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**Considering a Doctorate in Education?**

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- Flexible, hybrid courses
- Small cohorts conducted by accessible faculty
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- High Graduation Completion Rates

**For more information, contact:**

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<https://www.wcsu.edu/campustour/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2016/11/campusdirectionsheet.pdf>

Revised: 11/19/20

## **Just the Facts . . .**

**WCSU's EdD in Instructional Leadership program has**

**Admitted over 179 students.**

**An August 2019 graduation rate of 81% of retained students, the national average after 10 years is 50%.**

**Nationally accredited doctoral and administrative leadership programs.**

**A program satisfaction rating of 2.9/3.0, on an 80-item survey.**

## WCSU Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership

### EdD in Instructional Leadership: Program Description

WCSU's EdD in Instructional Leadership is the only doctorate of its kind in Connecticut and is one of the few doctoral programs in the country to focus on instructional leadership. The dynamic curriculum prepares educators, such as teachers, curriculum specialists, counselors, school psychologists, and administrators to create innovative learning environments; to respond to reform at the national, state and local levels and; to transform educational organizations. Graduates of this program are able to apply advanced curricular systems and strategies in classrooms and schools. The program prepares educators to be instructional leaders within their districts, able to assist with many decisions related to academics and assessment. More information can be found at [www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership](http://www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership).

Faculty members include Dr. Marcy Delcourt, Dr. Jody Piro, and Dr. Tricia Stewart. Their profiles can be found at [www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership](http://www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership)

The following questions are addressed in this document:

1. [Is this an accredited program?](#)
2. [What types of courses are offered?](#)
3. [How do I apply for the Doctor of Education \(EdD\) in Instructional Leadership?](#)
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## 1. Is this an accredited program?

This **Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership degree program at WCSU** is approved by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is the current national accrediting body for the program and the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) is the organization overseeing the accreditation for the University.

Once accepted into the EdD in Instructional Leadership program, students may also enroll in the program to obtain a **Certificate in Intermediate Administration and Supervision (Endorsement #092)**. This certificate program is also accredited by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). Additionally, it has received national accreditation from the Educational Leader Constituent Council (ELCC) of the National Policy Board for Educational Administrators (NPBEA) and from NCATE. Please note that as State and national policies change, the programs will be updated accordingly.

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## 2. What types of courses are offered?

Based on the reflective practitioner model, all courses are designed to assist doctoral candidates in taking leadership roles to improve the curriculum and instruction in their classrooms, schools, and districts. The EdD in Instructional Leadership at WCSU has three major components:

**Leadership Theory and Foundation.** In one of our first courses of the program, students participate in a leadership exercise and construct an individualized Leadership Development Plan. This plan acts as a blueprint for the acquisition and enrichment of leadership behaviors and skills. Additionally, students develop individual, group, and organizational competencies throughout the program.

**Area of Specialization.** Students investigate cognitive-developmental and socio-cultural theories and research-based strategies to design and modify classroom curricula as well as to create professional development experiences in schools.

**Inquiry Strategies and Dissertation Sequence.** Doctoral students interpret and apply a full complement of in-depth research strategies to educational settings. Students develop skills and extend their knowledge in the areas of evaluation, interpretation, and research implementation.

Courses included in each area are listed below.

*Courses in the EdD in Instructional Leadership, WCSU*

<b>Core Courses in Leadership Theory and Foundations</b>	<b>Area of Specialization</b>	<b>Inquiry Strategies and Dissertation Sequence</b>
ED800: Foundations of Instructional Leadership	ED820: Topics in Curriculum and Instruction	ED860: Quantitative Methods Applied to Educational Research
ED801: Group Leadership, Group Processes, and Team Building in Education	ED821: Leadership Assessment and Development	ED861: Qualitative Methods Applied to Educational Research
ED802: Emerging Instructional Technologies	ED822: Talent Development Across the Curriculum	ED865: Introduction to Educational Research Designs

<b>Core Courses in Leadership Theory and Foundations</b>	<b>Area of Specialization</b>	<b>Inquiry Strategies and Dissertation Sequence</b>
ED803: National Standards Current Practices, and Policies in Education (Summer Institute)	ED823: Models of Creative Thinking	ED881: Dissertation Seminar 1
ED804: Learning, Cognition, and Teaching	ED824: Diversity Issues in Schools	ED882: Dissertation Seminar 2
ED805: Research and Evaluation in Education	ED826: Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Applied to Educational Research	ED883: Dissertation Seminar 3
		ED884: Dissertation Seminar 4
		ED885: Dissertation Seminar 5
18 SH	18 SH	24 SH

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### 3. How do I apply for the Doctor of Education (EdD) in Instructional Leadership?

The application is located online at our website: <https://www.wcsu.edu/graduate/forms/edd-application/>.

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### 4. What are the admission requirements?

The following information is requested:

- 1. a completed application form: [EdD Application \(online\)](#)
- 2. evidence of educational experience in a PK-12 setting:
  - a. a copy of your educator certificate(s) and
  - b. documentation of at least three years of full-time educational experience in a PK-12 setting (e.g., documentation of employment from your school's Human Resources office or a letter from an administrator who works in your accredited institution).
- 3. a one- to two-page résumé
- 4. a \$100 nonrefundable fee
- 5. official transcripts from all colleges and universities you have attended; a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.67 for all previous graduate course work is recommended

**Please arrange for the following to be sent directly to the Office of Graduate Admissions at WCSU:**

- 6. an official score on the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) is required ([WCSU Testing Center](#)). The MAT must be taken within the past five years. In addition, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required for all international students.
- 7. three recommendations attesting to your professional educational qualifications and ability to complete a doctoral program. At least one of these recommendations must be completed by someone in a supervisory capacity in an educational setting. The official WCSU form must be used for the completion of all recommendations. [Recommendation Form](#)
- 8. a completed immunization form: [Health Form](#)

Documents can be mailed to Western Connecticut State University, 181 White Street, Danbury, CT 06810 Attention: Office of Graduate Admissions or sent as attachments to [Graduate Admissions](#)

**Please note:**

1. Admission to the program will be determined after a satisfactory interview with designated WCSU representatives from the Ed.D. admissions committee.
2. Please do not send any additional materials.
3. Admission to the Ed.D. Program in Instructional Leadership is competitive.
4. Cohorts are limited to approximately 20 to 25 candidates.
5. Review of application materials begins March 1 and continues through mid-August. All admission requirements must be received by the Office of Graduate Admissions at least one month prior to the beginning of classes for the first course in each cohort sequence.
6. This program is based on a cohort model that accepts students every other year.

For additional information, please contact the program Coordinator. Contact information is located at [www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership](http://www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership).  
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**5. What is the cost of the EdD in Instructional Leadership program?**

Costs are set by the Connecticut State University Board of Regents. Graduate tuition and fees are located at <http://www.wcsu.edu/registration/grad-tuition.asp>  
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**6. Are there any prerequisite courses in order to apply to the EdD in Instructional Leadership program?**

Students applying for the EdD in Instructional Leadership must already have completed a Master's degree in education or a related field. There are no specific prerequisite courses, however applicants are asked to indicate their experiences related to the topics of curriculum and instruction, educational technology, foundations of education, measurement and evaluation, and special education.  
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**7. What does it mean to be part of a cohort model?**

A new cohort is accepted into the program every other year (e.g., Fall 2019, 2021, etc.). Each cohort is limited to approximately 20-25 students. Students complete courses together in the same sequence. Accommodations can be made for students who request changes to the program sequence. The model provides the opportunity for candidates to form study groups and to serve as a support system while advancing through the program.  
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**8. How long will it take for me to complete the EdD in Instructional Leadership program?**

This program is designed for full-time educators to complete a doctoral degree while taking classes on a part-time basis. Participants are accepted into the program every other year (e.g., Fall 2019, 2021, etc.) and may complete all requirements over a 57-month period, or just under 5 years as a part-time graduate student. Students have completed the program in 4 years. Candidates are expected to complete all course work during 3 academic years, including two summers. After completing the comprehensive exams in the summer of the 3rd year, the dissertation process begins in the fall. An

individual may take up to 6 years to complete the program, otherwise an application for an extension is required. The overall sequence is illustrated below.

### Program Sequence

Academic Year 1 (12 SH) 2 courses/ semester	Summer 1 (6 SH) 2 courses	Academic Year 2 (12 SH) 2 courses/ semester	Summer 2 (3 SH) 1 course	Academic Year 3 (12 SH) Coursework Completed Summer Comprehensive Exams	Academic Year 4 (6 SH) Dissertation Seminars 1 and 2	Summer 4 (3 SH) Dissertation Seminar 3	Academic Year 5 (6 SH) Dissertation Seminars 4 and 5
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*Note.* SH = Semester Hours. Courses are 3 credits each.

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## 9. What is the sequence of courses and experiences?

The timeline for courses is available on our website: [www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership](http://www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership). The program is also designed to provide candidates with a variety of experiences including publishing, program evaluation, professional development activities, and conference presentations. Every other year, students and faculty members organize an Instructional Leadership Conference to highlight student accomplishments, activities of educators in local school districts, and pertinent research conducted by colleagues in other institutions.

### Course Timeline: EdD in Instructional Leadership, WCSU

Date	Program Requirement	Cohort Entry Date- Fall 2021, 2023, etc.
Fall 1	EdD and Admin. Cert.	ED800: Foundations of Instructional Leadership
	EdD	ED821: Leadership Assessment and Development
Spring 1	EdD	ED860: Quantitative Methods Applied to Educational Research ED803: National Standards Current Practices, and Policies in Education
Summer 1	EdD	ED802: Emerging Instructional Technologies ED822: Talent Development Across the Curriculum
Fall 2	EdD and Admin. Cert.	ED804: Learning, Cognition, and Teaching
	EdD	ED824: Diversity Issues in Schools
Spring 2	EdD and Admin. Cert.	ED820: Topics in Curriculum and Instruction
	EdD	ED861: Qualitative Methods Applied to Educational Research
Summer 2	EdD	ED801: Group Leadership, Group Processes, and Team Building in Education
Fall 3	EdD	ED865: Introduction to Educational Research Designs ED826: Quantitative and Qualitative Applications of Educational Research Begin pre-Dissertation Advisement
Spring 3	EdD and Admin. Cert.	ED805: Research and Evaluation in Education
	EdD	ED823: Models of Creative Thinking pre-Dissertation Advisement
Summer 3	EdD	Comprehensive Exams
Fall 4	EdD	ED881: Dissertation Seminar 1 Proposal defense, Complete IRB application
Spring 4	EdD	ED882: Dissertation Seminar 2 Set-up and Permission; Data Collection



Summer 4	EdD	ED883: Dissertation Seminar 3; Chapters 1, 2 and 3 or 1, 3, and 4 completed;
	Admin. Cert.	EDL618: Understanding the Political and Ethical Environment of School Leadership EDL656: Leadership and Supervision in Teaching and Learning
Fall 5	EdD	ED884: Dissertation Seminar 4; Chapters 4 and 5 completed
	Admin. Cert.	ED660: Internship & Seminar in Educational Leadership: Theory, Research, & Practice I
Spring 5	EdD	ED885: Dissertation Seminar 5 Chapters 1-5 revised; Editing Dissertation Defense
	Admin. Cert.	ED665: Internship & Seminar in Educational Leadership: Theory, Research, & Practice II
Summer	EdD	Dissertation Defense
Fall	EdD	Dissertation Defense

*Note.* Course sequence may be subject to change. Courses for the Administrative Certification that are identified in Blue can be completed at three possible times during or after completion of the EdD in Instructional Leadership program. Please consult the website for the Administrative Certification program for details.

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## 10. What will my schedule look like?

The EdD program includes 60 credits

- 15 courses (45 credits) over 3 years are followed by a comprehensive exam
- 5+ courses (approx. 15 credits) to complete the dissertation process through 5 or more semesterly seminars, additional seminars may be scheduled if a candidate needs further support
- The seminar requirements “chunk” the dissertation process into manageable bits
- A dissertation committee under the guidance of a dissertation committee chair directs the process

### Year 1

- 2 courses in the fall, on the same night from 5:00-7:00 and 7:15-9:15 (once/week plus 1 Saturday class/course), a single course may also convene on specific dates for the entire 4-hour timeframe
- 2 courses in the spring, on the same night from 5:00-7:00 and 7:15-9:15 (once/week plus 1 Saturday class/course), a single course may also convene on specific dates for the entire 4-hour timeframe
- 2 courses in the summer, during Summer Sessions 1 and 2, these courses are typically offered in an online format

### Year 2

- 2 courses in the fall, on the same night from 5:00-7:00 and 7:15-9:15 (once/week plus 1 Saturday class/course), a single course may also convene on specific dates for the entire 4-hour timeframe
- 2 courses in the spring, on the same night from 5:00-7:00 and 7:15-9:15 (once/week plus 1 Saturday class/course) a single course may also convene on specific dates for the entire 4-hour timeframe
- 1 course in the summer, during July

### Year 3

- 2 courses in the fall, on the same night from 5:00-7:00 and 7:15-9:15 (once/week plus 1 Saturday/course), a single course may also convene on specific dates for the entire 4-hour timeframe



- 2 courses in the spring, on the same night from 5:00-7:00 and 7:15-9:15 (once/week plus 1 Saturday/course), a single course may also convene on specific dates for the entire 4-hour timeframe
- Comprehensive Exams, the last 2 Saturdays in July

Year 4

- Fall (dissertation proposal), Spring (data collection), Summer (dissertation chapters 1-3)

Year 5

- Fall (dissertation chapters 4 and 5), Spring+ (revisions/defense)

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### **11. What if it takes me more than 6 years to finish the EdD in Instructional Leadership program?**

An individual may take up to 6 years to complete the program, otherwise an application for an extension of the 6-year time limit is required. This extension is subject to approval by the Graduate Council.

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### **12. When do I complete my dissertation?**

The dissertation process begins as soon as you start to think about possible topics for your investigation. This should commence with your first course. Collect ideas, discuss them with your peers and professors, and begin to investigate the feasibility of each by reviewing the literature.

You will formally begin the dissertation process after completing your comprehensive exams, which are scheduled in the summer of the third year of study. This program has been designed to assist you to complete your dissertation by having a series of seminars for each stage of the process. The proposal, proposal defense, data collection process, and chapter revisions are incorporated into the seminars. The dissertation process culminates in the Dissertation Defense.

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### **13. Do I choose a major advisor or is one assigned to me?**

Your major advisor will be determined according to the topic you choose and the type of research methodology that is best for your study. While a major advisor is assigned by the Program Coordinator, changes might be made as a candidate refines ideas based on research content and procedures.

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### **14. How do I select my doctoral advisory committee?**

A doctoral committee includes at least three people who have earned doctoral degrees. They will guide you through your dissertation process. With guidance from your dissertation committee chair and the Program Coordinator, you will select and contact two individuals to serve as dissertation committee members. These individuals, in addition to your major advisor, will be your doctoral advisory committee.

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### **15. Is there a residency requirement?**

This is a part-time program and there is no requirement for full-time commitment to coursework, therefore, there is no residency requirement.

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### **16. Can I transfer in courses?**

Yes. Up to 9 hours of prior coursework may be transferred into a program of study. These courses can be no older than 6 years when the candidate graduates from the present program, each course must be at the doctoral level, and each course must be equivalent to the course it is replacing. Consult with the Program Coordinator in order to apply to transfer any courses. Both a course description and syllabus must be reviewed in order to make this determination. No course can be transferred if it was a requirement for a formerly completed degree. Courses from Sixth Year Certificate (SYC) programs are eligible for transfer into the EdD program.

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### **17. May I take courses at other universities?**

After acceptance to the program, courses may be transferred if each meets specific criteria. Each course must be from an accredited institution, equivalent to a course in the EdD program, within the total course credit transfer limit of 9 SH, approved by the Program Coordinator. Before registering for any course outside of the EdD in Instructional Leadership program, an approval form must be completed, signed by the Program Coordinator, and filed with the graduate office.

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### **18. Are the courses offered every semester?**

The courses in this program are offered in a given sequence only. When a cohort is accepted, it is expected that all students enroll in the set sequence of courses. While these courses are offered in a presented sequence, a student seeking any change in the sequence must apply for a change through the Program Coordinator. For example, changes could occur if a student transfers credits from another institution.

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### **19. How do I register for classes?**

Each semester, registration procedures are handled by the Program Coordinator, who sends the schedule and a list of students/course to the office for the Division of Graduate Studies.

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### **20. How is the Administrative Certification incorporated into the EdD in Instructional Leadership program?**

The Certification for Intermediate Administration and Supervision (Endorsement #092) is an optional program for WCSU's EdD in Instructional Leadership candidates. Four courses incorporated into the EdD program are a part of the course sequence for the accredited administrative endorsement (ED 800:

Foundations of Educational Leadership, ED 804: Learning, Cognition, and Teaching, ED 820: Topics in Curriculum and Instruction, and ED 805: Research and Evaluation in Education). Students who wish to obtain this certificate, apply to the “092” program and complete an additional 4 courses. Two of these courses are offered in collaboration with Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and the other 2 courses constitute the required program internship. Students may complete the courses for the administrative certificate beginning in Summer 2, Summer 3, or after obtaining the doctoral degree. A schedule for both programs is indicated in the program timeline ([www.wcsu.edu/graduate/edd/edd-timeline.pdf](http://www.wcsu.edu/graduate/edd/edd-timeline.pdf)). This timeline represents a schedule for beginning the additional administrative courses in Summer 3.

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## **21. What else do I need to know?**

Take some time to read the graduate catalog ([www.wcsu.edu/catalogs/graduate/](http://www.wcsu.edu/catalogs/graduate/)) and the EdD in Instructional Leadership website ([www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership](http://www.wcsu.edu/edd-leadership)). The catalog contains the basic academic rules and regulations of the university and provides course descriptions, while the program website contains all documents pertaining to the EdD procedures.

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## **22. What are key outcomes of the EdD in Instructional Leadership program?**

Our greatest outcomes are represented by the accomplishments of our students. Of the candidates who are eligible to defend their dissertations, we consistently have between 88-92% completion rate. The national average for dissertation completion is 50% after 10 years. Candidates are indeed becoming active leaders and researchers in their school communities both before and after they graduate. They influence their local schools and districts by accepting the following roles: Department Chair, School Dean, Principal, Assistant Principal, District Language Arts Coordinator, Mentor Program Director, Grant Director, NEASC Coordinator, Director of Technology, etc. They have also led their schools to becoming award-winning institutions at the state, regional, and national levels.

In order to prepare for one of our Accreditation Reviews, an external consultant, Dr. Dennis Shirley from Boston College, was asked to review all aspects of the program. He reviewed all program documents and held individual and group interviews with faculty members, students, community members, and university administrators. Among other comments, Dr. Shirley made the following two points:

As a professor of education who is well aware that one of the persistent criticisms of schools of education for decades has been that they are excessively theoretical and irrelevant to the concerns of teachers, principals, and superintendents, I found myself admiring the commitment, talent, and vision of the faculty and staff at WCSU who created and are sustaining the Instructional Leadership doctoral program.

Second, the collaborative nature of the instructional leadership doctoral program was evident throughout this site visit. Within WCSU, the program is viewed by students, faculty, and administrators to be internally coherent and well sequenced. Discussants held that the doctoral program is embedded in a broader, university-wide commitment to the improvement of public education that they find praiseworthy and worthy of emulation by other universities.

Significantly, local educational leaders on the Advisory Board agreed, confirming that the doctoral program is meeting their needs for highly qualified teachers and administrators.

Dr. Shirley's very positive assessment of the program is reinforced by the following student comments:

The excitement of working with classmates who are experienced practicing educators and faculty members who are dynamic and engaging, challenges my thoughts and ideas about education. Frank LaBanca, Danbury Public Schools

This doctoral program enables me to not only be a stronger, more knowledgeable leader, but it also inspires me to be a better educator.

Joan McGettigan, Darien Public Schools

I have learned so much about myself as an educator and a leader through participation in this program. Nora Marrinan, Ridgefield Public Schools

I have no regrets about choosing to participate in this challenging program.

Mike Obre, Danbury Public Schools

I came to WCSU's Ed.D. Program for the education, but I am staying because of the inspiration. Lori Kolbusz, Norwalk Public Schools

The most recent Accreditation Report from NEASC included the following comments:

A survey of graduates shows significant career growth, such as teacher to assistant principal or principal to superintendent, following graduation. The Team examined the process of outcome evaluation and found strong evidence of student success, careful assessment, and caring faculty. The University is to be commended for its efforts to build a strong and rigorous program that is thoughtfully and effectively evaluated and managed. (Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2013, p. 13)

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### **Completed Dissertations**

All completed dissertations are available at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/educationdis/>

### **Graduates in the News**

**Her school rules: WCSU graduate at the helm of 'Elementary School of the Year' Principal of Danbury's Western Connecticut Academy of International Studies Dr. Helena Nitowski earned her Ed.D. in instructional leadership at Western**

DANBURY, CONN. — A recent graduate of the [Educational Doctorate program in Instructional Leadership](#) at [Western Connecticut State University](#), Dr. Helena Nitowski is the principal of "Elementary School of the Year" for 2014-15

Nitowski, a principal in Danbury for 13 years, has been at the helm of the Western Connecticut Academy of International Studies (AIS) since it opened in 2006. The public magnet school has a mission of developing socially responsible global citizens who use technology to access the world. Prior to AIS, Nitowski was the principal of Mill Ridge Intermediate School.

The AIS magnet school, located on property adjacent to the university's Westside campus, is open to all Danbury students as well as students from area towns through a lottery system. With a theme of International and Global Studies, the school's 412 students in kindergarten through fifth grade are also taught a foreign language.

Nitowski said she chose to earn a doctorate degree at Western after looking at several online degree programs. "I preferred programs that had face-to-face time," Nitowski said. "Also, I really liked the cohort model, which builds on being able to complete things. I enjoyed working with the professors and connecting with other members. It's a supportive process."

The Western graduate said the program was a rigorous one that prepared her for looking at the role of leader in terms of instruction, management and goal-setting. It also helped her develop her skills in conducting more quality research with a deeper understanding of the issues. "I'm looking at things through a different lens now," Nitowski said. "We are always lifelong learners. In a program such as the Ed.D., you are learning at a higher level and applying at a practical level."

The K-5 school was selected by the [Connecticut Association of Schools](#) (CAS) as "Elementary School of the Year" for 2014-15. AIS was chosen from a number of Connecticut elementary schools and "clearly distinguished itself as a consummate elementary school," according to the nonprofit organization.

The school's international studies theme centers on the concept of peace and the role of peacekeepers in the world. Students start the day reciting the AIS Peace Pledge in both English and Spanish. An emphasis on international studies and world language facilitates critical thinking and broadens mastery of the district curriculum. Students learn about environmental awareness by food composting in their cafeteria, tending to a community garden, bonding with local organizations and recycling.

The criteria used to evaluate the school included whether the school was welcoming to students and visitors, and whether the school had an appropriately developed and research-based curriculum. Other items rated included whether technology at the school supported instruction.

Most importantly, as indicated in the CAS award, the AIS magnet school is centered on the students, not the teachers, and provides a learning environment that supports instruction and encourages higher-order thinking skills. CAS is a nonprofit educational organization. An informed leader in Connecticut's education system, CAS provides services to the state's K-12 schools in areas ranging from academics to athletics. The association represents more than 1,100 schools in the state.

## **Western graduate chosen principal of new STEM and global academy Alumnus says WCSU's educational doctorate program a 'community of thinkers'**

DANBURY, CONN. — When [Danbury Public Schools](#) opened the doors to its newest school this month — a state-of-the art STEM and global academy — Frank LaBanca, a graduate of the [Western Connecticut State University doctorate in education program](#) (Ed.D.), was at the helm as its principal.

LaBanca, of Newtown, said that the Westside Middle School Academy will be progressive in the way that teaching and learning will take place; he credits WCSU with instilling in him the ability to focus on what is going on in the classroom to make it a valuable experience for students.

“The Ed.D. program at WCSU is a very unique one,” LaBanca said. “Most doctorate programs are about leadership, which includes management and vision. The program at Western focuses on instruction, what’s happening in the classroom and how you change practice in the classroom.”

LaBanca isn’t the only WCSU graduate who will be at the school. More than 1,400 people applied for the school’s 30 open positions and a third of those hired or transferred from other Danbury schools are WCSU graduates: Joseph DiGuiseppi, Alessandra de la Vega, Natalie Locke, Beth Manning, Joshua Meade, Laura Muller, Julie Pokrinchok, Jennifer Power and Kristy Zaleta.

The school will accommodate 600 students by 2016-17 and will open with 300 students in [STEM](#) (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and 100 students in global studies. More students will be phased in over the next two years being chosen through a districtwide lottery system.

“It will be an ‘inquiry school’,” LaBanca said. “Students learn well when they ask meaningful questions they can investigate. This is what schools today are moving toward.”

The school is considered a magnet school because it draws students from all over the district and also has a theme of exploration. The STEM exploration will be scientific challenges, whereas the global academy will explore challenges based on global issues.

For instance, LaBanca explained that if students were faced with the current issue of water quality around the world, the STEM students will look for ways to purify water and devices necessary for that process. The global students would explore the geo-political point of view and campaign to educate people to find solutions.

“Each can take an issue and develop real solutions that are useful,” LaBanca said. “We’re asking them to take ownership of their education and the teachers are there to help students construct understanding and meaning.”

LaBanca’s goals as principal are to create an environment that involves project learning and uses technology, and increases teacher capacity where students are being guided to learning at a more-involved level.

“I want to create an environment where kids feel connected to their school,” he said. Hoping to be paper-free in three years, LaBanca also wants to increase the use of technology in the classrooms. There are charging stations in every classroom and two project rooms equipped with 3-D printers.

Prior to the WSMSA, LaBanca ran a STEM program in Connecticut through [Education Connection](#) where he prepared 120 teachers in 50 schools to instruct 3,000 students.

“Now I am looking forward to being in an environment where I can lead teachers and students and be a direct part of their learning,” he said.

# WCSU doctoral graduate heads Connecticut ‘School of Distinction’

Founding administrator Laura Main has served at Booker T. Washington Academy since 2014



Dr. Laura Main

DANBURY, CONN. — A New Haven charter school guided since its founding by principal and [Western Connecticut State University](#) doctoral recipient [Dr. Laura Main](#) has earned the coveted designation as a “[School of Distinction](#)” in the latest Connecticut State Department of Education survey of public schools released in February.

[Booker T. Washington Academy](#) (BTWA) was cited among the state’s “[highest performing elementary schools](#)” and “[greatest improvers](#)” in the State Department of Education’s Next Generation Accountability System evaluation of performance by all public schools in Connecticut during the 2016-17 academic year. The New Haven charter school, chosen as one of 124 Schools of Distinction in the new survey, currently enrolls students from kindergarten through grade 4 and will complete its development into a comprehensive K-5 institution in fall 2018.

Main, who joined the founding administrative team at BTWA in fall 2014 after completing her [Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership](#) at WCSU, said that three factors have been critical in promoting superior academic performance among Academy students at all grade levels, whom she refers to as “our scholars.” These factors include “a curriculum built with consistency, coherence and rigor; a relentless focus on continuous improvement and taking action based on data; and a low teacher/student ratio,” currently at one faculty member to every 11 students, she said.

“From the very beginning, our curriculum was built carefully to make sure all scholars received the same instruction, no matter what classroom they were assigned,” she remarked. “Additionally, the curriculum is carefully crafted so that there is coherence both within each grade and between the grades. In this way, the concepts introduced are built upon each other in a manner that is both developmentally appropriate and provides each scholar with access to high-level content.”

Dr. [Marcy Delcourt](#), coordinator of the WCSU education doctoral program, described Main as “an extremely creative educator who has the vision, ideas and enthusiasm to initiate school-wide reforms. She truly



exemplifies a graduate of WCSU's Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership program by using her skills and talents to design an environment that improves the quality of education for all students.”

The Academy's dynamic and multi-faceted instructional plan over an eight-hour school day focuses on providing rigorous education in core content areas including reading, writing and mathematics, as well as regular enrichment in science, music, dance, art, world languages and physical education. By providing each class with a team of one lead teacher and one academic assistant, Main observed, BTWA is able to structure the school day as a series of workshops that feature both group lessons and individualized one-on-one or small-group instruction. Teachers for each grade level meet weekly to review instructional data and use these findings to design and adapt action plans for immediate implementation in the classroom, she noted.

The New Haven charter school's mathematics curriculum has been recognized as one of the top-performing elementary school math programs statewide, and its reading program has been cited among the top 20 percent statewide by the Department of Education. Main observed that problem-solving provides the basis for learning math skills at BTWA, while language arts education includes a strong emphasis on writing narrative, informative and persuasive texts. “Beginning in kindergarten, our scholars solve real-life problems using pictures, numbers and words to explain their thinking,” she said.

With comprehensive school sessions that feature five hours' instruction in core content as well as additional time to teach two special subject areas each day, BTWA lesson plans regularly break down disciplinary boundaries to approach related topics in new ways, Main said. “For example, the scholars may be learning about the rainforest through a read-aloud exercise, and then may create a group mural of the rainforest in art class,” she said. “Similarly, scholars may learn about three-dimensional shapes in math, and then in the science lab they may learn to create those shapes using clay and toothpicks. As our scholars learn about fractions in math, they also learn about musical notation in music class.” A lesson about the fragility of the environment, she added, may inspire an assignment to “write a persuasive piece about the importance of taking care of the earth.”

The BTWA administration, faculty and staff seek to reinforce the educational mission of the school by creating what Main described as “a warm, welcoming environment for all,” from greeting arriving students with high fives and escorting them into school every morning to providing homework support and enrichment activities in an active after-school program serving one-third of all school families. “Staff members help to make sure that each and every scholar is ready to start the day with a positive attitude,” she said. “If a scholar needs social or emotional support, a member of our team will offer that assistance in the moment.

“Our parents are extremely supportive of our school and consider it an extension of their family, as it should be,” Main added. “They often comment about how far our staff will go to make sure each and every scholar is successful. If there is a need or concern, we work diligently to make sure it is addressed as soon as possible.”

“Laura has made a tremendous change in the lives of the students who attend BTWA and has impacted the families of these children by building trust in the educational system and giving them hope for the future,” Delcourt observed.

Main credited her academic training in the Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership program in the WCSU [Department of Education and Educational Psychology](#) as sound preparation for tackling the challenges she has faced at BTWA after previous administrative experience in the Naugatuck school system. “It has been the most difficult work I have ever done, but also the most rewarding,” she said. “I believe that I learned to persevere with the intensity I have needed to accomplish this work because I had gone through the doctoral program at WCSU, in particular the dissertation process.”

Her doctoral work at WCSU enabled her “to be a careful decision-maker, always using research to ground my decisions,” she said. “The process I went through gave me the skills I needed to build a comprehensive program that has a solid research backing. It also allowed me to grow my abilities in presentation, which has been an extremely important skill set in this work.”

Main benefited from her studies and doctoral work with faculty mentors at WCSU who have strongly influenced her development as an academic administrator. She cited Delcourt for being “incredibly supportive” while “pushing me to think deeply and critically.” She noted that Professor Emeritus of Education Dr. Karen Burke “taught me so much about learning styles, which I use in my work with teachers and teams,” while former faculty member Dr. Jane Gangi provided insights into developing teaching plans for accelerated math learners. “It was through their mentorship and support that I was able to clarify my educational philosophies and hone my skills as an instructional leader,” Main said.

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