

Commissioner Mike Morath appointed a Reading Advisory Committee in accordance with HB 3 to advise the agency on reading practices. The call for nominations went out on August 1, 2019 and 16 members were ultimately selected to encompass a diverse range of backgrounds, expertise, and current roles. This group includes practitioners and academic professionals with expertise in teaching, educational leadership, bilingual education, ESL, special education and dyslexia. For further details, review the [To the Administrator Addressed](#) from October 17, 2019. Committee members bios are listed below.

### Reading Advisory Committee Bios

**Dr. Stephanie Al Otaiba** is a Professor and serves as the Patsy and Ray Caldwell Centennial Chair in Teaching and Learning at Southern Methodist University. She remains a Faculty Affiliate of the Florida Center for Reading Research where previously taught at Florida State University. She received her doctorate in special education from Vanderbilt University. A former special education teacher, her research focuses on early literacy interventions for students with or at-risk for disabilities, response to intervention (RTI), multi-tiered systems of support, and on teacher training. She enjoys teaching graduate students and mentoring doctoral students. Her research has been supported by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the Office of Special Education Programs, and the National Institute of Health (NIH). Her current projects include an IES grant to explore RTI/MTSS implementation related to reading outcomes and an NIH grant examining the efficacy of blending reading intervention with growth mindset training. She is the author or coauthor of over 130 articles and chapters. Dr. Al Otaiba has served as the President of CEC's Division for Learning Disabilities; she currently serves on the International Dyslexia Association's executive board; and on the Early Childhood Grant Review Panel for IES. She is the editor of the Journal of Learning Disabilities, she was Associate Editor for Education Researcher and Elementary School Journal and she serves on review boards for many journals in education and psychology.

**Dr. Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan** is a bilingual speech and language pathologist, certified teacher, dyslexia therapist, certified academic language therapist and a qualified instructor. Dr. Cárdenas-Hagan is President of the Valley Speech Language and Learning Center in Brownsville, Texas. Elsa has had the privilege of collaborating in national research projects sponsored by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development and the Institute of Education Sciences, a research arm of the United States Department of Education for the last 19 years. Each national project was related to the development of language and literacy skills among Spanish-speaking English learners. Dr. Cárdenas-Hagan is currently the Chairperson of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, a Past Vice-Chairperson of the International Dyslexia Association, Past Chairperson of the Texas State Board for Speech Pathology and Audiology and the Texas State Dyslexia Advisory Board. She has written many scholarly articles and book chapters related to language and literacy development among English learners.

**Rebecca De Leon** is the Leadership Coordinator for the Bilingual/ESL & Migrant Department in San Antonio ISD. In her current position, Mrs. De Leon supports the implementation of holistic biliteracy instruction and assessment in the district's dual language programs. She coordinates and presents professional development for elementary teachers, leads the development of biliteracy frameworks and biliteracy units for district-wide use and collaborates with the English Language Arts and Reading Department to ensure best practices in literacy are being utilized district-wide. She has also worked with different education partners, including TEA and Student Achievement Partners, to launch innovative pilots for effective biliteracy implementation. Mrs. De Leon brings 12 years of education experience to her leadership in SAISD. She began her career working as a dual language teacher at Storm Academy in San Antonio from 2005-2009. She then studied at the University of Texas at Austin, earning a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with a focus on bilingual education in 2012. She worked as a science coach in Colonial Hills Elementary, a dual language campus in North East ISD, from 2012-2014. Later in 2014, Mrs. De Leon became the founding assistant school leader at KIPP: Esperanza Dual Language Academy before serving as the Spanish Language Arts and Reading Content Specialist for KIPP San Antonio. She completed her master's degree in educational leadership at Trinity University in 2017. Since 2005, Mrs. De Leon has worked with dual language education and advocated for emerging bilinguals. She is proud to be serving San Antonio ISD and supporting the love of reading.

**Dr. Jack M. Fletcher**, Ph.D., ABPP (Clinical Neuropsychology), is a Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at the University of Houston, where he also serves as Associate Vice President for Research. For the past 35 years, Dr. Fletcher, a board certified child neuropsychologist, has conducted research on children with learning and attention disorders, and brain injury. Dr. Fletcher directs a Learning Disability Research Center grant and has directed program projects involving neurobiological factors and learning in spina bifida and math disabilities, all funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. He served on the NICHD National Advisory Council, the Rand Reading Study Group, the National Research Council Committee on Scientific Principles in Education Research, and the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. Dr. Fletcher was the recipient of the Samuel T. Orton award from the International Dyslexia Association in 2003 and a co-recipient of the Albert J. Harris award from the International Reading Association in 2006. He is the Past President of the International Neuropsychological Society.

**Brett Gallini** is the Managing Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Uplift Education in the DFW area. Uplift operates 43 public charter schools, (19 elementary, 13 middle and 11 high) in DFW. Uplift Education is one of the largest IB authorized networks in the US. Brett just began his 22nd year in public education. He began as a teacher in Los Angeles Unified School District. He's worked in the two largest school districts in the United States (Los Angeles and New York City.) Brett has been a teacher, literacy coach, held two principalships in the New York City Department of Education before founding a charter school for children with Autism in Harlem. Recently, Brett moved to Texas and is enjoying his time at Uplift. He's also completing his Doctorate in Urban Education. When he's not working he is writing his dissertation on emotional support for school leaders, running or playing with his rescue pup Mikey!

**Dr. Elizabeth “Liza” Garza** is Instructional Officer for Bilingual Programs in Katy Independent School District. Previously, she has served as a researcher, dual language teacher, ESL teacher, foreign language teacher, academic support teacher, dyslexia teacher, instructional coach, and campus administrator. As instructional officer, Dr. Garza has led the development of a biliteracy curriculum that meets the instructional needs of sequential and simultaneous bilingual students as well as for English speakers learning a second language. She is committed to helping educators plan, optimize, and implement instruction focused on growing bilingual, bi-literate students who can achieve high levels of academic proficiency in two languages. Additionally, Dr. Garza has fostered collaboration among surrounding Houston districts on various dual language initiatives by hosting campus visits, dual language teacher conferences, and a Dual Language Think Tank with Teacher’s College. Dr. Garza received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas at Austin and a masters and doctorate from the University of Houston.

**Dr. Mary Ellen Isaacs** is the director of Literacy First, a program of the Dana Center at UT Austin. Literacy First is dedicated to providing low-income schools with highly trained tutors to ensure that children advance to grade level in reading before third grade. Each year, Literacy First provides evidence-based literacy tutoring to 1500 young struggling readers in 25 Central Texas schools. Dr. Isaacs has worked with Literacy First since 1997, developing and administering this national service tutoring project. She brings over three decades of experience working in the field of reading difficulties as a teacher, diagnostician, and program coordinator. Previously, she worked at the Mt. Sinai Hospital Center for Learning Disabilities in NYC and the Duke University Developmental Evaluation Center. She received her Ph.D. in Language and Literacy Studies from UT Austin in 1996. Her dissertation research focused on phonemic awareness development and its relationship to reading and spelling in first grade.

**Dr. Whitney Lawrence** was born and raised in Arlington, Texas, which is where she currently resides with her two young children, Joplin and Lennon, and husband, Matt. Professionally, Whitney served at the elementary level as a teacher and an instructional specialist for 12 years. She holds a Ph.D. in Language and Literacy from the University of North Texas, where she is currently an adjunct professor. In 2015, she was the recipient of the NTCTELA Elementary Teacher of Excellence award. Presently, she works at Region 11 Education Service Center as the Content Lead for the Literacy Achievement Academies. Whitney serves on the leadership team for the local branch of National Writing Project, North Star of Texas Writing Project. Whitney’s work in the field of language and literacy demonstrates her commitment to children’s access to authentic, supportive literacy and language practices and her belief that teacher learning is the path to student learning.

**Derek Little** serves as the assistant superintendent for early learning with the Dallas Independent School District. In that role Derek leads the district's efforts from birth to 2nd grade, working to ensure every kindergartner is ready for school and every 2nd grader is reading on grade level. Prior to this, Derek served as the deputy director of early childhood at the Louisiana Department of Education, where he led policy planning for funding, accountability, enrollment, workforce and governance of early childhood programs. Previously, Derek was the director of finance and operations for the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts, where he was able to increase funding for the school at a time of budget

cuts to education statewide. Derek started his career teaching high school math. He earned a bachelor's degree in molecular biology and a master's degree in finance from Tulane University. He has also earned master's degrees in educational leadership from Northwestern State University and the Broad Center for Urban Education.

**Cynthia Montes-Bustamante**, M. Ed. has 22 years of teaching experience. She began her career as a Kindergarten teacher, then became a literacy coach and now currently serves her campus as an Active Learning Leader for literacy/biliteracy. She has taught at her current campus, Mesita Elementary/ECDC, which is nationally known for their Dual Language program, for 21 years. During that time, she has worked alongside some of the gurus in the field of Dual Language Education including Mrs. Laila Ferris, Dr. Elena Izquierdo, Dr. Kathy Escamilla and Dr. José Medina. She also serves as adjunct faculty at UTEP, where she has taught a Foundations of Literacy and Learning reading course for the past five years. Cynthia is a proud El Paso native and a mommy to a 5th grade Dual Language student. She is honored to serve on this advisory committee to serve all Texas Public Schools children in grades K-3rd.

**Barbara Page** is a 2019-2020 Teach Plus Policy Fellow. She serves as a third-grade teacher at Castleman Creek Elementary in Midway ISD, while also researching best instructional practices for English Learners for her doctoral work at Baylor University. Barbara is a member of the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) in her district and serves on advising committees for English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) development and Bilingual Target Language Proficiency Test (BLTPT) development with the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Last year, she served on the Education Specification Subcommittees with the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) for school facilities. Previously, Barbara taught third grade in Waco ISD, Ysleta ISD in El Paso, TX; and in Corpus Christi ISD for several years while also serving on district education improvement councils and being an administrative intern. She is currently working on an EdD in Educational Leadership at Baylor University. Barbara graduated from The University of Texas at El Paso with an MS in Education Administration and received her BS in Interdisciplinary Studies from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

**Dr. Susan Silva**, Ed.D., is a transformational, visionary leader who inspires those she serves. She has a deep-rooted knowledge in curriculum, a history of success in implementing instructional vision and change, and the ability to build capacity in others. She pushes herself to be the one person that can change the course of a child's life each day. The love of teaching began early for Susan, as her mother was a long-time kindergarten teacher. Susan's brother and sister became teachers as well. She is married to an art teacher and enjoys visiting his classroom to watch the creative energy of his students. Susan began her teaching career in Galveston ISD in 1993. After serving as a teacher for 11 years, she moved to Clear Creek ISD where she has served as a third-grade teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, principal, and executive director for professional learning. Dr. Silva currently holds the title of executive director for curriculum and instruction in Clear Creek ISD.

**Dr. Sharon Vaughn**, Manuel J. Justiz Endowed Chair in Education, is the Executive Director of The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, an organized research unit at The University of Texas at Austin. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the CEC research award, the AERA SIG distinguished researcher award, The University of Texas

Distinguished faculty award and outstanding Researcher Award, and the Jeannette E. Fleischner Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Field of LD from CEC. She is the author of more than 35 books and 250 research articles. Several of these research articles have won awards: one the A.J. Harris IRA award for best article published and another the School Psychology award for best article. She is currently Principal Investigator on several Institute for Education Sciences, National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, and U.S. Department of Education research grants. She works as a senior adviser to the National Center on Intensive Interventions and has more than six articles that have met the What Works Clearing House Criteria for their intervention reports. She has conducted technical assistance in literacy to more than 30 State Departments of Education and has worked as a literacy consultant to more than 50 technical assistance projects over a 30 year career.

**Dr. David Vinson** has served as Superintendent for the Wylie Independent School District since July of 2011. Wylie ISD is a fast-growing district with 20 campuses located in southern Collin County. As a national leader in character education, Dr. Vinson created his own model of Achievement Education called “the Wylie Way.” Since taking the helm of Wylie ISD, the district has grown from 12,800 students to more than 17,200 students. Student performance exceeds both the state level and neighboring districts. During his tenure citizens approved three bond programs, allowing Wylie ISD to expand course and program offerings while maintain functional equity throughout the entire district, without increasing the tax rate. The Texas PTA/PTSA named him the 2016 Superintendent of the Year. He holds three degrees from Texas Tech University, including a doctor of philosophy in curriculum and instruction. He and his wife, Cristy, have two children, Cal and Kate.

**Dr. Tracy Weeden** is a seasoned and passionate leader dedicated to advancing literacy and academic excellence. She has spent her career developing scalable and innovative programs, systems, and teams. In her current role as President and CEO of Neuhaus Education Center, Dr. Weeden is expanding the reach and impact of the Neuhaus Education Center (NEC) within the State of Texas, and on a national level. The NEC mission provides evidence-based professional learning to educators, information and resources to families, and adult literacy services. Prior to serving at NEC, Dr. Weeden was the Executive Director of Academic Planning for Scholastic Achievement Partners. Dr. Weeden spent 5 years as the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for the Houston ISD. A graduate from the University of Detroit, with a B.A. in Speech Communications and English, Dr. Weeden also received her M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Houston.

As early as 2nd grade, **Elizabeth Franco Williams** knew she wanted to be a teacher. She pursued this passion in high school and college, taking coursework related to education and serving as a substitute teacher. She graduated with a BA in Spanish and minor in Bilingual ESL from The University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPM) in Odessa, Texas. She then continued at UTPM to earn her Teaching Certification with Bilingual Certification added. Elizabeth’s passion for teaching has only grown stronger after teaching 1st and 2nd grades for the past eight years, in both charter and traditional public districts. She most recently became the AVID teacher for Sam Houston Collegiate Preparatory in Midland, Texas. She enjoys making a difference in students’ lives and being able to help and coach other teachers as well.

When she's not teaching, Elizabeth enjoys spending time with her son. They are both movie buffs and enjoy going to the park and traveling as much as possible.