

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
April 15, 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 Mr. Michael Stapleton, Director of Student Services Susan Owen, Director of Finance & Operations Mr. Brian Scott, Principal, Cohasset High School Mr. John Scopelleti, Principal, Cohasset Middle School
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Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee to order at 6:00PM.

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

Opening Remarks

Chair Lesky welcomed the Committee to the meeting and noted that there was a busy agenda.

Public Comment

A comment was made that there was no audio for online attendees. This issue was resolved. There were no other public comments.

Invited Guests

Spotlight on Learning: Cohasset High School Harvard Model Congress Trip (Mr. Chris Luvisi and Students)

Mr. Luvisi and Cohasset High School students presented on the recent Harvard Model Congress trip, highlighting the highly successful experiential learning opportunity in which students assumed the roles of U.S. legislators, debated real-world policy issues, and engaged with peers from across the country. Student speakers emphasized the program's academic rigor, civic engagement, and social growth opportunities, while Committee members

praised the trip's ability to broaden perspective, develop critical thinking, and deepen student engagement through immersive learning.

Challenge Success (Dr. Brandon Wiley)

Dr. Shannon introduced the district's new partnership with Challenge Success, a Stanford Graduate School of Education-affiliated organization focused on improving student well-being, belonging, engagement, and healthy academic balance. She noted that this initiative is being funded through support from the Cohasset Education Foundation. Dr. Shannon explained that this work will help define what student success should look like in Cohasset while also addressing student and staff stress, strengthening mental health supports, and creating a more balanced educational environment.

Dr. Brandon Wiley presented Challenge Success's initial district survey findings, which reflected exceptionally strong student engagement, school safety, and trusted adult relationships across Cohasset Public Schools relative to national benchmarks. He also identified important growth areas, including student sleep deficits, academic stress, time management challenges, and broader societal pressures around achievement. Dr. Wiley emphasized that the district's already strong foundation positions Cohasset well to use this data proactively through listening sessions, stakeholder engagement, and targeted pilot initiatives designed to strengthen wellness without sacrificing academic rigor.

Committee members discussed the practical implications of the data, including homework balance, executive functioning, digital distractions, and student voice integration. Mr. Evans highlighted existing student-led wellness efforts such as Safe Harbor, while Chair Lesky focused on understanding the root causes of identified stressors. Dr. Shannon emphasized that this grant-supported initiative represents the beginning of a broader multi-year process aimed at aligning wellness, academic achievement, and community belonging in a sustainable and data-informed way.

Alternative Energy Committee (AEC) Request re: Solar Energy Arrays at Deer Hill and Joseph Osgood (Ms. Tanya Bodell)

Ms. Tanya Bodell presented on behalf of the Alternative Energy Committee, requesting formal School Committee authorization to initiate the procurement and Request for Proposal process for potential solar energy arrays at the Joseph Osgood and Deer Hill School properties. She explained that this request follows prior unanimous School Committee support in November, which allowed the Committee to seek broader Town authorization for potential property leasing related to solar development. Ms. Bodell noted that the district and Town previously explored similar opportunities in 2020 but did not ultimately move forward, and that this renewed effort is intended to responsibly revisit potential long-term energy and sustainability benefits with School Committee support.

After discussion clarifying the scope of the request,

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. MacLellan, to grant permission to the Alternative Energy Committee to proceed with the Request for Proposal process for potential solar energy arrays at Deer Hill and Joseph Osgood Schools.

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

High School Program of Studies (Principal Brian Scott)

Mr. Brian Scott presented the updated Cohasset High School Program of Studies, noting that the proposed revisions were relatively minimal and primarily reflected modest adjustments based on ongoing curricular

refinement and student input. Discussion highlighted the meaningful role of student voice, particularly through the Wellness Committee, in shaping certain program considerations and ensuring that student perspectives were authentically incorporated into academic planning.

Chair Lesky specifically praised the district's responsiveness to student feedback, emphasizing that student participation in program discussions created genuine and impactful opportunities for students to influence their educational experience. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Evans, to approve the amendments to the Cohasset High School Program of Studies.

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

Middle School Program of Studies (Principal John Scopelleti)

Principal Scopelleti presented the Cohasset Middle School Program of Studies, outlining several relatively minor revisions primarily driven by staffing and operational changes. These updates included adjustments to course placement processes following the loss of department chairs, removal of Digital Literacy and Coding/Robotics offerings due to the loss of a technology instructor, handbook revisions removing outdated Honor Roll references, and general copyediting for clarity and consistency.

Mr. Dial praised the district's continued commitment to providing diverse educational opportunities at the middle school level while asking how future program offerings may evolve under new leadership. He specifically inquired whether broader programmatic review and fresh perspectives may eventually produce additional curricular diversification.

Principal Scopelleti responded that while significant immediate changes are unlikely due to staffing and scheduling realities, the district is actively evaluating future opportunities through school council discussions and stakeholder feedback. He noted particular community interest in expanding arts and specialist offerings, though such changes would require careful long-term planning and resource consideration.

Chair Lesky thanked Principal Scopelleti for his leadership during his first year at Cohasset Middle School and for thoughtfully balancing operational realities with future program development considerations.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial, seconded by Mr. MacLellan, to approve the Cohasset Middle School Program of Studies as presented.

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

Superintendent Report

Appointment Recommendation of Elizabeth (Beth) Wilcox - Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Shannon provided a broad Superintendent update highlighting several district initiatives centered on authentic student learning, community engagement, and district communications. She celebrated the success of Mosaic, the district's annual diversity celebration, which brought together students, families, and staff from across grade levels to honor cultural heritage, belonging, and inclusion through food, music, and shared experiences. Dr. Shannon also praised the rapid expansion of the middle school TREPS entrepreneurial program, which gave students hands-on experience in business development, product design, and marketplace participation, as well as

the launch of the student-led Digital Leaders Club, which is enhancing district communications through modern social media, branding, and public relations strategies.

Committee members praised these initiatives as strong examples of experiential learning, student voice, and future-ready educational programming. Mr. Dial specifically emphasized the growing importance of entrepreneurship education in a rapidly changing economy, while Mr. Evans and Mr. Dial also stressed the importance of clear parent communication and strict adherence to student privacy protections within new digital media efforts.

Dr. Shannon then formally presented her recommendation for Dr. Elizabeth (Beth) Wilcox as the next Assistant Superintendent of Cohasset Public Schools following an extensive multi-stage search process involving thirty-eight applicants, multiple interview rounds, public forums, and broad stakeholder feedback. Dr. Shannon emphasized that Dr. Wilcox emerged as the strongest candidate through a highly competitive process and aligned closely with the district's strategic priorities, values, and educational mission.

Dr. Wilcox expressed gratitude for the opportunity and enthusiasm for joining the Cohasset community, emphasizing her commitment to student-centered decision-making, thoughtful instructional leadership, and strategic budget awareness. Committee members, including Mr. Evans, highlighted the value of Dr. Wilcox's prior experience in similarly situated districts and expressed optimism about her ability to contribute meaningfully to both academic and operational leadership.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Evans, to appoint Dr. Elizabeth (Beth) Wilcox as Assistant Superintendent of Cohasset Public Schools.

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

Teaching and Learning

Cohasset Public Schools Before and After School Program Update

Dr. Scollins presented a proposal to transition the district's before- and after-school programming fully under Cohasset Public Schools administration rather than the Recreation Department, due primarily to licensing and operational constraints faced by the REC Department. She explained that this shift would require School Committee authorization for the district to formally apply for program licensure through the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, allowing CPS to directly oversee registration, scheduling, financial administration, and day-to-day operations.

Mr. Dial inquired about the operational and budgetary implications of the transition, particularly whether the program currently operates at a surplus and why it had historically been housed under the Recreation Department. District leadership explained that the program is financially self-sustaining through a revolving account structure and that bringing operations in-house would financially benefit the schools by allowing surplus funds to directly support district programming. Dr. Scollins also noted that the existing staffing structure largely remains unchanged, with many current school staff already supporting the program operationally.

Chair Lesky emphasized the importance of maintaining scheduling flexibility to support working families who rely on before-school accommodations and encouraged thoughtful planning as the district assumes greater operational control. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Dial, to authorize the Assistant Superintendent to proceed with the required application process.

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

Title I Program Review Update

Dr. Scollins provided an update on the district's successful completion of its six-year federal Title I Program Review, which evaluates compliance with federal and state requirements related to equitable educational access, academic achievement support, and proper use of federal program resources. She explained that the review serves as both a regulatory compliance measure and an opportunity for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to assess effective program delivery, resource allocation, and promising educational practices.

Dr. Scollins reported that Cohasset Public Schools successfully passed the review process, receiving confirmation that district programming fully meets applicable federal and state standards and appropriately serves student needs. She noted that this positive outcome reflects strong district performance, effective administrative oversight, and successful alignment of academic support systems, allowing the district to move forward without further Title I review concerns for another six years.

Student Services Update

Mr. Stapleton walked the Committee through March 2026 Student Services data, providing an overview of special education meeting activity across elementary, secondary, and out-of-district placements. The data summary reflected the volume and categories of annual reviews, re-evaluations, initial evaluations, and independent evaluations, offering the Committee a snapshot of ongoing compliance, service coordination, and student support demands across the district.

Mr. Stapleton then introduced Deer Hill special education teachers Ms. Mairead Boulrisse and Ms. Lauren Flynn, who presented on the district's evolving specialized writing instruction framework for upper elementary students. Their presentation focused on structured, research-informed writing supports that integrate executive functioning strategies, mnemonic devices, graphic organizers, vocabulary development, editing processes, and student independence. They emphasized that this work is designed not simply to improve writing output, but to create consistent, transferable systems that help students build confidence and long-term writing proficiency.

Mr. Stapleton praised the initiative as an important step toward district-wide vertical alignment in specialized writing instruction, similar to established consistency in specialized reading interventions. He highlighted the growing consistency across classrooms, teacher collaboration, and paraprofessional training as major strengths of the framework.

Mr. MacLellan strongly praised both educators for the depth, rigor, and practical value of the program, emphasizing that effective written communication is among the most essential educational skills students can develop. He also noted the broader applicability of many of these tools beyond special education populations and commended the district for continuing to strengthen supports for struggling learners.

Chair Lesky echoed this praise, focusing particularly on the importance of consistency across classrooms and buildings in building student confidence and reducing educational disruption. She described the structured, logical approach to writing instruction as especially valuable given the emotional and academic challenges many students face in writing development, and commended the educators for delivering highly impactful, scalable instructional innovation.

Budget, Resources and Governance

Monthly Update

Mrs. Owen presented the district's monthly financial summary, reporting that the FY26 operating budget is effectively fully committed, with total expenditures and encumbrances accounting for nearly all available funds. She explained that while the district currently shows only a minimal uncommitted balance, ongoing review of outstanding purchase orders, utility obligations, and operational encumbrances may still identify opportunities to free additional funds through cost savings and liquidation of unnecessary obligations. Mrs. Owen also noted that positive spring athletic fee collections and approximately \$55,000 in salary savings provide additional flexibility to offset potential year-end deficits.

Committee discussion focused heavily on utilities, transportation, and operational pressures. Mr. Evans asked about pending February utility costs and snow-related expenditures, while district leadership noted that utility costs remain under close review and that snow removal costs fall largely outside the school budget. Dr. Shannon and Mrs. Owen emphasized that utility savings following winter months may create some additional budget relief.

Transportation staffing emerged as a major operational concern, with Mrs. Owen highlighting ongoing statewide school bus driver shortages that have forced route consolidations and increased logistical strain on families. Mr. Dial raised questions regarding broader workforce shortages and compensation pressures, while district leadership noted that the shortage reflects larger statewide and regulatory workforce challenges rather than solely local district conditions. Mrs. Owen expressed hope that recruitment efforts will improve staffing levels ahead of the next academic year while thanking families for their patience during current disruptions.

Capital Budget Update

Dr. Shannon presented an encouraging Capital Budget update, reporting that the Capital Planning Board approved nearly all district capital requests, including significant infrastructure, equipment, and operational investments, with football uprights as the sole exception. She highlighted that an important addition to the approved capital package included approximately \$46,500 for laptop device replacements, which had originally been budgeted within operating expenses but was successfully shifted to capital funding. This strategic reallocation created additional operating budget flexibility and directly supported broader district financial stability.

Committee members praised the approvals as a major financial and operational success. Mr. Evans emphasized that these approvals represent meaningful hidden savings and demonstrate how thoughtful capital planning can drive substantial operational efficiencies. Chair Lesky described the approvals as especially welcome given the district's broader fiscal pressures. Mr. MacLellan strongly underscored the unprecedented collaboration between the Town and school district.

Dr. Shannon further noted that prior capital investments in transportation assets such as the athletic bus and multi-purpose van have already generated significant recurring cost savings by reducing reliance on outside transportation vendors.

Public Hearing on School Choice

Dr. Shannon introduced the required annual Public Hearing on School Choice for the 2026–2027 school year, explaining that under Massachusetts law the School Committee must formally review whether to remain a non-School Choice district or open enrollment to out-of-district students. She noted that Cohasset has historically not participated in School Choice and that any future participation would carry both potential revenue opportunities and significant financial and operational risks.

Mr. Dial raised a procedural question as to whether the School Choice Hearing was required to be a separate meeting from a regular school committee meeting. After discussion, the Committee determined to delay the school choice hearing and hold a specific public hearing on school choice prior to the next scheduled regular school committee meeting. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Evans, to reconvene the Public Hearing on School Choice for FY2026–2027 at 5:45 PM on May 6, 2026.

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

Community Relations / Communication

No reports.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Dial, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee at 8:03 PM.

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

Documents/Materials Used

- Spotlight on Learning: Cohasset High School Harvard Model Congress Trip (Mr. Chris Luvisi)
- Alternative Energy Committee (AEC) Solar Energy Arrays at Deer Hill School and Joseph Osgood School (Ms. Tanya Bodell)
- Cohasset High School Program of Studies (Mr. Brian Scott)
- Cohasset Middle School Program of Studies (Mr. John Scopelleti)
- Title I Program Review Update
- Student Services Update – Data Sharing (Mr. Michael Stapleton)
- Specialized Writing Instruction (Mairead Boulrisse and Lauren Flynn)
- Budget and Finance – Monthly Update (Mrs. Susan Owen)
- Budget and Finance – Capital Update (Dr. Sarah Shannon)

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial
May 17, 2026