

# Zoie Watson Saunders, M.Ed.

[zoiesauanders@gmail.com](mailto:zoiesauanders@gmail.com) | (615) 957-8719 | 1117 S.E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316

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## Professional Profile

Broad strategic and operational experience in public school governance, education management and municipal-led workforce readiness programs. Operational oversight of mission-critical work streams, including school enrollment, budgeting, school opening, board relations, grant utilization and system adoption. Strategic oversight of academic improvement, system accreditation, growth strategy, enterprise-wide reporting, and innovation projects. Business management of new value creation through digital product design, curriculum development and strategic partnerships. Track record of launching new education divisions, programs, and services in non-profit, for profit, and government contexts. Visionary leader with success managing cross-functional teams of educators, business partners and community organizations to achieve KPIs.

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## Education

**Vanderbilt University, Peabody College of Education and Human Development**, Nashville, TN

Master of Education, Community Development & Action, May 2012

Awards: Orrin Ingram Scholar, Schwab Award, Peabody Research & Teaching Fellow

Thesis: *Building Collaborative Capacity at the Program Level: Re-framing How Practitioners Think About Human Service Delivery*

**Harvard University, College of Arts & Sciences**, Cambridge, MA

Bachelor of Arts, English and American Literature, June 2005

Year Abroad in Madrid, Spain at Universidad de Complutense

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## Professional History

### State of Vermont

*Secretary of Education responsible for leading the Vermont Agency of Education, implementing federal and state education laws, overseeing \$2 billion in federal and state grants, and promoting equitable learning opportunities for over 80,000 Vermont students through leadership, oversight, and support of supervisory unions/supervisory districts.*

#### Secretary of Education

**December 2024-Present**

- Appointed by Governor Phil Scott to serve as the permanent Secretary of Education, following a 6-month tenure as Interim Secretary of Education that resulted in improved statewide data reporting, analytics, and school district operations along with new statewide initiatives to promote literacy, afterschool programs, strategic budgeting, grant utilization, and inter-agency coordination.

#### Interim Secretary of Education

**April -November 2024**

- Led a Listen and Learn Tour, involving regional planning with education leaders, teacher focus groups, student focus groups, and public engagement sessions across the state to capture communities' educational priorities and align the Agency's work to state, regional, and local needs.
- Transformed the Agency of Education's data analytic and reporting capabilities to address long-standing issues, yielding comprehensive data reports, including the *State Education Profile Report* and *Vermont's Education Funding System: Explained and Compared to Other States*, along with open-source data sets to inform planning and policy development.
- Stabilized school districts at high-operational risk through targeted support, on-the-ground training, and capacity building strategies.

- Launched Read Vermont, a comprehensive statewide initiative to promote improved literacy outcomes through professional learning, job-embedded coaching, a literacy learning network, and caregiver resources.
- Amended Vermont's Every Student Succeed Act Consolidated State Plan to improve identification of schools in need of comprehensive support and accelerate assessment data reporting to the field.
- Developed a new career and technical education (CTE) grant to purchase equipment and supplies, expanding training programs in high-demand industries.
- Expanded summer food benefits for eligible families by launching the new Summer EBT program.
- Hosted the Governor's School Safety Conference, training school leaders on incident prevention, emergency operations planning, and behavior threat assessment management, among other topics.
- Initiated planning for a new educator licensing system to streamline the licensing process for Vermont educators, which is expected to go live in the summer of 2025.
- Served on legislative committees to provide policy recommendations to the General Assembly, including the Commission on the Future of Public Education, the Pre-Kindergarten Education Implementation Committee, Advisory Council on Literacy, Afterschool Advisory Committee, among others.

### **Broward County Public Schools**

*Cabinet leader responsible for aligning resources, maximizing facility usage, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing support services for the sixth largest school district in the country, comprised of 230 schools serving over 200,000 students.*

#### **Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer**

**January -April 2024**

- Designed and launched a data-driven, participatory process of reimagining district operations to enhance educational delivery and promote equitable learning outcomes.
- Facilitated community planning with a diverse range of stakeholders to co-develop the criteria and goals for short-term operational improvements while developing the District's long-range facility master plan.
- Cultivated strategic partnerships to support educational program expansion and innovative school models, designed to increase demand in District schools.

### **City of Fort Lauderdale**

*Launched and led a new government office to expand learning opportunities for 180,000 residents. Recognized for innovation in education by the U.S. Department of Labor, National League of Cities, State of Florida Department of Education, Broward County Public Schools, and Neighborhoods USA.*

#### **Chief Education Officer**

**2019-2023**

- Spearheaded innovative education programs that earned the city of Fort Lauderdale recognition as a recipient of the Florida Department of Education's Commissioner's Business Recognition Award and Broward County Public Schools Partner of the Year at the Secondary Level.
- Expanded workforce development opportunities in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods through partnerships with Broward College and Prosperity Broward.
- Launched the Avionics Systems Technician Program in coordination with Atlantic Technical College and the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport to prepare workers for high-demand, high-wage jobs.
- Selected by the National League of Cities and U.S. Department of Labor to implement scalable workforce training programs through the *Good Jobs, Great Cities Academy*.
- Designed and implemented the city's Summer Enrichment Program to provide academic support and college and career counseling for 2,000 low-income children and teens, mitigating summer learning loss.
- Implemented an afterschool literacy program in partnership with the Barbara Bush Foundation, resulting in participants reporting greater confidence in reading.
- Used an equity index to expand access to community parks through a shared-use partnership with Broward County Public Schools, resulting in the approval of \$12 million in park bonds.
- Successfully advocated for school facility improvements, resulting in increased funding in the District Education Facilities Plan for city schools.

- Mobilized community support for underperforming schools through the establishment of Community Action Partnership for Education (CAPE) Teams, promoting increased volunteer hours and school sponsorships.
- Mobilized resources for students and families experiencing homelessness through a series of community programs.
- Served as the City's subject matter expert on education matters and liaison to the City's Education Advisory Board, involving frequent presentations and ongoing engagement with the City Commission, School Board of Broward County, Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance, CareerSource, Early Learning Coalition, Children's Services Council, and other partners.

## **Charter Schools USA**

**2012-2019**

*Led school improvement of national charter school network, operating 83 schools across seven states and educating 70,500 students. Over 7-year period recognized for top performance through promotions and leadership selection for high-priority initiatives.*

### **Vice President of Strategy**

**2016-2019**

- Received promotion following performance leading CSUSA's AdvancED accreditation renewal process, enhanced board reporting approach and cross-functional service optimization to schools.
- Led academic task force, resulting in 100% school grade improvement for target schools with an average of 41% improvement in school grade points.
- Doubled proportion of A and B schools within 2-year period by systematizing proven methodology and deploying tools for school grade improvement.
- Designed, developed and deployed a web-based school improvement platform with 200% ROI and correlation with high performance.
- Led enrollment task force, resulting in 475% increase in proportion of schools meeting enrollment targets.
- Increased AdvancED accreditation ratings on all improvement priorities through management of enterprise-wide initiatives.
- Oversaw accreditation applications for new schools, resulting in additional capital outlay funding in year 1 of school operation.
- Facilitated corporation strategic plan that involved input from over 5,000 stakeholders and resulted in revised company mission, vision and three-year goals.
- Managed grant portfolio of over \$20 million in competitive and entitlement grants across 60 schools.
- Led Steering Committee to design and implement innovative, technology-rich school models in new markets. Optimized strategic partnerships with Apple and other education technology providers to enhance blended learning and student personalization.
- Developed company-wide Standard Operating Procedures and Core Fundamentals of Education and Enrollment.

### **Director of Strategy**

**2015-2016**

- Received promotion following successful design and implementation of budget priorities process and academic intervention.
- Led AdvancED system-wide accreditation, resulting in maximum accreditation renewal for all schools.
- Oversaw 30% expansion of school portfolio within 2-year period and coordinated cross-functional task management that resulted in 100% of schools opening on time.
- Developed revised board management and reporting process, credited with charter approvals for governing boards in growth markets.
- Spearheaded cross-functional working group to integrate and maximize impact of organizational services, resulting in departmental KPIs.
- Demonstrated impact of proprietary social & emotional learning (SEL) curriculum on student self-esteem.
- Developed business requirements for SEL app to expand reach of proprietary curriculum.

**Manager of Strategy****2012-2015**

- Led academic intervention that resulted in 90% of targeted schools improving one letter grade or more.
- Designed and implemented budget priorities process that resulted in strategic resource alignment and expedited budgeting approval timeline.
- Developed performance management system to flag schools in need of intervention, identify model schools and share best practices.
- Implemented organization-wide process improvement methodology to reduce organizational redundancies and to increase transparency of cross-functional processes.

**Vanderbilt University, Peabody College of Education****2010-2012**

*Research assistant in Department of Human and Organizational Development. During 2-year graduate program, selected to lead research projects and consult on education reform initiatives.*

**Consultant & Program Evaluator, Promise Neighborhood Initiative**

*Place-based education reform initiative designed to break intergenerational poverty.*

- Developed the optimum governance structure to promote participatory decision-making, resulting in memorandums of understanding with over 50 public, private and government agencies.
- Researched, analyzed and implemented a process improvement system to promote organizational learning.
- Designed and facilitated strategic planning sessions to develop the lead organization's theory of change and formulate strategies for expansion.
- Analyzed strategic, operational and core partnerships using bi-modal network analysis, resulting in a presentation at a national conference.

**Lead Program Evaluator, Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee**

*Evaluation measuring the impact of an early learning scholarship program for working poor families.*

- Investigated multi-level impact of scholarship on family stability, socialization opportunities, and life-long learning. Reported policy implications and recommended fund development strategies.

**HospiceCare of Southeast Florida****2007-2010**

*Nonprofit healthcare organization providing palliative care and bereavement support.*

**Director of Development**

- Launched new division of pediatric services and implemented a national demonstration project through partnerships with 3 children's hospitals, 2 research universities and Children's Medical Services.
- Led organizational change working groups to improve interdisciplinary service delivery, interdepartmental coordination, and data sharing.

**Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center****2006-2007**

*Nonprofit pediatric health clinic serving over 10,000 children.*

**Coordinator of Development**

- Managed annual fundraising campaign via special events, public and private grants, corporate philanthropy, annual giving and oversight of volunteer auxiliary.

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**Awards**

- Florida Department of Education Commissioner's Business Recognition Award, 2021
- Neighborhoods USA 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Honoree in the Best Neighborhood Program/Social Revitalization, 2021
- Broward County Public Schools Partner of the Year at the Secondary Level, 2020
- Charter Schools USA's Putting Students First Award, 2016
- Schwab Award, 2012
- Orrin Ingram Scholar, 2010