

**A Narrative Biographical Summary of
Michael W. Kirst**

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

Michael W. Kirst was born in West Reading, Pennsylvania on August 1, 1939. He grew up in Wyomissing, an industrial area outside of West Reading, which today has the dubious honor of being the nation's poorest city.

On his maternal side, Mike's mother, Marian Wiele, came from a leading industrial family of German Lutheran roots. Though she did not attend college, Mike states that many of his maternal relatives were well-educated and received Ivy League or Seven Sisters college educations.

Mike paternal family was also German and had middle class roots. His father, Russell Kirst, was a graduate of Gettysburg College and owned a small painting and paper hanging business. Both sides of Mike family were Republican by affiliation. Mike states that his maternal grandfather often repeated that Roosevelt ruined the country.

Mike grew up attending public schools and graduated from Wyomissing High School in 1957. He recalls Wyomissing as a wonderful high school. It was Mike's football coach that shepherded him through the admissions process to Dartmouth College. Like all Ivy League colleges, Dartmouth did not give football scholarships, but Mike was awarded an academic scholarship, which made his attendance affordable. After his first year, Mike was then awarded the Alfred P. Sloan Scholarship to Dartmouth, which paid all of his tuition and living expenses. Incidentally, Alfred P. Sloan was then head of General Motors.

At Dartmouth, Mike focused on scholarship and fraternity life. He received his A.B. in Economics in 1961 with highest honors, and graduated Summa Cum Laude. He also became interested in government policy, always affiliating as a Democrat.

Mike went on to graduate school, to concurrently pursue a Masters in Public Administration and a PhD in Political Economy and Government at the Littauer School (now the Kennedy School of Government) at Harvard University. Mike earned his M.P.A. in 1963, and his Ph.D. in 1964. Ironically, Mike states that the Harvard School of Education was right next door to the Littauer School, though he never once set foot in it.

After Harvard, set his sights on Washington DC and was hired by the U.S. Bureau of the Budget as a budget examiner. In a matter of pure serendipity, he chose to investigate K-12 education for the Office of Education, and became staff to President Johnson's Gardner Task Force. In 1965, at the young age of twenty-five, he found himself writing a memo for President Lyndon B. Johnson, and telling then Commissioner of Education, Frank Keppel, that the administration needed reduce the number of employees.

By 1966, Mike's interest in education policy had blossomed, and he transferred from the Bureau of the Budget to the U.S. Office of Education. He was hired as Special Assistant to the Director of Title I implementation. Indeed, he was the only third person ever hired in this capacity. Over three months time, he helped to administer the billion dollars of new ESEA and Title I monies that had been appropriated through the passage of the ESEA in 1965.

Also in 1965, Mike became the Associate Director of the President's Commission on White House Fellows and for the National Advisory Council on Education of Disadvantaged Children, where he advised on the implementation Title I. In 1967, Mike was then appointed Director of Program Planning and Evaluation for the U.S. Office of

Education's Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education. In this position, he evaluated the effectiveness of existing programs, as well as planned new ones.

Mike cites these years as pivotal in terms of establishing both the aggressive new federal role in education, as well as establishing the structure by which the new laws would be implemented. Indeed, Title V of the ESEA was designated specially to work through state governments, more specifically through funding and maintaining state education departments, so that they could administer federal law. This particular structure was unlike other governmental structures (i.e. the Department of Labor), which often created regional offices to implement federal policy. To this day, Mike states that 70% of the salaries and expenditures of state education departments are paid for by the federal government.

In 1968-69, Mike's career departed from the field of education policy, when Senator Joseph S. Clark (D-PA) hired Mike as staff director for the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Manpower, Employment and Poverty, which Clark chaired. In 1969, he then returned to the world of academia, invited by Stanford University's Business Administration and School of Education departments. Mike taught at Stanford from 1969 to 2006. He was then named Professor Emeritus in 2007. From 1975 to 1977, Mike also became a member of the California State Board of Education, and was elected President of the Board from 1977-1981. Today, he's the only one of the group of SIFEPP narrators that is currently in public office, serving as President of the Board of Education for the State of California until 2015.

Mike has published extensively over his career. One of his latest works is, *The Political Dynamics of American Education* (Richmond, Ca.:McCutchan, 2009) with Fred Wirt.