

Cohasset Public Schools
143 Pond Street
Cohasset, MA 02045
Empower Students to Improve Communities

Meeting Minutes
Cohasset School Committee
Wednesday, March 19, 2025
6:00 PM

In Person Participation

Learning Commons
Cohasset Middle and High School
143 Pond Street
Cohasset, MA 02025

Televised

Streamed Live on Cohasset 143tv

Virtual

Zoom (*chat enabled*)
<https://zoom.us/j/93210720844>
ID: 932 1072 0844 / Password: 461964
Dial In: +1 929 205 6099
Facebook (*watch / listen only*)
Cohasset Live Streaming

All Cohasset School Committee Meetings Are Recorded.

In Attendance:

Craig MacLellan, Chair
Lance Dial, Vice Chair
Ted Carr, Secretary
Jennifer Lesky
Tori Hanna

Also, In Attendance:

Mrs. Susan Owen, Director of Finance & Operations
Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent
Mrs. Sarah Shannon, Superintendent

AGENDA

Call to Order

Chairman, Craig MacLellan called to order the regular meeting for the Cohasset School Committee for Wednesday, March 19, 2025 at 6:08 PM. Members of the Cohasset School Committee who are present are asked by the Chair to please indicate so in roll call.

Roll Call

Mr. Carr - Present; Mr. Dial – Present-virtually; Mrs. Hanna - Present; Mrs. Lesky - Present; Chairman Mr. MacLellan - Present.

Opening Remarks

In- person attendees who are able and willing are asked by the Chair to please rise to the recitation for the Nations Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, proceeding meeting(s) being called to order at all Cohasset School Committee meetings.

At the outset of Public Hearing, the Chair would like to remind folks that all school committee meetings are recorded, broadcasted on Cohasset 143TV, and live streamed on Facebook. One can participate virtually, by clicking the link that appears at the top of the agenda to access the website and use the Q&A feature on Zoom to type a comment, raise a question, or have a concern. Please state your name and residential address so your comment, question, or concern can be memorialized properly in the meeting minutes. The school committee would be happy to address any comments that come in later.

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Public Comment

No public comment.

Invited Guests

Exhibit C-1

- **Cohasset Middle and High School Washington DC Trip ** (Ms. Jenna Blouin, Mrs. Aleisa Gittens-Carle and Principal Mills)**

Ms. Jenna Blouin, and Mrs. Aleisa Gittens-Carle are here tonight to propose a 3-day trip to Washington, D.C., for students' grades 8-12 who attend Cohasset Middle and High School. This trip would happen in October, 13-15, 2025. Both Ms. Jenna Blouin, and Mrs. Aleisa Gittens-Carle reached out to the Grand Classroom and the itinerary is enclosed in each of the school committee's packets, Exhibit C-1.

Students will see all the National monuments and museums and see Howard University and Morgan State University which both are HBCUs and some of the history in Washington, D.C., that is specific to African American and Black History. Superintendent, Mrs. Shannon, says this trip is intentionally designed to be a pilot where they can all learn from experiences as well. It's a great idea for students to build some opportunities to inclusive learning experiences. It's a wonderful itinerary and incredibly thoughtful, and this trip is open to all students in grades 8 through 12.

Some of the books the students read in ELA classes and some of the histories don't really affect you until seeing it in person, seeing actual artifacts. To have that experience that so many students haven't had, it's not in regular history, it's the pieces of history that were left out, or haven't been talked about. It will also give students an opportunity to see where they've been, where they are, and where they'll need to go as far as developing relationships and partnerships with each other.

Students will travel by air and lodge at a hotel. There will be a bus and a tour guide through the Grand Classroom that will take students through the city. Through Grand Classroom, they'll have a Security Guard provided to monitor the hallways nightly while at the hotel, and another chaperone to provide any updates they might have. All tour guides from the Grand Classroom are first aid trained.

Ms. Blouin was thinking to cap it around 30 students, preference given to the upper classmen because this trip is for students thinking about college tours, a little relevant for students closer to graduation, but all students in grades 8 through grade 12 are welcome to join. The cost depends on how many students attend. If 25-29 were to go, the cost per student would be \$1,565. If 30 or more students come, the cost per student would be \$1,485.

Mr. Carr asks if this trip is approved, when would families need to decide? What days of the week would this trip happen.

Ms. Blouin says students would fly there on Monday, stay at the hotel for two nights, & return home on Wednesday, with their biggest hurdle being fundraising. Both Ms. Blouin and Mrs. Gittens-Carle run "Mosaic" together and were thinking of having a booth there with information about the trip as a fundraising opportunity, as well as a popcorn fundraiser where the proceeds go directly to fund for the trip. Also, Ms. Blouin and Mrs. Gittens-Carle both did the "Boston Bridges Initiative" which was also a grant they received. This grant was used earlier in the year taking a group of students to see the movie "Wicked." Then the group talked about it, talked about the themes of looking at how it currently mimics what they're dealing with in society, a great opportunity for the students to have those conversations with each other.

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Mrs. Hanna feels that capping it at 30 students feels like it's really going to be a junior, senior trip. They're still missing with the now 7th graders who will be 8th graders who have not gone on any field trips outside of Cohasset and still thinks they're missing a gap there.

Principal Mills would like to point out there is a scheduled 8th grade trip to "Treetop Adventures" in June, a great team building day. The 7th grade students have a team building day called Bodie Board. The 6th grade students went to the Patriots Hall of Fame two weeks ago as part of a team building day.

Mrs. Lesky loves the D.C. trip for students, it's one for students to go and to learn so much there. It's one that's actually affordable and accessible. The Smithsonian Institution's and loves the concept of the multi age group which is really important. The most exciting thing is making connections at HBCU's and having a class and staff from Cohasset to make connections there to help facilitate those relationships even just two institutions could do huge things for the students here to start developing not necessarily pipelines, but relationships where if those schools are of interest to students who are here there's some acknowledge from this town on the coast of Massachusetts. These major universities could really be wonderful experiences for students. Getting your feet on the ground, seeing a college campus can really be transformative and she loves that element of this trip.

Mr. MacLellan echoes Mrs. Lesky sentiments. The Washington, D.C. trip presents a unique set of experiences and would love to see this school district do this on an annual basis in some way, shape, or form. They did it last year and he'd like to keep on doing that. It's really important this district is able to deliver that experience to students and it's incredible to have faculty and staff willing to dedicate and volunteer their personal time to make this a reality for students. Mr. MacLellan would like to make sure for this trip that criminal background checks are confirmed through the Grand Classroom, and to let the Central office know the name of the company. Also, the rooms in the hotel that are connected make sure that different genders aren't in the same rooms with junior high kids and high school kids joining in those situations. Mr. MacLellan noticed that the World War II Memorial is not on their itinerary, and he'd like to suggest that these kids see that one, it's a magnificent memorial. They're all magnificent in their own right and extremely solemn and important and ask Ms. Blouin and Mrs. Gittens-Carle if they could ask Grand Classroom to incorporate that, everyone would really like it, it would be an important part of the experience.

Mr. Dial, who is virtually attending, would like to thank both Ms. Blouin, and Mrs. Gittens-Carle for their initiative in bringing these experiences to kids here. He appreciates the discussion Mrs. Hanna brought up on making sure that all grade levels are getting these opportunities. He too echoes Mr. MacLellan's comments, making sure that while the kids are in D.C. to see all sorts of the richness that city can offer as far as history and from the perspective on our country.

A motion was made by Mrs. Lesky to approve of the October, 2025 Washington, D.C. trip as presented tonight. Bearing the request by the Chair, confirming the security company criminal background checks and notifying Central office of the name of the security company, seconded by Mrs. Hanna.

Aye - All

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Superintendent Updates

• **Family Communication (Mrs. Sarah Shannon)**

Superintendent, Mrs. Sarah Shannon and Chair MacLellan attended the South Shore Roundtable Legislative Breakfast. This event was attended by all South Shore Superintendents and respective Senators and Representatives. The district is very grateful to Senator Patrick O'Connor and Representative Joan Maschino for their attendance and support of the schools. The intent of this breakfast was to update all local politicians on their budgetary plates, as they've been talking about all year. The budget concerns here in Cohasset are being echoed across the Commonwealth. The cost of inflation, loss of grant funding, and the rising costs of out-of-district special education tuition and transportation are untenable for the public schools. While the administration continues to be grateful for the support and collaboration of the Town, State, and local funding, formulas can't keep up with the rising costs in the district. Hearing all the local Representatives and Senators sharing their support and how they're working to support public school funding left this district and hopeful and they need to continue to work as a Town to figure out how to meet these challenges until their elected officials are successful in securing this additional funding for the entire public-school community across Massachusetts.

Mrs. Shannon shares an update with regard to the district strategic planning process. A group of 30 plus stakeholders with many, many students who are amazing have met twice now and they'll have their third meeting next Tuesday afternoon. They've reviewed work that's been done in this district from the last strategic plan to the data they've gathered through the strategic planning process. Next week they'll review and revise the mission, vision, and core values. From there, they'll start to identify their compass points and strategic objectives for 2025 and beyond. Mrs. Shannon will keep the school committee posted as their work continues and she looks forward to presenting a new strategic plan for Cohasset Public Schools in May.

Dr. Scollins, Aleisa Gittens-Carle and Mrs. Shannon attended the 20th Annual Women's Educational Leadership Network Conference that's hosted by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. It was a powerful and inspiring day, and they came home very proud of the work that they do together and as a district and looking forward to continuing that.

The chorus has a great celebration of student's voices with a concert tonight and the band is tomorrow night. This is one of Mrs. Shannon's favorite events because you get to see 3rd grade through 12th grade, "The Progression of Music." Everyone was wonderful, there was one group that sort of stole the show. For anyone who's looking for something to do tomorrow night at 7:00 PM it's all band night.

Dr. Scollins and Mrs. Shannon took a trip down to the Osgood School and went to a "*Mr. Dycus Dance Party*." The dancing was amazing, but what was really amazing was reflected in being joyful and fun, the students exhibited all of what they'd learned through physical education and all that *Mr. Dycus* provides. Mrs. Shannon is grateful to Mr. Dycus, for the seamless ways he incorporates learning into something that brings so many smiles to the community.

Thursday, March 20, 2025, Dr. Scollins, Mrs. Gittens-Carle, Director of METCO, Chairman MacLellan and Mrs. Shannon will be attending the METCO Advocacy Day at the Statehouse. Their METCO program is an essential part of the district and for many districts across the state. It's really important to be there tomorrow to advocate for funding and legislative support to continue to grow and enhance the program.

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Superintendent Updates

- **Family Communication (Mrs. Sarah Shannon)**

Mrs. Shannon has a follow-up from the last school committee meeting, held on March 5, 2025. The administration was asked a question to find out if there was any time when the Girls athletic teams had been given Boys uniforms instead of Girls uniforms. Mrs. Shannon investigated this claim, and she wanted to let the community know this has not happened. They do pass varsity uniforms down to JV teams of the same gender and they've not passed any boys uniforms down to any girl's teams.

Teaching and Learning

- **Academic Initiatives (Dr. Leslie Scollins)**

Last Thursday was Professional Development Day, which was half day and then no school on Friday. On the half day, the Middle and High School continued their work with benchmark assessments. In the elementary schools they did a lot of building-based time work with the Math Specialist around fluency, and it was a well-planned day. On Friday, they had a company called "Essential Partners" come and work with the High School and Middle School staff as well as the leadership team. This was around, how to have constructive conversations in the classrooms and in the community. The leadership team worked to learn about a dialogue protocol on how to have conversations and ask questions. Frame questions in a way that gets full information and engage in work that allows them to listen to all different stakeholders and kind of pull it all together. This was a wonderful day and were fortunate to get a generous donation from the Cohasset Diversity Committee to support them with that. Towards the end of the day, the elementary staff worked with TLA who has been working with the school for a couple of years along with the Reading Specialist. Each building did work specifically to where they are in the process around comprehensive literacy approach. Deer Hill School focused on writing that they've been doing a lot of that work all year. The Osgood School looked at what their accomplishments this year were with the Reading Workshop, where it's always so important to reflect on the things that have gone well and look at how to work with small groups and they'll continue that work on interventions and small instruction. MCAS starts next week with ELA at the high school on March 25th and 26th. There is a calendar on the website under teaching and learning under the MCAS tab.

Budget, Resources and Governance

- **Monthly Update- FY25 February Finance Report (Mrs. Susan Owen)** **Exhibit F-1**

The approved school budget for FY25 totals \$23,909,407, with an additional one-time allocation of \$342,399 to address the special education shortfall. This brings the total available budget for FY25 to \$24,251,806. As of February 28, 2025, expenditures amounted to \$14,213,865, with encumbrances for supplies, materials, and remaining payrolls on purchase orders totaling \$10,932,751. This results in an estimated shortfall of **(\$894,810)**, an increase from last month's shortfall of **(\$817,071)**.

The Finance and Operations Department is closely monitoring all accounts, and the budget has been frozen from early November, 2024. No budget overrides will be permitted, meaning no deficits will be allowed unless approved by the Superintendent. The Special Education (SPED) tuition budget was set at \$926,416 and is currently encumbered on purchase orders. There is a shortfall of **(\$180,935)** in tuition costs, which remains unchanged from last month. Additionally, SPED transportation shortfall has held steady at **(\$111,608)** over the past two months. Budget line items which show shortfalls are as follows:

	<u>January, 2025</u>	<u>February, 2025</u>
SPED Tuitions	\$180,935	\$180,935
Utilities	\$154,178	\$195,915
SPED Transportation	\$111,384	\$111,608
Custodial Supplies/Materials	\$ 40,884	\$ 48,417
Salaries	\$329,690	\$357,935

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Budget, Resources and Governance

• Monthly Update- FY25 February Finance Report (Mrs. Susan Owen)

Exhibit F-1

<u>School</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Expended</u>	<u>Encumbrances</u>	<u>Balance</u>	<u>% Used</u>	<u>FTE</u>
Osgood	\$4,559,387	\$2,540,051	\$ 99,740	\$1,919,597	57.89 %	52.10
Deer Hill	\$4,335,012	\$2,366,421	\$ 63,993	\$2,231,590	56.06 %	46.40
Middle	\$4,218,395	\$2,237,494	\$ 2,942	\$2,304,794	53.11 %	46.00
High School	\$7,241,994	\$4,346,099	\$181,290	\$2,714,605	62.51 %	66.80

Circuit Breaker funding received in FY24 was \$1,177,034. Due to budget shortfalls and unanticipated expenditures, the district needed to utilize \$1,078,643 leaving a balance of \$98,391 to be carried over into FY25. Circuit Breaker funding to be received in FY25 will be \$1,097,956 being paid for in four installments. Received the first two payments in the amount of \$274,489 each, totaling \$548,978. This will continue to come in for the rest of the year. The Circuit Breaker program is a state initiative designed to assist school districts by reimbursing a portion of the expenses incurred in providing a “Free Appropriate Public Education” (FAPE) to students with special needs. This reimbursement helps offset the costs associated with special education services including tuition and transportation for out-of-district placements. In Massachusetts, the program reimburses 75% of eligible special education costs that exceed four times the state average per pupil foundation budget. This support is crucial for districts managing the financial challenges of delivering specialized education services to students with significant needs.

Approved Capital FY26 Requests

Bus Lease – 8 School Buses +	\$151,300
1 Electric School Bus	\$ 25,000
1 Additional School Bus Lease	\$ 20,650
2 District Athletic Vans Lease (5 year)	\$ 35,784
Interactive Boards (³ / ₄ year)	\$117,628
Security Enhancements (Cameras & PA Upgrades) (approx. \$6,244)	\$ 91,338
Furniture (Recurring line item) Babain HS & MS Counseling Rooms	\$ <u>35,672</u>
I-Pads – Osgood School	Moved to FY27
Window Shades at all CPS	Moved to FY27
Total	\$484,778

Currently reviewing transportation needs due to an increase in ridership. The old “blue bird” bus has permanently retired, as it’s beyond repair. The school is coordinating with the Town to surplus both the “blue bird” and the “minibus,” which has been out of service for several years. Additionally, they have submitted a capital request to replace the “blue bird” bus in the upcoming year. At this stage of the school year, there are concerns regarding utilities, tuitions, transportation, and salaries. The FY25 Budget has been frozen, no additional expenses will be approved without the Superintendent authorization.

Chairman MacLellan recognizes Ms. Maher from the Town Select Board who is present in the audience and asks Ms. Maher for her expertise in municipal budgeting and invites Ms. Maher to the table to participate in discussion.

Mr. MacLellan is becoming increasingly alarmed at the growing shortfall in which they’ve instituted a budget freeze, and how are they going to stop this bleeding where it’s only March and going into seven figures in no time. Mr. MacLellan would like to brainstorm on how to stop increasing this a month.

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Budget, Resources and Governance

• Monthly Update- FY25 February Finance Report (Mrs. Susan Owen)

Exhibit F-1

Superintendent, Sarah Shannon, would like everyone to keep in mind that it is the current number. As they get closer to June there will be ways to bring that number down. They know that there is \$100,000 in Circuit Breaker Funding that can be applied to this to bring that down to \$100,000. They've encumbered salaries and yes, they need to continue to think about how to stop that.

Mr. MacLellan asks if this has been broken down to what is accounting for these monthly increases in the shortfall. What about a little bit more of a creative deployment of their revolving accounts. There are a few revolving accounts that are a little healthier than others, one in particular. There may be ways to creatively deploy those assets and might be able to offset some bleeding in that way.

Mrs. Owen says they've been identified in utilities, transportation, athletics, and tuitions for out of district placements. They have staff that go out on unpaid leave or medical leave and don't return, so the savings are there. If someone resigns, most times they are not rehiring. As they get closer to the end of the year, they can see what the revolving accounts look like and charge off.

The administration has looked at shifting their supplier for a lot of those things, a potential cost savings of \$10,000 in shifting suppliers and looking at those moves and trying to find all the ways they can to save money.

Mr. MacLellan asks Mrs. Susan Owen on the ways to identify that shows the majority in a pie chart illustration that shows these increases from month to month to show more prominent factors where they may be able to devise ways to offset those.

The Chair would like to note on record how grateful they are to the Capital budget because this is an incredibly challenging fiscal situation for schools. To be able to add resources of any type right now is an enormous victory, not only are they adding resources, but they're actually taking on the burden of some costs which also helps them. The Chair found the current Capital Budget Committee to be extremely supportive of the schools, incredibly thorough. and their support is evidenced by the decisions they made and they're really, really grateful. Adding the 9th bus is going to be huge, as well as the vans. It will broaden some horizons for them in terms of transportation and opportunities for students. Extend sincere thanks to the Capital Budget Committee for that. This is a dire circumstance to add a few resources here because of what they were able to deliver to the school district.

• Fee Discussion (Mrs. Sarah Shannon and Mrs. Susan Owen)

Exhibit F-2

Superintendent, Sarah Shannon will give some cliff notes version of the Fee presentation. It was presented in full at the last meeting as well as the February 26, 2025 school committee meeting. No decisions will be made on fees tonight as noted in the district email on any of the fees. The additional Public Hearing was to invite supplementary or additional feedback from their constituency insights and perspective on fee increases and they're not going to make any decision until a special school committee meeting that will focus on fees on Monday, March 31, 2025. This will be advertised independently, and folks will be well aware of when and how that is going to happen. The school committee will get right into comments or questions from families that are watching the March 19, 2025 school committee meeting tonight.

➤ Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Supply Cuts	\$574,743	\$574,743
Athletic Fee Increase	\$ 63,000	\$637,743

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• **Fee Discussion (Mrs. Sarah Shannon and Mrs. Susan Owen)**

Exhibit F-2

➤ **Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

Student Parking Fee	\$ 20,000-\$41,000	\$ 657,743
One Time Special Education Costs	\$350,000	\$1,007,743
Retirement Savings	\$150,000 ***	\$1,157,743
Bus Lot Lease	\$ 48,000	\$1,205,743

Other Considerations

Increase to Chapter 70 Money

Increasing Building Rental Fees

Grants (Circuit Breaker, Title I)

Kindergarten Fees

In Fiscal year 2024, Cohasset Public Schools moved from requiring families to pay a \$3,000 fee for full day Kindergarten. The Town supported the transition with a one-time monetary payment to cover the lost Kindergarten fees for FY24. The district did not adapt the FY25 budget to accommodate for the need to absorb the \$300,000 into this year's budget, adding to their current shortfall. To reinstitute the full day Kindergarten fee, it could be able to offset the budget deficit. A list of other school districts in the state is shown of the districts that still charge Kindergarten fees. If the school district were to reinstitute Kindergarten fees, the district would look over a 3–5-year period of time to try to get back to potentially not having Kindergarten fees, but philosophically that is the right thing to do and financially the school district is in a difficult place.

Transportation Fee Proposal

Currently, the school district has 450 students who ride the school bus to and from school.

		Proposal 1	Proposal 2	Proposal 3
Fee	\$ 350	\$ 400	\$ 425	\$ 450
Family Cap	\$ 590	\$ 750	\$ 800	\$ 850
Revenue Potential	\$157,500	\$180,000	\$191,250	\$202,500
** Based on 450 riders				
Revenue Increase		\$ 22,500	\$ 33,750	\$ 45,000

Another area for consideration is student ridership that is going up with more and more families who are required to go back into an office setting. Mrs. Owen talked about transportation costs and the deficit that they're running. The school buses will be returning back to the Middle School and High School facility which will save \$48,000 per year for the schools. Looking to propose an increase in athletic fees adding multi tiers because the costs for running athletics do differ, and CPS is looking at 2 tiers for athletic fees rather than just one. That increased revenue would help offset the deficit with the athletic revolving account. The school district will be taking in some additional Spring Sport fees and gate fees so that will shift. Again, the school district is in an area where the revolving account is not covering all of their athletics needs.

Gate fees do go towards the athletic revolving account and help support the athletic department. Found out that they are very much aligned with other area districts with regards to gate fees, so this school district is not actually proposing a gate fee increase.

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- **Fee Discussion (Mrs. Sarah Shannon and Mrs. Susan Owen)**
 - **Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

Exhibit F-2

STUDENT ACTIVITY FEE PROPOSAL

Looking at a potential new fee, a student activity fees. This is something that other districts are doing. This would cover the cost of after-school clubs that would incorporate the student gate fees for sports. It would also cover some of the other non-sport activities that students do throughout the school year that they currently don't charge for but does cost the district money.

Proposing \$60 per student at Cohasset Middle School and \$100 per student at the High School. Also, proposing a new student parking fee, currently don't have a student parking fee as most schools in the area do. CPS is proposing \$2.00 per day to park at the high school that would potentially bring in \$41,400 of revenue per year to the schools. Also looking at building rental fees, it is not a huge revenue source for the district, but it is a revenue source with the increased costs of utilities, maintenance and supplies to raise that fee to cover costs. It's hard to justify losing money to outside organizations, with a proposal of what those increases could look like.

Athletic Fee Increase	\$ 63,750
Student Parking Fee	\$ 20,000 - \$41,000
Transportation Fee	\$ 27,750
Student Activity Fee (35% participation)	\$ 19,800
School Bus Lot Lease	\$ 48,000
Kindergarten Tuition Fee	\$300,000
Total Additional Revenue	\$479,300 - \$500,300

The hope is that considering these fees, there's potential to close the budget gap, at least half of it.

Mr. Carr says they met as a subcommittee and went through these lines by line to brainstorm some ideas about what makes sense and it was a robust conversation, but his is consistent with what they discussed.

Mr. Dial has a question and then a comment. He didn't see an update for getting funded Kindergarten fees where they viewed Chapter 70 funding would increase making it Free Kindergarten for the district. It wasn't they didn't get anything; it came below what they expected, and he would like the correct number on the potential savings. If the district charges for kindergarten again, they'll lose whatever increase they did get. Do we have an idea of what that increase is, it's not going to be a \$300,000 savings, it will probably be \$150,000 - \$170,000 because \$20,000 did come through with that Chapter 70 increase.

Mrs. Owen can definitely reach out and find out. The hope is that the formula doesn't change again.

Mt. Dial says it wasn't necessarily a change in the formula as it was the plugging in the inflation rate and the inflation rate was so high it hit a cap and came in as lower numbers than expected. Mr. Dial says he's in favor of all these fees, except for the kindergarten fee. He knows it's the biggest line item, but also feels as a school committee they made a commitment to the community to have free kindergarten that the Town funded to do this and now they need to live up to that. It's also not fair for kindergarten families to bear the burden of the overall budget just because this was allowed to charge. This would be an unfair burden for a small segment of this community.

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Exhibit F-2

➤ **Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

The Chair states Mr. Dial made a really good point and asks Mrs. Owen, do they know what the increased kindergarten tuition is before considering a vote and what the actual benefit would be.

Kate Renny of 9 Forest Notch states the athletic fee budget/expense doesn't seem to be posted in materials, higher expenses than the budget for coaches. How is the budget decided for coaches and what is the number of coaches per team.

Superintendent Mrs. Shannon says the number of coaches and the salary are determined by the contract on which positions are available by contract. It's also important to note they have many volunteer coaches who are actually on the coaching staff but don't get paid or receive an honorarium through the boosters.

Mrs. Hanna seconds Mr. Dial on the kindergarten fees. That was a big thing coming out of COVID. She aligns with Mr. Dial thoughts around the Town having voted to support that. On the transportation fee, Mrs. Hanna had voiced this before to be careful about what they're projecting out on savings there, because once they raise that, people that are within a 2-mile radius may not sign up for the school bus. That's part of it actually getting a realistic number of ridership rather than nickel and diming the budget and everything may not be \$40,000 in savings and one some of the other projections. Would the student activity fee be mandatory of \$60 for middle school or is that an opt in, opt out thing, per student? In terms of the facility fees, Mrs. Hanna concern here is that as a Town, they're 17 fields short. As a Town, they have 2 full size fields that people can participate on. If a student signs up for the Town Basketball team, it costs almost \$400, almost \$400 for Lacrosse, these things start adding up and then participation in sports is going to start dropping. It's going to cost close to \$500 a season for a third grader to play soccer which is astronomical thinking about it. Raising fees have been raised year after year and at this point Alumni Field is the only field that has lights. It's the only field they have, and only the Town gets access to that field on Friday nights. This ends up becoming a huge issue on the Town sports side of things. The Town Boards should be involved in this and have real conversations about the impact because it does become a bigger problem, a bigger burden that goes across the entire Town on that. Mrs. Hanna says there's other ways to do this. To go after facilities, let's get a really strong culture from an athletic standpoint and get money through Sponsorships as opposed to raising these fees and dinging everybody on the back end because people will just not play and/or participate, if season after season gets hit with \$400-\$500 fees.

Mrs. Owen would like to add on to Mrs. Hanna comments on building rental fees. One of the recommendations is the custodian areas because they're not covered. The overtime rate for a custodian is more than what they're charging.

Mrs. Lesky says she's trying to find that middle ground. She thinks about the word, access, and public schools, and access is one of the most important things in public schools. Raising fees is the most tenable solution to the budget issue. Mrs. Lesky also wants to speak for those families in the community for whom multiple raises would create financial hardship and would limit access to opportunities. That being said, Mrs. Lesky also heard bandied around a couple of times, making this district a private school tuition, this is not like private school tuition, even if you are a kindergarten family and paying every single other fee that's being put forward here, they're getting an excellent education. Just to be on the record for clearing up that sort of misunderstanding and something that she's heard at least 10 times. Sometimes we have to pay for those things that are valuable to us and valuable to us, as a community.

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• **Fee Discussion (Mrs. Sarah Shannon and Mrs. Susan Owen)**

Exhibit F-2

➤ **Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

That's also part of our role as adults and community members is to support our schools. Reconciling those two ideas of complete accessibility for all families and for all the kids and funding our schools appropriately. Mrs. Lesky question is about sliding scales and how many of these fees can be put on sliding scales in a way that feels equitable, productive, and helpful that doesn't create undue sort of bureaucratic burdens on the business office, such as a kindergarten fee, or a transportation fees. There are probably families for whom see this start to creep up and then can't do this. There may be a 2-parent working family that needs to get their kids to school, and they can't walk because of where they live. Mrs. Lesky doesn't want that to be the burden for families in this community.

Superintendent, Mrs. Shannon says Mrs. Lesky comment is a really good point and philosophically very aligned. It's important to note that all of this has accessible features. The schools do collect and encourage families to fill out the *"Free and Reduced Lunch Forms,"* and there's such a misnomer about the purpose of those *"Free and Reduced Lunch Forms."* For the entire state of Massachusetts and for Cohasset free lunch is provided. When a family fills out the *"Free and Reduced Lunch Form,"* and they qualify, that allows families access to the sliding scales that Mrs. Lesky talked about and that's for all fees. It's for the fees that they're talking about and the other fees as well. It's for AP tests, SAT tests, field trips, all of those things, and it's really important that even though they have free lunch, families who do need that support fill out that form. This was sent out to families again last week by the school building Principals, everyone within the school community should have received an email. *A small plug, by filling out that form can also help the schools get more grant funding. This form is about so much more than lunch.* It provides services to families who need those services, and it potentially brings more money into the district. For anyone who is listening, Mrs. Shannon says the school administration encourages families to fill out that form, and thank you, Mrs. Lesky, for raising that.

Mrs. Renny from 9 Forest Notch chimes in via Zoom with a follow-up to thank the school committee for the initial explanation about how coach positions come about, (although it raises other questions about fairness and resources.) Why is there a \$178,000 difference? Are the schools overspending on their budgeting?

Mrs. Shannon says that currently the athletic revolving account is negative **(\$100,000)**. That will shift as they bring in all of the Spring sports fees, and bring in Spring gate fees, so it will be less than \$100,000 in the deficit. In this case they're trying to increase the fees to offset the budgeted necessary number.

Kevin Hine of 57 Hull Road comments, with any transportation fee increase, that it could put more of a burden on the roads leading to, and from, the school campus. Most parents are already familiar with long drop offs/pickup lines that spill over, onto nearby streets and burden nearby neighborhoods. Furthermore, any revenue projections by increasing transportation fees are sending the wrong message by placing more individual cars on our already burdened town roads. His family is electing to opt out by paying higher fees from Mrs. Hanna sentiments raised earlier.

Mr. Dial would like to respond to Mrs. Lesky's thoughts on trying to find that middle ground, he agrees with that, and he hates that they're having to have these conversations on fees. Is there a way for them to figure out the impact of these fees on the average school family, (e.g. a family with 2 kids who plays sports and go on field trips.

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While Mr. Dial agrees that it's a different order of magnitude between what would show versus private school tuition, the sentiment is real, and it's a significant amount of money where the school committee just approved of a field trip that would cost a family \$1,000 and approved of other trips that cost families several thousand dollars. People with multiple kids have to know they don't have to do this if they don't have access to those experiences and feel they're left behind. There's a real fiscal component to all these fees that families have to deal with.

Mr. Dial says the problem they have is a structural one. Their utilities costs are too high, the required special education spending is too high, and the solution to this is not trying to band-aid it by raising fees, but rather revisiting what their budget needs are, and working with the Town. As citizens of this Town get an approved budget that is potentially through an override or whatever platform that meets the needs of their schools. They've talked about this for years since Mr. Dial has been on the school committee that they've been lightly funded and now they're underfunded. Not necessarily because of anything in particular, just that everything has gotten more expensive. People need to have that discussion as a Town because these expenses are the expenses that are rightly borne by the community as a whole and not by subsets of committees based on what access they want to the Town. Setting up the idea from his perspective, the balance in this is not necessarily landing on the fees but looking forward and ahead to having larger conversations with the Town Select Board on how to increase the Town's funding for their schools because that's really where Mr. Dial thinks they are.

Mr. MacLellan would like to address the parking lot for the school buses, it's the first time he's heard that definitively they've decided to do that, and they've been able to make that happen. Relocating the school buses to school property would require moving the buses somewhere else during the day than shuttle bus drivers back and forth because their cars would be elsewhere. He didn't know there'd be a logistics challenge to overcome.

Superintendent, Mrs. Shannon replies they haven't overcome that piece of it yet. They're still exploring, and they've talked about that at the budget subcommittee meeting. Mrs. Owen reached out to a bunch of different places a couple of years ago looking for overnight parking. They're going to reopen those conversations to look for parking for the school buses during the day. Even if they can't find a place, they still need to bring the school buses back and that would mean they'd lose some student parking. Spending \$48,000 on bus parking when they have this much of a budget deficit is not necessarily fiscally responsible. They're continuing to look for a place that can house the buses from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm.

The Town Select Board Chair, Ms. Maher is here tonight at the school committee meeting as a community member to addresses something Mr. MacLellan brought up a few years ago, the MBTA was engaged from the parking lot next to the Old Colony Center and that offer can still be on the table and it might allay some of the previous concerns. If it's only during the daytime, they wanted to know how many spaces there were and the number at that time given was a low four figure annually, which is certainly attractive to lease some space there.

This is not a permanent parking solution because there are no facilities there. Mr. MacLellan would like this on the record just to be clear about this issue because there's some misinformation about their decision to have a leased private space for the school buses. They'll need to make sure there's a facility for the bus drivers, and a space for them to park their cars.

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The Town used to allow the schools to park at the DPW area near the Transfer Station, it doesn't happen anymore. They need to understand the school buses are a town asset. It's not like schools and towns like this are a town asset. The Town did not have a location for buses, and they did not have a place to park the school buses. Folks became agitated by the fact that they had seemingly been recklessly allocating \$50,000 to a private parking area. First of all, it didn't start at that amount. Second of all, there wasn't an alternative. They're trying to find this alternative which in itself is suboptimal because they're going to be transferring school bus drivers. It's just a creative solution that was not something they would have considered when they weren't in sort of a fiscal crisis, but now every dollar matters. To individuals who thought that was just hazily done, it wasn't. They had a Town parking location for the school buses, and it was taken away and didn't have that anymore. They're trying to find one and Mrs. Maher just offered one potential option that they can look at. It's not going to be free, but hopefully it's going to be a lot cheaper than what they're currently paying and will still require some logistics for school bus drivers to and from. It can't serve as a permanent location because there's no facilities. That's edifying and optimistic to Mr. MacLellan about that but it's encouraging.

Ms. Maher, Town Select Board member asks Chairman MacLellan if she can jump in with her thoughts regarding the schools deficit this year. Whatever the schools can save only allows the Town to help you more next year. The longer the Town doesn't know that number, the tougher it gets because the Town does have free cash and has a competing interest in free cash. The Town Select has priorities that are banging on the door and they're kind of keeping everyone at bay until they get the school's final investment number. Ms. Maher can't promise every dollar they save this Spring will be a dollar for FY26, but the Town Select will do their best on that front. That was a message from the Town stated publicly so Ms. Maher is not speaking out of term of what she mentioned earlier about the MBTA parking lot. The Town Select Board talks about the school bus parking lot a lot and what they can do and where they can go. They all know this Town intimately, there's not a lot of land here, it's 30% water and they do brainstorm on what they can do for the buses and it's not off their radar. Ms. Maher just wanted to let the school committee know that they haven't come up with anything other than the MBTA.

Ms. Maher had a meeting with Superintendent Shannon where Ms. Maher expressed her thoughts about transportation, some members of the school committee mentioned in terms of fees getting too high. Families do get hit with additional bus fees, parking fees, this fee, that fee. The Select Board always had a practice of regularly reviewing fees, and they should always be reviewed and upgraded during the normal course of school business. Ms. Maher knows about athletics; it's what she knows best and has been in it for decades here in Cohasset. The Town hasn't raised the fee since 2008, it's been the same when it was initiated in 2007, it was \$150. In 2008, it went up to \$250 and it never moved. The school's reviewing is good, and their benchmark is good on that. From the perspective of a citizen and not as a Select Board member, Ms. Maher has been coming up here to go to events prior to 2006. She has seen an escalation in game day staff over the years and she would challenge do they need a police detail at every event? Indoors, or outdoors because they pay for that. Sometimes Ms. Maher would see two policemen here at the schools and she doesn't know if one's on patrol and just stops by to catch the game or not, but do they really need 2 detailed police and four people taking tickets at football games at \$75 - \$90 a game. Do they really need 4 people for the 150 people that come to the game? Do they need two people and an administrator and an athletic director at basketball games.

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➤ **Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

Ms. Maher would really encourage the athletic department to look at staffing during game days and what it really needs because she has seen it grow over time now. There are certain areas they need at a basketball game, you need a table, a timer, a scorer, and a 30 second clock, but do they need all the other people? Do they really need the quality and caliber of the kids in this district? Do they really need an administrative overview, supervising what is already good behavior? Those staff members get stipend sometimes if playing a big rival and if it's a big event and expect capacity crowds. Ms. Maher would encourage the school committee and administrators to look at those game days and game day expenses. Spring sports haven't started, and Ms. Maher sees the glaring of the lights on the Alumni Field, and she doesn't know why the field lights are on, doesn't know why at 5:45 a.m. in the morning as she's driving to work. The student parking lot is dark, and the Middle School is lit up like a Christmas tree all night long. The school's usage is down, but the rates are up, and she knows these are just simple things. Ms. Maher would encourage the school committee to resume the practice that maybe Mr. MacLellan remembers where they used to have season end with athletic reports with the Athletic Director would come in and present the prior season, team by team and would go through the roster sizes, accolades and the highs and the lows of the season, and give a shout out to the kids and the teams that do well. Their sports teams do exceptionally, exceptionally well! Then they go through the budgets to question, why so many coaches, this is what the gridiron does, this is what the gate fees are and then break it down. Ms. Maher found that to be very helpful not to get into this kind of situation where now they're trying to scurry along and try to figure it out. Ms. Maher says she has some examples that she can send somewhere in her archives.

Another recollection Ms. Maher reflects upon back in 2008 when the district was in financial distress. Ms. Maher was involved with the Basketball Boosters, Gridiron Club, Scituate/Cohasset Youth Football at the time and Ron Ford was the athletic director at the time and he called all the boosters in, and said they're cutting all JV sports, they don't have the budget, and don't have the money. Ms. Maher said they all said "no, that's not good!" Once something is cut, it's very hard to get in back. Ron Ford laid out every sport, every JV coach, assistant coaches in their contract, head coach don't get stipend, so sometimes they'd get two assistant coaches, set of three football officials. There were different financial implications for JV sports. Ms. Maher said they came up with a way to support JV sports and support the program in a one-year crisis, and they were very clear this a one-year thing. They did a little extra fundraising and cut out some of the swag that kids got, all the banners, posters, gifts for Senior night, gifts at banquets, flowers from Winston's for the moms. It's kind of snowballed, paying \$500 for flowers from Winston's where there are bouquets from Trader Joe's, a lot less expensive. Getting the booster groups together and asking what they can do, because a lot of them already support maybe a half-time assistant coach out of their fundraising, and Ms. Maher said it's worth a conversation. Also look at the school's subscriptions to sub varsity sports to see how many kids from varsity play down on a JV and how many JV kids play where there's not enough for a true JV when the kids sign up, doesn't mean the kids are committed.

Stephanie Saunders from 10 Strafford Terrance chimes in via Zoom to say if they're able to park the school buses at the MBTA they should reach out to either the landlord at Old Colony Square, or the owner of the workstation to ask about the use of facilities, (bathrooms are shared amongst businesses there.)

Mrs. Shannon says the facilities would be addressed through the schools because the drivers would park the school buses over there then come back here to get their cars and use the school facilities.

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Mr. MacLellan says perhaps Ms. Saunders' comment was to avoid the logistics challenge that involves the use of that as a full-time location.

Laura Soderberg, from 16 Black Horse Lane comments, so many of their students play sports and participate in activities, finding themselves too busy to attend other athletic games and clubs. What average number of activities do you anticipate students per year might attend for the \$100 student activity fee? What assumed costs per activity were assumed to arrive at this fee? Ms. Soderberg says she finds her kids don't have a lot of opportunities to attend other activities given their busy schedules. This fee, plus increasing the athletics fee is a lot!

Mr. MacLellan believes Ms. Soderberg is primarily questioning the calculus they employed arriving at the amount. Mr. MacLellan was not personally involved in that and would defer Ms. Soderberg question to someone who was to answer.

The Superintendent, Mrs. Shannon says some of that was looking at other areas for participation fees. Also, looking at all the middle and high school clubs, some of those are stipend positions, and some of them aren't. Some clubs during the day are stagnant because of the activity that happens outside of the school day as well. Looking at some of those costs for running some of those clubs and looking at gate fees. The schools are trying to find ways to encourage students to start coming to games. Conversations came from students actually from the Forums held for their Strategic Plan, was not have students bring money to the games, just come and watch their peers. It was from the students' perspective where they were always having to find \$5 or whatever it is to come. There's an issue where students don't come to watch one another and Mrs. Shannon thinks Laura Soderberg is right, that sometimes it's because kids are so busy and doing other things.

Mr. MacLellan would like to add they've identified a lot of the competing interests here and it's a complicated issue, especially in a year when they're struggling to confront a shortfall. Mrs. Lesky brought up this sort of accessibility and interest element to this. There's also the ability to maintain their current programming which is moving in the right direction. The schools are performing well right now, and then there's consideration of the fact that the public schools are an employer and probably the largest employer in Town. People's careers are attached to obviously people's livelihoods, so that is a factor to consider. Nobody likes fees, they're essentially taxes and they already pay a lot of taxes, but Mr. MacLellan views them as reduction mitigation tools. The more they approve, the less reductions they have to confront though some may make more economic sense and practical sense than others. Mr. MacLellan is also becoming increasingly concerned about the timing of all this, some of them are too sudden! Mrs. Hanna raised a point earlier about collaborating a little bit more with some of the sports boards prior to increasing sports fees. As the Superintendent, Mrs. Shannon stated the objective fact is that the schools are losing money. It's not like it's a dire circumstance and there's not too many conversations to be had in this arena. Mr. MacLellan just wants to make sure that everyone realizes how complicated this is. It's not a matter of revenue source, it's a little misleading and makes people feel as though they're trying to make money off of families and that is not at all what they're trying to do, it's to mitigate the number of reductions they have.

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Exhibit F-2

- **Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

Mr. MacLellan is absolutely and completely adamantly opposed to reducing student-facing positions and as a community they can come together and pay a few extra fees to ensure that doesn't happen. These are all just proposals and they're going to continue to consider them as they go into the special school committee meeting to make some decisions that are going to be hard decisions to make.

Mr. Dial says there's two things that would be helpful to him, one is the Chapter 70 figure for kindergarten, and two, if there's any modeling, they can get on what an average family would pay in fees, what they're paying now and what they'd pay assuming they make all these changes. To be honest, Mr. Dial sees all these numbers and it feels big, maybe when they do that modeling it's not as big as it seems.

Community Relations / Communication

- **Reports from School Committee Subcommittees and Liaisons**

Mr. Carr reports at a subcommittee meeting they started to discuss one item as a potential for offsetting the budget deficit that could have some ramifications around contracts they currently have in place. Mr. Carr recommends a convenient time to discuss that, perhaps in an Executive Session to see if it's something they might consider.

Mr. MacLellan needs to reach out to Jason Earls on the School Facilities Committee.

School Committee Governance

- **Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair**

There are no topics not reasonably anticipated in 48 hours by the Chair.

- **Approval of Minutes**

There are no meeting minutes to approve.

- **Future Agenda Items**

Mrs. Hanna would like some audit for the athletic department giving transparency to people on what that looks like. Giving some line of sight to everybody to understand what this audit is and what the process of it is. Are they replacing or taking the place of having a committee, because Mrs. Hanna says as a school committee, they owe it to people about how they're doing. There are some middle school families that have a lot of concerns too.

Mr. Carr says there was a request from an outside party for one set of minutes from last year, Jennifer has been in touch with him, and Mr. Carr will do some research on that and will keep everyone posted.

Mr. Dial would like to have discussions about a budget item line at some point about the future planning for the Stabilization Fund. What the planned expenses are over a 5–10-year period and how they're going to deploy that fund now that they're dipping into it for the roof and making sure they've got a longer-term maintenance plan.

Mr. MacLellan would like to explore some homework a little bit and continue it in their conversations and what the definitive policy on homework is for the district. Also, he would like to have a METCO presentation about programming sometime in late April, early May.

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School Committee Governance

- **Adjourn****

A motion was made by Mrs. Hanna to adjourn the regular school committee meeting for Wednesday, March 19, 2025 at 8:24 p.m., seconded by Mrs. Lesky.

Aye – All

****Requires Committee Vote / Action**

Documents/Materials Used at the March 19, 2025 School Committee Meeting

Cohasset Middle and High School Washington DC Trip ** (Ms. Jenna Blouin, Mrs. Aleisa Gittens-Carle)	Exhibit C-1
Budget, Resources and Governance – Monthly Update (Mrs. Susan Owen)	Exhibit F-1
Budget, Resources and Governance – Fee Discussion (Mrs. Susan Owen & Mrs. Sarah Shannon)	Exhibit F-2