

## Meet Our Instructional Specialists

On a recent morning with coffee in hand, Michelle Cebula and Melissa Stoeckel sat with several first grade teachers, discussing differing ways to incorporate guided math practice and small group math instruction in their classrooms.

“Who doesn’t like to start the day talking about math,” Cebula says with a smile.

As instructional specialists for the Warren Township School District, Cebula and Stoeckel work with teachers to strengthen and refine instructional practices through mutual collaboration.

“I don’t think an instructional specialist should be an ‘expert,’” says Stoeckel, a former special education teacher and technology coach at Central School. “My goal is to help teachers to help themselves, not tell them what they should be doing. My background and expertise allows me to offer suggestions and resources to help teachers problem solve, and I’m constantly looking for ways to learn more about what the teachers need.”

Stoeckel and Cebula were board approved as instructional specialists in April 2015 and began work in the new role on September 1. The two help to build continuity of instruction from grade to grade and between the four elementary schools. Each instructional specialist generally covers two schools; teachers can schedule one-on-one appointments and/or attend short, structured professional development sessions.

“I think of myself as a co-teacher. There are times when I can easily suggest a great resource or recommend an instructional strategy to a teacher,” says Cebula, who worked for 9 years as a classroom teacher at Mt. Horeb School. “There also are many instances when I’m asked something and I share my uncertainty. Together we plan, research, and/or brainstorm for a solution.”

Cebula and Stoeckel say their varied experiences as educators provide a balance to their approach as a team, each bringing complementary strengths to the position.

“This is new for Warren so we are creating as we go,” Cebula says.

Stoeckel says she hopes that teachers will “feel comfortable inviting me to help them take risks and try new instructional strategies.” She also plans to create an easily accessible digital bank of resources for teachers through the use of Google Classroom, Pinterest and Blogger, a free blogging tool from Google.

Despite the relative newness of the instructional specialist position, “we’re already seeing the benefits,” says Curriculum Supervisor Stacey Hann-Modugno. “Our teachers work with Michelle and Melissa to further grow their craft and to fine tune what they already do well. It’s exciting to see the enthusiasm.”

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