

Alumni Spotlight

Jacalyn Auris, Ed.D.

Vice President of Educational Services
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health



Please provide your biographical information (major/minor at WCU, town you grew up in, reason why you came to WCU).

I grew up in Montgomery County in the Collegeville/Audubon area. I went to West Chester University (WCU) because it has an excellent reputation for graduating excellent teachers and I wanted to be one! I majored in special education and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Education from WCU.

Jacalyn's formal bio:

As Vice President of Educational Services, Jacalyn Auris, Ed.D., brings more than 25 years of special education experience to this position. Prior to joining Devereux, Auris spent 28 years at the Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU), most recently as director of student services where she provided leadership for the merger of multiple educational divisions and all specialized educational services. During her tenure, she designed and implemented a successful reorganization plan, and provided leadership for special education, alternative education, related services, nonpublic education, family-based services, behavioral health services, partial hospitalization, community-based instruction and federal grant programs. Before this, Auris held roles of increasing responsibility at CCIU, including director of student services (single division); supervisor of special education; assistant principal at the CCIU's Child and Career Development Center; professional mentor; and teacher. She also served as an adjunct professor at Chestnut Hill College from 2006 to 2010.

Auris earned a Bachelor of Science in Education from West Chester University; a Master of Education from Chestnut Hill College; and a Doctor of Education from Immaculata College. She has received several awards, including the CCIU Outstanding Service Award; Annie Sullivan Award; Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units' Gary L. Miller Distinguished Service Award; Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association Award of Appreciation; and the National Association of Counties Employment and Training Award. In addition, Auris has served as a member of numerous community groups and associations, including the Pennsylvania School Boards Association; the Council for Exceptional Children; the Pennsylvania Association of School Administration; the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units' (PAIU) Public Policy Committee and Statewide Lead for New Preschool Funding Models; the CCIU Policy Committee; and West Chester University's Special Education Program Advisory Committee.

What made you go into degree?

I have always loved children and when I got old enough, I began babysitting. When I was 10 or 11 years old, my father, who had his own air conditioning and heating repair business, took me to work with him at the Institute for Human Potential in Chestnut Hill, Pa. While there, I saw children with disabilities receiving therapies, and realized instantly I wanted to help children with disabilities.

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

I am the vice president of educational services at Devereux Advanced Behavior Health. Devereux changes lives by unlocking and nurturing human potential for people living with emotional, behavioral and cognitive differences. I am responsible for advancing educational initiatives at Devereux on a national level; creating new service lines that are designed to support our students, families, school districts and community agencies; expanding coaching and consultative services, and expanding sales of educational products created by Devereux professionals.

What have been the biggest challenges at work?

The biggest challenge within my field is the reality that we, as an educational community, do not have all the answers to "cure" the challenges students face. This is particularly true of students who have experienced trauma or who have special needs. We can always impact positivity by applying research-based strategies, but it is challenging to see children in need and not be able to make it all go away.

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What do you enjoy most about your current position?

I really enjoy my job, and I have a great deal of respect and admiration for Devereux's commitment to the students and families it serves every day. I am learning so much about the differences in educational systems within our geographic footprint, and I have connected with so many educational professionals across the U.S. – it's exciting!

What skills, talents, and other traits are useful and necessary to do your job?

You have to be a willing collaborator, be flexible, resilient and be able to make tough decisions for the betterment of children. In addition, in my role, it was important that I be committed to, and be trained in, the field of education because I truly want to help children learn – and help families meet the goals they have for their children.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy hiking, running, cooking, visiting with my family and going to Philadelphia Flyers games when I have free time. I am looking forward to seeing the Flyers play again once it is safe to do so.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I plan to have helped create better outcomes for students who have experienced trauma and/or have special education needs. I think having excellent transition programs that focus on preparing students for adult life are critical to ensuring a successful transition from school age programming to adult life. Helping students find their passion in life, including work, leisure activities and home life is my passion.

What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

I would first tell prospective students that they have chosen an impactful career that will provide joy, meaning and professional fulfillment to others! In addition, I would say you need to always remember how important your job is, because students will be watching you all day, every day, and you will become a major role model in their young lives. Keep it always about them and not anyone else.

How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

I give West Chester University (WCU) much of the credit for my success and happiness in my career. WCU accepted me into the Academic Development Program (ADP) and I was able to attend the university the summer after I graduated from high school. I was given the support of counselors, academic advisors and course work that prepared me for college that fall. I did very well through this type of structure and support. I went on to help others in the program and, later, became a founding member of an honor society for students within the ADP.

I was also encouraged by an advisor to apply for a travel abroad program – and it was an experience I will never forget. I spent my junior year at Swansea University in Wales, United Kingdom. I developed a lifelong love of travel and cultures as a result of that experience, and I met people from different parts of the world. I am still friends with some of the people I met while there, and my husband and I enjoy traveling to visit them.

What's your favorite memory from when you were a student at WCU?

My favorite memory of WCU is the library – it was beautiful. I loved going to the library to study and read. At the time, there were long tables and I could spread all my notes out and organize them. I also went there before tests, and just about daily to read books I found at the bookstore. I would choose books for literature classes and read whatever I found interesting.

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About Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health

Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health is one of the nation's largest nonprofit organizations providing services, insight and leadership in the evolving field of behavioral healthcare. Founded in 1912 by special education pioneer Helena Devereux, the organization operates a comprehensive network of clinical, therapeutic, educational, and employment programs and services that positively impact the lives of tens of thousands of children, adults – and their families – every year. Focused on clinical advances emerging from a new understanding of the brain, its unique approach combines evidence-based interventions with compassionate family engagement.

Devereux is a recognized partner for families, schools and communities, serving many of our country's most vulnerable populations in the areas of autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, specialty mental health, education and child welfare. For more than a century, Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health has been guided by a simple and enduring mission: To change lives by unlocking and nurturing human potential for people living with emotional, behavioral or cognitive differences. Learn more:

www.devereux.org.