

*In anticipation and hope for an early Spring, we are pleased to offer Part II of the special double issue of JALE, by guest editors Kamal Hamdan and Anthony Normore.*

## **The Teacher Support Institute: An Innovative Approach to Supporting New Teachers in Urban, High-Need Schools**

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On average, close to 20% of new teachers leave the teaching profession in less than three years, and as much as 46% of new teachers leave the teaching profession within their first five years of teaching (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll, 2003). Various factors can be attributed to why novice teachers leave the teaching profession. For example, in urban, high-need schools, a particular trend that novice teachers attribute to leaving the profession is that they do not feel supported by their school sites and/or school district and they do not feel properly prepared by their teacher education preparation program. Thompson and Smith (2005), emphasize that teachers value support from their peers and their university as reasons for remaining in the profession. Furthermore, in a study by Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra, and Volman (2015), findings indicate that teachers that formed networking or collaborative groups to support one another felt more adept and engaged at their school sites. With this being said, the California STEM Institute for Innovation & Improvement (CSI3) at CSUDH, has designed an innovative approach to supporting novice teachers serving in urban, high-need schools. This approach aims to curb the oftentimes frustrating first year that new teachers experience, particularly math and science teachers teaching in urban, high-need schools. Through peer collaboration in a cohort model, the Teacher Support Institute (TSI), pairs first year teachers with seasoned, veteran teachers in a one-on-one environment to support one another on a bi-weekly basis.

As stated by Waddell and Ukpokodu (2012), teacher education programs play a crucial role in the development and retention of their teachers, particularly teacher education programs that focus on staffing teachers in urban, high-need schools. TSI is offered to all participants (and alumni) enrolled in any of CSI3's alternative certification programs (Transition to Teaching, Transition to Teaching Hybrid, STEM Teachers in Advanced Residency, and the Secondary Special Education Teacher Interventionist program) at CSU Dominguez Hills.

### **The Teacher Support Institute Design**

The vision behind Teacher Support Institute (TSI) is to offer novice teachers enrolled in credentialing programs with the California STEM Institute for Innovation & Improvement (CSI3) one-on-one support. The support is provided by seasoned, veteran teachers who teach in the same content areas, have the same demographics and in some instances, work in the same schools as the novice teachers enrolled in CSI3 credentialing programs. In terms of TSI, "support," is defined as anything from classroom management support to sharing best teaching practices, lesson planning, differentiating instruction, designing units of instruction, incorporating culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, grading student work, creating rubrics, organizing a classroom, time management, and emotional support – to name a few of these practices. The general premise is that novice teachers are better prepared in

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their first year of teaching than those teachers who do not receive similar support in a collaborative environment (Howard & Obidah, 2005). Moreover, participants learn to grasp a better understanding of their students and the community, and truly gain a greater appreciation for the teaching profession. In turn, a long term goal is that our new teachers will continue to serve in urban, high-need communities, provide rigorous quality instruction, and aid in reducing the high rate of teacher attrition in urban, high-need schools.

### Participants

Participants in the 2015–2016 TSI cohort included 59 alternative certification candidates enrolled in one of the four credentialing programs offered by CSI3 at CSUDH. These participants are all first-year math, science, English, and/or Special Education teachers serving in urban, high-need schools, in South Los Angeles. Additional participants include seasoned, veteran teachers, referred to as TSI Lead Teachers. The TSI Lead Teachers serve as peer coaches to support the candidates and range in teaching experience from 4–15 years of teaching and perform in multiple leadership capacities (e.g. department chair, ILT lead, AVID coach, etc.). During the 2015–2016 school year, TSI had about 15 TSI Lead Teachers to support the 59 novice teachers.

Howard and Obidah (2005), state: “Teachers who serve students in urban schools have the lowest rates of expertise gained through certification, and these schools struggle to retain credentialed teachers, particularly in the areas of math and science” (p. 250). One of the goals of TSI is to level the playing field of novice teachers by providing them with the in-depth expertise of seasoned, veteran teachers, to confront the challenges that typical first year teachers may face, particularly in the areas of math, science and special education.

### The TSI Experience

TSI is held biweekly (every other Saturday) from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, throughout the academic school year. Participants receive a reminder email a few days prior to TSI requesting that they confirm their attendance. This is done to ensure that enough TSI Lead Teachers are available and that enough breakfast is prepared for the participants. TSI Lead Teachers are required to arrive 30 minutes earlier than the novice teachers to prepare for the candidates and share any updates on the candidates since their last meeting. TSI Leads also stay (after the first-year teachers have been dismissed) for an extra hour to debrief the support session, review all exit tickets, provide one another with more updates on the candidates and what concerns the TSI Leads may have for each candidate, and how candidates might be best supported when TSI is not in session.

As the novice teachers arrive, they are greeted by the TSI Lead Teachers. All participants partake in sharing a light breakfast and coffee with one another. The addition of a light breakfast and coffee is intentional because it provides the opportunity to informally check in with the candidate to see how their past two weeks have been and also provide all participants the opportunity to build rapport as a cohort. From the informal conversations, candidates and TSI Leads finish socializing and enter one of the five work rooms allotted during each session (e.g., math room, science room, English room, breakout room, and a quiet room). TSI Leads engage in a more in-depth discussion with the candidates, diagnose prob-

lems, offer solutions, and/or allows for the candidate to work independently. TSI Leads then move on to other candidates and check back in periodically to track their progress. Although TSI is only allocated three hours of collaboration time, oftentimes candidates stay for much longer, stating that they would simply not finish the work if they were at home by themselves.

In a typical day, TSI Leads and candidates cover a plethora of questions and concerns that range from brainstorming an engaging lesson opener to working collaboratively on a rubric. At another table, leads and candidates may discuss solutions to a particular discipline issue, while another group might conduct a mock Individual Education Plan (IEP), sample whether a lesson makes sense for one of their peers, or just prepare lessons for the upcoming two weeks. In addition to one-on-one support, optional whole group breakout sessions are also offered on major topics of concern for candidates, facilitated by the TSI Leads. Ultimately, the range of support in TSI is virtually limitless.

Before TSI concludes, each participant is provided with an exit ticket that asks the following questions, “What did you plan on working on today? Were you able to accomplish it? How might we support you better?” These exit tickets are used by the TSI Leads to debrief afterwards and improve their practice in supporting the candidates more efficiently and effectively.

### The Impact of TSI on Novice Teachers

At the close of the 2015–2016 school year, six of the participants that attended the Teacher Support Institute had been nominated by their school districts as a “Rookie Teacher of the Year.” In fact, the “Rookie Teacher of the Year” for Green Dot Charter School was a TSI participant and the “Rookie Teacher of the Year” for the Los Angeles Unified School District was also a TSI participant. Furthermore, the collaborative culture of TSI allows for candidates to also support one another without necessarily requiring the expertise of a TSI Lead Teacher. Candidates grow to depend on one another and share vulnerabilities as their relationship as a cohort blossoms. This idea of collaboration supports Blankstein’s (2013) notion that collaboration should be used to “influence the conditions, culture and capacity for improved instructional practices” (p. 144). Below are a few of the claims written by novice teachers during the 2015–2016 TSI sessions:

- I was able to get organized and collaborate with my classmates. Please continue to offer the support. It is helpful to know that I am not alone in this journey.
- It was great to meet with a teacher using the same curriculum as me and see how she is implementing it in her class! Thank you!
- I just wanted to reach out and say thank you for all the help that you have given me thus far. The sense of relief that I feel is unreal.
- I just wanted to let you know that I thought today was great. I think that as a first year teacher this is what teachers need.
- This program has truly prepared me and helped me to avoid some of the headaches and hardships that are typical for first year teachers. This year is coming to a close and I still cannot believe that this program is really real and you guys are just simply amazing people.

### The Impact of TSI on Veteran Teachers

Although the emphasis of TSI is on novice teachers receiving the

support that they need in order to be successful in their first year, the actual impact of TSI is two-fold. As the novice teachers gain more expertise in teaching and learning, the TSI Leads are exposed to more opportunities to refine their practices as teacher leaders. The TSI Leads are afforded opportunities of professional development (e.g., Cognitive Coaching), to practice their coaching and leadership skills with the candidates. At the close of the 2015–2016 school year, 6 out of the 15 TSI Leads received promotions to out-of-classroom positions and one was awarded “LAUSD’s 2016 Teacher of the Year.” An email from one of the TSI Leads regarding TSI stated the following:

I had the opportunity to be at TSI last Saturday and can I just tell you that this is the GREATEST thing on Earth! If they cannot articulate to you how great it is, let me tell you! Besides the networking that is happening between the candidates, just that time together is priceless. They may not know yet how important that time together is, but they will one day.

### Final Reflections and Implications

There appears to be a need for more research on teacher education programs and the types of support systems beneficial to supporting new teachers. The aim of CSI3 is to recruit, train and place credentialing candidates into teaching positions in urban, high-need, hard-to-staff schools. Further, the role of the TSI is to retain those highly qualified teachers to continue serving in the communities that need them most. Scherer (2012) underscores the importance of supporting novice teachers by engaging in “systematic, intense mentoring” such as what is being provided to all of the participants at TSI. Additionally, when discussing how imperative it is that novice teachers receive weekly support and coaching in their first year of teaching, Scherer (2012) adds, “That is the ideal way to make sure beginning teachers don’t just survive, but also become competent and effective—and stay in the profession” (p. 18).

The TSI is a groundbreaking, innovative approach to support our new cohort of teachers and teacher leaders. Teaching is a difficult profession in-and-of itself, but through peer collaboration, coaching and unlimited support from the university’s teacher ed-

ucation program, our first-year teachers serving urban, high-need schools are off to a great start.

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## First Year Implementation of an Alternative Pathway Designed to Alleviate Special Education Teacher Shortages: Participant Voices

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Teaching is the United States’ single largest profession with more than 3.5 million teachers working within schools and classrooms (DeMonte, 2015). Recent estimates suggest the nation is currently experiencing a severe teacher shortage that unless abated will soar to 300,000 by the year 2020 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Scholars within the field define teacher shortages as the inability to staff teacher vacancies with qualified teachers, as evidenced by their preparation resulting in credentials awarded by respective governing bodies. At the national level, shortages are based on the number of “(a) teaching positions that are unfilled; (b) teaching positions that are filled by teachers who are certified by irregular, provisional, temporary, or emergency certification; and (c) teaching positions that are filled by teachers who are certified,

but who are teaching in academic subject areas other than their area of preparation” (Cross, 2016, p. 3).

The extant literature specific to the P-12 educational shortages indicates that shortfalls are most acute within high needs fields (math, science, special education, and second language learning) with the greatest and most chronic needs experienced in the field of special education (Boe, deBettencourt, Dewey, Rosenbert, Sindelar, & Leko, 2013; Cross, 2016; Darling-Hammond, Furger, Shields, & Sutcher, 2016; Lin, 2013; Mason-Williams, 2015). Additionally, these shortages disproportionately affect culturally and linguistically diverse learners as well as economically poor students. Many researchers situate these shortages within a social justice context; noting that unequal distributions of unqualified, underprepared,

and under-certified teachers, significantly hinders educational equity and academic achievement (Boe, et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; DeMonte, 2015; Mason-Williams). After all, the most powerful in-school influence on academic achievement and learning is the quality of instruction provided by teachers (DeMonte, 2015).

### California's Special Education Shortage

California's need for special education teachers (SETs) is profound with the California Department of Education (CDE) estimating the need to increase the current special education teaching force by 48% (CDE, 2015a). These numbers are stark when one considers that the next highest area of anticipated teacher need was for mathematics resulting in about 9% of planned hires in California (CDE, 2015a). Empirical studies (e.g., Boe, et al., 2013) frequently use full-certification in the field one teaches in as an indicator of teacher quality. It is troubling that in California, an estimated 48% of SETs lacked full-certification thus, inadequate preparation, with the greatest number of these teachers working in high poverty urban schools with California's most vulnerable students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Within a civil rights framework it is important to recognize that, "teacher shortages deny students with disabilities their right to a free and appropriate education as mandated by federal law" (Esposito, Hamdan, & Benitez, 2015, p. 8).

### Special Education Enrollment

Although special education enrollment data over five years (CDE, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015b), suggest there was a decline in P-12 enrollment overall, with a slight increase in 2014, the trend of declining enrollment returned to approximately 2013 levels in 2015 (see figure 1 below, -9 slope indicates a declining enrollment with a R2 of .26, suggesting that about 26% of the variance can be explained by the regression line) while, recent empirical models (e.g. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016) indicate increases in school age populations nationally.

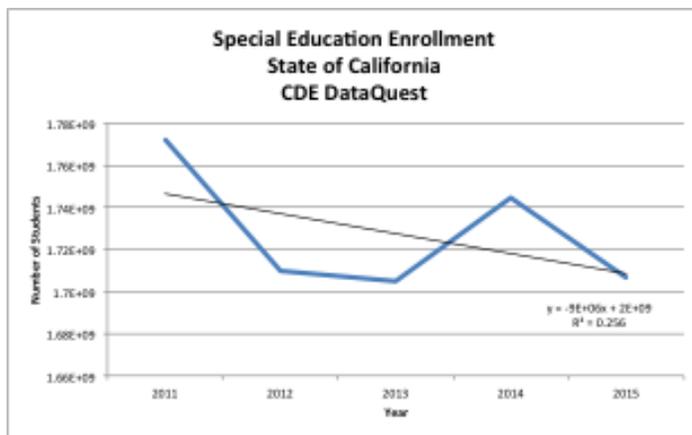


Figure 1. Enrollment Trend

As such, special education enrollment does not solely account for the extraordinarily high number of SET hiring required in California, which was about 40% higher than the next highest subject need area, mathematics. Moreover, in year 2015 (a year with lower enrollment), California issued 50% more substandard credentials to SETs (Sutchter, et al., 2016) thus, it is clear that factors unrelated to enrollment play a significant role in SET shortages.

### Sources of Teacher Shortages

The extant literature specific to teacher shortages reveal multiple factors including a decline in teacher preparation program enrollments and high attrition rates as driving these poor outcomes related to teacher shortages (See Boe, et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2016). Within the context of teacher preparation, and more specifically within the context of the program for which we report and share in this article, attrition and declining university enrollments are the most germane. As such, the following sections will address these two factors in greater depth.

### The Need to Address Attrition Rates

Teacher attrition in the United States is one of the largest contributing factors to teacher shortages (Ingersol, 2001). Emphasizing this, Sutchter, et. al. (2016) implored, "changing attrition would reduce the projected shortages more than any other single factor" (p.2). Empirical evidence(Sutchter, et al., 2016) demonstrates that attrition rates are highest in the field of special education because SETs are more likely to enter the field with less preparation, feel the least supported, and thus leave the field earlier than other teachers (Boe et. al., 2013). Research specific to the identification of strategies to reduce attrition rates suggests preparation prior to entering the field and the extent to which SETs feel supported once in the field (e.g., by school administration, colleagues or mentors, or university faculty) are critical to reducing attrition (Ingersol, 2001; Sutchter et. al., 2016). Additionally, an adequate number of SET candidates within teacher preparation programs is central to reducing the reliance on an underprepared SET teaching force due to paucity of prepared SETs (Suckow & Roby, 2016).

Education policy makers, school site and district level leaders, along with researchers have ardently called for increases in the number of teacher candidates enrolled in preparation programs. Their calls however have been unmet (Futernick, 2007; Sutchter, et al., 2016). For example, national estimates suggest that teacher preparation program enrollments have declined by 35% over the last 6 years (Sutchter, et. al., 2016). California's decline has exceeded national trends, with evidence demonstrating a 48% reduction over the past 5 years (Suckow & Roby, 2016). At these authors' local level, declining teacher preparation programs negatively impact the local school districts. For example, California State University (CSU) Chancellors Office (2012) found that even though CSU campuses prepare approximately 3,350 new special education teachers annually, an increase of more than double this amount is needed to meet districts' hiring needs. In other words, the pipeline of teacher candidates is not sufficient to produce the number of quality teachers to educate the anticipated population of students with special needs. Strategies to encourage more SET candidates to enroll in teacher preparation programs include inducements such as reduced program length and financial incentives such as scholarships as critical components (see Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016 for complete review).

### Special Education Teacher Support

As reported earlier, SETs, relative to their colleagues in general education, self-report that a perceived lack of support was a primary reason for leaving the field (Boe, et al., 2013). To investigate potential reasons for this, we used qualitative analysis of publicly provided forum posts (from 10/2014 to 8/2016, N=40 posts)

obtained from Edutopia.org to obtain rich, contextually situated discourse relating to SET burnout. This analysis was conducted via Dedoose.com, a mixed methods research platform. Thematic content was coded as: support from teachers, passion for teaching, administration, students, and so on. In figure 2, coded phrases represented by larger fonts represent a greater frequency of thematically coded excerpts.



Figure 2. Thematically Coded Excerpts

In terms of inter-individual protective factors, SETs who participated in this forum indicated fellow teacher support, followed by administrative support was invaluable for these SETs. In turn, this substantiated other researchers' assertions (e.g., Boe et al 2013; Podolsky, Kini, Bisho & Darling-Hammond, 2016) that ensuring regular support from other teachers, and administrators is essential for success in teaching. In short, these researchers and voices of everyday teachers assert that creating a culture of support is critical to ensure longevity of SET careers.

### SSETI Program

Teacher preparation programs aimed at increasing SET supply and reducing attrition are essential, if students, especially students most in need, have access to a quality education. Researchers and policymakers (for complete review see, Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016) have implemented a variety of strategies to improve the preparation, retention and distribution of quality teachers in high need schools. One strategy implemented is alternative certification routes (ACR), which enable teachers to enter the field quicker than traditional routes. ACRs have been credited with increasing both the number (Sindelar et al., 2012) and the diversity of the candidates placed in high needs schools. In efforts to recruit, train and retain math, science and special education teachers the California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) in partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), has been awarded multiple federal grants (e.g., Hamdan, 2007, 2009, 2014) to develop innovative ACRs, with the most recent Office of Special Education Projects grant at the U.S. Department of Education (Hamdan & Esposito, 2014, # H325K140416-15) designed to recruit, prepare, place and retain qualified special education teachers. Through this Secondary Special Education Teacher Interventionist (SSETI) grant, candidates are provided with multiple strands of support, delivered through CSUDH's California STEM Institute for Innovation and Improvement (CSI<sup>3</sup>) (Hamdan et al., 2014). One of these innovative supports is the Teacher Support Institute (TSI) (see Hamdan et al., 2014 for complete review or earlier article in this issue) -which provides focused support through bi-monthly seminars held at local middle schools, where interns lesson plan with expert teachers,

refine their teaching skills and receive individualized support from veteran teachers (Hamdan, Borden & Duenas, 2015). Another support provided to the SSETI candidates, is participation in a Lab School (LS – see article 1 and 2 in this issue). In partnership with LAUSD, CSI<sup>3</sup> has developed and operated multiple secondary LSs, for high need middle and high school students in economically poor urban centers (see Hamdan, Borden & Duenas, 2015 for complete review). These LSs hold classes on Saturdays and weekdays during the summer, which not only provide secondary students, in high needs areas, with quality academic instruction, but enable SSETI candidates to observe, teach and receive coaching from expert teachers. The LS and TSI are innovations designed to provide the needed support to prepare and support, thus retain our SSETI candidates. These authors assert that SSETI is a viable model that others across the nation can replicate when seeking to recruit, train and retain quality SETs (see Esposito, Hamdan, Benitez, 2015 for complete review).

### Program Outcomes in Year One

The SSETI program completed year one of implementation in May of 2016, with 9 program completers earning Educational Specialists Mild/Moderate Credentials. Data analyses of pre-post surveys demonstrate SSETI respondents held many positive views of their preparation. When asked to describe the greatest strengths of the SSETI program responses centered around three primary themes including support from their cohort and SSETI faculty/staff, the accelerated program, and the financial stipend. These findings are similar to other researchers (Boe et al 2013; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016) who have called for teacher preparation programs to identify strategies to support new SETs, enable candidates to enter the field quickly, and provide for monetary incentives to enter the profession.

Research indicates that social relationships with supportive educators are key to building skills and improves a sense of belonging that lead to commitment to the profession (Shernoff, et al., 2011). The SSETI candidates' responses echoed these finding with candidates stating that one of the best aspects of the program was having other SSETI candidates employed at their work site. In short, responses suggest that candidates enjoyed working with other SSETI candidates at the same school site, because it engendered camaraderie, collaboration, and the feeling of a common bond.

To assess SSETI candidates' preparation for working in urban settings, candidates were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10 their confidence in their teaching abilities. Results from selected items on the surveys (program entrance and program exit) demonstrated increases in the SSETI candidates' confidence—or teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997) to work in difficult to staff areas. As evidenced in table 3, the percent change from the pre-test to the post-test revealed a 9.3% overall change. The greatest level of candidates' improved teacher efficacy was related to the ability to deal with "almost any learning problem" with a percent change of 27.5%. When asked about their beliefs regarding the SSETI program, responses were overall highly positive, with no changes in perceptions evidenced. These authors assert candidates' initial perceptions of program were inflated because candidates had not begun teaching, thus candidates may not have the experience needed to accurately assess their preparation which may account for the lack of change in pre-post responses. Additionally, because candidates

at the time of post survey completion were experienced teachers they were able to more accurately assess the extent to which their teacher preparation program prepared them for the realities of urban settings. In short, as teachers of record, these candidates have first-hand knowledge of the extent to which they were adequately prepared to meet the demands of urban settings. Results further demonstrate that the SSETI candidates in this study felt prepared to handle a variety of learning problems (27.5% increase), had the ability to adapt instructional strategies according to student needs (13.2% increase), and implement research supported methods for academic and non-academic instruction (8.3% increase). Please see Table 3 for survey questions and percent changes in the pre-post survey administrations. Although the sample size is small, these authors hold that as teachers of record, respondents have first-hand knowledge of their teacher education preparation, thus increases the meaningfulness of these results.

Teacher Efficacy Pre-Post Rating Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree; 10=Strongly Agree	N	Pre	N	Post	Percent Change
I have enough training to deal with almost any learning problem.	9	5.1	6	6.5	27.5%
When a student is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it to his/her level.	9	7.6	6	8.2	7.9%
When a student gets a better grade/performance than he/she usually gets, it is usually because I found better ways of teaching that student.	9	7.6	6	8.0	5.3%
My teacher-training program has given me the necessary skills to be an effective teacher.	9	7.8	6	7.8	0%
I can select and adapt instructional strategies and materials according to my students' learning needs.	9	6.8	6	7.7	13.2%
I use research-supported methods for academic and nonacademic instruction.	9	7.2	6	7.8	8.3%
Total	9	42.1	6	46	9.3%

Table 3. Teacher Efficacy

### Final Reflections

Initial indicators suggest the SSETI program is a viable teacher preparation model. Of note, is the fact that nine high quality SET's are currently employed in hard to staff secondary school settings working to improve educational outcomes for the many students with special needs they serve. Although generalizability of the program's effectiveness is hindered by limited data, these researchers currently have a robust cohort (N=17) completing year two of implementation. Continued assessment of the program's outcomes will serve to validate the SSETI program model and add to the extant teacher shortage literature. Because it is most likely that acute SET shortages will persist, further research investigating strategies for increasing teacher preparation program enrollment and the retention of SETs is most welcomed.

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**EDITORIAL OBJECTIVES:** The Journal of Authentic Leadership in Education (JALE) is a refereed journal established in January 2010. This journal is published quarterly, on line and in traditional paper format. JALE is a project operated by the Nipissing University Centre for the Study of Leadership and Ethics (NUCSLE). NUCSLE is part of the Centre for the Study of Leadership and Ethics (CSLE), which was established as a program centre of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) in 1996. JALE is housed in the Schulich School of Education of Nipissing University under the editorship of Dr. Heather Rintoul. Layout by Mark Giddens

**SUBMISSION INFORMATION:** The editors will review all articles to determine their suitability for this publication. In addition, at least two additional reviewers will conduct blind reviews of the article.

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