

# More views on school budget cuts

## Forced to make a choice

To the editor:

I am one of the more than 500 signatories to the petition submitted to the newspaper asking our representatives not to close one of our elementary schools.

The sad truth is that I hesitated to sign that petition because I was thinking of what else might be cut in order to make up this disgraceful \$800,000-plus shortfall. (We are fighting a war in Iraq that costs how much a day, and for whose benefit?)

In particular, I am deeply concerned for my 10th-grade daughter, a high honors student with impeccable grades in her academic classes whose deep passion in life is learning and making art. She has found her great talent and nourished her true passion because of the brilliant mentoring of Northampton High School's art teachers, and plans to take all four semesters of Honors Art, enabling her to compile and submit a knock-your-socks-off portfolio to college.

I calculated, "If we keep the elementary schools open, will those teachers and classes be cut (among others)?" I signed the petition, ashamed of my own "special interests" and outraged that I should have to make such choices.

Rabbi Nancy Flam  
Northampton

## The least damaging cuts

To the editor:

I would like to comment on the ongoing town budget/school closing debate. In your March 27 letters section, a reader expressed concern about the effects that cuts in bus transportation would have on the town. I fully agree with that reader's opinion, but I would like to point out that if budget conditions improve, cuts in bus

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GAZETTENET.

A budget shortfall has forced the Northampton school district to consider closing one of its elementary schools. Coverage of the story and more letters can be found on [www.gazettenet.com](http://www.gazettenet.com)

service can be restored.

The history of school closings in this town shows us that a school closing will not be reversed. If the town decides to close a school, it will be a permanent decision.

It seems likely that hard budget decisions will have to be made. No matter which way we turn, these decisions will have a negative impact on the town. Several of these difficult choices are reversible.

These include cuts to bus service, reduced school staffing, increased class size, and several other unpleasant changes.

They all trouble me, but they can all be reversed if conditions change. Permanent removal of a community of teachers, staff and children will create its own host of social and environmental issues, and it certainly violates the town's shiny new Sustainability Plan.

It may turn out that closing a school is the least damaging way to go, but it's not a decision that should be made in haste. Closing a school to balance the budget for next year will require that a decision be made in just a few weeks. This is not enough time to fully investigate the consequences of all our options. Better to make hard but reversible decisions now so we have another year to consider the hardest decision of all.

Graham Ridley  
Northampton

## A district in flux

To the editor:

For over 10 years the Northampton school system has been struggling with budget cuts and whittling away at each school. We are now at a point where the quality of education we provide our children is at great risk. The budget situation shows no sign of improving and looking at a long-term picture of the city budget had Mayor Higgins looking very scared. It's time to take a proactive approach to these continual financial shortfalls. The truth is we don't need to close one elementary school; we need to close two.

In so doing we have the opportunity to create two great elementary schools with 500 students each; we can call them Calvin Coolidge and Sojourner Truth Elementary Schools. With the savings, bring back programs and positions that have been eliminated over the past years, vice principals, an elementary librarian, elementary health education, reading recovery, instrumental music, and continue to develop after-school programs. At the middle and high school level, funds will be available to provide the staff needed to offer diverse, quality courses and to provide bus transportation for all children. Public education is a 13-year process and support is needed at every level. There will be some difficult losses but that is the case with every scenario; with thoughtful restructuring we can also have gains. Any alternative will leave us with bare-boned learning institutions to which no one wants to send their children.

Northampton School District needs to define itself as a school district in flux and then get to work to rebuild itself in a new model. Now is the time, not to fight for an individual building or program but to fight for the whole district.

Ellen Hirschberg  
Northampton