

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 8, 2025
6:00 PM

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
Mr. Michael Stapleton, Director of Student Services

Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee (the “Committee”) to order at 6:01 PM.

Roll call: Lance Dial, Corey Evans, Craig MacLellan, Jacob Squatrito, and Jennifer Lesky were 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 Interim Committee Member Jacob Squatrito to the School Committee. She reminded participants that the meeting was being broadcast on Cohasset 143tv and that public commenters should state their residential address for the record.

Public Comment

Jennifer Chu (25 Virginia Lane)

Ms. Chu voiced frustration with what she described as fiscal mismanagement and poor planning around the school district’s budget, particularly in utilities and operational costs. She noted that Town Manager Chris Senior has stated that roughly 61 percent of tax revenues go to the schools, yet that amount still fails to cover total costs. Ms. Chu argued that, despite this large allocation, the Committee has not managed to fund free full-day kindergarten, which she believes should be a basic service offered in Cohasset as in most other Massachusetts towns. She emphasized that the Town’s residents voted in favor of tuition-free kindergarten, reflecting a strong community mandate. She suggested that if the School Committee cannot balance its budget responsibly, then additional Select Board oversight of the school budget may be warranted.

Cassandra Dragon Archambo (290 Beechwood Street)

Ms. Dragon Archambo spoke passionately in support of reinstating tuition-free full-day kindergarten and thanked the Committee for including the matter on its agenda. She tied her remarks to the district's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, asserting that early education is foundational to readiness, equity, and lifelong learning, yet is absent from the plan's measurable objectives. Dragon Archambo argued that continuing to charge tuition compounds inequities each year and deprives some children of crucial early-learning opportunities. She called for making tuition-free kindergarten a concrete, measurable goal with transparent progress reporting. She also questioned how the district would safeguard such a policy once adopted—whether through a standing rule, bylaw, or other mechanism—to ensure that future reversals cannot quietly undo it.

Katie Dugan (100 Black Rock Road)

Ms. Dugan, a former School Committee member and Cohasset Education Foundation board member, cautioned that the citizens' petition could undermine the cooperative fiscal progress made between the schools and the Town. She provided detailed context on the district's recent financial challenges, including past deficits in athletics and transportation that required using free cash and other one-time funds. Dugan reminded attendees that the Town and schools avoided layoffs only through collaborative effort and that taxpayers have already shouldered higher costs through debt overrides and capital contributions. She acknowledged the importance of full-day kindergarten but urged that it be restored through the regular budget process rather than a stand-alone warrant article. In her view, the petition's refund element would benefit only a small number of families while jeopardizing broader community support for the schools.

The Chair then directed the Committee move to the next agenda item, and invited Mr. Ashton to present to the Committee.

Citizen's Petition – Tuition-Free Full-Day Kindergarten

Presentation

Will Ashton of 25 Doane Street and Victoria Lattanzi of 125 Doane Street presented a citizens' petition seeking to reinstate tuition-free full-day kindergarten in Cohasset beginning with FY26. Mr. Ashton explained that the petition had gathered 140 signatures, easily exceeding the threshold for inclusion on a Special Town Meeting warrant, and outlined how the proposal would reallocate approximately \$300,000 within the Town's budget to fund the initiative. He compared Cohasset's situation to that of other Massachusetts districts, noting that 95% of communities statewide already offer tuition-free full-day kindergarten, and argued that Cohasset's per-capita school spending ranked in the 90th percentile, suggesting capacity to fund it. The presentation included charts showing budget growth across departments and asserted that school spending had increased more slowly than the overall Town budget, leaving room for reallocation. Mr. Ashton said Advisory and Select Board members had advised that while the petition could move money within the budget, only the School Committee could determine how to use it; he therefore urged the Committee to commit to applying the funds toward kindergarten if the article passed. Ms. Lattanzi added that their analysis was intended to open a collaborative conversation, not to criticize, and that they viewed the effort as a community-led initiative to align resources with educational values. Both presenters emphasized that reallocating free cash or moderating growth in other departments could provide a bridge solution while the Committee worked toward long-term sustainability. They asked the Committee to endorse the article or at least express support for the principle of making kindergarten universally accessible and free of charge.

Committee Responses

Mr. Dial thanked the citizens and public commenters for their engagement and enthusiasm. He explained that when the Committee first approved tuition-free kindergarten, it was expected to be self-funding through Chapter 70 adjustments, not an ongoing expense the budget could absorb. He acknowledged that the Committee faces

difficult tradeoffs and said he personally disliked having to approve fee increases or staff reductions, but noted that resources remain constrained. Dial emphasized that while full-day kindergarten remains a priority, the Committee must also address other pressing needs such as capital repairs and staffing. He invited continued collaboration and public support in developing a sustainable funding approach through future budget cycles.

Mr. MacLellan thanked Mr. Ashton for the professionalism of his presentation but warned against the perception of hostility or mistrust within the community. He stressed that no town officials or Committee members seek to harm the community and that decisions are made transparently through public meetings. MacLellan questioned the wisdom of cutting positions or reducing safety funding to finance the proposal, pointing out that every budget line supports real people and services. He also noted that temporary reliance on “free cash” would not provide sustainable funding for a permanent program. While appreciative of community advocacy, he urged a collaborative rather than confrontational approach during the regular budget process.

Mr. Evans said he sympathized with the petitioners’ goals and reiterated that he had supported using free cash to fund kindergarten in earlier discussions. However, he characterized the current petition as unstructured and procedurally unsound for a Town Meeting vote. Evans emphasized that all parties share the same ultimate goal—restoring tuition-free kindergarten—but need to coordinate timing and method. He encouraged working within the FY27 budget process rather than through mid-year amendments, observing that unity and coordination would make progress easier and more durable.

Mr. Squatrito thanked the community members for their time and involvement, acknowledging the personal sacrifices families make to participate in such discussions. As the newly appointed interim member, he said the petition raised reasonable concerns but also procedural complications. He was sympathetic to parents facing the cost of tuition, especially families with twins, yet agreed that issuing refunds mid-year could create accounting and fairness issues. He underscored that the Committee’s choices affect the whole community and that any permanent tuition-free plan would need predictable annual funding rather than one-time transfers.

Chair Lesky praised the petitioners’ civic engagement and research, calling their effort a valuable example of grassroots democracy. She reiterated that the Committee must follow a structured budget process requiring detailed financial review before making commitments. Lesky said she could not give an immediate answer on reallocating funds because responsible decision-making depends on current financial data and forecasts. She closed public comment by encouraging continued dialogue and community involvement, noting that apathy, not engagement, is what weakens civic life.

Superintendent Sarah Shannon thanked the petitioners for their effort and for bringing renewed attention to how public schools are funded in Massachusetts. She explained that while she shares the community’s philosophical support for tuition-free full-day kindergarten, the district must pursue it in a fiscally responsible way that does not negatively impact other programs or families. Dr. Shannon emphasized that the most productive path forward is to collaborate through the upcoming FY27 budget process to develop a sustainable, long-term funding solution.

After additional discussion, the Chair directed the Committee to the Superintendent’s Report.

Superintendent’s Report

Superintendent Shannon welcomed Mr. Squatrito to the School Committee, commending his willingness to serve the community and expressing hope that his participation would inspire other young residents to get involved.

Ms. Shannon reported progress on the Strategic Plan, noting that several committees—including the Professional Learning Council, PDL Steering Committee, AI and Tech Task Force, Communications Committee, and Wellness Council—had begun meeting with strong community participation from parents and caregivers. Shannon invited School Committee members to consider joining one of these groups, particularly the new Communications

Committee, to strengthen coordination across initiatives. She thanked Principal Scott for organizing the community summer read and forum on Never Enough and described a successful Challenge Day at the high school that promoted student well-being, belonging, and academic success. Ms. Shannon announced that DESE MCAS results showed Cohasset as one of only thirteen schools statewide to meet or exceed pre-COVID performance benchmarks since 2019, congratulating staff and students for their achievement and noting that individual results would be posted in Aspen on October 17. In response to a question from Mr. Evans, Ms. Shannon said comparative data had just been released and that Dr. Scollins would present a full analysis later in the fall or early winter.

Agenda Motion

Mr. MacLellan observed that members of the community attending in public may appreciate the Committee's attention to the requested vote whether to recommend support of the citizen's petition earlier in the meeting. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to move Citizens' Petition item on the agenda to the current time

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Dial-Aye; Mr. Evans-Aye; Mr. Squatrito-Aye; Mr. MacLellan-Aye; Chair Lesky-Aye.

Citizen's Petition

Ms. Lesky directed the Committee to the text of the citizen's petition, which she read into the record:

Article 13 as presented in the Warrant in the Citizens' Petition. Tuition free full day kindergarten to see if the Town will vote to guarantee tuition free full day kindergarten to all residents beginning fiscal year 2026 for academic year 2025-2026. This requires the appropriation of \$300,000 from the Town budget to cover the costs. The school budget will re-base line to include funding for full day kindergarten. Thereafter, the school committee will be responsible for ensuring full day kindergarten is tuition free to all residents absent a Town vote clearly delineating otherwise.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan to recommend approval of the Citizens' Petition to a Special Town meeting as presented tonight and just read by Chairperson Lesky, seconded by Chair Lesky.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Dial-Nay; Mr. Evans-Abstained; Mr. MacLellan-Nay; Mr. Squatrito-Nay; Ms. Lesky-Nay.

Ms. Lesky again thanked the petitioners, and directed the Committee to return to the Superintendent's Report.

Superintendent's Report (continued)

South Shore Educational Collaborative

Superintendent Sarah Shannon reported that the South Shore Educational Collaborative remains financially stable with no planned rate increases, and that a representative will visit an upcoming meeting to discuss establishing a Capital Stabilization Fund requiring approval from each member district's school committee.

Revisions to Calendar – Local Elections

The Committee reviewed items related to upcoming state elections, including requests from the Town to use school facilities as polling locations. Members discussed adding the September 1, 2026 State Primary and the November 3, 2026 State Election to the district's 2026–2027 school calendar. Ms. Shannon noted that the Town Hall would be unavailable for these elections, and other potential alternatives had certain limitations or drawbacks. Ms. Shannon noted that the September 1 date would have limited impact on school schedules, but hosting the November election would require moving a professional development day from a preceding long weekend to that Tuesday.

Committee members noted that the November change would require more community feedback, but generally were amenable to the September date. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to allow the Town to hold the State Primary Election at the Deer Hill School Gymnasium on September 1, 2026.

Roll Call Vote: Dial-Aye; Evans-Aye; Squatrito-Aye; MacLellan-Abstained; Lesky-Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans to add the September 1, 2026 election date to the 2026-2027 School calendar, seconded by Mr. Dial.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Dial-Aye; Mr. Evans-Aye; Mr. MacLellan– Aye; Mr. Squatrito–Aye; Ms. Lesky–Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to defer consideration of approving the use of the Deer Hill School Gymnasium for the November 3, 2026 state election until a later date

Roll Call Vote: Dial-Aye; Evans-Aye; Squatrito-Aye; MacLellan-Abstained; Lesky-Aye.

Teaching and Learning

Director of Student Services Michael Stapleton presented a monthly update, summarizing special education meeting statistics and ongoing initiatives. He outlined continued work on MTSS processes and collaboration with SEPAC. Chair Lesky commended SEPAC for its outreach and support for families.

Budget, Resources and Governance

The Chair directed the Committee to the materials provided with respect to the disposal of surplus materials. After brief discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to approve the disposal of surplus chorus materials.

Roll Call Vote: Dial-Aye; Evans-Aye; MacLellan-Aye; Squatrito-Aye; Lesky-Aye.

The Chair then directed the Committee's attention to various warrant articles for the Committee's consideration.

Electric Bus Lease Payment

The Chair read the following warrant article into the record:

To see if the Town will vote to raise an appropriate transfer from available funds and or borrow pursuant to any applicable statute of sum of money to fund various Capital improvements, Capital projects and or Capital equipment for the various department(s) boards, commissions, agencies of the Town or to take

any other action relative to the general fund and the electric bus lease payment which the school department the project of a diesel bus lease payment in the amount of \$22,682.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to recommend the approval of the warrant article as presented to the Committee.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Dial - Aye; Mr. Evans - Aye; Mr. MacLellan – Aye; Mr. Squatrito – Aye; Ms. Lesky – Aye.

Joseph Osgood Elementary School Roof.

The Chair read the following warrant article into the record:

To see if the Town will appropriate borrow or transfer from available funds the sum of \$5,858,522.00 to be expended under the direction of the school building committee for the roof replacement project at the Joseph Osgood Elementary School located at 210 Sawyer Street in Cohasset which proposed for care project would materially extend the useful life of the school and preserve an asset that otherwise is capable of supporting the required educational program and for which the Town may be eligible for a construction grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, the MSBA. The Town acknowledges that the MSBA's grant program is a non-entitlement discretionary program based on need as determined by the MSBA and any project cost the Town incurs in excess of any grant approved by, and received from, the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the Town. Any grant that the Town may receive from the MSBA for the project shall not exceed the lesser of \$1,902,262.00 or 32.47% of eligible approved project cost as determined by the MSBA or to not exceed the total maximum grant amount determined by the MSBA or take any other action relative thereto.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded my Mr. Evans to recommend the approval of the warrant article as presented to the Committee.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Dial - Aye; Mr. Evans - Aye; Mr. MacLellan – Aye; Mr. Squatrito – Aye; Ms. Lesky – Aye.

Lease of School Property for Solar Power Generation

The Chair introduced for discussion a warrant article relating to the lease of school property for solar power generation. After discussion, the Committee members determined that they lacked sufficient information to provide a recommendation at this time and would defer to making a recommendation on the floor of town meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. Dial to table a vote on a recommendation with respect to the solar power warrant article.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Dial - Aye; Mr. Evans - Aye; Mr. MacLellan – Aye; Mr. Squatrito – Aye; Ms. Lesky – Aye.

The Chair the directed the Committee to the next agenda item.

School Committee Governance

Subcommittee and Liaison Assignments

The Chair recognized the departure of Ms. Hanna and the appointment of Mr. Squatrito, and proposed the Committee review the Subcommittee and liaison assignments applicable to the Committee members. After discussion, the Committee proposed the following assignments:

The following changes reflect School Committee Liaison and Committee Assignment with the addition of Jacob Squatrito to the school committee, resignation of Ms. Hanna and changes to the organization pertaining to collective bargaining.

Representative & Liaison Assignments

- **School Councils** - Corey Evans – Osgood Elementary School
- **School Councils** - Craig MacLellan – Deer Hill Elementary School
- **School Councils** - Lance Dial – Cohasset Middle School
- **School Councils** – Jen Lesky and Corey Evans - Cohasset High School
- Parent School Organization (PSO) – Craig MacLellan
- Elder Affairs – Corey Evans
- Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) – Craig MacLellan
- Legislative Liaison – Corey Evans
- Cohasset Education Foundation (CEF) – Jen Lesky
- Emergency Management – Lance Dial and Corey Evans
- Post Employment Benefits (PEB) – Corey Evans
- Alternative Energy Committee (AEC) – Corey Evans
- Long Range Planning (LRP) - Lance Dial
- Diversity – Jen Lesky
- Wellness – Jake Squatrito
- Selectboard – Corey Evans
- Safe Harbor – Craig MacLellan

Subcommittees

- School Governance Collective Bargaining – Lance Dial and Corey Evans
- Policy and Standards – Superintendent Eval – Jen Lesky and Craig MacLellan
- Budget & Resources – Lance Dial and Corey Evans
- Communications – Jen Lesky and Corey Evans

In addition, the Committee discussed the Food Services and Nutrition Subcommittee had accomplished its goals and therefore was no longer necessary as a stand alone subcommittee. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to reconstitute subcommittee and liaison assignments as discussed and to disband the Food Services and Nutrition Subcommittee. Roll Call Vote: Dial-Aye; Evans-Aye; MacLellan-Aye; Squatrito-Aye; Lesky-Aye.

Minutes

The Chair directed the Committee to the materials which include minutes for several prior meeting. Mr. Dial noted for the Committee that he had summarized the normally very detailed minutes, and reminded the Committee to review them carefully. After discussion, the Chair sought approvals of each of the draft minutes:

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the May 21, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Abstained; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the June 4, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Abstained; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the June 18, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Abstained; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the August 13, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Abstained; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. MacLellan to approve the August 20, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Abstained; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. Dial to approve the September 3, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Abstained; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. MacLellan to approve the September 17, 2025 meeting minutes of the Cohasset School Committee as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Abstained; Evans – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Squatrito – Abstained; Lesky – Aye.

Executive Session and Adjournment

The Chair noted that there was a reason to move into executive session, citing Reason #2, conducting collective bargaining discussions.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Dial to enter Executive Session pursuant to purpose #2 (collective bargaining).

Roll Call Vote: Dial-Aye; Evans-Aye; MacLellan-Aye; Squatrito-Aye; Lesky-Aye.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Lance C. Dial

November 5, 2025