

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
November 19, 2025
6:00PM**

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

Attendance

Committee Members in Attendance	Jennifer Lesky, Chair Craig MacLellan, Vice Chair Lance Dial, Secretary Corey Evans, School Committee Member Jacob Squatrito, Interim School Committee Member
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Others in Attendance	Dr. Sarah Shannon, Superintendent Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent Susan Owen, Director of Finance & Operations
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Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee to order at 6:03 PM.

Roll Call: Mr. Dial-Present; Mr. Evans, Present; Mr. MacLellan-Present; Mr. Squatrito-Present; Ms. Lesky-Present.

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky welcomed attendees and congratulated Superintendent Sarah Shannon on the completion of her doctoral degree, noting that Dr. Shannon achieved this while leading the district through a full academic year and into the current school year. Lesky invited public commenters to participate during the designated portion of the meeting or via virtual channels monitored by Committee members.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Invited Guests

Washington, DC Trip Reflections and Learnings

Dr. Shannon introduced Ms. Alesia Gittens-Carle and Ms. Jenna Blouin, who presented reflections on the joint Washington, DC Civil Rights trip for students in grades 8–12, organized with the Cohasset High School Black Student Union and the Cohasset Middle School Inclusivity Club. The trip included museum visits and historical tours and was designed to deepen students' understanding of civil rights and civic history, although a Nor'easter and partial federal government shutdown prevented visits to several key sites. The cost of the trip was approximately \$1,485 per student and covered airfare, lodging, food, and entrance fees, with partial scholarships

supported by the Cohasset Education Foundation. Shannon also noted ongoing work on a districtwide field trip handbook that will clarify expectations, planning processes, and developmental appropriateness of trips across grade levels.

Committee members expressed strong support for experiential learning opportunities of this kind. Members thanked Ms. Gittens-Carle and Ms. Blouin for the significant effort involved in organizing and chaperoning the trip, and noted the educational value of exposure to Washington, DC and to people and perspectives beyond Cohasset.

Cohasset Middle School Quebec Trip 2026

Mr. Bob Erlandsen and retired CMS French teacher Ms. Sanchez presented the proposed Cohasset Middle School Quebec Trip 2026 for eighth-grade students. The longstanding trip includes cultural and historical experiences in one of the oldest cities in the Americas, a visit to a “sugar shack,” and walking tours within the walled city, supplemented by pre-trip research projects and journal writing in French. Students will stay at the Royale Hotel within the walled city, and the trip includes structured supervision, hallway security overnight, and protocols for securing and managing passports. Erlandsen noted that, as in recent years, the trip is planned in partnership with Scituate, which helps increase enrollment and reduce per-student costs, with the anticipated cost of approximately \$700 or less per student depending on final numbers.

Committee members thanked Mr. Erlandsen and Ms. Sanchez for sustaining this tradition and highlighted the value of immersive language and cultural experiences at the middle school level. Members asked brief questions about chaperone ratios, supervision arrangements, and the ongoing collaboration with Scituate and expressed appreciation that cost considerations are being actively managed.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Dial to approve the Cohasset Middle School Quebec Trip 2026 as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

CHS South Carolina Girls Lacrosse Trip 2026

Mr. Steve Rotondi and Ms. Kara Connerty presented a proposal for a Cohasset High School Girls Lacrosse trip to South Carolina during April vacation in 2026. The trip would include two games—against Bishop England High School and Oceanside Collegiate Academy—along with practice time and some local educational and cultural activities in the Charleston area. The proposed dates are April 19–22, 2026, with travel on Sunday and Wednesday and games on Monday and Tuesday; the Boosters plan to lead fundraising efforts to offset costs and make the trip more affordable for families.

Committee members were enthusiastic about the opportunity for team bonding, competition outside the local league, and exposure to a different region. Members raised questions regarding overnight supervision and suggested securing a hallway monitor in the hotel, and they expressed appreciation for scheduling the trip over April vacation and for efforts to reduce the financial burden on families.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the CHS South Carolina Girls Lacrosse Trip 2026 as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Shannon reported that districts across Massachusetts, including Cohasset, are facing difficult budget conditions despite local efforts to maintain balanced budgets. She described recent statewide hearings hosted by Governor Healey's administration regarding public school funding and shared that she spoke at a session to highlight Cohasset's concerns and the broader systemic funding challenges that extend beyond a single community. Shannon thanked local legislators, including Senator and Representative Joan Meschino, for their advocacy on education funding and indicated she will continue to update the Committee as the Governor's decisions and next steps are announced.

Shannon also reported that the district recently held the National Honor Society Induction Ceremony, celebrating students' accomplishments in character, scholarship, leadership, and service, and she congratulated students and their families. She recognized the efforts of the soccer and field hockey teams for strong seasons that recently concluded and noted that the football team will compete in the state semifinal against Northbridge on November 22. Shannon further shared that the Leadership Team met with the newly formed Cohasset Community Assistance Fund, a 501(c)(3) providing short-term financial relief to Cohasset residents, and expressed enthusiasm for partnering to support families in need. She reminded families of the Thanksgiving recess schedule, with early release on Wednesday and no school on Thursday or Friday.

Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy – Second Read

Dr. Leslie Scollins presented the second read of the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy, noting that it is required by the state to ensure students are informed about alternative programming options at South Shore Vocational Technical High School and Norfolk Agricultural School. She explained that the primary entry point for vocational programs is grade 9, though later transfers may be possible depending on space, and outlined how counselors and visiting school representatives provide information and opportunities for students to tour programs. Committee members asked questions about how families are educated regarding these options and whether there are additional strategies beyond counselor-delivered lessons to broaden awareness.

Dr. Scollins also reported on a Cohasset Education Foundation grant supporting work with Dr. Richard Blue of Brown University, who has provided professional learning for elementary teachers and a parent presentation focused on behavioral strategies and supporting positive learning environments at home and school. She noted that Dr. Blue will work with guidance counselors and therapists on December 12 and that the sessions have been well received. In addition, Dr. Scollins described recent "learning walks" conducted with math and reading specialists and department chairs, highlighting a shift to full-day visits focused on "look-fors" related to learning community and student-centered instruction in math. She reported that the visits revealed strong mathematical discourse and vocabulary in early grades and will inform future feedback to staff and alignment across grade levels. Committee members praised Dr. Scollins' leadership in these initiatives and emphasized the value of reflective practice and cross-classroom observation.

Budget, Resources and Governance

Gift – Donation to Support CMS Student Council

Dr. Shannon presented a donation from a parent/caregiver to support the Cohasset Middle School Student Council. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. Dial to accept the donation from a parent/caregiver to support the CMS Student Council.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

Office Hours

Mr. Craig MacLellan led a discussion regarding the idea of School Committee office hours in a public location such as the library, based on feedback from parents seeking more informal opportunities to speak with Committee members. He suggested that such office hours could provide a neutral setting for conversations that do not fit within the structure of a formal School Committee meeting, while carefully avoiding quorum issues.

Committee members expressed support for increasing accessibility but raised concerns about time demands, equity of participation among members, and the risk of setting expectations that may be difficult to sustain given volunteer and professional obligations. Members discussed alternative approaches, including ad hoc meetings arranged via email, rotating office-hour assignments, use of scheduling software, and informal presence at community events (e.g., athletic events or farmers' markets). The Committee agreed to keep the topic on a future agenda and to consider a pilot approach, such as offering informal availability before regular meetings, to balance accessibility with workload.

Budget and Finance

Director of Finance and Operations Susan Owen provided the monthly budget update, including a review of special education expenditures, revolving accounts, and utility costs. She reported that special education spending is tracking close to budget with an approximate \$10,000 shortfall based on current projections.

In response to questions from Mr. Dial about Food Services, Ms. Owen explained that the current statewide free-lunch program and corresponding federal and state reimbursements have made Food Services fully funded, with prior surpluses now functioning as an important buffer should universal free meals end. Dr. Shannon added that this surplus also positions the district to run a self-sustaining program if funding models change, noting that the district cannot charge less for a second lunch than the reimbursement rate.

Mr. Evans asked about the role of the athletics and transportation revolving accounts, emphasizing that balances in those funds represent timing differences rather than true surpluses and that negative balances can affect free cash. He requested continued clarity around how those accounts are used over the course of the fiscal year and how they inform future budget adjustments. Mr. Squatrito asked whether utility expenditures exceeding projections already reflect the additional \$180,000 allocated for FY26 and whether further overruns are anticipated.

Finalize FY27 Budget Priorities

Dr. Shannon presented a revised FY27 Budget Priorities document, formatted to align with the forthcoming budget book and organized around level-service goals and the district's strategic compass points. She emphasized

that the top priority is to maintain at least level service—preserving current services, staffing, and student experiences—which will require an increased budget rather than level funding. Additional priorities include supporting student and staff wellness, aligning grading and homework practices, and investing in professional development and program structures that enhance belonging and engagement.

Committee members expressed strong support for the focus on level service and for the clarity of the revised format. Mr. Evans highlighted the importance of articulating that level service requires additional resources to maintain class sizes, staffing, and program quality that the community values. Mr. Squatrito noted that the document will be a helpful tool both for community understanding and for the Committee’s advocacy during the spring budget process. Mr. MacLellan suggested minor formatting refinements, such as the use of bullet points to further clarify separate issues, and members praised the assumptions section as an effective “mission statement” for the budget work.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. MacLellan to approve the FY27 Budget Priorities as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

Finalize FY27 Budget Calendar

Dr. Shannon presented the FY27 Budget Calendar and a companion budget process overview summarizing key milestones from fall through spring. She explained that while the sequence of work remains similar to prior years, some specific dates have shifted, and she plans to set Budget Subcommittee meetings through the end of the year so that dates can be posted and communicated clearly. Shannon reiterated that the district plans to produce a budget book consolidating budget information and welcomes community participation at regular meetings and at the formal budget hearing in the spring.

During discussion, Mr. MacLellan noted that the date for the School Committee vote on the FY27 budget was left blank, and Mr. Dial stated for the record that the vote is planned for April 1, 2026. Chair Lesky encouraged community members to engage with the budget process early and reminded the public that School Committee contact information is available on the Town website.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Dial to approve the FY27 Budget Calendar and the supporting FY27 budget process documents.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

FY27 Capital Budget Prioritization

Dr. Shannon provided an update on the FY27 Capital Budget Prioritization, noting that she and the Leadership Team have continued to refine priorities and have begun discussions with the interim Town Manager. She explained that upcoming meetings with the Budget Subcommittee and liaisons from the Capital Planning Board will further inform the final ranking of requests.

Committee members asked questions about specific items, including football field uprights, security camera expansion, music instruments, and recurring CPS furniture requests. Mr. Evans suggested that the Committee revisit its security camera policy to align capital requests with a clearer statement of goals and expectations. Mr. MacLellan raised the possibility of developing targeted donation lists for items like instruments, and Ms. Lesky inquired about the relationship between recurring furniture requests and prior investments at Deer Hill and the

middle/high school. Shannon clarified that most Deer Hill classroom furniture has been updated and that ongoing requests are now focused primarily on middle and high school classrooms. She noted that this was the Committee's second review of the capital list and that a final prioritization will be presented for a vote at the December 3, 2025 meeting.

Community Relations / Communication

Reports from School Committee Subcommittees and Liaisons

There were no reports from School Committee subcommittees or liaisons.

School Committee Governance

Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair

Chair Lesky stated that there were no topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.

Approval of Minutes

There were no minutes presented for approval.

Executive Session and Adjournment

Chair Lesky stated that the Committee did not have a reason to enter Executive Session.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to adjourn the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee at 8:05 PM on Wednesday, November 19, 2025.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting of the Cohasset School Committee was adjourned.

Documents/materials used by school committee members for the November 5, 2025 meeting.

- Washington DC Trip Reflections and Learnings (Ms. Alesia Gittens-Carle & Ms. Jenna Blouin)
- Cohasset Middle School Quebec Trip 2026 (Mr. Bob Erlandsen & Ms. Sanchez)
- CHS South Carolina Girls Lacrosse Trip 2026 (Ms. Kara Connerty & Mr. Steve Rotondi)
- Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy – Second Read (Dr. Leslie Scollins)
- Gift – Donation from parent/caregiver to support the CMS Student Council
- Budget and Finance – Monthly Update (Mrs. Susan Owen)
- Finalize FY27 Budget Priorities (Dr. Sarah Shannon)
- Finalize FY27 Budget Calendar (Dr. Sarah Shannon)
- FY27 Capital Budget Prioritization (Dr. Sarah Shannon)

Respectfully submitted,

Lance C. Dial
12.17.2025