

## LETTER FROM THE BOARD

We are overjoyed to share the 2nd issue of the Neag School of Education Journal. Leading from our mission, our journal provides a unique space for graduate and early career scholars to develop and share a broad variety of scholarly work, including research articles, essays, literature reviews, and reflective pieces. We take pride in providing a supportive “testing-ground” for graduate authors to refine their original work in collaboration with our graduate-led editorial board. Fundamentally, the Neag School of Education Journal is committed to the growth and development of emergent educational researchers across fields. After much hard work and dedication from our authors and editorial board, we are thrilled to unveil the culmination of their efforts - four carefully selected pieces that showcase the excellence of our 2024 edition.

Each of this year’s articles exemplify the equity-grounded, methodologically rigorous, and innovative research that this journal endeavors to elevate.

Our first piece - *Neuroscience concepts supporting teachers’ adaptive expertise*. This essay, by Kristin Simmers and Sameera Massey, delves into the integration of neuroscience concepts in teaching, emphasizing the importance of understanding cognitive and neural mechanisms for effective instructional decisions. It argues that adopting the Mind, Brain, and Education (MBE) framework enhances teachers’ adaptive expertise, enabling them to navigate unpredictable teaching scenarios with efficiency, analyze classroom dynamics holistically, and maximize student engagement and learning outcomes. At a time when learning and brain myths are rampant in the teaching profession, this piece puts scientific understanding and research-informed approaches at the bedrock of good teaching and learning.

Second - *From fixed to flexible: Needed conditions to promote elementary teachers’ equitable use of within-class ability grouping*, by Sarah Caroleo. This essay explores the historical context of fixed and flexible within-class student grouping practices and examines their impact on students’ access to equitable learning outcomes. The author advocates for flexible grouping strategies, supports the argument with empirical evidence, details the practical application of flexible grouping, and offers organizational and policy recommendations for its implementation. In this way, this piece pushes those supporting and training teachers as well as policymakers to think more expansively about how we ensure differentiation serves to meet all children’s needs rather than reinforce inequities.

Next - *Does this mean we get an A? Causal implications of changes in school accountability* by Samuel Kamin - utilizes regression discontinuity to draw causal conclusions about the impact of school rating categorization through the New York City Department of Education’s most recent school report card rating system. Notably, this piece provides causal evidence that schools that score just below the cut-score categorization of “Meeting” Student Achievement rating (i.e., a score of “Approaching”) show positive and significant math test score gains the following year. As such, the piece has implications for how we think about both the impact of external accountability systems for schools and whether and to what degree such policies need to include carrots or sticks to provoke change.

Finally - *Perceptions of higher education professionals on the utility of the activities, programs, or policies tool to promote self-determination for college students with disabilities*, by Dr. Ashley Taconet. This qualitative exploratory study investigates the experiences of 30 post-secondary disability resource and student affairs professionals with the Activities, Programs, or Policies (APP) Tool. Derived from work showing the benefits of developing and providing opportunities for self-determination for post-secondary students and specifically those with disabilities, this manuscript offers an overview of practitioners' experience with the tool and recommendations for further development of this instrument. As such, the piece provides analysis of a tool for campus leaders to promote and improve student self-determination.

We look forward to your enjoyment of this issue's work and the outstanding contributions from our graduate and early career authors. We further hope that authors use the feedback they received during the editing process and choose to publish these manuscripts in professional peer reviewed journals in the future. At the Neag School of Education Journal, we focus on the development of student work by employing a high-dose, collaborative review process. Our novel copyright policy is designed to empower students and early career scholars, allowing them to maintain the copyright for future publication.

We have many fantastic and dedicated people to thank for the realization of our 2nd issue. To Dr. Jennie Weiner, our advisor, thank you for your tireless dedication to this journal and to students. You model to us what a human-centered and compassionate review process can be and have taught us enduring lessons as reviewers and researchers.

Another thank you to Dr. Jason Irizarry, our dean, who has enthusiastically supported the journal from its inception and made it clear that our work and voices matter.

Thank you to Shawn Kornegay and the design team at UConn who helped ensure a second issue as beautifully apportioned as the first. We look forward to continuing to uplift graduate students' work in years to come.

Thank you to the members of the journal whose hard work and enthusiasm made this issue possible. We are excited to continue advancing this work with your assistance going forward.

Finally, thank you to the authors of the pieces featured in this issue and all who submitted work. It goes without saying that this would be impossible without your contributions. We are immensely proud to feature your work in this issue.

To learn more about our team and mission, please visit us at <https://education.uconn.edu/neag-journal/>