



STATES' IMPACT ON FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TED SANDERS



Narrative Biographical Summary

Supplemental to the recorded oral history interview
conducted with Ted Sanders in April 2015
on behalf of New York State Archives

compiled by Anita Hecht, Life History Services, LLC
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Project Background

While U.S. education policy is widely discussed and well documented, the impact of our nation's states on that policy has received much less attention. Launched in 2003 and led by the New York State Archives, the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project has worked to create and foster the use of a comprehensive, accessible, nationwide historical record that documents the efforts of states to affect U.S. education policy since the mid-twentieth century.

The Project has connected leaders in state and national education with archivists to ensure the preservation of and access to the record of education policy, and supported sustainable connections between the two communities. The policymakers are themselves repositories of stories and wisdom not captured in the written record. The interviews presented here enrich the written record of education policy during this dynamic and critical period. Our narrators helped to shape the course of education policy in the United States over the past decades. We invite you to learn from their unique experiences and perspectives.

To the Reader

This narrative biographical summary is supplemental to the oral history interview recorded in April 2015 between Ted Sanders and Anita Hecht of Life History Services, LLC, on behalf of the States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project of New York State Archives. Accompanying this biographical summary is an oral history interview and print transcripts, also housed at New York State Archives.

Oral history interviews contain first-person accounts of historical events, individual experiences and significant memories. In this spirit, let it be understood that these interviews do not attempt to recount "absolute truth." Instead, they intend to relate the stories that hold meaning for the particular narrator. Interviews are not always chronological or complete with regards to specific data. Accuracy is always the goal, though there may be corrections, and certainly additions, to any oral history.

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**A Narrative Biographical Summary of
John Theodore “Ted” Sanders**

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New York State Archives
Oral History Project
2015**

A Narrative Biographical Summary of John Theodore Sanders

As told to Anita Hecht, Life History Services, January 2015

John Theodore Sanders was born on September 19, 1941, in Littlefield, Texas, where he lived for two weeks. His parents then moved to Vega for two years, then to Dimmitt where he started school, and eventually to Friona, Texas, where Ted grew up and later graduated from high school in 1959.

Ted was the oldest of three sons born to John and Phyllis Sanders. His maternal family were of English and French origins and immigrated to New York prior to the Revolutionary War. Ted's mother, Phyllis Cook, grew up in Sherman, Texas, where she graduated from high school. His mother and father met in Littlefield, Texas, where his father was the senior, enlisted non-commissioned officer at the Civilian Conservation Corps camp. His mother traveled to West Texas to visit her brother, Col. Courtney Cook, who was serving as the commanding officer of the CCC camp. Phyllis studied graphic arts beyond high school, and later in life she studied art at West Texas State University. She became a fine artist. Her oil paintings were known throughout Texas and, for many years, she was the only Texas artist carried in Texas fine art galleries and The King Galleries in Dallas/Fort Worth.

Ted's father, John Duff (Jay) Sanders Jr., was of Scottish descent and came of age in West Texas during the Dust Bowl and Depression years. Even though both of his parents had college degrees (his father in accounting and his mother in music), there was no money to send their seven children to college. Nevertheless John became a self-trained, successful engineer. He spent his career working for the U.S. Soil and Conservation Service, designing and building earthen dams, locating deep-water wells, and planning contour farms in West Texas.

Religion, public education, and the Boy Scouts were greatly valued in Ted's family. Both parents firmly believed that college education was the path to a better life, and Ted and his brothers all earned multiple undergraduate and graduate degrees, including two doctorates.

The family was Southern Baptist, though as Ted states, they were not fundamentalist or strict in their practice. Both of Ted's parents were active in leadership positions in the Boy Scouts. They started the first Cub Scout pack in Friona, and Ted's father became a Boy Scout Troop leader when Ted and his middle brother became Scouts. Ted and his brother became the first Eagle Scouts in their community.

Ted attended public schools in Friona where two teachers, Cornelia Kelly, his third grade teacher, and Dempsey Watkins, his high school math teacher and basketball coach, deeply influenced him. In addition to playing basketball, he was active in almost every extra-curricular activity available in his small high school. He was president of the Math and Science club and the Thespian Club. He secured a paper route at the age of eleven and ran it through high school graduation. Summers he served as a staff member at Don Harrington Boy Scout Camp just outside Amarillo, Texas. He graduated from Friona High School in 1959. Given both his intellectual and physical prowess, he was offered several basketball and academic scholarships. He chose to attend Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas, on a basketball scholarship. A career in basketball was not in the cards however, as Ted suffered a major knee injury during his first year.

By 1962, Ted had earned a bachelors degree in mathematics. Incidentally, both of his brothers also earned college degrees in mathematics at Wayland. At the time, Ted's goal was to become a research mathematician and study number theory. During his years at Wayland Baptist, Ted met this future wife, Beverly McSwain. They were married during their final year of college. Upon graduation, Ted followed Beverly to Mountain Home,

Idaho, where she got a position as a music teacher. Since Ted needed to save money for graduate school, he got an emergency teaching credential from the State of Idaho due to the shortage of teachers and started teaching math in grades six through eight in Mountain Home.

From 1962 to 1965, the couple remained in Idaho and Ted states that he accidentally fell in love with teaching and “found his place.” After leaving Idaho, the couple moved to Pueblo Pintado, New Mexico, where Ted worked as a second grade teacher for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Beverly stayed home with their two young children. He describes the experience of learning to teach non-native speakers as both positive and challenging.

In 1966, Ted returned to graduate school at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, after winning a competitive National Science Foundation fellowship. There he earned a Masters degree in Mathematics. The couple then returned to New Mexico, which they loved, and Ted taught high school mathematics in the Albuquerque public school system from 1966 to 1971. The Sanders family grew and two more children were born in New Mexico.

In 1971, Ted sought a new position and was hired by the New Mexico Department of Education to develop a new mathematics curriculum. His work was initially funded by Title V of ESEA. This move marked a pivotal shift in Ted’s life, as he began a long and fruitful association with his mentor, then New Mexico’s State Superintendent, Leonard DeLayo. Ted was the first young person that DeLayo hired in the Department, who was neither an administrator nor a school principal.

Ted remained in the State Department of Education for the next eight years until 1979, and was groomed to take over DeLayo’s position upon his (DeLayo’s) retirement. During

these eight years, Ted he had held every major leadership position in the department, which included handling relationships with the state legislature.

By the late 1970s, DeLayo was not yet ready to retire and encouraged Ted to apply for the position of Chief State School Officer for the State of Nevada. Ted was selected by the Nevada State Board of Education and served in this position from 1979 to 1985.

In 1985, Ted was recruited by Dr. Vern Cunningham, the Ohio State University Dean of Education, who was conducting a search for a state superintendent for the Illinois State Board of Education. Ted was selected and served as Illinois State Superintendent until 1989, when he was invited to Washington DC by President George H.W. Bush to serve as Deputy Secretary of Education under Lauro Cavazos and later under Lamar Alexander. At first Ted declined the offer, but was eventually persuaded.

Prior to this invitation, Ted and his deputy in Illinois, Nelson Ashline, wrote three policy papers that were to become an integral part of Bush's education goals. Ted sent the papers to all the presidential candidates in both parties that were testing the waters in Iowa and New Hampshire. He and Ashline believed three specific actions had the potential to increase support for the fledging education reform that was fermenting in the states, and eventually could focus federal action on policies, programs, and funding that would help. The policy papers included a call for the new president to convene a summit of the nation's governors to address the improvement of the nation's K-12 schools, the creation of a "Committee of 100," to be chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, to set national education goals, and the creation of a set of voluntary high school exit exams based on NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress) tests, to be used by parents and communities in judging the quality of high schools.

Ted served the US Department of Education until 1991, when he was named Ohio state superintendent of public instruction. He states that he allowed his name to be

considered for the Ohio position based upon a desire to return to a state superintendency. He loved the role of chief state school officer and there were not many large population states in which to serve. Therefore, he viewed the Ohio vacancy as an attractive possibility. Vern Cunningham pressed Ted to throw his hat in the ring, plus Governor George Voinovich personally called and encouraged him to apply. During these years, state governors sought a greater role for themselves in shaping education policy. Indeed, Governor Voinovich sat in on all interviews for this position, which Ted reports was a direct outgrowth of the Bush Summit. Ted enjoyed the intersection of policy and politics and served as Chief State School Officer for the State of Ohio under Governor Voinovich from 1991 to 1995.

After completing his tenure in Ohio in 1995 Ted taught mathematics at West Texas State University and education leadership at the University of Nevada at Reno. He was then recruited to serve as President of Southern Illinois University (SIU) in Carbondale, Illinois. SIU had campuses in Edwardsville, East St. Louis, a school of medicine in Springfield, and a school of dental medicine in Alton. Ted was responsible for leading all the campuses.

Then In 2000, Ted was recruited by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), where he served as President for the next four and a half years. Since 1965, ECS has been tracking education policy, following research, and creating opportunities for state policy makers to learn from one another.

In 2005, Ted became Executive Chairman of the Cardean Learning Group, an education company. Cardean (formerly UNEXT) developed an online MBA program with the University of Chicago, Stanford University, Carnegie Mellon University, Columbia University and the London School of Economics. Later, they developed online degree programs for the New York Institute of Technology. Ted remained there until 2008.

Since then, Ted has served on a number of corporate and non-profit boards. He was lead director for Plato Learning LLC, vice-chair of Knowledge Universe LLC, chair and board member of ACT, Inc. and chair of The Teacher's Support Network LLC. Over the last few years, Ted has been winding down to full retirement.

Today Ted devotes his time to three non-profit corporations. He co-chairs, along with former Secretary of Education Richard Riley, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. He serves on the boards of the National Institute on Excellence in Teaching and his alma mater, Wayland Baptist University. Additionally, he advises early stage start-up companies in education and technology.