

How Budget Cuts Affect Literacy Development
in the Elementary School Setting

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Abstract

Recent budget cuts have drastically impacted elementary schools; depleting funding for the amount of supplies and materials educators use. One area in which these reductions are most critical is in the success of struggling readers and writers. Literacy is an important skill across all subject areas. Therefore, having the proper materials and resources to reach out to those struggling readers is essential. This study surveys teachers and an assistant principal of a nearby elementary school in Staten Island, NY, of how these recent cuts affected them within their own classroom. Results indicated that with these recent cuts schools were forced to cut support staff and resources essential for students to succeed.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Importance of Study

Current economic conditions have forced managers across all industries and professions to prioritize and alter expenditures. With numerous cut backs all over the United States, unemployment has sky rocketed and certain professions have been impacted more than others. One profession in particular that has been affected by the recession is the education system (Quinn, 2003). Schools across the nation are struggling to cope with these reduced funds and losses. With these cut backs, schools are forced to cut support staff, school libraries, and other resources essential for students to succeed (Quinn, 2003). These cuts not only affect the educational system as a whole, but especially so students in need of extra support for literacy development.

Statement of Problem

The problem this study will address is if the recent budget cuts in New York City have had any effect on the literacy development of struggling readers in elementary schools. Literacy includes both skills in reading and writing; without these capabilities children can possibly “slip through the cracks” of our education system. Literacy is important in our everyday communication. Everyone needs to learn how to read, write, and speak in order to effectively communicate with those around us. Literacy development is important in a child’s development and is essential for children to be able to learn in all subject areas (Dever & Burts, 2002). School curricula require that teachers must have all students meet certain learning standards. These standards are more rigorous than ever. The task of teachers’ to address all individual student needs becomes extremely challenging when adequate support is not available.

Today, educators are enriched with a higher level of education preparing them to teach all levels of learners. This is important for the education system because teachers are able to modify their lessons to address specific needs for all learners. Although this benefits the students, this means that teachers need to think on a higher level to alter their lessons and attend to each student’s needs. For example, if a teacher is teaching a lesson on sequencing and the order of events and a child within the classroom is a visual learner, this teacher might need to create a power point lesson that connects these ideas together. By showing a student an example after reading a passage that tests their understanding of sequencing, students may gain a better understanding of how to read sequentially (Parette, Hourcade, Beckmann, & Blum, 2008).

All students differ in backgrounds, economic class levels and learning abilities. Not all students learn the same way; some students more than others rely on the additional support in staff and resources available in order to succeed (Holloway, 2006). Students with special needs may require additional resources that address one’s individual IEP. If a child requires more

resources such as colorful diagrams and visuals within a lesson, the budget cuts may put that child at a distinct disadvantage. Thus, it is necessary for educational leaders to understand the importance of these resources and additional support to the overall educational development of many young students. The following study attempts to show this connection.

Research Question

The current study will seek to answer the following research question: What do educators say about the impact of recent budget cuts on the literacy development of elementary school students?

Definition of Terms:

Literacy- A mixed knowledge of both reading and writing (Tompkins, 2010).

Budget cuts- A reduced spending on materials and resources (Quinn, 2003).

Professional Development Workshops- Workshops that train teachers to learn new skills and concepts to practice in the classroom (Holloway, 2006).

Environment Print- Print and familiar logos that are all around us (Genisio & Drecktrah, 1999).

Scaffolding- Specialized instructional support between the teachers and student to introduce a new task (Genisio & Drecktrah, 1999).

Smart board- An interactive touch screen computer program used within classrooms for teaching (Mechling, Gast & Krupa, 2007).

Academic Intervention Services (AIS) – Provides additional services to students in need of academic support and instructional strategies.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The Overall Impact of the Budget Cuts in Schools

Education systems nationwide are facing funding shortfalls. Not only is this affecting the staff and teachers, many would argue that it is having an impact on the academic successes of students as well (Manzo, 2008). Now compared to the past, additional funding within education systems has decreased. With our economic recession and cut backs across the board teachers pay, bus transportation, staff, teacher planning, resources and materials have been reduced (Quinn, 2003).

Teachers and their salaries are getting cut. During job recruiting, some people say schools are now less interested in teachers who have their Master's and more interested in teachers who have their bachelor's degree, so they do not have to pay them as much. Schools are also cutting programs teachers partake in for extra money; for example, extracurricular activities like sports and summer school are opportunities for teachers to gain a little extra money. Yet, if funding is tight, these programs must go (Green, 2009).

Budget cuts are now limiting funding for key programs such as Title I that address low income students, and fewer special education grants are being funded for students with special needs (Davis, Samuels, & Cavanagh, 2006). For example, breakfast is a key program under Title I for low-income students; children depend on this critical program to get the energy they need throughout the day. In 2007 during the Bush administration, these same shortfalls of funds were addressed, trying to meet the goals of supporting the No Child Left Behind Act (Manzo, 2008). Special Educational grants under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were also affected by the cuts (N/A, 2000). It is hard to meet these needs and promote learning if the financial support is lacking. Though there are many programs being cut, some other programs such as “Reading First” are finding ways to transfer budget money to the most essential programs (Manzo, 2008).

Inside classrooms, teachers and students are both suffering from staff reductions. With staff decreasing and the number of students enrolled increasing, the ratios of teacher to students are increasing (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Larger classes bring more challenges for teachers, as students become more distracted and less focused. Students in a smaller classroom setting may be more likely to receive individual help if needed (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Now that class sizes are growing it may become harder for a teacher to make sure all their students are following along and staying on task.

Teachers are not only trying to accommodate for these losses in classrooms but are also increasingly held accountable for having children meet the needs of content standards (Langhorne, 2005). With limited resources and staff support, as expectations rise budget cuts make it harder to meet these goals when the necessary support is no longer available. The teacher alone must ensure all of their students are grasping the material being taught while

passing their standardized tests as well. Teachers have to do what they can with the increased number of students and fewer resources. Budget cuts severely limit teachers' ability to meet these challenges.

Teachers are finding that the only ways to compensate for these needs are by dipping into their own pockets to fill the gaps (Green, 2009). Yet, most teachers lack such resources. For example, supplies and resources are one of the major cuts within a classroom. Teachers need certain supplies such as literature, poster boards, updated textbooks, technology/software, and extra supplies to make appropriate progress within a classroom and reach higher learning standards (Green, 2009). But expecting teachers to make up for these diminished resources is unrealistic and even harmful.

Limiting funding may affect the ability of schools to progress. Certain cuts affect different areas that can hinder a student's learning. By eliminating certain resources, materials, or even other perks that made the educational system run smoothly, teachers are expected to take up the slack. Another area where schools are negatively affected is in the area of professional development. When innovative and creative professional development is not available to teachers their effectiveness is reduced and their ability to cope with large groups of students is undermined (Neuman & Celano, 2004).

Budget Cuts Impact on Literacy Specifically

Budget cuts are not only affecting our education systems as a whole, but are impacting the amount of supplies and assistance available to teachers (Dyrli, 2008). Society today is constantly evolving, and people are consistently finding new ways to teach children to learn. But how can teachers use these different teaching strategies if schools are limiting their funds?

Though money is being cut and programs are beginning to diminish, preparing for children to succeed means more than just listening to a 40-minute lesson/lecture. One of the key parts of the groundwork in education is a child's literacy development. Teaching children to read and write is essential for children to succeed in different content areas. Yet, with these cuts, it can have an impact on a students' learning. Students who may struggle with reading and writing or students who are bilingual or have special needs rely on these extra programs for help. With the cut backs of additional planned disbursement, staff support and teacher workshops, teachers now will need to go above and beyond the average expectations of a teacher to meet all these needs (Quinn, 2003).

All children should be immersed in literacy development such as reading and writing. Yet, not all children are fortunate enough to be exposed to literacy enriched settings prior to school, therefore they rely on our education system for this enrichment. This is when our education system could help these students reach higher levels.

"Reading First," is an existing program that helps with student literacy development to strengthen literacy development. Not all schools are given this federal reading intervention grant, yet those who receive it reported it to be "very effective" (Sparks, 2008). With these types of programs being cut, students may not be able to achieve at a high level.

Each year the bar gets raised and the standards increasingly get more difficult. The expectancy of student's performance is measured and the responsibility of students to meet these standards is a reflection on teachers. Therefore, teachers must do all they can to reach these certain expectations, and for all students to achieve these goals. Whether it is school grants, intervention services, staff support, classroom materials, or resources for students, when these materials are unavailable the quality of instruction is likely to be compromised.

How Literacy Development is Undermined by Budget Cuts

Literacy development is mixed knowledge of both reading and writing and is an important subject area for all students (Tompkins, 2010). Reading and writing is critical in our society and in order to work in the real world, students will need these skills to succeed. Reading development includes phonics and phonemic awareness that later help children read challenging vocabulary words. Reading instruction also helps readers become more fluent readers and enable students to comprehend what they are reading. Writing development includes practicing how to write. Writing instruction on the other hand includes brainstorming good ideas and converting them into words. Using proper spelling, grammar and punctuation are all key writing strategies for becoming a good writer (Tompkins, 2010).

The first key component of literacy is a child's word identification. When exposing a child to literacy it is imperative to have the classroom full of literature. Whether it is creating word walls, organizing certain play centers (with labels to identify objects and materials), or even writing centers, all these activities help children reinforce their vocabulary (Tompkins, 2010). Additional support that is fun can make reading and writing enjoyable, yet budget cuts can put the purchase of supportive supplies out of reach.

Since many schools are not receiving the funding they have in the past, teachers are now limited to the amounts of resources they can buy for their classroom. Copies produced from the copy machine to create these word walls and environment print for these play centers may be restricted. These are the type of expenses teachers now need to cover, but there is a limit to how much they can do. Classroom supplies such as pens, pencils, erasers, and paper for children are also materials that are being controlled because of the cuts (Dyrli, 2008). These crucial writing

utensils are all things students need to write. These cut backs constrict teacher's ability to rely on fun lessons like these to spark a child's interest, especially for those struggling readers and writers.

Literacy Strategies and Limited Resources

Restricting Literacy Strategies

Teaching is a profession in which teachers are constantly learning new ways to introduce information to their students. An effective teacher could use the balanced literacy approach, which includes a mixture of reading, writing strategies, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, content-area study, oral language, and fluency. Using interactive reading books and choral reading, engaging students in conversations, having students take turns reading aloud, and having interactive writing are ways to educate learners that do not cost money to teach; yet, some other teaching strategies require more elaborate lessons and teaching.

Guided reading and writing on the other hand are different teaching strategies used to teach students how to read. Guided reading and writing are great for grouping children in groups on the same reading levels. This allows students to work with books that are at their reading level instead of reading books that are too hard or too easy. Guided reading consists of all children in the group having their own books and reading along together with one another (Tompkins, 2010). This type of teaching would be extremely beneficial for the larger class sizes; yet, with the different levels of reading and the overpopulated classes teachers cannot afford to buy all the books that are needed to make this strategy work well. For some teachers, these large class sizes may be too overwhelming. Therefore, by breaking students up in groups according to their students reading levels may make it be easier for a teacher to conference with all these

groups as a whole. Yet, with these cut backs teachers may not be able to use these newer strategies.

Undeserving Students with Special Needs/Struggling Readers

Another issue that may affect a teacher's professional development in the area of literacy is the availability of multiple resources within their classroom (Dyrli, 2008). When given a classroom with mixed learning abilities it is important to address children who have special needs. With the different types of research out in the world and the new methods of teaching strategies, teachers are able to reach out to help those children who are at a disadvantage (Genisio & Drecktrah, 1999). Yet, when schools are given a certain budget and limited amount of money to spend, teachers may not be able to obtain the best resources needed for their individual students. These limited funds may then cause teachers to underserve students who may need the extra help.

For instance, if a teacher had a child who was classified with the learning disability dyslexia within their classroom it may be difficult to serve this student without the appropriate professional development techniques. Although dyslexia is considered a minor learning disability, it is still a disability in which a child may have difficulties with their word recognition, in addition to poor spelling or decoding skills (Williams & Lynch, 2010). Also, in extreme cases especially, it can be very limiting. In a case like this, a teacher may need to use an intervention that will be effective for this child's needs. Individual magnetic trays, sentence strips, letter picture cards, alphabet stamps, and jigsaw letter puzzles are activities to address certain learning development weaknesses (Genisio & Drecktrah, 1999). Some effective teaching instructions may include integrating multisensory teaching (Williams & Lynch, 2010). These alternate teachings may express the same ideas or concepts, yet stimulate a student according to a specific

child's learning needs. But when teachers are restricted in the amount of money available to them it can hurt learning, especially students who need it the most. Instead, teachers may choose to update materials for the entire class to use as a whole, rather than focus on students individually. With the lack of individual grants or even classroom funding, this may limit access to additional learning substitutions and utilities for children with special needs, to grasp material in different ways.

For struggling readers and writers, teachers may need to specialize their reading instructions and integrate multisensory instruction to accommodate all auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, and visual learners (Williams & Lynch, 2010). If a teacher has a student that is an auditory learner they may need to address that student best by having them listen to information or instructions. Since auditory learners learn best by listening, this learner may learn better by listening to books on tape. Tactile and kinesthetic learners on the other hand may need to carry out a specific learning activity or work hands on with a specific activity. Having a child play a game that relates to a specific reading focus may spark a child's interest, allowing a child to process information differently than those other traditional methods of teaching. Other learners such as visual learners may call for a lesson that provides many visuals or diagrams. These specific visual learners process information better when the texts they are reading are illustrated.

With the reduction in the numbers of teachers, class sizes are growing larger and more students of differing learning abilities are mainstreamed in one classroom setting. If there is only one teacher in the class, this not only makes it harder for teachers to teach, but also for students to learn. Students are less likely to get the individual help they need especially for the struggling readers and writers who need the support. Conferencing and other assessments such as running

records in literacy may take longer for teachers to carry out and get results. Therefore, teachers may not be achieving the goals they want for their class.

Diminishing Teachers' Resources

When teaching students how to read and write, updated resources and materials are also important to have in a classroom. Chart paper, a smart board, and classroom-based activities are tools useful for teaching reading and writing lessons. Integrating these valuable tools into a lesson can make learning interactive and reading or writing more interesting.

Chart paper can be useful for children with individual learning needs as well as for a class as a whole. For instance, if a teacher taught a lesson on how to identify non-fiction text, a teacher may split their students into groups and distribute each group ten pieces of text for them to examine. Student will then sort through the different types of text, and bullet the types of non-fiction text only on the chart board. After this lesson the chart paper can then be displayed in one's classroom wall for students to refer to if needed. This type of group work may require materials such as poster paper, pens/markers, and different non-fiction or fiction texts for this particular lesson. Yet, because of the budget cuts a teacher may be limited by the amount of supplies available for their classroom. As a result, one may need to think of another less effective way to teach this lesson that can fit within the budget of a particular classroom teacher.

Classroom based activities such as learning centers can also be a good source to infuse literacy through different genres and levels of literature. A reading center within a classroom can create a comfortable learning atmosphere for students. Reading centers may be set up with cushions, rugs, baskets, even a rocking chair to make the tone more comfortable for students to learn (Genisio & Drecktrah 1999). At this reading center students can share dramatic play and

retell personal stories. This type of center can also include a listening center, pocket chart (using sentence strips), letter blocks, and flip chart blending.

It is important to have accessibility to different literacy resource materials to support best literacy practices. By combining different teaching strategies like integrating multisensory instructions within a lesson and using different teaching materials, students are likely to be more engaged with a lesson. Therefore, when teachers are provided with resources to obtain certain educational materials such as poster boards, a smart board, or classroom based activities it becomes possible to introduce old teachings with new technologically and up to date equipment. All children need to feel engaged with the lesson in order to stay focused on succeeding, so by integrating different teaching techniques with new educational materials teachers can be more confident of reaching out to all their students.

Cuts that Affect a Child's Development

Reduced Staff Support

Another resource being cut is extra staff support and classroom aides. Now that many of the extra staff is gone, teachers may be short the extra coverage they could use within a classroom. If extra support is no longer available for children who need the support, students could fall below the acceptable standards. This eventually may lead to a child “falling through the cracks” to be pushed through the grades when he or she is clearly not ready to move forward.

Staff reduction and collaborative teaching teams are crucial issues for students who rely on the extra support within mainstreamed classrooms (Green, 2009). Extra support also helps with large classroom sizes. Instructional aides/staff support is helpful as they can help teacher's direct instruction to an entire class or for those children with IEP's. Aides can also assist teachers with certain lessons by distributing materials, collecting data, or even helping monitor

the student's classroom involvement. Furthermore, aides can help initiate different class activities for these students as well as assist in documentation in a child's progress during individual teacher student conferences. Additional aides or paraprofessional support in a classroom can help learning move more smoothly.

Other staff support that is helpful are the reading specialists. These reading specialists are specifically for students who are having difficulties in these targeted areas (Sen, Burns & Miller, 2009). With this extra support students are able to focus on the areas they may be struggling with. With this extra support, this allows more time for teachers to teach a class as a whole. Instead of taking class time to stop and go over information with a struggling reader an instructional aide or paraprofessional can help those with these struggles.

Curtailed Professional Development Training

Another aspect that affects the impact on literacy is professional development workshops. Professional development workshops are workshops that train teachers to learn new skills and concepts to practice in the classroom (Holloway, 2006). This training is designed to improve student learning and help build knowledge to improve students' results in literacy development.

Programs like these are helpful for both newer and older teachers (Green, 2009). Of course teachers can teach based on older methods, but why would they want to rely on outdated strategies that no longer work? It is important for teachers to be updated with new theories, methods, demographic changes, and how to address the needs of children referred for special education in our forever changing education system (Green, 2009). Teachers are learners themselves and for teachers to improve and be effective teachers they need to be constantly updating themselves with new concepts to teach (Holloway, 2006).

When professional development workshops are chosen to support the school's goals, these new ways of training can help teachers improve their lessons and contribute to overall institutional effectiveness (Holloway, 2006). For example, the idea of teaching mini-lessons is fairly new in school systems. Within a mini-lesson, students are read aloud a particular type of literature and then taught a strategy for identifying the main idea. After reading a particular passage or book the students then are prompted to go back to their seats. At this time, students will look for or mimic the same reading technique they were just taught while reading their own literature as a teacher is walking around the room conferencing with each child independently. Next, the children will then re-group and discuss what they found in their own reading relating to the topic they just were taught. This can also be used for writing lessons as well.

Due to the elimination of these extra programs, many older teachers may not be as familiar with these newer teaching methods. In order for the older teachers to be in unison with the new teachings, teachers as well as students need to be taught and updated with the newest method. Therefore, it is important for teachers and staff to have opportunities to sit in on different workshops and professional development classes to enrich a teacher's education development as well. Without sufficient financial resources such professional development suffers.

Technology Assistance

Technology assistance is another resource likely to be affected by the budget cuts. Today children are growing up in a world full of technology; therefore, it is important to provide students with instruction that incorporates these technological changes. With limited resources, teachers may not be able to take full advantage of the use of technology within a classroom. Teachers may have the technology within their classrooms, yet not knowing how to use certain

equipment can hinder a teacher from teaching to their full potential. Another limitation that may hold back a teacher from using technology within a classroom is the technical difficulties. If a computer needs to be repaired when it breaks down or even updated, not all teachers are knowledgeable enough to fix this problem. Without a technology assistant, this equipment within a classroom may be of no use.

Technology is a big part of society, so presenting different ways to use technology: smart-boards, computers for internet, software programs and games, interactive DVD's, and electronic learning aids enhance a student's concentration (Hisrich & Blanchard, 2009). Many classrooms today have converted to the use of smart-boards, yet many teachers do not know how to properly use this equipment. Frequently, this type of modern technology is not being utilized properly and then becomes a disadvantage or even inconvenience to a particular teacher.

For instance, modernized lessons using PowerPoint or a smart board can be used to help struggling students develop emergent literacy skills. Presentations with diagrams, charts, or even visuals can grasp a learner's attention and help put certain texts into context for different multisensory learners. Technology allows teachers to use a variety of strategies to make lessons more engaging and eye-catching. For example, if a student is struggling with their phonemic relationship or letter sounds, a colorful slide presentation can be designed to connect sounds and picture animations to associate these different sounds more easily (Parette, Hourcade, Boeckmann, & Blum, 2008).

A smart board is another great way to introduce technology into classrooms. Utilizing new ways to introduce technology within a classroom can make all the difference for children who are struggling. Not only are students learning the main lesson or focal point, but they also are learning how to navigate different advanced technology. With the use of a smart board,

teachers can save certain lessons and re-open them at a later time if needed. With older technologies like chalk boards, lessons and materials that were supposed to be saved are often lost forever. A smart board also has different programs on it to use to make lessons more entertaining and hands on. Instead of a teacher lecturing, teachers who use newer technology and creative teaching styles allow students to be more engaged and motivated when learning a lesson. Smart boards can also be used for computer assisted instructions, observational learning, interactive writing, and research (Mechling, Gast & Krupa, 2007).

Teachers can also integrate the use of computers during free time in class. Children can use the Internet to download software or play games that are geared to educational purposes only. For example, if a child is struggling with reading comprehension, during some class free time a teacher can send that student to go online to play educational games that focus on these specific skills (Tompkins, 2010). Technology is an additional resource that can help reinforce what he or she is learning or struggling with. Certain online databases can help students gather important information for research projects and help them reach their full learning potential.

The Internet is another way technology can be resourceful. With the large amounts of accessible materials found on the Internet, anyone can “Google” anything these days. The Internet could be useful for classrooms to research different material, but can also be extremely useful for school libraries or computer labs. Having access to multiple computers within a school’s library or computer lab, teachers are able to teach children how to use a computer to do research as a whole. With certain technology assistants, children can gain a better understanding on how to navigate and use the Internet and to find additional resources other than using texts such as encyclopedias and outdated textbooks.

By diversifying children's learning through technology you can help stimulate an interest in the new hands on methods in teaching content. Classrooms that are not being updated with these technical resources or lack the funds to use these additional support programs will be at a disadvantage. Consequently, our future generation will slowly fall behind this new technological research and how to navigate or resort to these modernizations.

Literature within a Classroom

Another shortage teachers may have to put up with as a result of budget cuts is the supply of interesting multi-leveled literature. Within a curriculum, teachers should focus on both lessons being taught and materials being used. Having a library with different type of genres, teachers can use these different books to teach literacy instruction. Teachers should also be familiar with the different ethnicity of each student and incorporate multicultural literature within their classroom whenever possible.

Although majority of classrooms have a small library for reading, many teachers are limited by the amount of different literature within their own class. All class libraries should include different genres of books, including fiction books such as fantasy, realistic fiction, mysteries, historical fiction, traditional literature, and science fiction (Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2010). Non-fiction books such as informational books, biographies, and autobiographies are also efficient components of a strong, enriches library.

Class libraries give children the opportunity to borrow and return books at their own leisure. Partaking in a class lending library is a great ways to help practice reading skills at home using the different literature available within a strong classroom. These lending libraries include backpacks that are full of supplies to teach a particular topic. These backpacks may include a book, worksheets, journals, and notes to inform the student/parent what to work on. For

example, a bilingual bag can be made for a student who is fairly new to the country and a struggling reader. This bilingual bag may include books in English and Spanish with directions written in both languages so that a child can make connections in both languages (Dever & Burts, 2002). This allows a student to work independently or with the help of an adult to strengthen their English with the comfort of referencing a book that is in their own language as well. Not all students have books at home; therefore, to strengthen these skills children need to be given the opportunity to practice and reinforce these skills.

Having an abundance of literature within one's classroom, both student and teacher can use this literature. Yet, these budget cuts may limit the amount of money used to buy new literature for one's classroom. With these deficits, teachers may need to resort to taking out books from local libraries to share with their class, which also creates problems and lends to severe shortages.

Chapter III

Methods and Design

Setting

The setting for this study was a public elementary school in the city of Staten Island, NY. The racial makeup of the area is 54.6 % Black or African American, 31.7 % Hispanic or Latino, 9.8 % White, 3.2 % Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Island and 0.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native (Walcott, 2011). This public school serves grades PK -5.

This study focused on what a small group of teachers and one assistant principal said about the impact of budget cuts and reduced funding on the literacy learning of elementary school students. This study provides insight into what a select group of teachers and one administrator believe have been the effects of budget cuts on the literacy development of elementary school children. After a survey was distributed and collected, these surveys were then analyzed to answer the research question about the impact of budget cuts.

Participants

The participants selected were the Assistant Principal of a nearby elementary school and other participating teachers within an elementary school setting. These teachers and the assistant principal are currently working in the educational profession. The participating teachers share a

mixture of knowledge teaching to either a regular education, special education classroom or even an integrated classroom.

Instrumentation

Participants were given a cover letter, consent form and survey in their mailboxes. First a consent form was given to the participants. In order to maintain privacy, participants placed their information, upon completion, inside an attached envelope. After the survey was filled out, thank you letters for the participants were placed their mailboxes.

Cover Letter to Teachers and Assistant Principal

The cover letter was a letter of notification given to all teachers and assistant principals with information regarding the study. This letter introduces the researcher and the study to be conducted. This letter also explains the attached informed consent form that needs to be signed in order to participate in the study (See Appendix A & B).

Teachers and Assistant Principal's Informed Consent Form

The informed consent form was a letter that secured the confidentiality of participant's within the study. This correspondence also explained how much time the participants had to complete the survey. This letter also included the researchers contact information. This statement insured all participants that this survey was strictly voluntary and that their signatures indicate they are agreeing to take part in data collection (See Appendix C & D).

Teachers and Assistant Principal's Survey

This survey was a questionnaire given to both teachers and the assistant principal to determine if experienced teachers and one assistant principal in one school believe recent budget cuts have negatively influenced children's literacy development. This survey included questions about their experience and use of materials within their classroom. This survey includes both a likert scale and anecdotal responses to gather as much information as possible (See Appendix E & F).

Thank You Letter to Teachers and Assistant Principal's

The thank you letter was developed to thank all participants for their involvement in this study. This letter was given out at the conclusion of the study to show gratitude to participants for being a part of the research. This letter also informs the participants that the results in regard to this study will be available upon their request (See Appendix G).

Procedure

This study began with a survey that was distributed to all teachers and the assistant principal at a nearby elementary school. A cover letter, consent form and survey were placed in the mailboxes of all teachers and the participating assistant principal in the school. Participants were requested to return the consent forms and surveys to Assistant Principal's office within two weeks. Only those participants who signed off on the consent forms completed a survey. Participants then completed a survey sharing their beliefs regarding the effects of the budget cuts on the literacy development of elementary school children.

At no time did the researcher know the identity of those who have agreed to participate. In order to maintain privacy, participants were asked to omit their names from the surveys. In order to remain confidential and anonymous, the researcher invited participants to place their

signed consent forms in an envelope marked “consent forms” posted outside the Assistant Principal’s office and to leave their anonymously completed surveys in a separate envelope marked “completed surveys,” also posted outside the Assistant Principal’s office. Participants were requested to return the consent forms and surveys to the Assistant Principal’s office within two weeks. Once all surveys had been collected, the researcher then placed a thank you letter in the mailboxes of those who completed consent forms. After reading these results and analyzing the collected data, the researcher offered conclusions as to how the participants assessed the impact of the budget cuts on children’s literacy development.

Results

According to the New York City Department of Education (DOE) progress report, findings shows that since 2010 the total amount of the school’s budget decreased, as did the number of full-time teaching staff within the school (Walcott, 2011). The enrollments from 2007-08 until 2009-10 had decreased by sixty-three students; however, in the survey nine out of the thirteen participants agreed class size increased due to the reduction in teaching staff. According to the DOE this school’s general and special education paraprofessional budget has decreased as well as the number of paraprofessional staff (Walcott, 2011). Within the surveys, teachers had stated that class size plays a huge role in determining the amount of individual time given to students. Since the class sizes increased, and staff was reduced teachers did not have the time to address all students’ needs, especially those with special needs.

Also addressed in the DOE progress report were the budget cuts specifically allocated to literacy development. Since 2008, the following literacy programs have been affected: Reading Recovery and Title I Reading. The Reading Recovery program was cut in 2009, and the Title I

Reading program was cut in 2010 (Walcott, 2011). Although some other reading/literacy programs are still available and taught, these two programs were designed specifically for students to learn literacy skills. Not only does this affect a school as a whole but also underserves students with special needs or who are struggling readers. The results of surveys state that ten of the thirteen participants agree that the recent budget cuts have had an impact on students' literacy development. When asked to specify certain types of issues, some participants described how resources received from the Academic Intervention Services (AIS) were affected. Other teachers remarked that the budget decreases cut their pull-out reading programs and also affected the necessary and extended services that students receive to help them become more literate. Professional development for teachers was another issue participants felt was impacted as well. According to some participants, in previous years they had participated in more professional development workshops.

The limitations created by the current budget cuts have impacted whole classes as well. Not only have they affected the regular students but the cuts have significantly hurt struggling readers and writers. One teacher states that there are, "not enough materials." As the survey progresses, teachers were asked if teachers needed more resources and materials to enhance students' literacy skills, and eight of the thirteen participants agreed. In expanding on these responses, participants suggested materials and resources were needed to enhance their students' literacy skills. The types of materials these teachers felt they could use within their classrooms but that were increasingly scarce were different level books for take home reading, non-fiction books, puppets, story board pictures, flashcards, computer programs for literacy development, sets of books for guided reading, as well as different literacy activities.

When surveying how strongly the budget cuts affected other resources and materials, participants were then asked if technology was limited now because of the cuts. A majority of the teachers did not feel that they lacked access to any new technology, but only two of the thirteen participants agreed that the use of technology is helpful for literacy development. Teachers felt technology is something that all classrooms can benefit from; however, they also felt that it is not essential for literacy development.

Though technology seemed to be sufficient to meet instructional needs within the classrooms, the participants offered some suggestions to improve this area if given the opportunity. Only one teacher had commented on the speed of the Internet and suggested that if anything was needed to help children within the classroom it would be Internet access that works at a “normal working speed.” Some of the participants also stated that students would benefit if they had more programs or games to use. Another teacher suggested that kindergarten teachers needed smart boards as well and that they could benefit from this type of technology for their classrooms if given the resources.

Professional development training on the other hand seemed to be another resource that did not seem to be greatly affected by the budget cuts. Teachers felt that although some professional development workshops have diminished, more college workshops have been incorporated to offset these cuts. Therefore, the teachers believed that they were still up to date with learning newer material and sharing it with their students.

In the survey, many teachers voiced the opinion that if they were given more money to increase the literature within their classroom libraries they would add the following: low level fiction books, non-fiction, narrative non-fiction, and trade books for leveled libraries. Due to recent budget cuts, the DOE states that the library budgets have been reduced; however,

according to a few of the teachers surveyed the budget cut had little impact on their individual school library (Walcott, 2011). This was due to the fact that a library had just recently been added to the school, benefitting the school greatly. The teachers stated that prior to the new library the literature available for students was extremely limited, but the new library changed all that. What follows are a series of figures that summarize the range of responses to key interview questions posed by the researcher.

Figure 1:

Do you feel recent budget cuts are having an impact on students' literacy development?

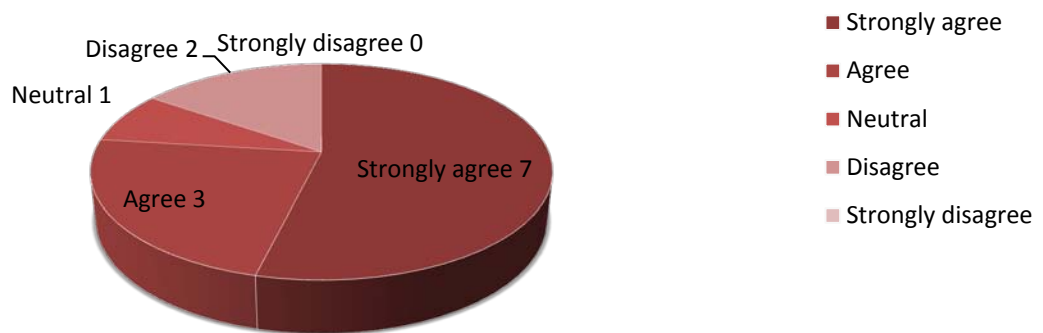


Figure 2:

Did your classroom lose any materials due to budget cuts?

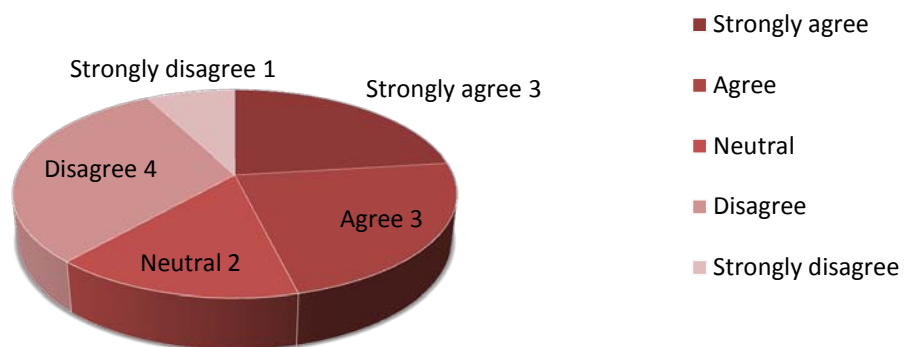


Figure 3:

Do you feel your class has increased in size due to the budget cuts?

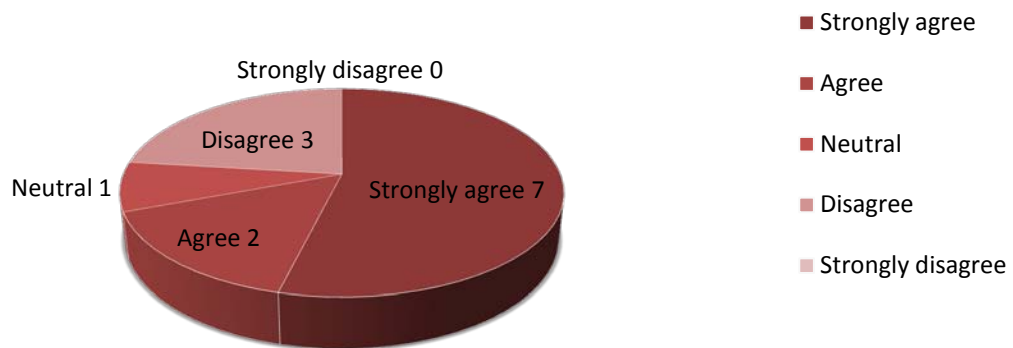


Figure 4:

Do you feel that over the past year or two students' literacy development has decreased?

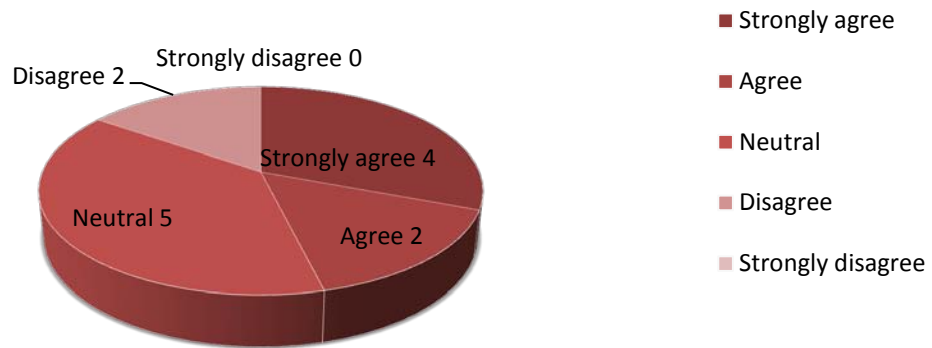


Figure 5:

Do you feel teachers need more resources and materials to enhance students' literacy skills?

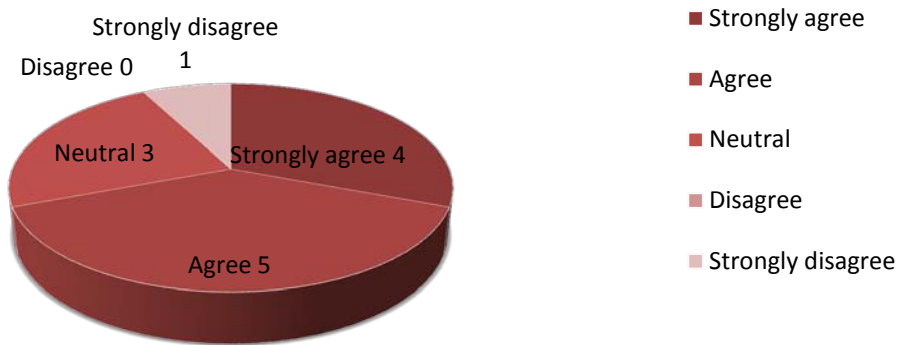


Figure 6:

Do you feel the professional development training within your school got affected by the cuts?

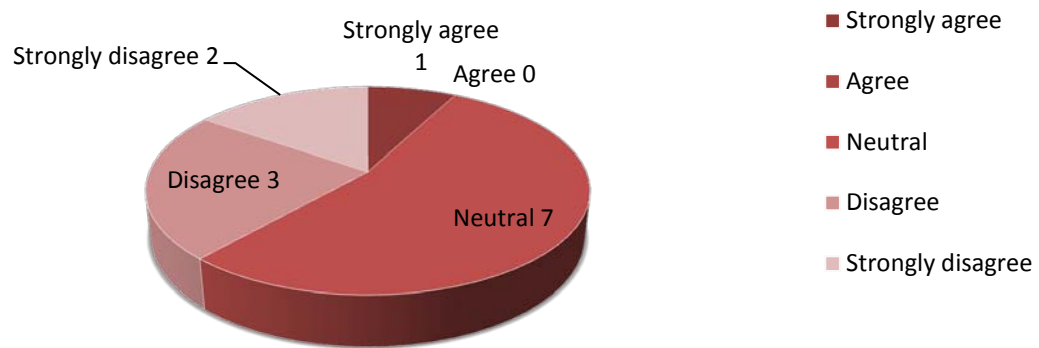


Figure 7:

Do you feel the budget cuts have affected the amount or type of literature within your classroom?

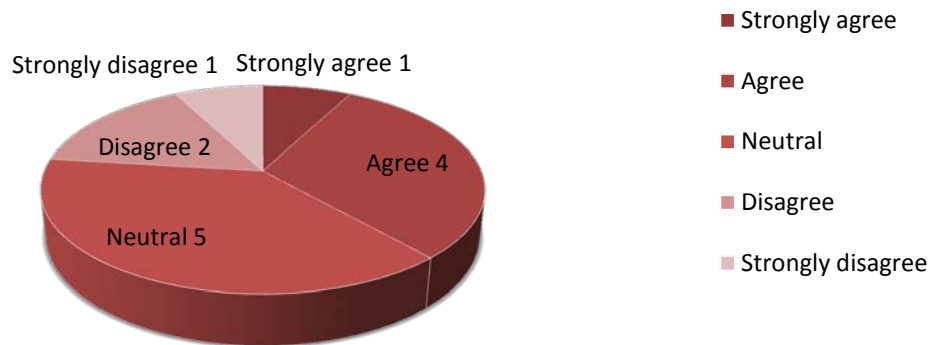
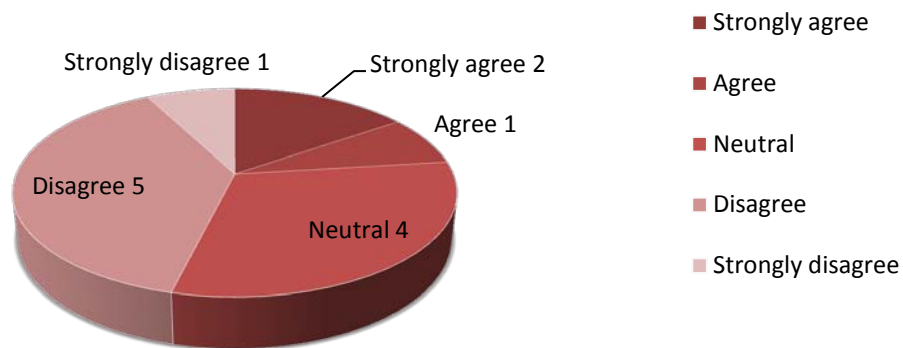


Figure 8:

Do you feel you have limited access to new technology because of the budget cuts?



**Chapter IV:
Implications for Practice and Research**

Limitations of Study

This study is limited in a few ways. For instance, the results may have been affected by the fact that not all of the teachers in the school were able to fill out the surveys. Some teachers did not have the time to complete the survey, while other teachers were unwilling to participate. The initial responses to my requests to fill out the survey were tepid, and I found myself having to remind teachers to hand it in. In future research studies, it is a good idea to follow up with another letter in the beginning of the second week to remind potential participants that these surveys need to be handed in within the week. Another limitation of the study was that only one school was surveyed. By surveying other schools, it would have been possible to compare and contrast the differences in responses between the schools. By surveying just one school the results are limited to how the budget cuts affected only this particular school. By surveying

multiple schools, it would have been possible to have a larger participant pool and more diverse viewpoints in which to analyze the results.

Discussion/Conclusion

The results support the conclusion that the budget cuts do have a significant impact on literacy development. A large majority of the participants surveyed agree that these cuts not only affect our educational system as a whole, but are especially detrimental to students who are in need of extra support for their literacy development. The survey revealed the strong feelings that the participants had regarding the decreased budget and the limitations it places on educators.

Ten of the thirteen participants in the survey agreed that the budget cuts did diminish the amount of resources and materials available for reading and writing within their classrooms. Participants felt that with these cuts, teachers are limited in the amount of resources they are able to use when teaching literacy in their classrooms. Literacy development is extremely important for children in all content areas. Having the available resources makes it much easier to convey new information to students within any class. Consequently, budget cuts have made it more difficult for teachers to effectively teach essential literacy skills to their students, as they have fewer resources at their disposal to do so.

When the amount of money teachers have to use for their classroom is decreased, they must make do with less and therefore need to prioritize their own classroom budgets more carefully. Teachers may need to purchase resources and materials that are beneficial for the class as a whole. Teachers, especially teachers working with children with special needs, require the proper resources to expand or differentiate lessons to effectively address all learners' needs. When supplies are scarce teachers may need to acquire the following: different forms of visuals

(enlarged print, diagrams, smart-board, projector), computer games, flash cards, sentence strips, chart paper, markers, etc. This is how teachers are forced to dip into their own pockets to purchase supplies, in order to create a diverse learning environment. This creates a very inequitable situation in which teachers who are wealthy are able to access these materials, while the less wealthy are not. This is really unfair to students and drives an even greater wedge between the well off and poor.

Furthermore, there are updated methodologies and technologies available to teachers that are not being utilized due to budget constraints. Though teachers and students can get by with limited amounts of resources and older literature, it would be better to have newer and updated resources. For instance, sets of level text books are great for students to work in groups of different learning levels. This allows for more individual focus on students, as it provides an opportunity for students at different levels of literacy skill to work at their respective levels, instead of having the entire class go at the same rate of learning. Students working with one another in groups on a particular book not only helps with content learning but also allows students to progress at different reading speeds. The smaller groups allow students to share new information with one another while a teacher walks around conferencing with each group. Yet, because of budget constraints, this teaching tool is not available in many classrooms.

Students with different learning disabilities are especially affected by budget cuts, since they require the most personalized attention. Teachers who have classes of mixed students or only disabled students feel that because of these cuts they are limited in the number of extra support staff that they need to help their students succeed. The survey indicates that teachers believe that students who may require extra help or more attention cannot receive this personal

care because of the reduced staff support. Teachers feel that this is not only unfair to the teachers but also unfair for those students who should be given the extra support.

All teachers, whether in a regular education class or special education classes must be able to differentiate instruction to their students and in doing so may need to come up with different ideas and more creative ways to present the information to their students. Meeting the needs of all levels of learners usually calls for more elaborate ways of teaching. After a mini-lesson students may benefit more by reinforcing what they learned with fun games or activities that may require additional resources. For example, if students are learning different rhyming words it may be helpful to break students up into centers to work on this task. Each center will have a different task that may include one of the following: dry erase boards, flash cards, word blocks, or even computer games. These different materials may spark a child's interest while reinforcing the learning objective for that day. But when budgets are cut these materials are less readily available.

Though lessons can still be taught with the older teaching methods, why would a school go through the trouble of having their staff and teachers attend different professional development or teacher college workshops when some of these new methods cannot be implemented on the fixed and reduced budget that most teachers now face? This can be a source of frustration for many teachers, as evidenced by some of the remarks in the survey. Literacy is an essential aspect of life, and students need both reading and writing to succeed. However, with these limitations that exist because of budget issues it is very difficult to have all students learn to their full potential.

Implication for Practice

The findings from this study support the idea that the recent budget cuts often affect the literacy development of elementary school students. Educators today are expected to teach extensive school curricula as well as meet rigorous state standards. Therefore, the cutting of the amount of resources and materials available to teachers makes it much more difficult to meet each individual child's needs (Quinn, 2003). When teaching students of different learning levels it is important for teachers to utilize all types of available resources or materials to effectively meet the specific needs of individual readers and writers. Students are more likely to grasp information when the proper learning tools or techniques are being applied to them. There are multiple strategies to address different learners as well as different resources to meet a child's needs and instead of resorting to the older methods of teaching, teachers should be able to assimilate to the newer resources and improvement of teaching. Yet, these options are not available to them when budgets are slashed. As the survey shows, these budget reductions come at great educational cost to the literacy development of young emerging readers and writers.

Implication for Future Research

Further implications of this research for how budget cuts affect a classroom can be explored by having researchers experience directly what actually goes on in classrooms and how supplies and resources are used to enhance the teaching of literacy. When researchers spend time in classrooms systematically observing and recording what teachers do, they can more readily understand how special materials are used by these teachers to help learners, especially those with special needs. One way to do this, for example, would be to observe two teachers deliver the same lesson to two different but similar groups of students. One lesson could be

delivered with extensive supplies and resources, the other without these materials or with outdated materials and the results could then be compared.

A similar idea would be to have researchers observe a regular education classroom and a special education classroom without intervening in any way. What supplies and resources are needed by these respective teachers? Do special educators need more extensive materials to teach effectively than regular educators do? And if so, what are the implications for schools budgets?

Just as important for future research is studying how special resources and materials affect instruction over a longer period of time, anywhere from a month to an entire academic year. What materials seem to be most necessary over time to help students, whether in regular or special education classrooms? Perhaps even more significant would be a longitudinal study that is carried out over many years, to determine how the ups and downs of budgetary allocations affect the quality of instruction from year to year. By conducting further research to observe and itemize different use of materials first- hand, researcher will be able to track ongoing budget and funding alterations.

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Appendix A

March 15, 2011

Dear Ms. Alfano, Professor Ortis and Dr. Preskill:

Your research proposal received by the Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB) on January 18, 2011 (and revised on March 7, 2011) entitled “How budget cuts affect literacy development in the elementary school setting” (project S11-1) was considered under the expedited review procedure and approved. Please consider the following suggestion:

Suggest to the teachers that they may put their consent form in a separate sealed envelope before they drop it in the envelope you provide. This will ensure that no other teachers nor the principal knows who submitted a questionnaire to you.

As described in the revised proposal, the project complies with all of the requirements of HERB for the protection of human participants in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after the approval date.

1. A project status report (available on the HERB website as Part C of application packet) must be returned to HERB within one year.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure must be reported to HERB immediately prior to altering the project.
3. Any injury to a participant because of the research procedure must be reported to HERB immediately.

4. The investigator must keep all signed consent forms on file for 3 years past completion of the project.

5. HERB must be informed of the addition of new investigators not named in the original application.

Please inform HERB when the study has been completed. All future correspondence regarding this project should display the HERB identifying number.

Best wishes,

Laurence Nolan
Chair, Human Experimentation Review Board

Appendix B

Cover Letter

April 4, 2011

Dear Classroom Teacher,

I would like to take this time to introduce myself. My name is Alaina Alfano, and I am currently earning my Master's Degree in Literacy at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York.

I am presently conducting research that will lead to my master's thesis on Literacy. My thesis proposal, "How Budget Cuts Affect Literacy Development in the Elementary School Setting", has been approved by Wagner College's Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB).

With this letter, I am asking you to participate in the study described in the consent form. Enclosed are two copies of my informed consent form. Please review it, and if you agree to participate, please sign one and return it to me. You should keep the other consent form for your records.

The information collected during this study will not be associated with your name. When my thesis is completed, I will be happy to share the findings with you.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via email Alaina.Alfano@wagner.edu or phone (201) 919-3756. I thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Alaina Alfano

Appendix C

Cover Letter

April 4, 2011

Dear Assistant Principal,

I would like to take this time to introduce myself. My name is Alaina Alfano, and I am currently earning my Master's Degree in Literacy at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York.

I am presently conducting research that will lead to my master's thesis on Literacy. My thesis proposal, "How Budget Cuts Affect Literacy Development in the Elementary School Setting", has been approved by Wagner College's Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB).

With this letter, I am asking you to participate in the study described in the consent form. Enclosed are two copies of my informed consent form. Please review it, and if you agree to participate, please sign one and return it to me. You should keep the other consent form for your records.

The information collected during this study will not be associated with your name. When my thesis is completed, I will be happy to share the findings with you.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via email Alaina.Alfano@wagner.edu or phone (201) 919-3756. I thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Alaina Alfano

Appendix D

Consent Form

The Department of Education at Wagner College supports the practice of protection of human participants in research. The following will provide you with information about the study that will help you in deciding whether or not you wish to participate. If you agree to participate, please be aware that you are free to withdraw at any point throughout the duration of the study without any penalty.

This study surveys teachers about how budget cuts affect literacy development in an elementary school setting. Only those teachers who sign off on the consent forms will complete the surveys, but at no time will the researcher know the identity of those who have agreed to participate. Participants will be instructed to answer all questions to the best of their ability. All information you provide will remain confidential and anonymous, as I ask that you please do not include your name on your survey. In order to maintain participants' privacy, the researcher will invite participants to place their signed consent forms in an envelope marked "consent forms" posted outside Assistant Principal Polanco's office and leave their anonymously completed surveys in a separate envelope marked "completed surveys" also posted outside Assistant Principal Polanco's office. Participants will be requested to return the consent forms and surveys to Assistant Principal Polanco's office within two weeks. Once all surveys have been collected, the researcher will then place a thank you letter in the mailboxes of those who completed consent forms.

If you have any further questions concerning this study please feel free to contact us through phone or email: Alaina Alfano at alaina.alfano@wagner.edu (201) 919-3756 or Stephen Preskill at

stephen.preskill@wagner.edu (718) 420- 4070. Please indicate with your signature on the space below that you understand your rights and agree to participate in the study.

Your participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary. All information will be kept confidential and your name will not be associated with any research findings.

_____ Signature of Participant	_____ Alaina Alfano, Investigator
_____ Print Name	_____ Date

Appendix E

Consent Form

The Department of Education at Wagner College supports the practice of protection of human participants in research. The following will provide you with information about the study that will help you in deciding whether or not you wish to participate. If you agree to participate, please be aware that you are free to withdraw at any point throughout the duration of the study without any penalty.

This study surveys the assistant principal about how budget cuts affect literacy development in an elementary school setting. Only those who sign off on the consent form will complete the surveys, but at no time will the researcher know the identity of those who have agreed to participate. Participants will be instructed to answer all questions to the best of their ability. All information you provide will remain confidential and anonymous, as I ask that you please do not include your name on your survey. In order to maintain participants' privacy, the researcher will invite participants to place their signed consent forms in an envelope marked "consent forms" posted outside Assistant Principal Polanco's office and leave their anonymously completed surveys in a separate envelope marked "completed surveys" also posted outside Assistant Principal Polanco's office. Participant will be requested to return the consent forms and surveys to Assistant Principal Polanco's office within two weeks. Once all surveys have been collected, the researcher will then place a thank you letter in the mailboxes of those who completed consent forms.

If you have any further questions concerning this study please feel free to contact us through phone or email: Alaina Alfano at alaina.alfano@wagner.edu (201) 919-3756 or Stephen Preskill at

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

6. Do you feel that over the past year or two students' literacy development has decreased?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If so, why?

If not, why not?

7. Do you feel teachers need more resources and materials to enhance students' literacy skills?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If yes, what type of resource materials would you suggest for your own classroom?

8. Over the past year or two what has been the trend on the literacy part of state exams?

Test scores:

Increased greatly Increased slightly No Change Decreased slightly Decreased greatly

9. Do you feel the professional development training within your school was affected by the cuts?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If so, what specific changes?

10. Do you feel the budget cuts have affected the amount or type of literature within your classroom?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If you were given money to add literature to your classroom library would you? _____
What literature might you add and why?

11. How important is the use of technology when teaching literacy within a classroom?

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

Not helpful at all

12. Do you feel you have limited access to new technology because of the budget cuts?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

If so, what specific technology could all classrooms benefit from when teaching children how to read and write?

13. Are there any students with special needs within your classroom? _____

If so, do you feel that you have the proper materials/staff support to reach out to these students with these special needs?

Significantly

Somewhat

Not really

Not at all

14. If you were given the opportunity to have extra staff support within your classroom for your struggling readers and writers, would you use it?

Appendix G

Assistant Principal Survey

1. Do you feel recent budget cuts are having an impact on students' literacy development?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

2. If so, how is a student most affected?

3. Have classrooms lost any materials due to budget cuts?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

4. Do you feel classes have increased in size due to the budget cuts?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5. Do you feel that over the past year or two students' literacy development has decreased?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If so, why?

If not, why not?

6. Do you feel teachers need more resources and materials to enhance students' literacy skills?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If yes, what type of resource materials would you suggest?

7. Over the past year or two what has been the trend on the literacy part of state exams?

Test scores:

Increased greatly Increased slightly No Change Decreased slightly Decreased greatly

8. Did you feel the professional development training within your school was affected by the cuts?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If so, what specific changes?

9. Do you feel the budget cuts have affected the amount or type of literature in your school library?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

If you were given money to add literature to your library would you? _____

What type of literature might you add and why?

10. How important is the use of technology when teaching literacy within a classroom?

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

Not helpful at all

11. Do you feel classrooms have limited access to new technology because of the budget cuts?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

If so, what specific technology could all classrooms benefit from when teaching children how to read and write?

12. Do you feel that teachers have the proper materials/staff support to reach out to these students with special needs within their classrooms?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

13. If teachers were given the opportunity to have extra staff support within your classroom for their struggling readers and writers, would you allow it?

Appendix H

Dear (Name),

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking your time to fill out my survey. Your participation was extremely valuable for my research study for my thesis. Your input has been extremely helpful. Please feel free to contact me at alaina.alfano@wagner.edu or 201-919-3756 if you would like a copy of my thesis.

Again, I thank you for your time and participation.

Regards,
Alaina Alfano

