COURSE AND TITLE           EDLE 634: Contemporary Issues in Education Leadership

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TEXTBOOK
Other readings will be provided as handouts or electronic references.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Examination of current and emerging issues confronting educational leaders, with primary emphasis on use of information technology and data-driven decision-making to educate diverse learners, including those whose achievement is influenced by race, gender, poverty, or disabilities.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY
A variety of instructional methods are used in this course. Most class time is used for scheduled presentations by candidates and small group and whole-class discussions led by the instructor or assigned candidates.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Access to a computer, the World Wide Web, and email are essential for this course. Candidates will be given access to Blackboard.com for communication and resource purposes. Candidates are expected to competently use standard computer office tools such as word processing, spreadsheet, database, and presentation software.
Candidates are expected to attend all of each class. Candidates who must be absent from class are expected to notify the instructor in advance by telephone or email.
Assignments are to be completed by the due date shown. Assignments submitted late will have points deducted. Assignments submitted more than one week late may not receive full credit. All written assignments are to be completed using standard word processing or presentation tools and may be submitted in advance electronically.
GMU HONOR CODE

Candidates are expected to abide by the George Mason University Honor Code. Please refer to the University Catalog or www.gmu.edu for the full Honor Code.

CANDIDATE OUTCOMES

COMMUNICATION

Outcome 1: Lead members of the school community in clarifying and responding appropriately to social, economic, political, and legal issues affecting education.

Indicator 1a: Use excellent oral, written, and technical skills in presentations, papers, and class discussions.

Related knowledge, skills, and dispositions:
- Use computers to prepare a variety of documents and public presentations.
- Make public presentations on controversial matters.
- Lead deliberations of professional and community groups.

Indicator 1b: Analyze and explain complex issues affecting education.

- Help others understand issues by objectively reviewing opposing positions and relevant arguments.
- Recognize and consider community values.
- Work constructively with others, including persons from other cultural traditions.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Outcome 2: Lead members of the school community in making sound, ethical decisions based on valid analysis of data and on an understanding of current social, economic, legal, and political influences affecting education.

Indicator 2: Demonstrate the appropriate use of data in making an organizational decision intended to improve student learning.

Related knowledge, skills, and dispositions:
- Use data management tools.
- Analyze and interpret data to a variety of audiences.
- Understand ethical implications of policy options and strategies.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Outcome 3: Lead members of the school community in making effective use of information technology to manage school operations and promote student learning.

Indicator 3: Analyze and describe the ways information technology is currently being used at a particular school.

Related knowledge, skills, and dispositions:
- Be familiar with current and emerging technological applications appropriate for schools.
- Understand problems and issues affecting the use of information technology in schools, including copyright, censorship, access, and evaluation of effects.
STUDENT DIVERSITY

Outcome 4: Lead members of the school community in providing curriculum and instruction appropriate for today’s diverse student population, including students with disabilities.

Indicator 4a: Analyze and describe provisions for students with identified disabilities who attend a particular school.

Indicator 4b: Propose appropriate strategies for improving achievement in a school serving large numbers of low-scoring students whose learning is affected by race, poverty, or limited English.

Related knowledge, skills, and dispositions:
- Recognize and value diversity.
- Know strategies for adapting curriculum and instruction to varied student needs.
- Know characteristics of children with special needs, such as learning disabilities, visual and hearing impairment, ADHD, and giftedness.
- Understand the concepts of mainstreaming and inclusion and be able to describe ways special educators and regular educators can collaborate.
- Know factors that contribute to differences in student achievement, including those related to gender race, ethnicity, and limited English.
- Know strategies that have been found effective for improving achievement of students living in distressed neighborhoods.
- Understand how to use research and professional knowledge in planning curriculum and instruction.

RELATIONSHIP TO PROGRAM GOALS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

This course is intended as one of two culminating courses in the Masters in Education Leadership Program. Course content focuses on key contemporary issues in public education, both current and emerging. At the conclusion of the course, candidates are expected to demonstrate knowledge and skills that increase their effectiveness when working in diverse school settings, an expected hallmark of education in the 21st century.

Candidates in this course will demonstrate proficiency in
ISLLC standards: 1-K1, 1-K4, 1-K5, 2-K7, 2-K10, 2-P5, 2-P6, 2-P9, 2-P16, 2-P18, 3-K8, 3-P3, 3-P16, 3-P17, 4-K1, 4-K2, 4-P11, 5-K3, 5-P12, 6-K6, 6-K8, 6-P2, 6-P4, 6-P5.
Virginia VA DOE competencies: 1-d, 1-e, 2-c, 2-d, 3-g, 4-a, 5-c, 6-e, 6-f.
NCATE Curriculum Guidelines: Strategic Leadership (1.3, 1.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4); Instructional Leadership (3.3, 3.4, 3.6); Organizational Leadership (6.2, 6.4, 7.2, 7.4, 9.2, 9.3); Political and Community Leadership (11.1, 11.5).
A complete list of these standards is available on request.
EVALUATION AND GRADING

As this is a graduate-level class, high quality work on all assignments and substantive class participation are expected. Rubrics will be used in the evaluation of course work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attend all classes, arrive promptly, and participate constructively in class discussions.</td>
<td>15 points</td>
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</table>

Indicator 1a: Use excellent oral, written, and technical skills in presentations, papers, and class discussions. (Evaluation included in other indicators.)

Indicator 1b - Communication: Analyze and explain current issues affecting education. (2 presentations, 10 points each) 20 points

Indicator 2 – Knowledge Management: Demonstrate the appropriate use of data in making an organizational decision intended to improve student learning. 15 points

Indicator 3 – Information Technology: Analyze and describe the ways information technology is currently being used at a particular school. 15 points

Indicator 4a - Diversity: Analyze and describe provisions for students with identified disabilities who attend a particular school. 15 points

Indicator 4b - Diversity: Propose appropriate strategies for improving achievement in a school serving large numbers of low-scoring students whose learning is affected by race, poverty, or limited English. (Individual paper 15 points, group report 5 points) 20 points

The grading scale for EDLE courses is:

- A+ = 100 points
- A  = 95 - 99 points
- A- = 90 - 94 points
- B+ = 85 - 89 points
- B  = 80 - 84 points
- B- = 75 - 79 points
- C  = 70 - 74 points
- F  = 69 points or below

The grading scales and assigned points shown above are guidelines only. Your final grade for the semester will reflect the instructors’ judgment of your total performance.
MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS
Note: Candidates for whom these assignments may not be fully appropriate are encouraged to suggest modifications or alternative tasks. Alternative tasks will be approved if their successful completion would be an equally valid indicator of the relevant course outcome.

Indicator 1b – Communication: Analyze and explain current issues.
Part of each class meeting is devoted to discussion of current issues. Each week the instructor offers advance briefings on the issues to be discussed the following week, explaining the nature of each issue, major arguments for various positions, and some possible relationships to broader social trends. At the next class meeting class members make brief presentations and/or lead the discussion of each issue. Presentations may take one of the following forms:
1. A tentative position on the issue, including arguments for one position and against the opposite position (such as explaining why it is good public policy to allow students from high-poverty neighborhoods to attend non-public schools at public expense).
2. A debate (or a pro-and-con discussion) with another class member in which the participants have been assigned to represent opposing positions on the issue. (In a debate, each speaker presents a position, then each gives a rebuttal. In an informal discussion, the parties hold a conversation, countering one another’s arguments.)
3. A brief summary of the issue followed by a report of how the issue is currently being handled in a local school or school system.
Supplement your oral presentation with a handout and/or visuals (PowerPoint or overheads). Criteria:
• Demonstrates understanding of the issue, including its history, the current legal and political situation, and conflicting values underlying the issue.
• Articulates a reasoned position on the issue while recognizing the merit of opposing views.
• Demonstrates recognition of how the issue is represented in recent developments in local schools (if applicable).

Indicator 2 – Knowledge Management: Demonstrate the appropriate use of data in making an organizational decision intended to improve student learning.
Prepare a paper and make an oral presentation supported by visuals using actual data from a school or school system. With words and graphic displays, explain how you interpret the meaning of the data and report a decision or action intended to improve student learning that has been made or could be made on the basis of the data. Criteria:
• The cited data are valid and are relevant to a decision involving an important aspect of instruction or curriculum.
• The data are interpreted correctly and the interpretation is clearly explained.
• Issues raised by the data are identified and considered.
• The decision or action to be taken is specifically identified and appropriately linked to the data. (The presenter explains why the decision seems reasonable.)
Date due: February 23.
Indicator 3 – Information Technology: Analyze and describe the ways information technology is currently being used at a particular school. Prepare a paper and make an oral presentation supported by visuals in which you describe the major applications of information technology at a particular school. Identify the number, type, and locations of computers in the school and the primary ways they are currently being used to manage school operations and to support student learning. Recommend possible improvements based upon suitable professional sources. Criteria:

- Provides a thorough inventory of equipment and current major applications.
- Identifies alternative applications that might be considered, arguments for and against current and potential applications, and additional equipment that would be needed for new applications.
- Recommendations are consistent with respected professional sources, which are appropriately cited.

Date due: March 15.

Indicator 4a: Analyze and describe provisions for students with identified disabilities who attend a particular school and suggest possible improvements. Prepare a paper and make an oral presentation supported by visuals analyzing provisions for students with disabilities at a particular school. Tell the number of students with each disability, the provisions for inclusion currently in use or planned, and accommodations that are to be provided when the students take required assessments. Suggest possible improvements, especially any steps that might be taken to enhance inclusion in regular classes and collaboration between regular and special educators. Criteria:

- Identifies the number and types of disabilities.
- Describes current provisions for inclusion clearly and accurately.
- Explains assessment accommodations.
- Suggests possible improvements that are feasible and in accord with recommended practice.

Date due: March 29.

Indicator 4b: Propose appropriate strategies for improving achievement in a school serving large numbers of low-scoring students whose learning is affected by race, poverty, or limited English. You will be given a description of a typical school that has large numbers of students who score low on required state assessments. Prepare a paper in which you identify a combination of strategies to be undertaken by the school principal (such as reducing class size in some grades and requiring staff development for teachers) in accord with research-based recommendations from the literature on improving student achievement. For each recommended strategy, identify specific research sources by citing them in the body of your paper and listing them in an attached annotated bibliography. Criteria:

- Cites a sufficient number of relevant documents from respected sources to establish the advisability of the recommended strategies.
- The recommended strategies are appropriate and feasible.
- Relevant issues, such as the need to win support of the staff and parents, are recognized and considered in the paper.

Date due: April 19. (Group reports based on the papers will be presented April 19.)
OTHER REQUIREMENTS

1. Monitor Electronic Newsletters
Class members are asked to subscribe to at least two free electronic newsletters. Scan the contents to get a sense of the issues being covered in major newspapers and in official reports. Each week bring one example of a particularly interesting or relevant article featured recently in one of the newsletters that you would like to bring to the attention of class members.

EducationNews.org (required)
Daily newsletter with links to articles about education in major newspapers.
http://www.EducationNews.org

Public Education Network NewsBlast (required)
Weekly newsletter with abstracts and links to articles in newspapers and professional journals. Emphasizes parent and public participation.
http://www.publiceducation.org/cgi-bin/newsblastsubscribe/subscribe.asp

Gadfly: Education News and Analysis from the Fordham Foundation
Weekly newsletter with a conservative orientation featuring the views of Chester “Checker” Finn.
http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly

Progressive Policy Institute
Bi-weekly commentary on education from a “new Democrat” perspective.
http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ka.cfm?knlgAreaID=110

2. Conference with Instructor
Please schedule a conference of 30 minutes to an hour in length with the instructor at some time during the term. The conference may be held at your place of work, at George Mason University, or another convenient location of your choosing. If desirable, it may be on March 8 or April 5 when the class is not meeting. The purpose of the conference is to discuss your career goals, expectations and possible topics for the required class assignments, and your thoughts about the contemporary issues being discussed in the class.

3. Readings
All class members are expected to read selected background material in preparation for discussion of the topics to be considered at each class session. Readings may include chapters from the required texts, duplicated articles distributed in class, and other articles made available as links to particular web sites. In addition, the class members assigned to make presentations on particular issues are expected to become especially well informed about their topics by referring to additional documents, including at least three of the sources provided as links. Readings for each topic are listed on Blackboard, but may occasionally be updated as new documents are published. When such a change is made, the instructor will ordinarily announce the change in the Announcements section of Blackboard.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Related Contemporary Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Review of syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The political and social environment</td>
<td>- Standards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The nature and purposes of education</td>
<td>- Testing (2)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Grade levels vs. social promotion</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Low-performing schools in distressed neighborhoods (2)</td>
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<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT “No Child Left Behind” Act</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Adequate yearly progress</td>
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<td>- Valid knowledge</td>
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<td>- Scientific research</td>
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<td>- Effective practices</td>
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<td>- Comprehensive school reform</td>
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<td>Feb 23</td>
<td>Data-driven decision-making</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Teacher qualifications (2)</td>
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<td>- Teacher pay</td>
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<td>Mar 1</td>
<td>Data-driven decision-making</td>
<td>School organization</td>
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<td>- Class size</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- School size</td>
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<td>Mar 8</td>
<td>(No class – spring break)</td>
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<td>Mar 15</td>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>Curriculum &amp; instruction</td>
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<td>- Academic vs. practical</td>
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<td>- Early education</td>
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<td>Mar 22</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Tracking</td>
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<td>- Virtual schooling</td>
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<td>Mar 29</td>
<td>DIVERSITY Students with disabilities</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
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<td>- Student sexual orientation</td>
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<td>- Inclusion</td>
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<td>Apr 5</td>
<td>(No class. Instead, a conference with each</td>
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<td>individual sometime during the term.)</td>
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<td>Apr 12</td>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>English language learners</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Minority achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 19</td>
<td>IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT</td>
<td>Governance and parents’ role</td>
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<td>- Centralization vs. decentralization</td>
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<td>- Charter schools</td>
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<td>May 3</td>
<td>Improving achievement</td>
<td>Choice (and vouchers) (2)</td>
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<td>(Class evaluation)</td>
<td>- Privatization</td>
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<td>May 10</td>
<td>Leadership of change</td>
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EDLE 634: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Accountability

Standards
How should states ensure that students are learning what they need to know at acceptable levels of quality?

Testing
To what extent should states require use of particular tests to make “high-stakes” decisions about students and schools?

Grade Levels vs. Social Promotion
To what extent should students be required to meet minimum standards in order to be promoted to the next grade?

Accountability of Low-Performing Schools in Distressed Neighborhoods
To what extent should schools be held accountable for student achievement despite the powerful effects of social and economic factors that schools cannot control?

Adequate Yearly Progress
Should schools be expected (as required under NCLB) to raise student scores, including those of groups who have traditionally not done well, each year until all are proficient?

Valid Knowledge

Scientific Research
To what extent can the relative effectiveness of various practices be established by research? What forms of research can be trusted to produce the most useful knowledge?

Effective Teaching Practices
To what extent are particular teaching practices related to student learning? Should teachers be expected to use practices shown by research to be effective?

Comprehensive School Reform
Is the adoption of research-based “whole school” designs an effective way to improve schools?

Teachers

Teacher Qualifications
What is a “highly qualified” teacher? To what extent does knowledge of subject matter determine teacher effectiveness? Who should decide which teachers are effective, and how?

Teacher Pay
To what extent should teachers’ salaries be tied to their demonstrated competence (including student learning results) and to need (including subjects taught), rather than to their training and experience?
School Organization

Class Size
To what extent does class size affect student learning? Is cutting class size the most cost-effective way to use available funds?

School Size
In what ways are small schools more effective than large ones, and vice versa?

Curriculum and Instruction

Academic vs. Practical
To what extent should schools teach practical knowledge and skills (such as home economics and vocational education) rather than more abstract academic content?

Early Education
To what extent should the education of young (“preschool”) children emphasize academic skills (such as reading readiness) rather than related matters such as health and social skills?

Tracking
To what extent should students be assigned to classes with different content and expectations based on their apparent ability or current level of achievement?

Virtual Schooling
To what extent can and should schooling be conducted through computers apart from regular school buildings?

Diversity

Student Sexual Orientation
To what extent should public schools acknowledge and respond to students’ same-sex orientation? How should schools protect gay and lesbian students from harassment?

Inclusion
To what extent should students with disabilities be included in regular school classes?

English Language Learners
What provisions should be made to ensure that English language learners have the opportunity to master the content standards established for all students?

Minority Achievement
What factors contribute to achievement gaps between white and minority students, and what should schools do to reduce the gaps?
Governance and Parents’ Role

Centralization vs. Decentralization
To what extent should staffing, budgeting, curriculum, and other key decisions be made at the local school level rather than at the school district (division) level?

Charter Schools
To what extent should local schools operate independently except for being accountable to a chartering agency? How should chartering agencies hold charter schools accountable?

Choice (and Vouchers)
To what extent should parents be able to choose the schools their children attend, rather than being assigned by place of residence? How can parents be allowed to choose without increasing social stratification and inequality?
- To what extent should public funds be used to pay costs of students attending non-public schools?
  - Should public funds be used to support teaching religion, even indirectly?
  - If non-public schools receive public funds, should they be accountable to the public for how the funds are used?

Privatization
To what extent should schools be governed and operated by private interests rather than only by publicly elected or appointed officials?

Other Issues

Future vs. Past
To what extent should school curriculum focus on presumed future needs rather than on knowledge and skills inherited from the past?

Evolution
To what extent should students be taught the theory of natural selection as established scientific knowledge even if their parents believe it violates their religious beliefs?

Sexuality Education
What should public schools teach about human sexuality, including prevention of AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases?

Social Studies and History
To what extent should social studies be limited to history, geography, and economics rather than being focused on current social issues and needs, including global education?

Church and State
To what extent should public schools accommodate religious beliefs and practices of students and teachers?
**Health (obesity)**
To what extent should schools be responsible for what students eat and drink at school?

**Commercialism**
To what extent should businesses be able to promote their products and services in schools?

**Gender Equity**
To what extent should schools change particular practices that give an advantage to students of one gender over the other?

**Gifted Students**
What special provisions should be made to ensure that gifted students receive the kind of education they need?
- How are the needs of gifted students different from those of other students?

**Affirmative Action**
To what extent should race be a factor in admission to competitive programs?

**Home Schooling**
To what extent should public schools cooperate with and support parents who teach their own children rather than sending them to school? To what extent should home-schooling parents be accountable to the state for the adequacy of their children’s education?

**Innovation and Variation**
To what extent should schools be “restructured” to become more effective? To what extent should experimentation and variation be encouraged?