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## Schools' careful budgeting yields city a \$55K surplus

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Saturday, August 9, 2008

EASTHAMPTON - After closing out the books for the fiscal year that ended June 30, the School Committee returned a \$55,000 surplus to the city.

"I felt all along that it's the responsible, fiscally prudent thing to do," said School Committee Chairman Thomas Brown. "The city gives us upwards of \$16 million to operate, and if we have the ability to operate the school for less than that then it should go back to the city."

Brown, a School Committee member for about eight years, said this is the first time the department has returned money to the city during his tenure.

"In light of what's going on around us in schools, this is a huge positive for Easthampton and the operation of our school district," Brown said.

Superintendent of Schools Deborah Carter said the surplus was generated in part because of the school district's "very conservative" fuel cost estimates, as well as conservative estimates for vocational and special education tuitions. Tuitions, fuel and utility costs aren't finalized until the end of the year. Carter said the department planned for "worst-case scenarios" because "things happen until the end of June."

"We spend carefully," Carter said in a telephone interview Friday.

"I certainly don't think those (costs) will come in as low next year as they did this year, but that's the reality."

The surplus will go back into the city's general fund.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik said money coming back to the general fund is hardly notable, merely a routine occurrence.

"There's nothing significant about it," Tautznik said. "It's the way you close the books at the end of the school year. The new budget starts July 1 so you have a new barrel of money to spend and money left in the barrel from the last time around gets returned. There's no secrets; there's no magic; no unusual circumstances."

Small amounts of other surplus money also went toward completing the \$247,000 pool painting project at White Brook Middle School, the purchase of a \$16,000 pot washer for the White Brook Middle School cafeteria and into the school choice account.

Some money has also been put aside for retroactive pay raises for teachers, who still have not settled a contract with the School Committee and city.

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