



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Ave Tatum

FACING A CRISIS: 'WE'RE DOING ALL WE CAN TO SUPPORT ALL OUR TEACHERS'

Learning Forward member Ave Tatum talks about her role as a professional learning coordinator, her work in the Learning Forward Academy, and how she's helping educators in her district navigate school closure due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Current position:

Coordinator of professional learning, Clayton County (Georgia) Public Schools.

Current Learning Forward roles:

Board member, Learning Forward Georgia, and member of Learning Forward Academy Class of 2020.

Fast fact:

She co-presented a session at the 2019 Learning Forward Annual Conference called "Putting you back in YouTube" about screencasting to create a YouTube library of resources for new teachers.

Years in education:

20.

NOMINATE A COLLEAGUE FOR MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

We love to feature the voices and stories of passionate learning professionals. If you'd like to nominate a Learning Forward member, email suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org and tell us whom you think we should feature and why.

Q: What is the focus of your professional learning work?

I oversee training for new teachers in our district through the district's alternative certification program. I also oversee training for veteran teachers who are becoming certified in teacher support and coaching so they can mentor new teachers.

Through the Learning Forward Academy, I am examining the impact of the mentor training on teacher retention and student achievement, looking at achievement levels for students of the mentor teachers we're training and the new teachers they're mentoring.

Q: What are the biggest professional learning needs you're seeing due to the COVID-19 crisis and the unexpected closure of schools?

We're fortunate that we have digital resources. But not everyone knows how to use them effectively. They have lots of questions, from "How do I do it?" to "How do I know if my students are using it?" to "What about students who don't have access?" Another big focus is making sure credential candidates are completing the classes they need by transitioning from blended to online-only.

Q: How are you connecting with educators in your district during this unusual time?

We're using social media, holding PLCs online, and meeting through technology to make sure everyone has what they need. Everyone has access to Google Classroom, and we're creating extra virtual classrooms for teachers to meet and plan. We're hosting "teacher tech talk" meetings once a week and creating blog posts. It's new to all of us, so no one is an expert yet, but we're doing all we can to support all our teachers.

Q: How is the sudden shift to distance learning affecting new teachers?

Some of them are really embracing the digital tools. The alternative certification candidates just completed a course where they learned how to use Flipgrid and other resources, so they feel prepared. We are tapping into a population of new teachers who are digital natives. For millennials, this is their time to shine in some ways.

Q: What bright spots are you seeing amid this crisis?

The thing that is really inspiring me is that everyone is willing to do the work and everyone is very solution-oriented. This moment shows who we really are and that we're willing to do whatever it takes to get all our students educated. And I've seen more collaboration than I ever have in the past. People are not afraid to say they need help, even people who have been around for a long time and thought they didn't have much to learn.

Q: What's one lesson you are taking away from the current crisis?

Coming out of this, we will all be talking about what kind of programs we can offer teachers so they are ready to teach online. This presents an opportunity to push for professional learning. When we go before legislators, we will be able say, "You can't cut our funding because this is an urgent need." ■