

Review Panel for the Evaluation of Prekindergarten Assessment Instruments

The panel of reviewers for the *2024-2027 Commissioner's List of Approved Prekindergarten Assessment Instruments* includes researchers and practitioners with robust experience and qualifications in a range of areas, including early childhood education, special populations, literacy, English Language Learners, psychology, statistics, and research methodology.



Kristi L. Santi, Ph.D.

Kristi Santi is a Professor of Special Populations at the University of Houston. She has extensive experience working with high-needs students in Pk–20 educational settings. Prior to joining UH, Dr. Santi served as a teacher in both inclusion and resource classrooms in elementary, middle, and high school. She has worked with turn-around schools throughout the U.S. Currently, Dr. Santi is the lead investigator on two grants funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): (1) Assessment, Intervention, and Instruction for the Prevention and Treatment of Dyslexia (AIIPaT: Dyslexia) grant and (2) Leadership for Special Populations and Educational Disparity (LEAD: SP+ED).



Coleen Carlson, Ph.D.

Coleen Carlson is an Associate Research Professor and the Associate Director of the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES) at the University of Houston. She has over 25 years of work in the field of early literacy, second language learning, and quantitative and qualitative data analysis. She has also directed numerous large and small-scale federal and state grants and contracts. Dr. Carlson is currently the co-principal investigator with Dr. Santi on the AIIPaT: Dyslexia OSEP funded grant, a co-investigator for the Center for the Success of English Learners (CSEL), and the external evaluator for several Department of Education funded National Professional Development Program grants.



Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan, Ed.D., CCC/SLP, CDT, CALT, QI

Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan is a Bilingual Speech and Language Pathologist, certified Dyslexia Specialist, certified Academic Language Therapist, and a qualified Instructor. Dr. Cárdenas-Hagan is President of the Valley Speech Language and Learning Center in Brownsville, Texas, and a Research Associate with the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES) at the University of Houston. Her research interests include the development of language and literacy skills among Spanish-speaking English learners. She has worked with teams of researchers designing assessments and interventions for English learners who struggle with reading.



Jeremy Miciak, Ph.D.

Jeremy Miciak is a Research Associate Professor for the Department of Psychology and an affiliated faculty member at the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES) at the University of Houston. Dr. Miciak's research focuses on the assessment, identification, presentation, and treatment of learning difficulties, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. He currently serves as a Co-Principal Investigator for two large-scale funded projects focused on emergent bilingual students (EBs): (1) an Education Development Research Center funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) that aims to improve opportunities and outcomes for EBs and (2) the Texas Learning Disabilities Research Center project funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) examining learning disabilities identification and remediation for EBs with reading disabilities. He also serves as the Principal Investigator for a large-scale study investigating learning risk among newcomer emergent bilingual students.



Paulina Kulesz, Ph.D.

Paulina Kulesz holds a joint appointment as a Research Associate Professor at the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES) and the Department of Psychology at the University of Houston. Given her extensive educational psychology and neuroscientific background, her substantive research interests concern: (a) developing empirical models of reading comprehension that account for variation within readers and across texts; (b) the assessment of constructs related to reading performance, particularly academic vocabulary and motivation to read; and (c) neural and cognitive correlates explaining aberrant behavior and performance in children with spina bifida and learning disabilities. She has considerable experience in the application of random effects models, including explanatory item response models, as well as more traditional structural equation modeling (SEM) and item response theory (IRT), robust statistics, and cluster randomized trials in education and clinical settings.



Ken Nieser, M.Ed.

Ken Nieser is a Project Manager at the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES) at the University of Houston. He has nearly 40 years of experience in elementary, bilingual education. At UH, he has worked on numerous projects that focus on various aspects of early literacy, bilingual education, and English Language Learners. He has presented at national, state, and local bilingual conferences and is a national trainer for the Tejas LEE (El Inventario de Lectura en Español de Tejas) assessment and the Esperanza Program.



Griselda Barcenas, M.Ed.

Griselda Barcenas is a Project Manager at the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES) at the University of Houston. She has 21 years of experience in educational research. She is currently a member of the Tejas LEE (an early Spanish reading instrument) development team with responsibilities to develop content and conduct training for school districts as requested. Barcenas has served as a classroom observer and provided feedback to teachers across different school districts in Texas. She is an experienced trainer and has conducted a variety of literacy-related training for teachers for the past 18 years. She is also responsible for coordinating and collecting pilot and reliability/validity data for various research studies at TIMES.



Hope Rigby-Wills, M.Ed.

Hope Rigby-Wills is a Lecturer and Program Administrator for the Master of Education in Special Populations at the University of Houston. She is also a doctoral candidate in the UH College of Education's Ed.D. in Professional Leadership program with a concentration in Special Populations. Her area of interest is literacy — specifically, the use of data-based instruction to identify foundational literacy gaps and implement targeted interventions. In her 29 years in special education, 13 have been spent providing services to students in Pre-K through fifth grade. Rigby-Wills also served as a district-level Special Education Administrator in New York City and at a large charter school system in Texas, where she helped launch an Early Childhood Special Education program.



Teresa Guerra, Ed.D., CCC-SLP

Teresa Guerra serves as an adjunct Clinical Educator and guest Lecturer for the University of Houston Communication Sciences and Disorders Department (UH COMD). She provides clinical education and supervision for the graduate bilingual evaluation specialty team across various settings. Dr. Guerra guest lectures on bilingual topics for several undergraduate and graduate courses throughout the academic school year at UH. Her clinical and research interests include assessing and treating culturally and linguistically diverse populations, curriculum equity for preschool bilingual learners in special education programs within public schools, and pediatric feeding disorders among children with autism spectrum disorder. Dr. Guerra graduated with her doctorate from the UH College of Education's Professional Leadership program with a concentration in Special Populations. Dr. Guerra's doctoral dissertation focused on curriculum alignment for bilingual students with autism spectrum disorder and teachers' perceptions regarding the professional development opportunities received to support inclusive instructional practices.



Molly McGinnis, Ed.D.

Molly McGinnis has devoted the last 8 years to serving special education/general education students in the early childhood classroom. Her experience includes teaching in Early Childhood Special Education and pre-kindergarten classrooms. Dr. McGinnis currently serves Clear Creek Independent School District as a general education pre-kindergarten classroom Teacher, where she has presented professional development to the educators in the Early Learning department. In addition, Dr. McGinnis serves as the Campus Coordinator for Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) to train teacher colleagues and monitor campus implementation and fidelity of PBIS best practices. Dr. McGinnis' experience and current placement in a pre-kindergarten classroom provide a distinct outlook on the application and practicality of assessments in an early childhood setting. Dr. McGinnis graduated with her doctorate from the UH College of Education's Professional Leadership program with a concentration in Special Populations.



Keuntae Sweed

Keuntae Sweed is in her fifth year of teaching Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and is currently at Winship Elementary School in Spring ISD. She enjoys working with pre-kindergarten special education and non-special education students simultaneously. Ms. Sweed is a firm believer in life-long learning and seeks to learn from her students as they learn from her. Her goal is always to be a better role model and teacher for her students, just as teachers were for her during her formative years.



Maribel Medina, M.A.T.

Maribel Medina is a Co-Teacher in a blended pre-kindergarten classroom in Spring ISD at Clark Elementary. She is the Special Education Teacher in the classroom. She has 22 years of experience working with preschool and Pre-K children. She has her associate degree in Liberal Arts Early Childhood Education from Passaic County Community College, her bachelor's degree in Family and Child Studies from Montclair State University, and her master's degree in a Dual Degree in General Education and Special Education from Montclair State University. Being an educator was something she always wanted to do. Teaching has come naturally to Ms. Medina, and she goes above and beyond to ensure every student succeeds in school and life.



Iris Hinojosa

Iris Hinojosa is an alumna of the University of Houston and certified in bilingual and special education. She is currently an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Teacher, Dyslexia Provider, and Special Education Department Chairperson in the Houston Independent School District, where she is also part of the Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant. In her 15 years of teaching, she has gained experience in the areas of bilingual, dual-language, special and general education from early childhood to fourth grade, as well as high school English as a Second Language (ESL). She also has led multiple school committees and community outreach events. Ms. Hinojosa strives to understand and make connections with the population she serves to provide a meaningful learning experience, be it students, parents, or fellow colleagues.