

Details

What Does a Regional Tech Coordinator Do? with Dr. Sarah Thomas - 136

In this episode, I'm joined by educator and author Dr. Sarah Thomas, to discuss the role of a regional tech coordinator. You'll also hear tips on professional learning and leadership opportunities for educators beyond the classroom.

<https://classtechtips.com/2021/11/02/tech-coordinator-136/>

Introduction

Hello there and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast! If we haven't met before, my name is Monica Burns. I'm a former NYC public school teacher and I've been out of the classroom for a few years leading professional development for teachers, and writing about all things EdTech on my blog ClassTechTips.com.

This fall you'll hear a combo of educator interviews, and quick solo episodes where I share favorite tips and ideas -- including some from my new book *EdTech Essentials*!

A quick reminder — head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes and resources from today's episode, and if you're listening to this episode on a podcast player like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts, you should see a link in the description that you can click on as you listen today with the show notes and all the resources mentioned in today's episode.

Promotion/Reminder

This episode is sponsored by Levered Learning, a 21st century instructional system for elementary math. Created by educators to provide just the right level of support and challenge for every student. Levered gives teachers the ability to create personalized learning paths using real-time data on student progress, tools to support intervention and enrichment. Levered's individualized online math curriculum is proven to increase learning growth by 70% on state testing in the first year of implementation. Learn more at levered.com!

Today's Intro

This week's podcast is titled: *What Does a Regional Tech Coordinator Do? with Dr. Sarah Thomas* and I'm so excited to have Sarah on the podcast. We connected a long time ago on social media through Twitter. We've spent time together catching

up at conferences and she has such an amazing perspective on education and on running an education business. Let's dive into the conversation!

Episode Transcript

Monica:

All right. Well, welcome to the podcast. I am so excited to have Dr. Sarah Thomas on the podcast today to talk about a whole bunch of things, but I'm hoping that since today, we're going to talk about your role in education, kind of as our focus. That's usually the first kind of question I like to chat with you about. So before we get into your role, I'm hoping we can start a bit at the beginning of your career. How did you get started in education? What was your first role?

Sarah:

Yeah. Thank you so much, Dr. Monica for having me here. I'm super excited to be here on the podcast, longtime listener, first time on the show. So, , but yeah, so I've been in education now. This is my 17th year and I got in through alternative certification. So it's funny. Because when I was a little kid, then I always wanted to be a teacher. My mom was an educator in various roles over the years. , but it wasn't until she actually started in a middle school classroom. And I started, , coming down and working with her. This was maybe my freshman or sophomore year in college. I was already in for TV production, you know, already most of my credits done, but she started working in the classroom. And so I came to a French class and started working with these eighth graders and I was just like, wow, this is really what I want to do.

Sarah:

You know? , like the TV stuff is great, but this is really, really calling me. So it just happened by chance one day. , after I re-enrolled in a master's program for intercultural communications, I came down the stairs. I saw that a nearby school district was recruiting teachers, , from different fields. And I was just like, wow, this is just like fate. So yeah, so I signed up, , you know, did the interview, they selected me. I took all of my supplemental classes , took the Praxis, went to their summer Institute and started in my classroom the following year. And it was definitely a learning curve and attorney. , over the 17 years I've picked up, , I picked up some skills I would say. So, , you know, I'm super, just happy to be in this profession. There's nothing else I could think of myself doing.

Monica:

Well. That's so interesting to think about those steps is I feel like there's so many pathways to coming into education, right. And just hearing those different pieces, especially now, when we're talking about, you know, a teacher shortage in so many places, kind of convincing people that might have a different type of career, that this is a great kind of space to be in, right. Despite and acknowledging all of the challenges, right. That are a part of it. I'm always so interested to hear those different kinds of pathways. So I appreciate that background as we talk about our topic for today, kind of our title for this episode. Can you tell us a little bit about your role now? What is your official, or I know there's sometimes a lot of unofficial things that go into write a job description, right. It might not be quite in the paragraph, but it's part of your work. So what is your role now and what is that official or unofficial job description?

Sarah:

Yeah, solely. So I work with a large school district in Maryland. We have 209 schools in our district and I'm a regional technology coordinator. So pretty much what that means is that I'm on a team with approximately 15 to 20 I've lost count, but, but nominal people that I work with, , between the two of us, we just kind of divide up the district into different clusters. And I work with a particular cluster. My cluster has 20 schools in it. And, , pretty much what I do is I support the work of educators in all roles, as well as other stakeholders, such as obviously students and parents and, , just help them in terms of the integration of technology to facilitate learning. And there's other things that come with the job as well, such as the business software that we help to troubleshoot and things like that. But , really my favorite part of the job is being able to work with folks and help them get the most bang for their buck when it comes to learning.

Monica:

Yeah. And you know, you started saying 200 schools and then you said 20, and it seems like, oh, well, 20 is not as big, but 20 is still a lot. Right. That's all a lot of, you know, compared to 200, it might not be as many, but the idea of having 20 or so, right. Two dozen schools that you, you, school sites that you work with, you know, is a lot. So within that cluster, I would imagine there's a lot of different kinds of needs. Is that something that you see in that regional tech coordinator role?

Sarah:

Yes, totally. It's it's wild because our district is so huge. We have urban, we have suburban, we have rural, , we have schools of all different levels. So we have in my cluster, I have a lot of early childhood centers. , and you know, we also have elementary schools. I have, I have early childhood centers as well as elementary schools in my cluster, but in other clusters there are middle schools and high schools and things of that nature, but it's, it's very, there's a lot of factors at play in terms of what each school may need and , what each student in each school needs, obviously.

Monica:

Yeah. And I would imagine that even within right, that same region, just those differences can be pretty pronounced, right. Depending on different factors I taught in New York city schools where, you know, there's only a couple of blocks over, there's a whole nother elementary school. Right. And it can be a completely different world. And just the terms of, you know, the school culture, right. What's happening in that school, what their priorities are, what their needs are. So yeah, I guess that idea of being right that regional tech coordinator might seem like there's a lot of similarities, but just like you mentioned, right. Plenty of differences between these school sites.

Sarah:

Oh yeah, totally, totally. And we also have some emergent schools in my cluster as well, so I forgot to shout that out. So we have elementary, , immersion, which are elementary as well and early childhood centers. So we have those, , a mix of those within my specific cluster.

Monica:

Yeah. And so, you know, I know you've been in your role for some time now, right. So when we think about the past two years now, right. It's hard to say almost two years or 18 months or whatever the number might be at a particular time. There's just been so many changes. And even this school year where I think many of us were hopeful that things would feel the way that they were a couple of years ago. It's just another kind of different. And so I'm curious when you're thinking about your role, which probably has maintained the same title and description, but all the other things have changed really greatly. So, you know, how has your role changed in the past two years or so when we think about all these different learning models?

Sarah:

Yeah. It's definitely transformed quite a bit. , you know, because of the pandemic and, , you know, we're still in a pandemic, but just the different iterations throughout this, this whole process. So I remember when we went emergency remote back on, , March 13th, 2020, and they stayed that way for quite some time about a year. And then after that, we started going into hybrid situations and now this year we are back face-to-face. , and there, there is, , there, they do have virtual schools for elementary and middle and high as well, but , most students are back face-to-face. , so I mean, it's changed in so many ways. I would say that one thing that is a positive that I'm seeing in my district is that the capacity has just been raised tremendously, you know, because it was a situation where prior to the pandemic, then I know that we were doing a lot of, Hey, this is, you know, this is great, great technology, you know, like it's, it's so awesome.

Sarah:

We're telling you it is great. And you know, when we found ourselves in that situation where there was no other option, then people really stepped up to the plate and they did, , everything that they needed to do for their students, , in terms of building their own capacity and students as well, you know, we've had students sessions where we've helped students kind of troubleshoot their, their issues as they were adopting. , and that was, that was really interesting to see because a lot of times you hear about, you know, how kids they have technology all the time and they're, they're gonna, you know, catch on right away. And that's not always the case. So, I mean, that was definitely enlightening to see.

Monica:

Yeah. I think that's something that, you know, I've noticed this year and a half or so two years, as well as just some of the changing vocabulary, right. The capacity, like you said, to have conversations around thoughtful technology integration and just kind of a wider understanding. Like we do need some instruction on these foundational navigation skills, right. We can't just assume certain things about the way, you know, kids are using devices as learning tools. And so, you know, as we kind of think about just those challenges in different places, you know, I bet, you know, or I should say, I assume because we connected first before meeting face to face, right. , several times that we connected first on social media and as you're kind of hearing from other people too, and kind of the different work that they're doing, I'm curious, and maybe it's from some of these social media connections, but do you know other people in other parts of the country, maybe even in international spaces that have a similar role kind of to what you do, maybe there's a different name for it in a different

state, but are there other folks you've connected with that have a similar type of role?

Sarah:

Oh yeah, absolutely. And I really have to give a huge shout out to my PLN because even before I was in this role, then I felt like the connections I was making were helping me prepare for this role. , but I've seen, you know, a lot of very similar positions in different areas. They might not be exactly the same. So my position, I'm a 12 month teacher , in a central office role. So that's, it's kind of unique in my district. There's a few of us in this position, but it's not very common. , but I would say similar the most similar to what I have seen from other districts are probably, , maybe TOSA. , and I would say that the difference, , I don't, I don't know, like the ins and outs of what TOSAs do, but I know that we do have also some administrative things that we do, like for example, today, as we're recording this, then, , we're working on report cards and working with schools to make sure that they're able to put in there, , you know, their, their data for the report cards. So, , so there's a lot of things that we do. Yeah.

Monica:

Yeah. And that's that TOSA connection or the teacher on special assignment connection is really interesting. Cause I think the first time I even heard that term was talking to California educators where I feel like TOSA is thrown around a lot or that terminology, but then there are a lot of parallels to, I wouldn't necessarily use that term, but right. You could see that kind of teacher on special assignment piece, right. You might still have this sort of contract that's the same yet your role or your day to day is very different than what it might've looked like when you were teaching fifth grade or teaching high school or having that traditional teacher piece. So yeah, I think that TOSA connection is, is really interesting. And you know, if someone is listening in and is just like super interested in what your role looks like, and they're thinking like I already kind of feel I'm that person, everyone comes to me with their questions all day long, or, you know, another school in the district sometimes has me go over there to show them how to use Flipgrid or like whatever it might be. Right. They might be doing that kind of organically. If someone wants to be a tech coordinator in their region, what are some things they can do? You know, besides maybe looking up the openings, but like, are there some things that you did to kind of prep or prepare for your role or even in hindsight was a good decision.

Sarah:

Yeah, totally. I would say that this position is best for, , lifelong learners, like people who just seek out, , who seek out the best ways to reach students. So definitely, , getting our own learning in, and that can be in the form of conferences, but there's also many other ways to do it such as listening to podcasts like this one, doing Twitter chats, you know, Facebook groups pretty much anywhere that folks are then there's probably a teacher community there and, or an educator community. So, , getting connected, , I'll put in a quick plug for Edumatch, which is, , which is a company that I founded. And, you know, we, we have like a very strong network of educators around the world just learning and growing together. But, , there's, there's several, like there are so many professional learning opportunities, both synchronous and asynchronous happening all the time. So I would say just getting connected, , and being up to speed on, on what is, what is happening in our field, what's happening in the world? How did the two interplay, you know, that would probably be it.

Monica:

I love that advice because I think going into a role where you're supporting other people in your profession who are learning something new, having that lifelong learner mindset is just crucial, right? Not only are you trying to gather all the newest information, which is a huge part of it, but even just walking into a situation, ready to find out something new, curious about technology, really open to the fact that, you know, we don't know everything. There's always going to be an opportunity to learn and explore. I think that's such a great set of qualities for someone who might be interested or interviewing, or even just prepping for what might be next for them. If they're, they're looking kind of at that role. And, you know, I'm sure with just your title and your experience, and when you walk into buildings or maybe beam in virtually on zoom with your colleagues and your district, I'm sure people come to you with lots of tech questions. And I'm curious, do you have some go-to favorite EggTech tips or favorite strategies or even tools that you find yourself sharing a lot with your colleagues?

Sarah:

Oh my goodness. I would say the thing that has probably, , really helped facilitate things over the past couple of years has been that now people are more familiar with screenshotting. I know that that's like, that's like a little itty-bitty thing, but screenshotting, , you know, making videos to explain things or, or just to show us their side of whatever they're seeing and how we can help troubleshoot so much easier now that we can see what error message you're getting or, you know, what

like what their interface is. So I know that that's like one tiny thing, but I mean, it has made such a huge difference.

Monica:

No, I think I agree with the tiny but mighty, you know, because I think the instructional videos, the screen recordings, all of that, I am a big believer in that being a great way to help someone solve a problem. And even though I feel strongly about it, I still catch myself like two sentences into an email response to someone and just say, no, like I'm going to record a 30-second video instead of taking 10 minutes to write this email perfectly with all the steps. Right. And it makes such a huge difference. So I think that's a great kind of recommendation, not only for the workflow of people asking you questions right. And prepping them with, send me a screenshot with your question, but also how they can proactively maybe address questions that their students have too. So I love that, that, you know, checks a couple of different, a couple of different boxes. Now there a, you are an author and run a publishing company, you mentioned , Edumatch. And I'm going to make sure to put all the links for people to find in the show notes for today, but you know, that's a different side of your work, right? It doesn't necessarily fall underneath that regional tech director. So tell us about your work as an author and your publishing company. So people can kind of get a feel for that other passion that you have.

Sarah:

Yeah, definitely. So, , so Edumatch kind of started out very grassroots. , and I mean, it's still very grassroots stout. That was the flavor behind it, but just sparked from a conversation about mutual interest. A friend of mine had an interest in fantasy sports and I said, you should meet my cousin who used to teach math. He gave me a book on fantasy sports and you all should connect with this guy, Chris [inaudible], who's now a great friend of mine , who is awesome, a gamification and you all should have a conversation. So from there, , an idea kind of birth it itself in my mind, this was back in 2014 and I set up a Twitter account and, you know, asked if anyone wanted to get Edumatched, which since people is not a dating site. So, you know, but it's, , just matching up with, with people with similar interests as to have conversations.

Sarah:

And as people signed up, then they brought their great ideas. , eventually I, I set up a website and Google form that actually happened pretty quickly, probably day two folks that are signing up. I actually saw your name on there. So you were one of our early, early adopters. And , from there, then we group people brought their ideas. So

we went to a Voxer group, , from the Voxer group in multiple ideas, came out like, let's do Twitter chats, let's do podcasts, let's do ed camps and then let's write a book. And so from that, just kind of rolling with it and folks have, , you know, at this point we've released about 60 titles so far, I would say, , with more on the way with some amazing educators sharing their stories and , you know, through Edumatch. Imagine we've also branched out to a nonprofit arm that gives me grants as well as, , a PD branch. That's newer, I would say, but we are a Google recognized partner for education. So it's just really kind of grown over the past seven years. And I'm super happy about that.

Monica:

Gosh, I mean, it's been so much fun to watch all of that and, you know, as I'm sure you notice too, cause you're of course so deepen in that work, but I always get so excited when I see someone in our network who posts a picture of signing a contract or submitting, submitting a draft or something. So it's been so much fun to watch all of that the past few years kind of, you know, that outsider around, but then also, you know, being able to chat with you about those pieces as everything's kind of evolved in our com conference run-ins and all of those kind of components, so, so wonderful. And I'm going to make sure to link out so anyone who's listening can tap and learn more about Edumatch, but where can people connect with you before we finish up today? Where can they learn a little bit more about your work?

Sarah:

Yeah. I would love to connect with anybody who's listening. I am @sarahdateechur on pretty much all of the socials, so you can find me there. I have a website it's not very well-maintained, but it's there sarahjanethomas.com, , and also edumatch.org, edumatchpublishing.com. edumatchfoundation.org, edumatchlearning.com and edumatch-publishing.myshopify.com. . So those are our websites right now.

Monica:

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for coming on today for talking all about your role as a regional tech coordinator. So appreciate your time.

Sarah:

Thank you so much. And I appreciate you having me here.

I'm so glad that Sarah, Dr. Thomas, could join today! Let's finish up like we always do...

So let's make this EdTech easy...

First, think about how capacity for PD has changed this year.

Next, leverage the ways your colleagues use EdTech already.

Then, get connected with larger communities on social media

Finally, dedicate time to becoming a lifelong learner yourself.

Remember, you can find the show notes for this episode with all of the resources and tools mentioned today plus how to connect with Sarah Thomas by heading to ClassTechTips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #136.

Promotion/Reminder

A big thank you to our sponsor Levered Learning for this episode. No matter what this school year tosses our way, Levered's systems-level approach to teaching and learning will be key to building back with an accelerated learning path for every student. If you'd like to learn more about how Levered can impact your teacher satisfaction and student impact, email info@levered.com and ask for the Digital Promise Brief.

Outro

Did you like today's episode? Well, if you are listening to this podcast on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or another favorite app, don't forget to hit the "Follow" button. When you follow along with the podcast each new episode will download for you automatically so you don't miss a thing. And if you think a friend or colleague would enjoy the tips from today, send them a text with the link for today's episode, and if you share on social media, don't forget to tag me @ClassTechTips -- I just might have something special for you. Have a great week and check back on Tuesday morning for next week's new episode!

Episode Resources

- Connect with Dr. Sarah Thomas on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Check out Dr. Sarah Thomas' websites: edumatch.org | edumatchpublishing.com | edumatchfoundation.org | edumatchlearning.com

- Find Dr. Sarah Thomas' book on [Amazon](#) or [ISTE](#)
- Browse [books published by Edumatch](#)
- [ISTE Standards | The Leader in Edtech Standards](#)
- [How to Create Instructional Videos with Flipgrid Shorts](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Voxer](#) (Voice Communication App)
- [What Educators Need to Know About Clubhouse with Marlena Gross-Taylor](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [ASCD: Professional Learning & Community for Educators](#)
- [Free STEM Professional Development Opportunity for Teachers](#) (Blog Post)
- [10 Tools Every Coach Can Use Tomorrow](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [3 Ways Coaches Can Support Teachers](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Tips for Coaches Tackling Remote Learning with Martine Brown](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Must-Have Tech Tools for Instructional Coaches](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Strategies for Coaching Educators in the Digital World](#) (Blog Post)
- [More Engaging Video Learning: 6 Strategies That Work](#) (Blog Post)
- [Creating a Professional Portfolio with Spark Page](#) (Blog Post)