

## Stern Center for Language and Learning



# ...Expertise...

The Stern Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of students of all ages because we believe all great minds don't think alike. Since 1983, we have worked with children and adults to help them reach their academic, social and professional goals. We provide research-based learning evaluations and customized instruction for all students, including those with learning disabilities, dyslexia, language disorders, social learning challenges, autism, attention deficit disorders and learning differences. We design and deliver customized professional learning programs and system development using current research and trends in education. Through the Cynthia K. Hoehl Institute for Excellence (CKHIE), we partner with schools and provide courses and workshops to individual educators in the areas of: early literacy, oral language, reading, written language, social cognition, executive functioning and math.

### Connect with us online

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Website | <http://www.sterncenter.org>

### Contact Us

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## THIS KIT INCLUDES -

- History of the Stern Center
- Profiles of Chief Officers and Senior Management
- Service Information (including performance reviews)

## HISTORY OF THE STERN CENTER



In the late 1960s, Dr. Blanche Podhajski began teaching preschoolers struggling with language at a hospital clinic in Vermont. She was intrigued as to why some of them had trouble making sounds correctly enough to be intelligible and why others spoke as clear as a bell but in only one or two word phrases. She was even more intrigued when these delays would be “fixed,” but would then have the same children come back at a later date speaking fine, but with reading and spelling problems. What was going on in their young brains?



After 15 years of clinical work, university teaching, and private practice, Dr. Podhajski formed a nonprofit, providing evaluations and direct instruction for individuals and professional learning for educators and physicians. Funded by a \$50,000 grant from the Bernice and Milton Stern Foundation, the Stern Center for Language and Learning was opened in 1983.



For more than 30 years, the Stern Center has been making strides in the fields of language and learning. Using research-based practices, they have developed educator training programs, established a second location providing services for over 800 students and 1,500 educators annually, and created partnerships with national organizations to help expand teacher knowledge and in turn ensure that children are ready to read by grade 3.

## PROFILES OF CHIEF OFFICERS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT



### **Blanche Podhajski, Ph.D., President**

Dr. Blanche Podhajski is president and founder of the Stern Center for Language and Learning. Established in 1983, the nonprofit Stern Center provides direct services for children and adults, professional development opportunities for educators and medical professionals, and research on best literacy practices. Dr. Podhajski is clinical associate professor of Neurology at the University of Vermont College of Medicine and clinical associate professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. She is the rotation director of the Pediatric Psychiatry Fellowship and senior Neurology majors, collaborations with the University of Vermont College of Medicine and the Stern Center.

Dr. Podhajski received her Ph.D. in Communication Disorders, specializing in Learning Disabilities, from Northwestern University. She holds the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech Pathology from the American Speech-Language Hearing Association.

Dr. Podhajski is the co-author of the "Sounds Abound Program: Teaching Phonological Awareness in the Classroom", published by LinguSystems. In addition, she is co-author of the MindPlay Teacher Companion. She created T•I•M•E for Teachers™, a professional development initiative to bring information about current research-proven reading interventions to classroom teachers.

She also developed BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LITERACY®, a course for early care and education providers to prepare preschool children for school success, which is available free online. She also co-authored "Identification of Reading Difficulties and Best Referral Practices: A Guide for Future Physicians", a CD-ROM course for medical students.

Dr. Podhajski has over forty years experience working with individuals with learning differences. She teaches and consults with educators throughout the country and is a frequent presenter at regional and national conferences.



### **Jane Nathan, Ph.D., Research Director**

Jane Nathan is a licensed clinical psychologist doctorate and a licensed school psychologist. She received her doctorate in psychology from the University of Vermont. In addition to directing research at the Stern Center for more than ten years, she has a private practice that specializes in a wide array of psychological services for children and families. Dr. Nathan also holds a clinical assistant professor appointment through Family Medicine at the University of Vermont College of Medicine where she teaches and serves as mentor and career advisor to first year medical students. She has also taught courses at University of Vermont, Middlebury College, and Trinity College.



**Janna Osman, M.Ed., Vice President for Programs**

Janna Osman comes to the Stern Center having spent eight years as the learning disabilities consultant at the Vermont Department of Education. She spent 12 years as a special education practitioner and a practicum coordinator at St. Michael's College. She has an M.Ed. from St. Michaels College. Her collaboration with the Stern Center, in her role with the DOE, led to the development of The VT Lab School, and a Tier 3 assessment and instruction design for students with learning disabilities. Her current position at the Stern Center enables her to design and provide outreach professional learning opportunities for educators and families, to enhance the lives of all learners, on both a state and national level.



**Sandy Rendall, M.B.A., Communications Director**

Sandy began her affiliation with the Stern Center as a board member serving from 1988 to 1994. During her tenure she was Board Chair from 1992 to 1994. Sandy has an extensive background in marketing and communications. She has a B.A. with a major in Psychology from Dartmouth College and an M.B.A. from Duke University with a concentration in Marketing. She spent five years teaching marketing at UVM's Business School of Administration as an adjunct professor and she has over twenty-five years experience working in the business community, most recently as director of client services at Resolution.



**Michael Shapiro, M.B.A., Chief Operating Officer**

Michael received a B.A. with a major in economics from Providence College and an M.B.A from R.T.I. He has been working in corporate finance for 18 years. Past professional experiences include Fidelity in Boston, Sotheby's in New York, and Revision Military in Essex Junction, Vermont.



**Melissa Farrall, Ph.D, Program Manager for Evaluations**

Melissa is the author of "Reading Assessment: Linking Language, Literacy, and Cognition", and the co-author of "All About Tests & Assessments" published by Wrightslaw. Melissa Farrall worked as educational consultant for St. Joseph Hospital in Nashua, NH. She taught the structure of language at Simmons College in Boston, MA. Dr. Farrall received her doctorate from Brown University in the area of Slavic

Linguistics. She received her master's degree from Rivier College in Learning Disabilities and her certification as a specialist in the assessment of intellectual functioning. Dr. Farrall worked as a learning disability specialist in the public schools for several years. She has worked with the International Dyslexia Association at both the national and branch levels.



**Michelle L. Szabo, M.S.Ed., Instruction Program Manager**

Michelle manages the Instruction program, supervising instructors and programs for students, as well as serving as a collaborative consultant working with families and schools. She also provides direct instruction to students of all ages, focusing on developing reading skills, executive functioning and study skills, and written language. She received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology/Human Services from Lyndon State College, and her Masters of Science in Education, specializing in Special Education from Simmons College in 1998. Michelle taught as a language arts and reading teacher at a private high school, and as a title I reading specialist in a public school prior to joining the Stern Center for Language and Learning in 2002.



**Julie Erdelyi, M.A., Autism Specialist, Communication Services Program Manager**

Julie provides evaluations, consultation and instruction. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Vermont and a master's degree in special education - developmental disabilities from the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has extensive experience as a special educator and autism specialist designing and implementing academic instruction, proactive behavior intervention plans, and Social Thinking® instruction for elementary and high school students who have Autism Spectrum Disorders. She has presented at local and national conferences and was published in the Autism Asperger's Digest Magazine.

## SERVICE INFORMATION

### Learning Evaluations

A learning evaluation can provide a full picture of how an individual learns and can be provided at any age. In addition to our evaluations identifying learning differences, they also provide research-based recommendations for instruction and progress monitoring. Clients often use this service to determine if they have a learning disability, to provide information for schools to review when seeking accommodations, as well as to determine learning strengths and weaknesses.

*"Our family had a good experience here. My high school age daughter began to struggle for the first time in school so we took her to Stern for an assessment. She spent a couple of hours with a person who went through a very thorough process with her-- a combination of interview questions and test exercises to determine her strengths, weaknesses, and learning style. Several weeks later we received a very detailed evaluation of our daughter as a learner. I was very impressed with the process and happy with the result. It allowed us, the anxious parents, to stop worrying if our daughter had an undetected learning disability. As a result of the test we got her some coaching (not at Stern) to help her with planning and scheduling, and it really helped her get back on top of her school work."*

- Parent

### Customized Instruction

Our multi-disciplinary staff work with the student, family, and on occasion, school teams to create an individualized instruction plan to help students reach his/her full potential. We have discovered through years of experience that everyone learns differently and at their own pace, and with assistance, establishes their own goals to help build confidence and achieve success. Our services provide assistance in reading, writing, spelling, math and enrichment, as well as study and organization skills, SAT/ACT prep and homework support. College students find great success when working with an instructor to establish strong time management skills.

*" We had heard many good things about the Stern Center before we considered it for our daughter, so our expectations were already high. The Center did not disappoint and exceeded even our own high expectations. The instructors and tutors were wonderful and the staff made enrolling and going through the process incredibly easy. A wonderful experience from beginning to end, and now our daughter has benefited greatly and we can see the results of all the work the Center put in to her wellbeing. Fantastic!"*

- Parent

## Communication Services

We offer speech and language interventions as well as providing social learning strategies through our Social Thinking® groups. Our social learning team of special educators, certified speech-language pathologists, and psychologists provides individual and group coaching for students with social cognitive challenges, including autism, Asperger's, nonverbal learning disabilities, and ADD; cognition issues with attention, memory, executive functioning and visuospatial skills, and medical and behavioral diagnoses, including social-emotional disturbances, ADHD, dyslexia, stroke, traumatic brain injury and cerebral palsy.

## Professional Learning

Current research clearly indicates that increasing the knowledge of teachers leads directly to increased student success. Our Professional Learning programs offered through the Cynthia K. Hoehl Institute for Excellence (CKHIE), provide opportunities for individual educators, school teams and/or whole districts to extend their expertise within their own classrooms. Our full spectrum of courses share research-proven, best practices in structured literacy, social cognition, executive functioning and math, and include: Orton-Gillingham trainings, BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LITERACY®, T-I-M-E for Teachers(TM) and Wilson Reading programs, like Foundations. These programs are embedded in schools or districts, as undergraduate and graduate course, or as individual workshops.

*Thank you for your time.*