

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
January 21, 2026
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 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 6:02 PM.

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

Mr. Dial was absent.

Ms. Lesky noted that with four members, the Committee had a quorum.

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky welcomed attendees and noted the full agenda, including student presentations. She thanked families for attending and reminded the community that the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Invited Guests

Spotlight on Learning – Osgood Second Grade Assembly Committee

Second grade students from Osgood School, led by Principal Amy Gaudette, presented their Behavior Expectations Assembly Matrix emphasizing being Respectful, Responsible, and Safe.

Committee members commended the students for their poise, presentation skills, and confidence. Dr. Shannon reflected that student presentations highlight the purpose and impact of the district's work.

Superintendent Report

METCO 60th Anniversary

Dr. Shannon shared that Cohasset Public Schools, a METCO partner since 1968, will participate in METCO's 60th Anniversary Opportunity Ball and attend the upcoming legislative breakfast. She invited community participation and emphasized the continued value of the program. Members discussed the benefit of student involvement in advocacy efforts.

Appointment – Director of Finance & Operations

Dr. Shannon recommended Mr. Keree Simmons for appointment as Director of Finance and Operations effective July 1, 2026, following a comprehensive search process. She noted that three highly qualified candidates were interviewed and that Mr. Simmons emerged as the strongest candidate based on his depth of municipal finance experience, leadership approach, and alignment with district priorities. The hiring process included stakeholder participation and multiple rounds of interviews designed to assess both technical expertise and collaborative fit within the district's leadership team.

Members commented on the strength of the candidate pool and expressed appreciation for the rigor and transparency of the process. Mr. Evans highlighted the thoughtful discussions throughout the search and noted that each candidate brought valuable perspective, but that Mr. Simmons clearly distinguished himself. Chair Lesky emphasized the district's commitment to robust hiring practices and thanked those who participated in the screening and interview process.

Dr. Shannon also noted that there will be intentional transition planning and overlap time prior to July 1 to ensure continuity in financial operations and budget preparation.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to approve the appointment of Mr. Keree Simmons as Director of Finance and Operations beginning July 1, 2026.

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

2026–2027 School Calendar – First Read

Dr. Shannon presented two draft calendars differing on Good Friday: early release with a June 17 last day, or no school with a June 21 last day. The Committee discussed operational challenges, equity considerations, snow day implications, attendance data, and family planning. No vote was taken.

Teaching and Learning

Academic Initiatives

Dr. Scollins reported that Cohasset High School received AP Honor Roll recognition and highlighted the Marine Science program's project-based learning and community research impact. She also reviewed middle school vocational pathway resources available to families.

International Exchange Student Application

Dr. Scollins presented a proposed exchange student placement under the EF program, including a request to waive the per-pupil expenditure contribution. The Committee discussed educational enrichment, financial implications, English proficiency considerations, and Superintendent discretion under policy. No vote was taken.

Retirement Announcement – Dr. Leslie Scollins

Dr. Leslie Scollins announced her retirement effective September 26, 2026, concluding a 30-year career in both public and private education and seven years of service to Cohasset Public Schools. She reflected on the privilege of working in a district centered on students, collaboration, and continuous improvement, and expressed appreciation for the alignment of values among district leadership, educators, and the School Committee. Dr. Scollins specifically acknowledged the collective leadership during the COVID period and the progress made in curriculum alignment, professional development, and strategic planning during her tenure.

Committee members expressed gratitude for her steady leadership, particularly during periods of significant challenge and transition. Members noted her work in strengthening curriculum systems, supporting teacher induction, advancing instructional coherence across grade levels, and maintaining high academic standards. Dr. Shannon thanked Dr. Scollins for her partnership and described her as a trusted collaborator whose institutional knowledge and thoughtful approach have been instrumental in advancing district initiatives.

Dr. Shannon outlined the timeline for the upcoming search process, stating that the district intends to post the position promptly in order to attract a strong candidate pool. She noted that a broad stakeholder search committee will be convened, including administrators, faculty, staff, a School Committee member, and parent or caregiver representatives. Dr. Shannon emphasized that the process will mirror the recently completed Director of Finance and Operations search in structure and transparency.

Budget, Resources and Governance

Gift from Parent School Organization

Mrs. Owen informed the Committee that the Parent School Organization (PSO) had forwarded an additional check in the amount of \$626.00 to support the purchase of clocks at the Joseph Osgood Elementary School. She noted that this amount had been inadvertently omitted from the total gift recognized at the January 7, 2026 meeting and is part of a broader package of PSO support for school needs.

The Committee expressed appreciation for the PSO's continued partnership and generosity. Members acknowledged the important role the PSO plays in supporting classroom enhancements and school-based needs that directly benefit students. It was noted that the clocks will support instructional operations and daily classroom management at Osgood School.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to accept and approve the additional \$626.00 gift from the Parent School Organization.

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

Monthly Budget Update

Mrs. Owen presented the January 21, 2026 monthly financial report and noted that the full report would be posted to the district website. She reviewed current projections across major categories, including athletics, salaries, utilities, and revolving funds.

The Committee discussed the athletics line item, which currently reflects a projected deficit. Dr. Shannon explained that this overage was anticipated and reflects a more accurate accounting of true program costs. She noted that the FY27 budget proposal incorporates an adjustment to better align the athletics allocation with historical spending patterns.

Members also reviewed the salaries report, where encumbrances reflect a shortfall when compared to the budget. Dr. Shannon clarified that these encumbrances assume full-year obligations at prior staffing levels and do not yet reflect realized savings from retirements, staff departures, and revised hiring patterns. She explained that approximately \$200,000–\$250,000 in projected salary savings is expected to offset current pressures in athletics and utilities.

Utilities were discussed as another area of projected overage. While current reports show a shortfall based on encumbered amounts, administration noted that actual expenditures are trending more favorably than initial projections. Dr. Shannon stated that the presentation of encumbrances versus actuals can create confusion and that the administration will work to present future reports in a clearer format that distinguishes projected liabilities from expected end-of-year balances.

The Committee also discussed revolving accounts, including preschool and kindergarten funds, and ongoing payroll obligations that reduce those balances biweekly.

Members emphasized the importance of transparency and clarity in financial reporting, particularly as the district prepares for FY27 budget discussions.

FY27 Preliminary Budget Presentation

Dr. Shannon presented the FY27 Preliminary Budget, describing it as a level-service proposal designed to preserve current programming while more accurately reflecting the true operating costs of the district. She explained that the budget development process began in the fall with enrollment projections, review of strategic plan priorities, analysis of contractual obligations, and a detailed examination of line-item expenditures.

Dr. Shannon emphasized that this proposal does not expand programming but instead aims to sustain existing services, correct historically under-budgeted categories, and align appropriations with actual expenditures. She noted that adjustments were made in areas such as athletics and utilities to better reflect ongoing cost realities rather than rely on end-of-year transfers or one-time savings.

The presentation outlined the primary cost drivers for FY27, including contractual salary increases, special education obligations, transportation, utilities, and insurance. Dr. Shannon explained that contractual increases alone account for a significant portion of the projected growth and are not discretionary. She also highlighted the importance of maintaining small class sizes, academic electives, student support services, and co-curricular programming that define the district's level of service.

Members discussed the gap between projected needs and anticipated municipal funding. The Committee acknowledged that further reductions beyond those already implemented in FY25 would likely impact student programming, course offerings, staffing levels, and overall educational experience. Several members spoke to the importance of long-term sustainability and the risks associated with incremental erosion of services.

Discussion also included the timing limitations of a potential operational override, noting that the FY27 budget must be adopted prior to the start of the fiscal year and cannot be built on speculative revenue. Members emphasized the need for clear communication with the community regarding both the financial realities and the implications of various funding scenarios.

Dr. Shannon noted that this presentation represents a first draft and that refinements will occur following joint meetings with Town officials, updated revenue projections, and additional public input. A public hearing and subsequent vote will follow later in the budget cycle.

Ms. Lesky then turned to public comments:

Jennifer Chu, 25 Virginia Lane

Ms. Chu stated that the projected additional FY27 funding equates to approximately \$400 per household and described it as a reasonable investment to sustain the district's educational quality. She encouraged the community to consider the long-term value of maintaining current services and competitive programming.

Committee Response: Members acknowledged her framing of the household impact and agreed that clear communication about cost implications will be important in upcoming discussions.

Will Ashton, 125 Doane Street

Mr. Ashton described the budget situation as serious and questioned whether an operational override should remain under consideration. He urged the Committee to pursue sustainable, long-term solutions rather than defer structural funding decisions.

Committee Response: Members explained that the FY27 budget timeline limits the ability to pursue an override for the upcoming fiscal year and noted that longer-term solutions would need to be evaluated within future budget cycles.

Cassandra Dragon Archambo, 290 Beechwood Street

Ms. Archambo emphasized that strong schools are central to the community's identity and property values. She encouraged broader outreach and communication to mobilize support for maintaining educational excellence.

Committee Response: Members agreed that continued community engagement and transparent communication will be critical as the budget process moves forward.

Garrison McDonough, Stevens Lane

Ms. McDonough expressed confusion regarding the application of preschool and kindergarten tuition revenues within the district budget and requested greater clarity about long-term planning. She asked how those funds are used and whether similar tuition structures should be expected in future years.

Committee Response: Administration clarified that revolving funds are restricted accounts tied to specific payroll and program costs and indicated that additional information will be shared as part of ongoing budget presentations.

Community Relations / Subcommittee Reports

There were no reports.

School Committee Governance

Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated

There were no topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.

Approval of Minutes – October 22, 2025

The Committee reviewed the October 22, 2025 meeting minutes and noted a correction to the attendance record, clarifying that Mr. Rotondi had been listed in error. The minutes were approved as amended to reflect the corrected attendance.

After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan and seconded by Mr. Squatrito to approve the October 22, 2025 minutes as amended to correct attendance.

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

Executive Session

There was no reason to move into executive session.

Adjournment

After discussion,

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 PM.

Documents/Materials Used

- 2026–2027 CPS School Calendar – First Read
- International Exchange Student Application
- Gift from Parent School Organization
- Monthly Budget Update
- FY27 Preliminary Budget Presentation

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial
3.4.26