# 2023 HISPANIC LEADERS IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY



### Mónica Romero, PhD Assistant Professor at The University of Texas at Austin



#### Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology

"You don't need to prove you belong; you already know you do! We are conditioned to believe we don't belong in these spaces, but our mere presence is an act of resilience and empowerment. Nunca te olvidez de todas las fortaleza que tu tienes y lucha por lo que tu sueñas. You are paving the way for others and making la comunidad fuerte! Si se puede!

### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what

led to your entrance into the field? Before I knew I wanted to become a School Psychologist, I wanted to enter a field devoted to social justice-oriented work to address the inequalities impacting the Latine/x community. My first initial exposure was during my undergraduate studies. I had the opportunity to get exposed to the field of School Psychology. I got involved with two research projects led by faculty members in the school psychology program. Furthermore, I was involved in a research project that explored the effects of a peer mentoring program to prevent school dropouts and increase school engagement among Latine/x adolescents. Additionally, I had the opportunity to facilitate academic and mental health interventions at a local elementary school with a high percentage of Latine/x newcomer students. This role taught me the valuable skills of being a mental health provider and the importance of fostering a supportive environment. My research and clinical experience, combined with my background, sparked my decision to enter the field of school psychology. Specifically, I am interested in prevention science for English Learner students.

Learn more about Dr. Romero at https://education.utexas.edu/faculty/monica\_romero X/Twitter: @Romeromonica28 Instagram: monicaromero828

#### **Geovanna Rodriguez, PhD** Assistant Professor, University of Oregon/School Psychology

#### Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology

"Don't let imposter syndrome silence your voice. As a first gen Latina, I often felt out of place and like I didn't belong. Navigating two worlds, two languages, and spaces that were not designed

for people like me was mentally exhausting! I realized that imposter syndrome was normal given I was doing something no one in my family had ever done before. I represented something so much bigger than myself. Your heritage and cultural wealth offer so much to this field. We bring a unique lens to explore and understand the needs of our communities which stems from our own lived experience being raised in this culture. Understanding how to leverage and honor your roots and dual consciousness in

ways that challenge the status quo and empower our community, will push the field forward and bring you a sense of place and belonging. Being Mexican is a large part of my identity. I inherited a legacy of hard work, sacrifice, perseverance, and community. This knowing/conocimiento has enriched my work, relationships, and purpose, especially during times where I have felt displaced and lost. Do not hide parts of your identity to make others feel comfortable, your presence and voice bring

hope."



### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

I was working as a project coordinator for an autism screening clinic. During my time there I encountered many Spanish-speaking families that faced challenges in the early identification process and accessing school-based services due to language barriers, mistrust in school personnel, discrimination,

and difficulties navigating the school system. A lot of my work was supporting family navigation of these systems and becoming a bridge to get families connected and involved in their child's education. I realized services were not always appropriate or tailored to the needs of dual language learners and needs of children with developmental disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. I was drawn to the field of school psychology because it seemed like schools were the ideal setting to increase access to families and provide supports that might not be accessed in the community. It was a privilege to occupy a position where I could serve as a bridge between families and schools. Being able to advocate for families and engage in socially just approaches to the special education process, culturally responsive mental health programming, and school climate prevention to promote belonging for minoritized youth, have been wonderful contributions the work I do in this field.

Learn more about Dr. Rodriguez at https://education.uoregon.edu/directory/spsy/all/geovanna

#### Jorge E. Gonzalez, PhD University of Houston

### Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology

"To understand the educational values and expectations in the Latine/x culture you need to immerse yourself in the culture. Knowing your roots and the sources of your values can significantly inform your efforts at achieving educational equity for Latinos in the schools. Latinx families value education above for their children and connecting your practice to this knowledge whether in referrals, assessment or intervention will connect you to Latino family sources of strength and thereby commitment from significant adults in the lives of Latino Children and youth.esence and voice bring hope."



# What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

One day in 1987 my "tia" (aunt) from Mexico whose children were enrolled in Texas elementary schools asked me to assist her in understanding the results of her child's psychoeducational assessment conducted by an educational diagnostician. She was both confused and concerned about findings. To begin with, she didn't understand much English, so she was confused by the entire referral process. All she knew was her child was having difficulties in reading grade-level books. She shared the assessment results and to my surprise the entire assessment had been conducted in English. Her child, my cousin, was an English language learner (ELL). After carefully reviewing the assessment findings, I questioned her about the school referral process and her involvement. All she could recall was "firme los papels" (I signed the paperwork). She didn't know what she had signed nor why. Shortly thereafter, I accompanied my aunt to the school to inquire about the assessment results. After consulting with principal and the special education director who both seemed surprised that we were questioning the assessment results, we all agreed that the English-only assessment was incomplete without assessing academic skill performance in Spanish. The new and more culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment revealed no performance deficits in Spanish thus the IQ achievement discrepancy was accounted for by language dominance and not a disability. This experience changed my career trajectory from a career as a financial analyst to finding my into school psychology.

Learn more about Dr. Gonzalez's work with Native Mexican parents' beliefs about children's literacy and language development at https://scholar.google.com/citations? view\_op=view\_citation&hl=en&user=Ims5w5IAAAAJ&cstart=20&pagesize=80&citat ion\_for\_view=Ims5w5IAAAAJ:N5tVd3kTz84C

### Jacqueline Rodriguez, M.S.,C.A.G.S. Boston Public Schools

Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology "You are entering a field where you are surely needed.
Congratulations!!! It's an exciting time to join us! Find other likeminded colleagues to share your stories as you'll likely face challenges. Be proud of your background and know so many students will benefit from having you there as a SP.
Remember, you are not only the expert in the room, you are also the Bilingual, Bicultural expert SP in the room. When they go low, go high, as Michelle Obama says. Because you'll see days when they go low. And you will be stronger for rising above it. This is a great profession and you will do well if you remember to take care of yourselves in the process."



What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

I did not learn about the profession until I met a SP. She explained what she did and I was hooked. I had been a Clinician before entering SP. I wanted to work within a school system and use my bilingual skills.

Learn more about Jaqueline Rodriguez on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/jacqueline-rodriguez-31b9555a/

### Yahaira "Yari" Diaz, PhD, NCSP Maine West High School

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"Be confident in your perspective, share your knowledge, and don't get wrapped up in toxic gratuity. Use your lived experience to disrupt old systems and impact change. Stay grounded in your roots y adelante!"

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

Systems can oppress, sustain, or elevate. I wanted to be in a position that can shift mindsets and work with students and families. I wanted to be a part of a field that serves people and can heal souls. It's also a field that is embedded in a system that touches most of society in important ways. It is one of those rare roles that connects teachers, students, and families. I didn't know this role existed until my principal told me about the one position that impacts the student body like no other role she knows.

Learn more about Dr. Diaz's dissertation at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/004208591772 1953

### Irmarie Cruz López, PhD,

Assistant Professor - University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez Campus: Department of Psychology, School Psychology Program

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology

"I would tell the next generation of Latine entering the field of school psychology that our work is valuable. It can get tough, but our people, our families, and our children need more of us in the schools and other areas. We're not just doing this for ourselves, we do this for our communities too. We create a different path and we give voices to those that are ofte unheard. Find your people in this field and never forget where you come from. Pa' lante siempre! """



What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

I was first introduced to the field of school as a freshman in college. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and have never heard of school psychology. It was during my first year of college in my intro to psychology class professor was a school psychologist. It was through her that I learned about this field and fell in love with it. This professor became my mentor throughout undergrad and inspired me to pursued a doctorate in school psychology.

Learn more about Dr. Lopez at www.linkedin.com/in/irmariecruz-lopez

twitter-irmari\_e

### Korah La Serna Guilar, NCSP Licensed Educational Psychologist at CSUS

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"Your existence in this field, and your dedication to represent and advocate for BIPOC students and Latine leaners is more valuable than most employers will ever be willing to admit. Establish healthy boundaries, pursue continual professional development to keep those skills sharp, and you will always have a job doing what you love!"

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field? My initial exposure to school psychology was a couple of decades ago when most school

psychologists were white, monolingual women. I wanted to know what more our practices could do for the diverse students being served at the time. I sought out and joined a bilingual school psychologist group in my region, and we collaborated and developed new materials so that our Latine families could have better access.

Learn more about Korah La Serna Guilar at https://instagram.com/kgeminii\_psy? igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA==

#### María del Carmen Needham, M.S., LSSP Bilingual School Psychologist in the state of Texas

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology

"As a Latine student or practitioner, we often feel nervous coming into spaces where it is not common to see people that look like us, talk like us, or have a background like ours. At times it can feel intimidating. But I want you to remember that you arrived to this moment drawing from the strength of our ancestors and the sacrifices our parents made to give us this opportunity. Do not apologize for your presence. Instead, take up all of the space that you need and find your voice. Give a voice to the generations that will follow you. Be bold and remember that you belong here in your most unapologetic and authentic way. Lean into the diversity that you bring. Your heritage is your superpower. You will be able to connect in meaningful ways with families because of your shared experiences. You will be the bridge for the child and/or parent in an unknown environment. Thank you for coming into this field to support children that desperately need someone like you."



#### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field? I was introduced to School Psychology by my undergraduate professor,

I was introduced to School Psychology by my undergraduate professor, Dr. Anthony Scott at the University of Texas- San Antonio, who wanted to know what my plans were post-graduation. I shared that I was interested in going into clinical psychology. He shared that there were many clinical psychologists, but what there was not enough of where school psychologists. He explained to me that I would be working with children, but in the schools. He encouraged me to reach out to Dr. Cynthia Gonzalez out of Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. I fell in love with the idea that I could support families in the most difficult times, but also be able to guide them. Dr. Scott and Dr. Gonzalez were not wrong when they told me that it was a rewarding job. Seeing me in the children I serve and seeing my parents in the parents I serve gives me great pride that I can be a partner and help advocate for their child. .

Learn more about María del Carmen Needham -

Aside from supporting districts in the Central Texas Region, María del Carmen Needham is currently NASP's Multicultural Affairs Committee, Latinx Co-Chair as well as the Texas Association of School Psychologists Area 4 Representative.

https://www.nasponline.org/utility/about-nasp/nasp-leadership/nasp-committees-and-boards

Instagram-@schoolpsychcarms

### Milton J. Cepeda Bilingual Specialist in School Psychology

Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology "Expand your mind...schools are not the only field you can contribute to."

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?



My initial exposure

was not school psychology at first, but the field of psychology in general.

Learn more about Milton J. Cepeda's research on Comparing impact of pesticide exposure on cognitive abilities of Latinx children from rural farmworker and urban non-farmworker families in North Carolina.

### Dr. Pedro Olvera, Doctor of Psychology

#### Program Director/Associate Facult -Cal Baptist University

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"As Latinx school psychologists, we stand at the threshold of a world brimming with possibilities. It is our moment, our time, to forge lasting impacts on the lives of children, families, and the very systems that shape our educational landscapes. With demographic shifts unfolding before us, we are gradually becoming the majority, underscoring the urgency of our role in comprehending the intricate intersection of culture and mental well-being. The field of school psychology calls for our expertise-individuals who can navigate the subtle nuances of immigrant experiences and establish robust support systems that enable these young minds to not just survive but thrive. We have a profound duty to cultivate environments where every child's potential can flourish, where cultural diversity is celebrated, and where mental health is a priority. In this

pivotal era, let us embrace our heritage, knowledge, and passion to become beacons of change. Together, we will illuminate the path towards equitable education and holistic well-being for all, leaving an enduring legacy that echoes through generations. The world is indeed ours, and we shall mold it with wisdom, compassion, and unwavering dedication."

# What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

My journey into the world of school psychology started long before I even knew of the profession. Initially, I wanted to become a bilingual teacher in the vibrant landscape of Southern California. However, fate took an unexpected turn with the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998, which reduced the demand for bilingual educators. This shift led me to work with children within protective services. My professional path led me to various settings, from group homes to therapeutic education centers, and eventually, I worked as a social worker. By chance, I was invited to a job fair when I had the privilege of listening to a passionate school psychologist describe her impactful work with children. As I reflected on my life experiences, both personal and professional, I couldn't ignore the profound alignment with this job. The school psychologist emphasized the pressing need for bilingual professionals in her field, along with her dedication to supporting children facing emotional challenges. It was as if the stars had aligned, and I knew this was the path meant for me. Without hesitation, I enrolled in a school psychology program, and since that moment, I have never looked back.

Learn more about Dr. Pedro Olvera at https://calbaptist.edu/faculty-directory/profileview?id=752

## Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino, PsyD

Associate Commissioner for the New York State Office of Mental Health's Office of Prevention

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"The advice that I would share is that the field of school psychology needs you because as a Latina/x scholar and practitioner, you bring a unique cultural humility to the work being done daily in school settings. Our students need to have access to empathic practitioners who look like them, have lived in similar communities, and can speak their native language. I would also advise that the sky is the limit with an education and experience in school psychology. The unique training that you receive truly prepares you to be a wellrounded mental health professional. I am currently using the skills and knowledge I obtained in my programs to lead statewide efforts in New York to promote mental health prevention policies and programming."

#### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

Almost 25 years ago, I was a new mental health clinician working in New York City's foster care system with children and adolescents. I found that in the work I was accomplishing daily, the work that had the most impact was school advocacy. I worked diligently in providing consultation and psychoeducation to school building personnel on the effects of the trauma these students in particular had faced and how it was impacting them in the classroom. I prevented unnecessary referrals to special education and helped to appropriately handle discipline issues without punitive measures and causing further trauma for these students. I loved the work in schools so much I went back to graduate school to obtain a school psychology degree. The rest is history!

Learn more about Dr. Erazo-Trivino's research interests and endeavors: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Audrey-Erazo-Trivino

Instagram: @LatinaDoctora

#### **Patricia Sánchez Lizardi, PhD** Assistant Professor, San Diego State University/Department of Counseling and School Psychology

Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"Be inspired by your Hispanic/Latine/x background. Our schools are increasing in diversity, and we are beautifully positioned to provide culturally affirming services to many children and families who share our background. School psychology needs our strengths and skills, which have been recognized by the California **Consortium for Bilingual School** Psychology (a faculty group formed out of the School Psychology Educators of California) as we move toward preparing and certifying bilingual school psychologists."

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field? I became exposed to school psychology when I decided to go to graduate school. As an international student from Mexico, I began looking for psychology programs with an emphasis on child development. It was kind of an accidental find, I did not know school psychology existed, but given my interests in child psychology and education, I fell in love with it immediately. I think our field has gained more visibility over the years, but in many ways, it continues to be a treasure to be found.

Learn more about Dr. Sanchez Lizardi at https://education.sdsu.edu/directory/patricia-sanchez-lizardi

#### Ronald S. Palomares-Fernandez, PhD Associate Professor, Texas Woman's University

### Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology

"Words of advice for the next Latine/x generation of school psychologists? Succinctly, I would say – Welcome new opportunities with open arms and seek the help and support from those around you, as well as always look for the opportunity to give back. As a first-generation college student, I found I often needed to blaze new paths unfamiliar to me or my family. I could only do that by myself or by seeking the support and help from others. Together, along with the cultural values and focus my parents instilled in me, I can say I've had experiences I had never

dreamed to be possible! But it is also important to be grateful to others. Share and help those around you who may not know the questions to ask or even the opportunities available. School psychology has such a variety of experiences and directions where it can take someone, and I encourage others to seek the directions that call to you and your unique skills and talents. Those are the ones I found to be most rewarding. No matter your choice, there will always be those who need your services."



# What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

Syl've often heard school psychology referred to as a "Stealth Profession" because many people never heard of it. It was like that for me up until I started my doctoral program application process. My first exposure to school psychology was when I was talking to a psychologist for guidance on applying to doctoral psychology programs. I already had a master's degree in counseling psychology but the focus of that training was with adults and I felt the calling to work with children, where many mental health issues first appear, before they became adults. My mentor mentioned that I might be more interested in school psychology and, as they say, the rest is history! After I learned more about school psychology, I applied and was accepted into several doctoral programs in school and counseling psychology. I selected the Texas A&M University School Psychology doctoral program to attend because they had a Hispanic Leadership Grant serving Latine/x doctoral students in their school psychology program. I now include a discussion on school psychology in every undergraduate class I teach to ensure they hear about and consider a career in school psychology early in their formative academic years.

#### **Ivonne Borrero Irigoyen, Psy.D** Assistant Director, Behavioral Health Services at Boston Public Schools, MA

#### Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"The field of School Psychology has the power to change the lives of our children but we need representation. It is then that we can advocate for our students. When we can have a seat at the table their voices can be heard and they are seen as members of a larger community. We need to represent each other."

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

I was a teacher before becoming a school psychologist. I understood that many of my students were being segregated because they were diagnosed with disabilities. Their learning styles were different than the majority group and I wanted to understand why this was happening but also how could I help them. This is when I combined my love for teaching and psychology.

#### Rachel Santiago, PhD Assistant Professor, University of Missouri

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"You belong here! Who you are as a person is not separate from who you are as a school psychologist. Your identities and lived experiences are the foundation of all the strengths you bring to this field—build community with people who see and value that."

What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

When I was in undergrad I knew I wanted to do something in psychology and something with children, but I knew that seeing clients 1:1 all day wasn't the right fit for me. I stumbled upon school psychology while researching psychology-related career paths online, and the field's combination of education and psychology clicked for me. I'm generally a very planful person, so figuring out my career during a week of panic-searching the internet for post-graduation plans was a really lucky accident!

Learn more about Dr. Santiago at https://education.missouri.edu/person/rachel-santiago/ social media- @DrRachSant

# Jaciyn Wolf, PhD

#### Assistant Professor, San Francisco State University

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"This work is hard, and it is personal for so many of us. We are fighting alongside others to right the wrongs we and our families have experienced in these same spaces. I think it is helpful to remember that one person cannot change an entire system! Yet, we can still do great work within the system. To that end: Your voice matters, and it deserves to be heard! It is a powerful tool for enacting change. Make sure to celebrate the victories as they come, even if they are small. As much as you can, find Latine mentors and others who can support you in this work. And, never forget that your Latine identity and your experiences within that identity are a great strength!"

#### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

I did not learn about school psychology until I was already in graduate school in a related field (clinical psychology). I later decided to pursue my doctorate in school psychology at the University of Arizona and was fortunate enough to study under Dr. Desireé Vega. Having a Latina mentor was very impactful for me, and ultimately changed the way I saw my role as a school psychologist. Amongst so many other things, I love that, through this work, I get to advocate alongside Latine youth and families to make the educational system equitable and more accessible.

> Learn more about Dr. Wolf at https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=eYd-K64AAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao

#### **Alejandra Ojeda-Beck, PhD** Lecturer/Health Service Faculty at the University of California,

Lecturer/Health Service Faculty at the University of California, Berkeley. I am also a school psychologist at Peidmont Unifeid School District

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"Look for mentors! The people who have been the most influential in my career have been those who were open to have a chat over coffee or grab a quick drink at a conference. There have been so many

opportunities I have been able to take advantage of because I was advised to take a risk I didn't feel ready to take. Oftentimes, the mentors who get to know you, are able to see the fit for you better than you can. And if you are very lucky, they become good friends as well!"

#### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

I was working as a paraeducator in a Spanish Immersion elementary school supporting reading and English Language Development when the school psychologist asked me to sit in on a testing session and help translate when she thought the student may know more. There was no prep for this, just an invitation to sit in. I decided to go to grad school to study school psychology and find a better approach to assessing our multilingual students. When I arrived at UC Berkeley, I discovered the existing body of research and have enjoyed thinking creatively about what we know and how we could best support these students, and by extension all of the students we work with.

> Learn more about Dr. Ojeda-Beck at https://bse.berkeley.edu/alejandra-ojeda-beck

### Arlene Ortiz, PhD

Assistant Teaching Professor; University of California, Santa Barbara

# Advice for the next generation of Latine/x scholars and practitioners entering the field of school psychology



"School psychology needs you and it needs to hear your voice. You belong here! You have many strengths that will blossom as you complete your training if you allow them to. Seek out opportunities and mentors that will allow you to gain confidence in your ability to provide equitable service delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse students."

#### What was your initial exposure to school psychology, what led to your entrance into the field?

During undergrad I was studying to be a teacher and while completing my student teaching I quickly discovered I was most interest in working with students who were having difficulty in the classroom. I realized teachers had too many responsibilities and did not have time to figure out the why – why are these children not thriving like their peers? At the same time, I encountered well intentioned teachers give poor guidance to families of English language learners who were behind their monolingual peers in reading. For example, I observed a teacher tell a Spanish-speaking parent that in order for their child to become a better reader the parent needed to stop communicating with their child in their heritage language. These experiences motivated me to pursue a career in bilingual school psychology.

Learn more about Dr. Ortiz here https://education.ucsb.edu/research-faculty/bio? first=Arlene&last=Ortiz; Communique Article: https://www.nasponline.org/account/login? returnTo=https%253A%252F%252Fwww.nasponline.org%252Fpublications%252Fperiodica ls%252Fcommunique%252Fissues%252Fvolume-51-issue-5%252Fa-collaborative-journeyto-inform-the-development-of-bilingual-school-psychology-competencies-incalifornia&error=This+resource+is+restricted.+Please+login+to+view+it.