

Cohasset Public Schools
143 Pond Street
Cohasset, MA 02025
Empower Students to Improve Communities

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Wednesday, September 17, 2025
6:00PM**

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

Attendance

Committee Members in Attendance

Jennifer Lesky (Chair)
Craig MacLellan (Vice Chair)
Corey Evans
Tori Hanna

Lance Dial (Absent)

Others in Attendance

Sarah Shannon, Superintendent
Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent

Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Roll call confirmed Mr. Dial absent; Mr. Evans joined virtually at 6:04 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky noted an upcoming vacancy on the School Committee and invited members of the public to submit statements of interest. She welcomed community participation in district governance.

Public Comment

No public comments were offered.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Shannon reported a strong start to the school year, with well-attended Open Houses and appreciation for the work of teachers and staff.

Dignity Index

Superintendent Shannon introduced the Dignity Index, a framework learned at the Superintendent's Conference, aimed at fostering respectful dialogue across differences and modeling dignity in interactions. She explained that administrators and teachers embraced it for its simplicity and usefulness, with high school staff introducing it to students at the start of the year. The Index encourages conversations that emphasize curiosity, listening, and valuing others, even in disagreement, and will be highlighted in both the principal's and superintendent's newsletters. Committee members praised the initiative, with Mr. MacLellan noting its importance in teaching life

skills and Mrs. Lesky emphasizing how even subtle communication cues shape respectful interactions. Dr. Scollins added that the Dignity Index's online resources are freely available and valuable for ongoing community use.

Community Partnerships

Shannon highlighted partnerships with Safe Harbor Coalition, including a student ambassador program, the Screenager parent event, and an upcoming community forum on the book **Never Enough**. The Committee discussed how these collaborations support student wellness.

Committees

She noted that Project-Based Learning, AI/Technology, and Communications committees are being formed, with applications open through September 29.

MSBA Updates

Superintendent Shannon reported that the MSBA approved the schematic design and budget for the Osgood School roof project at its August 27 meeting, with a total project estimate of \$5.86 million. The MSBA grant will cover about 32.5% (\$1.9 million), leaving the Town's share at roughly \$4 million, which will be addressed at the November 3, 2025 Special Town Meeting using the School Facility Stabilization Fund and additional bonding as needed. She noted that construction is expected to begin in Summer 2026 and that cost estimates may ultimately come in lower than projections. Shannon emphasized that planning with Town officials, architects, and community partners is underway to ensure continuity for summer programs at Osgood during construction. She also updated the Committee on the Middle School/High School Statement of Interest submitted in April, explaining the MSBA's review process and possible next steps, including whether the project remains under consideration or requires a site study.

The MSBA conducted a Senior Study visit at the Middle and High School, meeting with district leaders, touring the facilities, and reviewing academic programming as part of their evaluation of the district's Statement of Interest. Superintendent Shannon reported the visit went well, with a decision expected at the December 13 Board meeting, and Mr. Evans emphasized the importance of clear messaging about project costs and community support if Cohasset is invited into the next phase of the MSBA process.

Teaching and Learning

Assistant Superintendent Scollins reported that curriculum review committees are active, student assessments are underway, and new interactive whiteboards have been installed. The Committee discussed the importance of using assessment data to guide instruction.

Budget, Resources and Governance

Superintendent Shannon presented on behalf of Susan Owen, noting the Budget Subcommittee had recently met twice to refine a new reporting format. The FY26 appropriated school budget totals \$24.8 million, with an additional \$150,000 one-time allotment, and to date roughly \$2.1 million has been expended and \$3.0 million encumbered, mainly to forecast salaries and utilities. While the district expects overspending in utilities and athletics, savings from summer hiring will offset the shortfalls, keeping the budget balanced. Shannon highlighted that CPS has been awarded \$808,537 in grants, including a return to Title I funding, thanks to families completing "free and reduced lunch" forms that also allow the district to provide fee relief for field trips, athletics, and exams. Revolving accounts are stabilizing, with transportation expected to clear its deficit by September 30 and athletics by year-end, while food services remain strong due to state and federal support. Mr. Evans emphasized the need

for context in budget reporting, urging updates that compare current spending against projections to better inform decision-making and long-term forecasting.

Will Ashton of 125 Doane Street suggested reinstating the budget reporting format used in 2019, offering to share examples for reference. Chair Lesky thanked Mr. Ashton for his feedback, noting the Committee's commitment to transparency and responsiveness, and expressed appreciation for the community's engagement and attention to the budget process.

Disposal of Surplus Property

Ms. Shannon noted that the elementary schools migrated to a new version of Bridges Math program. As a result, the schools requested to dispose outdated material to bring in new material and clear some space in the classrooms.

After discussion and a motion duly made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Ms. Hanna, it was:

RESOLVED, to dispose of outdated Bridges Math materials as presented;

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Evans – Aye; Ms. Hanna – Aye; Mr. MacLellan – Aye; Mrs. Lesky – Aye.

Substitute Pay Rates

Superintendent Shannon outlined the district's substitute teacher shortage, noting the current \$100 daily pay rate is well below neighboring districts, which offer \$125–\$150. She stressed the need for more qualified substitutes to avoid pulling teachers from non-teaching blocks or ESPs from special education services, which disrupts learning and adds costs. Shannon proposed a phased plan: beginning with \$110 per day for non-certified and \$125 for certified substitutes, moving by FY27 toward \$125 and \$145–\$150, respectively, with a dedicated building substitute at each school. She argued this approach could ultimately save money compared to covering absences with existing staff, while also improving consistency for students. Mr. Evans cautioned that \$125 may be the “worst-case” rate—costlier without increasing competitiveness—and suggested aiming for \$150 to truly attract substitutes and reduce long-term costs. Mr. MacLellan urged a more conservative approach, preferring to test a modest increase before committing to higher rates, citing the district's recent budget challenges. Mrs. Lesky added that budget planning should consider not just last year's overruns but also how expenditures align with current-year allocations.

Public commenter Danielle Zietti of 12 Hillside Drive asked how many current substitutes hold teaching certificates and whether pay could vary by experience regardless of certification. Superintendent Shannon acknowledged both questions were valuable and said they would gather more data to inform future discussions. The Committee agreed this was an initial conversation, not a vote, and would continue exploring options with input from staff and the community.

Community Relations / Communication

Mr. Evans reported on the PSO and SEPAC updates, and noted that the Budget Subcommittee had recently met.

School Committee Governance

No unanticipated topics were presented. There were no minutes for approval.

Executive Session

Ms. Lesky informed the Committee that there was a reason to move into executive session (to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, or to conduct collective bargaining sessions, or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel).

After discussion and a motion duly made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Evans, it was:

RESOLVED, to enter Executive Session at 7:09 PM for contract negotiations and not return to public session;

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Evans – Aye; Ms. Hanna – Aye; Mr. MacLellan – Aye; Mrs. Lesky – Aye.

Adjournment

The regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee for Wednesday, September 17, 2025, was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial