

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
February 25, 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 Lance C. 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
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Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee to order at 6:03 PM.

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

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky thanked Dan Kelly, town departments, school staff, families, and students for their extensive efforts and patience during an unprecedented extended February break caused by severe weather and power outages, recognizing the community-wide work required to safely reopen schools.

Public Comment

None.

Superintendent Report

Dr. Shannon provided a superintendent update focused primarily on the district's recovery from recent snowstorms and extended closures, thanking facilities, transportation, DPW, and school staff for safely preparing schools to reopen. She emphasized safety concerns related to snowbanks, traffic, and transportation delays, while noting that the district's fifth snow day extended the tentative last day of school to June 25, 2026. The Committee briefly discussed community concerns about potentially using April vacation days to offset additional snow days, though Dr. Shannon noted such measures would be a last resort.

2026-2027 School Calendar

Dr. Shannon then presented the third and final reading of the 2026–2027 school calendar, with primary discussion centered on whether Good Friday should remain a half day, full day, or no school day. Committee members weighed attendance patterns, logistical concerns, religious equity, and preserving instructional days.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Dial, to approve the 2026-2027 School Calendar draft that included Good Friday as a half day, as presented to the Committee.

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

Teaching and Learning

Ms. Scollins noted that there was nothing to discuss with the Committee owing to February vacation and snow days.

Budget, Resources and Governance

Gifts

The Committee reviewed and accepted two gifts from the Parent School Organization (PSO): \$715 to support an eighth-grade middle school field trip to the Strand Theater and \$406.25 for Math Day materials. Members expressed appreciation for the PSO's continued generosity and partnership in supporting both educational enrichment opportunities and classroom resources throughout the district.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial, seconded by Mr. MacLellan, to accept both gifts from the PSO with thanks from the School Committee.

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

Monthly Budget Update

Mrs. Owen reported that the FY26 budget remains on track to end the year with a balanced financial position. While nearly all available operating funds have been committed, strategic budget freezes, revolving account transfers, and salary savings have preserved modest flexibility to address potential overages in areas such as utilities and athletics. Administration clarified that encumbrances represent projected obligations through year-end, allowing the district to monitor both anticipated and actual expenditures carefully.

Updated FY27 Budget Presentation

Dr. Shannon presented updated FY27 budget projections, emphasizing the severe fiscal pressures created by escalating special education, transportation, and utility costs within the broader constraints of municipal funding limits. She outlined that while the Administration had worked extensively to minimize reductions, significant cuts—including student-facing staffing reductions—were likely necessary absent additional revenue or structural funding changes.

Mr. Dial praised Dr. Shannon and the Administration for conducting a comprehensive and transparent review of the district's financial challenges. He emphasized that the district's current position reflects broader statewide structural funding problems rather than local failures and noted that every reasonable mitigation strategy had been

explored. Mr. Dial underscored the difficult reality that reductions were being driven by necessity rather than choice and highlighted the importance of long-term planning alongside immediate budget management.

Mr. Evans echoed concerns about structural flaws in public school funding, particularly the limitations imposed by Proposition 2½ and municipal revenue structures. He stressed that each proposed staffing reduction represented not only operational cuts but also meaningful losses to students and educators. Mr. Evans framed the budget crisis as part of a larger, ongoing effort to build community awareness and support for future financial solutions.

Mr. Squatrito emphasized that the district has historically operated leanly and efficiently, making current reductions especially painful because they now directly impact students, teachers, and educational quality. He highlighted concerns over larger middle school class sizes and the cascading effects of staffing cuts on both students and remaining faculty. Mr. Squatrito also stressed the need to avoid recurring annual reductions and advocated for long-term sustainability planning.

Mr. MacLellan strongly objected to accepting staffing reductions as inevitable and argued that the district should aggressively pursue unconventional solutions before finalizing cuts. He expressed deep concern about preserving the district's educational excellence and protecting high-quality educators, whom he described as essential community assets. Mr. MacLellan proposed independent community fundraising efforts as a potential short-term strategy to mitigate reductions while broader solutions are developed.

Chair Lesky acknowledged both the emotional and operational gravity of the proposed reductions, emphasizing that affected staff are valued members of the broader school community. She supported exploring unconventional strategies to preserve district talent and educational quality while recognizing the significant work already undertaken by Administration. Chair Lesky also expressed appreciation for the dedication of educators, administrators, and stakeholders during this difficult budget process.

Public Comment to FY27 Budget Presentation

Will Ashton, 125 Doane Street, expressed appreciation for Dr. Shannon's efforts in preparing the proposed budget but asked what actions the School Committee intended to pursue to increase top-line funding and potentially prevent some or all proposed cuts. In response, Chair Lesky stated that the Committee is exploring unconventional independent fundraising efforts as well as longer-term structural solutions to school funding challenges.

Jen Madden, 60 Forest Avenue, asked how the proposed staffing reductions would affect the workload of Cohasset Middle School ELA and Math teachers, specifically regarding section counts and total student loads. In response, Dr. Shannon explained that teachers would continue teaching five sections, but average class sizes would increase from approximately fourteen to fifteen students to twenty to twenty-one students per section.

Cathy Cerruti, 65 Brook Street, Scituate, requested clarification regarding how contractual "bumping" rights associated with staffing reductions could affect personnel assignments across the district. In response, Dr. Shannon explained that reductions in force are governed by seniority and certification rules, with more senior staff potentially displacing less senior employees within certification areas, creating a highly situational reassignment process.

Jen Madden, 60 Forest Avenue, asked whether school choice could generate additional district revenue. In response, Dr. Shannon noted that while school choice could potentially increase revenue, it could also create substantial additional costs, particularly related to special education and capacity concerns. Mr. Dial further added that the district has historically determined that school choice could create operational demands and expenses exceeding any net financial benefit.

Jen Madden, 60 Forest Avenue, also asked whether increased class sizes would raise middle school teacher student loads above eighty students. In response, Dr. Shannon confirmed that middle school ELA and Math teachers would likely serve approximately 100–105 students per grade level under the proposed model, depending on scheduling variations.

Abby Aranstamb, 142 Old Forge Road, Scituate, asked whether, if additional fundraising or future override funding became available, the district had established priorities for restoring eliminated positions. In response, Dr. Shannon stated that the Administration is developing a prioritization list for future recalls but had not yet finalized that process.

Will Ashton, 125 Doane Street, questioned how the district could simultaneously claim to be near capacity while also eliminating positions. In response, Mr. Dial clarified that staffing reductions are being driven strictly by fiscal necessity rather than excess capacity, emphasizing that additional school choice enrollment could paradoxically worsen financial pressures by increasing service demands on a reduced staff.

Chris Luvisi, 20 Brewster Road, voiced support for broader community consideration of future override efforts, noting that public voting on increased funding may be an appropriate long-term path. In response, Mr. Dial acknowledged broad Committee support for pursuing structural long-term funding solutions but emphasized that such efforts could not be implemented quickly enough to resolve the immediate FY27 budget cycle.

Cathy Cerruti, 65 Brook Street, Scituate, asked whether elementary specialist positions could be restored to full-time status if future funding became available. In response, Dr. Shannon explained that some current reductions primarily reflect formal alignment of FTE designations with existing teaching loads, while broader restoration priorities are still under review.

Jen Madden, 60 Forest Avenue, asked whether the district currently has available funds within its Special Education Stabilization account. In response, Dr. Shannon explained that approximately \$99,000 exists within a special education reserve-related account, but legal and procedural steps are still required before those funds could be formally accessed and applied toward district needs.

Community Relations / Communication

Ms. Lesky reported that the Communications Subcommittee, together with Mr. Evans, Dr. Shannon, and Dr. Scollins, met to discuss strategies for improving agenda presentation and increasing public engagement in School Committee meetings. She noted that these efforts will continue through broader collaboration with a district-wide communications committee composed of parents and community stakeholders to strengthen overall district communications.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Dial, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee at 7:46 PM.

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

Documents/Materials Used

- Superintendent Update (Dr. Sarah Shannon)
- 2026–2027 CPS School Calendar – Third and Final Read
- Gift from the Parent School Organization (PSO) – Grade 8 Field Trip

- Gift from the Parent School Organization (PSO) – Math Day Materials
- Budget and Finance – Monthly Update (Mrs. Susan Owen and Dr. Sarah Shannon)
- Budget and Finance – Updated FY27 Budget Presentation and School Committee Discussion

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial
May 17, 2026