

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
December 3, 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 Michael Stapleton, Director of Student Services
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Call to Order

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

Roll Call: Mr. Dial-Present (virtually); Mr. Evans-Present (virtually); Mr. MacLellan-Present; Mr. Squatrito-Present; Ms. Lesky-Present.

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky welcomed attendees and noted that this was a busy time for the schools.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Invited Guests

Dylan Jewell, Representative of the Superintendent Student Advisory Council (SSAC) was scheduled to attend, but Dr. Shannon noted that he was unable to attend due to participation on the school debate team.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Shannon provided updates on upcoming district events, reminding families of key dates and times.

Dr. Shannon also noted that Ms. Susan Owen, the Director of Finance and Operations announced her intention to retire at the end of the 2025–2026 school year. Dr. Shannon thanked Ms. Owen for her service.

Dr. Shannon noted that the district has begun the search for a new Finance and Operations Director and will form a screening committee consisting of district administrators, business office staff, a town representative, and a community member. The district hopes to identify a finalist before winter break, with a recommendation to the School Committee anticipated after the new year.

Dr. Shannon reported on implementation efforts related to the new strategic plan, which emphasizes learning, growth, and inspiration across the district. The Professional Learning Committee has organized a teacher-led professional development day scheduled for December 22, centered on the theme of balance and belonging. The morning sessions will focus on classroom strategies applicable across grade levels and content areas, while the afternoon will emphasize educator wellness. Thirty-five educators have developed workshops for their colleagues.

Dr. Shannon noted that the Communications Committee will soon distribute a survey to families seeking feedback on district and school-level communication. The survey will be promoted at school events such as sporting events and concerts in an effort to increase participation. The Committee will review survey results and provide recommendations to the School Committee at a future meeting. Members expressed appreciation for innovative efforts to engage families and improve communication.

Committee members expressed gratitude to teachers and staff for their leadership in professional development and for fostering a culture of peer learning and collaboration across the district.

Staff Attendance Report (D-1)

Dr. Shannon reviewed recently released staff attendance data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). While districts have long reported staff attendance data to DESE, this is the first time the Department has publicly released the information. For reporting purposes, DESE defines an absence as missing more than half of a workday for reasons other than paid school vacations or approved professional development. The data includes sick leave, bereavement leave, school business days, and long-term leaves such as parental or medical leave. Data is reported in aggregate and does not identify individual staff members.

Dr. Shannon presented comparative data showing that Cohasset Public Schools' staff attendance rates exceed both state averages and those of neighboring districts. The Committee expressed appreciation for the professionalism and dedication of district staff.

Committee members noted that while attendance data has always been monitored internally, the public comparison confirms that the district performs favorably relative to peers. Members acknowledged that while fluctuations are modest, maintaining strong attendance is meaningful and reflects staff commitment. Additional comments highlighted the personal sacrifices educators often make to minimize absences and remain present for students.

Teaching and Learning

*Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy IHAlA** [Final Read] (E-1)*

Dr. Leslie Scollins reviewed the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy, noting that Cohasset Public Schools has long provided 8th grade students with opportunities to explore vocational pathways, including South Shore Vocational Technical High School and Norfolk County Agricultural High School. The policy formalizes existing practice and aligns with state requirements.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to approve the Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy as presented.

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

Graduation Requirements Policy IKF [1st and 2nd Read] (E-2)

Cohasset Competency Determination Policy IKFE [1st and 2nd Read] (E-3)

Dr. Leslie Scollins presented proposed Graduation Requirements and Competency Determination policies in response to the elimination of MCAS as a statewide graduation requirement. DESE has directed districts to adopt policies outlining coursework, competency metrics, and related procedures by December 31, 2025.

Dr. Shannon reported that DESE recently conducted a statewide webinar acknowledging that additional guidance remains forthcoming, although districts are still expected to meet the December 2025 submission deadline. Final recommendations from the state are not anticipated until June 2026.

Dr. Scollins explained that the proposed policies largely memorialize existing district practice, with the primary change being removal of MCAS as a graduation requirement. Under district standards, students must earn at least 175 credits, achieve passing grades of 60% or higher, and meet all applicable state accountability requirements. Cohasset's graduation requirements exceed state minimum standards.

Principal Scott noted that these requirements have historically been published in the Program of Studies and remain substantially the same, apart from elimination of MCAS. He further explained that an appeals process has been added in light of the statutory change, allowing certain former students who previously received certificates of completion due to MCAS requirements to seek review under the updated standards.

Committee members discussed whether the policies represent substantive changes or primarily elevate existing practices into formal School Committee policy. Mr. Dial requested additional time for thoughtful review and community input before voting, given the importance of graduation standards.

Discussion also addressed possible future DESE requirements, including end-of-course assessments, portfolio or capstone components, literacy requirements, and other criteria such as FAFSA completion. Members acknowledged that significant uncertainty remains regarding how such elements may ultimately be structured.

Several members expressed concern regarding the timing and evolving nature of DESE guidance and noted that adopted policies may require revision once additional direction is issued.

The Committee agreed to defer action and place the item on the December 17 agenda for further consideration.

Student Services Update – November 2025 (E-4)

Director of Student Services Michael Stapleton presented an update on student services, providing the committee with current data on eligibility evaluations and determinations.

Mr. Stapleton highlighted the implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) interventions across grade levels, including reading and math supports, executive functioning assistance, and high school interventions. Student Services teams are working proactively within the 45-day evaluation window to implement targeted interventions before initiating formal eligibility evaluations, ensuring students receive timely support.

Circuit Breaker Audit Findings

Mr. Stapleton reported on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) audit of Cohasset's claims under the Commonwealth Special Education Reimbursement Program, commonly known as Circuit Breaker, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. Circuit Breaker provides reimbursement to districts for extraordinary special education costs, particularly out-of-district placements and specialized transportation.

DESE representatives conducted a full-day on-site audit on November 12, 2025. Mr. Stapleton recognized Teresa Miller, Administrative Assistant in the Office of Student Services, for her leadership in managing and documenting the district's claims. The audit confirmed that the district was well prepared, had conducted a thorough pre-audit review, and had properly reported tuition and transportation costs. No systemic errors were identified, and the audit affirmed the district's understanding and implementation of the Circuit Breaker claim process.

Tiered Focused Monitoring Review

Mr. Stapleton announced that on January 7, 2026, DESE's Office of Language Acquisition will conduct a Tiered Focused Monitoring Review of Cohasset Public Schools. This review occurs every six years to assess compliance with federal and state English learner education laws and regulations.

The review will examine placement procedures, parent and community involvement, curriculum and instruction, student support services, licensure requirements, program plans, evaluation practices, and recordkeeping. An electronic survey will be distributed on December 5 to parents of students whose records may be reviewed. Survey responses will be submitted directly to DESE.

Cohasset SEPAC 2025 Information

Mr. Stapleton reported that due to a scheduling conflict, the planned presentation by school psychologists at the December 11 SEPAC meeting has been rescheduled to January 8, 2026.

Committee members expressed appreciation for Mr. Stapleton and the Student Services team. Members congratulated the department on the successful Circuit Breaker audit and acknowledged the complexity and importance of the reimbursement process to the district's budget. Additional comments recognized the proactive MTSS approach, responsiveness to prior Committee and community questions, and the team's continued diligence in managing audits and compliance responsibilities. A SEPAC representative also thanked Mr. Stapleton for his leadership and collaboration.

Budget, Resources and Governance

*FY27 Capital Requests ** [Final Read] (F-1)*

Following presentation and discussion of the FY27 Capital Requests, Committee members raised several questions regarding specific line items.

Mr. Dial asked whether the proposed security enhancements were developed in consultation with law enforcement or security professionals to ensure investments are appropriately targeted. He also inquired about the proposed football uprights, asking whether the request anticipates continued use of the current field in light of the ongoing MSBA process and whether installing uprights would represent a temporary investment. He requested an estimated cost for the uprights.

Dr. Shannon responded that building walkthroughs were conducted with the district's security vendor, technology staff, and previously with Officer Taylor. The security enhancements are part of a multi-year plan informed by prior feasibility work. With respect to the football field, most design concepts associated with the feasibility study contemplated maintaining the field during construction to allow continued use. If that assumption changed, the district would reconsider the investment. Current estimates for football uprights are approximately \$13,000–\$14,000, pending updated pricing.

Mr. Evans commented that smaller capital items, such as the uprights, could potentially be accommodated depending on available capacity within the capital budget. He noted that the Capital Budget Committee includes several new members and that institutional knowledge may be limited, requiring renewed discussion of project justifications.

Mr. Evans expressed continued concern regarding the proposed \$200,000 security camera investment. He stated that, while recognizing the heightened security environment, he would prefer additional discussion regarding camera policy, privacy considerations, and overall scope before proceeding. He indicated a preference to table the request to allow further internal discussion.

Mr. Squatrito asked for clarification regarding the security enhancements budget compared to prior years. Dr. Shannon indicated that the request may be slightly lower than the prior year's \$90,000–\$100,000 range, as more extensive upgrades were completed at Deer Hill last year, with current work focused on middle and high school buildings. Final costs for outdoor cameras remain under review.

Mr. MacLellan noted that, regardless of potential MSBA outcomes, the district will likely remain in the current facility for several years. He emphasized that continued maintenance and capital improvements are necessary and should not be viewed as wasted investments. He thanked district and finance staff for their work preparing the capital plan.

Ms. Lesky echoed the importance of maintaining the current building while acknowledging that even in the event of MSBA approval, the district would likely remain in the facility for several years. She expressed appreciation for the collaboration among administration, business office staff, Committee members, and community members throughout the capital planning process and recognized the strong community interest in the school budget.

Following discussion of the FY27 Capital Requests, a motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to approve the FY27 Capital Requests as presented. Before the vote was completed, Mr. Evans raised a procedural concern, stating that he supported all items except the security camera line item and requested that the cameras be separated so his vote could reflect that distinction. In the interest of allowing additional comment, the original motion and second was withdrawn.

Mr. Evans reiterated his support for all capital requests other than the interior camera investment, noting that he supported exterior security upgrades but had ongoing concerns regarding policy, monitoring, and privacy implications associated with interior cameras.

A motion was then made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the FY27 Capital Requests as presented, excluding the camera line item.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Aye; Squatrito – Aye; MacLellan – Nay; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed 4–1.

After discussion,

A motion was then made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the camera line item in the FY27 Capital Request.

Roll Call Vote: Dial – Aye; Evans – Abstain; Squatrito – Aye; MacLellan – Aye; Lesky – Aye. Motion passed 4–0–1.

Following the vote, Mr. Evans asked for clarification regarding Mr. MacLellan’s vote. Mr. MacLellan explained that he supported the full slate as originally presented by the administration, including the cameras, and voted against the amended motion because it excluded that funding.

After discussion, to allow for a unified recommendation on the remaining items, the Committee proceeded with reconsideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial and seconded by Mr. Evans to reconsider the prior vote with respect to the FY27 Capital Requests as presented, excluding the camera line item and to approve the FY27 Capital Requests as presented, excluding the camera line item.

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

Dr. Shannon indicated she would present the approved FY27 Capital Requests to the Capital Committee on December 15, 2025.

Community Relations / Communication

The Committee discussed the concept of establishing formal School Committee office hours.

Mr. Dial expressed reservations about formalizing office hours as a School Committee policy. He noted that members are already available to the community through email and other outreach, and he expressed concern that formal office hours could unintentionally chill informal engagement or create optics issues if some members are less able to participate due to time constraints. He emphasized that his concern was procedural and structural, not a reluctance to engage with the community.

Mr. Evans agreed that individual members could announce informal availability without creating a formal policy. While supportive of the idea in principle, he indicated that formalizing it would add unnecessary structure and administrative overhead.

Mr. Squatrito suggested that the purpose of office hours would not be to increase availability but to set an expectation that the Committee is open and accessible. He proposed a practical approach of having a member arrive one hour before a regularly scheduled School Committee meeting to be available for conversation. He noted that interested community members could also coordinate in advance via email.

Mr. MacLellan expressed support for piloting an office hours program, noting that the idea originated from a family meeting and should be taken seriously. He suggested testing the concept to assess overall interest and appetite, while being mindful of convenience and location considerations.

Ms. Lesky supported piloting the concept and proposed that one or two Committee members be available from 5:00–6:00 p.m. prior to the first School Committee meeting of each month. She suggested running the pilot from February 2026 through May 2026, prior to Committee reconstitution following elections.

Dr. Shannon recommended that notice of office hours be distributed via the same community email that accompanies the meeting agenda, rather than placing it on the formal agenda itself.

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 noted that there was a reason to enter Executive Session for reason #2 to conduct collective bargaining strategy regarding teachers.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Dial to adjourn Public Session and enter Executive Session for reason #2, to conduct collective bargaining strategy regarding teachers, with no return to Public Session and to adjourn from Executive Session.

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 at 7:27 PM.

Documents/materials used by school committee members for the December 3, 2025 meeting.

- Superintendent Report – Staff Attendance Report
- Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy IHAIA
- Graduation Requirements Policy IKF
- Cohasset Competency Determination Policy IKFE
- Student Services Update – Data Sharing November 2025
- Budget and Finance – FY27 Capital Requests

Respectfully submitted,

Lance C. Dial
3.4.26