

The Williston Northampton School is a Good Neighbor – In Good Times and Bad

Even in the midst of one of the worst recessions in recent memory, the Williston Northampton School remains committed to providing financial assistance to local Easthampton groups, sharing its facilities and inviting the larger community to many on-campus events.

Williston is an independent boarding and day school for 540 students in grades 7 through 12 and attracts students from all over the country. Since its founding in 1841, the school has played a major role in the economic health of the Easthampton area.

According to its community impact statement, in the 2007-08 fiscal year the school's payroll totaled \$8.9 million, with \$5.6 million going to Easthampton residents.

In the same period, Williston purchased nearly \$600,000 in goods and services from area businesses. That figure does not include purchases made by students, their families and other campus visitors or the additional activity and business brought in by groups that come to campus, such as summer athletic camps.

Last year Williston families who live on campus sent 18 children to Easthampton public schools and gave a total of \$631,500 in financial aid to the 33 students from Easthampton who attended Williston.

The school spoke in favor of improvements to the local water and sewer systems through an additional assessment based on usage volume, even though Williston is one of the systems' largest users.

The school and its contractors also contributed to the city in the form of fees and building permits for construction, and campus residents paid excise taxes on a number of vehicles.

In addition, Williston Northampton:

- Made \$20,000 contributions annually to the Emily Williston Library over the past several years
- Helped establish, and contributed more than \$15,000 to the Easthampton Learning Foundation
- Gave the Easthampton Parks and Recreation Department a \$4,200 discount for ice time for public skating on the Williston rink

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"We're going to deal with it and we'll get through it, and when we do, our economy is uniquely positioned to bounce back," the senator said. "The Massachusetts economy is a model of what the 21st century is looking for."

Massachusetts does not have the natural resources of other states, he said. Our strength is in our educational and intellectual resources, as represented by MANS&C member schools and colleges.

Advocate for Education

On Beacon Hill, Panagiotakos's advocacy and work over the last four years have resulted in unprecedented state investments in public higher education through increased appropriations and a landmark higher education bond bill, which was recently passed and signed into law by the governor.

The foundation of the senator's work on public higher education has been affordability, quality and economic development.

The school also:

- Assists with plowing and policing all the town roads running through the campus
- Helps provide upkeep for a section of the Manhan Rail Trail
- Participates in the Hampshire County Big Brothers Big Sisters program
- Contributes to a long list of local organizations

Use of Facilities

Williston's facilities, including meeting rooms, its swimming pool, and sports facilities, are used by many local groups. In each case, usage fees are either waived or significantly reduced. In one example, when the city was looking for alternatives after the Whitebrook Middle School swimming pool was closed for repairs, Williston provided its pool for use by the high school and the Parks and Recreation Department so their swimming programs could continue.

In addition, the Kiwanis Club has used the school's Galbraith Field for its annual fireworks display for more than 35 years. The event raises revenues for local scholarships and to help purchase new equipment for the Easthampton Fire Department, among other things.

The school also invites members of the Easthampton community to campus during the year for free art gallery exhibits, writers' workshops and photography presentations by nationally renowned artists.

Students and Employees

Williston employees also volunteer their time for a variety of civic and charitable groups, such as the Easthampton School Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Center Pepin PTO and Easthampton Learning Foundation.

The students give back to the community by doing yard work for local seniors, hosting the school's semi-annual blood drive and volunteering at regional Special Olympics events, among other things.

He spearheaded the creation of the TEAMS Academy at UMass Lowell to encourage local high school students to pursue careers in math and science. An advocate for investment in the innovative economy, he also secured funds for the construction of the Emerging Technologies Innovation Center at UMass Lowell, an \$80 million nanotechnology and bio-manufacturing research center of excellence.

Panagiotakos was co-chair of a Senate Task Force on Public Higher Education in 2005, which proposed a seven-year comprehensive plan to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of public higher education throughout the commonwealth.

Before being elected to the Senate in 1997, Panagiotakos served two terms in the House of Representatives and two terms on the Lowell School Committee.

The senator attended Phillips Academy in Andover, received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University and has a juris doctorate from Suffolk University Law School. He maintains a law practice not far from his home in Lowell.