

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
October 22, 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

Others in Attendance Sarah Shannon, Superintendent
Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent
Susan Owen, Director of Finance & Operations
Michael Stapleton, Director of Student Services
Amy Gaudette, Principal, Joseph Osgood School
Alexandra Sullivan, Principal, Deer Hill School
John Scopeletti, Principal, Cohasset Middle School
Brian Scott, Principal, Cohasset High School

Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee to order at 6:10 PM.

Roll call: Evans, MacLellan, Squatrito, and Lesky were present; Dial was not present.

Pledge of Allegiance

Attendees stood for the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky welcomed attendees and noted that the Committee had a substantial agenda with several invited guests. She encouraged active participation and recognized the contributions of staff and students in preparing materials for the evening's discussions.

Invited Guests

Spotlight on Learning – DESE Civics Project Showcase

Ms. Kathy Cerruti and Dr. Blair Duncan presented student projects from the DESE Civics Project Showcase. Students described action-based research addressing community issues such as marine science, diversity, and sustainability. Cohasset students Keira Lynch and Charlotte Reilly served as student leaders at the state level, and several teams received recognition for exemplary research. Committee members congratulated the students and teachers on their work and emphasized the value of experiential, action-oriented learning.

Mr. Dial joined the meeting at 6:16 PM

2025–2026 School Improvement Plans

Joseph Osgood School (Principal Amy Gaudette)

Principal Amy Gaudette presented the Osgood School’s plan, developed collaboratively through its School Council of teachers and parents, including Beth Owens-Rigby, Kailey Schneider, Susana Arevalo, Whitney Klepadlo, Laura Gaskins, and School Committee liaison Corey Evans. The plan builds on the district’s new Strategic Plan and focuses on actionable goals that reflect real work, not symbolic priorities. The school formed six working groups—MTSS for academics, MTSS for behavior, homework, belonging, play, and safety planning—to ensure broad staff input. The first priority is refining academic and behavioral MTSS practices; the second is updating homework expectations by grade; and the third is creating opportunities for connection and play to foster belonging and support mental and physical health.

Principal Gaudette emphasized the importance of capturing staff voices and making initiatives efficient and meaningful. Each working group will analyze data and make recommendations that reinforce a sense of community, wellness, and inclusion for both students and staff. The “play” initiative is designed to strengthen relationships and social skills alongside academic growth, reflecting a commitment to educating the whole child.

Committee members praised the plan’s balance between academic rigor and emotional well-being. Mr. Squatrito commended the emphasis on play as a way to build classroom relationships. Mr. Evans noted that Osgood’s joyful and student-centered approach is “counterintuitive but more effective” than traditional drilling. Mr. MacLellan highlighted alignment with community conversations on *The Anxious Generation* and Deer Hill’s corresponding MTSS work, while Ms. Lesky remarked on the thoughtful dual focus on academic and behavioral MTSS as “two equally important paths” supporting every child’s growth.

Deer Hill School (Principal Alexandra Sullivan)

Principal Sullivan, joined by returning Council members Jennifer Dial and Simon Leonard, outlined Deer Hill’s 2025–2026 goals, supported by teachers Karin Johnston and Maika Massari and parent Nicole Berg. The first priority is to strengthen professional collaboration and belonging within the school community—targeting staff wellness and teamwork. Five working groups—belonging, homework, MTSS for academics, MTSS for behavior, and professional collaboration—are meeting regularly and already driving progress. The second priority is re-examining homework practices to build cohesive expectations across grades. Families will be invited to share feedback at a PSO forum on November 6, and students will participate through the Student Advisory Council.

The third priority involves analyzing Deer Hill’s MTSS model to establish consistent academic and behavioral expectations. Sullivan also acknowledged new English Language Arts pilot units and updates to the math curriculum, describing them as a “heavier lift” that faculty have embraced with strong administrative support. Joint faculty meetings with Osgood are renewing vertical alignment and continuity between the two elementary schools.

Mr. Dial asked about expanding collaboration with the middle school and the long-term homework research goals; Principal Sullivan confirmed plans to extend cross-school coordination in future years. Mr. MacLellan

noted that the MTSS alignment across schools reflects districtwide progress in identifying and supporting students' needs. Ms. Lesky praised the renewed emphasis on professional collaboration, saying it enriches both teaching practice and staff well-being.

Ms. Lesky recognized public comment from Stephanie Saunders (10 Stratford Terrace) asked whether the curriculum pilots represent new programs or updates. Superintendent Sarah Shannon clarified that they are updated versions of existing units—piloted voluntarily by interested teachers to provide feedback—and not curriculum replacements. Principal Sullivan added that the updates streamline teacher resources and improve efficiency.

Cohasset Middle School (Principal John Scopeletti)

Principal John Scopeletti presented the middle school plan alongside Council members Ashley Hannon, Samantha LaPanne, Kristin Quinn, Emma Richardson, and Lauren Wagner. The first goal is to foster a culture of joy, ensuring students, staff, and families feel supported and valued as they pursue academic and social-emotional growth. The second goal centers on high-quality teaching and leadership, encouraging excellence in classrooms, extracurriculars, and professional roles while expanding enrichment and leadership opportunities. The third goal focuses on strengthening MTSS systems for academics and behavior through better tracking and more consistent interventions.

Scopeletti emphasized that creating joyful, connected environments complements strong academics and that leadership opportunities will help both staff and students grow. Enhanced MTSS processes are intended to improve outcomes by providing timely, data-driven supports.

Mr. Dial praised the plan's clarity and suggested greater intentionality in field trip planning across grade levels. Mr. Evans supported continued feedback loops from elementary pilots to ensure smooth workload transitions. Mr. MacLellan commended the focus on joy and the attention to high-achieving students, noting it balances support for vulnerable learners. Mr. Squatrito asked about the potential use of generative AI to aid differentiation; Scopeletti responded that AI could free teachers' time for individualized instruction while maintaining professional oversight. Ms. Lesky added that such tools could promote higher-order thinking and creativity, and she applauded the "culture of joy" as a hallmark of great schools.

Cohasset High School (Principal Brian Scott)

Principal Brian Scott presented the high school's plan, supported by Council members including Jennifer Lesky, Danielle Ziady, Marya Toffey, Dylan Jewell, Abigail Rini, Molly Irwin, Quinn Kearney, Allison Battista, and Jessica Hanssens. All three goals align with the district's Strategic Plan and extend the middle school's themes. The first goal seeks to define high-quality teaching and learning, using surveys and peer review to identify and share best practices that deepen engagement and improve Tier I instruction. The second goal aims to redefine success through community and stakeholder forums tied to the "Vision of the Graduate," measuring belonging, mental health, and engagement as indicators of achievement. The third goal is to form an Athletics Advisory Committee to modernize communication, policies, and support systems for the district's robust athletic programs.

Scott emphasized that success should be measured by joy, purpose, and authentic engagement rather than solely by grades or college outcomes. The athletics initiative will develop a mission statement, handbook, and protocols to unify expectations and strengthen student-athlete development.

Mr. Dial reflected on the tension between redefining success and traditional college pressures, calling the focus "refreshing and necessary." Scott acknowledged that challenge, noting research showing that long-term success correlates more with joy and purpose than GPA. Mr. Evans and Mr. Squatrito praised project-based learning that gives students ownership and combats rote study habits. Mr. MacLellan called the initiative "cutting-edge," tying

it to the district's evolution beyond linear, college-centric measures of achievement. Ms. Lesky described the plan as "brilliant" in helping adolescents build self-understanding and recognize success in diverse, authentic ways.

Ms. Lesky recognized public comment from questioned the size and representativeness of the proposed Athletics Council. Principal Scott responded that the group will start small to remain functional but will expand outreach through rotating membership, a Booster's Council, and open feedback channels to ensure broad community input.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Dial to approve all School Improvement Plans as presented.

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

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Sarah Shannon thanked the Cohasset Education Foundation for its recent fundraising event supporting the district.

Ms. Shannon announced that Director of Finance and Operations Susan Owen intends to retire effective June 30, 2026, and outlined plans to initiate an early search for her successor. A hiring committee of 10–12 members, including a School Committee representative, will begin candidate review in November with interviews anticipated in December.

Superintendent Shannon also highlighted upcoming school and community events including senior recognition nights, the school play Newsies, and the Joseph Osgood School's annual Trunk or Treat.

Revisions to Calendar – State Election

The Committee revisited discussion of the Town's request to use the Deer Hill School Gymnasium as the polling location for the November 3, 2026 State Election. Superintendent Shannon explained that the proposal would shift a professional development day from October to November to accommodate voting logistics. Committee members debated the impact on families and school operations, and considered whether alternative Town facilities, including Wilcutt Commons, could be used. Mr. Dial shared community feedback opposing the calendar change and requested clarification regarding deed restrictions at Wilcutt Commons. Mr. Evans shared the language of the deed restriction, and Mr. Dial noted that there appeared to be interpretive room for that building to host voting. Mr. Dial noted his view that, unless it was very clear that the Deer Hill school was the only option available to the town, he would not support altering the calendar to host elections. Mr. Evans supported approving calendar change to support the use of Deer Hill for for 2026 but recommended future collaboration with Elder Affairs to minimize disruption in subsequent years.

After additional Committee discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to approve use of the Deer Hill School Gymnasium for the November 3, 2026 State Election and adjust the 2026–2027 school calendar accordingly.

**Roll Call Vote: Dial – Nay; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Abstained; Squatrito – Aye; Lesky – Aye.
Motion passed 3 to 1, with 1 abstention.**

Ms. Lesky recognized Stephanie Saunders of 10 Stratford Terrace who represented that the Cohasset Elder Affairs board went to court on this issue and that the building was not purchased by the Town of Cohasset

Budget, Resources and Governance

Superintendent Sarah Shannon, presenting in lieu of Director of Finance and Operations Susan Owens, reported that the district's FY26 budget of \$25.3 million remains on track with 98.2% of funds utilized and a small positive balance projected at year-end. She noted that administrators and department heads continue to exercise conservative, intentional spending and that hiring efficiencies have generated savings to offset modest overages. The district is actively recruiting for a special educator to fill a one-year leave at the high school, a new head custodian following a recent retirement, and a bus driver to anticipate an upcoming retirement.

Shannon highlighted utility costs as an area of concern, with expenditures exceeding budget projections despite an added \$180,000 allocation for FY26. Collaboration with the Town is underway to identify cost-saving measures. The transportation revolving account is stable and expected to grow, while the athletics revolving account will remain negative through the spring season, with related transportation expenses covered by the operating budget. She added that special education placements are being closely monitored, and the arrival of the district's tenth bus and new multi-use vehicle should help reduce future athletic transportation costs.

Superintendent Shannon expressed optimism about the current state of the budget, with spending patterns aligned to projections and no major budgetary risks anticipated at this time. Continued monitoring of utilities, transportation, and special education will remain priorities to ensure the district closes the fiscal year within budget.

The Committee conducted first reads of the FY27 Budget Priorities and Budget Calendar, both aligned with the Strategic Plan. The Committee reviewed the Budget Priorities as presented in the materials which including focuses on curriculum review, culturally responsive materials, and deeper project-based learning, while also promoting student and staff wellness by fostering belonging, play, and responsible risk-taking. The plan further emphasizes community engagement and responsible resource management, including facility improvements, potential middle/high school renovation under the MSBA process, and efforts to reduce financial burdens on families. Discussion included anticipated MSBA timelines and upcoming capital request planning for November.

Community Relations and Communication

Under Community Relations and Communication, Mr. Dial reported that the Budget Subcommittee recently met and reviewed many of the same topics presented by Superintendent Shannon, expressing confidence in the district's current fiscal position and budget process. Mr. MacLellan, serving as liaison to Safe Harbor, noted that the organization is planning a "Restaurant Night" fundraiser at Cohasset High School for early next year. The event, focused on substance abuse awareness, will feature student-developed menus, marketing, and staffing in collaboration with Food Services Director Mr. Cardone, with plans to include live music and visual art displays.

Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair within 48 hours of the Meeting

Alternative Energy Committee – Solar Article 11

Tonya Bodell, Chair of the Alternative Energy Committee (AEC), presented Article 11, which would authorize the Town to lease school property for potential solar installations. Ms. Bodell, a thirty-year energy-industry consultant and AEC member since 2010, explained that previous efforts to add solar to school roofs were delayed due to the buildings' mid-life condition. With upcoming roof replacements, particularly at Deer Hill School, the timing is now favorable to pursue a developer-financed model requiring no Town or School Department capital investment.

Under Article 11, the developer would construct and operate the solar arrays, while the Town would purchase the electricity generated under a long-term power-purchase agreement of up to twenty-five years. The AEC requested School Committee support so the article could advance to the upcoming Special Town Meeting.

r. Dial inquired why the proposal takes the form of a lease rather than direct Town ownership, and Ms. Bodell explained that leasing enables private developers to capture federal tax credits unavailable to municipalities, making the project more cost-effective. She outlined how Cohasset could choose between behind-the-meter and in-front-of-the-meter configurations to maximize savings. Committee members expressed appreciation for the AEC's continued work on renewable-energy initiatives and agreed the project aligns with long-term sustainability goals.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. MacLellan to recommend Article 11 for inclusion in the Town Warrant.

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

Minutes

Ms. Lesky noted there were no minutes to approve.

Executive Session

Ms. Lesky noted there was no need to move into executive session.

Adjournment

Ms. Lesky requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. In response,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Dial to adjourn the meeting.

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

The regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee was adjourned at 8:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lance C. Dial

The Committee did not reconvene in open session. The regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee was adjourned at 8:38 PM.

November 5, 2025