

Librarian: Tiffany Cothrantcothran@piedmont.k12.ca.us

Beach Elementary School Teacher Librarian	Havens Elementary School Teacher Librarian
Monday, Tuesday, Friday	Wednesday, Thursday
510-594-2690	510-594-2683

My interview with Tiffany Cothran, an elementary school librarian serving two campuses in Piedmont, California, revealed significant insights into the real-world application of library leadership concepts explored in our class. Her experiences highlight the multifaceted nature of leadership in school libraries, with key themes emerging around adaptive leadership, data-driven decision making, role balance, community engagement, and policy innovation.

Adaptive leadership in ever changing environments

Tiffany demonstrates adaptive leadership in her ability to manage responsibilities across two schools while navigating evolving challenges, particularly those intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Her daily and weekly schedules constantly change, requiring flexibility and improvisation. For example, she often modifies lesson plans in real time based on student reactions, and she has learned to compartmentalize tasks effectively. This aligns closely with our readings highlighting an emphasis on resilience and change management, particularly in how library leaders respond to unpredictable environments and shifting institutional rhythms.

Data-driven decision making and evidence-based advocacy

Central to Tiffany's leadership approach is the use of data to inform collection development and user engagement. Using Follett Destiny® Library Manager, she monitors circulation statistics, assesses the age and relevance of the collection, and explores creative, community-driven crowdsourcing initiatives such as a "Save a Series" campaign, where dedicated readers were invited to advocate for saving underperforming series by sharing why it deserved to be preserved. These efforts demonstrate an evidence-based mindset that is essential to strategic planning—a core competency explored in the course. By sharing data with other librarians and integrating feedback from students, she models inclusive, informed decision-making that supports the long-term sustainability and

relevance of library services.

Balancing multiple roles with realism and boundaries

Tiffany's dual role as librarian and teacher across two schools reflects the growing need for equitable staffing models. Her ability to sustain a high level of service while acknowledging the limits of her capacity shows leadership grounded in self-awareness and ethical responsibility. She emphasizes the importance of saying "no" as an act of self-care as an important leadership skill in maintaining sustainability. Her experience highlights the need for systemic support in staffing and workload distribution to ensure program effectiveness without burnout.

Community engagement and shared leadership

Tiffany actively cultivates relationships with teachers, parents, and students, viewing leadership as a shared endeavor. Her ability to mobilize parent volunteers to reorganize the library during the pandemic after the cleaning staff removed all the books from the shelves and her success in launching a school-wide read-a-thon (raising over \$45,000 for the library) exemplify the principles of distributed leadership and community-centered programming.

Leading through policy and program innovation

Tiffany's work in updating the library's challenge policy to reflect community standards, while clearly distinguishing it from curriculum policy, demonstrates her thoughtful engagement with intellectual freedom and policy leadership. She also led efforts to increase accessibility within the physical space and promoted more inclusive programming. These initiatives exemplify ethical leadership and innovation—two critical themes in Class 717. Her proactive response to parent input and policy gaps showcases her ability to mediate between institutional requirements and community expectations.

In conclusion, Tiffany's leadership practice illustrates the real-world application of library and information center management principles. Her adaptability, strategic use of data, boundary-setting, community engagement, and innovative policy work align with the course's frameworks for ethical, inclusive, and effective leadership. Through her work, she embodies the challenges and opportunities of school library leadership in today's educational landscape.

Reflection and takeaways

Interviewing Tiffany, the librarian at my children's elementary school, deepened both my personal appreciation for her work and my professional understanding of what it means to lead a library in a dynamic, community-focused environment. Having volunteered with Tiffany regularly, I've witnessed her commitment firsthand from curating inclusive collections to giving up her own Saturday evenings to read to children during the library's read-a-thon. Through this assignment, I gained a deeper perspective on how library leadership extends beyond managing collections and into the realm of advocacy, service, and equity.

This experience allowed me to meaningfully connect course content from our class with real-life library leadership. Tiffany's exhaustive work reveals how systematic inequities such as budget cuts, staffing gaps, and divided roles can impact information access and programming continuity. Her creative problem-solving, community partnerships, and data-driven decision-making help offer a model for leading with cultural competence and resilience. Tiffany's ability to inspire trust, lead collaboratively, and maintain realistic expectations while advocating for long-term change reminded me of the importance of humility in leadership, something I value highly in a leader. She leads admirably not by command, but through connection with students, teachers, parents, and peers. This interview reinforced the need for continuous learning and flexibility as a librarian, especially when navigating multiple roles with limited resources.

A key takeaway for me is that impactful leadership often looks like quiet consistency: showing up, listening, adapting, and caring deeply, something that is not always easy for a control freak like myself. Tiffany's approach embodies many of the desired values emphasized in this course, including user-centered service, ethical decision-making, and inclusive leadership. It has encouraged me to think about how I can better integrate these principles into my own evolving professional identity and eventual leadership in my future career with information science.

Interview questions:

1. Can you tell me about your management and leadership path? How did you become a leader?
2. What does a typical day or week look like for you?
3. What kind of preparation goes into your leadership or library-related activities?
4. How do you manage your time and priorities as the librarian for the entire school?
5. Do your leadership/management activities typically go as planned? Can you share an example of an unexpected situation and how you responded?
6. What kinds of decisions or actions are you typically responsible for, and how do you make those decisions?

7. What short- or long-term plans do you have for the library's future?
8. What challenges do you typically encounter in your role? How do you approach or resolve them?
9. What activities, programs, or innovations are you most proud of? What has been your least favorite or most frustrating?
10. What advice would you give to someone entering librarianship who wants to grow into a leadership role?