

Thomas William Payzant

November 29, 1940 ~ July 23, 2021

Condolences to the family. You are in my thoughts and prayers. Mr. Payzant was an amazing person and superintendent. He will truly be missed.

- Sandra Franklin Johnson

Dr. Payzant hired me for my first building administrator position at age 27 in 1980 for the OKCPS. He was the best leader we had during my 31 years as a principal in Okla. City and I was honored to say he gave me my first job in public school administration. I have great memories with him in my interview process and getting the position. Being his daughter's vice-principal when she attended Moon Middle School, the day I had to call him to tell him that she was being suspended for breaking the school rules (fighting) was not easy but he told me to call her mother and she would come and pick her up. That told me so much about the man. He was as straight and honest as any Superintendent could be. I was proud to work for him. Condolences to the family. I will never forget this man.

- Fred Pahlke

Tom Payzant was one of a kind! I first knew Tom when he participated each summer in the Superintendent's Seminar that I was responsible for in my role as Assistant Director of Programs in Professional Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the 1990s. His commitment to improving lives through quality education were at the core of who he was as an individual and as an educator. Tom was a kind and thoughtful man who treated everyone with dignity and respect. Eventually, when he was leading the Boston Public Schools, he became the chair of Harvard's Seminar for New Superintendents. His breadth and depth of knowledge helped launch many into this most challenging role. Our paths crossed most recently at the Carnegie Foundation Summits on Education each year, as Tom was on their board of directors. Education has truly lost a champion. It was a professional privilege to know him and to call him a friend and colleague. My condolences to the Payzant family on your loss. As the old Jewish saying tells us, "may his memory be as a blessing."

- Linda L. Greyser

REST IN PEACE

- Don Johnson

Dear Ellen and family. Sending thoughts to you as you are missing Tom. Tom and Mark being friends from Williams to,Harvard and the to their incredible devotion to public education. I will always remember our friendship, the fun times as well as the supportive times to these dedicated men. I miss Mark every day, but am so glad we had 56 years together. Would love to talk after a while. I live in Maine, 23 Birch Meadow rd, Brunswick 04011. Take care of yourself and give the “kids” my love as well. Judy smith

- Judy smith

Tom was such an amazing leader, mentor and friend. He will be greatly missed and remembered fondly by those of us who had the good fortune of working with him. His influence will last generations to come. May you rest in peace my friend.

- Amalia Cudeiro

Very sad to hear of Tom’s passing. Thoughts are with you and family.Had ringside seat on Tom’s leadership career. I was heavily involved in LA’s education reform called Learn and Tom’s legendary leadership in SanDiego at similar time’. Tom gave graduation speech at my Daughters graduation from UCLA’s teachers Masters program. Side note for your children and grandchildren. I can personally attest to fact that your mom and dad were truly truly remarkable people who were widely loved and respected community members. Best Jack

- Jack McDonough

Very sad to hear of Tom’s passing. My thoughts are with you and your family. I had ring side seat to Tom’s amazing record of educational leadership in Southern California. I was heavily involved in educational reform (LEARN) in Los Angeles and we were all well aware of Tom’s legendary record as superintendent in San Diego. Tom gave the graduation address at my Daughters graduation with masters degree and teaching credential from UCLA’s graduate school of education. I remember he was on verge of taking on a major role in Washington at the time of his speech. Glad to add personal testimony that your Mom and Dad were truly wonderful people who were among the most beloved and highly respected people in their Mid-Hudson Valley Community.

- Jack McDonough

Tom Payzant was the greatest Superintendent of Schools I ever met or worked for in my 37 years in Public Education. Bright, kind, focused and sensitive to the issues of teaching and learning in an urban multicultural world he made significant differences in the San Diego City Schools while he was there. I pray for his family at this time and know that Heaven has just received an incredible educational leader.

- Dr. Bob Stein

Dear Ellen, Gigi, and the whole Payzant family. I was so sorry to read of Tom's passing and am sending you all condolences and love from San Diego. I still have happy memories of Tom's support for community involvement in education systems and planning when he was in San Diego. I still believe he was the best Superintendent ever at

San Diego Unified School District. He cared. And he showed that care in his decision-making. And I hope you carry tons of incredible memories about him. He was quite a special person and leader. With affection Sylvia Selverston

- Sylvia Selverston

My most vivid memory of Tom goes back twenty-nine years to when I produced a videotape entitled “A Day in the Life of Tom Payzant.” He was then San Diego’s school superintendent and I was teaching a course on school-system leadership. I asked Tom to make the tape because he was widely regarded as the best urban superintendent in the country—and I wanted my students to see up-close what that takes. With a camera in hand, I followed Tom around for a week, interviewed him and his colleagues, and spent a memorable evening with his delightful family. On the tape, Tom checked all the boxes: he showed that he was a skilled listener, extremely knowledgeable about education, resourceful in the face of scarce resources, and articulate about his district’s needs. But what I remember most about Tom was his display of decency, kindness, and caring. He cared passionately about kids. About his colleagues. About doing his job with integrity. And he cared deeply about his family. Of course, skills and knowledge matter. But Tom illuminated in his actions the oft-forgotten bedrock of successful leadership: caring matters most. My deepest condolence to Tom’s loving wife, Ellen, and to his family. --Jerry Murphy

- jerome t murphy

I first met Tom about fifty-six years ago, when we were both doctoral students. It was the mid-sixties: everyone was crazy, but Tom was calm. My wife and I last saw him and his wife Ellen when we spent what turned out to be a farewell week-end with them in Boston about eight years ago. Even though he was beginning to fail, his essential kindness and caring never left him. And Ellen's commitment to him and to their family was, and remains, a model. I remember staying with them for a night when they were living in New Orleans; ditto San Diego. But my most powerful memory was of their visit to our home in Pittsfield in the early eighties, accompanied by mother and mother-in-law:they were on the way to Williams College, his alma mater, where he received an honorary degree. The Payzants may have moved from city to city ... almost like a military family ... but always with their loved ones, and always leaving a city in better shape than when they had arrived. I could go on; suffice it to say that I am very sad. And my admiration for Ellen is as strong as it was when we first met.

- Jonathan M. Daube

I wrote a synopsis of all of the many national education reform studies, written in the 1980s. Tom knew that I felt that the most important of all them was the 1986 A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century. He saw to it that I was present for the official unveiling of that monumental report, to which he was he was a major contributor, at the Hotel del Coronado. When I worked in the very troubled San Ysidro School District first as assistant superintendent for instruction and then as superintendent from 1992-95, Tom saw to it that all of the numerous major federal Title VII grants (bilingual grants) that we submitted for funding were, enabling the SYSD to shift from being one of the worst out of 1,000 statewide in terms of academic performance into academically one of the best.

- John W. Tierney, PhD

Supt. Payzant was the best superintendent I worked under during my 26 years at the Boston Public Schools. His example of integrity changed the culture of the district and his steadfast espousal and intelligent support for high but achievable goals produced measured results. Boston was better for his being. My condolences to his family and friends.

- Charlotte Harris

I am so sorry to hear of Tom's passing. I worked in Mayor Thomas Menino's office as his Executive Assistant and Tom would often come in the office. I will always remember his smile and his kindness to everyone. He truly cared about the Boston school system and it showed from his many years there. My deepest condolences go out to his wife Ellen and their family and friends.

- Annette Gales

I did not know Tom through any of his many distinguished accomplishments, though I knew of them. I knew him simply as an incredibly nice neighbor and friend in Boston. He was as unassuming as he was accomplished. Ellen, my deepest sympathy to you and the entire family.

- Jim F. Brinning

Dear Ellen and Family, I am very late in sending this note, but it took a while for Tom's passing to sink in. I am one of the countless superintendents (former in my case) who Tom influenced via the Broad Urban Superintendents' Academy. Tom was a mentor in the program when I participated, and he graciously agreed to be my coach when I became superintendent of schools in Providence, RI. some years later in 2011. I also had the support of Mass Insight - the organization I now lead - so I was able to benefit from both Tom's and Mike C's wise counsel. I was very fortunate indeed! I learned innumerable things from Tom. One of them, that was very apropos of Providence, was that "you should never confuse size with complexity." Tom led an amazing life. Few people can claim his span of influence when they pass -- all for the betterment of students. I can tell you, from first hand conversations, that BPS headmasters still harken back to the days Tom led that system. He leaves enormous shoes to fill, and we are all better for his contributions. I send you my thoughts, prayers, and sympathies, and also want to express my profound gratitude to all of you for sharing Tom with us. All My Best, Sue Lusi

- Sue Lusi