Cohasset Public Schools

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

MINUTES OF THE
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF
THE COHASSET SELECT BOARD
THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
THE COHASSET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

February 10, 2026, 7:00PM

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

Attendance

Select Board Members in Attendance	Ellen Maher, Chair Paul Grady, Member David Farrag, Member Julie Rollins, Member.
School 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 (late)
Advisory Committee Members in Attendance:	Jean Astino, Chair Mike Barclay Mark Cameron Tom Callahan Michael Flaherty Courtney Murphy Vince Thornton

Call to Order

Chair Maher called the Select Board meeting to order and confirmed a quorum.

Chair Astino called the Advisory Committee meeting to order and conducted roll coll.

Chair Lesky called the School Committee meeting to order at 6:02 PM and conducted a roll call. Ms. Lesky noted that Mr. Squatrino would be joining late.

FY 27 School Budget Update

The primary purpose of the joint meeting was to review and discuss the FY27 School Budget. Chair Lesky introduced the presentation by noting the importance and quality of the school district contrasted against the financial challenges the district is facing.

Superintendent Dr. Sarah Shannon presented the updated budget proposal. Dr. Shannon explained that the FY27 budget process has involved an extensive review of historical spending, line-by-line analysis, and collaboration with town leadership. She noted that the district has refined its budgeting practices in order to more accurately reflect actual spending patterns, particularly in areas such as utilities and out-of-district special education, which have experienced significant cost increases beyond the district's control. Through this process, the district reduced its initial level-service request from 11.88% to 8.82%. Based on discussions with the Interim Town Manager, the district anticipates a 3.5% increase over FY26, or approximately $869,000, leaving an estimated $1.3 million gap to maintain level services.

Dr. Shannon reviewed enrollment trends, noting that since 2019 overall enrollment has declined by approximately 121 students, consistent with statewide and national trends. She explained that enrollment shifts are not evenly distributed across grade levels and that class size analysis must take into account the complexity of middle and high school scheduling. At the elementary level, class sizes remain within typical ranges. At the middle and high school levels, however, scheduling variables such as leveled courses, electives, combined sections, and Advanced Placement offerings complicate simple average class size comparisons.

Dr. Shannon discussed the benefits of the high school block schedule, citing accreditation feedback and district analysis demonstrating that the schedule supports deeper learning, expanded AP access, flexibility for students with IEPs and 504 plans, and overall academic opportunity. She stated that the block schedule aligns directly with the district's strategic plan goals and contributes to student success beyond graduation.

The presentation also addressed staffing trends. While staffing has fluctuated in recent years, reductions were implemented in FY26 and further adjustments are anticipated in FY27. Dr. Shannon reiterated that the majority of the school budget is personnel-based, meaning significant reductions necessarily impact staffing. To close the FY27 gap, the district is projecting reductions in the range of 10 to 15 FTE, which may include partial reductions rather than solely full position eliminations.

Utility costs were reviewed, with Dr. Shannon noting that although consumption has decreased due to efficiency efforts, overall expenditures have increased significantly due to rising rates. Athletics was also discussed, including the high participation rate among students and the rebuilding of the athletic revolving account following prior deficits. Dr. Shannon explained that recent fee increases and transportation efficiencies are helping restore that account's balance.

The presentation further detailed pressures related to out-of-district special education tuition and transportation. Dr. Shannon explained that tuition increases, previously as high as 14% in a single year, have significantly impacted district budgets statewide. While Circuit Breaker reimbursement offsets a portion of these costs, reimbursement levels remain below full funding. Transportation costs for out-of-district placements were described as largely unregulated and difficult to control.

Dr. Shannon outlined proposed gap-closing measures, including reductions to instructional technology and facilities allocations, supplies and professional development, stipends and certain athletic expenses, and staffing adjustments. She emphasized that reductions in professional development and instructional materials will slow progress on strategic plan initiatives, even if educators work diligently to mitigate impacts.

Discussion followed among members of the Advisory Committee, Select Board, and School Committee. Advisory members requested multi-year comparisons reflecting actual expenditures rather than solely budgeted amounts in order to better identify structural trends. Questions were raised regarding state education funding and the allocation of statewide revenue intended for education. Dr. Shannon explained that certain funding streams, including Student Opportunity Act allocations, do not benefit Cohasset and that broader structural changes at the state level would be necessary to resolve many municipal funding challenges.

The topic of regionalization was raised. Dr. Shannon stated that the district has not engaged in discussions regarding regionalization. School Committee members acknowledged that such a decision would require broad community involvement and emphasized that any long-term structural change would ultimately reflect community priorities and willingness to support funding decisions.

Facilities planning through the MSBA process was also discussed. Dr. Shannon clarified that the MSBA requires evaluation of multiple options, including renovation and new construction, through a structured feasibility process involving a multi-stakeholder building committee. She noted that no final decisions have been made and that the process will formally begin in April.

Additional questions addressed kindergarten enrollment forecasting, the potential role of community fundraising organizations in supporting classroom materials or professional development, teacher contract negotiations and projected salary impacts, and opportunities for cross-committee collaboration in long-range planning.

Several members emphasized the need to begin coordinated discussions regarding a potential Proposition 2½ override strategy to provide sustainable funding beyond FY27. It was suggested that representatives from the School Committee, Advisory Committee, Select Board, and Town administration convene a working group to begin multi-year planning while ensuring broad public engagement and transparency.

The Committee thanked Dr. Shannon and the administrative team for their thorough presentation and ongoing efforts to refine the FY27 budget. Members recognized the shared responsibility among Town boards and the broader community in addressing both immediate and long-term financial challenges. The Committee affirmed its commitment to continued collaboration and public engagement as the budget process moves forward.

Adjournment

With no further business with respect to the School Committee, Chair Lesky sought a motion to adjourn:

A motion made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Evans, to adjourn the meeting.

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

The School Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:31PM

Documents/Materials Used

- Updated FY27 Budget Presentation

Respectfully submitted,

Lance C. Dial
3/4/026