

**A Narrative Biographical Summary of
Christopher T. Cross**

**States' Impact on Federal Education Policy
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As told to Anita Hecht, Life History Services, August 2013

Christopher T. Cross was born on May 30, 1940 in Lakewood, Ohio. Both Chris's maternal and paternal families were of English and German heritage. His maternal grandparents settled in southern Michigan in the town of Jackson, where his grandfather was an engineer for the New York Central Railroad. Chris's mother, Virginia Taylor, was one of five siblings. Unfortunately, one of her sisters died in the influenza epidemic of 1918. Virginia completed high school in 1929, went on to become a registered nurse, and worked at Lakewood Hospital where Chris was born.

Chris's paternal grandparents lived in Cleveland, Ohio. His paternal grandfather was a house painter and his grandmother a homemaker. Chris's father, Sterling Cross, was an only child. Though he didn't graduate from high school, Sterling earned a business school certificate and was employed in the defense industry during World War II. After that, he managed the estate of a well-to-do family in Kirtland. After the Cross family moved to California in 1955, Sterling Cross worked for the aerospace industry until retirement.

Chris's parents met and married in Cleveland around 1934 and had two sons. Their eldest was Chris, followed eight years later by his brother Sterling Cross. Chris spent most of his youth in Kirtland, Ohio, a rural town to the east of Cleveland. There he attended public schools. His family was Congregationalist by faith and Republican in political affiliation. Though neither was intensely political or religious, Chris states that his parents placed great value on education.

When Chris was fifteen, the Crosses moved to the Westchester neighborhood of Los Angeles. Chris started tenth grade at Westchester High School. It was quite an adjustment, going from a class of 30 in Kirtland to a class of almost 430 students. Nonetheless, Chris excelled. He became a finalist for American Field Service, worked for the school newspaper, and was a member of Westchester High School's Honor Society.

Chris graduated from high school in 1958, and was accepted at several colleges. He chose Whittier College, incidentally President Richard Nixon's alma mater, since they offered him a significant academic scholarship. While at Whittier, Chris's interest in political science blossomed due to Whittier's first-rate political science faculty. Chris became very active in extracurricular activities. He was editor of the student newspaper for two years, ran for student body president, and became president of the political

science honor society. Also, between his junior and senior years, Chris got married and started a family.

In 1962, Chris graduated from Whittier with Bachelors degree in political science. He states that at the age of twenty-one, the legal voting age of his day, he registered as a Republican. Today, he considers himself an independent.

After college, Chris went to work in the public relations office of Whittier College, where he remained for three years. During this time, he became active in his professional association of college public relations professionals.

In 1965, Chris was hired as the assistant to the president of California State University in Los Angeles, a position he held for the next two years. In 1967, he moved to northern California to do fundraising for the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California.

While living in Stockton, Chris ran for his local school board. His campaign manager, Pat Story, happened to be the daughter U.S. Senator Len B. Jordan (R-ID) Also in 1968, Chris helped run Nixon's election committee in San Joaquin County. Impressed by his work, Pat recommended Chris to her father for a political position in Washington D.C.

In 1969, Chris was then hired by the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to work as a special assistant for Youth and Student Affairs in the office of the secretary of HEW. He moved himself, his wife, and two young daughters across the country to Washington D.C.

It was an intense time throughout the country. After the Kent State riots and shootings of 1970, President Nixon created a President's Commission on Campus Unrest. The executive director of the commission hired Chris to do external relations for this independent commission and to lead some research activities.

After this brief stint, Chris states that didn't necessarily want to return to HEW, but when he was offered an interesting position as deputy assistant secretary of legislation for education, he accepted. By then, Elliot Richardson was the new secretary of HEW, and Chris became one of the principal liaisons between the Secretary and the Office of Education.

This position signaled Chris's entrance into the field of federal education policy. Chris's primary duty at HEW was as the Nixon administration's front person working on the 1972 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which created the Pell grant program and Title IX, as related to women in sports. In 1971, Chris also earned a masters degree in Government from California State University in Los Angeles.

In 1972, Elliot Richardson left HEW for the Department of Defense, and Representative Al Quie (R-MN) became the senior Republican on the House Committee on Education

and Labor. He offered Chris a job as senior education consultant to the committee. Chris accepted and served in this capacity from 1972 to 1978, helping to craft several reauthorizations of the ESEA. He became the Republican Staff Director in 1977 and was involved with the legislation that eventually triggered the creation of the U.S. Department of Education in 1979.

In 1978, when Al Quie became the Governor of Minnesota, Chris did not want to follow him to the cold Midwest and instead left Capitol Hill for the private sector, where he spent the next ten years in the area of executive management. Since Chris had been involved earlier in the creation of the National Institutes of Education, the research arm of HEW, he was offered a position from Abt Associates, based in Cambridge, MA, to direct their Washington Office. Abt was a policy research organization that looked at a variety of issues such as education, health, and the economy. Chris spent two years at ABT and was then recruited by a division of Westinghouse Learning (based out of Iowa) to set up their Washington office. While there, he helped win a large federal contract to operate information systems for the Pell Grant program. He was then hired by University Research Corporation as a senior VP and then later became president of the group.

After the election of George H.W. Bush in 1988, Chris returned to federal education policy work and accepted a position as Assistant Secretary of Education for OERI (Office of Education Research and Improvement) in the U.S. Department of Education, where he stayed until 1991. During these years, Lauro Cavazos was the Secretary of Education. In 1991, Cavazos was unceremoniously dismissed and replaced by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN). Lamar, in turn, dismissed most of Cavazos staff, including Chris in 1991.

From 1991 to 1994, Chris was the Director of Education Initiatives for the Business Roundtable, as well as chaired the National Assessment of the Title I Independent Review Panel on Evaluation for the U.S. Department of Education. The panel was created in the 1994 ESEA reauthorization and existed until 2000.

Then from 1994 to 2001, he was president and CEO of the Council for Basic Education, a non-profit organization that promoted high standards in education. During these years, Chris was involved in research, advocacy, and technical assistance to promote higher standards at the elementary and secondary levels.

Also from 1993 to 1997, Chris served on the Maryland State Board of Education and was president from 1994-1997. This signaled a shift for Chris from engaging almost exclusively in federal policy work to becoming involved on the state side of policy work. From 1997 to 2002, he chaired the National Research Council Panel on Minority Representation in Special Education

In 2001, Chris retired from the Council for Basic Education and moved back to California. Upon leaving DC, he received a grant to write a book on federal policy, *Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age*, published in 2004, with an updated edition released in 2010.

In 2004, he founded Cross & Joftus, an education policy consulting firm that works closely with states and local districts on issues of education policy. Chris has continued to write extensively and has been a Senior Fellow with the Hunt Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, the Center for Education Policy, and with the Education Commission of the States.

In more recent years, Chris chaired a NRC (National Research Council) panel on Early Childhood Mathematics, and was on the Board of Trustees of Whittier College. Chris also served on the board of The New Teacher Project and EdSource. His current involvement includes serving as Commissioner for WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges), which accredits four-year institutions of higher education, and serving on the board of DBASSE (Division of Behavior, Social Science, and Education of the National Research Council), the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences.