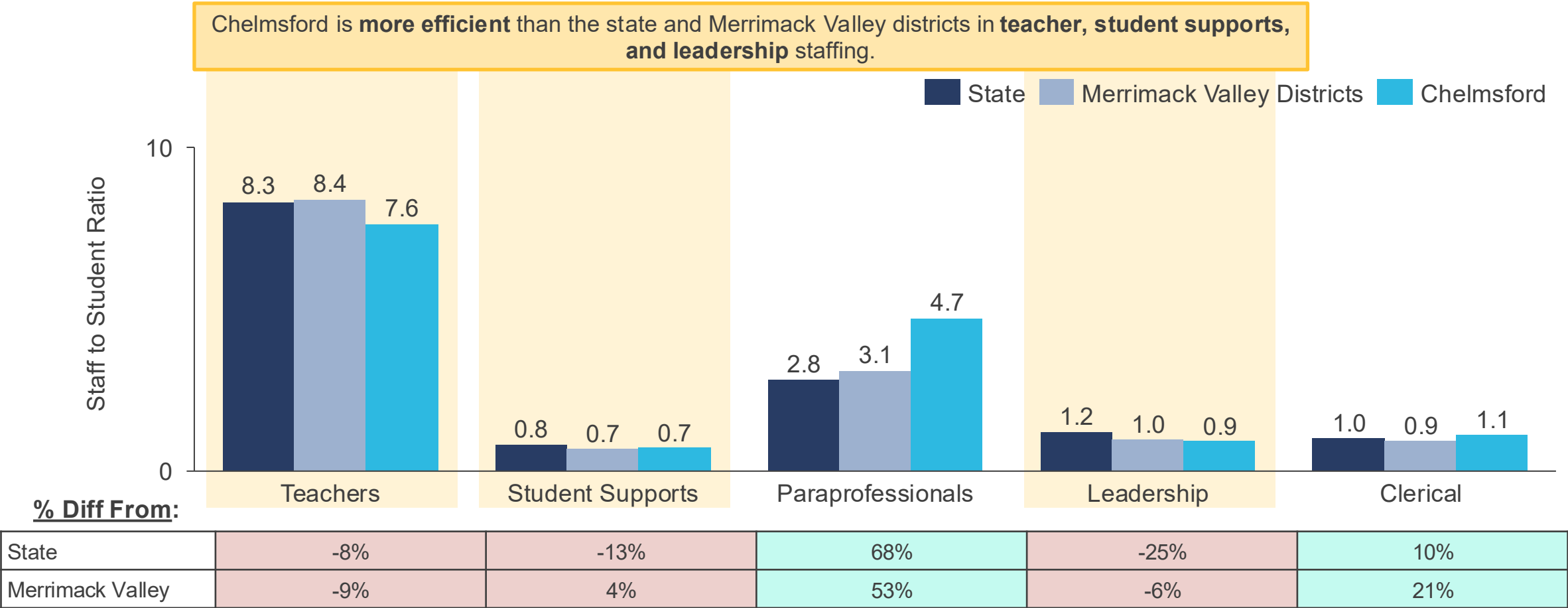
% Diff From:					
	Average Salary	BA Step 1	BA Top Step	MA+30 Step 1	MA+30 Top Step
State	0%	-	-	-	-
Merrimack Valley	-4%	5%	6%	6%	3%

Source: Massachusetts DESE, Chelmsford Public Schools, District Websites

Chelmsford has fewer teachers, student supports, and leadership positions per student than the state average and Merrimack Valley districts, but more paraprofessionals and clerical staff.

Staff Ratios
Staff to 100 Students by Role

2

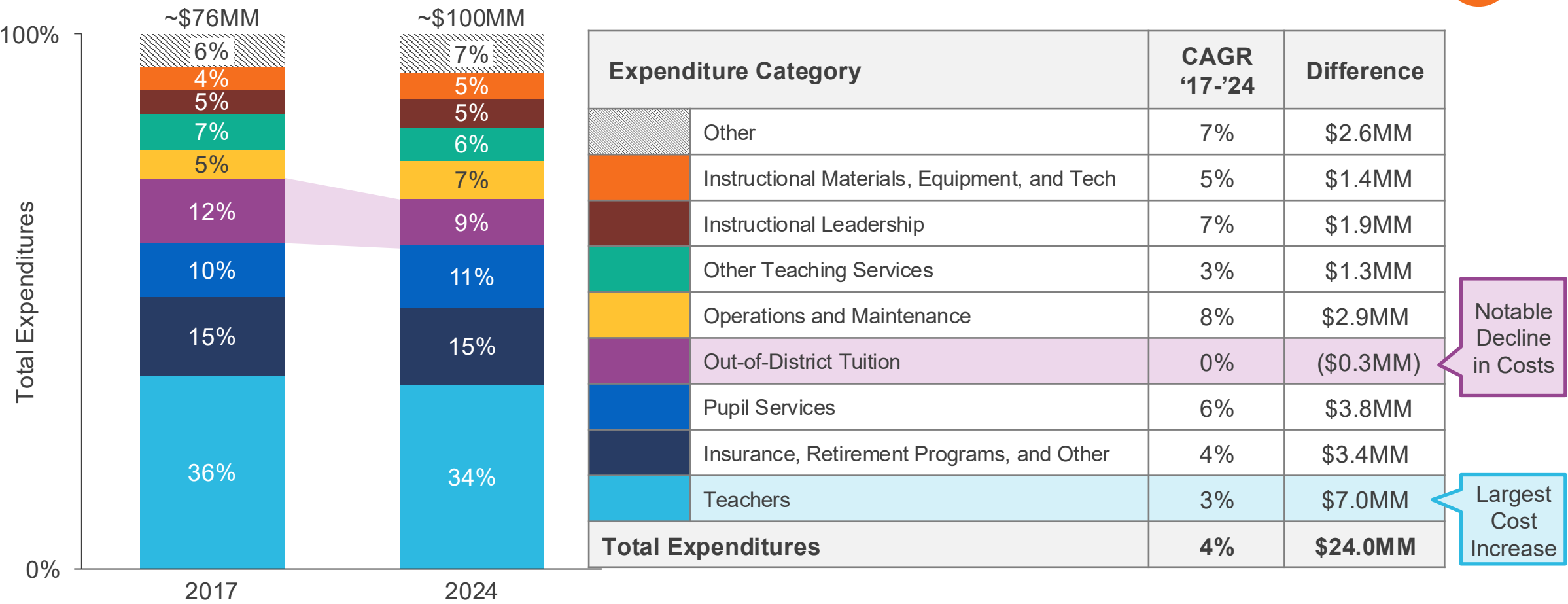


Source: Massachusetts DESE

Low growth in teacher expenditures has contributed most to budget growth over the past 10 years (~\$7.0MM). Investments in SEL supports, in-district special education continuum, and operations and maintenance are also reflected in budget changes.

Chelmsford Public Schools Total Expenditures (2017-2024)

2

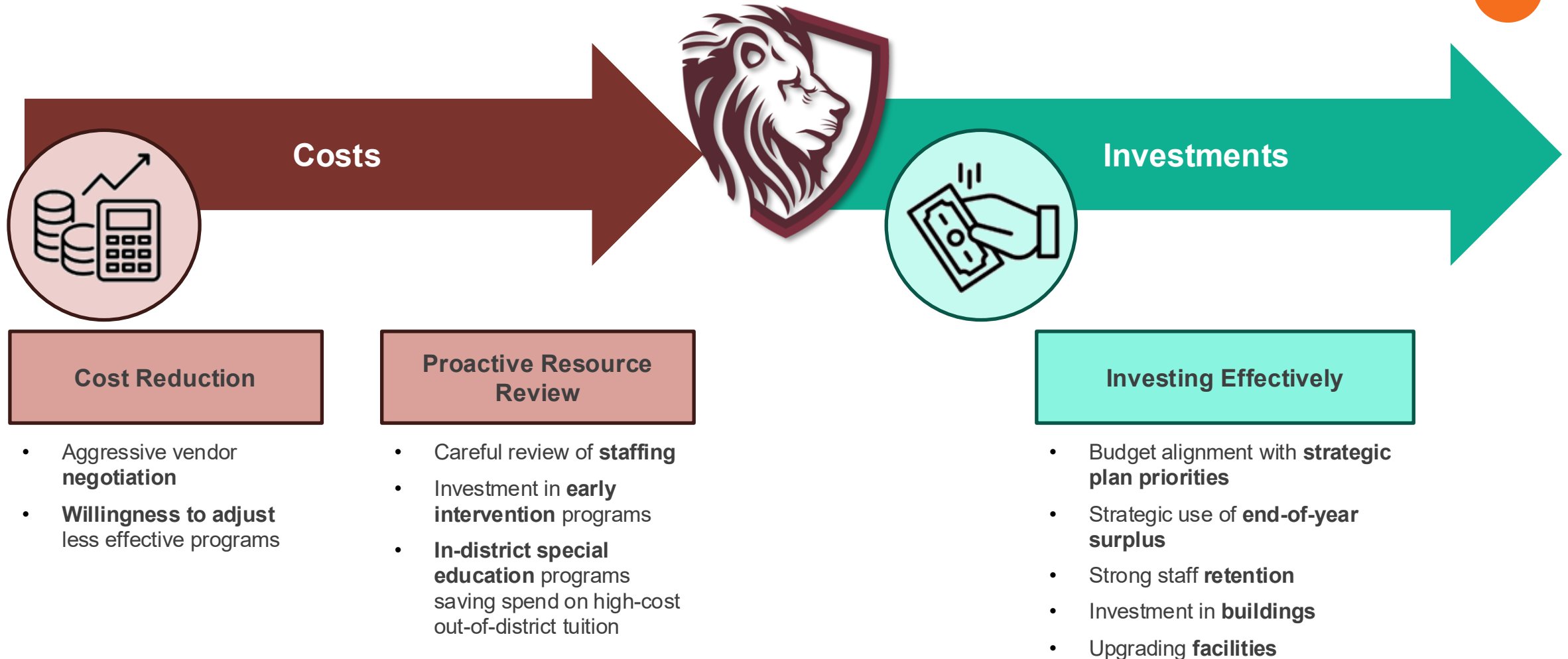


*Other includes guidance, counseling, and testing; administration; out-of-district transportation; and professional development | Source: Massachusetts DESE

Chelmsford is highly proactive and methodical in its approach to financial management, which has stabilized the district's financial situation and maximized the reach and impact of community resources.

Methodical and Structured Budgeting Practices Drive Lower Spend

2



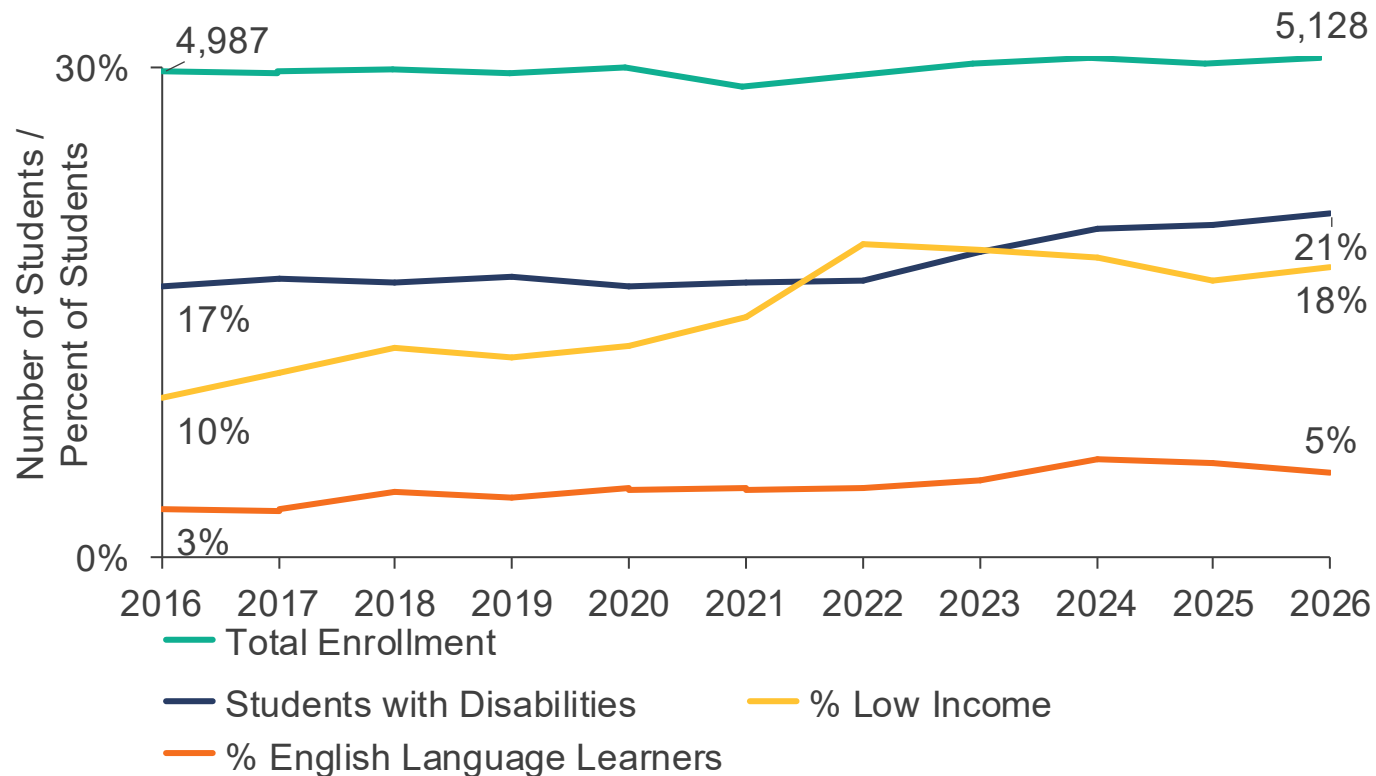
Source: Chelmsford Public Schools

Student needs have increased over the past few years, as the share of students with IEPs and English Language Learners has grown at a faster pace than enrollment. CPS is meeting the evolving needs of students and families.

Change in District Student Demographics

Number of Students in District and Percentage of Total Student Population – Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Low Income

3



Source: Massachusetts DESE

Demographic Changes

- **Higher population growth** than the state average
- Almost **doubled English Language Learner population**
- High growth in **low-income student population**
- **Increasingly complex** student needs

District Action

- Invested in **in-district special education continuum**
- Prioritized practices of **inclusion**
- **Expanded ELL staff**, social work staff, and ELL resources

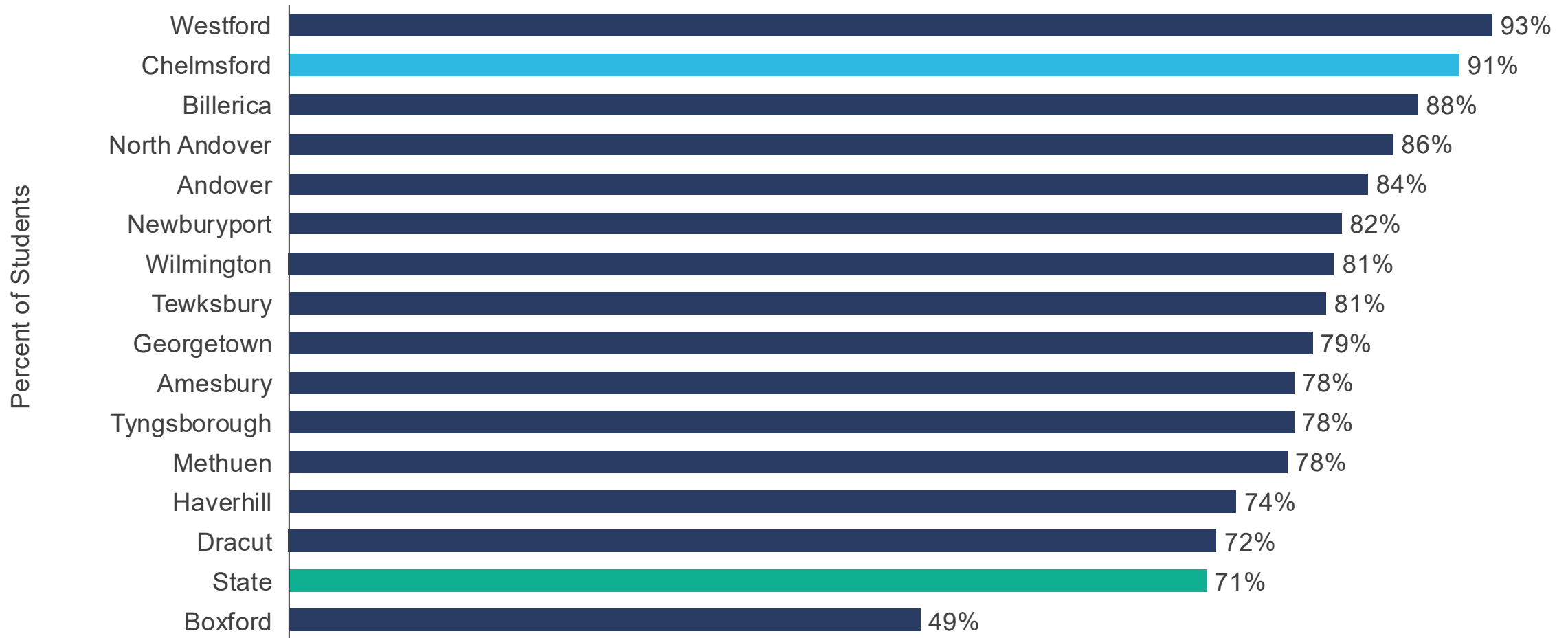
Outcomes

- **Decrease in out-of-district** placements
- **Stability** of achievement gaps despite complex needs
- **Excelling ELL** students

Chelmsford is among the top districts of Massachusetts in keeping students in its public schools. 91% of kids in Chelmsford go to local public schools vs. 71% in Massachusetts overall.

Students in-District – Chelmsford vs. Merrimack Valley Districts *Percent of Students in Local Public Schools*

3



Source: Massachusetts DESE

Chelmsford has made significant investments into its in-district special education continuum, staffing, funding, and supporting a variety of in-district programs. As a result, the district has been able to decrease out-of-district students in a period of high growth in identification rates.

In-District Specialized Programs

Program	Purpose
SAIL	Substantially separate autism program
STRIVE	Therapeutic and behavioral support program
Language-Based	Program for students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) in Basic Reading or a Language-Based disability with average to above average reasoning abilities
PAVE (Providing Academic and Vocational Experiences) / Life Skills	Program for students with intellectual disabilities including autism, neurological, complex physical and/or multiple disabilities K-12. It provides a replacement curriculum for students which develops foundational and functional academic, communication, activities of daily living, social, and vocational skills.

The number of special education students in-district has grown 6% p.a., while the number of students out of district has declined 1% p.a. going from 9% of students in 2021 to 6% in 2026.

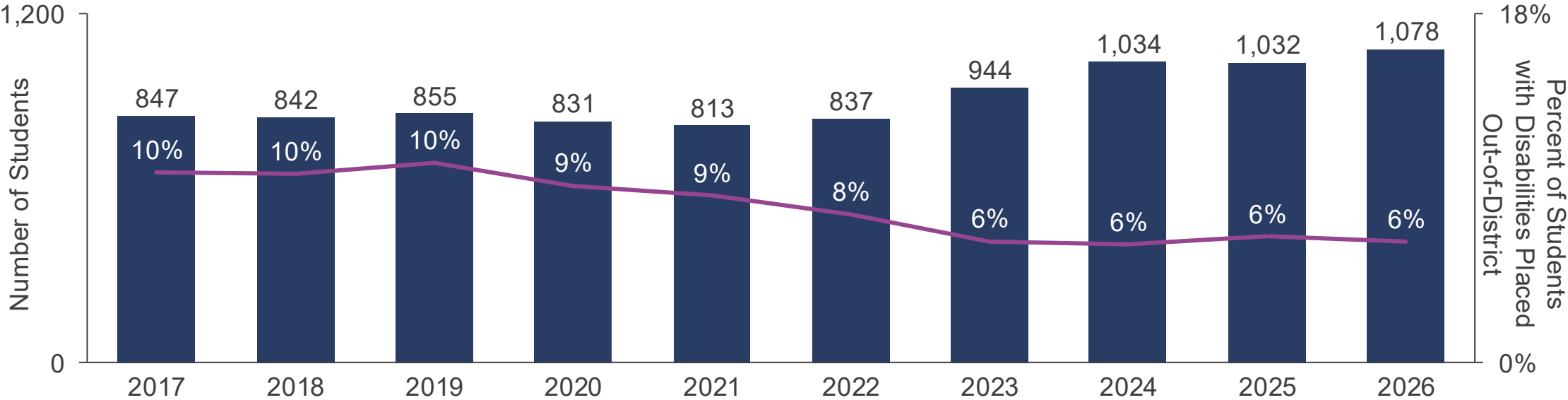
Trend in Students with Disabilities Out-of-District

Number of Students with Disabilities and Percent of Students with Disabilities Placed Out-of-District

3

- Number of Students with Disabilities
- % of Students with Disabilities Out of District

Students	2021	2026	CAGR '21-'26
Students with Disabilities	813	1,078	6%
In-District	743	1,012	6%
Out-of-District	70	67	-1%

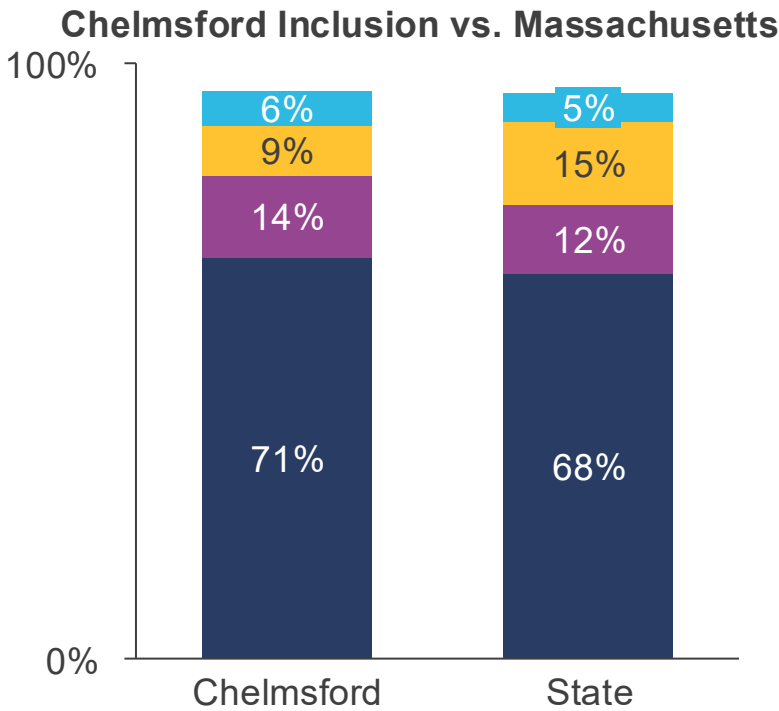
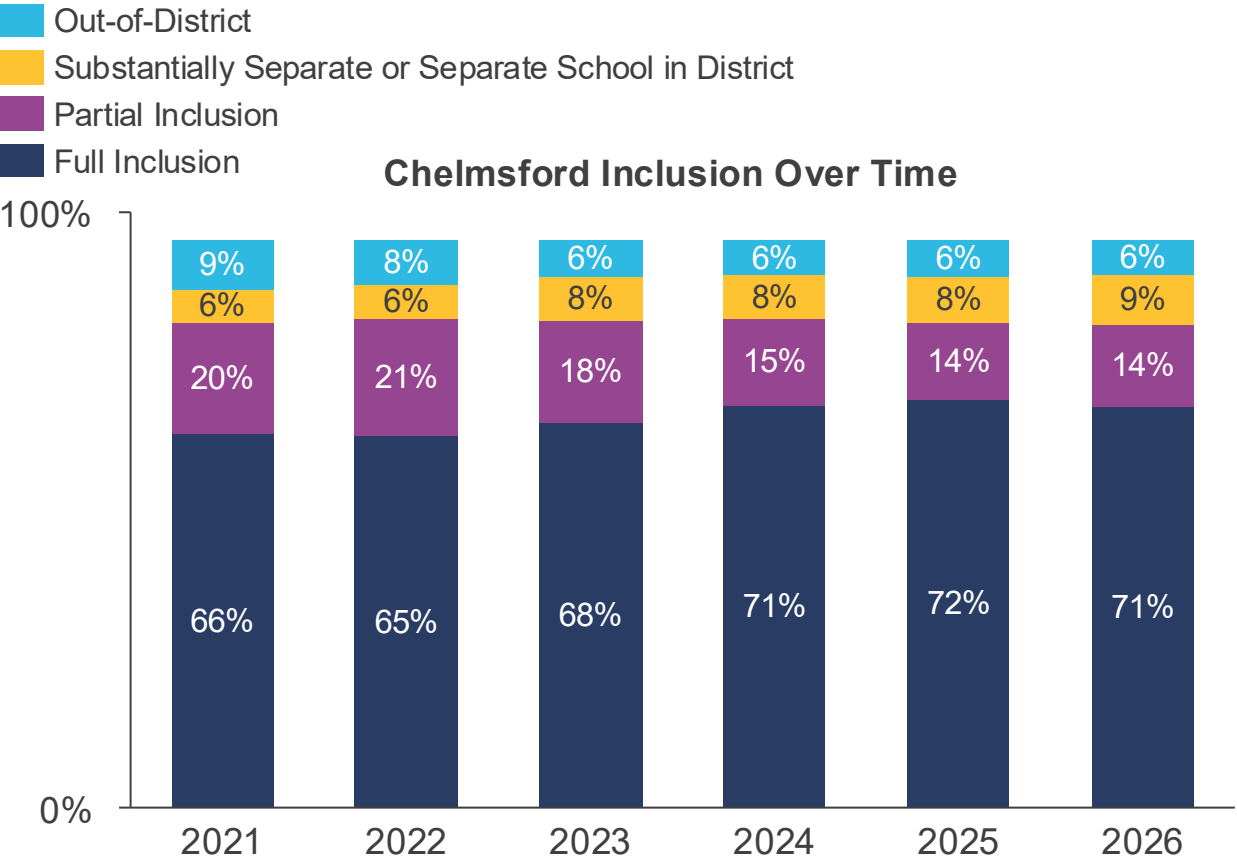


% of Students with Disabilities	17.0%	16.9%	17.2%	16.6%	16.8%	16.9%	18.7%	20.2%	20.4%	21.0%
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Source: Massachusetts DESE, Chelmsford Public Schools

Inclusion has also grown in the district, from 66% of students fully included in 2021 to 71% in 2026.

District Inclusion
Percent of Students with Disabilities by Education Environment Placement

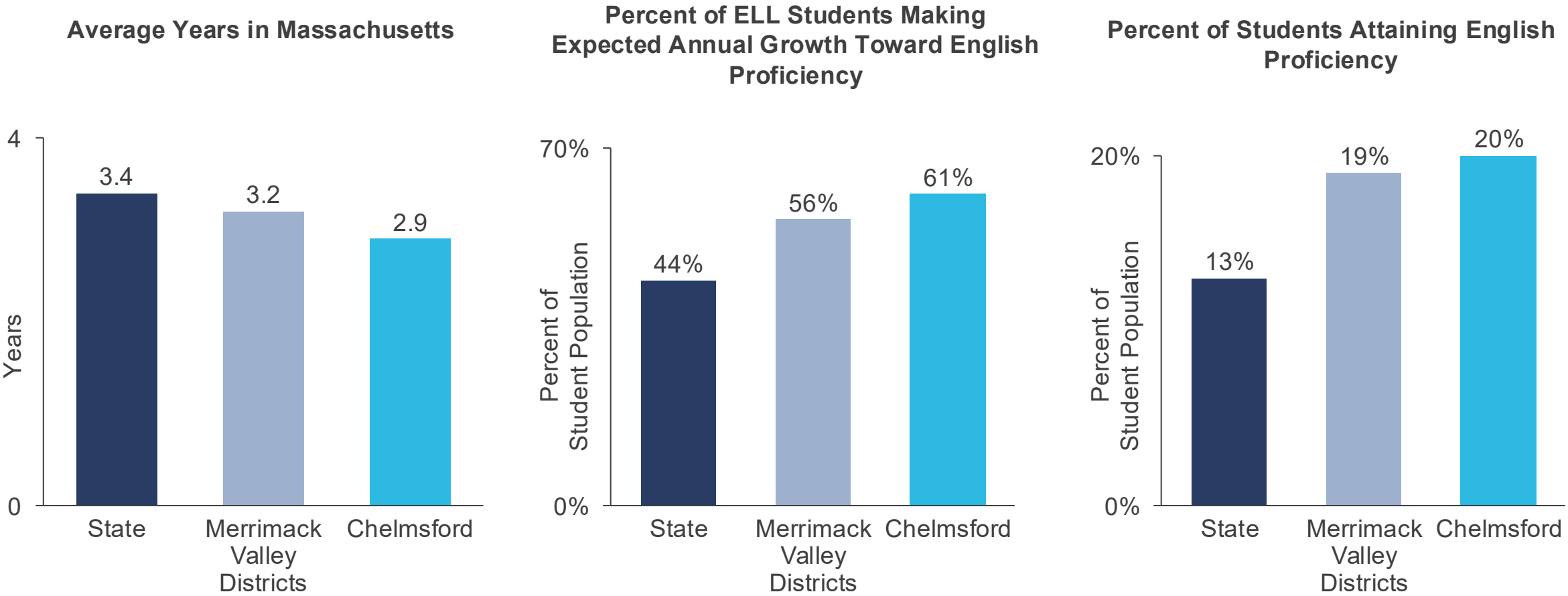


Source: Massachusetts DESE

Chelmsford ELL students are able to grow faster and achieve proficiency more readily than in comparison districts and across Massachusetts.

English Language Learner Proficiency and Growth

3



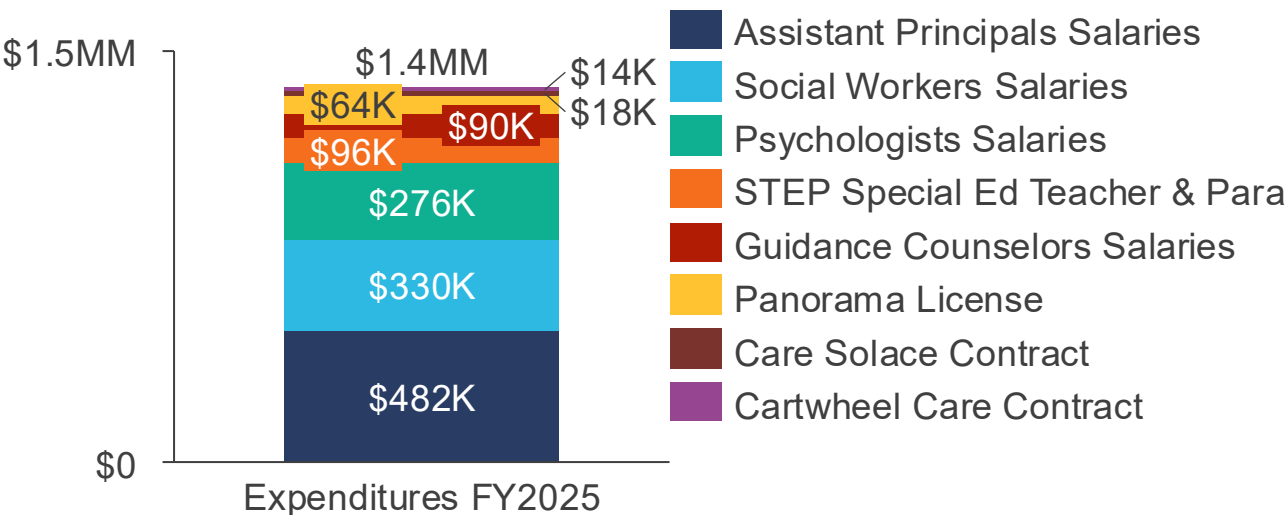
Source: Massachusetts DESE

Chelmsford Public Schools has made highly intentional, systemic investments in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and student mental health.

Caselet A

While the district has managed to keep chronic absenteeism (below 10%) and exclusionary discipline rates low (below 2%) these intentional efforts require **extensive resources and strategic staffing** - most notably school social workers and counselors. Recognizing that a sense of **belonging and safety are prerequisites for academic achievement**, the district has built a comprehensive, wraparound support infrastructure that spans every school level. These efforts have been driven by district leadership and implemented through **expanded staffing, external resources, and data-tracking tools**.

Incremental Investments (Annual Costs)



Source: Chelmsford Public Schools

Outcomes

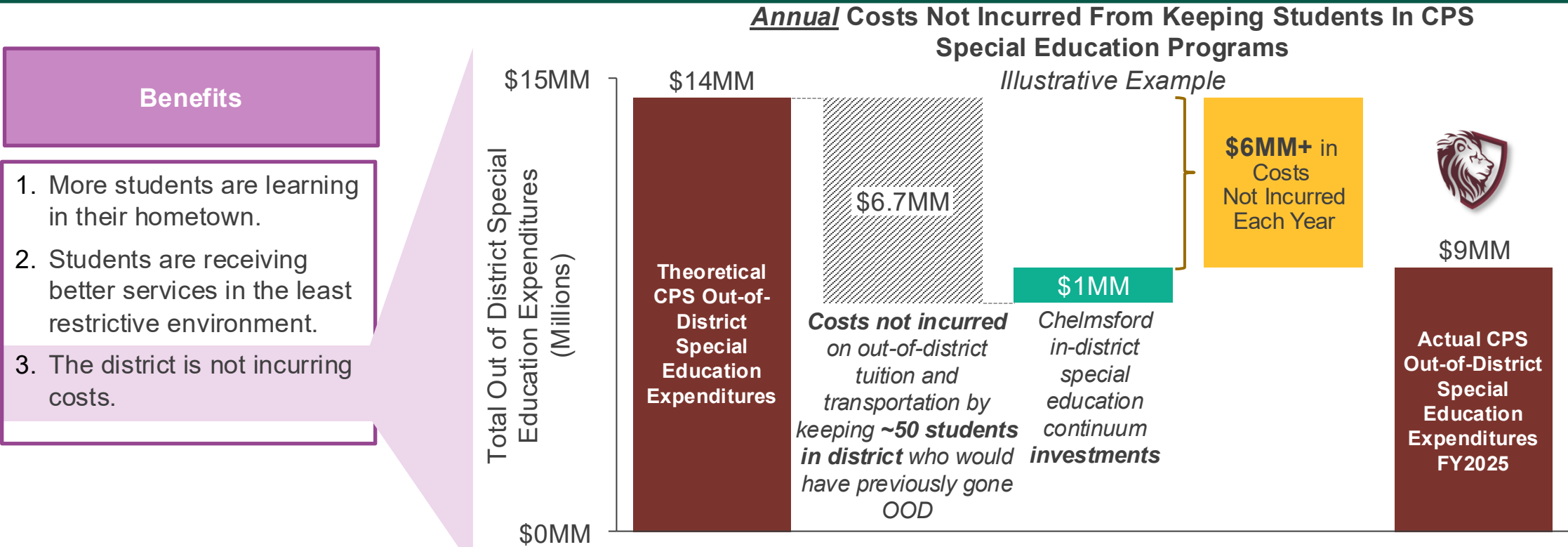
1. A **vast majority** of CPS students report having **positive relationships with staff**, and **over two-thirds report feeling a sense of belonging**; both metrics have grown over the past few years.
2. Students are **less likely to be chronically absent**, which directly contributes to stronger academic outcomes across the country.
3. Students are **regulating their emotions and behavior** better than in previous years, improving their own and their peers' **ability to learn**.



Over the past several years, CPS has made a deliberate, multi-year investment in building an in-district continuum of specialized programs for students with disabilities, which have been highly successful in keeping students in the best in-district programs for them.

Caselet B

Over the past several years, CPS has made a **deliberate, multi-year investment** in building an **in-district continuum of specialized programs for students with disabilities**, including the STRIVE behavioral support program, the SAIL autism program, and the **Life Skills / PAVE** program. This investment has produced **meaningful academic and financial returns**.



Note: Analysis uses 2020 as a baseline year for comparison. | Source: Chelmsford Public Schools

Agenda

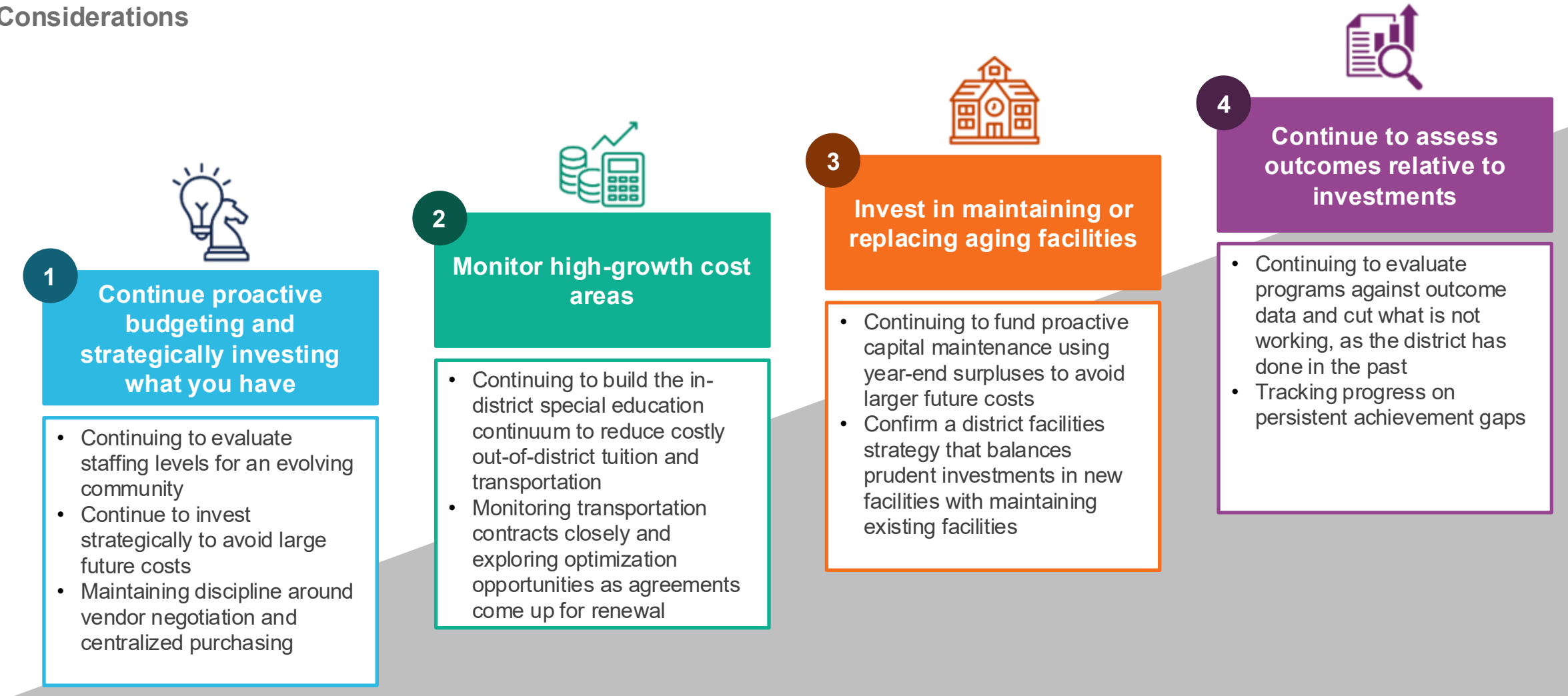
Introductions & Overview of Work

Historical Analysis

Considerations for CPS

CPS might consider pursuing actions that reinforce its commitment to delivering strong academic outcomes in a cost-effective manner, while stabilizing schools for future generations of students.

Considerations



Source: DMG Analysis



District Management Group

Helping Schools and
Students Thrive

If you have any comments or questions about the contents of this document, please contact District Management Group:

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APPENDIX

Below is the full list of functional spending categories that DESE uses in its per pupil expenditures calculations.

Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) Cost Categories

1

Function	Description
In-District Expenditures	
1110	School Committee
1210	Superintendent
1220	Assistant Superintendents
1230	Other District-Wide Administration
1410	Business and Finance
1420	Human Resources
1430	Legal Service for School Committee
1435	Legal Settlements
1450	Districtwide Administrative Technology +
ADMN	Administration (sub-total)
2110	Curriculum Directors and Department Heads (Supervisory)
2120	Curriculum Directors and Department Heads (Non-Supervisory)
2130	Instructional Technology Leadership +
2210	School Leadership
2220	<i>Curriculum Leaders and Department Heads (School Level)*</i>
2250	Administrative Technology (School Level)
2315	<i>Instructional Coordinators*</i>
LDRS	Instructional Leadership (sub-total)
2305	Teachers, Classroom
2310	<i>Teachers, Specialists*</i>
TCHR	Teachers (sub-total)

Source: Massachusetts DESE RADAR (Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) – [Link](#) & District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) - [Link](#)

Below is the full list of functional spending categories that DESE uses in its per pupil expenditures calculations.

Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) Cost Categories

2

Function	Description
In-District Expenditures	
2320	Medical/Therapeutic Services
2324	Substitutes, Long-Term
2325	Substitutes, Short-Term
2330	Paraprofessionals
2340	Librarians/Media Center Directors
2345	Distance Learning/Online Coursework +
TSER	Other Teaching Services (sub-total)
2351	Professional Development Leaders
2352	Instructional Coaches
2353	<i>Professional Days*</i>
2354	Stipends for Teachers Providing Instructional Coaching
2355	<i>Substitutes for Professional Development*</i>
2356	Costs for Instructional Staff to Attend Professional Development
2357	<i>Professional Development Costs*</i>
2358	Outside Professional Development Providers for Instructional Staff
PDEV	Professional Development (sub-total)
2410	Textbooks +
2415	Instructional Materials (Libraries)
2420	Instructional Equipment
2430	General Classroom Supplies
2440	Other Instructional Services
2451	Instructional Hardware (Student and Staff Devices) +
2453	Instructional Hardware (All Other) +
2455	Instructional Software and Other Instructional Materials +
MATL	Instructional Materials, Equipment, and Technology (sub-total)

Source: Massachusetts DESE RADAR (Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) – [Link](#) & District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) - [Link](#)

Below is the full list of functional spending categories that DESE uses in its per pupil expenditures calculations.

Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) Cost Categories

3

Function	Description
In-District Expenditures	
2710	Guidance/Adjustment Counselors
2720	Testing and Assessment
2800	Psychological Services
GUID	Guidance, Counseling, and Testing (sub-total)
3100	Attendance and Parent Liaisons
3200	Medical/Health Services
3300	Transportation Services
3400	Food Services
3510	Athletics
3520	Other Student Activities
3600	School Security
SERV	Pupil Services (sub-total)
4110	Custodial Services
4120	Heating of Buildings
4130	Utility Services
4210	Maintenance of Grounds
4220	Maintenance of Buildings
4225	Building Security System
4230	Maintenance of Equipment
4300	Extraordinary Maintenance
4400	Technology Maintenance/Support (Salaries) +
4450	Technology Maintenance/Support (All Other) +
OPMN	Operations and Maintenance (sub-total)

Source: Massachusetts DESE RADAR (Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) – [Link](#) & District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) - [Link](#)

Below is the full list of functional spending categories that DESE uses in its per pupil expenditures calculations.

Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) Cost Categories

4

Function	Description
In-District Expenditures	
5100	Employer Retirement Contributions
5150	Employee Separation Costs
5200	Insurance for Active Employees
5250	Insurance for Retired Employees
5260	Other Non-Employee Insurance
5300	Rental Lease of Equipment
5350	Rental Lease of Buildings
5400	Short Term Interest RANs
5500	Other Fixed Charges
5550	School Crossing Guards
BENE	Benefits and Fixed Charges (sub-total)
III	Total In-District Expenditures
Out-of-District Expenditures	
9100	Tuition to Massachusetts Public Schools
9110	Tuition for School Choice
9120	Tuition to Commonwealth Charter Schools
9125	Tuition to Horace Mann Charter Schools
9130	Charter Transportation Tuition ^
9200	Tuition to Out-of-State Schools
9300	Tuition to Non-Public Schools
9400	Tuition to Collaboratives
ODTR	Transportation
OODD	Total Out-of-District Expenditures

Source: Massachusetts DESE RADAR (Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) – [Link](#) & District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) - [Link](#)