

Like Mother, Like Son ... Ed Leadership Is A Family Calling

The mother-and-son relationship in the Ceglarek household is just super — as in superintendent.

Nick Ceglarek became a second-generation superintendent in the family when he was appointed to the post at Baldwin Public Schools in December 2002. At age 29, he became the youngest superintendent in Michigan.

Catherine Ceglarek has been the superintendent for Allendale Public Schools since 1998.

The mother-and-son duo are the 2003 co-recipients of the Outstanding Administrator Award presented by the School of Education to distinguished alumni. Nick and Catherine were honored at School of Education convocation ceremonies on April 25, at the Welsh Auditorium in downtown Grand Rapids.

"They have really given me two awards," Catherine Ceglarek said. "The one that blesses my son and recognizes him is certainly a memory that is unforgettable.

"To receive an award like this is really a reflection of our opportunities and relationships with people we come in contact with."

Catherine Ceglarek has been in the Allendale Public School system for 21 years, including 14 as a teacher, two as a building principal and the past five as superintendent.

"My mother was a monumental influence on me," Nick said. "I've really been blessed with a mother that is so caring and nurturing. Not just as a mother, but as a role model and as a mentor as well."

Nick Ceglarek is head of the Baldwin Public Schools district, which is located in the poorest county (Lake) in Michigan.

"Working with great people that care about kids and the kids themselves are the greatest rewards," Nick said. "When I have a really bad day, I go down to the elementary and hang out. There are a lot of rewards when you see the smiles on the kids faces when they see you.

"We may be low social economically here, but kids are the same all over. They need to know that you care about them and you do what you need to do to make it better for them."

Both Ceglareks have earned degrees from GVSU and both are currently enrolled in separate cohorts of GVSU's Educational Leadership doctor-



Catherine Ceglarek and Nick Ceglarek

al program with Eastern Michigan University.

"I don't think either one of us would be where we are at if not for our education at Grand Valley," Nick Ceglarek said. "I see this position as a calling. Being a true educator is a service, and I believe Grand Valley helped foster that."

So now, as well as being mother and son, the Ceglareks are also colleagues as educational administrators.

"He will call me from time to time and ask me what I think about certain issues, or I will call him and ask what he thinks," Catherine said. "We share what news we receive from the state department, he tells me about workshops he attends and I share what I learn from workshops.

"I have truly learned from him."

Challenges Are Part Of Job Description For State's Youngest Superintendent

Nick Ceglarek has never been one to shy away from challenges.

As the youngest superintendent in the state of Michigan, he has plenty of them ahead of him.

The GVSU graduate was 29 years old when he accepted the position of superintendent at Baldwin Public Schools in December of 2002. He left his position in a financially solvent district at Rockford Public Schools to take over as superintendent for the Baldwin school district, which is located in the poorest county in Michigan.

"Without a question, the No. 1 issue facing all districts is the financial issue," Ceglarek says. "There are a lot of quality programs that need to be evaluated and eliminated because finances just aren't there.

"I found out that every community is unique, and some challenges that face Baldwin are challenges that others don't have. The poverty level in Lake County is unbelievable, and the biggest challenge we're facing now is school finance and how that affects the kids.

"Along with that poverty, we are rural but also very diverse with a 40 percent minority population. When you put all those things in the mix, as school leader you have to ask yourself what these kids needs."



Nick Ceglarek

Ceglarek, a former quarterback for the GVSU football team, inherits his educational leadership role naturally. His mother, Catherine, is superintendent for Allendale Public Schools.

"Once I got into teaching, I was fortunate enough to get a teaching job in Rockford and fortunate enough to go back and get my teaching masters right away," Nick Ceglarek said. "At that time, my mom was in administration and it intrigued me, she encouraged me and

felt I had some skills to be an effective administrator."

After teaching high school mathematics — including algebra, geometry, calculus and A.P. calculus — Nick Ceglarek interviewed to become an assistant principal, and was appointed to the position.

With his background in mathematics, Ceglarek was eventually named assessment coordinator and assisted in implementing district wide MEAP tests and California Achievement tests. When a new middle school opened, he became principal and director of district assessment.

At the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, Nick Ceglarek moved to the Rockford Freshman Center to devote more time to district assessment before accepting the position as Baldwin's superintendent in December, 2002.

"Baldwin was looking for someone to focus on student achievement and test scores, and I felt that it was a strength I brought to the table with my testing background at Rockford," Nick Ceglarek said. "Of course, kids need reading writing and math, but also have other needs such as social needs.

"It is challenging, but I don't regret my decision for a moment. I believe in what I'm doing and hope that I am making a difference."