

## Trimming 'fat' from public schools before trimming staff

To the editor:

The Northampton public schools are facing budget cuts unprecedented since the year Proposition 2½ went into effect. The high school alone is being asked to trim its staff by 14 teachers — an almost 25 percent cut from the current level. Many classes at the high school are already over 30 students (when I retired I had a classroom of 38), with projections that some will reach the mid-forties next year. If these dire predictions come true, the impact on students will be devastating. Rather than first jumping to cut electives like art and music, can we be more creative in our thinking?

For example, does the high school really need two vice-principals in addition to one principal? During my career at the high school, Eugene DeFilippo did a fantastic job at running a smooth and disciplined school. And he did this by himself. Can the school get along with three guidance counselors for a few years, instead of four? Does the new two-year United States history requirement (instead of one year, as in the past) make sense, especially now that the Department of Education has postponed the history MCAS test until at least 2014? Does the school really need to require two years of health class, instead of one?

Can teachers be told to limit the material they copy for students? Might the school committee members forego their stipend for the year as an indication of intent to show solidarity with the teachers? Is the alternative high school in Florence really necessary at this time or could this school be absorbed into the present high school system?

Indeed, there is much "fat" that can be trimmed from the system before talk of school closings and teacher reduction is necessary. Let's be creative in our thinking and trim the budget in ways that have the least negative impact on students.

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