

Mark Tallman: My name is Mark Tallman, and I've worked with the Kansas Association of School Boards since 1990 as an advocate, a lobbyist, a researcher, a writer, and I'm conducting this interview with Dr. Cindy Lane on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators and other significant leaders of state government, particularly those who have served from the 1960s through 2010. These interviews will be accessible to researchers, educators, and the public through the KOHP website, ksoralhistory.org and also the Kansas Historical Society and the State Library. Transcriptions are made possible by generous donors. David Heinemann is the videographer today.

So, the person we're talking with today has a wide range of experiences that we're going to explore, most notably beginning as an educator and then leading one of our state's largest districts, culminating as superintendent, Superintendent of the Year, transitioning then to our State Board of Regents, serving as leader of the Governor's Education Council, and now, not retired fully at least, is leading the state's Blueprint for Literacy. I think we'll have a chance to talk about all of that, but an honor to talk with you, Dr. Lane. Why don't we begin with the requisite, "Tell us a little bit about yourself." Where did you grow up? What were some of those experiences? What kind of led you both into education and maybe ultimately to become a leader in education?

Cindy Lane: First of all, thank you for the opportunity to be here and have this conversation with you, Mark. I grew up in southeast Kansas. I'm a lifelong Kansan, Parsons, Kansas in particular. My family were small business owners at the time when I was growing up. My grandmother actually ran a small business for ladies' apparel, and my mother was a florist. I spent a lot of time modeling clothes and helping to decorate for weddings and things. It was wonderful growing up with my siblings there.

So, an amazing experience there as a kid except for school.

CL: I had wonderful teachers, but my favorite subject was recess. I tell people that all the time, and it's really true. I wanted to be outside playing, and I still as an adult, much, much older, I prefer to be outside and enjoying life in Kansas.

I struggled to learn to read as a kid. Becoming an educator was kind of an interesting choice that I made because going through school, other than the activities, and I was an athlete and had an opportunity to be in plays and all those things, I loved that, but choosing the field of education was the last thing I thought I would do when I walked across that stage at high school graduation.

MT: Really?

CL: Yes.

MT: Well, somewhere between crossing that stage, something must have happened. What were your next steps?

CL: I went to the university, Kansas State Teachers College that became Pittsburg State University. So, I went to Pitt State and thought I was going to pursue a career in clinical psychology, frankly, because if you know Parsons, one of the major opportunities for employment in Parsons was the state hospital. As a kid, I did some volunteer work there.

But moving through course progressions, I thought, “This doesn’t quite seem to fit my passion.” So, I changed to elementary ed, particularly special ed, and started my career in Parsons teaching special education.

MT: I think I knew your teaching background was special education. Eventually I know, and I think when I probably met you, you had moved to a much bigger district, Kansas City, Kansas. What took you there?

CL: I spent two years in Parsons and decided it was time for me to spread my wings and go elsewhere. I had a friend that worked in the Kansas City, Kansas school district. I had no idea really where that was or anything about the community, but I applied for a job and began my career in KCK as a special ed teacher.

I had some back-and-forth return to the state hospital to actually do some transformation work there in the eighties. I’m glad to talk to you about that. It was really a very interesting experience in leadership for me. I finished my master’s at Pitt State and then went back to KCK. I spent most of my career in Kansas City, Kansas, although I also spent some very significant time, meaningful time for me in Spring Hill, Kansas as their Director of Special Ed.

MT: Okay, but you were kind of in that Kansas City area.

CL: Right.

MT: You may have given me an opening with that, doing some of these other things. You were an educator, and certainly if there’s anything you want to share about the teaching experience, but clearly at some point, you moved into a more administrative role. So, maybe talk a little bit about #1, any reflections you might have on the teaching experience in a couple of different districts, and what caused you to move into an administrative leadership role.

CL: I highly value the time I was in the classroom, but it was only six years of my career in the classroom, working with individuals who had some emotional challenges or cognitive challenges. That really shaped how I spent the rest of my life because I saw kids that perhaps lacked opportunity because of the challenges that they faced. I saw a lot of kids that I wondered if they truly had these learning challenges, or if it was more environmental impacts, poverty that was causing them to struggle in school. And frankly I could relate to some of their challenges because I was a kid that didn’t learn to read really until I was in seventh grade. I didn’t know the secret code, and frankly, I didn’t learn phonics and the key aspects of how you learn to read until I was at Pittsburg State, learning to become an elementary educator. The time that I had in the classroom, I saw kids that really kind of touched my heart and my soul. I wanted them to have the same opportunities that I got, kids in my own family had.

MT: So, I guess I'm a little curious. You say at seventh grade or even college before you learned some things. Clearly you made it to seventh grade. Clearly, you graduated, and clearly you got to college. What do you mean when you say you couldn't read? You were clearly functioning on some level. What do you mean by that?

CL: I culled words. I read laboriously slow, painful. I was horrified at the oral reading assignments where we all did round-robin reading to read out loud in class. I would anticipate where my place in that would be and I'd read that instead of listening to what was going on. I had strategies that I used to get through.

And I did fine. I mean, if you look at my ancient grade cards, you'll see that I passed and did fine. It wasn't that. I knew I wasn't at the skill I needed to be to be successful, and frankly, I was in the Blackbird reading group. There's nothing more crushing to someone's self-worth, feelings of self-worth to know that you're assigned to this group of kids who are struggling.

But I know that experience really shaped what I'm doing as an educator because I wanted to make sure that we see kids as opportunities, not for their deficits, and we figure out a way to help every child move forward. I think I must have had strategies that I used to get by, and I had adults that helped me. But was I thriving in school? I would say I wasn't.

MT: So, both what you're saying now and other conversations we've had, it seems like some of your motivation then was so that children maybe wouldn't have to wait as long or get as lucky with some of the other help they might have along the way if you could do more with them at a younger age.

CL: This is something my mother instilled in me, always to have confidence in yourself to figure it out. I wanted to be able to help other young people understand that success really relies on your self-determination. Don't let other people define who you are and what you can do. I felt there were some people in my life as I think about some educators who embrace that notion that kids can be successful and that our work is to help them unlock their dreams and know how to get there. But I also had adults that I can remember that suggested that I had limitations. So, my motivation frankly throughout my career has been to help individuals discover their own path to opportunity.

MT: One of the things we've been wanting to do in this series is talk a little bit about how things have changed over time and how some of those historical trends have affected Kansas and our school system, maybe Kansas in general. So, you would have been beginning your career as a teacher and in special education in kind of the eighties. So, not to date you—

CL: Thank you.

MT: One of the things we would observe is that was within a decade really of the federal special education law, Kansas law. So, you started in that area relatively close to the beginning of current special education. Do you have any reflections on maybe what it was like at the time,

what it was like going into special education at I assume a relatively new profession, and how that's changed at least over the years that you were involved?

CL: What I can recall, thinking all that time back, is that the children that were identified in special ed were separated out to do something different. At the time, we thought that was right—design a plan for them, for those children and help them move forward. As I look back, that created a lack of opportunity for them to actually have grade-level content and find strategies to help them move forward at the pace and the level that they needed to be. So, I learned a lot from that. We were side by side with our general ed peers, my peers as educators and their peers, but we were never fully integrated.

As I left the classroom, I became a coordinator, and one of the big pushes, a coordinator in special ed, is that we focused primarily on supporting children in the general classroom where they could get the wealth of experience that all kids had and additional supports.

MT: When did you arrive at KCK? [Kansas City, Kansas, Unified School District 500]

CL: In 1984.

MT: One of the things which has been another sort of major story, at least on the K-12 side, we'll have a chance to talk a little about higher ed as well, has kind of been—well, again, in my experience, I sometimes group it by lawsuits and school finance formulas, and, of course, one of the things that would have been happening when you entered was an approach to school funding called the School District Equalization Act, which was really designed to equalize funding, and that I think was probably of note to communities like Parsons or communities like Kansas City, Kansas, which—although I can't necessarily speak to them in the eighties—at least through much of my time, have tended to be higher poverty, less well. So, the issue is how do you try to ensure that those students have the resources to get some type of equal access to education? And, of course, part of that also has always been a question of “How do we fund special education,” a different population with different needs. Do you have any reflections or comments on some of the things you saw or maybe were a part of during that sort of first period of time when we really were looking at equities in funding on both sort of the general education, property tax side and special education?

CL: You know, I think my career has spanned some really interesting trends. I started in special ed when it was really a pull-out-down-the-hall kind of a thing. I left the classroom and went to the state hospital where it was in the transformation of custodial care, where literally furniture was bolted on the floor and TVs bolted to the wall, and people were shuffled to. My job was to lead the transformation to have that institution be a learning institution where they actually learned job skills. And then going back to KCK as a special ed administrator, etc., and then my time in Spring Hill—vast differences in opportunities, vast differences from what I had access to as a teacher in Kansas City, Kansas public schools versus what I saw being made available in Spring Hill, a totally different circumstance. So, the issue of funding, I lived it. I could see it—the kinds of tools teachers had, the training, the opportunities, the quality of the learning environments, dramatically different.

Later in my career when I became the CFO for KCK and eventually the superintendent, that funding disparity really resonated because the tax base is so divergent, being a community right next to the wealthiest county in our state, being the poorest county, you could see in every day practice, what curriculum materials, quality of the environments, everything that we did was not at the quality that our neighbors had access to, and it was all because of the tax base. So, the school finance formula was lived out in my career and what I was exposed to and tried to advocate to change.

MT: That was around the time when I was starting my work with KASB, [Kansas Association of School Boards] learning all that, and of course, there were really a series of lawsuits in the early nineties that ultimately led the legislature before action by the Supreme Court to write a new school finance formula, conceptually the one we're continuing to live with today as we're recording this in 2025.

Primarily I think it should be noted that, just the example you raised, many districts received a dramatic increase in funding to get to a base level, and then there was a 25 percent additional level to make sure no one had to come down to that level was essentially the—I think that shows the financial disparities at the time to say nothing of some of the tax disparities. But my recollection of those years is that in order to sell that in the legislature, there was also the idea, “If you're going to get more money, there's going to be some more accountability.” So, the legislature wrote in most dramatically a system of state assessments, a longer school year, a site council, and a direction that the State Board implement an outcomes-based accreditation system basically saying that we should be evaluating schools more on the basis of what they're producing than just looking at the input.

So, a lot of the nineties were kind of about implementing some of those reforms. How did you experience it at that time?

CL: As a person in special ed, when the whole movement, the No Child Left Behind movement came about, I was Director of Special Ed for Wyandotte County Cooperative. We celebrated that because it was like finally our children are being recognized as important, and the accountability of their progress was being recognized. That quickly turned however because growth was not valued. It was simply hitting these particular marks on state assessments.

So, I experienced the state assessments with a lot of conflicted thought. I understand that we need to be accountable and measure growth and the outputs. I think that the test is just one data point. Most of my career in KCK as a leader was to focus on outcomes that actually transformed kids' lives, that opportunity piece. So, our focus was on improving academics, of course, and outcomes, but doing it in a way that allowed kids to open the door to community college and to technical college. So, I spent much of my time and career focused on the test scores are one data point, but can we get students on a career path towards their dreams, if you will, with a plan so that they know how to open doors beyond the high school experience?

So, it was the push/pull—the understanding about the test accountability, the disappointment with the system that started being punitive instead of looking at growth, the change from the tests were supposed to measure the quality of your curriculum to deciding to use them to judge whether children are progressing. All of those things were difficult. But trying to put those in a context of “That’s our reality, but how we also ensure that kids understand that if they want to be an electrician, a plumber, a doctor, or a lawyer that these are the courses you take, and these are the experiences that you need to have?” We call that “Diploma Plus,” graduate with your high school diploma plus a year of college or an industry-recognized credential because those things open doors for kids. A test score does not open a door, but it can close the door.

MT: Your work in that area I would say in many ways anticipated where the State Board of Education and Department of Education moved with the *Kansans Can* vision because it was really an attempt to sort of “Yes, you need to have an academic foundation,” but valuing a wider range of maybe credentials, really looking at the idea that as our economy is changing, you need to make sure that students have at least high school and in many, many cases, need more than that. So, how do you prepare for that?

I think your district was really working on some of those things early on. But tied into that at the same time, we had another lawsuit, the *Montoy* case ultimately. I observed—I always thought it was a little bit interesting that kind of legislature wanted standardized testing for accountability, but it also become, well, plaintiff evidence of disparities in those outcomes.

That next lawsuit, the *Montoy* lawsuit, while it did have some funding equity issues, to a larger extent, it was really more focused on disparities in outcomes, I think it’s fair to say. Your district would have been in the eye of the storm on both of those, again having certainly one of the highest percentages of high need/high poverty students in the state.

You may want to talk a little bit about the different—I look at that over a period of time as several years leading up to that, a decision in 2005, four years kind of legislative fight and implementation really culminating in about 2009 when another thing happened, we’ll get to in a minute. What were you doing during those times in terms of your positions and working on some of those things that you talked about?

CL: Well, in the early 2000s, I was director of Special Ed Co-op, loving that, thinking that I was going to spend my career working with families and teachers with kids with special needs. A knock on the door, Friday afternoon. The superintendent said, “Monday, you’re the CFO for the school district.” That’s how I remember—

MT: No choice, huh?

CL: No choice. You don’t say no to your boss, and I’ve always believed, my mother taught me, when the door opens, go through it. You never know, right?

So, I got on the phone with Dale Dennisⁱⁱ that afternoon. I said, “I need help of Earl Peters.” They made time for me on Monday morning because, frankly, I didn’t even balance my checkbook at the time. How could I be CFO? Oh, my gosh.

But that experience with my education experience in the classroom and then having the opportunity to see the operations side was enormously impactful to my future career as superintendent because I got to understand how all the financing truly impacts what happens every day in the classroom. So, thank goodness for Earl and Dale in giving me all that time to help me understand school finance.

Then 2010, the same year, the *Gannon* case moved forward. KCK, my superintendent and I had been sitting on the sideline, cheering on the Schools for Fair Funding people, joining their meetings, but not really fully investing ourselves, knowing full well that our school district had the highest level of at-risk kids in the state at that time, nearly 90 percent free-and-reduced lunch.

The very first decision, the first board meeting that I attended as superintendent, the board said, “Dr. Lane, what do you want to do? Do we fully engage in the school finance lawsuit? If so, why? If not, why not?” The outcome, the decision that we collectively made was “It’s time to step into the arena and to help people understand that we, the same accountability outcomes that we want for all children and all families: Do well in school, have strong academics, be a good human, and pursue your dreams, and get a job,” all of those things were important to our kids, and we realized that our kids come in the door without the resources, generally two or three years behind a more well-resourced community. So, we stepped into the school finance lawsuit.

My eight-and-a-half years as superintendent was juggling, advocating, not only for KCK, but frankly all schools in Kansas. It was important to the board that we not take advantage of funding that would help us that would not help our neighbors, balancing, being engaged in that advocacy work, at the same time creating an environment where kids could understand the pathway to their aspirations and making sure they had access to high-quality education, teachers that were highly skilled and then these other opportunities for post-secondary success. So, it was trying to combine those two and keeping my feet in both places. It was challenging at times. It was difficult to walk into the capital, knowing that the positions you were taking were not well received. So, how could I explain why those were vital to my kids, at the same time, not letting the decisions that were made in the capital keep us from doing what we needed to. It was hard, very hard, but crucial.

MT: And my recollections, I want you to correct or fill in a little more if I get it wrong, is that while the *Montoy* case was essentially about—what it ultimately led to was significantly more resources for all kids, but particularly for kids with particular challenges. So, more at-risk funding based on low income. More special education funding, more early childhood funding sorts of things, and fully funding the equity formula that says, “When you have some local dollars, we equalize those so that everyone has an equal opportunity.”

The *Gannon* case occurred because the legislature admittedly when confronted with a huge budget challenge after the recession of 2008, 2009 essentially stopped putting in the equalization

dollars, which would tend to disadvantage districts with lower property wealth and then basically cut and did not fully restore the base amount, which also affects—this is kind of technical to probably some of our viewers, but the weightings that are associated with those high-needs populations.

So, it went back to the Supreme Court to basically—and I think the Court essentially said, “If you’re going to allow local funding, then you need to equalize it so that every district”—basically what that just means is if you’re a low-wealth district, and you put in say a mill, the state will also put in money to essentially get you to a more average or equitable—not at the top, necessarily—ability to compete and then further said that the legislature was not funding its own studies, which indicate what it would cost.

If I remember correctly, you testified at one point in one of these trials where you talked a little bit about why money matters because in a sense that’s something that the Supreme Court ultimately wrestled with, still controversial, but the question is, “Does the quality of education in some fairly substantial part depend on having resources?” If you remember, what were some of the things you talked about, the examples of how money helped or lack of money hinders districts?

CL: Let me back up. My time at CFO was during that time that you mentioned in that 2005 to 2009 period. One of the things that happened when the formula was not funded is that I was faced in making recommendations to the superintendent on how we were going to reduce ten to twelve million dollars in the current year, right? Most school district budgets are primarily personnel, right? Primarily. Four hundred people on a list that were providing important services to our children so that we could be held accountable to the same outcomes that we had to cut, lost jobs. Immediately we were in a situation where we knew what we needed to do for children, but we didn’t have the people or the financial resources to do it, right?

Then moving into the *Gannon* case, that was really compelling to why to get involved. During *Gannon*, I remember vividly being in the district court testifying for eight hours one day and then another half day the next, having pictures of Alex and Rachel, two of my kids, on the stand to keep focused on why are we doing that and being asked questions by the state attorney about whether or not I believe that we could truly help all children be successful, whether or not my idea of creating opportunity and pathways to what kids wanted to do after high school, their dreams, if you will. Wasn’t that excessive? Wasn’t that just trying to provide an excellent standard rather than just a good standard of education? Just being bombarded that this idea that we needed more funding was not worthy, and that shouldn’t we just set some kids aside? I mean, literally that attorney said to me, “Shouldn’t we set some kids aside?” So, I looked down at those two pictures, Mark, and just got infuriated and picked up a picture and said to him, “If this was your kid, would that be your answer? Just to set them aside?”

It seemed like a full-circle moment because I could have been that kid, doing okay in school but really not as well that needed more resource. I met throughout my career hundreds of kids and families whose children needed more resource, and yet the state was suggesting that we should

just move forward and leave them, to use the phrase, behind, to just not invest. If they needed more, that's on them. That was the take-away from that experience.

MT: And I guess you could say to an extent the Supreme Court agreed with you though they have in their decision would talk about the state's obligation is not everything you want, but it's this idea of suitable or adequate, but part of that I think was them trying to say that the state itself has commissioned studies on what it would take to get, again not everyone to the highest level, but simply to bring all students to a level where many students are not at today. And ultimately that prevailed, but as we again sit here today, the legislature is still kind of arguing over some of those same issues. Ultimately a decision was reached to phase in funding again under *Gannon*, which is what had happened under *Montoy*, and I don't know if either you or I will be involved in, but as part of that, the legislature has sunset the school finance formula in a few years—we'll try to look at it all the way again.

In the time we have, I also want to talk about some of the other things you've done. I want to move on to your work with the Board of Regents, your work with the Governor's Education Council and some of the things you're doing today. But before we leave that, are there any other things about your work as superintendent that you want to comment on?

CL: That experience, leading KCK School District, was not one that I pursued. It was one that I was encouraged to take. It was a gift. It truly was. It was hard work, but I had an extraordinary team and a board that was focused on creating opportunities for families, and it was a gift. Oftentimes when people ask me about it, they reflect on how hard it must have been. It was challenging, but so impactful to me as a human being to have had the experience to support those kids and families and those teachers. It was an unbelievable experience.

And also it has me believing even strongly today that our legislators' intentions of holding school districts accountable is the right thing, but if they're only looking at state assessments, they're totally missing the mark on how to hold school districts accountable for ensuring that children graduate with strong academic skills on a pathway to a family-supporting wage in a field that both the person wants, the student, and the family, but also our state needs to move forward. As long as we are looking at a test score on a high-stakes exam as the only measure of success, we are going to be disappointed.

MT: It's interesting that the State Department has done some research. They very clearly show that your score on a state assessment is a predictor of graduation rates, post-secondary success, but certainly not an absolute one. So, you can look at kids in our lowest level, and a lower percentage of them go on to success, but some still do, and some kids in the highest level don't have that success. The take-away from them is you really do have to look at other measures and find something rather than a one-day, one-time test. What connects with that child? So, again, I think some of that work very much helped with where the State Board is now.

Talking about preparing kids I think really does fit into the work I know you—what you've described as what the Board of Regents is really about. So, K-12 is really trying to get kids prepared for the world, but more and more that preparation is going to have to involve some of

type of work even more than high school. So, what led you to the Board of Regents, and what were some of your either personal experiences there or the big issues the board was wrestling with?

CL: Before the Board of Regents was the Governor's Council.

MT: That's true. Sorry. Whatever step you want to take.

CL: What led me to both of those was Governor [Laura] Kelly recognizing that I wasn't ready to just sit down I think.

MT: Retirement wasn't just sitting around.

CL: She wasn't ready for me to just sit. So, the focus of the Governor's Council was really an extension of thinking about how do we build a work force. What does education need to do to build a work force that really helps grow prosperity in Kansas?

So we worked on things like work-based learning was just similar to Diploma Plus and policies around early childhood and those kinds of things and trying to help the connection between what does business need? What can education do? And move that forward.

In that journey then, the opportunity came to be a Regent, again Governor Kelly asking me if I was interested. I thought, "If I could add value, trying to build a bridge if you will, between the K-12 system and the higher ed system, again that's a way to create pathways of opportunity for individuals." So, serving as a Regent, I told myself every day, "My role is to be the voice to make sure that we are expanding opportunity for individuals."

So, the Board of Regents is focused on three things: helping families, supporting businesses, and growing economic prosperity being involved in that. So, those kinds of things just seem to fit nicely into my life's work, I think. I really enjoyed that. I enjoyed being part of what the board was grappling with.

The board that I worked with and the current board is very focused on student success. What does it mean to be successful? How do we make sure we're offering programs that lead to quality jobs? How do we create more and more opportunities for not just those who traditionally go to college, but those who don't see college or universities as access? It really is a lot about access, about success, about supporting the college students when they're in the universities to make sure that they complete and that they have a degree that will actually open doors for them. So, that was the work.

MT: In some of the conversations we've had in the past, I think you and the board have tried to tackle that, both in terms of things like academic preparation counseling, but also recognizing cost issues, and the things that I think has really been a trend, but again I think it goes back to some of the things your district was a leader in, really emphasizing allowing students to take courses, college courses while they're still in high school. Some of that's supported by—I'm

going to forget the number, but the Senate bill passed under Governor Brownback on expanding CTE programs and access. But you've been even working on trying to make sure that students who are interested in a traditional academic track have the opportunity to take courses in high school. That seems to have been a high priority. How are we moving on that?

CL: A very high priority. Senate Bill 155, I don't know—

MT: I think that's right.

CL: You and I are rusty there, a great success and creating opportunities for more and more students to take concurrent classes or dual enrollment. If you look at the data, those opportunities, they're there, but again not for everyone, and not for every demographic, and certainly our rural kids have less access.

So, how are we doing on that? Well, this year, the current board is focused on the first fifteen—trying to find a way to ensure that all students have access to at least the first fifteen hours of courses. That was not funded during this session, at least it hasn't been to this date. So, it's an opportunity to keep advocating for why a credential beyond a high school diploma is important and why we should be investing in them. So, the board hasn't given up, but they haven't had the success that they currently have wanted to. They'll keep going at it, I'm sure.

MT: We're now getting a little more contemporary, and that's a little outside kind of the target range, but these recordings will live forever. Let's talk a little bit about what you're involved in right now, which is also I think a passion project, but fits very much into the theme that we've been talking about, and that is the Literacy Blueprint. Can you quickly describe that, where it comes from, how it fits into some of these other things?

CL: Just in brief, the board, the Kansas Board of Regents, and the universities identified a few years ago that literacy was a priority, and educator preparation is what we do. So, we needed to provide more focus. We supported and Senate Bill 438 was passed that established the blueprint. It went into effect a year ago in July, July 1, 2024, and I determined last spring that I needed to get off the bench, as I called it, and be fully engaged in trying to help stand up the blueprint, which really is focused on—I call it the main thing, the main thing is equipping teachers so that every child learns to read because if you don't have strong reading skills, you lack access to opportunities.

So, our work is to support improvements to our educator preparation and undergraduate programs and to provide meaningful high-impact professional learning to educators that are already in the classroom. We're doing that in partnership with the State Board of Education in KSDE, but we recognize that higher ed needs to do more. So, a lot of focus on how do we help build skills of teachers so that every children has what they need.

MT: Again, having thirty-some years of watching this, I think what's been interesting about the issue around literacy is the challenge of getting our big systems to work together because we tend to bifurcate probably in most states, certainly in Kansas, higher ed under the Board of

Regents, K-12 under the State Board of Education under local school boards, and yet it is higher ed that produces the teachers that have to work there, and the challenge of kind of getting the system to agree on priorities and then what each can do to support the other is a challenge as it would be with any system.

But this issue around literacy, which really goes back to some work on dyslexia several years ago in the legislature where the legislature was trying to support efforts to improve reading for that group, and I think increasingly have learned those lessons or the best way to help those readers really can help everyone learn how to read. So, there has been this push that you've been a part of, and that really is where you're at now, is continuing to see how do we implement it, not just structurally, but I think you've used the term as a movement almost that everyone has to be a part of. It's not something that just higher education or the Board of Regents or even the school systems can do. You really need full community buy-in.

CL: It is a movement. We talk a lot—when I say “we,” the advisory committee that supports the blueprint, we talk a lot about “How do we build a movement?” because we have had pockets of work. The State Board is doing good work. The legislative body has passed good policy. KBOR [Kansas Board of Regents] is producing educators. Families are trying to do something. Imagine what we could do if we were all moving in the same direction, having honest conversations about what we need to strengthen, what we need to stop doing.

So, building a movement in my mind is the way we're going to solve this challenge that we have with a large percentage of our children who don't read well. I'm not saying that they don't read. They don't read well, and we want all kids to be able to read well so that they can access opportunities in the future.

I think if you want to sum up what is the Blueprint about, it's about building a movement. It's about providing educators what they need and really families what they need because families want their children to thrive, and when there's a struggle in the area of literacy, we need to surround that family with support. Some of the amazing outcomes that we've seen so far in the few months of the Blueprint is that we have the public university system working together on projects to solve this. We have the State Board, the Board of Regents identifying how they can collaborate, and we have legislative support.

Unfortunately, we have some areas to work on in that arena to help legislators truly understand what we're trying to do. They want to hold us accountable for outcomes. It's going to take all of us together to solve this puzzle.

MT: Well, you have clearly picked an ambitious set of things to do in “retirement.” As we kind of wrap this up, I'm not saying your career is over, but I guess I'll just give you maybe one more opportunity if you want to look back. Are there some things you are particularly proud of or maybe disappointments or maybe just lessons? Part of the purpose of this project I think is certainly people are interested in Kansas history, but maybe a little bit of it is people who want to learn lessons from the past.

So, as you kind of look back on your career as leading education in Kansas in a lot of different ways, are there some particular lessons or accomplishments or, as I say, disappointments that you want to share before we finish up?

CL: I believe strongly in teams, and that doing meaningful work requires that you have teammates, partners, that community around you. That's been my career. Where I've seen the most forward progress, it's been because of the teams, and I've had the privilege of being part of those teams.

A lesson learned is if we truly want to move our state forward to make sure it continues to be a great place to raise a family and for businesses to grow, we need to continue to realize that that happens collectively. It doesn't happen when we're trying to do something on our own.

It's the Kansas spirit. We're about community and family. I think every day we should remind ourselves of that. For me, life purpose is about service. How do we continue that? It's been a privilege.

MT: It's been a privilege to talk to you. I just want to thank you for your service to Kansas, which is not over, but you've had an opportunity to see an awful lot and be a real participant in a lot of it. Dr. Lane, thank you. I want to, of course, thank the viewers. I hope you've learned a lot. I certainly have. We appreciate your looking at this part of the Oral History Project.

[End of File]

ⁱ Both the *Montoy* and *Gannon* cases, which are about funding public schools, are referenced in this interview. For a greater understanding of the cases, please read the [Interview of Justice Lawton Nuss by Richard Ross](#) from July 27, 2022 in the Kansas Courts and the Rule of Law Collection. Appended to the end of Justice Nuss' interview are Westlaw summaries of the pertinent cases.

ⁱⁱ People interested in the development of education policy in Kansas will find no better resource than this 2020 oral history interview with [Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner of Education](#).