

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
March 4, 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 Michael Stapleton, Director of Student Services 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 6:00 PM.

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

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky welcomed robust in-person and virtual attendance, thanked participants for their engagement, and invited public comment.

Public Comment

Will Ashton, 125 Doane Street, requested greater clarity regarding the procedural timeline and authority surrounding potential override efforts, noting conflicting public statements from the School Committee and Select Board about whether override discussions are premature or already overdue. He also acknowledged recent efforts to identify additional funding to minimize staffing losses but argued that such measures alone would not restore necessary service levels, resolve longstanding structural underfunding, or reverse prior fee increases imposed on families. Mr. Ashton urged continued pursuit of a true level-service FY27 budget and expressed his belief, based on personal review of district finances, that the Town must ultimately allocate additional funding to adequately support the schools.

Invited Guests

School of the World Trip (Ms. Carolyn Crimmins, Karina Nelson and Ms. Natalie Hanbar, Chief Operating Officer of School of the World)

Ms. Carolyn Crimmins, Ms. Karina Nelson, and representatives from School the World presented plans for the April 2026 Guatemala service trip, during which participating students will travel to Indigenous communities to help construct educational facilities while engaging in cultural exchange and service learning. Presenters outlined the trip's itinerary, fundraising progress, community partnerships, and extensive safety infrastructure, including on-the-ground staff, emergency preparedness protocols, medical support, embassy registration, and security monitoring.

Mr. MacLellan expressed strong support for student travel opportunities while focusing extensively on student safety, requesting detailed clarification regarding local security presence, supervision protocols, and contingency planning. Ms. Lesky inquired about financial accessibility and fundraising support for participating families, while Ms. Nelson and Ms. Crimmins outlined both group and individual fundraising opportunities designed to reduce financial barriers. Mr. Evans and Mr. Squatrito similarly emphasized safety and logistical preparedness, including geopolitical contingencies and travel disruptions. Mr. Dial voiced strong support for the program, praising both Guatemala as a destination and the value of providing meaningful international educational opportunities for students. Committee members generally agreed that the service trip offered significant educational and personal growth benefits while expressing satisfaction with the thorough safety measures presented.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to approve the School the World Service Trip to Guatemala as presented.

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

Superintendent Report

Dr. Shannon provided updates on upcoming district and extracurricular activities, including the rescheduled METCO Opportunity Ball celebrating METCO's 60th anniversary and encouraged community participation. She also highlighted numerous winter athletic achievements across girls' basketball, swimming, skiing, wrestling, and other programs, recognizing student accomplishments and postseason qualifications while noting the conclusion of several winter sports seasons.

Committee members raised questions regarding the cancellation of the school musical due to snow-related rehearsal disruptions and the status of snow load safety concerns on school facilities. Dr. Shannon confirmed that the musical had been canceled following a collaborative student-led decision and reported that all school buildings had been proactively inspected, cleared, and approved for safe occupancy following recent severe weather, with particular recognition given to district facilities staff for their preventative efforts.

Budget, Resources and Governance

FY27 Budget Update

Dr. Shannon presented a significantly improved FY27 budget outlook, announcing that the Town had released additional overlay funds and combined with retirement savings, increased the school budget to approximately a 5% increase over FY26. While this funding still falls short of full level-service needs, it substantially reduced the projected deficit, preserved a number of previously threatened staff positions, restored some funding for

instructional resources and professional development, and represented meaningful progress through close collaboration among district leadership, Town officials, and staff.

Mr. Dial welcomed the improved budget update as highly encouraging news, emphasizing that retaining staff remains central to preserving district quality. He specifically praised Dr. Shannon, the Town Manager, and Town leadership for uncovering additional resources while cautioning that these one-time solutions do not resolve the district's underlying structural funding challenges. Mr. Dial strongly advocated for future override efforts to create long-term fiscal stability and warned against any perception that the district can continue relying on temporary budgetary levers indefinitely.

Mr. Evans praised the revised budget for preserving critical human capital, noting that retirements and savings represented not just financial adjustments but meaningful efforts to preserve educational continuity for both current and future staff. He emphasized that this difficult process provided valuable insight into district priorities, operational efficiencies, and specific programmatic impacts, which will strengthen future advocacy efforts. Mr. Evans also highlighted that many sacrifices made across district and municipal departments were one-time collaborative measures, underscoring the urgent need for permanent structural funding solutions.

Mr. Squatrito expressed cautious optimism, acknowledging that while the revised budget substantially improved the district's position, it still remains materially below level-service needs. He stressed that the district and community must treat this year's near-crisis as a warning regarding the severe consequences of continued underfunding, particularly regarding human capital and educational programming. Mr. Squatrito further emphasized that while some immediate harm had been mitigated, ongoing student-affecting reductions and future structural vulnerabilities remain significant concerns requiring broader long-term action.

Mr. MacLellan strongly welcomed the revised budget improvements while cautioning that the district's work is not complete until all feasible staffing and programmatic protections have been pursued. He reiterated his full support for aggressively pursuing future override solutions and praised the extraordinary collaborative efforts of Town leadership, district administration, unions, retirees, and community stakeholders in achieving the improved outcome. Mr. MacLellan emphasized that the community's demonstrated support for the schools should serve as a foundation for continued advocacy and structural reform.

Chair Lesky echoed widespread appreciation for the persistence, collaboration, and creativity demonstrated by district and Town leadership in improving the FY27 budget outlook. She emphasized that these efforts have not only preserved critical positions but also established a stronger long-term foundation for understanding and advocating for the district's true financial needs. Chair Lesky further praised the strengthened partnership between school and municipal leadership as essential to addressing future challenges.

Review and Discussion of Policy ECAF: Security Cameras in Schools

After a brief discussion the Committee determined it was not prepared to address this agenda item at the current time.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to table discussion of Policy ECAF regarding security cameras in schools.

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

Teaching and Learning

Academic Initiatives / Student Opportunity Act

Dr. Scollins and Mr. Stapleton presented an update on the district's 2024–2027 Student Opportunity Act plan, which focuses on reducing reading and math achievement gaps for students with disabilities through evidence-based interventions, expanded co-teaching models, enhanced MTSS implementation, and data-informed instructional practices across targeted grade levels. The presentation emphasized long-term strategic planning to improve equity, deepen student learning, and strengthen inclusive educational supports.

Student Services Update

Mr. Stapleton walked the Committee through Student Services data, including a high-level chart summarizing special education evaluations, annual reviews, re-evaluations, eligibility determinations, and related service meetings across elementary, secondary, and out-of-district placements. He also presented updates on the 2026 Extended School Year (ESY) program, including temporary site adjustments, scheduling, and operational planning, as well as upcoming SEPAC programming focused on transition services through MassAbility.

Stephanie Saunders, representing SEPAC, expressed appreciation for the restoration of certain middle school staffing positions while emphasizing the particular importance of specialist and support staff for students with disabilities. She noted that even partial reductions to specialized educators can significantly affect both student outcomes and staff morale, particularly for vulnerable student populations.

Mr. Dial thanked Ms. Saunders for SEPAC's continued advocacy and support throughout the budget process, emphasizing that all staffing reductions remain painful for the district. He also praised Mr. Stapleton's leadership, clarity, and programmatic direction, expressing strong confidence in the district's progress in student services.

Mr. Evans asked Mr. Stapleton to further explain the district's long-term strategy of building internal programming capacity to better serve students in-district. Mr. Stapleton described a strategic vision focused on expanding partial inclusion, language-based, and therapeutic programming across grade levels to reduce costly out-of-district placements while strengthening comprehensive in-district services for students with diverse needs.

School Committee Governance

Reports from Subcommittees

As the Budget and Resources Subcommittee, Mr. Evans and Mr. Dial noted they have previewed the FY27 budget and their meeting with Ms. Owen and Dr. Shannon. Dr. Shannon mentioned they're kind of in a fast-moving moment and they'll continue to meet with the Communication Subcommittee to talk about how they can make information more digestible.

Approval of Minutes

The Committee reviewed and approved meeting minutes for multiple prior School Committee meetings, including December 3, 2025; December 17, 2025; February 4, 2026; and the February 10, 2026 Joint Meeting with the Select Board, with a correction to reflect Mr. Squatrito's attendance at the Joint Meeting. Separate approvals were also conducted for the January 21, 2026 and January 7, 2026 meeting minutes.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. MacLellan, to approve the December 3, 2025; December 17, 2025; February 4, 2026; and February 10, 2026 Joint Meeting minutes, with correction to the February 10 attendance record.

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

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to approve the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes as presented.

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

A motion was made by Mr. Squatrito, seconded by Mr. Evans, to approve the January 7, 2026 meeting minutes as presented.

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

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee at 7:48 PM.

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

Documents/Materials Used

- School the World Service Trip to Guatemala (Ms. Carolyn Crimmins, Ms. Karina Nelson, and Ms. Natalie Hanbar)
- Budget and Finance – Updated FY27 Budget Presentation and School Committee Discussion
- Teaching and Learning – Student Opportunity Act Update (Dr. Leslie Scollins and Michael Stapleton)
- Teaching and Learning – Student Services Update: Data Sharing (Mr. Michael Stapleton)
- School Committee Governance – Approval of Minutes
 - December 3, 2025
 - December 17, 2025
 - January 7, 2026
 - January 21, 2026
 - February 4, 2026
 - February 10, 2026 (Joint Meeting)

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial
May 17, 2026