Interview with Ted Sanders
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Interviewer: Philip Pogue

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Pogue: This is Phil Pogue. We're at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois. This is July 30, 2014. We're doing a phone interview with Dr. Ted Sanders, regarding the 1985 Educational Reform Act and its importance to the state of Illinois and to the education process in the state, in addition to its impact on all stakeholders involved in education.[1] So, Dr. Sanders, to begin with, would you review your family history and your general background information?



Dr. Ted Sanders

[1] The 1985 Educational Reform Act, Public Act 84-126, Volume 1 of the Laws of Illinois for the Eighty-Fourth General Assembly (1985 session), pp. 1351-1470. The act consisted of 169 educational reforms and changes, including 1) state testing, learning goals/standards, and school report cards, 2) teacher and principal evaluation, 3) residential statewide math-science academy, 4) staff development, 5) prekindergarten at risk, 6) levy equalization for unit districts (education, transportation, and operations/maintenance), 7) grants for programs in agriculture, science literacy, gifted students, summer school, elementary foreign language, bilingual, reading improvement, truant, and alternative education, 8) guidelines for school reorganization (later dropped), 9) educational service centers (later dropped), 10) including Chicago teachers in a state certification system, 11) testing potential beginning teachers, 12) funding full day kindergarten, 13) defining purpose for schooling, 14) new teaching certification endorsements, 15) reporting child abuse, 16) school discipline plans, 17) creating Chicago advisory councils, 18) increasing principal leadership, and 19) creating a new school holiday, Casimir Pulaski Day.

Sanders: Sure. I was born on September 19, 1941, in Littlefield, Texas—that's Lamb County—located in the south plains of Texas in the far western part of Texas. I attended undergraduate work at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas, did my master's degree in mathematics at Washington State University [Pullman, Washington], did a EdD [PhD in Education] at the University of Nevada at Reno. I have, as an adult, lived across the country, actually dictated by the steps in my career.

My mother grew up in Grayson County, Sherman, Texas. Her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents were among the early settlers in that part of Texas. My maternal grandfather was, among other things, a county commissioner. On my father's side, my granddad came to Texas, attended college in Waco, stayed, entering business and eventually, the latter part of his life, spent as a farmer.

My parents both grew up in the Great Depression.[2] In fact, the conditions out in west Texas and the Depression and the dust bowl, the great drought in that part of the world, forced my dad to leave home—because his parents couldn't feed all of their children—and fundamentally worked, followed work, all the way up into the northwestern part of the United States during those years.[3] I'm kind of a first generation product of parents, at least one parent, whose family suffered pretty significantly in the Great Depression.

Pogue: Was high school also in Texas?

Sanders: Yes, I attended high school and elementary school in Friona, Texas, a small town with about 2,500 people, just thirty-five miles from the New Mexico border.

Pogue: Could you give us some background on your work history?

Sanders: Sure. I did an undergraduate degree in mathematics. My intention was either to become a mathematician or potentially do research in mathematics. Number theory was my interest, which would require teaching at the university level.

I got married my last year in college and needed to work. Actually, Idaho was hiring teachers without degrees but were close to having a degree completed. Beverly [Sanders' wife] and I went to Idaho where we taught in the public schools there for three years, while we both finished our undergraduate degrees.

[2] The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression that took place mostly during the 1930s and began in the U.S. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great Depression)
[3] Early in the Great Depression, drought and erosion combined to cause the dust bowl, which shifted hundreds of thousands of displaced persons off their farms in the Midwest (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great Depression)

I actually found out I loved teaching. Public school teaching was a career that found me instead of me finding it or planning for it. A number of years I taught in Idaho and then New Mexico.

Eventually, I went to work as a mathematic specialist for the New Mexico Department of Education, spent ten years there under the mentorship of Leonard Delayo, the state superintendent. Leonard, for some reason, decided fairly early on in my tenure there that he was going to groom me to replace him. So, across a ten-year period, I did just about every leadership position in the senior leadership positions of the New Mexico Public Education Department.

I went to Nevada as state superintendent in January of 1979, and then, six years later, came to Illinois as state superintendent. I was hired by the Illinois Board [of Education] after a search was completed in, I think, October of eighty-four.

From there, I went to Washington [D.C.], having been asked by the president to serve as the deputy secretary of education in his administration. That was President George Herbert Walker Bush. From there [I] went to Ohio as state superintendent, doing my third state superintendency.

Then in 1995, the Southern Illinois University Board contacted me and asked if I'd be interested in being considered for the presidency of the university. I said yes. They eventually selected me, and then the capstone in my career, I was selected and served as the president of the Education Commission of the States, which is an interstate compact, doing policy research for both K-12 [kindergarten through twelfth grade] and higher education.[4]

After I retired from ECS, I joined a number of corporate boards and eventually, because one of the boards I was serving on—and at the time chairing—parted ways with their CEO [Chief Executive Officer], I spent about two-and-a-half years serving as the chief executive of a privately-held higher education corporation, based in Chicago. So, basically, about a forty-five, forty-six-year career in education.

Pogue: When you talked about serving as state superintendent in Ohio, Nevada, Illinois and New Mexico, were those similar types of positions, or was the authority of the state superintendent different in each one?

Sanders: Actually, they probably were more alike than they were different, but each had unique authorities that would not be found in the others. For example, in New Mexico the State Board of Education had the authority to intervene and take over failing school districts, either failing academically or failing

[4] The Education Commission of the States (ECS) partners with education policy leaders to share resources and expertise. (https://www.ecs.org.)

financially. And we did so with some degree of frequency. I think we took over maybe four districts during the time I was in New Mexico. That's rather unusual authority.

In Nevada, the state superintendent has the authority, with the consent of the interim finance committee of the legislature, the ability to award additional monies for operation purposes to school districts, between legislative sessions if, after analysis, it was determined that financial help from the State was warranted. So, there are some unique pieces, but more likely, though, the powers and duties were actually fairly similar.

Pogue: You indicated that you fell in love with teaching when you were in Idaho. What were some of those things that you found rewarding, as a teacher in that state?

Sanders: Actually, the thing I found most rewarding was the engagement in helping young adolescents to make decisions about their lives, while also teaching them mathematics. Also, I enjoyed helping students blossom in their learning in mathematics. Many of those students thought that they didn't like math and didn't think they could do it and could actually find out differently and learn that, actually, that subject matter could be pretty important to them in life. But, more than teaching mathematics, I enjoyed the interactions and the opportunity, in a small way, to help shape who these young people would become.

Pogue: What led you to Illinois?

Sanders: It's very simple. Vern Cunningham, who had been at the University of Illinois and, at the time, was at Ohio State University. He'd just stepped down from the dean's position, had worked as a consultant for the Illinois State Board of Education, off and on across the years, and assisting them, particularly, with a retreat that they did each year. The board, whenever they were hiring the replacement for Don Gill [Illinois State Superintendent of Education, 1981-1984] decided to use Vern Cunningham as a search consultant.

I had seen the opening for the Illinois state superintendency, but it had not even crossed my mind to apply for it. Vern called me and suggested that I ought to throw my hat into the ring for consideration and really personally encouraged me to apply. I'm sure he did a lot of other people that he thought would be good candidates. I was, naturally, very interested in the position. I was doing the job at a very sparsely populated and rather unique state and was really curious, could I do the job in a large, complex state like Illinois? So, given that he encouraged me, I put in an application. So, Vern Cunningham is the reason why. That and the fact that the state board, with whatever reasoning they were using at the time, thought I was what they were looking for.

Pogue: When you came to Illinois, you were coming from Nevada where you had, probably, a large school district area in Clark County. But Illinois has the Chicago system, the suburban system and urban areas, in what we call downstate. Then you had the rural schools, unit districts and high school districts and elementary districts. Was that a difference that you hadn't seen before?

Sanders: The separate high school and elementary districts, I'd not personally encountered before, but of course, I'd read about them in the literature. But none of the states where I'd worked had; all had unit school districts. I know it is rather strange, but on the demographics side, it's more a matter of scale.

There are similarities too. Clark County was the Chicago of Nevada, if you want to think of it that way, still is today. Reno, or Washoe County, was not as big as Clark, but certainly another large... You could think about it as something like a district, like U-46 [Elgin Area School District] or any number of... I think U-46 is still the second largest district in Illinois. But we also had suburban regions, as well. There were suburban areas; they just happen to be contained within, like Clark County. You had Las Vegas and then you have Henderson and Boulder that were actually bedroom, suburban areas. You certainly had the same kind of situation with the downstate, with both really rural, many remote rural, schools and districts, and then what you'd consider probably mid-size cities with Elko, Yerington, perhaps Tonopah. So, we weren't an exact, one-to-one match; strangely, they had similar characteristics driving their interests, both educationally and in other political dimensions.

Pogue: When you came to Illinois, what were the major responsibilities that the state board had?

Sanders: Of course, they had the broad authority to set policy, to set the conditions under which teachers would teach, overseeing all of the federal programs. They had some limited authorities in contract negotiations and so forth. But the specific thing that they were interested in, whenever they hired me, was...They had been working on these studies, internally, that were driving the work of the Illinois Commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education.

All of the research work and everything driving the considerations of that commission were coming out of a small work group over in the State Board of Education. The board was very interested in having the new superintendent able to work with the legislature and others to actually see that legislation passed. I think they'd kind of grown weary, candidly, of not being able to get things done with the General Assembly and wanted more than anything else to hire someone this round who could work very effectively with legislators and with the governor to get that legislation passed and implemented. I think, from their perspective, that was by far the most

important consideration, as they hired a new superintendent, from among all of their duties and responsibilities.

Pogue: At the time you were coming in, there was a document that became known as ""A Nation at Risk"." [5] You mentioned that a number of commission studies were going on and hearings in Illinois, regarding the state of elementary and secondary education, and you had many other researchers publishing a number of things at this juncture. How important were all of those to the movement that eventually would lead to the 1985 Education Reform Act?

Sanders: Actually, they're extremely important. In fact, I think you'll find many of the ideas, perhaps in different forms, found in one or more of those reports. Nothing came close to *"*A Nation at Risk,*"* however, for setting a climate of expectation and the way Ted [Terrel] Bell [President Reagan's secretary of education] and President Reagan held those regional forums and attracted governors and legislators and state boards and state superintendents and local boards and superintendents to those regional meetings around the country.

The media play around *"*A Nation at Risk.*"* Its very compelling language even helped set a climate. That report was released in 1983, and it literally transformed the national conversation. I don't think the country had ever talked about the need to improve its schools, that came close to the character of the conversation that took place coming out of 1983, so that literally, every—not every, there were a couple of states that did not. All, I think, but two states, maybe three, started conversations inside their state about what do we do; how do we understand this?

In Nevada, I had Milt Goldberg, who was the staff director producing "A Nation at Risk," out several times, meeting with legislators and local boards and superintendents. We also used John Goodlad's *A Place Called School.*[6] Ernie Beyer's book, *High School,* was released in that same period of time. They helped set the stage pretty well for states to begin thinking about what students actually learned.

In fact, as an interesting side-note here, that language that's now part of the national vocabulary, "what students know and are able to do," was actually coined by Nelson Ashline, who was the deputy superintendent at the state board whenever these studies that backed up the 1985 reforms were taking place. Adrienne Bailey, a member of the Illinois State Board of Education, was hired by the college board to do an equity report. That report became the document that put what students should know and be able to do in the national conversation. It came right about the time of the 1985 reforms, or slightly after. Adrienne picked up that language from the work in Illinois and

[5] "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" was the 1983 report of Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/"A Nation at Risk")
[6] John Goodlad was an educational researcher and theorist who published influential models for renewing schools and teacher education. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John Goodlad)

took it to the college board in writing their report, which I found is fairly interesting. So the origins of that language are actually Illinois specific.

During 1984, state board staff supported the work of the Illinois commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education. The commission's report was well supported by research studies. Missing, I believed, was mention of pre-school education. My belief was based on the Perry Preschool Study of Head Start programs.[7]

There wasn't any early childhood piece in the Illinois commission on the improvement of elementary and secondary education when I was hired, back in the fall, and I recommended that they take a look at the Ypsilanti study because I thought that early childhood was an important thing to be thinking about. That eventually became a part of the report. There were a couple of other things that I recommended be included before I actually showed up to go to work.

Pogue: You mentioned that forty-seven, forty-eight of the states were getting involved because of "A Nation at Risk" and the climate and the publicity and all the other studies. How exciting was it, as a state superintendent, to see that movement?

Sanders: It was incredible. It's a dream come true when you're sitting in that particular position because the climate was just right for getting things done. There was actually money available to do things at the time. Most of the states were in fairly good economic condition, so that they had a tax base and reserves, where they could actually put money behind reforms. It was just a perfect environment for things to happen, and they did; they happened all over the country. As we've learned across time, some of the things were smart policies and investments and others not necessarily so.

Pogue: The Illinois General Assembly had been doing some work, prior to your coming, on various commissions…

Sanders: Right.

Pogue: …but you also indicated that there had been some stagnation or inability to get things accomplished. What changed during that time? Was it just that more money was available, and the mood of the country was different?

Sanders: I think there are a lot of things. Yes, there was a heightened set of expectations, from the public, that something needed to be done; you had expectations from constituents. You had lots of road maps to consider, just

[7] The Perry Preschool Project is a research study to determine whether high quality pre-schools education could impact high risk children's lives. It was a powerful longitudinal study. Search the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) for the "Preschool Intervention, a Preliminary Report of the Perry Preschool Project" by David Wiekart. (information provided by Ted Sanders at a later date.)

from the reports mentioned earlier. Yes, you had an economic situation where things were possible. And with the various pieces of work that had gone on in the state and in the legislature, those ideas set in different ways in different places so that you had bases from which one could craft a consensus, eventually, for what ought to happen.

You also had a government legislature that had figured out how to compromise and to get things done whenever they needed to do so. There weren't many states that had a pattern where the governor and the four legislative leaders could close the door, sit down and hammer out a consensus. You had a governor, Jim Thompson, and four legislative leaders who had learned together how to do that. You actually had a political mechanism that would allow a robust piece of legislation to be enacted. That mechanism, with the decision-making among the leadership, was central to putting together what eventually became the act itself.

Pogue: When you mentioned the legislators, especially the four leaders, being involved, how did the work go to actually start crafting a bill? Was this done at the legislative level? Did the State Board of Education provide guidance? Were you directed to come up with some things and forward it to them?

Sanders: Principally, what happened is we were having senior level discussions among the legislative leadership, and it extended beyond the four leaders. You had… Art Berman and John Maitland [Jr.] played really significant roles, as did Barbara Flynn Currie and Richard Mulcahey, and there were others, Gene Hoffman, that were in the room working on what would go into the bill.[8]

Then, after those discussions, I was meeting with their staffs, and we were working on the specific language that would make up the bill. Periodically, the work would go up to the governor and the four senior leaders in each of the houses, but they had their staffs there. Each of those played a pretty significant role.

Carol Lambert particularly, from Mike Madigan's staff, was an important player in those negotiations and the lifting that had to be done by staff in writing what would go into the legislation. I would have to say that, in many respects, the Illinois Commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education had language that was fairly easily translated into policy. We also pulled single pieces of legislation that had been introduced across time that now were ripe for inclusion in the law.

Pogue: Could you give us a timeframe when all of this was going on? You talked about the 1983 commission study that was done before you arrived; how much time passed before and after, ending with the passage of what became known as the 1985 Educational Reform Act?

[8] Art Berman and John Maitland, Jr. were state senators and Barbara Flynn Currie, Richard Mulcahey, and Gene Hoffman were state representatives at the time that the Educational Reform Act was passed in Illinois.

Sanders: When I said 1983, I was talking about "A Nation at Risk." The Illinois Commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education, literally, was finished right about the first of January 1985. That work had been taking place, I think, for close to a year, maybe longer. Sally Pancrazio can probably tell you when it started, because I don't recall. I'm sure I knew at one time, but time has taken its toll (laughs). Literally, that work was finished just as the… I don't think the ink was dry on it when I was hired. We started work early in the session in 1985, and the legislation passed like five months later.

Pogue: I think about 169 individual topics were part of the 1985 Educational Reform Act. Senate Bill 730 was the one with the most notoriety, but probably over thirty other bills ended up part of what became known as the Reform Act. How did all of that get lumped together? You indicated that many of them came from the study, the Commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education, and you talked briefly about others that had been kind of floating around and had not been enacted in past years. How did you deal with all of these things in the few months between January and the bill's passage? How did you funnel all of them?

Sanders: The mechanism that we used is the one that I described. The goal was to put together a mega bill, and there were all these other individual ideas. You had the report that Madigan had released from his hearings around the state. Literally, we sat down with the key legislators that were assigned to work on this by leadership, and we worked our way, one by one, through every one of those ideas, deciding what was in, what was out, what needed to be modified, what other ideas ought to be incorporated. In my experience, I've never seen a group of legislators put forth the effort and work as hard, in a compressed period of time to produce something, as what happened in the first six months of 1985.

Pogue: Did the senate and House have the same type of procedures, or were they different in how they were putting their packages together?

Sanders: They weren't putting their separate packages together. They were working together to put together a single package. That's the reason why the passage, actually getting it through the two houses, worked extremely well, because they had already worked out, across the party aisle and across the aisle between the two bodies, and they had the governor's engagement. So, at the end of the day, everybody was on board with the legislation and the compromises that it contained.

Pogue: You stated that items were added or deleted. Were there any significant items that you thought should have been in the reform act that were deleted?

Sanders: No, not in my judgment. I don't recall any, offhand, that were just central to the act, no.

Pogue: Of the new pieces added, was the early childhood component an example of that?

Sanders: Yeah. It came in fairly late, but there had actually been attempts and interest that predated this. Plus, you had a pretty strong advocacy in Chicago with Irving Harris.[9] I don't know whether you remember Irving Harris, but he and his brother started Gillette, the Gillette Company. Irving had put a lot of his own personal money into support of early childhood initiatives and was pressing hard from outside for legislation. I think he and his colleagues were probably the strongest external voice. But, again, the Perry Preschool study, like many of these other reports, was pretty significantly debated. I think, as time shows, this one turned out to be really important investment, if you take a look at the growth and the money devoted to early childhood today, compared to the $12 million that was this Act.

There was also the debate as to whether the consolidation language ought to be in this bill or a separate bill. Yeah, this is a dynamic process, so lots of ideas that didn't make the final cut were discussed, and ideas were reshaped from what they appeared to be originally in the process. Through that early part of 1985, this thing was truly a work in progress, where not just the idea, but how to implement an idea, was debated pretty heavily.

Pogue: What role did your predecessor, Don Gill, play in this reform package?

Sanders: Candidly, I think very little. I think the principal driver working on the ideas at the State Board of Education was clearly Nelson Ashline, who was the deputy, and a small group of staff that he had hand-picked to work on this, including…

You're going to be talking to Sally Pancrazio, but Gail Lieberman was Nelson's executive assistant, and she also was the staff director of the Illinois Commission on the Improvement of Elementary and Secondary Education. She was the one bringing at least the state board's staff work to that commission, leading up to eighty-five.

Pogue: How did the stakeholders view the reform bill, as it was being debated?

Sanders: Are you talking about the school boards' association?

Pogue: Right, local district leaders, regional superintendents, the unions, businesses community.

Sanders: Whenever I came, I started a process that I'd used during my superintendency in Nevada, but slightly changed. Nevada had seventeen superintendents. I

[9] Irving Harris was a businessman and philanthropist, who, with his brother Neison, co-founded the Toni Home Permanent Company, which was sold to the Gillette Safety Razor Co. in 1948. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving Harris.)

could sit down monthly and meet with superintendents, impossible to do that in Illinois. I started a pattern of meeting once or twice weekly, during the legislative session, with the leadership of the school boards' association, with the school administrators' association, the AFT [American Federation of Teachers] and the NEA [National Education Association]. We also included ED-RED [Education Research Development] in that group.

During the time the negotiations were going on, I was keeping them informed of what was transpiring, what the debates were. [I] could hear their thinking on issues. [That] didn't mean that their positions would always prevail, but we had relationships so that at least I could keep them informed. We could close the door and have a private discussion or debate, and I could represent those positions so that they were adequately considered, back in the debates that were going on in legislative chambers.

Pogue: What were the major items that you thought became the Educational Reform Act? At the beginning, I mentioned a booklet, listing 169 different components, that was published by the State Board of Education after everything was done.[10] What were the major things that were new to Illinois?

Sanders: I think there were several that were really significant. This is strictly my perspective, but I think that important in all of those things, I'd have to put at the top of the list, creating a statement of the purposes of education, requiring a process that would literally define outcomes or define what students know and are able to do as a result of their education, and the assessment system that we created to go along with that, along with the report card. Those four things were always of the same fabric to me. They went together, and they were significant.

One of the tragic things—I'm going to jump to one of your later questions—[was that] the assessment structure we envisioned had nothing to do with student accountability. It used a broad sampling strategy, so that you could make judgements about the overall performance of a school and a district. [This was] most important because everybody was thinking school was the unit of change at the time and [that] that assessment system could not survive the requirements of No Child Left Behind, when it passed nationally, like eight years later, nine years later.[11]

Another set of… Kind of a string of several of the elements that were extremely important [included] the teacher evaluation requirement and the

[10] The State Board staff published a document describing the legislation that was used in regional meetings of school officials, following the passage of the legislation. (Information provided by Ted Sanders at a later date.)
[11] No Child Left Behind was an act of the U.S. Congress in 2001 that supported standards-based education reform, based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals could improve individual outcomes in education. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Child_Left_Behind_Act, promoted by President George W. Bush)

changes in the employment law, to include uncorrected unsatisfactory work performance as a basis for which you could dismiss teachers.

Previous to that, the law basically allowed dismissals and breaking the tenure relationship for a variety of reasons, none of them having directly to do with actual performance in the classroom. The Act made it clear that teachers could be dismissed after uncorrected unsatisfactory work performance. We combined with that a principal academy to train principals to do effective teacher evaluations. I think that string of things were extremely important in the legislation.

The early childhood investment was very, very important. There also was funding and mention of support for children, whose primary language is other than English, trying to beef up how we both train teachers and how we help kids whose situation was that English was a second language to them. There were a lot of other pieces, but those are ones in my mind that stand out even today as still extremely important.

Pogue: As we kind of conclude discussion of Illinois Senate Bill 730, did all this come at the end of the session, or were these bills being passed throughout this period, including 730?

Sanders: I believe some of them were passed earlier. Too much time has passed. I know that we couldn't pass the mega bill until we could settle on all of the financial decisions the state had to make, what it was going to fund. So, it was logical that the big bill was going to come in that part of the decision, where you really were finally cementing how you're going to spend the state's money.

Pogue: When this bill and the funding came about in the General Assembly, were members of the state board present, or was this done at a time when you were not in attendance?

Sanders: Oh, we were in attendance, and there were state board members in attendance at the time, sitting up in the galley.

Pogue: Once the major bill was passed, take us through what you then had to do, now that you had the money. You had 169 different pieces of legislation to deal with, and many of them were brand new to Illinois.

Sanders: That's when my first big shock came, because right after the legislation passed, within a day or two, I had the key staff up in my office. I said, "Now I want to see the implementation plans for the legislation. You guys have been working on most of these ideas for some time, show me our implementation plans." I was told, "We have none."

I think Sally and others will tell you, we went into a crisis mode over the next several weeks, building implementation plans for every single piece of that legislation, to get ready to do a round of regional meetings in the state,

to walk school districts through the requirements of the legislation and what it was going to expect of them in the way of implementation. We just redirected the work of large numbers of people within the agency to work on the plan for implementation and to work on the implementation. Those people rose to the occasion; they got the work done and did it, actually, very, very well.

Pogue: Did you have to create new divisions because of having greater responsibility now?

Sanders: No. The same organizational super structure, I ended up leaving in place. I made some minor adjustments. We did it by reallocating staff from within divisions and spread the elements of the legislation into units where they logically belonged, left the staff there, but redefined what their jobs were, from there and going forward. In many cases, whole staff units, overnight, had their work completely redefined.

However, I created a central reporting structure on these particular implementation items, so that Nelson Ashline was supervising them. Today you would call it matrix management, where, depending upon the piece of work, you'd be reporting to different individuals.

Pogue: You talked about a team to implement the structure of this massive bill, how many people had that type of responsibility?

Sanders: I'm hesitant to put a full number on it because I think almost everyone that... I bet you three-fourths of the people who were non-federally funded were working in one way or another on the implementation of this law, a very significant number. I don't know to tell you it's 250 or what. I never counted (laughs) exactly the number of people there. At one time, I had a document that showed each of the elements and who was the full staff complement working on that item, but I lost all those papers in a flood.

Pogue: Looking at the booklet that was published for all of the school districts, I saw a topic, and then a summary of what the legislation included. There was a contact person and then a source of funding. In some cases, it had an NA [not applicable], and in some cases it had a large amount. How did you, as a state superintendent, assign those 169 things? Was that your responsibility? Was it one of your deputies that did the assignment or your team planning group?

Sanders: Actually, I wouldn't say that we had... We did have a team planning group, but it wasn't called that. Those decisions were actually a set of shared decisions. Most everyone that had responsibilities in the areas where that legislation rested participated in the decision as to who to assign what. It wasn't an individual decision. That was very much a shared decision making process.

Pogue: During the time that you're planning implementation activities, did you have any contact with the legislative leaders or the governor on how things were

proceeding, or did they pretty much let you run with it until you were ready to have your regional meetings with the schools?

Sanders: If you're asking, did they dabble around with the implementation? The answer is no. Did I have conversations with them about what we were doing and our thinking in the implementation? Yes, I had conversations with them because I was still spending a lot of time talking with members of the General Assembly.

Probably most frequently, the conversations were with people like [Senators] Art Berman, John Maitland… But I'll say, to all of their credit, they weren't trying to…they never even attempted to micro-manage the implementation or the management of the implementation.

Pogue: How many months did it take you to get everything ready for your meetings with the school districts?

Sanders: I think we probably had six weeks, maybe two months. It wasn't a long period of time.

Pogue: Was the legislation clear enough for rulemaking? Currently, you have a group that's called JCAR [Joint Committee on Administrative Rules] that starts writing rules regarding legislation.[12] Did you have all of that, back in 1985?

Sanders: Yeah, we had to deal with JCAR. There were meetings where we worked out differences, but I don't recall any kind of substantial potholes that were presented to us by JCAR.

Pogue: One of the areas that was included in the reform act was reading improvement.

Sanders: Correct.

Pogue: Did you have great interest in that subject?

Sanders: Yeah, because I'd served as a visiting board member for the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois. I probably should have put the reading improvement in that list of substantial pieces, but I've been here just drawing off of recall. I should have probably found a copy of that little gift book (laughs) we gave to school districts to work my way through all of the 169 pieces. But yes, that was an important piece of the legislation.

Pogue: What were you hoping to accomplish? What goals were you considering for the reading improvement?

[12] The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules oversees the administrative rules and regulations in State agencies that implement statutory law. (http://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/ilrulemakingprocess.pdf)

Sanders: First of all, I think probably everyone believed that reading was one of the most central skills to success in school and in life. As I recall, we were drawing pretty heavily out of the work of the Center for the Study of Reading at U of I [University of Illinois] because we wanted that work, and we wanted the reading assessment to reflect their best thinking. If you'll recall, they too had a report that took place during this same period of time, just leading up to the eighty-five reforms. Fundamentally [they were] trying to take the central parts of their learning and put it into policy.

Pogue: Were there any models for the instruction of reading that the state board encouraged?

Sanders: There probably were, but I don't recall at this point, Phil.

Pogue: You're now getting this off. You said that in six weeks you were ready to start talking to the various stakeholders. What were some of the challenges that you ran into, early in the implementation and the discussion with those groups?

Sanders: Probably, without a doubt, the one piece of legislation that was dominating the discussion was actually the legislation to do the consolidation studies. That probably was driving more of the responses and the rhetoric. People were overwhelmed with the number of changes in one fell swoop and were working on all of them at the same time, the need to understand what this really means to me, what I actually have to do here?

Some of the things required really substantial effort to ramp up, just on our end and then with similar efforts on the school district side. The teacher evaluation requirement, the principal academy, those things required substantial amounts of time and work on our part and on the part of districts. The other thing is people were overwhelmed with the amount of work that was, all of it, coming at them at one time.

And then there were different voices, both in support of and in opposition to each of the components of the legislation. You'd find people strongly supporting or people that weren't. You were hearing all of those voices.

Pogue: School reorganization has been covered in one of our earlier interviews in this Education is Key component. But, since you brought it up, that particular issue called for every district to have some plans and hearings, and there was kind of a look at trying to create more unit districts as a model, that high schools would have 500. When that was going through the legislature, did you sense that this was going to be the challenge to implement once the bill was passed?

Sanders: No, I didn't anticipate it was going to be. Gene Hoffman had introduced consolidation legislation, eliminating small districts. Also, his greatest interest

was in the separate elementary and high school districts, wanting to create unit districts there.

I helped to revise that because I took data from ACT, principally, had the research staff look at fifteen years of data that tell me what's the relationship between achievement and high school size. [13] It's pretty compelling, about the impact of very small high schools on student achievement. Around 200 and smaller are pretty devastating. You look around Illinois, and there were a lot of small high schools close to other small high schools. I helped bring Gene Hoffman's bill back into those discussions, with this new set of empirical data that would support one part of his ideas. The way we crafted that legislation, we called for regional studies. They were not individual district studies, but they were regional studies then a vote by region.

I thought that using a democratic process to reconfigure district lines would be far more politically palatable than what it turned out to be. I think most people never really read or considered exactly what that legislation required. They just presumed that their small district disappeared. While in truth that could be, it was not a guarantee. At the end of the day, you'd have a plan drawn, using the regional superintendents for each of those areas, and eventually a ballot out that would go to a general election, where the people would decide, up or down, on whether boundaries would be redrawn or not.

It was political; I helped make it political. After Adlai Stevenson was the candidate for the Democrats, I went up to see the senator and asked him specifically not to make a political issue out of consolidation and gave him the wedge issue that he really wanted (laughs).[14]

Pogue: That was the thornier issue. Did you have any issues with the teacher evaluation component? You mentioned that that would change the structure of tenure.

Sanders: Right, yes. What that instrument would look like and how it would get used. I got buttonholed a number of times by school administrators who were concerned about simply the additional work that that was going to require.

Pogue: When you had the regional meetings, were you generally getting positive feedback from people, other than on the school reorganization? How did all that go, as you traveled the state, or were there segments of the school districts or locations that were opposed to significant portions of it?

[13] The ACT is a standardized test used for college admissions in the United States. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACT (test)

[14] Adlai Stevenson III was a U.S. senator from Illinois from 1970 to 1981 and was candidate for governor of Illinois in 1982 and 1986 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adlai Stevenson III)

Sanders: There were segments that were opposed to parts of it, yes, but again, overwhelmingly, the discussion of the consolidation piece was the most intense. From the districts up on the Gold Coast [a historic district in Chicago], from those superintendents, I heard consistently, "You really don't need... Just leave us to set our own policies, and you ought not to set a state policy, unless there was compelling empirical evidence that it would work, if you implemented it" to concerns in Chicago over the early childhood legislation and who we would and would not allow to provide those services.

There were other concerns that were raised at almost every one of those regional meetings. Those meetings were not a cake walk, nor did we expect them to be, because, due to the time, people had to deal with so much so fast.

Pogue: Did you hear from the regional offices, concerning the service centers?

Sanders: Absolutely. They were concerned we'd created these new regional centers to do some of the work, and they believed that that, should have been placed with them.

Pogue: How did you feel after the first year, after going through the regional meetings, setting up everything for schools to apply for projects? How did you feel about the accomplishment of the state board, one year after the legislation passed?

Sanders: Generally very, very good, in reality. The state board staff had executed well; the reforms were generally good ideas, and districts had responded and were implementing, as best they could, with fidelity. I candidly was astounded that you could get so much done so quickly.

Once Governor Thompson took the consolidation issue off the table, and the legislature completely rescinded that law, it didn't relieve all of the kind of political pressure that was accompanying the bill, but it relieved a great deal of it.

Pogue: How long did you get to work on the Educational Reform Act before you left Illinois?

Sanders: Almost my entire tenure. I went to Washington in mid-1989—that took us a half a year—so I worked on it for four years and kept an interest in it after that.

Pogue: As you look back, what seemed to go smoother than you actually thought? You indicated that you were very pleased after the first year. You had the reorganization component; you had the teacher evaluation; you had the service centers. What seemed to go very smoothly from that legislation?

Sanders: The large committee we put together that brought together a broad representation of stakeholders to define learning outcomes. That just could not have gone better. It went exceptionally well. The implementation of the new assessments, I thought, went extremely well. I had known from past experience that this is not really easy work. The early childhood implementation went exceedingly well and was already whetting the appetite for expansion. The principal's academy was going well; it was well received. People were implementing the new evaluations.

But I was disappointed in the actual result. I'd heard, all of my career, both in New Mexico and in Nevada, the same thing that I heard when I first came to Illinois. Superintendents and local boards saying, we can't fire teachers, and here we clearly gave them a tool and put the mechanism in place, where if a teacher wasn't adequate, they could be placed under an improvement plan. I just was really disappointed that few people took advantage of that new, really powerful legislation. So that was a disappointment.

As I said, I was really pleased with the assessments. I think we were probably too far ahead of our educational capacity on some facets of the reading assessment, but even still, I was really pleased with the result there. By the time we finished up the eighty-five/eighty-six school year, I was personally just astounded at how far we'd come and how really responsive districts, communities had actually been to the legislation.

Pogue: Because Illinois adopted so many projects, did other states contact you about using Illinois as a model?

Sanders: Yes, they did. In fact, one of the significant things [was] Ted Bell, who was U.S. secretary of education—the first one in Ronald Reagan's presidency—had the staff that had worked on *"*A Nation at Risk" identify states that they believed had really done things right in responding to "A Nation at Risk." They ended up selecting two states, Illinois and North Carolina.

The secretary had a group of us from Illinois and a group from North Carolina come to a big national meeting, out in Salt Lake City, to showcase the reforms from the two states. Art Berman, John Maitland and I went out to receive the award for Illinois. But yes, after this legislation passed, I had other state superintendents or state board members or legislators or, in some cases, local superintendents and local board members, call, wanting to talk about this or that part of the legislation.

Yeah, we got a lot of national attention for some of the specific elements, across the next several years. We got a lot of attention in the meetings of the Education Commission of the States. I don't know how many panels I was part of that was driven by one piece or another of the eighty-five reforms.

Pogue: When you left Illinois and worked in Washington and then had the responsibility of looking at what all the states had been doing to meet "A Nation at Risk," was there a great variety of efforts?

Sanders: There were different things, but there were a lot of commonalities. The truth of the matter, Illinois had done some things very different from most of the other states. A lot of states just simply raised high school graduation requirements, did things like that. Our putting in place, specifically what students should know and be able to do, knowledge and skills, along with a sampling design in the assessment, no other state had done exactly that [or] anything close to that particular design.

I think it's just tragic that it didn't survive the No Child Left Behind legislation. It should have been allowed there, but the next President Bush was so intent on having student accountability that an Illinois-type design couldn't survive.

Pogue: As you look back now, what initiatives do you see that are still surviving in Illinois?

Sanders: Clearly, the early childhood, the little bit of start of effort that we did, and the investments we made in the Center for Bilingual Education have survived, done well. For the most part, the work on the learning requirements survived. The assessment system, in its form at that time, did not survive. The teacher evaluations, that requirement's still in place. That change in the law that changed the conditions of tenure are still in place. I think the principal's academy is still in place; is it not?

Pogue: Yes.

Sanders: I think, if I were to go down the 169 things, I think there's a pretty substantial number of those policies that are still in place, though some of them modified, as they should be, given time and learning.

Pogue: What lessons should this particular reform movement teach educational leaders and future state boards and general assemblies?

Sanders: I think I am going to start at the top there because we seem to live in a world today where it's next to impossible to work across the political aisle and get anything thoughtful done. The first lesson is, I think, the importance of being able to govern, once you get elected, which means, of necessity, compromise and having in place the mechanisms in which debate can take place and decisions get made. Illinois was not perfect, but there was a history of how the political parties and political leadership worked together, could work together, could have conversations with one another, and could reach compromise that was in the larger interest of the state. I think that's the most important lesson that both our Congress and most state legislatures need to learn again.

The second lesson, I think that good research and staff work pays off. You had all of these studies that had taken place, that had raised the level of dialogue. But at the end of the day, there was a lot of staff work, looking at the rationale behind and what kind of evidence was there to support the ideas that were being proposed? If I were a state superintendent or state board, I think the big lesson is the importance of really, really good staff work. The second is the relationships that are required also, to be able to work across the aisle, to actually get things done in the legislative environment. The same thing's true, I think, with local districts and communities, actually the importance of paying attention and lobbying when work is in progress to influence, based on your own personal or your district interest, as things are taking shape in the beginning, so they don't just happen to you.

Pogue: Having been involved with education all of your life, and looking at the reforms that have happened since 1985—you mentioned No Child Left Behind; we've got Common Core and Race to the Top; the Chicago School Reform Act, I believe, after that, and some other reforms in Illinois education[15]—How significant was the eighty-five reform act, and how did it compare in major changes to these later reform pieces?

Sanders: I think it is very significant in Illinois history. It's the first time, I believe, there was a mega bill. I think this was the first session with this much legislation focused on education, in the state's history. The truth of the matter is that we stand on other people's shoulders every time we do something. If you take a look, in many cases these new [pieces of] legislation are logical extensions of what's gone before. That's not always the case.

If you take a look across time and from the passage in the sixties of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, you see progressively how it has changed across time.[16] You can see the influence of "A Nation at Risk" on the ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act]. You can see that the conditions and all of the reforms that were taking place in the mid-eighties cascade to actually drive No Child Left Behind as a next version of ESEA. And Race to the Top are both new policies and trying to correct what people think were errors in the previous authorizations. I see all of these things as related to one another and fitting together and helping to drive, or form, the basis for what comes next. We make lots of errors, but most of the time it's trying to create a better version of the policies we've had in the past.

[15] Common Core was a federal educational initiative in 2010 that detailed what K–12 students should know in English language arts and mathematics at the conclusion of each school grade. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Core_State_Standards_Initiative; and Race to the Top was a federal grant created to spur and reward innovation and reforms in state and local district K-12 education, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race to the Top; both during the administration of Barack Obama)

[16] The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, part of the War on Poverty of Lyndon Johnson, is considered to be the most far-reaching federal legislation affecting education ever passed by the U.S. congress. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elementary and Secondary Education Act)

Pogue: On a personal level, you've been in education throughout your lifetime. Where does the 1985 Educational Reform Act passage fit into what you consider your major accomplishments?

Sanders: It's right up at the top. I'm proud of a lot of things that I've done or participated in, and every one of them are efforts of a lot of people. I think that the line that, success has many parents and failure is an orphan, is really true. Things that happen, happen because of a lot of people.

The eighty-five reforms, they wouldn't match Mr. Jefferson's three things [that] he put on his epitaph, of his accomplishments.[17] But, as I think about things, the eighty-five reforms in Illinois... The National[Education] Summit and the National [Education] Goals—which, by the way, both somewhat grow out of the eighty-five reforms—that happened in George Herbert Walker Bush's tenure as president, and the National [Education] Goals Panel certainly related to and were influenced by our experiences in the eighty-five reforms in Illinois.[18, 19, 20]

There are a couple of other things that I would put up there, but if I had to single out one thing that I was most proud of in my career, just might be the eighty-five Illinois reforms.

Pogue: When you look back, when you talked to members of the General Assembly, the leadership that helped you pass that, before you left Illinois, what were their feelings about what they accomplished?

Sanders: Everyone I talked to were very proud of it, especially those who played significant leadership roles in it.

Pogue: My last question: Were you later in Ohio?

Sanders: Right.

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[17] The Thomas Jefferson [3rd U.S. president], in his epitaph, listed what he considered were his three most important accomplishments: author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and Father of the University of Virginia. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas Jefferson.)

[18] In 1989, President George H.W. Bush convened the Charlottesville Education Summit—the first and only national education summit—for the nation's governors, with the goal of identifying national goals that would create a new pathway toward educational excellence. (https://thehill.com/opinion/education/463224-a-summit-of-states-turned-around-us-education-30-years-ago-its-time-for)

[19] The National Education Goals, known as Goals 2000, were set by the U.S. Congress in the 1990s, establishing certain criteria to be met through standards-based education reform by the millennium. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goals_2000)

[20] The National Education Goals Panel was established in 1990, after the Charlottesville meeting, to report on the nation's progress toward the six education goals adopted there. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Education_Goals_Panel)

Pogue: When you look at what Ohio had done, compared to Illinois, were there any significant differences?

Sanders: Yeah. If you took a look, what Ohio had done was not nearly as robust as Illinois when it came to defining what students ought to know. Their assessments were typical to the other assessments that were given around the country, out of the reforms that were taking place at the time, not nearly the rich, robust kind of assessments that Illinois produced. Ohio had done things that were fairly typical to what other states were doing at the time. They were okay, but not anywhere in the class of what Illinois had done.

Pogue: I want to thank you for sharing your insights on how all of this legislation came about, some of the key components of it, how you organized the State Board of Education to fulfill the legislative requirements, and for giving us an overview on what changes were made over the decades, related to the law. Did you have any final thoughts you would like to share with us regarding that 1985 package?

Sanders: Not that I can think of, Phil. You're going to learn a lot more, down in the depths of what went on in the department, whenever you talk to [Lyndon] Wharton and others that were over their heads most days with the implementation. I'll just be anxious to see your final product.

Pogue: We certainly look forward to greater dialogue on it. And thank you very much for sharing the history of a significant piece of Illinois education.

Sanders: Thank you. I appreciate being invited.

(end of transcript)