

# Melissa LeStrange: Lighting the Way to Better Outcomes



Melissa LeStrange has been teaching second grade at Gwyn Nor for nine years. Melissa originally became an educator because of her passion for learning and working with children. She shares, "This summer I attended the Syracuse Inclusion Conference. The focus of the conference emphasized the positive benefits intertwined with inclusive education. This was represented through narratives from adults, college students, and peers who were able to excel in both their personal and academic lives because of the opportunities and resources provided to them through inclusion."

Melissa notes that, "the quote, 'It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness,' can have many interpretations. The reality is that change can require work and initially feel overwhelming and challenging. However, despite this "darkness", one must focus on the positive outcomes that result from change. Each day I see the benefits my students receive because of inclusive instruction. Not only is the teaching more accommodating with the support of my co-teacher and staff, but I can personally see that my students have built strong and diverse relationships. Furthermore, all my students have a sense of belonging and are valued members of the classroom. Seeing the positive reactions my students have with one another is the light that drives me to provide a positive and strong inclusive teaching environment."

Steph Kulp, Melissa's co-teacher, comments, "Melissa comes to school every day with a smile on her face, eager to work with all of our students. As we face everyday tasks as a co-teaching pair, Melissa always approaches every situation with a positive attitude, ready to tackle any challenge. She constantly shows our students that she has the utmost confidence in them, pushing them to do their best even

when tasks are difficult for them. Melissa is always finding innovative ways to include all the students in our classroom, both socially and academically... Melissa is a "light" that shows us how far hard work and a positive outlook can take us and our students."

Melissa received her undergraduate degree from the University of Delaware and her master's degree from Cabrini College. She is currently pursuing her doctorate from Immaculata University. During her free time, she enjoys running, cooking, reading, and traveling. Melissa and her husband have three rescue cats and two frogs.