

Thomas William Payzant

November 29, 1940 ~ July 23, 2021

Thomas William Payzant, of Salt Lake City, previously of Boston, passed away peacefully on July 23, 2021. He was 80 years old.

Born on November 29, 1940, in Boston, to Ruth Dennison Payzant and Stuart Payzant. Tom grew up in Wollaston, MA attending public school there until he accepted a spot at Mount Hermon School for Boys, Northfield, MA, currently, Northfield Mt Herman. At Mount Hermon, Tom says he learned the value of hard work, as all the students had duties, in addition to their classwork.

Following graduation from Mount Hermon, Tom attended Williams College, where he earned a bachelor's degree in American history and literature in 1962. That same year, he married his High School sweetheart, Ellen Watson, and they moved to Tacoma, Washington where they both had teaching jobs. He moved back to Boston, to receive a master's in teaching, then a doctorate in education from Harvard in 1968.

For the next ten years, Dr. Payzant cut his teeth as a superintendent all over the country, starting as the assistant superintendent in New Orleans. In 1969, Dr. Payzant was tapped for his first district leadership position and came back east to take the reins of a small, 4,500-student school district in Springfield Township, Pennsylvania. He was just 28. This was followed by superintendent positions in Eugene, OR; Oklahoma City, OK; and San Diego, CA. In San Diego, he tested the tenets of longevity as a tactic in school leadership, staying there from 1982 until 1993.

In 1993, Dr. Payzant accepted an appointment from President Clinton as the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education. In that position, he worked on "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" which President Clinton signed into law in 1994. In 1995, he left Washington DC to return home to Boston as its superintendent - his dream job. He served as the Superintendent of Boston Public Schools for 11 years, leading a number of significant reform efforts that helped narrow the achievement gap and increase student performance on both state and national assessment exams.

Dr. Payzant's work received recognition at the regional and national level. In 1998, he was Massachusetts Superintendent of the Year; in 2004, he received the Council on Great City Schools' The Award for Excellence in Urban Education. Governing Magazine named Dr. Payzant one of eight "Public Officials of the Year" in 2005. Dr. Payzant also received the McGraw Prize for his leadership of the San Diego school system.

After his retirement from Boston Public Schools, Dr. Payzant served as a senior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Dr. Payzant also served on numerous boards including Chair, Board of Trustees for the College Board; Board of Directors, Goldman Sachs Foundation; Board of Directors, National Center for Education and the Economy; Executive Committee for the Council of Great City Schools; Chair Carnegie Foundation; Chair, The Broad Center and with his wife Ellen, a Trustee at Northfield Mt. Herman.

Tom is survived by his wife of 59 years Ellen Watson Payzant, his children Scott, Gigi, and Kristin, his son-in-law Kenny, and five grandchildren, Emily, TJ, Kai, Bryson and Kenyon as well as one great grandchild Kinsley.

Friends are invited to greet the family during an open house to honor Tom’s life at the Payzant home located at 9564 South Raintree Drive, Sandy on Saturday, July 31st from 2:00 to 4:00 PM.

To virtually attend Tom's memorial service on Monday, August 9th at 4:00 PM, please visit https://cpg.zoom.us/j/97619143832