

Watson Scott Swail, Ed.D.

Chief Executive Officer | Non-Profit CEO | Education Policy & Strategy Executive

Suffolk, VA | 757-513-8266 | wswail@educationalpolicy.org | LinkedIn.com/in/wssswail

DR. WATSON SCOTT SWAIL is an accomplished executive leader with more than two decades of experience founding, leading, and scaling mission-driven organizations in the education and public policy sectors. As Founding President and Senior Research Scientist of the Educational Policy Institute (EPI), he has built and led a nationally and internationally respected nonprofit organization focused on advancing educational access, affordability, and student success. Under his leadership, the organization has conducted over 100 research and policy initiatives spanning the full education continuum, influencing institutions, governments, and foundations across North America and beyond.

Dr. Swail brings a rare combination of executive vision, operational leadership, and intellectual authority. He has successfully guided organizations through strategic planning, fundraising, program development, and large-scale research implementation, helping partners secure more than \$100 million in federally funded initiatives. His leadership experience includes managing multidisciplinary teams, advising boards and senior stakeholders, and forging partnerships with prominent philanthropic organizations such as the Lumina Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education.

A proven nonprofit executive, Dr. Swail has deep expertise in mission alignment, organizational growth, and evidence-based decision-making. His work emphasizes measurable impact, data-driven strategy, and sustainable program design. In his concurrent role as Principal of SwailLandis, he advises higher education institutions and organizations on strategic transformation, student success initiatives, and performance analytics, further demonstrating his ability to translate vision into actionable outcomes.

Dr. Swail's leadership career reflects a consistent trajectory of increasing responsibility across both nonprofit and public-sector institutions. He has held senior roles with the Council for Opportunity in Education and the Pell Institute, as well as leadership and policy positions with SRI International and the College Board, where he directed influential national reports on college affordability and student aid. His early career as an educator and professor grounds his executive work in practical, on-the-ground experience.

Recognized as a thought leader in education policy, Dr. Swail is widely known for developing the Swail Geometric Framework for Student Retention, a globally utilized model that informs institutional strategy and student success initiatives. He is a prolific author, keynote speaker, and policy advisor, with extensive publications and testimony before the U.S. Congress.

Dr. Swail holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Policy from The George Washington University and has built a career defined by innovation, cross-sector leadership, and a commitment to expanding opportunity through strategic, high-impact nonprofit leadership.

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EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Mission-driven executive with more than two decades of experience founding, leading, and scaling high-impact organizations in education and public policy. Founder and CEO of a nationally and internationally recognized institute delivering research, strategy, and analytics to governments, higher education institutions, and philanthropic organizations.

Proven track record driving organizational growth, multimillion-dollar fundraising, and cross-sector partnerships, with demonstrated success influencing policy and institutional outcomes at scale. Known for translating research into actionable strategy, operational execution, and measurable impact. Trusted advisor to boards, senior leaders, and public officials. His professional publications have been cited over 5,000 times in research journals and he has over 96,000 followers on LinkedIn.

CORE LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS

- Organizational Strategy & Growth
- Nonprofit Executive Leadership (CEO/C-Suite)
- Fundraising & Grant Development (\$100M+ enabled)
- Board & Stakeholder Engagement
- Strategic Partnerships (Government, Philanthropy, Higher Ed)
- Operational Management & Program Execution
- Policy Analysis & Systems Reform
- Data Strategy, Predictive Analytics, & Performance Improvement

EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCE

President & CEO | Senior Research Scientist

Educational Policy Institute (EPI) — Virginia Beach, VA | 2002–Present

Founder and chief executive of a globally recognized nonprofit research and policy organization focused on education access, affordability, and student success.

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Enterprise Leadership & Organizational Growth

- Founded and scaled EPI into a high-impact, multi-sector policy institute delivering more than 100 research, evaluation, and strategic initiatives across North America and internationally
- Established a mission-driven organization operating at the intersection of research, policy, and implementation, serving federal agencies, universities, foundations, and school systems
- Lead multidisciplinary teams delivering complex, multi-year engagements across K–12, higher education, and workforce systems

Fundraising & Financial Stewardship

- Directed partnerships and program development enabling clients and collaborators to secure over \$100M in federal funding and philanthropic investment
- Built and sustained relationships with major funders including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, USAID, and U.S. Department of Education

Board Engagement & Strategic Partnerships

- Advise and collaborate with boards, government leaders, and institutional executives on strategy, policy, and organizational performance
- Developed partnerships with leading global and national organizations including OECD, UNESCO, National Council on Disability, and major higher education systems
- Serve as a trusted external advisor and thought partner on large-scale initiatives and system reform

Operational & Program Leadership

- Directed large-scale initiatives including federal Title III, Title V, Race to the Top, and Investing in Innovation (i3) programs
- Built and implemented enterprise-level data systems, dashboards, and predictive analytics tools to support institutional performance and decision-making
- Led development of evaluation frameworks, performance metrics, and program models used to guide organizational improvement and funding strategies

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Policy & Systems Influence

- Led research and policy efforts influencing decision-making at local, state, national, and international levels
- Testified before the U.S. Congress and advised policymakers on education access, affordability, and student success
- Positioned EPI as a trusted voice in policy, data analytics, and institutional transformation

Principal

SwailLandis — Virginia Beach, VA | 2017–2026

Founder of a strategic consulting enterprise advising higher education institutions and organizations on transformation and performance improvement.

- Led strategic planning, change management, and institutional effectiveness initiatives
- Delivered data-driven solutions to improve retention, completion, and operational performance
- Supported institutions in aligning mission, strategy, and analytics with measurable outcomes

Vice President & Founding Executive Director (Pell Institute)

Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) — Washington, DC | 2001–2002

- Founded and launched a national research institute (The Pell Institute) focused on access and equity in higher education
- Built research agenda, organizational structure, and national visibility from inception

Senior Policy & Research Leadership Roles

SRI International | The College Board | McKenzie Group | 1993–2001

- Directed national research and policy initiatives on college affordability, access, and student success
- Produced influential national reports (*Trends in Student Aid*, *Trends in College Pricing*) used by policymakers and media
- Provided data, analysis, and briefings to Congress and national education leaders

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SELECTED IMPACT

- Delivered 100+ cross-sector research, evaluation, and strategy initiatives influencing institutions and policy systems
 - Enabled \$100M+ in grant funding through program design, evaluation, and strategic advisory
 - Designed and implemented data systems and predictive analytics platforms to improve institutional decision-making and student outcomes
 - Led evaluation and advisory work for multi-million-dollar federal and philanthropic initiatives
 - Collaborated with federal agencies, global organizations, and leading foundations to shape education policy and practice
-

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP & POLICY EXPERTISE

Internationally recognized authority in education policy, student success, and institutional performance.

- Developer of the Swail Geometric Framework for Student Retention, used globally to inform institutional strategy
- Prolific author of books, policy reports, and peer-reviewed research
- Frequent keynote speaker and advisor to executive and board-level audiences

Areas of Expertise:

- Postsecondary access, affordability, and ROI
 - Student retention and institutional performance
 - Program evaluation and systems analytics
 - Education policy and large-scale reform
-

BOARD & PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

- Advisor to universities, nonprofit boards, and public-sector organizations
- Testified before the U.S. Congress on education policy
- Frequent keynote speaker and policy commentator
- Active member of AERA, AIR, ASHE, and American Evaluation Association

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EDUCATION	EXECUTIVE POSITIONING
Ed.D., Educational Policy & Higher Education Administration The George Washington University	Founder-CEO with a distinctive combination of organizational leadership, policy influence, and data-driven strategy expertise, capable of leading complex organizations, building high-impact partnerships, and driving measurable institutional and system-level change.
M.S., Technology Education Old Dominion University	
B.Ed., Mathematics & Technology University of Manitoba / Red River College	