

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

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE COHASSET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
May 6, 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
--	--

Others in Attendance	Dr. Sarah Shannon, Superintendent Dr. Leslie Scollins, Assistant Superintendent Mr. Michael Stapleton, Director of Student Services
-----------------------------	---

Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Lesky called the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee to order at 6:01PM.

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

Public Comment

None.

Invited Guests

Spotlight on Learning: Coh-Lab-oration Project (Ms. Nina Berkowitz Bock and Students)

Ms. Nina Berkowitz Bock presented the district's Coh-Lab-oration arts initiative, a large-scale collaborative visual arts project that brought together students across multiple grade levels to create community-centered artwork through interdisciplinary, multi-age engagement. She explained that the project exceeded expectations in both participation and impact, with significantly higher student involvement than originally anticipated. Supported by local artists and district art educators, students applied to participate and reflected on the personal importance of art, creativity, and community in their lives.

Student participants shared enthusiastic reflections on the project, emphasizing creativity, leadership development, mentorship, and the value of working across grade levels. Younger students highlighted the hands-on creative process, while older students particularly emphasized the opportunity to mentor younger peers, strengthen community connections, and deepen their own artistic development.

Mr. Dial praised the project as an outstanding example of the district's strengths, emphasizing that experiential, collaborative, and creative opportunities like Coh-Lab-oration are precisely what distinguish Cohasset Public Schools and enhance educational excellence. He commended the students for their confidence, leadership, and thoughtful participation.

Chair Lesky strongly emphasized the project's broader educational and emotional benefits, particularly noting the powerful role of art in supporting student mental health, stress relief, and personal expression. She also praised the initiative's multi-age leadership opportunities, environmental sustainability through artistic reuse, and community-building impact, describing the project as an exceptional example of authentic learning, district unity, and whole-child development.

National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN) 2027 Proposal (Mr. Shawn Turner)

Mr. Shawn Turner presented on the highly successful 2026 National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN) trip to New York City, where fifty Cohasset High School juniors and seniors participated in an intensive multi-day diplomacy simulation conference at the United Nations. The experience combined rigorous academic preparation, international policy simulation, committee-based negotiations, public speaking, and significant cultural enrichment through visits to the UN, 9/11 Memorial Museum, and Broadway. Students represented multiple countries across seventeen committees and engaged deeply in global issues, diplomacy, and leadership development. Mr. Turner also presented the proposal for the 2027 NHSMUN trip, which would send forty-eight students to the conference at an estimated self-funded cost of \$950 per student.

Student participants overwhelmingly praised the program's academic rigor, social growth, and transformative experiential learning opportunities. Students highlighted improvements in public speaking, international relations knowledge, cultural competency, negotiation skills, and personal confidence, while many noted that the social and collaborative dimensions of interacting with peers from across the globe were among the most impactful aspects of the trip.

Mr. Dial strongly supported the continuation of the program, emphasizing that these types of immersive educational experiences represent some of the most valuable opportunities the district can provide. He praised the diversity, challenge, and life experience the trip offers while also encouraging broader strategic review of district-sponsored travel opportunities to ensure affordability and equitable access for families.

Mr. Evans focused on the practical diplomatic and negotiation experiences students gained, while Mr. Squatrito and Mr. MacLellan praised the trip's long-term educational, leadership, and social development benefits. Mr. MacLellan in particular emphasized the extraordinary value of large-scale experiential learning in preparing students for college, professional life, and civic engagement.

Chair Lesky praised both the educational and personal growth dimensions of the trip, commending faculty for safely managing such a substantial undertaking and highlighting the importance of ensuring scholarship or financial support mechanisms remain available so that cost does not become a barrier to participation.

A motion was made by Mr. MacLellan, seconded by Mr. Dial, to approve the 2027 National High School Model United Nations trip to New York City.

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

Superintendent Report

Superintendent Update

Dr. Shannon's Superintendent Report focused on celebrating the district's staff, sustaining community engagement during the busy spring season, and highlighting both student achievement and districtwide strategic progress. She recognized Teacher Appreciation Week and numerous other staff appreciation milestones, emphasizing that the strength of Cohasset Public Schools depends on the full network of educators, administrators, support staff, transportation personnel, and other community members who contribute to student success. Dr. Shannon also previewed the district's robust schedule of spring arts programming, performances, and student showcases, underscoring the importance of broad student engagement opportunities.

A major highlight of Dr. Shannon's report was Deer Hill School's innovative 5th grade project-based learning initiative focused on homework research and policy analysis. Students engaged in rigorous nonfiction research, developed nuanced positions on homework's benefits and drawbacks, and presented their findings to district and school leaders. Dr. Shannon praised this as an exceptional example of deeper learning, public speaking, and strategic alignment with district goals around project-based learning and authentic student voice.

Strategic Goal Update

Dr. Shannon also delivered a comprehensive end-of-year update on the district's 2025–2026 strategic goals, outlining substantial progress across six major operational priorities. She reported successful advancement in professional leadership development through the New Superintendent Induction Program; major districtwide improvements in curriculum alignment, MTSS systems, and professional learning; foundational development of a long-term project-based and deeper learning instructional model; launch of the grant-funded Challenge Success wellness initiative to redefine district success metrics; significant communications audits and strategic planning to improve family and community engagement; and major fiscal progress through budget recalibration, stronger Town collaboration, and the groundwork for a formal five-year financial forecast. While several initiatives remain ongoing, Dr. Shannon emphasized that the district has successfully built the systems, infrastructure, and relationships necessary to sustain meaningful long-term progress. In response to a question from Mr. Evans, Dr. Shannon noted that she hopes to have a four-year contract with the Cohasset Teachers Association ratified by the end of the month.

Committee members strongly praised Dr. Shannon's leadership throughout an unusually demanding year. Mr. Dial commended the breadth of her accomplishments despite significant fiscal pressures, Mr. Evans emphasized her work strengthening communications systems and collaborative labor relationships, and Mr. Squatrito highlighted a noticeable increase in public trust regarding district financial stewardship. Chair Lesky similarly praised Dr. Shannon's extraordinary ability to simultaneously manage immediate crises while continuing to advance broader district priorities, describing her leadership as instrumental to the district's continued forward momentum.

Teaching and Learning

Academic Initiatives (Dr. Scollins)

Dr. Scollins provided a brief academic update highlighting the district's intensive spring assessment season, noting that Cohasset High School students are actively engaged in both Advanced Placement exams and ongoing MCAS testing, while middle and elementary students continue with Math, Science, Technology, and upcoming Civics assessments. She emphasized that despite the heavy testing schedule, meaningful classroom instruction and deeper learning remain fully active across the district.

Dr. Scollins specifically praised the continued strength of classroom engagement, referencing the Deer Hill 5th grade homework research initiative as an example of how students are continuing to demonstrate high-level learning, critical thinking, and academic growth even during a demanding assessment period. She characterized this time of year as the culmination of months of sustained effort by both students and educators, showcasing the district's instructional progress and resilience.

Student Services Update

Data Sharing

Mr. Stapleton walked the Committee through April 2026 Student Services data, including updated special education meeting activity, referral source trends, and longitudinal evaluation metrics designed to provide greater transparency into how students are identified, assessed, and supported across the district. The revised data format gave the Committee a clearer view of parent versus MTSS referrals, eligibility outcomes, and broader system functionality, while also reinforcing that approximately 20% of students districtwide currently receive IEP-based special education services. Committee members praised the improved reporting structure, with Ms. Lesky and Mr. Dial specifically highlighting the value of more nuanced referral source tracking and longitudinal analysis.

DESE Integrated Monitoring Review – Findings and Next Steps

Mr. Stapleton then provided a major update on the district's DESE Integrated Monitoring Review, one of the most significant regulatory and compliance undertakings in recent district history. He explained that the review process spanned nearly a full year and included extensive audits of special education programming, civil rights compliance, IEP development, student identification, evaluation timelines, records management, and districtwide regulatory systems. Cohasset Public Schools achieved exceptional results, receiving full implementation ratings on 39 of 40 special education standards and full compliance on all civil rights standards, with only one minor finding requiring limited refinement.

District leadership, Committee members, SEPAC representatives, and public attendees overwhelmingly praised Mr. Stapleton's leadership and the extraordinary strength of the district's Student Services systems. Dr. Shannon described the results as exceptionally rare and a direct reflection of years of strategic systems-building, while Mr. Dial—drawing on his own professional compliance experience—emphasized how unusually impressive near-perfect regulatory outcomes are in practice. Mr. Evans similarly praised both the quantitative compliance results and the strong qualitative parent trust that Mr. Stapleton's department has built, while Chair Lesky framed the achievement not simply as administrative competence, but as an example of exceptional educational leadership. Overall, the presentation strongly reinforced Student Services as one of the district's highest-performing operational areas.

Budget, Resources and Governance

Gift from PSO

The Parent School Organization offered a \$1,000 gift to support the district's Mosaic event, further demonstrating its continued commitment to enriching student experiences and supporting community-centered district initiatives. District leadership expressed gratitude for the PSO's ongoing generosity, noting that its support played an important role in helping make Mosaic a successful celebration of diversity, belonging, and community engagement.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to accept the \$1,000 donation from the Parent School Organization with the School Committee's sincere thanks.

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

(Note: Mr. MacLellan had stepped out of the meeting for the vote)

School Committee Governance

School Choice Vote

Dr. Shannon opened the School Choice discussion by providing a detailed explanation of how Massachusetts School Choice functions financially and operationally, emphasizing that widespread public assumptions about its fiscal benefits are often inaccurate. She clarified that Cohasset would receive only approximately \$5,000 per incoming School Choice student—far below the district's roughly \$22,000 per-pupil expenditure for resident students—creating a substantial structural funding gap. Given current staffing alignment, limited classroom capacity, and recent budgetary right-sizing, Dr. Shannon strongly advised that participating in School Choice would create disproportionate operational and financial risks for Cohasset Public Schools.

Committee members engaged in thoughtful discussion regarding both theoretical efficiencies and practical liabilities. Mr. Evans explored whether selective enrollment in underutilized grades could potentially create modest incremental revenue without materially increasing costs, though he also raised concerns regarding enrollment composition and broader class balance. Mr. Squatrito similarly acknowledged the superficial appeal of additional revenue but strongly emphasized that even limited participation would expose the district to unpredictable lottery-based admissions, special education obligations, and broader strategic risks that outweigh potential gains.

Dr. Shannon further noted that while the district could cap seat availability by grade, state law would significantly limit local discretion over student selection, requiring lottery-based admissions without consideration of academic, behavioral, or service-related variables. This lack of control, combined with the district's already constrained fiscal environment, reinforced her recommendation that Cohasset should avoid assuming such risks at this time.

Overall, Committee sentiment reflected caution, with members recognizing that while School Choice may offer narrow theoretical opportunities, the broader fiscal, operational, and strategic risks currently make participation an imprudent option for the district. After discussion,

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. Dial, that Cohasset Public Schools will not participate as a School Choice district for FY2027.

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

Acknowledgment of Mr. Jake Squatrito

The Committee formally recognized Mr. Jake Squatrito for his service as his appointed term concluded with the upcoming Town election. Chair Lesky delivered an especially warm acknowledgment, praising Mr. Squatrito not only for bringing recent student perspective to the Committee, but also for quickly distinguishing himself as an analytical, thoughtful, fair-minded, and highly engaged member whose preparation, independent thinking, and consistent attendance strengthened the Committee's overall work. She emphasized that his civic commitment,

maturity, and willingness to deeply engage with difficult issues made him an exceptional representative for both students and the broader community.

Vice Chair MacLellan presented Mr. Squatrito with a commemorative plaque recognizing his distinguished service, specifically noting his role in ensuring student voice remained meaningfully represented in Committee deliberations and praising him as an embodiment of the district's educational mission.

Committee members each offered strong personal praise. Mr. Evans highlighted Mr. Squatrito's ability to consistently ground policy discussions in empathy, culture, and broader student-centered considerations. Mr. Dial praised his conceptual abilities, public service instincts, and future leadership potential, expressing confidence that his talents will continue to benefit future communities. Dr. Shannon similarly encouraged Mr. Squatrito to consider future civic leadership opportunities, including a potential return to School Committee service later in life.

In his remarks, Mr. Squatrito expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity, candidly reflecting that what began as a tentative decision to fill a vacancy became an experience he genuinely came to love. He thanked his fellow Committee members for their extensive behind-the-scenes dedication and emphasized his admiration for the seriousness and care with which the Committee approaches its responsibilities. His comments reflected both humility and an evident appreciation for public service, closing his tenure on a notably thoughtful and gracious note.

Superintendent Evaluation

Chair Lesky presented the Committee's formal annual evaluation of Dr. Sarah Shannon, explaining that the review was compiled through the standardized DESE evaluation framework and reflected the collective assessment of all School Committee members. She emphasized that the process is designed to provide a comprehensive, balanced, and transparent evaluation of superintendent performance across all major leadership domains.

Chair Lesky and the Committee praised Dr. Shannon's extraordinary breadth of accomplishments during the 2025–2026 academic year, describing her leadership as exceptional across both strategic and operational priorities. While her stewardship of the highly complex FY27 budget process was identified as a defining achievement, the Committee also highlighted numerous additional accomplishments, including multiple senior administrative searches, strategic planning initiatives, development of the Project-Based Learning Steering Committee, successful labor negotiations culminating in a four-year contract, major facilities progress through MSBA acceptance, strengthened professional development systems, expanded parent engagement efforts, enhanced school safety initiatives, and completion of her doctoral degree while serving as Superintendent.

The Committee providing Dr. Shannon with the following evaluation:

- Standard I – Instructional Leadership: Exemplary
- Standard II – Management and Operations: Exemplary
- Standard III – Family and Community Engagement: Exemplary
- Standard IV – Professional Culture: Exemplary

The Committee's summative assessment described Dr. Shannon as a high-performing and exceptionally valuable Superintendent whose professionalism, strategic vision, transparency, collaboration, and relentless dedication have substantially strengthened both the district and the Town. Committee leadership specifically noted her ability to simultaneously manage immediate fiscal crises while continuing to advance long-term strategic priorities, describing her overall performance as exemplary and expressing strong confidence in her continued leadership moving forward.

Superintendent Performance Bonus

Following the Committee's formal Exemplary evaluation of Dr. Shannon, members engaged in extensive discussion regarding the discretionary performance bonus provision contained in Section 8 of her contract, which authorizes up to \$10,000 for exceptional performance. Committee members broadly agreed that the clause was specifically designed not for routine annual compensation, but rather to reward truly extraordinary leadership under exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Dial, who helped negotiate the contract language, emphasized that Dr. Shannon's performance this year precisely reflected the intent behind the provision: sustained exemplary leadership coupled with successful navigation of extraordinary district challenges, particularly the FY27 budget crisis. Mr. MacLellan strongly echoed this view, arguing that Dr. Shannon's exceptional performance across all DESE standards, strategic accomplishments, labor negotiations, district advancement, and budgetary leadership made a compelling case for the full discretionary award. Ms. Lesky similarly framed the bonus as an investment in one of the district's most valuable leadership assets, while Mr. Squatrito and Mr. Evans both expressed strong support, with some discussion around fiscal optics given broader budget pressures.

Ultimately, Committee consensus strongly favored awarding the maximum bonus, with members emphasizing that failing to fully recognize Dr. Shannon's extraordinary contributions would undermine both the contractual incentive structure and the district's commitment to rewarding truly exceptional public leadership.

A motion was made by Mr. Dial, seconded by Mr. MacLellan, to award Superintendent Dr. Sarah Shannon the maximum discretionary contractual bonus of \$10,000 for exemplary performance.

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

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. Evans, seconded by Mr. Squatrito, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Cohasset School Committee at 8:19 PM.

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

Documents/Materials Used

- National High School Model United Nations (NHSMUN) 2027 Proposal (Mr. Shawn Turner & Students)
- Superintendent Report – 2025–2026 District Goal Update
- Teaching and Learning – DESE Integrated Monitoring Review: Findings and Next Steps (Mr. Michael Stapleton)
- Budget, Resources and Governance – Gift from Parent School Organization (PSO)

Respectfully submitted,
Lance C. Dial
May 17, 2026