SOLICITING STUDENT NARRATIVE REGARDING EDUCATIONAL BUDGET CUTS

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ABSTRACT

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Educational budget cuts are prevalent and increasing across the nation (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011). Existing literature indicates that cuts in educational funding have a negative impact on students' academic performance (Payne & Biddle, 1999). However, most of these studies generally rely on academic outcomes, which are limited to capturing a more holistic perspective of students' experience. Research is beginning to examine students' perceptions of their school climate (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). Yet, student perspectives regarding school budget cuts have not been examined. The purpose of this master's thesis is to address this gap in the literatures, by eliciting student narratives in order to understand students' schooling experiences in a school where budget cuts occur. This study employed qualitative methods, utilizing a phenomenological approach, and involved student focus groups (n= 16) with sixth and seventh grade students. Findings indicated that students had more negative experiences in school, compared to previous years. Furthermore, students were aware of the budget cuts and identified several factors that negatively contributed to their school experience, which they attributed as being caused by the budget cuts; (a) increased teacher attrition, (b) reduced school supplies, (c) fewer electives, (d) less school activities, (e) poor maintenance of the school facilities, and (d) school closure. In addition, students generated creative solutions for handling future budget cuts. Implications for school administrators and future research are discussed.

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Introduction

Across the nation, states are currently facing budget cuts of historic proportions. Compared to other industrialized nations, the United States is unique in that public education is predominately funded through local property taxes and state revenues. This funding structure explains why educational budgets vary from wealthy to impoverished communities, and are vulnerable to cuts in times of economic crisis (Reschovsky, 2004). The recent recession from 2007 to 2009 was the longest economic downturn since the Great Depression and has continued to contribute to ongoing cuts to public education (Reschovsky, 2004). The Center of Budget and Policy Priorities' 2011 report (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011) asserts that thirty-four out of the forty-seven states with new budgets will be making significant cuts to kindergarten through twelfth grade public education. School districts are cutting thousands of teaching jobs, including 36,000 in California, 20,000 in Illinois, and 16,600 in New York. In addition, school districts are also cutting programs, reducing school hours, and enlarging classes and schools. Moreover, the cuts that many states enacted in 2011 are more severe than those implemented in previous years. For example, Illinois has cut educational funding by 4% ($311 million) from the preceding year, Georgia by 5.5% ($403 million), and Colorado by nearly 5% ($260 million). Michigan is no exception, cutting $564 million in the School Aid K-12 budget this year, a 7.1% decrease from previous years, and laying-off nearly15,000 educators statewide (Lavey, 2011; Michigan Education Association [MEA], 2011). Thirty-six of Michigan's 550 kindergarten-to-twelfth grade school districts are operating at a deficit (Mudgett, 2011). Because educational budget cuts are prevalent and increasing across the nation, it is important to critically examine and understand students' schooling experiences within the context of these budget cuts.

Research indicates that cuts in educational funding have a negative impact on students' academic performance (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002; Payne & Biddle, 1999). Reductions in school funding result in decreased rates of high school graduation and college attendance (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002; Payne & Biddle, 1999). Cuts in educational funding also disrupts the structure of schools, resulting in larger classes, less extracurricular activities, school closures and student displacement (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). However, because most of these studies are dated and generally rely on academic outcomes as the dependent variable (e.g., grade point averages, standardized test scores), they are limited in capturing a more holistic perspective of students' experience of budget cuts. As researchers, educators, and politicians continue to debate how to cope with the cuts to educational funding, the voice and input of those who are most affected, students, has been left out of the discussion. Without their contribution, we have incomplete information on students' experience of schooling within the context of the budget cuts.

Thus, the purpose of this master's thesis is to elicit student narratives to understand students' schooling experiences in a school where budget cuts have occurred. This study employed qualitative methods, utilizing a phenomenological approach, and involved student focus groups with sixth and seventh grade students in one school within the Rockbridge School District (in the state of Michigan).[1] Rockbridge was specifically chosen because it is under-resourced, providing the opportunity to understand student experiences in a disadvantaged school district with few resources to buffer cuts to educational spending (Militello, Metzger, & Bowers, 2008). This study addressed the following research questions:

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[1] To protect the confidentiality of the school; the school, school district, and neighboring school districts throughout this paper were given pseudonyms.

(1) What are students' experiences within the context of budget cuts?

(2) How can students' experiences inform future budgeting decisions?

Results provide new insight into understanding students' experiences in a school with budget cuts, a less understood phenomenon in the literatures on educational policy, perceptions of school climate and student voice. This study also has the potential to provide information that can benefit the local school in which the study takes place, as well as the larger school district.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Section One: School Funding in the State of Michigan

This study was situated in the Rockbridge School District in Michigan. Although

Michigan has historically provided more funding for education compared to other states, it has

experienced a significant drop in educational funding in the past few years. Specifically, in 2002,

Michigan ranked eighth in the nation in teacher salaries, but by 2009 it ranked 19th. On May 26,

2011, Michigan legislators agreed to a $564 million cut in the School Aid K-12 budget, a 7.1%

percent decrease from the previous year (Lavey, 2011). The School Aid K-12 budget provides

funds to school districts, intermediate school districts, and after school programs. School aid cuts

will range from $256 to $297 per student. This is in on top of a $170 per student cut from the

previous year (MEA, 2011). In the spring of 2011, nearly 15,000 teachers and educators were

laid off statewide (MEA, 2011). In addition as, described below, Michigan has a unique funding

structure and School Choice Policy that makes school districts particularly vulnerable to

educational budget cuts and limits their available resources (Militello et al., 2008).

Rockbridge School District was chosen because it lacks resources compared to its

neighboring school districts Greer, Channing and Luis. Michigan's state average for per pupil

funding is $11,153. According to Homesurfer.com which ranks school districts by their amount

of per pupil spending, Greer ranks 16th ($17,925 per student), Channing ranks 26th ($16,034 per

student), Luis ranks 41st ($15, 003 per student) and Rockbridge ranks 150th ($10, 966 per

student).[2] In addition, Rockbridge School District is currently in the process of making cuts to

reduce a 30 million dollar deficit for the upcoming school year (MEA, 2011). Rockbridge is an

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[2] Homesufer.com provides homebuyers and sellers with real estate information and resources.
Homesurfers school rating is calculated using factors such as, spending per pupil, capital
spending and the debt position of the district.

under-resourced school district, providing the opportunity to understand student perspectives of budget cuts in a disadvantaged school with few resources to buffer cuts to educational spending.

Michigan's Funding Structure and School Choice Policy

In 1994, the State of Michigan passed Proposal A, a tax reform measure that capped funding from local property taxes and made Michigan's public school districts reliant on state per pupil funds. The tax reform aimed to reduce funding disparities among schools, increasing funding for school districts at the lower end of the funding spectrum (Michigan in Brief, 2002; Militello et al., 2008). Proposal A is unique from traditional US educational funding structures, in that it attempted to equally distribute funding based on student population. Unfortunately in combination with the passing of the school choice policy described below, Proposal A helped perpetuate stark differences in educational funding among Michigan school districts.

During this same time period, Michigan also established a school choice policy which allows school districts to accept pupils located in other school zones (Arsen et al., 2005). Militello et al. (2008) conducted an extended case study to examine how the Rockbridge School District faired compared to nine (suburban and rural) school districts, before and after the school tax reform and school choice policy were in place. The case study included structured interviews with key school officials and archival records of district bonds from the Michigan State Treasury. Militello et al. (2008) found that the school choice policy along with Proposal A government tax reform disadvantaged central city districts, such as the Rockbridge School District, which had fewer resources compared to suburban school districts to invest in their facilities and attract mobile students.

Militello et al. (2008) noted since the passage of Proposal A, Rockbridge School District experienced low capital expenditures, deterioration of school building, a decline in student

enrollment and a shift in the student body demographics from a 60% white student body in the 1990s to a 40% white student body in 2005. In addition, students from the Rockbridge District transferred to Greer, Channing, and Luis, three suburban and wealthier districts, which invested in new facilities. Each student transfer cost the district of Rockbridge approximately $7,280. Students who relocated to other districts often came back or were sent back after the Count Day, a day when all public schools in Michigan tally the number of students attending. Each student counted contributes to the amount of state funding a school district receives. Thus, Rockbridge School District received significantly less funding than school districts with high attendance on Count Day (Michigan Department of Education, 2011; Militello et al., 2008). Both school choice policy and Proposal A have significantly affected the current state of education in Michigan, in particular for poorer school districts.

Current Educational Budget Cuts in Michigan and Rockbridge School District

Currently, Michigan is facing major cuts to education across the state, impacting school climate, students and teachers. A critique of Proposal A is that it failed to provide fiscal security or financial adequacy, since it receives a portion of its funding through sales tax. Sales tax falls when the economy goes into a recession (Educational Policy Center at Michigan State University, 2005). Therefore schools are dangerously vulnerable to cyclical fluctuations in the economy. Thirty-six of Michigan's 550 kindergarten-twelfth grade school districts are operating at a deficit (Mudgett, 2011).

Rockbridge is experiencing major changes that will continue in upcoming years. The Rockbridge School Board passed a current budget of $173 million for the year of 2011-2012 (Lavey, 2011). Rockbridge school board has laid employees off including ninety-five school teachers. Those, of who are still employed with the district are experiencing a one year wage

freeze, are required to give larger employee contributions to health care, and many may see their

health care deductibles double (MEA, 2011). The district began closing and consolidating

schools, starting with Maple Creek Elementary School, which will be combined with Elmer

Middle School. The district also closed programs that provide services and extracurricular

activities for students, such as the Beverley Early Childhood Center which provided services to

young children and families, and the Eagle Wood Environmental Center which provided

extracurricular environmentally oriented programs to students (Lavey, 2011). Rockbridge School

district is forming a plan for additional closing and consolidating of many of the school sites.

The educational budget cuts faced by Michigan schools and Rockbridge school district in

particular, are important because they have implications for student academic achievement.

Section Two: The Impact of School Funding

Researchers in the fields of sociology, education, and educational policy have examined

multiple ways in which school funding alters the school environment (Coleman, 1990; Fowler &

Walberg, 1991; Greenwald, Hedges, & Lain, 1996; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002;

Payne & Biddle, 1999; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Studies have primarily focused on how

school funding impacts students' academic achievement, finding a positive relationship between

school spending and student achievement and a negative relationship between school spending

and dropout rates (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Greenwald et al., 1996; Jozefowicz-Simbeni &

Allen-Meares, 2002; Payne & Biddle, 1999; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006).

This section highlights studies that examine how budget cuts affect both classroom and school

level factors related to academic achievement and their limitations.

Class Level Factors

Loss in district funding contributes to oversized classrooms (Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Larger class sizes have consequences for students as studies consistently find that class size affects student academic performance (Akerhielm, 1995; Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Chapman, 2003; Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Robinson, 1990; Wenglinsky, 1997). For example, Wenglinsky (1997) used scores from a national data base and found that eighth graders in smaller classes scored higher in mathematics measured through the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Furthermore, Akerhielm (1995) found a negative relationship between class size and eighth graders' test scores in mathematics, English, history and science, using a data set from the National Educational Longitudinal Study.

In addition to an association with increased academic performance, smaller class sizes are also linked to higher quality teaching and increased student engagement. Empirical studies in elementary and high schools have found that teachers in smaller classes report a more positive outlook on teaching (Finn, Gerber, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2005; Finn et al., 2003; Rice, 1999). Teachers in smaller classrooms engage in more, innovative instruction, small group work and time devoted to whole class discussion instead of classroom management, consisting of keeping order (Finn et al., 2005; Finn et al., 2003; Rice, 1999). Studies also found that students are more academically engaged when class size is reduced (Finn et al., 2005; Finn et al., 2003).

School Level Factors

School funding also affects multiple factors within the larger school environment. Cuts to school funding can lead to district consolidation and school closure resulting in student displacement (Sunderman & Payne, 2009). In turn, school closure and student displacement has a direct impact on students' academic performance. Studies show that students, who are forced to relocate schools even once, were found to be 25% of a standard year achievement behind peers

after the move, and twice as likely to drop out (Kerbow, 1996; Rumberger, 2003; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Similarly, Kirshner, Gaertner and Pozzoboni (2010) compared standardized test scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates for a cohort of displaced high school students to students in another school district devoid of school closure and students in previous cohorts within the same school prior to closure. Students who were forced to move schools had lower standardized test scores across all subjects, an increased chance of dropping out, and a decreased chance of graduating. School relocation also adds personal stress on students forcing them to transition to a new environment, creating a loss of social support and feelings of marginalization (Kirshner et al., 2010; Rumberger, 2003; Sunderman & Payne, 2009).

Poorer school districts often face school closure resulting in remaining schools within the district gaining larger student bodies (Sunderman & Payne, 2009). School size also has an effect on student academic achievement. For example, Fowler and Walberg (1991) conducted a study in New Jersey and found an inverse relationship between school size and high school student's standardized test scores. In addition, studies show that students in smaller schools participate more in school activities, classroom discussion, and extracurricular school based activities (Appleton et al., 2008; Chapman, 2003; Finn et al., 2003; Lindsay, 1982).

Poor school funding also decreases the amount of extracurricular activities and innovative programming provided to students (Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of students' from sixth grade to twenty-five who attended ten school districts in Southeastern Michigan. Survey results indicated that students who participated in extracurricular activities benefitted in multiple domains including developing academic and professional skills, sense of connectedness, social recognition, and

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establishing supportive networks. In addition, McNeal (1995) found that students involved in extracurricular activities are significantly less likely to drop out of school.

Limitations (Alternative Factors)

There are limitations to these studies, in that it is difficult to determine if funding is a significant predictor of academic achievement without controlling for a host of other confounding variables (Coleman et al., 1966; Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willims, 2001; Payne & Biddle, 1999). Additionally, factors such as class size and per-pupil funding tend to be rather low in variation, decreasing robustness in findings and creating a lack of power in determining significant findings (Coleman et al., 1966; Ehrenberg et al., 2001).

One particular complication is that poorly funded districts tend to consist of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is difficult to distinguish whether familial and community factors (e.g., poverty) or educational factors (e.g., school funding) impact students' academic achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Payne & Biddle, 1999). For example, the Coleman report examined the impact of school characteristics including student teacher ratio, per-pupil expenditure and teacher salaries on students' academic achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Payne & Biddle, 1999). It found that school resources had a limited effect on student achievement after controlling for home background and the characteristics of the student body. Home background consisted of parents' educational level, parents' higher educational aspirations for their children, and engaging children in learning practices at home, such as nightly reading and interactive learning games. Characteristics of the general student body consisted of student attendance, student mobility and the degree to which students reported higher educational aspirations (Coleman et al., 1966; Payne & Biddle, 1999). Additional reports echo Coleman's findings (Jencks et al., 1972; Hanushek, 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1996; Mosteler & Moynihen,

1972). However, there are identified limitations within the Coleman report, such as the report's statistical technique, a lack of peer review, and a failure to use available scaling techniques to validate procedures (Bowles & Levin, 1968; Cain & Watts, 1970; Greenwald et al., 1966; Payne & Biddle, 1999; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Furthermore, Bowles and Levin (1968) argue that the report potentially missed significant patterns of variation within school districts, because per-pupil expenditure collected in the Coleman report aggregated expenditures for an entire district. As a result, the report overstated expenditures for schools with a lower-socio-economic student body and understated expenditures for schools with a higher socio-economic student body.

Summary

There have been significant cuts in educational funding across the state of Michigan, including reductions in per student funding, teacher dismissals, school closures and elimination of extracurricular programs (Johnson et al., 2011; MEA, 2011). Various studies conclude that school funding effects student achievement and results in increased dropout rates and poor academic attainment (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002; Payne & Biddle, 1999; Roscigno et al., 2006). Yet, little is known about how students perceive and understand budget cuts. Thus, this study solicited students' narratives and viewpoints regarding budget cuts at their school.

Section Three: How Students Perceive Their School Environment

Although research exists on the impact of school funding, this study examines a previously ignored perspective, students' perceptions within a school that is undergoing budget cuts. In order to fully inform this new research inquiry, it is necessary to review two sets of literature that examine how students perceive their school environment. The first set of literature pertains to students' perceptions of school climate, primarily from the fields of educational

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psychology (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010), public health (Libbey, 2004; Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010) and human development (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997; Piaget, 2008). The second is the student voice literature, developed in the fields of urban education (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Lee, 1999; Storz, 2008), teacher education (Cook-Sather, 2002; Lincoln, 1995), and school reform (Mitra, 2008; Zion, 2009). Although both sets of literature seek to understand how students perceive their school environment, they employ different methods. Specifically, the literature on students' perception of school climate is mainly quantitative compared to the student voice literature, which is primarily qualitative. This section will begin by introducing both sets of literature. Next, this section will highlight multilevel factors that relate to students' perceptions of their school environment relevant to educational budget cuts. In addition, this section will address factors pertinent to this particular study's student sample (i.e., sixth and seventh grade students, mainly African American, primarily from a lower socio-economic background).

Student's Perception of School Climate

The literature on students' perception of school climate focuses on measuring how students perceive their school climate by identifying various factors that influence these perceptions. Perception is the process of developing a particular perspective regarding one's environment (Osterman, 2000). Perception is shaped by one's interpretation of experience which includes transactions within one's social environment (Farrell et al., 2007). School climate refers to the quality and character of school life (Cohen, Mccabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Students' perception of their school climate is a complex phenomenon, operationalized in a variety of ways. Some examples of operationalizations include belonging (i.e., the degree to which a student feels a part of school) and discipline and fairness (i.e., the extent to which a

student views the school rules as being fair and justly enforced) (Libbey, 2004). Researchers primarily utilize quantitative surveys that employ various scales to examine students' perceptions of school climate (Libbey, 2004; Zullig et al., 2010). School climate surveys identify a variety of factors that influence students' perceptions, and that are relevant to the current budget cuts in the Rockbridge School District, and the sample demographics of the students in this study.

A general shortcoming of this particular set of literature is that most studies employ surveys as the sole measurement of students' perceptions of school. This means that response categories are already chosen prior to data collection, restricting participants' range of answers and the researcher's ability to explore new ideas. In addition, three more specific limitations were also detected; many of the studies did not employ psychometrically sound scales (Zullig et al., 2010), surveys tend to vary in dimensions and scales employed making it difficult to compare across studies (Griffith, 2000; Libbey, 2004; Zullig et al., 2010), and studies are limited in sample size, often constricted to one state or region of the United States (Zullig et al., 2010). These three specific limitations contribute to weaker inferences and less generalizable findings.

Student Voice Literature

The student voice literature consists of studies that specifically solicit student input regarding concerns in their school environment. These studies are primarily qualitative, consisting of a small sample with a specific area of focus. For example, Storz (2008) engaged a sample of urban middle school students who were primarily African Americans from lower socio-economic backgrounds in focus group discussions around their beliefs in the quality of their education. These studies have not addressed students' perceptions of school within the context of educational funding, but they have examined student perspectives on various issues occurring within their school such as educational inequity, quality of education, and current

reform measures. It is possible to use this literature as a guide to understanding the particular elements of the school environment to which students are attuned within the context of the budget cuts.

The student voice literature has a general limitation, common in most in-depth qualitative studies. These studies consist of small sample sizes that reduce the ability to generalize findings. In addition, qualitative studies have a narrow focus therefore limiting the topic range explored. Three additional specific limitations of the student voice literature were identified. First, these studies vary in detail describing how trustworthiness was established, whether member checks were employed, and information regarding procedures to ensure a degree of standardization in interviews conducted. Second, a few studies varied in methodological fit between the type of qualitative study employed and their data analysis plan. Lastly, although, these studies typically consisted of lower socio-economic and ethnically diverse student bodies in school districts experiencing loss in funding, there was some degree of educational reform and change occurring in the district. This was primarily the reason the researcher was allowed access to the student body, being invited by school officials to help inform school improvement efforts. These external changes in the school environment may have spurred greater discussion in the school, increasing students' awareness of their school environment compared to school districts with similar demographics that are not engaged in any school reform efforts.

Gathering Corroborating Evidence Utilizing both sets of Literature

The literature on students' perceptions of school climate and the literature on student voice complement some of each other's limitations. Both studies focus on understanding how students perceive and experience their school environment. The literature on students' perception of school climate employs surveys with an assortment of scales to measure a broad range of

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components that influence how students perceive their school environment (Libbey, 2004; Zullig et al., 2010). In addition, these studies are able to measure a large sample of students' overall perceptions, allowing for comparisons across schools. However, using a survey as the sole measurement of students' perceptions of school has limitations. Categories are chosen prior to data collection, restricting the ability to discover new ideas regarding how students perceive their environment. By contrast, the student voice literature utilizes interviews and focus groups. Focus groups and interviews tend to be concentrated on a particular issue that students face in their school environment. Thus, the student voice literature provides for a more exploratory and in depth look at what students perceive as important components regarding their school environment. However, this in depth approach requires trade-offs that lead to a limited sample size and topic range compared to the literature on students' perceptions of school climate.

Therefore, using both sets of literature helps supply corroborating evidence and understanding of how students perceive their school environment. Similar results using different methods allow for triangulation of findings and strengthen inferences made. This literature review found that both sets of literatures point toward multilevel factors that influence students' perceptions of school. These levels include the individual, class, and school. This section will expand upon how factors within each of these levels relate to the budget cuts and the specific sample of students that this study engaged.

Individual Level Factors

Findings regarding three individual level factors (i.e., race, socio-economic status and grade level) are relevant to the specific sample of students that this study engaged: African American students from lower socio-economic backgrounds that were in the sixth and seventh grade at the time of the study in 2011-2012.

Studies found that African Americans students in middle childhood and adolescence tend to view their school as less safe than Caucasian students (Conchas, 2006; Farell et al., 2007; Griffith, 2000; Koth et al., 2008; Kuperminc et al., 1997). For example, in the literature on students' perceptions of school climate, Koth and colleagues (2008) employed surveys with 5th grade students, and found race to be a significant factor in relation to how favorably students' perceived their school environment. Specifically, African American and American Indian students tended to view their school as being less safe and having less order compared to Caucasian and Asian students. Similarly, in the student voice literature, studies have found that African American students have high levels of conflict with their teachers (Farrell et al., 2007; Howard, 2001; Kozol, 1991; Mirón & Lauria, 1998). For example, Farrell and colleagues (1998) engaged sixth graders, who were primarily African American, in qualitative focus group discussion identifying problematic situations within their school. Farrell et al. (2007) found that students reported injustice occurring within their classroom for which they were often blamed by their teacher for what another student did.

Students of lower socio-economic background also tend to have a more negative view of their school environment (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). This is due in part to the fact that students with a lower socio-economic background are more likely to attend underfunded and understaffed schools (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Conchas, 2006; Kuperminc et al., 1997; Way, 1998; Way et al., 2007;). Researchers documented the negative perceptions of school evident among students with lower socio-economic backgrounds (Anyon, 1981, 1995, 2005; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Way, 1998; Way et. al., 2007). For example, middle school students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tended to view their school environment as lacking in teacher support on school climate surveys (Way et al., 2007). These students also rated their

school as having less clarity, consistency and fairness in school rules compared to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Various qualitative studies focused on how students from lower socio-economic backgrounds view their school environment (Fine, 1991; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Kozol, 1991; Storz, 2008). These studies found that high school and middle school students expressed a negative and frustrated view of their school environment and experience in school (Fine, 1991; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Kozol, 1991; Storz, 2008). Studies also found that students expressed doubts as to whether their education would afford them opportunity for social mobility, a concern that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds do not have (Fine, 1991; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Kozol, 1991). In a multiyear ethnographic study of low income, predominately African American and Latino high school students, Fine (1991) found that teachers differed from their students both in dimensions of race and class. At times, these cultural differences caused moments of tension because of differences in life knowledge. For example, Fine (1991) observed the class discussion between a white middle class teacher and predominately non-white, low income students about what students expected they would find in a rich person's trash versus a poor person's trash. As the discussion continued, one student voiced concern as to where the discussion was heading, stating that poor people were also happy. Instead of encouraging the student to engage in further explanation, the teacher halted the conversation asking for students not to make value judgments or generalizations. The students argued back that they were not making generalizations because they themselves were poor. Fine notes that these conflicts had the potential to promote great dialogue and sharing of knowledge but often consisted of silencing, when teachers with little support and resources felt their own authority was being questioned.

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There is less agreement in the literature regarding how a students' grade level and age may alter their perceptions of their school environment, as compared to race and socio-economic status, especially within the field of developmental psychology (Mascolo, Fischer, & Neimeyer, 1999; Piaget, 2008; Waxman & Huang, 1997; Way et al., 2007). Some researchers argue that age is a significant factor impacting how accurately students perceive their environment (Mascolo et al., 1999; Piaget, 2008). Mascolo and colleagues (1999) argue that young people's awareness of their environment does not solidify until they are eighteen. These researchers argue that cognitive maturity, defined by one's age, sets the limit of what children can and cannot understand (Mascolo et al., 1999; Piaget, 2008). In addition, Piaget (2008) argues that there are developmental differences between early and late adolescence, and that one's reasoning and capacity to understand complex constructs beyond one's immediate experience increases as adolescents' age. Alternatively, cultural developmental theorists argue that youth's cognitive ability is not solely defined by their biological age, but is also influenced by how a particular society defines childhood and adolescence (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Rogoff & Morelli, 1989). Recent developmental research suggests that youth hold more complex cognitions than previously presumed (Kellet, 2004; Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angellilo, 2003).

In studies that examined and solicited middle and high school students' perceptions of their school environment, no developmental differences were found other than that middle school aged students had a more negative view of their school environment (Waxman & Huang, 1997; Way et. al., 2007; Zion, 2009). For example, studies have shown that predominantly minority, lower income middle school students tended to have less favorable view of their school environment compared to elementary and high school students (Waxman & Huang, 1997). In

addition, a longitudinal study that examined students' perceptions of their school climate from sixth to eighth grade found that all dimensions of school climate, including teacher support, peer acceptance and student autonomy, decreased over time (Way et al., 2007). These findings may be due to the various transitions that middle school students undergo. The middle school time period is identified as a particular risk because adolescents go from an elementary school to a less structured middle school, while at the same time undergoing physical changes (Dubois, Felner, Brand, Adan, & Evans, 1992; Eccles et al., 2003; Seidman & French, 2004). The amount of stress that students experience during early adolescence influences their ability to adapt to new environments, such as secondary school (Dubois et al., 1992). However, this may not be the case for the sample of students in this study, because the particular site is an elementary school consisting of kindergarten through seventh grade.

Student Level Factors Pertinent to this Particular Study

Race, socio-economic background, and grade level were all identified as student level factors influencing students' perceptions and experiences of school. In the students' perception of school climate literature, students who were African American, from a lower socio-economic background, or in middle school tended to have a more negative view of their school climate (Griffith, 2000; Koth et al., 2008; Waxman & Huang, 1997; Way et al. 2007). In addition, the student voice literature, found that students who were African American, and students from a lower socio-economic background described having negative interactions with their teachers (Farrell et al., 2007; Fine, 1991; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Kozol, 1991). These students also expressed frustration and doubts regarding the ability of the institution of education to help them achieve social mobility (Fine, 1991; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Kozol, 1991). These individual level

factors are all relevant to this study's specific sample of students, which consists of primarily African American, low income, sixth and seventh grade students.

Classroom Level Factors

Classroom level factors were also identified as important factors in influencing students' perception of school. Classrooms are dynamic and complex environments, shaped and influenced by multiple components (Koth et al., 2008). Two classroom level factors, class size and instructional style, may be particularly relevant to current budget cuts within the Rockbridge School District.

Findings indicate that class size has a relationship with students' perceptions of school (Bateman, 2002; Bateman, Goldman, Newbrough, & Bransford, 1998; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Finn et al., 2003; Koth et al., 2008, Tseng & Siedman, 2007). One explanation for this phenomenon proposed by Tseng & Seidman (2007) is that smaller class sizes can facilitate change in social processes within the class environment, enabling students and teachers to develop closer relationships with one another and fostering more communication between all stakeholders. Finn and colleagues (2003) found evidence of this phenomenon in a literature review regarding the effects of class size. Students in small classes engaged more frequently with teachers and other students in class based work than their counterparts in large classes. Furthermore, studies found that larger class sizes have a negative relationship with how students perceive their school environment (Bateman, 2002; Bateman et al., 1998; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Finn et al., 2003; Koth et al., 2008, Tseng & Seidman, 2007).When employing school climate surveys with fifth grade students, Koth and colleagues (2008) found that larger class size also had a negative relationship with the extent to which students felt their school is a safe place and their own sense of academic capability. Lastly, in focus groups with high school students, Fine & Ruglis (2009) found that

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students identified overcrowded classrooms as a structural problem within their school. In particular, students identified large class size as a barrier to receiving quality instruction and attention from their teachers.

Both sets of literature found that students perceive their class environment more favorably when teachers structure the classroom to promote a sense of community (Howard, 2001; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009; Roland & Galloway, 2002; Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1997). Teachers establish a sense of community through ritualized class discussion and cooperative learning activities, by group work that eliminates groups based on homogenous ability, and by promoting interdependence among students (Howard, 2001; Roland & Galloway, 2002; Solomon et al., 1997). One example is conducting group activities, such as the Jigsaw method, that require a group of students to complete a task together, providing each student with a specific role and responsibility within the group (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). Solomon and colleagues (1997) employed teacher observations and student questionnaires to examine third, fourth and fifth grade students' perceptions of class environment. Results demonstrated that teacher practices which elicited student expression of ideas and promoted group activities positively related to students' overall behavioral engagement and with students' self-reported view of their classroom as a community including feelings of classroom support and opportunity for meaningful input in classroom decisions. In addition, results demonstrated that teachers' use of extrinsic control of threats and an emphasis on behavioral procedures were negatively related to students' overall behavioral engagement and view of their class environment. Phelan, Yu and Davidson (1994) employed qualitative interviews and class observations with high school students and similarly found that students prefer teachers who engage in pedagogical methods that encourage active participation. In

addition, students reported a strong preference towards working in groups. Students articulated that group work allowed them to generate ideas, and build relationships with their classmates.

Qualitative studies soliciting student input found that students report frustration and disengagement when their educational curriculum is repetitive, not culturally relevant, and consists of completing worksheets independently (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Lee, 1999; Phelan et al., 1994; Storz, 2008). Lee (1999) worked collaboratively with a team of students to conduct interviews with students of an inner-city high school, who were predominately minorities from lower socio-economic backgrounds and suffering academically. Interviews focused on the topic of school failure, in particular what factors students attributed to academic failure. Lee (1999) found that students often discussed issues in school curriculum. Students noted that classes in which they were active and focused employed multiple media sources, engaged in a variety of teaching techniques, and challenged the students to make personal connections to the subject.

Classroom Level Factors Pertinent to this Particular Study

Class size, teaching style, and curriculum were all found to have an impact on how students perceive and experience their school environment. In general, the students' perceptions of school climate literature found that smaller class sizes and more group work had a positive relationship regarding how students perceived their school environment (Koth et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 1996). In addition, the student voice literature, found that students identified being in a larger class as a barrier to their learning (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Students also articulated that they preferred group work, culturally relevant and participatory curriculum, compared to individualized instruction (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Lee, 1999; Phelan et al., 1994; Storz, 2008). Studies have also found that when schools are at risk for closure, teachers within the school tend to narrow their scope of curriculum and abandon more innovative teaching

strategies (Gay, 2007; Howard, 2001; Marchant, 2004; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). These class

level factors relate to current budget cuts in the Rockbridge School District. Rockbridge School

district closed various schools (Lavey, 2011), and dismissed many teachers (MEA, 2011),

causing a potential increase in class size (Lavey, 2009). In addition, due to the threat of school

closure throughout the Rockbridge School District (Lavey, 2011) teachers and principals may

feel greater pressure for their school to perform well on standardized tests, using more

standardized and repetitive instruction focused on test performance.

School Level Factors

Lastly, school level factors were identified as important contributors influencing

students' perception of school. School level factors are complex, consisting of both structural

and cultural components of the school, alongside the availability of resources (Fan, Williams, &

Corkin, 2011; Mijanovich & Weitzman, 2003; Koth et al., 2008; Zullig et al., 2010). Three

school level factors (i.e., resources, student mobility and staff turnover) are described below

because they relate to budget cuts within the Rockbridge School District.

Research indicates that students' views toward their school environment are influenced

by the resources available within their school. Resources include class supplies, quality text

books, extracurricular activities, additional programming (e.g., music, sports and art), and the

maintenance of the school's facilities (Fine & Rugilis, 2009; Storz, 2008). Quantitative studies

regarding students' perceptions of school found that school resources are positively associated

with students' perceptions of school climate (Fan et al., 2011; Mijanovich & Wietzman, 2003).

For example, Fan and colleagues (2011) found in a national sample of tenth grade students that

students in better resourced private schools perceived their school climate more positively in

order and safety, teacher student relationships and discipline and fairness than students in less

resourced public schools. Qualitative studies found that primarily minority students from lower socio-economic backgrounds attending schools in poorer school districts articulate an awareness of a lack of resources within their school district, in particular school supplies, available programs, and the maintenance of the school facility (Farrell et al., 2007; Phelan et al., 1994; Storz, 2008). In interviews, some students attributed poor school maintenance to school administrations' lack of care for students (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Moreover, students reported frustration that lacking school supplies restricted their learning experience (Storz, 2008). For example, students were unable to conduct science experiments. Students also articulated knowledge of their school cutting particular educational programming and the significance of the services these programs provided students.

Student mobility is quantified as the percentage of new students attending the school and the percentage of students leaving the school within a given year (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). Research indicates that a high percentage of student mobility within a school is related to students having a lower overall perception of their school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Kirshner et al., 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010). High student mobility is found to disrupt students' rhythm, sense of predictability and stability in their school and class environment. Bradshaw and colleagues (2009) conducted surveys with fourth and fifth grade elementary students and found that higher student mobility rates were associated with decreased perceptions of school safety. From a different view point, Kirshner et al. and a group of student researchers (2010) interviewed students who recently transferred from a school that had just been closed. Recent student transfers dealt with multiple challenges in settling into a new school environment. Students expressed challenges of losing friendships, anxiety towards

dealing with unfamiliar environment, not having established relationships with adults with whom they could confide, and becoming accustomed to new academic expectations and norms.

In addition, research indicates that high teacher attrition and school staff turnover are associated with students' having a lower perception of their school environment (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Griffith, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2010; Quiroz, 2001). When employing a school climate survey with 5th grade elementary school students, Mitchell and colleagues (2010) found that high teacher attrition and recent principal change was associated with lower overall student reported perception of their school climate as measured by the dimensions of fairness and order, parent involvement in the school, sharing of resources, student interpersonal relations, achievement motivation and the school facility. Quiroz (2001) conducted archival data analysis of twenty-seven, eighth grade students' personal narratives regarding their cumulative schooling experience. Student narratives often described teacher changes during the school year, especially in elementary school, as significant moments regarding their experience in school. These changes often consisted of temporary teachers for an extended portion of the school year. There was also a trend in narratives in which students described these teachers as conveying less of a commitment in teaching the class. Students identified these changes as disruptive to their learning, causing confusion and disorganization in their classroom.

School Level Factors Pertinent to this Particular Study

School level factors such as school resources, student mobility and high teacher attrition were linked to how students perceive their school environment. In the students' perception of school climate literature, students in public schools tended to have a more negative view of their school than students in private schools with more resources (Fan et al., 2011). In addition, students in schools with high student mobility and teacher attrition also tended to have a more

negative view of their school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). Furthermore, the student voice literature found that students expressed awareness of their school having fewer resources along with the importance of these resources (Storz, 2008). Students' also expressed struggling when they had multiple teachers within the same school year (Quiroz, 2001).These findings relate to current budget cuts in the Rockbridge School District. Recent cuts to educational funding resulted in the loss of school resources in the Rockbridge School District. For example, teachers have less class supplies and there is limited funding for field trips (Bunte, 2011). To handle current cuts, Rockbridge school district dropped some extracurricular programs, in particular school sports (Lavey, 2011). In addition, the school district fired teachers and school staff (MEA, 2011). This resulted in high teacher attrition throughout the district (Lavey, 2011; MEA, 2011). Teachers have either been dismissed or transferred to different schools to fill newly opened positions (Lavey, 2011; MEA, 2011). Rockbridge School District also closed various schools and is discussing the potential of closing more within the next few years. This will cause high student displacement throughout the district (Lavey, 2011).

<div align="center">Theoretical Approach toward Soliciting Student Perspective</div>

This study attempted to address a gap in the current literature (educational policy, student perceptions, and student voice) by examining students' experiences in a school that has undergone budget cuts. No specific study within this set of literature has studied how students experience and perceive their school environment within the context of budget cuts. Therefore, this study examined this phenomenon, by soliciting student voice and perspective. The following theoretical framework proposed by Mitra and Gross (2009), provided guidance in soliciting student voice.

This study utilizes Mitra and Gross (2009) proposed theoretical framework which is comprised of three different forms for increasing youth participation in school settings. The three forms are (1) "Being Heard", in which adults listen and learn from students' experiences, (2) "Collaborating with Adults", when students and adults work together to create change in their school and, (3) "Building Capacity for Leadership", where students are involved in student led initiatives and decisions regarding their school. Mitra and Gross (2009) argue that engaging student voice is foundation building and a context dependent process, in which the first stage must be attended to before engaging in additional forms. Thus, this thesis engaged in the first form of student voice, "Being Heard," by soliciting, examining and disseminating students' perspectives regarding their experiences and input on educational budget cuts.

Mitra and Gross's (2009) theoretical approach "Being Heard", was selected for two significant reasons. First, this approach places value on students as knowledgeable stakeholders in their own educational experience, whose perspective has been excluded in educational policy and research (Fielding, 2004, 2006; Ginwright, Cammorota, & Nogura, 2005; Kellet, 2005; Langhout, 2005; Mitra, 2003, 2004, 2008; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). This approach also encompasses the values within the field of community psychology which emphasizes the need for researchers to solicit community members who are structurally denied voice, to provide input on social problems, policies, and solutions pertinent to their lives and communities (Kelly, 1979; Langhout & Thomas, 2010; Rappaport, 1995).

The second reason is that studies show benefits to this approach within multiple ecological levels. At the individual level, soliciting student voice contributes to positive youth development, which includes developing a sense of agency, belonging and self-competence (Fielding, 2004; Ginwrith, 2003; Mitra, 2004). In addition, soliciting student perspective benefits

teachers, helping them develop skills in instruction, curriculum development, communication, and enhancing teacher-student relationships (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2004; Mitra, 2004; Storz, 2008). Research also documented soliciting student perspective to promote policy change at the district and national level (Ginwright & James, 2002; Soleimanpour, Brindis, Geierstanger, Kandawalla, & Kurlaender, 2008; Wernick, Woodford, & Siden, 2011). For example, a student initiative was successful in pushing a school district policy to protect the rights and safety of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and queer (Wernick et al., 2011). Studies that solicit student perspective find evidence of benefits at multiple ecological layers, which provide empirical validity for this theoretical approach. Soliciting student perspective regarding educational budget cuts is beneficial in that students feel their voice is heard and valued. In addition, sharing student narrative can help teachers and school administrators develop a greater understanding of students' perception of their schooling experience, along with the knowledge to attend to specific budgetary changes within the school environment that students identify as challenging. Finally, the Rockbridge School district will benefit by hearing what materials students' find crucial for progressing in school and where cuts have a smaller impact on students.

There has been little student input and perspective in informing national policy. Input has been achieved for other populations, such as, the disability rights movement. Similar to students, those with varying mental and physical health attributes were historically treated as not having the insight for decisions that directly impacted them. Yet, the disabilities right movement raised public awareness and played an active role in passing the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the Rehabilitation Act (1973) (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000; Feldblum, Barry, & Benfer, 2008; Pfeiffer, 1993; Shapiro, 1993; Switzer, 2003; West, 1991). The movement was effective in

forcing political, economic and cultural systems to recognize the experiential knowledge of people, whose lives would be affected by such legislation through challenging societal perception (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000; Switzer, 2003; West, 1991). Researchers played a role in such initiatives; in particular community psychologists were active in documenting organizing, identifying community members' experiential knowledge, and disseminating findings to multiple audiences to assist in challenging the societal perception (Rappaport et al., 1985). The disability rights movement illustrates a population, like students, who were historically viewed as lacking in experiential knowledge, can succeed in advocating for legislative change and shift in public perception, and the role community psychologists can play in these efforts. Soliciting student input and perspective regarding budget cuts might provide policy makers with crucial information such as; which cuts have a greater or lesser impact on students' experience and how students have been affected by budget cuts. Soliciting student narrative may inform national policy and shift societal perception of youth, as active stakeholders with crucial insights with regard to their education.

Two critiques regarding the utilization of data that solicits student perspective have been raised. Bentley (2005) a scholar in legal studies, states that there are logistically too many structural constraints placed on young people limiting their ability to have civic rights or make institutional change. As a result students may become even more disempowered by the process. Fielding (2004) a scholar in urban education identifies various misuses of research that solicits student perspective, accommodation, appropriation, and accumulation. Accommodation consists of taking students ideas that essentially challenge the status quo and incorporating them into existing structures. Appropriation elicits student voice to confirm the role of young people in school. Lastly, accumulation uses knowledge of the disempowered to provide information to

those in power. These concerns highlight the complexity across disciplines regarding the role of students in research. In addition, this debate encourages researchers to identify ways to engage students in an empowering manner and to be conscious of how information is utilized.

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to understand students' schooling experience within the context of educational budget cuts in the Rockbridge School District. Using a phenomenological approach, this study engaged sixth and seventh grade students in focus group discussions around their schooling experience. In addition, focus groups solicited student input of potential solutions and recommendations for school policy regarding the budget cuts.

This study addressed the following research questions:

(1) What are students' experiences within the context of budget cuts?

(2) How can students' experiences inform future budgeting decisions?

This study provides information that contributes to three different sets of literature: (1) examining how students experience educational budget cuts (educational policy literature) (2) understanding how students perceive school budget cuts (student perceptions literature), and (3) important venues to engage student voice (student voice literature). This study contributes to the educational policy literature by examining students' experiences in a school where budget cuts have occurred. This was accomplished by directly soliciting student perspective. This study attends to the student perception literature by inquiring into how students understand and make sense of the budget cuts. Finally, this study addresses the student voice literature by engaging students in new areas of school improvement through discussion on educational funding.

In addition to advancing the research literature, this study has the potential to provide information that can benefit the larger Rockbridge School District. Aggregated student focus

groups findings will be publicly presented to the local school and disseminated through a concise comprehensive pamphlet to local school officials, principals, school staff, teachers and students. Focus group findings will present information in the following areas: students' schooling experiences within the context of the budget cuts and student identified strategies to deal with the budget cuts. This information will provide school officials insight into understanding students' schooling experiences within the context of the budget cuts. Furthermore, focus groups findings that specifically address student identified strategies for handling the budget cuts can inform school officials of items to preserve in future budgetary decisions. Lastly, findings can offer youth insight for school improvement and alternative ideas to cope with the budget cuts.

Chapter 2: Method

Qualitative methods are more suitable than quantitative methods for exploring complex phenomena that are less understood in research. Specifically, compared to quantitative methods that require pre-established categories, qualitative methods allow for a more exploratory inquiry into a particular phenomenon (Kleinman, 2007; Patton, 2002). A key goal of this study is to understand students' experiences within the context of the budget cuts in the Rockbridge School District. Thus, qualitative methods are ideally suited for this study because they are designed to provide rich details about individuals' experiences, viewpoints and perspectives (Creswell, 2007). In addition, there is limited research that seeks to understand students' schooling experiences in schools where budget cuts have occurred. Due to this lack of research, qualitative methods are appropriate to explore the phenomenon of interest, student experiences in a school where budget cuts have occurred (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2001; Patton, 2002).

Furthermore, qualitative methods also address two core values in community psychology. First, qualitative methods involve detailed descriptions of the particular environment in which the experience occurs. Attending to the local context of the phenomenon of interest is a core value in community psychology (Kelly, 1979; Trickett, 1996). Student focus groups provide information to help further understand the particular context of the school and district contextualizing participants' perceptions, actions and behaviors. Second, soliciting participant narrative is an empowering process, a core value in community psychology (Rappaport, 1987). Empowerment is an intentional process in which participants gain greater share of resources (Rappaport, 1987). Rappaport (1987) emphasized the importance of being able to tell one's story as a significant resource. Student focus groups which aim to solicit student narrative from poorly funded school districts facing a loss in resources provide an environment in which student perspective is acknowledged, desired and validated.

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Qualitative Approach

This study applied a phenomenological approach. The aim of a phenomenological approach is to examine a specific group of individuals' experiences in order to develop a rich understanding of a particular phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002). Phenomenological studies typically consist of small homogenous samples which are utilized to capture the detailed experience of the phenomenon for a particular group of individuals. This study sought to understand students' experiences of the school budget cuts in the Rockbridge School District and involved in-depth focus group discussions around students' experiences.

Student Focus Groups

A focus group consists of an interview with a small group of people around a specific topic (Patton, 2002). Focus groups were chosen to solicit student perspectives on the Rockbridge School District budget cuts for multiple reasons. Focus groups allow the researcher the opportunity to gather an abundant amount of data in a short period of time (Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002). Focus groups also offer individuals a forum to express their subjective experience, evoking multiple perspectives. Previous literature emphasizes focus groups as a successful method to solicit student voice (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005; Storz, 2008; Zion, 2009). Focus groups provide an opportunity for researchers not only to gain individual students experiences regarding the budget cuts, but also to capture student interaction within the group (Zion, 2009). Group interaction has the potential to enhance student participation, building off the responses of other group members to produce shared terminology and reconsideration of individual perceptions (Kitzinger, 1995; Patton, 2002; Shoaf & Shoaf, 2006). This may be a particularly important factor when discussing the budget cuts, a subject that may feel overwhelming for students to discuss on their own. Student discussion on the budget cuts may

help some students develop a shared understanding of what the budget cuts are, and work together to identify changes they observed in their school. In addition, being with other students may raise student comfort levels to personally disclose, in contrast with a one on one interview with someone they do not know (Hyde et al., 2005; Storz, 2008).

It is important to note that there is debate in the literature regarding the fit of focus groups as a method for phenomenological studies (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2008; Chiu, 2007; Kooken, Haase, & Russell, 2007a, 2007b; Webb, 2003; Webb & Kevern, 2001; Wilkinson, 1998). Webb and Kevern (2001) argue that phenomenological studies require an individual to express their experience, and that the focus group environment skews individual narratives. In addition, they argue that data analysis for focus groups includes member checks where researchers present data analysis back to the participants. They note that this differs from traditional phenomenological approaches that are deemed credible if the researcher's description captures the essence of the experience, as judged by whether they convey a systematic approach to data analysis (Giorgi, 1988). Alternatively, Bradbury-Jones and colleagues (2008) contest Webb and Kevern's (2000) conclusions, claiming focus groups enhance the credibility of phenomenological research. They argue that the group approach helps phenomenologists identify personal prejudices. Through group discussion, group members challenge one another and the researcher, providing opportunities for crosschecking and clarification. This study adopts Bradbury-Jones and colleagues (2008) standpoint, that there are advantages for using, focus groups in phenomenological studies. There is also a well-established phenomenological data analytic approach that incorporates member checks. Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis provides a clear systematic guideline to conduct analysis and incorporates participant

feedback. Colaizzi's data analysis plan will be employed in this study. For further detail see data analysis section below.

Despite their advantages focus groups have limitations. One prominent limitation is that group interviews are vulnerable to over representing loud and salient voices that do not reflect accurately the majority of the groups' perspective. In addition, self-conscious participants may voice agreement with opinions exerted by more vocal members in order to avoid confrontation. Researchers articulate that data analysis is often difficult to determine which parts of the group interview portray group process and norms versus participant's subjective experiences of a particular phenomenon (Hyde et al., 2005). Focus groups have additional challenges. Contrary to an individual interview, a facilitator must attend to multiple participants within one discussion and an array of potential dynamics. Typical group dynamics noted in the literature include, the group interview being dominated by one participant. The participant may be repetitious in their answers or feel they have an authority over others. Group dynamics also include lack of participation which could consist of a few quiet individuals within the group or an entire group. Another noted dynamic is side talk among group members during the discussion. Also, specific group members may disagree with one another, resulting in the group discussion being polarized and limited in participation (Hyde et al., 2005; Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk, & Berger, 2001; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, group interviews with youth specifically are vulnerable to shy participants, group members goofing off and the group discussion losing focus (Hyde et al., 2005). With such a range of possible group interactions the facilitator role is crucial. Yet, the facilitator can also heavily influence group discussion (Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002). Variation in facilitation techniques or facilitators can produce stark differences in the focus group data. This creates a challenge during analysis in determining whether group

discussion varied due to differences in group narrative or in facilitation (Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton 2002).

Precautionary steps have been taken to prepare for focus groups. Resources were located to inform focus group facilitation and protocol development (Kaner et al., 2001; Krueger & Morgan, 1998; Patton, 2002). I gathered literature around specific facilitation techniques including creating a comfortable environment for participants (Kaner et al., 2001; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997), facilitating the interview so it is not dominated by vocal participants (Kaner et al., 2001; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002), seeking out quiet participants (Kaner et al., 2001; Morgan & Krueger, 1998), and specifically attending to youth dynamics (Hyde et al., 2005).

Furthermore, I created a focus group appendix to address the specific challenge of conducting focus groups that capture group narrative, along with structures to document my own consistency in facilitation. I incorporated the following five strategies in the focus group appendix. First, I listened to all existing audio recording before conducting the proceeding focus group. By listening to the recording I was able to be reflective of my own facilitation, gauging which strategies worked and what challenges I could possibly expect in future group discussions. Second, I had a note taker maintain a count of the number of comments made by each participant. This was checked against the audio, allowing me to gage the degree of group participation. Third, I compiled a list of the above mentioned problems from the literature that are typically found in focus groups (Hyde et al., 2005; Kaner et al., 2001; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002). These problems are accompanied by recommended strategies to employ. Strategies include the facilitator actively soliciting diverse perspectives, not assuming silence indicates group agreement, intentionally requesting voices that have not been heard, and

encouraging members to voice differences in perspective. Additional strategies include offering the focus group breaks, and addressing problematic behaviors to the group in a non-confrontational manner. I also changed the format to be more engaging by bringing a flip chart to record participant ideas and also monitored when the discussion stalled to determine when to transition to the next question.

This list informed the design of an observation sheet which completed after each focus group. I recorded any problems that arose during the focus group, the strategies I utilized, any alternative strategies I employed outside of the literature and the degree of success achieved when implementing each strategy. This facilitator appendix allowed for a degree of flexibility in using various strategies to solicit rich dialogue yet it still provides a pre-established rubric of potential problems and a list of recommended strategies to employ. For further details of the facilitator appendix, see appendix A. The observation sheet also provides documentation to gauge consistency in facilitation across focus groups and group participation. To view the observation sheet, see appendix B. All observation sheets were recorded in Microsoft word.

Furthermore, a brief one page survey was passed out after each focus group. The survey was designed to determine the degree to which student's felt their voices were heard in the group discussion and their own level agreement with the opinions expressed during the focus group. Hyde and colleagues (2005) recommend cross checking the trustworthiness of focus group data by using a post interview questionnaire. This allowed me to collect corroborating evidence on the degree to which group narrative reflected the majority of the participation's subjective experiences and opinions. The survey consisted of twelve statements accompanied by four Likert Scale responses, along with an open ended question to provide room for participants to indicate any additional thoughts. (To view the survey see appendix C).

I have eight years' experience working with youth, including being trained and training others in multiple settings (schools, afterschool and summer camps) and designing educational activities that aim for full participation of youth while fostering supportive youth dynamics. Prior to conducting my thesis, I facilitated group dialogue with incarcerated women discussing issues of injustice and domestic violence and two photovoice projects that engaged youth (ages nine to eleven, and fourteen to seventeen) in critical reflective dialogue around individual photographs. I participated in two focus groups trainings, and was the lead facilitator conducting four focus groups with youth aged thirteen to seventeen, for two different research projects.

Setting & Sample

The sample consisted of students attending Hayward school located in the Rockbridge School District. Hayward is an elementary school consisting of kindergarten through 7th grades. Hayward is a small elementary school located in the Rockbridge School District, with 308 students, 18.6 eligible full time teachers and a student teacher ratio of 16.6 students per teacher. Hayward's student body is predominately from low-income families. The school is title 1 eligible, with 283 students, 92% of the student body qualified for free and reduced lunch. Hayward's student body is predominately African American (78%), with 12% white, 7% Latino/a, 2% Asia, and less than 1% American Indian (GreatSchools.Org, 2012). Overall, Hayward has performed poorly on state standardized tests as reported by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Based on standardized test results state wide, Great School rated Hayward in the bottom 10% of schools in the state (GreatSchools.Org, 2012).

The week prior to conducting focus groups, Rockbridge School District adopted a re-structuring plan for the entire school district which is expected to save the district 2.5 million dollars (Henderson, 2012). This plan included the closing of four schools. Hayward is one of the

schools to be closed at the end of the 2012 school year (Henderson, 2012; Lavey, 2012a, 2012b; Wittrock, 2012).

Focus Group

Four focus groups were conducted, each composed of four students in the sixth and seventh grade. Sixth and seventh graders were eligible for recruitment, only if they attended Hayward a year prior to the implementation of current budget cuts. Focus groups were conducted in late spring toward the end of the school year, in order for students to reflect on the experience of the budget cuts during their current school year. During student classroom announcements, a total of eighteen sixth and seventh grade students identified as being at the school the prior year, and were therefore eligible to participate in the study. I was effective in recruiting sixteen out of the eighteen eligible students. Thus, I was successful in recruiting 89% of the participants out of the eligible sample. Two of the focus groups consisted of sixth graders (n= 8), and the two other focus groups consisted of seventh graders (n=8). Three out of every four students were female (75%). Three out of the four students were African American, and one out of every four students was Latina (25%).

Sixth and seventh grade students were chosen purposively because prior studies reported finding these students to be at a developmental stage in which they are cognizant of the environment around them and aware of what factors impact the quality of their learning experience (Storz, 2008; Zion, 2009). Storz (2008) had initially designed a study which involved interviewing a small group of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students regarding a teacher professional development project. Moved by the insights of the initial group of students, the research team decided to conduct a large scale project involving focus groups with two hundred and fifty; sixth, seventh and eighth grade students located in four urban schools. Storz (2008)

found the students to be incredibly articulate, and able to recognize factors that influence their public education. Similarly, Zion (2009) conducted focus groups with middle school and high school students around current school reform policies finding both groups produced rich and articulate dialogue. Focus group protocol was piloted with fifth, sixth and eighth grade students.

Homogenous sampling is a strategy used heavily in phenomenological studies to describe a particular subgroup in depth. Both Patton (2002) and Morgan & Krueger (1998) recommend constructing focus groups with participants of who share a similar background. This is done to obtain high quality data by creating an environment with a shared understanding in which participants can express their own views and respond to others throughout the discussion. This study constructed focus groups within the same school in the Rockbridge School District. Participants in focus groups were separated by grade level, sixth and seventh grade. Grades were chosen as a distinguishing factor for creating homogenous groups for three reasons. First, sixth and seventh grade students are at different developmental stages and vary in educational experience and concerns. For example, seventh grade students are in transition at the highest grade Hayward offers, and may reflect more on how their school experience prepared them for high school. Sixth grade students were planning to continue their educational experience at Hayward, and may focus on what changes or improvements they would have liked to see occur at their school. Second, Zion (2009) stresses a crucial factor in conducting focus groups with adolescent youth is to promote a comfortable environment in which participants have some degree of familiarity with one another. By constructing focus groups by grade level, participants have a higher chance of being familiar with one another. Lastly, Morgan and Krueger (1998) stress the importance of being mindful of potential dynamics of power within the group. Constructing focus groups by grade levels decrease potential power dynamics between grades.

For example a sixth grade student may feel intimidated expressing their opinion in front of a group of seventh graders, or an seventh grade student may feel their opinion is more important than a sixth grade students based on their seniority or more time spent in school.

Recruitment for Student Focus Groups

In order to participate in focus groups all student participants must have provided signed parental consent and student assent forms (see appendix D). Verbal consent over the phone was obtained by parents who indicated concerns regarding U.S. citizenship (see appendix E). This modification to procedure was approved through the Michigan State Institutional Review Board. Four recruitment strategies were implemented, with permission from the school principal and teachers. First, I came during staff lunch hours to ask teachers for permission to make announcements in their classrooms and then scheduled a time to make classroom announcements. Parent consent forms and student assent forms were distributed to interested students after class presentations. Second, I placed fliers in the sixth and seventh grade classroom providing information for students, parents and teachers about the study. I had different fliers to appeal to various stakeholders within the school: students, teachers, and parents (see appendix F). Third, I worked in the classroom and intentionally engaged students in dialogue around the study and building relationships and trust with students. Fourth, I had consent and assent forms easily located in the students' homeroom classroom. I emailed the teachers weekly to see if forms have been turned in, and picked up forms within the week. In addition, food was provided to students who participated in the focus groups as an incentive for students to volunteer. This information was disseminated throughout all four recruitment strategies.

Procedure for Student Focus Groups

Prior to conducting the focus groups, multiple arrangements were made. Focus groups were held during school hours. Based on teacher request focus groups were conducted during study hall to minimize any class disruption. I worked with the principal to arrange a private space on the school grounds to conduct the focus groups. The school nurse was also contacted prior to the focus groups, to have pre-established communication in case confidentiality needed to be broken. Confidentiality did not need to be broken.

I facilitated all focus groups, which lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour. Focus groups were audio-taped and notes were taken by an observing undergraduate assistant. The undergraduate assistant was provided a packet to draw a diagram of the physical location of all students in the group and to tally the number of comments made by each student. This helped orient me during the transcription process and allowed me to track the degree of individual and group participation across focus groups. The undergraduate had a handout on which to write notes for each of the focus group questions. Prior to the focus groups, undergraduates were informed of the study's purpose, received IRB approval, and were trained in note taking.

At the start of each focus group, I provided an introduction to the study, gathered consent forms from all participants, and made certain participants were comfortable proceeding. I also went over group rules such as not talking about what specific students say once the focus group is over, and to respect diverse opinions. After all students agreed to the ground rules, I began the discussion. After the focus group, I debriefed with the group, inquiring about their experience during the focus group, and if they had any particular concerns. For further details of the focus group protocol see appendix G. After the focus group discussion was completed, students were asked to fill out a brief survey regarding their experience in the focus group. Students were reminded that they had the right to not fill out the survey, to skip any questions, and that I was

available to assist in reading survey questions. Once the survey was completed, I informed

students that if they had any personal concerns, to feel free to stay back and discuss them. None

of the students indicated having any personal concerns with their focus group experience.

Measures

Focus group discussion consisted of semi-structured interviews. Student groups were

given guiding questions with follow up probes to strategically address and provide information

for the relevant study research questions (i.e., What are students' experiences within the context

of the budget cuts? How can students' experiences inform school districts future budgeting

decisions?). Interview questions were open ended allowing students to talk about their individual

subjective experiences and engage in dialogue with one another. Interview questions inquired

into the following main topics: (1) students' experiences in school within the recent school year

(2) what resources students need in order to do well in school (3) what challenges students face

in school (4) what ideas students have regarding changing their school and (5) solutions to

handling the budget cuts. Measures had been piloted and modified with two eighth grade

students, three sixth grade students and five fifth grade students. Pilots were conducted with

groups of students based on grade level and a few one on one interviews.

Security Procedure

Data were de-identified and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Parent consent and youth

assent forms were stored separately. Audio tapes were uploaded onto the researcher's password

protected computer, transcribed, re-listened to and checked against the transcription to verify

accuracy. Undergraduates also participated in checking transcripts against audio tapes as an

external check. Notes taken during the focus group were checked with transcription. When data

analysis was completed all digital audio files were erased.

Data Analytic Plan

This study utilized Colaizzi's (1978) proposed method of data analysis. This method of data analysis was chosen for several reasons. First, it is often employed in analyzing typically descriptive phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007). Second, Colaizzi's approach consists of clear steps suitable for a novice researcher (Sanders, 2003). Third, it incorporates member checks, a significant step for analyzing focus groups (Morgan & Kruger, 1998).

The first step is immersing oneself in the data and acquiring an understanding of each transcript. I personally facilitated each student focus group. I then listened to and transcribed each focus group audio prior to conducting data analysis. By engaging in all of the steps of data collection, I acquired a firm grasp of the data preceding analysis. The second step involved inductive analysis. This entailed thoroughly reading each transcript and identifying statements significant that helped me understand students' experiences within the context of the budget cuts. The third step is formulating meaning for each identified significant statement. I revisited each significant statement and carefully created an associated formulated meaning. Finally, in the fourth step of analysis, I clustered similar formulated meanings across all transcripts and used these clusters to identify emerging themes (For further details see Appendix H). These themes were then submitted to member checks.

The fifth step of data analysis is providing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon of interest. I reviewed each theme cluster and then proceeded to describe each theme clusters in great detail, including comments and feedback from students during member checks. The sixth step is describing the fundamental essence or structure of the phenomenon. After writing out an exhaustive description of my findings, I was able to review my description

and identify the fundamental components of the phenomenon, which is incorporated into my findings section (see below).

Verification of Results

Guba and Lincoln (1989) adequacy criteria were applied to assure trustworthiness in findings. These criteria were employed for various reasons. First, it provided a clear set of criteria for the researcher. Second, the criteria is heavily used, recommended, and cited in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; McNall & Foster-Fishman, 2007; Patton, 2002). Guba and Lincon's (1989) criteria for trustworthiness include the following components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmabilty.

Credibility is the extent to which findings portray participants' ideas. To ensure credibility I employed the following fourth strategies. The first strategy was prolonged engagement with the data. This was achieved through conducting, transcribing and analyzing the data with Coalizzi's approach. Second, credibility is achieved through incorporating exterior viewpoints. Peer review was used as an exterior check of the research process. Peer review is an essential strategy which allowed me to be exposed to alternative perspectives particularly during data analysis (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002). Regular meetings were held with my thesis chair to discuss stages throughout data collection and analysis (Sanders, 2003). In addition, inter-coder reliability was conducted by my thesis chair at step three and four of data analysis. For step three, both coders independently created formulated meanings. In step four, my thesis chair utilized a code book, which listed my definitions and rules for each identified thematic cluster to code significant statements. In both steps we achieved above 80% in consistency in formulated meanings and code application.

Third, students completed surveys after each focus group discussion, designed to assess whether students felt their voices were heard in the focus group discussion (N=16 students). Survey questions consisted of Likert scale responses. Scores ranged from 0 (students strongly felt that their voices were not heard) to 3 (students strongly felt their voices were heard). The 12 item scale scored a Cronbach's alpha of .79. On average, students indicated feeling mostly (2) to strongly (3) that their voice was heard in the focus group (M= 2.51, SD= .41; Confidence Interval: 2.10-2.91).

Fourth, member checks with participants were conducted. Findings were presented and discussed with students in the fourth step of data analysis (i.e., clustered formulated meanings). Because the school was closing this year, member checks were conducted over a two day period during students' study hall before the final write-up of the results. Member checks were conducted in a private room in two separate sessions, with seven students participating in session one, and six students participating in session two. Thus, thirteen students out of the sixteen students who participated in the study (81%) were able to provide feedback regarding the study findings. Each member check session included participation from a student in each of the four original focus groups. This was done to obtain diverse focus group representation in the member checks.

In traditional member checks, participants are often given a written copy of the findings and are asked to provide feedback (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). With students this process is more complicated. First, there are issues of literacy in that students may be unable to read, comprehend, or stay focused long enough to provide input on a lengthy report of the findings. Second, there are potential power dynamics between myself (an adult researcher) and the students. Social interactions between student and adults typically consist of asymmetric

power relations. Students are often instructed to view adults as possessing knowledge and authority (Camino, 2005; Checkoway& Richard-Schuster, 2003; Kellet, 2004 & 2005). Therefore, my concern was that the students might feel they did not have right to critique the focus group findings.

To address the power dynamics, I first asked students to work together to brainstorm what changes they remember discussing in their focus groups regarding their experiences in school this year compared to previous years. Students were given markers and butcher paper. They first created a web. At the center of the web they were asked to write, "Changes in School". Students then listed the changes they remembered discussing in their focus group by drawing arms and attaching them to the center of the web. Students color coded their webs, indicating whether they associated these changes with the budget cuts, or alternative reasons. (For further visual illustration see, Figure One: Student Member Checks Web). Students were asked to make note of any areas of disagreement with each other. I then presented students with my findings on posters. The posters were colorful and consisted of the cluster name, rules for including quotes in a particular cluster and example quotes from the focus group transcripts. I engaged them in a facilitated dialogue regarding their webs compared to the findings I presented. Since students worked together to re-construct their memory of the focus group discussion, they were vocal and appeared confident in comparing their webs to my findings. In addition, they were visually able to identify differences and similarities. For any areas of disagreement, new definitions, rules for clustering and perspectives were jotted down on available butcher paper. All changes were then reviewed by the group. Students voted on whether they felt the new rule accurately reflected their opinions. In both sessions, students were able to reach full agreement. Notably, students did not have any disagreement with the identified clusters, but they did add additional rules and

explanations for the clusters. In particular, they included a variety of reasons for why particular changes occurred in their school this year. For example, students articulated that the school closing contributed to a decrease in both school activities and the overall maintenance of the school. I took field notes after each member check session and incorporated feedback into the data analysis. New rules formed in the first member check session were presented to students in the second member check session for comments and feedback. Students tended to agree with their peers in the first member check session.

Figure 1: Student Member Checks Web
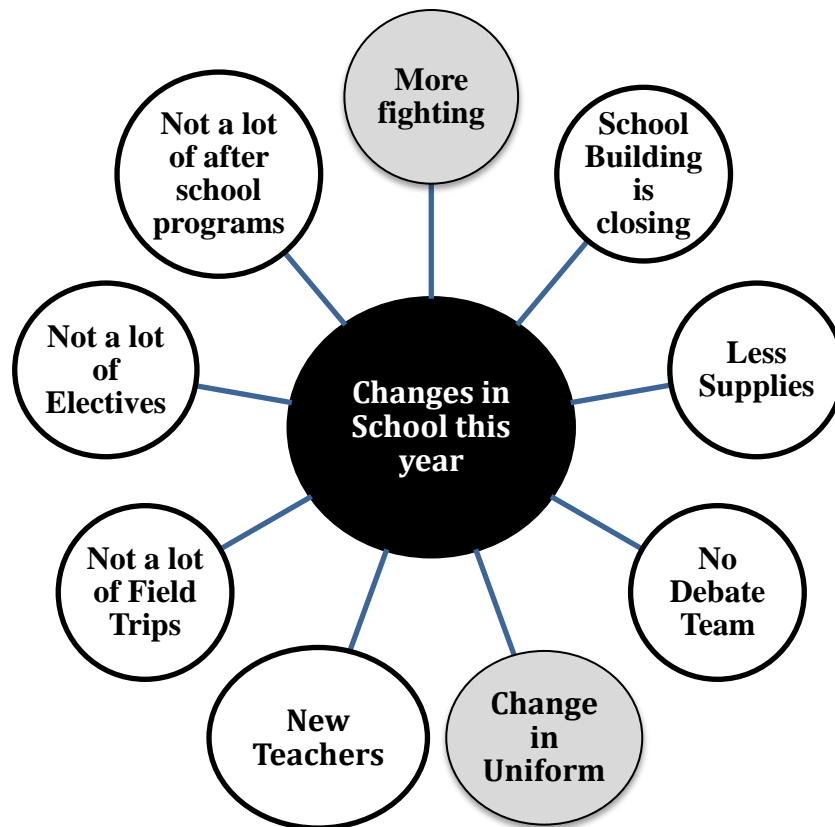
Key:
Black Outlined Circle = Related to budget cuts
Grey Filled Circle = Not related to budget cuts

Confirmability is the extent findings are based in the data. One strategy is to practice reflexivity which involves being actively introspective of one's own biases and assumptions. This was done maintaining a log of the my own reactions and experiences throughout the research process, prior to collecting data, during recruitment, data collection, and in data analysis (Daly, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kleinmen, 2007). This process allowed me to remain cognizant of my own internal processes (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002). In addition, I attached focus group IDs to all themes linking them

to specific focus group transcripts. This provided a clear path for tracking overarching themes to their original source (McNall & Foster-Fishman, 2007).

Transferability is the ability to identify the context of the study in great detail to allow readers enough information to determine if findings could apply to similar contexts. In my thesis defense I provide background information on the school, participant selection, to support readers with adequate information to determine the contexts of the findings. My description of the school was restricted in order to ensure the confidentiality of the school and district.

Dependability is the degree of stability throughout the project. I kept an audit trail of all of my decisions along the way in particular focusing on the data collection and analysis stages. I created a focus group appendix which documented all the strategies I followed while conducting focus groups. I reviewed each strategy in the appendix prior to conducting a focus group. After each focus group, I documented strategies utilized and their effectiveness. This process supported my efforts to remain cognizant of previously effective strategies when conducting the next focus group. I also created a codebook which listed all clusters, provided definitions, examples and criteria for grouping a quote in a cluster (For further detail see appendix I).

Lastly, another strategy heavily employed in phenomelogical studies; include supplying "rich, thick descriptions" of the particular phenomenon when writing up the results (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Using multiple quotes from students, I have provided the committee and future readers with information to be able to make their own decisions regarding findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Chapter 3: Results

Results are organized around prominent themes reported across student focus groups. The first section of results focuses on students' general descriptions of their experiences in school this year, 2011-2012. The second section of results focuses on changes students identified in their school during the year. The third section consists of findings related to students' conceptualization of and solutions to the budget cuts in their school. Lastly, the fourth section consists of two possible mediated effects that students identified during member checks.

The table below provides a summary of the themes that emerged across student focus groups. The second column indicates the prevalence for each theme discussed across all four focus groups. The third column specifies the prevalence in which themes were brought up by students during member checks, in the two separate sessions. For member checks, field notes and student's listed brainstorms were utilized to identify prevalence of themes. Lastly, column four indicates if students identified the budget cuts as a contributing factor to the corresponding theme. Focus group transcripts, field notes, and students brainstorms during member checks were all used to determine if students identified the budget cuts as partial contributing to changes they perceived in their school (For further detail see Table 1).

Table 1: Prevalence of Themes across Focus Groups and Member Checks

Themes	Focus Groups (4 Focus Groups)	Across Member Checks (2 Sessions)	Budget Cuts Contributing to Change
Negative Description of the Current School Year	100%	100%	Yes
Increased Teacher Attrition	100%	100%	Yes
Negative Changes in Teacher Instruction	100%	100%	Yes
Negative Change in Classroom Management	100%	100%	Yes
Less School Supplies	100%	100%	Yes
Fewer Electives	100%	100%	Yes
Less School Activities	100%	100%	Yes

Table 1: Prevalence of Themes across Focus Groups and Member Checks (cont'd)

Themes	Focus Groups (4 Focus Groups)	Across Member Checks (2 Sessions)	Budget Cuts Contributing to Change
Poor School Facilities	75%	50%	Yes
School Closure	75%	100%	Yes
Demonstrated an Understanding of Budget Cuts	100%	N/A	N/A
Had Solutions to the Budget Cuts	100%	N/A	N/A

Section One: What are students' experiences within the context of the budget cuts?

Students' Descriptions of their School Year

Students articulated their overall experiences in school as negative. Across all four focus groups students described their experiences in school as unexciting, lacking activities that promote engagement. "*It's boring. The teachers don't make it fun, they make it boring*" (student focus group). Furthermore, students described their school environment as stringent, restricting their ability to move around the school. Students expressed resentment toward being required to walk in straight lines, requesting permission to go to the bathroom or get a sip of water. Students noted that this was a common perceptions shared among many students within their grade. Overall, students described their general experiences in school as unpleasant.

Notably, students across all four focus groups identified last year as a more enjoyable experience compared to their current school year. *"Last year was better, there was a lot more fun"* (student focus group). Students described last year as more engaging, and interesting. Furthermore, students articulated having more autonomy last year. *"Like we had more freedom last year"* (student focus group). Students expressed an overall preference for the previous school year, in contrast they articulated not even wanting to come to school this year.

> *S: Like last year, it was fun but this year.*

S: It's strict.

S: It's boring!

S: I don't wanna come here no more.

*S: Like okay. It was fun last year. But I don't know! It didn't really affect me. I
don't care.*

I: Yeah? You're going to be okay either way?

S: Oh, no! I don't want to be here!

Alternatively, a few students noted that they and other students came to school for other reasons
(e.g., to see their peers or for a particular afterschool program). Yet these students echoed similar
dislike expressed by their peers of their current school year.

Students attributed their school as a negative experience this year for multiple reasons.
The primary reason found across all four focus groups was due to the changes implemented
during the current school year. Changes include findings noted in further detail below: increased
teacher attrition, less school supplies, fewer electives, and fewer school activities.

S: Last year was better.

I: Last year was better, why do you say that?

S: There was a lot more fun.

S: And this year they're being cheap.

S: We used to get pencils.

S: Like most teachers complain a lot.

S: The teacher last year, she never complained about anything.

S: Now, they don't care.

S: Last year, there were better teachers.

Students noted many students in their grade were aware of and discussed the changes implemented in their school. In one focus group, students noted that in addition to negative changes made this year, many of their close friends had transferred to another school. These students stated that school was less fun than previous years when their friends had attended.

Section Two: Students' Perceptions of Changes in their School This Year

School Level Factors: Increased Teacher Attrition

One prominent change identified across all four student focus groups is greater teacher attrition this year compared to last year. Some teachers that had taught at the school for years moved to different schools. Students stated it was hard to see teachers leave, many of whom they had come to know and cared for.

> *We had a whole bunch of teachers that were great at what they did, but now we only have a few teachers. Like* [Teacher Name] *was my homie. I did a whole bunch of stuff in his class for extra things. He made it fun for us. Now he's gone. He went to another school.*

When describing their school year, students identified teacher turnover as a significant negative change in their school experience compared to previous years.

In addition to losing former teachers, the sixth and seventh grade students had multiple teachers come in to teach their classes who ended up leaving the school before the year was over. The sixth and seventh grade students typically shared two teachers each grade was assigned a homeroom teacher who taught two subjects. One teacher remained the same throughout the entire school year, the sixth grade homeroom teacher. Yet, both the sixth and seventh grade had teachers transition in and out, filling the other teaching position. These particular transitions student described as abrupt, rough, and anxiety provoking.

S: We had all these teachers.

S: I was about to leave.

I: Why were you about to leave?

S: Cause…we had to change all these different like things. It's not the teachers, but like a different work style.

S: Yeah things that we had learned before we had to learn all over again every time a new teacher came.

Teacher turnover disrupted the students' schedules and their stable teacher's curriculum. Teachers who came to fill a teaching position felt equipped to teach specific subjects. Therefore, the one teacher who remained the same throughout the school year changed subjects to accommodate the needs of the incoming teacher. Students not only had to become accustomed to a new teacher, but also had to adjust to different subjects being taught by their teachers. Thus, frequent teacher attrition was reported in all student focus groups as a significant negative change students had experienced this year compared to previous years.

School level changes, such as teacher attrition, had implications for variations in the classroom environment. Notably, students observed two prominent changes with current teachers. Students articulated variations both in their teacher's *instructional style* and *classroom management* compared to last year teachers along with teachers earlier in the school year. Overall, students described disliking these changes.

Classroom Level Factors: Instructional Style

Students described changes in their teacher's instructional style. They articulated struggling with learning different teachers' instructional style each time a teacher switched during the current school year. *"I usually get like good grades in math. But when we switched teachers they had totally different strategies for how to teach math, so I really got confused"* (student focus group). Even the students perceived as studious struggled academically with teacher switching. *"Most of us in our class when we switched teachers, like our grades dropped.*

And we all know [Student Name] *had good grades but all of a sudden she got an A minus. How the hell did that happen?"* (student focus group). Students described becoming confused, regarding how their new teacher preferred their work to be completed, and learning different strategies taught to them for doing their work.

Students also noted that their drop in academic grades impacted their parents as well. They observed that their parents were frustrated and called their teachers often to complain.

S: And then, you got the teachers are mad because of parents calling.

I: So your parents have called to say what's going on?

S: Cause they're tired of us coming home with bad grades.

Students articulated being punished by their parents for receiving poor grades; by docking their allowance or time playing with video games. Notably, changes in students schooling experiences this year also transferred into their life outside of school.

In addition to the adjustment in learning various instructional styles throughout the year, students also articulated a difference in how their teachers taught class last year compared to this year. In particular, that their teachers did not engage the entire class this year. *"And she'll do a question. And she'll only ask five people. And I don't get why you can't ask the whole class, cause that way, we would all have a question to ask"* (student focus group). Furthermore, students identified changes in their teachers' instruction of curriculum this year as more boring, predictable and repetitive, often consisting of copying notes or watching videos. Students attributed their teacher's lack of engagement with instruction and providing new material, as their teachers not caring about their education.

S: They don't really care about our education.

I: Why don't you feel like they care about your education?

S: You know it's lame, they just turn on a video, shut off the light, just watch a video.

Some students also expressed fear of not being adequately prepared for the upcoming school year, indicating they welcomed more challenging work. Alternatively, other students stated they would favor their teachers' present more interesting material and engaging activities. Overall students expressed dislike for their current teacher's instructional style.

Students preferred last year teachers' instructional style, stating that their class activities were more engaging, and that they learned more last year. "*Last year was easier on us, like we got to learn more but, it was easier for us to learn"* (student focus group). They recalled last year having the opportunity to do various fun and interactive activities in class including participating in a game show using their social studies textbook curriculum. Students also described last year's teachers utilizing more interactive technology to teach, such as smart boards. Furthermore, students described their work as more challenging last year and feeling more prepared.

> *I: Do you think umm, do you feel like your work last year was a little too easy or repetitive?*
>
> *S: No, it was actually fun!*
>
> *S: It was really fun!*
>
> *S: It was like kind of hard, like we got an 8th grade, I think a work sheet*
>
> *S: She like had us work like above what we were normally doing so she actually get us prepare.*

In general, students described last year as being more fun, learning more and engaging in more challenging work.

Classroom Level Factors: Classroom Management

Students also described changes in how their teachers managed the class this year compared to last year. Classroom management encompasses behaviors such as rules and

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expectations, opportunity to work in groups or with partners, disciplinary measures, and the teachers' overall focus in overseeing the classroom.

Students described their class as being generally stricter this year, having various rules and that required them to ask permission frequently.

> *She don't let us, get up and like get something to drink or use the bathroom or anything like that. You have to raise your hand. If you don't ask her, the way she wants you to ask her, 'may I please use the bathroom.' You have to ask all nice and stuff or you're just going to have to sit there.*

Students also described having to work in silence often this year, independently, at their assigned seat. Students identified this rule as limiting both their ability to get help from other students and developing skills to work in groups. *"Some people don't work together and if we do more group work they could learn how to work together"* (student focus group). Overall, students described their current school year as more restrictive.

In comparison, last year students described being able to talk with one another and engage with the teacher when given instructions. Furthermore, students were able to move around the classroom freely, and had an opportunity to engage in group work.

> *S: Last year we could. We could sit next to a neighbor and we could have partners.*

> *I: Does it help sometimes to move around and work with a partner?*

> *Group: Yes!*

> *S: Cuz like if you know this problem and your partner don't, then you can help them with that. If you don't know this problem and then your partner do, they can help you with that.*

Students described last year only having to work independently when the teacher found them disruptive or unproductive in completing their work.

Students have various explanations for why teachers are stricter this year compared to last year. Some students thought that since both teachers had taught at a "real middle" school

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they were stricter. These students associated middle school with more rules and consequences. *"Cause middle school you can't go nowhere, you can't even go to the bathroom when you are in class. Like when you're in class that's all you can't go back out"* (student focus group). However, there was divergence around the thought that getting older, and being in a "real middle school" means more rules and regulations. Some students had the opposite reaction that the increase in teachers' rules made them feel as though they were in elementary school. These students suggested that the reason teachers were stricter was because students were acting up more especially around new teachers. Although students had different explanations for why teachers were stricter this year they all agreed that they had more rules and restrictions this year compared to last year. All students articulated preferring to have less rules and more freedom.

It is important to note students did not necessary equate their teachers strictness as a negative aspect. For example, students described their gym teacher last year as being more demanding and challenging, whereas this year he provides little to no instruction. "*We could be sitting here on the ground and he don't say nothing to us. He doesn't tell us to get up, to go, interact. He looks like he doesn't even care. Last year, we actually worked. He was more strict on us, we want more strict* (student focus group)." Students viewed their teachers positively when they were strict as long as their strictness was focused on challenging students rather than restricting their rights and movement within the class.

Students articulated that this year they felt their teachers did not care about their education, when teachers left the class unexpectedly to visit with staff, or did not provide a supervised make-up time period such as lunch detention for students to catch up on their work.

S: It's like they don't care about our education.

S: Yeah.

I: Can you say more about that.

S: I agree with her.

S: Like last year, they were focused to get us where we were supposed to be. They wouldn't be playing around. If we got in trouble they would send out automatically, because this year they just call home.

S: They're not worried about it.

Across all four focus groups, students described changes in both teacher instruction and classroom management as negative and differing from previous years. Students often attributed these changes to their teachers not caring this year about their education.

Reason for Changes

When asked why they felt there were more teachers switching this school year, students offered a few explanations: the budget cuts, teachers new to teaching their grade, and students misbehaving. The primary reason for teacher attrition was the budget cuts. Across all four focus groups students attributed having fewer teachers in school this year to the school budget cuts.

I: Do you think the budget cuts have impacted your school?

S [Group]: Yes.

I: Yeah? How so?

S: We have a lot less teachers.

In addition, all student focus groups noted that the school had to shuffle teachers around to fill teaching positions due to budget cuts: *"Budget or something? I guess something's going on with the money and they had to get different people… I think they're just kind of moving around and filling teachers in and taking some out"* (student focus group).

The second explanation provided by a few student observations was that teachers assigned to their grade had never taught sixth and seventh graders before. *"But that's how it is*

like, that's why we get so many different teachers cause they putting teacher in a grade that they

never taught before" (student focus group). Students concluded that their teachers left because

they became frustrated and felt unprepared.

A third explanation was provided by one student when reviewing the data, who felt

strongly it was the students who caused teachers to leave during the school year. This idea was

debated by students during member checks. Students noted that they were often told by their

teachers and substitutes how bad they were, raising critical questions if students in their school

were actually any worse than students in other schools.

> Students began to compare rumors they heard from students their age in other middle
> schools and debated whether their behavior was as bad in comparison. One student
> recalled a story of hearing that students from another middle school were caught having
> sex in the bathroom. Another student stated that when she thought about it wasn't it bad
> practice for teachers to tell students they were bad, because what if students start
> believing it and then act bad? (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes. 5/29/2012).

During member checks students reached consensus indicating that felt their teachers switching

during the school year was due to multiple factors. Students primarily identified the budget cuts

as the primarily reason for more teachers switching classrooms. Furthermore, students listed

additional factors such as teachers being unprepared to teach the class they were assigned to, and

students misbehaving (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes. 5/29/2012).

School Level Factors: Fewer Resources

Across all four focus groups students observed fewer resources in their school. The

following were identified by students as a decrease in school resources: school supplies,

maintenance and repair of the school facility, school activities and fewer electives.

School Supplies

Students across all four focus groups noted having less school supplies this year

compared to last year. Students indicated the following as school supplies: paper, pencils, rulers,

napkins and pencil sharpeners. Students also described having fewer supplies in their elective classes (i.e., art, gym and computers). Furthermore, students articulated a general decrease in the amount and frequency in which they were provided with supplies this year. *"We use to get pencils like 24/7. Like, every day. Like whenever we needed them. We go visit can like 'Can I get a pencil? Like, yeah, here' Now it's like once a month"* (student focus group). Students identified the lack of access to supplies, as a barrier in being able to successfully complete their work.

> *In our classroom if we don't have a pencil or like, our pencil broke, we can't get up and sharpen it. And if we ask the teacher to borrow a pencil sharpener or trade. She says 'no'. And then that way you won't be able to do your work, because you don't have a pencil. If they had more supplies then we would be able to do most of your work.*

Students viewed having more school supplies as providing them with the resources needed to accomplish their school work.

Students also expressed a desire for additional supplies to engage in activities they enjoy. For example, one student expressed her desire to have more paper. *"I write a lot, I like to use two journals a month"* (student focus group). Furthermore, due to limited supplies students described their activities being restricted particularly in art and gym class. *"Like we only do basketball, or playing bowling or jumping"* (student focus group). Thus, students noted the shortage in school supplies contributed to restraints in the activities they participated in.

A narrative of "personal sacrifice" emerged in student focus groups regarding school supplies. Personal sacrifice was attributed to teachers. *"He* [Teacher] *brings materials from home. Because the school doesn't have that much dollars, he already spent his own money"* (student focus group). Students articulated an awareness of their teachers' use of personal money to buy school supplies this year. Some students expressed gratitude to their teachers, acknowledging that it was not their teachers' job to buy school supplies. This indicated a mindfulness of their teachers' personal sacrifices.

A prominent memory for two student focus groups was their science teacher purchasing a pencil sharpener for the classroom with her own money. Unfortunately, the pencil sharpener broke the very day it was purchased. The science teacher was visibly upset. *"She cried because somebody in our class broke her pencil sharpener"* (student focus group). This particular memory stuck out to students in which they identified that the lack of school supplies impacted their teacher. Some students expressed frustration and uneasiness with their teachers' reactions regarding the lack of school supplies, describing their teachers as complaining much more this year compared to last year. Across all focus groups, students described a change in the amount of school supplies that were provided to them this year compared to previous years. They also identified this change as negatively affecting their experience in school.

Reason for Changes

Students were asked why they thought they had less school supplies this year compared to last year. One prominent reason that students provided across all four focus groups was the budget cuts. *"The budget cut, they get only get a stack of papers like this big* [student gestures thin amount of paper]*, every beginning of the month, and if they run out…they have to wait till next month"* (student focus group). Students also described their school as "going broke" and "becoming cheap" this year. *"Cause we ain't got no money. Our principal she ain't provided no money to help with the supplies, and they just and they ain't got nothing to use to do their work"* (student focus group). One pattern noted in students' responses across all four focus groups was that they tended to describe both the budget cuts and the school becoming poor, in tandem with one another. Students identified the school being poor in conjunction with the budget cuts as the reason for the school having fewer supplies this year.

Fewer Electives This Year

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Students in all four focus groups described having less school electives available this year compared to last year. Electives are alternative classes that provide students with a specialized subject outside of the general school curriculum. Students have the opportunity to select a particular elective provided in the school. In previous years, students had both minor and major electives. Minor electives are classes such as instruments, cultural class, school store or Spanish. Major electives are classes such as art, computers and broadcasting. This year, students only had major electives offered three days a week, and no minor electives.

Students articulated a desire for more electives. Students felt having more electives opened them up to new experiences, and taught them valuable information. *"We learn different stuff that will help us when we get older"* (student focus group). Furthermore electives provided students opportunities to develop interests outside of their core subjects. Students articulated the value of being exposed to an array of topics, provided in their electives.

Students also attributed having more electives to experiencing what it is like, in what they referred to as a "real middle school". Students often compared their experiences in their school, consisting of kindergarten through eighth grade, to students in a middle school comprising of students sixth through seventh grade. Students expressed concern that they were not getting a "real middle school" experience and that they would be behind their peers when entering high school. Choosing multiple electives was one experience that students attributed to being in middle school, and contributing to their academic success.

I: What do you need from your school to do well as a student?

S: If I was still as student here, I would like to have the other electives back.

I: Help me understand, why would having more electives help you do better in school?

S: Because we wouldn't just think of school being boring, this is an elementary school, but if it could be a real middle school.

S: You would learn how to do more stuff.

Students articulated the importance of having electives in providing them a more engaging school environment while having fewer electives made school boring. Electives provided students with a needed break from their homeroom, allowing them the opportunity to learn new things and interact with a different teacher. Without additional electives, students described feeling stuck in their classroom and their school day felt longer.

Students noted that having more electives allowed their teachers who taught their core subjects, additional time to prep. Students noted that their teachers had a lot of work to grade without much prep time. *"Cause if teachers got papers to grade, then their worried 'how I am I going to grade this paper', and you got parents calling like 'where's our report cards', and the teachers like 'I didn't get the chance to grade the work'"* (student focus group). Students attributed teachers delay in updating reporting of their grades and additional stress, in part, to a lack of prep time available for teachers during the day. Across all four focus groups students identified having fewer electives this year compared to previous years as a negative change.

Reason for Changes

Students identified the budget cuts and the school being poor as the main reason why they have fewer electives this year compared to last year. *"They don't have enough money to pay the guest teachers that come in for the electives. And they don't have enough money to make more electives."* (student focus group). Students also described their school as being "broke" as a reason as to why they did not have as many electives this year. In similar trend when discussing the school having less supplies, students often described the school being "poor" or "broke" in conjunction with the budget cuts. Thus, students articulated the reason the school had fewer electives this year was due to the budget cuts.

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Less School Activities

Students describe having less school activities this year. School activities include programs outside of general studies, special themed school days, and class field trips. Students described having fewer field trips this year compared to last year. "*Last year we got to go on field trips, this year they're no field trips. Like we got to go to [Name of AMUSEMENT PARK], we went to the capital, we did all these things. But now we don't do that. It's just straight work, we don't even get to go outside*" (student focus group) Students noted that overall most classes in the school did not have a field trip this year. Students articulated the importance of field trips in providing an opportunity to gain knowledge outside of the classroom.

> *I: So if someone were to ask you, why should students have field trips? What would you say?*
>
> *S: You'll get to explore stuff.*
>
> *S: Yeah, you'll get to get out of the classroom, like you could still learn but you're not going to be always in the classroom with a sheet of paper.*
>
> *S: You actually get to explore what you're going to come up against in real life.*

Students articulated value of field trips in having the opportunity for real life experiences and autonomy to explore and discover.

Students described having more special days at school last year. Special days included school activities where the entire school participated and fun games were provided. For example, students described having a water day in which they used a slip in slide. Students described these days as fun and memorable, an opportunity to interact with the entire school. This year, students described a lack in student attendance when special days occurred. *"They don't do nothing except for on Fridays, and that's mainly when kids don't come to school cuz they feel like, we not about to do nothing, what's the point'"*(student focus group). Thus, not only were there fewer

special days provided by the school, the quality and significance of special days for the student body also appeared to decrease.

School activities also include regular day to day events enjoyed by students outside of their general studies. These events include after-school programs, activities in art and gym class, and a school store. Students reported an overall drop in after school programs provided this year in school. Afterschool programs included activities such as debate, tennis, basketball, computers, and cub scouts. Students reported having four afterschool programs offered this year, compared to approximately seven to eight programs they recall being provided in previous years. Students enjoyed participating in afterschool programs and having various options. "*Yeah oh I liked it. Because this, last year they had debate and that's what I was in. But now they don't got debate and then, I don't go to none of the other afterschool programs because they're boring*" (student focus group). Notably, a drop in specific after school programs contributed to some students no longer engaging in any after school activities provided by the school.

Students also described having less activities provided in their courses outside of general studies. In particular, students described having few options in both their gym and art class. Students compared these options to other schools they attended. "*When I went to* [Other School Name] *we had to walk on a beam, and she taught us actual stuff. She taught us about swimming, all these different things, how to save someone*" (student focus group). Students' observed in their art class, that their teacher made up work for them to do. Students felt there was no value to some of these activities, rather there were just done to keep students busy, and that they were not gaining experiences compared to what other schools offered students. Overall students described having fewer school activities this year compared to previous years. Students articulated this change as negative, expressing a desire for more school activities.

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Reason for Changes

When asked why less school activities occurred this year, students provided multiple reasons. The primary reason indicated in all four focus groups was the budget cuts. *"The school is getting their money cut, and that all the activities they used to have is getting cut"* (student focus group). Students reasoned the school activities they enjoyed the most cost money, which was money the school no longer had.

Furthermore, students provided supplementary explanations as to why there were less school activities this year. Some students noted that there was overall less fundraising going on this year, such as bake sales, which provided additional money to fund some school activities. Another potential reason, identified by a few students, was that their classmates acted up more this year and teachers requested that activities be cancelled as a punishment. *"…and they said we were supposed to take field trip at the end of the year, but the kids keep messing it up"* (student focus group). Students described the staff as less invested in school this year. Teachers who had been active in fundraising no longer taught at the school.

During member checks students also indicated that student government was less active this year and therefore less school activities were being planned (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes 6/1/2012). Students also agreed that the school staff were not as focused on raising money for school activities.

> One student proposed that their teacher's lack of investment in school was in part due to the school closing next year. The group agreed with this observation. Other students described teachers as more focused on where they were to end up next year, then making sure students had fun experiences (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes 6/1/2012).

Overall, students agreed that school activities decreased primarily due to budget cuts this year. Although students felt there were other contributing factors such as the school closing, an

inactive student government, an increase in students acting up corresponding with an increase of teachers cancelling activities (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes 6/1/2012).

School Facilities

In three out of the four focus groups, students articulated that both their school and classroom were in poor condition this year. *"They don't do nothing to clean it or nothing"* (student focus group). Student descriptions primarily regarded the general upkeep and cleanliness of the school building and their classrooms, along with its aesthetic appeal. Students reported a lack of repair and investment going into the school facilities.

Students observed that their classrooms were dirtier this year compared to last year. Students voiced their distaste for the amount of dirt in their classroom. Students noted one reason for the change in the cleanliness of their classroom was that last year their teacher gave them more time and more opportunity to clean their classroom. "*We had to clean our desks at the end of every week, we either clean our desks or help clean up the room. See this year, we don't even clean the room"* (student focus group).This year students expressed frustration when they were given time to clean because they observed their teacher sitting at her desk. *"She'll do nothing. She'll just sit there and read one of those kid magazines"* (student focus group). Students articulated that their teacher's lack of participation indicated that she was not interested in helping the students maintain a clean classroom.

Furthermore, students noted their classroom was not very colorful, primarily consisting of white walls, with very little light coming from the outside. *"We have no light in her room. She always keeps the window closed. And her walls are white"* (student focus group). Other students expressed puzzlement as to why their teacher did not decorate the classroom. "*The teachers can color the walls themselves all they got to do is buy paint, and ask a couple of student to come*

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paint it" (student focus group). Students indicated that they would be willing to help make the

classroom more friendly and aesthetically appealing environment if given the opportunity.

Students described their entire school as a lot dirtier this year, and mentioned seeing rats

and bugs in their classrooms. Students also noted that other students tended to litter more this

year. *"I don't know what happened, but we just eat stuff and throw it one the ground"* (student

focus group). Students expressed feeling disgusted by their school building. Students described

their school building as deteriorating; in particular, cracks in the wall and broken light fixtures.

Furthermore, students recognized the school's lack of effort to repairing the facilities and school

resources. "*Some of the computers is broke or got food all in it. They don't do nothing to clean it.

They just it's broke they throw it away"* (student focus group). Students noted that much of the

facility was not properly maintained and that the school building was in worse shape this year.

Reason for Changes

When asked why they thought the school facility was in poor condition, students

provided multiple reasons. The primary reason students identified for the deterioration of the

school building was the lack of school maintenance.

> *S: If I were to break one these things at [Other School's Name], they would be able to fix
> it real quick but if I break something here.*

> *S: You have to wait like a week, or a year.*

> *S: You have to wait a whole year for somebody to fix it.*

Students articulated that the lack of changes, renovations, and maintenance of the school

building was due to the budget cuts. Students stated the budget cuts were the reason nothing new

had been done to the school building in years.

When reviewing the data, students provided additional reason for the decrease in the

maintenance of the school building. Students stated that the lack of upkeep for the school

building was also due to the school closing this year, which they identified as being caused by the budget cuts.

> Students noted that their classmates' behavior had changed this year that they tended to vandalize the school much more often this year. When they asked fellow classmates why they were writing on the walls, their classmates often stated that no one cared about the school because it was closing. When I inquired into whether they agreed with their classmates, they stated that their classmates were right, the teachers and staff did appear to care less about taking care of the school building, along with punishing students for vandalizing school property, because the school was closing (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes. 5/29/2012).

The school closing and the lack of maintenance of the school building were the primary reasons students attributed to the poor condition of the school this year, which they identified as being caused by budget cuts. Students also noted that teachers and school staff behavior changed this year due to the school closing. Specifically, they were less invested in making the school building a fun, clean, well maintained environment for students. This gave students the message that their school building and property was not worth putting time into and investing in, and some students felt free to litter and vandalize the school property.

School Closure

In three out of the four focus groups, students identified their school closing at the end of the year, and having to transfer to a new school next year, as a change in this school year compared to last. In past years, students have dealt with the threat of school closure. Therefore they did not indicate a sense of surprise or shock regarding the news. Students' reactions varied. Some students expressed happiness and excitement that the school was closing. "*I'm glad, they moving us. We got a way bigger building, much way better. They're probably way better teachers*" (student focus group). Students hoped that the school they were transferring to would be better. Yet, students also indicated hesitancy in whether their new teachers would be any better than their old teachers. Students also described apprehension as to whether they would be

welcomed by students already attending the school. "*It might be rough over there*" (student

focus group). Thus, students' expectations for their new school varied.

Students also voiced uncertainty as to which school they would attend next year. Since,

the newly merged school was not in the same neighborhood as their current school, students and

their families had a variety of options for where to go. It appeared many had not yet been told

where they would end up.

I: So do you all know where you're going next year?

S: I'm moving.

S: I think I'm going to... I don't know.

S: I don't know where I'm going to go.

Some students indicated they would attend one of the high schools yet to be determined. These

students also expressed hesitancy of being in high school. In particular, they worried they would

be picked on by the older students and they worried about their ability to successful switch

classes and not be stuck in the hallway after the bell rings.

Lastly, students discussed what the school closing meant for their teachers. Student

varied in how they thought teachers felt regarding the school closing.

S: Some teachers are happy.

I: You think some teachers are happy? How so?

S: Cause the kids in the classroom are bad and the teachers probably don't like it.

S: Some might be losing their job.

S: Probably cause some teachers trying to move to a different school then they can't.

Students did identify that their teachers would be impacted by the school closing. How each

teacher was impacted tended to depend on the particular teacher. Students felt teachers who

verbally expressed their frustration with the class, would be happy to switch schools and get away from the students. Whereas, they recognized teachers and staff closely tied to the school would have more difficulty with the transition. Students also expressed their concern that teachers' jobs were in jeopardy. Students identified the school closing as a major change this year compared to previous years.

Reason for Changes

When asked why they thought their school was closing this year, students in all three focus groups identified the budget cuts as the primary reason. "*This building it is getting closed down. They couldn't afford for this building to stay up any longer*" (student focus group). Students described the school as not having enough money to maintain the building. A few students mentioned the idea of the school losing students as an additional factor as to why the school could not afford to stay open. Some students also articulated the need to move to a bigger school to attract more students. Students were in agreement that the school was closing primarily because of the budget cuts.

Section Three: How can students' experiences inform school districts future budgeting decisions?

Descriptions of the Budget Cuts

In addition to the changes students identified occurring in their school this year, which they attributed as in part being due to the budget cuts, students also exhibited a general understanding of the budget cuts. When asked what words come to mind when they hear the phrase "budget cuts", students predominantly attributed budget cuts to money, specifically the school having less money. Thus, budget cuts were identified as a negative phenomenon.

> *I: When I say the word school budget cuts? What comes to mind?*

> *S: Less money for the school.*

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S: They give less money to the school.

S: Broke.

S: When they take away, when they take away money.

Students described their school as being in a poor financial state. To handle the budget cuts, students noted that the school had to restrict how they could use money. Thus, students often described the school as being "cheap" as a result of the budget cuts.

When asked what causes the budget cuts, students provided a variety of ideas. Student predominantly identified budget cuts as a result of laws passed by the government. One focus group delved deeper into this topic.

I: So what do you mean by that, what's making the school poor?

S: The government.

S: Like, yeah they're wasting their money.

S: On stuff we need.

S: They wack, they cheap.

S: So somebody got a million dollars in the government….

S: But they don't use it for schools.

When asked how the government was wasting money, students described the government as wasting money on scandals, specifically with women. It appears personal matters played out often in the news regarding government officials' personal endeavors and affairs with women, students attributed to detracting resources, money and attention from their school. Overall students tended to critique the government's currents decisions and use of money as not prioritized on supporting their school or education.

A few alternative causes for the budget cuts were suggested by students. One student articulated the budget cuts related to the financial status of the state. "*We all gonna, this state going to go into debt"* (student focus group). Another student identified teachers as causing the budget cuts, noting that teachers cost money and the school couldn't afford to pay for all of them. Lastly, one student identified the lack of students in the school as causing the budget cuts, stating that not many students were attending the school, thus the school couldn't afford to stay open. These explanations were a less common narrative that emerged across focus groups, and their reasoning tended to be less developed and brief in details.

Students identified ways in which the school was currently working to handle the budget cuts. A prevalent theme students noted across all four focus groups was that their school often fundraised through students to raise money for the school.

S: They using our money, to get our money for school.

I: Can you say more about that?

S: They have a lot more money when they have us dress down every Friday.

S: Cuz, then we could pay a dollar every Friday.

I: Oh so you mean the uniforms?

S [Group]: Yes.

S: Cuz, on Friday you can wear anything if you bring a dollar.

In addition, the school also had other fundraisers, such as carnivals, that students had to pay to attend. Students noted a clear trend in how the school handled the budget cuts. *"And that's the only way we can make money is by selling stuff to kids"* (student focus group). Thus, students conceptualized that law and government are responsible for the budget cuts. Furthermore

students believed the government had money but did not want to spend to support their school. Therefore, their school relied on students to raise money.

Students noted that the budget cuts affected their overall school experience. Students felt their school was strongly impacted by the budget cuts. Some students identified their school as being impacted the most by the budget cuts, more so than other schools.

I: Do you think the budget cuts have impacted your school?

S: Yes.

S: A lot.

S: The most.

S: A lot.

I: The most how so?

S: Just our school.

S: Like everything.

S: We got nothing.

Lastly, students noted that the entire student body was aware of cuts being made. Students noted that sixth and seventh graders knew specifically about the budget cuts. For younger students, students in the focus groups noted that they thought, they were at least aware, that supplies were decreasing in school this year compared to previous years. Across all focus groups, students indicated being aware of what the budget cuts were, and that their school was being impacted by the budget cuts in various ways. Furthermore, students indicated feeling as though their school was personally targeted by the budget cuts. *"Why is the school poor? Why is the school so poor? Like, why don't they just have…why would they cut the budget?"* (student focus group). Although, students offered global causes for the budget cuts, such as the government, they still

viewed the budget cuts as targeted specifically on their school impacting their experiences as students. This trend was further supported when students engaged in reviewing the data. Students described their school as the primary recipient of the budget cuts. Notably, students listed other schools as wealthy and rich, some of which were in the same school district and were also closing (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes. 5/29/2012). This narrative highlights students' conceptualization of the impact budget cuts had on their specific schooling experience.

Solutions to the Budget Cuts

When asked how they would handle the budget cuts if they were in charge, students offered a multitude of solutions for how they would handle the budget cuts, along with critique of their school's actions this year. In particular, students referred to actions that have not been done to their knowledge by the school to address the budget cuts. Across all four focus groups, students identified the need to save and generate more money, and proposed creative ideas for the school to do so. Students proposed several ideas for obtaining more money, such as taking out loans and seeking donations. Students also proposed the idea of selling unused school materials. For example, students proposed selling furniture that was being stored in empty classrooms. Furthermore, students proposed the idea of re-structuring the school to go up to sixth grade rather than seventh.

> *S: No, all these big kids up in here. This place would be booming, if all these kids are out in a regular middle school. And all these little kids come in here.*
>
> *S: That's true!*
>
> *S: It will save us more money.*

Students articulated that re-structuring the school would appeal to younger students and parents. Students emphasized the importance for the school to fill more of the building. Students noted that the school had empty unused rooms. Students reasoned that parents worried about their

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younger children's safety, viewing older students as a potential negative influence. Students

thought by cutting the school at sixth grade, would appeal to parents, raise the enrollment of

younger students and provide the school with more money.

Students also critiqued decisions their school made this year for handling the budget cuts.

They noted that if they were in charge, they would prioritize students' needs. Students articulated

the importance of continuity, especially regarding frequent changes of classes and teachers.

I: If you had to make cuts what would you for sure keep?

S: The teachers.

S: The same teachers that made everything easier.

S: They need to quit changing classes!

Furthermore, students articulated that former teachers switching schools, and the multitude of

teachers they had this year was a mistake and a change to be avoided when handling future cuts.

Students also generated ideas if they were in charge what they would spare being cut. In

particular they emphasized the need to keep supplies, such as; paper, pencils, pens, textbooks and

art supplies. In addition, students articulated a desire to keep supplies that utilize technology.

I: Like the projector or smartboard, how would you describe those materials?

S: Helpful

S: Funner!

I: Funner, helpful, yeah?

S: Cause we would rather see them writing on a smartboard, rather than a chalkboard. And like see it on a projector than having it explained to us.

Furthermore, students emphasized a need to keep some fun school activities and classes. For

example, students articulated a desire to keep their electives. Students negotiated that if the

school needed to cut some electives, they proposed a compromise. "*Our electives, or at least*

have like at least 5, I could say 'Oh they dropped 5 of our electives', we only have 3 electives" (student focus group). Students suggested that the school could make less drastic cuts in one particular area of focus electives, and emphasized the importance of preserving interactive materials that supported their learning.

Students also brainstormed what the school could eliminate. Notably, in contrast to what the school should keep, students did not have a prominent common narrative regarding what their school could cut. Students agreed that mean teachers should be cut. In addition, students noted that getting rid of the school uniform would help save the school money. Students debated whether the school library should be cut.

> *S: What can we get rid of? It's like…this library. I say we don't really need this library…*
>
> *S: I'm a reader, I love this library.*
>
> *S: But we got a public library.*
>
> *S: They ain't got no good books up there!*
>
> *S: What if I can't get to the public library?*

Students also debated the law and government room being cut, which is designed as court room.

> *S: Well they do need this because this is a law and government school so they keep this.*
>
> *S: No, they don't need this, really.*
>
> *S: I mean this is a law and government school.*
>
> *S: Okay, it ain't like nobody do classes in here*

Students came to an agreement that the elaborate decorations for the room as well as the extra furniture could be sold. Overall, students tended to have difficulty figuring out what their school could cut. Students expressed the impression that there school didn't have much to start with, thus making it difficult to figure out what they could do without.

Lastly, an unexpected finding, common across all four focus groups, was that students observed existing technological resources not currently being utilized by their school. Students emphasized that these resources could be used to provide instruction. Resources include TV's, smart boards, and laptops. One student expressed his frustration observing laptops not being used in his classroom.

> *Like before, like, when we had the white laptops, we used the white laptops all last year but now they're sitting in our room, nobody uses them. So, I've started using them because we had this blue cord that we could unhook and hook it up to the internet. And then somebody just took them away and I was like 'what?' Like the laptops, they're just sitting in our room, they can be used. They're worrying about like computers breaking but we have tons of laptops that we don't use.*

In addition, students identified being frustrated that their teachers this year did not use the smart board, an interactive board hooked up to a computer monitor that can facilitate class instruction and participation. Smart boards were used last year by their teacher to teach math using interactive games. Yet this year, the Smart boards in both classrooms go unused. One group of students in a sixth grade focus group expressed frustration that the Smart board in their class was ruined. *"She got that big whole thing in her classroom, in the back of her classroom, she don't even use it. That was a thousand dollars that they wasted. And her son drew on it. They should make her pay for it"* (student focus group). Thus, students expressed general frustration and puzzlement that there classrooms had resources that were not being utilized.

<div align="center">Section Four: Student Driven Mediated Models</div>

Relationships across Factors

During student member check, students' identified two potential mediated relationships between school and class level factors created by the budget cuts. First, students noted that changes in teacher instruction and in classroom management were indirectly related to the budget cuts, and primarily influenced by the rate of teacher attrition within a school year.

We began to discuss why these changes occurred, specifically "that teachers are stricter" and "class was more boring". The primary reason students identified was that teachers that had previously taught them, were no longer there. We started to diagram this idea. I had them draw arrows, from "Teacher Switching" to the two changes that occurred. I asked 'were there any reasons as to why teachers would switch school?' Students reviewed their brainstorms, and said it was because of the budget cuts. When we explored how this change could occur they came up with the idea of a domino effect, where one thing hits then another and another. (Kornbluh, M. Field Notes. 6/01/2012).

Students, utilizing their own focus group narrative, drew links between the budget cuts, increased teacher attrition, the change in their teacher's instructional style, "being boring", and classroom management; "stricter" (see Figure 1). Students proposed that an increase in budget cuts influenced rates of teacher attrition. Students perceived that more teachers either lost their jobs or were forced to switch schools. When this occurred, students were exposed to new teachers with different styles of instruction and classroom management. Students described changes in teacher instruction and classroom management as negative; that their new teachers provided more repetitive and less interactive curriculum, were stricter, and offered less opportunity for group work.

Figure 2: Students' First Mediated Effect

81
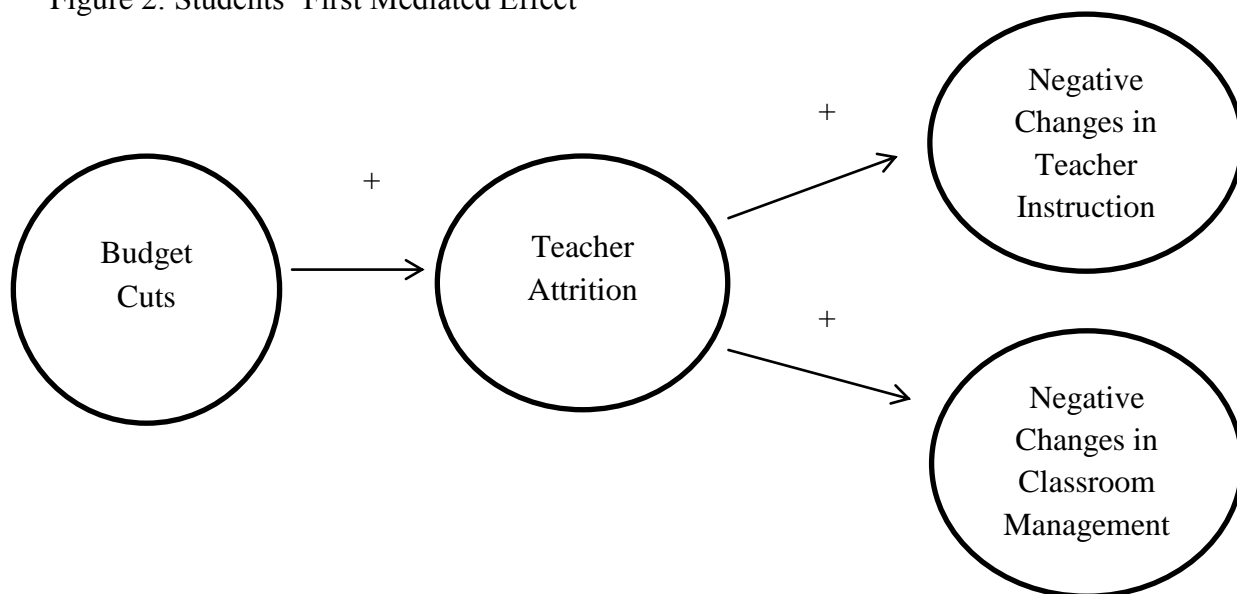
Second, students noted a decrease in both school activities and the overall physical condition of the school facilities were indirectly related to the budget cuts, and primarily influenced by the decision to close their school at the end of the academic year (see Figure 2). Students, employing their focus group findings, drew links between budget cuts, increased school closure, and a decrease in the school activities and the overall condition of the school facilities. First, students identified the budget cuts as contributing to their school closing. Yet, students noted the school closing at the end of the year significantly influence behavior changes in both staff and students (Kornbluh, M. Field notes. 5/29/2012). Overall students noted that staff were less engaged, which they perceived was due to staff's concern regarding the future of their own employment status. Students noted that staff were less active in helping fundraise and plan school activities. Students reasoned that this contributed to less school activities this year in contrast to last year (Kornbluh, M. Field notes. 5/29/2012). Furthermore, students noted that staff were less invested in the upkeep and maintenance of the school facilities. In addition, students observed behavior changes in their peers, who engaged in more vandalism of school property than previous years. Students noted that many of their peers articulated that since the school was closing, no one cared about the school. In addition, students noted that students' reason for vandalism was reinforced by staff's lack of acknowledgement. Students theorized that school closure influenced both staff's lack of maintenance and concern with regards to the school facilities, and an increase in student vandalism, which together contributed to an overall decline of the school facilities (Kornbluh, M. Field notes. 5/29/2012).

Figure 3: Students' Second Mediated Effect
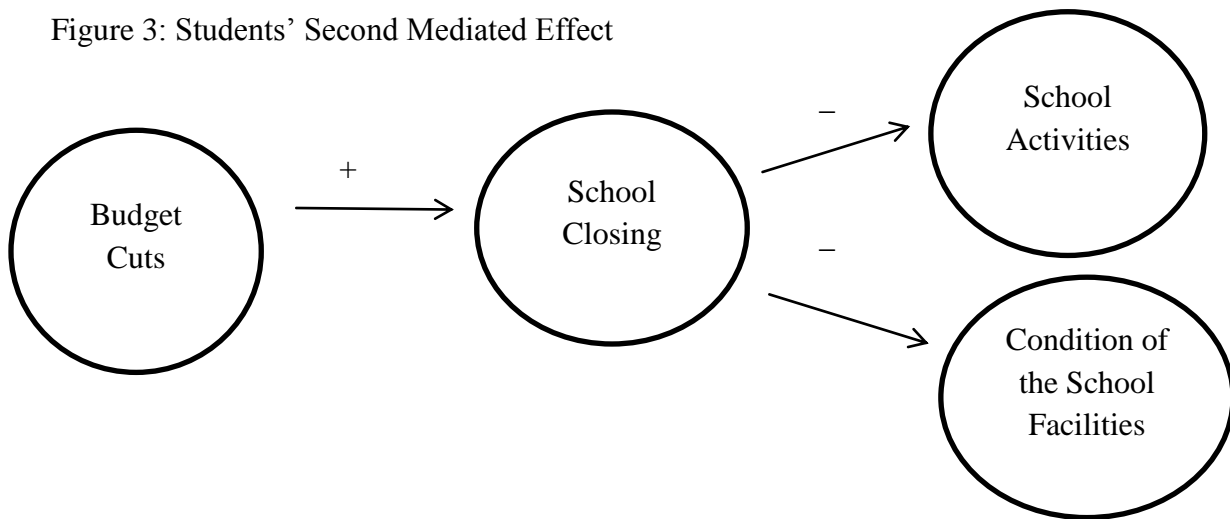
Chapter 4: Discussion

The intention of this study is to understand students' experiences within the context of the budget cuts, and to explore the implications of these experiences for future educational budgeting decisions. Prior literature concludes that minority students from lower socio-economic background often have negative experiences in school (Farrell et al., 2007; Fine, 1991; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Griffith, 2000; Koth et al., 2008; Kozol, 1991; Waxman & Huang, 1997; Way et al. 2007). This study's findings support prior literature in that students (African American and Latina) tended to express unfavorable views of their past year's school experience, 2011-2012. The literature on classroom level factors proposes that larger class sizes, more individual work, and less creative curriculum tend to contribute to students' negative perceptions of their school environment (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Howard, 2001; Koth et al., 2008; Marchant, 2004; Phelan et al., 1994; Solomon, et al., 1997). Consequently, these factors also tend to be associated with budget cuts (Howard, 2001; Lavey, 2011; Marchant, 2004; MEA, 2011; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Results of this study partially supported prior literature that students would note larger classes, less cooperative learning activities, and curriculum that failed to engage students. Lastly, trends in the literature suggest that school level factors including high teacher turnover, lack of resources, and high student mobility negatively contribute to students' perceptions of their school environment (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Fan et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2010; Storz, 2008; Quiroz, 2001). These factors also occur during times of budget cuts (Bunte, 2011; Lavey, 2011; MEA, 2011; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). The study's findings supported literature on school level factors, in that students describe the loss of teachers and students from the previous school year, and articulate receiving fewer school resources. The budget cuts were the primary reason students identified as contributing to the increase in classroom and school level factors, and an overall more negative school experience.

Student Level Factors

Overall, students generally described their current school year as boring and strict in contrast to last year, which was described as fun and engaging. Students articulated a sense of loss of the fun engaging elements that previously existed within their school. They noted that changes were a result of the budget cuts, and contributed to feelings of boredom. Specifically, students identified several factors, which they attributed to the budget cuts, which negatively influenced their experiences in school this year. These factors include (a) increased teacher attrition, (b) reduced school supplies, (c) fewer electives, and (d) less school activities. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical support that students are aware of the budget cuts, and describe an overall increase in negative school experiences within the context of recent budget cuts.

Furthermore, this finding suggests it is not solely student level factors, such as race and socio-economic background that contribute to students' negative perceptions of their school experiences. Rather cuts in the school budget were described as a prominent factor in an overall more negative school experience this year in contrast to previous years. Notably, minority students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately represented in schools experiencing the brunt of the budget cuts (Payne & Biddle, 1999; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). This connection highlights a potentially spurious relationship between student demographics and negative perceptions of school experience. Namely, higher levels of exposure to school deficits and district wide budget cuts may be at least partially responsible for associations between minority statuses or lower socio-economic backgrounds and negative perceptions of school. There is an ongoing debate in the educational policy literature regarding the impact of school funding on students (Coleman, 1990; Fowler & Walberg, 1991;

Greenwald et al., 1996; Hanushek, 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1996; Jencks et al., 1972; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002; Mosteler & Moynihen, 1972; Payne & Biddle, 1999; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Findings from this study provide empirical support for the argument that students' perceive cuts to school funding to be negatively and noticeably associated with their overall experiences in school.

Classroom Level Factors

Although students articulated multiple negative changes in their classroom environment, larger class sizes were not mentioned, contradicting previous findings in the literature (Bateman, 2002; Bateman et al., 1998; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Finn et al., 2003; Koth et al., 2008, Sunderman & Payne, 2009; Tseng & Seidman, 2007). In fact, the decrease in student attendance may have contributed to the district's decision to close the school (Lavey, 2009; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Yet school closure and consolidation is occurring across the Rockbridge School District (Henderson, 2012; Lavey, 2012a, 2012b; Wittrock, 2012). Thus, larger class sizes are likely to occur in the following school year (Lavey, 2012a, 2012b; Sunderman & Payne, 2009), and may be a long term consequence of the budget cuts not easily captured in a cross-sectional study.

Results did indicate two potential contributions to the literature. First, students noted a rise in individual repetitious course work and a decrease in group work that they tied to the increase in teacher attrition this year. Students articulated that for every new teacher they received this year, there tended to be more repetitive work, and less opportunity for collaborative group work. Students described their repetitious work and lack of opportunity to work with one another as contributing to their dislike of their classroom environment. This finding indicates that personal characteristics of the teachers may not have contributed solely to students' dislike of their classroom environment. Rather, external factors such as the school administrators' decisions to

cut teacher positions and relocate teachers (MEA, 2011) contributed to students' negative perceptions of their classroom experience. School administrators can attend to this finding by either avoiding teacher cuts, reducing the relocation of teachers, or by providing additional curriculum and personal support to new teachers entering the school.

Second, although students identified a link between external factors, i.e. teacher attrition, as fostering negative changes in their school experience, they also attributed these changes as a personal attack and felt that their teachers did not care about their education. Students perceived their current teachers as not making an effort to teach and felt their teachers' lack of investment in their education. For example, students articulated feelings of frustration that their teachers utilized videos frequently rather than providing hands on instructional activities. In addition, teachers cancelled lunch make-up time, which in previous years had been utilized by students to obtain extra help. This feeling that teachers are not invested can have negative long-term consequences for students' resulting in disengagement in the classroom and negative perceptions of their ability to achieve (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Lee, 1999; Phelan et al., 1994).

School Level Factors

This study is unique in that it captured multiple teacher turnovers within the same school year. Thus, teacher attrition was the most heavily discussed negative change in school during student focus groups. This finding complements a small group of literature that identified a trend in high teacher attrition and students' overall negative perceptions of their school environment (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Griffith, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2010; Quiroz, 2001). For example, Mitchell et al. (2010) found that high teacher attrition was associated with lower student ratings in dimensions of fairness, parent involvement, sharing of resources, student relations, achievement motivation, and the school facility. This study's findings further the understanding of how

students experience and perceive teacher attrition as students articulated feelings of stress, confusion, and discontinuity, and reported struggling academically each time a new teacher arrived. This study illustrates that teacher attrition is an important area for future inquiry regarding students' experiences of the budget cuts. In addition, these results highlight the importance of the school administration attending to teacher attrition when making decisions for handling future budget cuts. Students across focus groups advocated for the need of the school administration to keep current teachers in the school and reduce multiple teacher turnover.

Students articulated a variety of school resources that decreased this year in contrast to previous years. Overall, a decrease in any type of school resource was identified as a negative change in the school environment. Yet students had unique perceptions regarding how each particular school resource shaped their experiences and perceptions of their school year. For example, students described the decrease in school activities and electives as a missed opportunity to be exposed to alternative forms of knowledge outside of their general curriculum, and contributed to a general sense of boredom and repetition in their school day. Students articulated that the decrease in school supplies caused stress and created a barrier to complete their work. Lastly, students attributed a decrease in the overall condition of the school facilities to the school staff's lack of care in their education and school experience.

These findings portray unique and detailed information for school administrators in determining the consequences of cutting specific school resources when handling future budget cuts. Understanding why students value certain activities may help school administrators find alternative ways to incorporate those activities into the school day. For example, it is possible to allot times during the week for teachers to provide students with interactive topics of interest, outside of the general studies, if it is not possible to have full electives. Additionally,

understanding students' concerns can help administrators and teachers engage students in discussions regarding why changes are occurring, providing opportunity for students to brainstorm ways in which they can help. Focused discussion on the importance of conservation of school supplies and preservation of the school facilities may promote students' sense of school belonging and a heightened awareness of available school resources, to offset negative feelings due to the lack of supplies and general upkeep of the school.

Unique Aspect of the Setting

One unique aspect of the setting for this study was the impending school closure. The school closing was a complex change, having both positive and adverse consequences for this study. Regarding benefits, this study had the opportunity to capture the unique narrative of students' experiences in a school undergoing an extreme change resulting from budget cuts: school closure. School closure is an increasingly prevalent experience for students attending public schools in the United States (Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Results from the American Association of School Administrators survey in 2010 found that 6% of schools closed during 2008-2009, doubling the rate from the previous year, and an additional 11% were projected to close during 2010-2011 (McMilin, 2010). On the other hand, due to the school closure, students had a heightened awareness and understanding of the budget cuts having been privy to discussions at school and at home regarding the reasons for school closure. Thus, this study has a similar limitation to other studies in the student voice literature, in which the researcher gains entry into schools already undergoing significant changes (Mitra, 2008; Storz, 2008; Zion, 2009).

Students reasoned that the school closure contributed to students' misbehavior, including vandalism of school property. Primarily, students noted that their peers' misbehavior was in part due to the staff being less engaged. Students witnessed a general lack of interest and commitment

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from staff in providing students with support, making an effort to keep the school and classrooms clean, or helping raise money for school activities. Students opinion that this was perhaps due to the staffs' own uncertainty of their employment status for the following year. Students voiced feelings of frustration and noted some students acted out and became less invested in the preservation of the school facility, behavior that was not acknowledged by staff.

The literature states that school relocation adds personal and academic stress for students. Most of these studies consisted of surveys or interviews with students post school closure (Kirshner et al., 2010; Rumberger, 2003; Sunderman & Payne, 2009). This study's finding further contributes to the literature in highlighting the unique nuanced changes in student and teacher behavior within the context of impending school closure. In particular, the unintentional consequences of school closure, in which both staff and students became less engaged in their school environment. Furthermore, findings suggest that school administrators can work towards mitigating these consequences by either reducing the prevalence of school closure, or by providing additional support to staff and students and engage them in intentional dialogue focused on how to work together to create a memorable and positive final school year.

Students' Perceptions of the Budget Cuts

When asked the reason why these negatives changes occurred in students' school experiences, students across all four focus groups identified the budget cuts as a primary contributing factor. Students voiced that the budget cuts contributed to having fewer teachers in their school. Budget cuts were identified as contributing to less school supplies, fewer electives, less school activities, the school closing, and the poor maintenance of the school facility. Overall, students felt the budget cuts had a negative impact on their school experience.

These findings offer two contributions to the literature in further understanding how students perceive their overall school environment. First, findings indicated that students were aware and cognizant of the budget cuts and provided a rationale for how the budget cuts contributed to negative changes in their school environment. This is a new area of inquiry in the student perception literature, which has primarily consisted of student perceptions of their school environment in relation to school and class levels factors (Bateman, 2002; Bateman et al., 1998; Bradshaw et al., 2009; Fan et al., 2011; Finn et al., 2003; Koth et al., 2008, Mijanovich &Wietzman, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2010; Tseng & Seidman, 2007; Wietzman, 2003). This study provides new areas of inquiry around student perceptions with regards to school and budget wide policies. Second, although students articulated complex understanding of what caused the budget cuts, they still perceived them as a personal attack on them and their school, which can have negative consequences in students' public education. Students' discussions in focus groups suggested feelings of disengagement, for example feeling bored in one's class or a sense that their teachers were as not invested in their education. Research indicates that engagement is a key factor in students' academic success and graduation rates (Chapman, 2003; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Rumberger, 2000; Valeski & Stipek, 2001). Thus, this finding helps shed light on the potential long term consequences of budget cuts on students' engagement in school.

These findings are also unique to the student voice literature by examining a new domain for soliciting student narrative within the educational system, school budgets. Results indicated that students have insightful ideas for how to handle budget cuts, and critiques of the school's current decisions for managing budget cuts. Results also highlighted that students' ideas provide a unique perspective. For example, students identified untapped resources within the school that

were not utilized, which may help mediate the impact of the budget cuts. Thus, engaging students in discussions regarding the budget cuts was a successful endeavor in both understanding the perspective of students within a school undergoing budget cuts, and gaining unique ideas from students for potential solutions to mitigate the impact of future budget cuts. These findings illuminate the benefits of soliciting student feedback regarding educational funding, a group that was historically denied input and voice in these matters.

Relationships across Factors

During member checks, students offered two possible mediated effects regarding: (a) the relationship between budget cuts, increased teacher attrition, and a negative change in teacher instruction and classroom management, and (b) the relationship between budget cuts, the school closing, and a negative change in both the amount of school activities and overall condition of the school building. Future studies may want to examine these mediated effects in a quantitative manner, which could provide further empirical support to our understanding of students' school experiences within the context of the budget cuts, and how the budget cuts affect various school and classroom factors. These findings also add to the debate in the educational policy literature with regard to how school funding impacts students (Coleman, 1990; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Greenwald et al., 1996; Hanushek, 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1996; Jencks et al., 1972; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002; Mosteler & Moynihen, 1972; Payne & Biddle, 1999; Sunderman & Payne, 2009) by providing possible mediated effects conceptualized and proposed by students with regard to how the budget cuts influence their experiences and perceptions of their school environment.

Ruling out Alternative Explanations

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Possible alternative explanations may have contributed to students' observed changes in their school environment, rather than budget cuts. Three potential alternative explanations are students' cognitive development, changing grades, and new district policies. First, as students grow older, they cognitively mature, becoming more observant of their environment (Mascolo et al., 1999; Piaget, 2008). Thus, school changes identified by students may not have in fact been a change. Rather, students may be more cognizant of their school environment than in previous years. Second, changes specific to differences in grades (progressing a year in school, having a new teacher) might contribute to students' perception of changes in their classroom environment. Lastly, new school policy may result in changes to the school environment. For example, a new policy regarding school safety could result in students no longer having school field trips. Thus, it is important to determine that the various themes that emerged from the student focus groups regarding changes in the school environment can be attributed to the budget cuts and are not a result of alternative factors.

In order to rule out alternative explanations, I employed the following strategies. First I engaged in a series of follow up probes during focus groups to solicit detailed information regarding the nature and source of the changes that students observed in school. I was diligent in attending to these responses in my analysis. Second, I gathered corroborating evidence from archival records of local newspaper articles which featured coverage of budget cuts implemented in 2011, and their impact on the Rockbridge School District during the same school year as discussed in student focus groups 2011-2012.

For every change that students articulated, during a focus group, as occurring in the course of their current school year 2011-2012, I followed up with a series of questions. Such as; "Did this happen last year?", "Do you think students in other grades were affected?", "Why do

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you think this is happening?" I employed these questions in order to gather information as to whether students noted these changes as unique to their current school year. During the analysis phase, I examined narratives provided across focus groups to decide if a change was attributable to recent budget cuts, or was described as an enduring problem for the school. Furthermore, I examined if students observed the change to be distinct to their grade or whether it reflected a school wide phenomenon. I could then determine if the change was occurring across school years, attributable perhaps to students changing grades, or a phenomenon emerging within the current school year in which students in multiple grades were impacted. Lastly, I was able to gather evidence across focus groups that students attributed the budget cuts as the primary catalyst for these changes. Both the application of follow-up probes and examining responses during analysis were effective and complimentary strategies in determining which changes to incorporate into the results section. The results section only included school changes within the context of recent budget cuts. For example, many students noted their dislike of the cafeteria food and expressed the sentiment that less food was being offered compared to previous years. This was not included in the results section because students were inconsistent across focus groups noting if the food was worse or less abundant this year compared to previous years. In contrast, students consistently noted that many of their siblings and younger students observed fewer school activities, supplies and electives in the current school year, highlighting that these changes were unique to this particular school year and a school wide phenomenon.

Archival data, newspapers articles from local papers, also provided corroborating support for the various changes students observed as being influenced by the budget cuts. First, students had multiple teachers' turnover within the same school year, a change that had not occurred previous years. Students noted that teacher turnover resulted in multiple new teachers, which

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they articulated as negatively influencing their classroom environment. In particular, students viewed teacher turnover as contributing to negative changes in teacher instruction, and classroom management. Newspaper articles provided corroborating support that increased teacher attrition occurred across the school district, and was due to recent budget cuts (Dosmic, 2011; Lavey, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). "More than 140 layoffs…among the layoffs five assistant principals…62 workers-mostly teachers- employed in programs such as magnet schools that are funded by state and federal grants, and 63 more teachers" (Lavey, 2010a). In addition, the Michigan Education Association also provided a statement on their website regarding notably high teacher attrition due to recent budget cuts (MEA, 2011).

Second, students noted significantly fewer electives offered in school, compared to previous years. They attributed this change to the budget cuts, specifically, that the school had less money to pay for additional teachers and necessary supplies for alternative courses. Fewer electives were identified in one local newspaper article (Lavey, 2010b), which noted that the cuts for 2011-2012 would result in less electives offered across the Rockbridge school district. Third, students articulated having less school supplies this year compared to previous years. This was also noted in local newspaper coverage (Bunte, 2011; Misjak, 2011). Fourth, students reported fewer school activities offered this year. Less school activities were also confirmed in local newspapers' articles (Bunte, 2011; Lavey, 2011). For example, Bunte (2011) stated that recent cuts to the Rockbridge School District contributed to less field trips being offered. In addition, an article by Lavey (2011) stated that recent cuts contributed to less after school programs offered than previous years. Both trends identified by students in focus groups. Fifth, school closure was also noted by students as a result of the budget cuts, which was confirmed by various local newspaper articles (Henderson, 2012; Lavey, 2012a, 2012b; Wittrock, 2012). Lastly, students

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noted the poor maintenance of the school facility which they described as being in worse condition this year compared to prior years. Newspaper articles supported students' descriptions with regard to the budget cuts contributing to the overall poor condition of Rockbridge school district facilities (Durrett, 2012; n.d., 2010). In addition, students identified changes in their current school year specific to the budget cuts that contributed to the poor maintenance of the school facilities. For example, high teacher attrition resulted in new teachers, who spent less structured class time having students clean up the classroom. In addition, students reported that due to the school closing, teachers and school staff were visibly less focused on maintaining the school property and students engaged in more vandalism of school property.

I was able to rule out alternative explanations such as; students' cognitive development, changing grades, and the implementation of new district policies utilizing the following strategies. First, providing students with follow up questions during focus groups in order to gather information as to whether students noted these changes as unique to their current school year. Second, during the analysis phase, I examined narratives provided across focus groups to decide if a change was attributable to recent budget cuts. Third, I then gathered corroborating evidence from archival local newspaper coverage. Employing these strategies, I was able to gather substantial evidence illustrating that school changes identified by student were in fact attributable to recent budget cuts.

Limitations

This study had various limitations. First, this study's findings were limited in generalizability due to the small sample size, restricting the ability to make inferences to other student populations. Although small sample sizes are common in phenomenological studies, the potential pool of participants eligible for this study was limited to the number of students who

attended the school the prior year. Thus, the narrative from students who had been at the school in years prior may have differed from a large number of students' experiences, who had relocated from other schools. Furthermore, students in the sample, who have not changed schools, may differ in unique ways from the general student population (i.e. personality characteristics, family characteristics, socio-economic status) unbeknownst to the researcher. Although, this study's sample size was rather small, a criterion of saturation was utilized to identify whether the sample size was sufficient in answering the research questions. In qualitative research saturation occurs when interviews cease to produce new information (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In the case of this study, saturation occurred when student focus groups began to yield the same information regarding their school experiences within the context of the budget cuts. As indicated in the results table, the same themes were prevalent across focus group and member checks. In addition, new themes and ideas did not emerge as the focus groups progressed. After coding the data, I did a systematic analysis of the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) from the four focus groups, in an attempt to asses at which point the data was returning no new themes. I found that no new themes emerged after the first focus group. This finding is similar to other qualitative studies in which saturation is achieved early on when there is a high level of homogeneity among participants (Guest et al., 2006; Sim, 1998).

Second, the sample was predominately female, thus potentially not reflecting the perspective of both genders. This was not due to male disinterest in the study, as the alternative focus group which included transfer students had high male participation, and provided a rich narrative missing from this study regarding transfer students perspectives of their school within the context of the budget cuts. One particular reason for the low participation of male students was the high expulsion rates of male minority boys throughout the Rockbridge School District

(Cosentino, 2011). Thus, many of the sixth and seventh grade boys had not been at Hayward the year prior, and transferred to Hayward as a result of being expelled from their previous school. Another possible explanation is that developmentally from childhood through adolescent, females demonstrate higher cognitive skills in areas of planning and attention (Naglieri & Rojahn, 2001), and thus might have been more successful in turning in parent consent forms. As a minority of participants, male students who participated in the focus groups may have felt self-conscious, perhaps influencing their behaviors and opinions shared in the discussion.

There were no Caucasian students who participated in the focus groups even though they make up 12% of the student population (GreatSchools.Org, 2012), thus limiting the study's ability to capture a diverse ethnic range of student perspectives within the school. It is unclear why Caucasian students did not participate in focus group discussions. Caucasian students were the minority group in both the sixth and seventh grade class. Peer support has been found to promote participation in school activities (Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007). Findings indicate a trend that as children become older they prefer friendship with children of a similar race (Neal, 2010; Shrum, Cheek, & Hunter, 1988). Thus Caucasian children, the racial minority in the classroom, may have felt less eager to participate in focus groups, compared to students in the racial majority in the classroom.

Lastly, in one focus group, tensions arose between three students who did not get along with one particular student. This student spoke the least in the focus group and had the lowest survey score. Although facilitation was deliberate in soliciting all students' input and time was spent setting ground rules for the group discussion, it is a concern that this student's narrative may not have been fully shared, limiting the ability of the focus group findings to credibly capture all participants perspectives.

In the current study, I relied on teachers and administrators to provide input on the available student sample, which they informed me to be 30. Yet, they did not have an accurate assessment of the student sample, who had attended the school in years prior. This became clear when I made class presentations and found that a total of 18, sixth and seventh graders combined had attended the school the previous year. I was successful in recruiting 16 out of the 18 students available to participate in the study. To address these limitations in schools with high teacher attrition, student mobility and expulsions rates, future research efforts should engage with students directly to have an accurate assessment of potential participant sample for the study. This would allow the researcher flexibility in making changes to sample criterion in order to obtain a larger sample size, or to determine that recruitment should occur at multiple schools.

In addition, I sought teacher feedback on the construction of the focus groups. Yet due to multiple teacher turnover within the school year, teachers did not have the most accurate assessment of group dynamics as illustrated primarily in the one focus group where bullying was apparent. Prolonged engagement would also allow the researcher a richer understanding of class dynamics of gender and race. Recruitment can then be attuned to particular class dynamics, allowing the researcher to gain the trust of marginalized students within the classroom, and construct focus groups in which all participants feel comfortable and supported.

Conclusion

This study illustrated that students were not only aware of the budget cuts, but had an understanding for how the budget cuts negatively contributed to their school experience. Furthermore, students proposed possible mediated effects for how the budget cuts influenced school and class level factors. These mediated relationships can be quantitatively tested in future research, helping researchers further understand the impact of the budget cuts on students'

experiences. Although students articulated complex rationalizations with regards to changes in their school environment, they still perceived these changes as a personal attack. Thus, this study highlights the potential long term negative consequence of budget cuts contributing further to student disengagement in their school environment and the larger institution of public education. Lastly, this study highlights the potential benefits of including student perspective in district wide budgeting decisions, providing alternative and unique viewpoints with regards to mediating the impact of budget cuts.

Appendices

Appendix A: Facilitator Appendix

Table 2: Facilitator Appendix

Problem	Typical Mistake (Responses to Avoid)	Literature Recommended Facilitator Response	Strategy
Group discussion is being dominated by one highly verbal group member.	Focusing your energy on trying to control this one person.	Focus efforts on the passive majority. Encourage group members to participate. Trying to change the dominant person just gives that one person more attention. If a group member continues to disrupt the group discussion ask them to leave.	Strategy A. If there is a dominate student in the group actively solicit diverse perspectives. For example, "Let's hear another voice regarding this important issue", or "Does anyone feel differently?" Strategy B. Request that the student allow other students time to speak. Strategy C. Ask the student to leave the group and return to class. Have an undergraduate escort the student.
Students goofing off in the midst of a discussion.	Facilitator tries to control the group.	Give everyone a short break.	Strategy A. If the group is getting silly, offer students a quick break in order to regroup. For example, "It looks like we are losing focus. Let's take a quick break, and when we get back we can continue in our discussion."
Low participation for an entire group.	Facilitator assumes silence indicates agreement and group consensus.	Engage in a different discussion format. Have the group go around the circle sharing a thought. Have a member of the group write on a flip chart different ideas, encourage people to respond to one another.	Strategy A. If there is low participation in the group, have students respond in a circle to one particular focus group question. Strategy B. Have one student write ideas on a flip chart, encourage students to respond to different ideas.

Table 2: Facilitator Appendix (cont'd)

Problem	Typical Mistake (Responses to Avoid)	Literature Recommended Facilitator Response	Strategy
Two people are engaging in a long argument with one another.	Focusing energy on conflict resolution.	Focus on the passive majority. Solicit different perspectives. Move to another question. Finally, may need to ask group members to take a break from the group.	Strategy A. If two students are dominating the group discussion, intentionally solicit diverse perspectives. For example, "Let's hear some more voices." Strategy B. Move to another question. Strategy C. Request that students allow others to speak. Strategy D. If argument continues, ask students to return to class. Have an undergraduate escort the students.
There are one or two silent members in the group, while other members participate actively.	Facilitator puts someone on the spot.	Soliciting the input of people who haven't talked.	Strategy A. If one or two students haven't talked explicitly solicit the input of those who have not talked. For example, "I would really like to know everyone's thoughts in the group. For those of you who haven't spoken yet would you like to share?"
Group members are engaged in whispering and side jokes.	Facilitator ignores the behavior.	Address the behavior in a non-confrontational way. Offers a break. Switch to the next discussion question.	Strategy A. If students are engaged in whispering or side jokes. Address the behavior to the group in a non-confrontational manner. Strategy B. Offer a

Table 2: Facilitator Appendix (cont'd)

Problem	Typical Mistake (Responses to Avoid)	Literature Recommended Facilitator Response	Strategy
			break. Strategy C. Switch Discussion Questions.
A group member has become repetitive in their comments and answers.	Facilitator confronts the person.	Summarize person's point of view until they are heard. Ask if anything else needs clarifying. Encourage participants to state the views of group members whose views are different form their own.	Strategies A. When someone is repeating themselves. Summarize person's point of view. Ask if they want to clarify anything else. For example, "So this is my understanding…do I understand your ideas correctly? Thanks for sharing." Strategy B. Encourage participants to state their views of group members who differ from their own.

Appendix B: Facilitator Observation Sheet

Table 3: Observation Key

Typical Problems found in Focus Groups	Best Practice Strategies in Addressing Problem
1. Focus group discussion is dominated by a highly verbal member.	A. Employ the following. 1) Solicit other student's perspectives. 2) Request that the student allow others time to speak. 3) Request the student leave the group discussion, have undergraduate escort student back to group.
2. Goofing off during the focus group.	B. Offer a break.
3. Low participation for entire group.	C. Employ the following: 1) Have group members each respond to a question in a circle. 2) Have on member write ideas on flip chart, ask group members to respond to the different ideas.
4. Two students are continuing to disagree on a particular issue.	D. Employ the follow; 1) Solicit other student's perspectives. 2) Move to another focus group question. 3) Request that students allow others to speak. 4) If argument continues, ask students to return to class. Have an undergraduate escort them.
5. One or two students in the group are silent.	E. Be explicit in requesting the perspective of students who have not talked. Do not call on particular students.
6. Students whispering during the focus group.	F. Employ the following: 1) Address the behavior to the group in a non-confrontational manner. 2) Offer a break. 3) Switch focus group question.
7. One student in the focus group has become repetitive.	G. Employ the following: 1) Summarize a student's point of view. 2) Encourage other student's to state their views of group members who differ from their own.

Table 4: Observation Recording Template

Problem:	Strategies Used, Indicate Order Implemented:	Alternative Strategies Used:	Field Notes: (How successful was the strategy at addressing the problem?)

Appendix C: Survey

Focus Group Feedback

Hello! Thank you so much for participating in the group interview. We ask that you fill out this brief survey. This survey helps us understand what the group interview was like for you and other students. In particular, we are interested in learning if you felt your opinion, ideas and voice were heard.

Please fill in the circle of the category that best fits how you feel about the following statements regarding your experience in today's group interview.	**Strongly Disagree**	**Mostly Disagree**	**Mostly Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
My voice was heard in the group interview.	O	O	O	O
I did not get to share my thoughts in the group interview.	O	O	O	O
I have similar school experiences as other students.	O	O	O	O
I liked other students' ideas about handling the budget cuts.	O	O	O	O
I disagreed with other students' viewpoints.	O	O	O	O
My point of view was not talked about in the group interview.	O	O	O	O
I disliked other students' thoughts about how to deal with the budget cuts.	O	O	O	O
My experiences in school differed from other students.	O	O	O	O
I think other students were not being honest.	O	O	O	O
I had a chance to talk about my ideas in the group interview.	O	O	O	O
I believe other students were being truthful.	O	O	O	O
I agreed with what other students' said.	O	O	O	O

In the box below please write down any additional thoughts you would like to share:

Appendix D: Parent Consent & Youth Assent Forms

Parent Consent Form

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS STUDY?

- ❖ We are asking your permission to allow your child to participate in a study to understand students' experiences of school budget cuts. This study will be conducted by Mariah Kornbluh and Jennifer Watling Neal, Ph. D. at Michigan State University.
- ❖ We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before providing permission for your child to participate in the study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I AGREE TO PARTICPATE?

- ❖ With your permission we would like to conduct a group interview with your child and other students in his/her school regarding their experience of school budget cuts. Group interviews will be conducted during school hours to avoid any hassles in transportation. Alternative activities will be provided for students who do not wish to participate.
- ❖ We will request your child assent to participate in the group interview before proceeding. After the focus group we will ask your child to fill out a brief (one page) survey regarding their experience in the focus group. In particular we are interested in understanding if they felt their voice was heard.

The group interview will last forty-five minute to an hour. The survey will take approximately five to ten minutes.

ARE THERE RISKS?

- ❖ None of the questions we will be asking your child in the group interview or survey seek out personal information or sensitive topics.
- ❖ However, some children may feel uncomfortable with the group interview process. If your child feels uncomfortable at any point during the interview, they have the right to skip any question they want or leave the group interview at any point in time.
- ❖ In addition, your child has the right to skip any of the survey questions or refuse to take the survey at any point in time.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- ❖ Your child will be provided with snacks for participating in the study. There are no other direct benefits for you or your child for participating in the group interview. We hope information from students will help us understand student's experiences of the budget cuts.
- ❖ Together as a group your child and other students may come up with some solutions and potential changes they would like to see in their school that we could share with other students or school staff (like teachers and the school principal).
- ❖ Group findings will be used to provide school officials, staff, teachers and students with general information about student experiences of the budget cuts. Working with your

child's teacher, group findings will be incorporated into the class social studies curriculum.

WHAT ABOUT MY PRIVACY AND MY CHILD'S PRIVACY?

❖ Your child's participation is confidential. No one can link your child's answers to your child's name. Your child's name will never be used in any publications or presentations.
❖ When findings are shared from this study, we will only indicate whether statements or quotes were said by a boy or girl, a 6th, or 7th grader. We will not share anything your child says in a way that they can be identified. No personal stories or identifiable information will be shared with parents, teachers, or other students.
❖ The only time we will break confidentiality and tell someone what your child specifically says is if we believe your child is in danger or someone else is, or if we are mandated to report a past behavior.
❖ The focus group discussion will be audio taped. Audio tapes of the interviews will be typed. Audio tapes will be destroyed following transcription. Any mention of your child's name that occurs during conversation will be replaced by a generic identity (i.e. 6th Grade Boy). In addition, your child's name will be removed from the survey. The survey will be given a non-identifiable ID number.
❖ All data will be stored in locked file cabinets and on password-protected computers, which requires a specific code to access, in a locked research office at Michigan State University for 10 years after which it will be destroyed. Only research team members and the Institutional Review Board (a group that makes sure participants' rights are protected) will have access to this data.

WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTION OR AN ISSUE?

❖ This research project will be supervised and conducted by Mariah Kornbluh a graduate student at Michigan State University and Jennifer Watling Neal Ph.D., researchers in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. (IRB Research Protocol # Insert)
❖ If you have any questions, problems or issues please feel free to call or email
   o Mariah Kornbluh. You can contact her by email: mkornblu@gmail.com. You can also contact her by phone (650) 814-5056.
   o Jennifer Watling Neal: You can contact her by email: jneal@msu.edu. You can also contact her by phone (517) 432-6708
❖ If you have questions or concerns about your child's role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program; telephone: 517-355-2180, Fax: 517-432-4503, or email: irb@msu.edu or regular mail: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

- ❖ Your child has the right not to participate in the study. If your child chooses to participate, they have the right to skip or not answer a question, leave the group interview, or withdraw from the study at any time.
- ❖ If your child withdraws from the group interview, he/she will return to the classroom where the teacher will be supervising an alternative activity.

PLEASE INDICATE BELOW

Food will be provided for children participating in the group interview. Please identify in the boxes below whether your child has any allergies or other dietary restrictions.

- ☐ **NO** my child has no allergies or dietary restrictions.
- ☐ **YES** my child has allergies or dietary restrictions.
  - o **Please Specify:**
    _____

YOUR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Please sign below if you agree to have your child participate

_____   _____

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian   Date

_____

Your Child's Name Please Print

_____

Preferred Contact (Telephone Number)

<center>Student Assent Form</center>

<u>WHY IS THIS FOCUS GROUP BEING DONE?</u>

⇒ Would you like to be involved in a research project regarding understanding students' experiences of school budget cuts? The budget cuts are cuts in funding, money given to your school. Many schools in Michigan have had budget cuts this year.

⇒ We are interested in learning about your experiences in school this year. Mariah Kornbluh and Jennifer Watling Neal, Ph.D. at Michigan State University would like to ask you to participate in a group interview and fill out a brief survey.

⇒ We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

<u>WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I PARTICIPATE?</u>

⇒ If you participate, we will have you participate in a group interview during school hours. In the group interview we will be asking you and a group of other students' questions and recording your answers. Some examples of the types of questions we will ask are…
   o How does this school year compare to last year?
   o What do you like about school?

⇒ After the group interview, we will also ask you to fill out a brief survey. The survey will ask you whether you felt your voice and ideas were heard.

⇒ **The group interview will take from forty-five minutes up to an hour. The survey will take five to ten minutes.**

<u>WHAT ARE THE RISKS?</u>

⇒ None of the questions we will be asking you in the group interview seek out personal information or sensitive topics. But you still may feel uncomfortable. If you feel at any point uncomfortable, you have the right to skip any question you want or leave the focus group at any point in time. You also have the right not to take the survey or skip any survey questions.

<u>WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?</u>

⇒ You will be provided snacks for participating in the group interview. Other than that, there are no direct benefits for participating in this focus group. The information you give will provide important information in understanding students' experiences of school budget cuts. Working with your teacher will also use information from the group interviews in your social studies class.

<u>WHAT ABOUT MY PRIVACY?</u>

⇒ Your participation is confidential, that means no one can link your answers to your name. Your name will never be used in any publications or presentations.

<center>115</center>

- That means when findings are shared from this study, we will only indicate whether statements or quotes were said by a boy or girl, a 6th, or 7th grader.
$\Rightarrow$ No personal stories you share will be told to parents, teachers, or other students.
$\Rightarrow$ The only time we will tell someone what you specifically say is if you tell us that you are hurting yourself or that someone is hurting you, or if we are required to report something bad that happened to you in the past.
$\Rightarrow$ The focus group discussion will be audio taped. Audio tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed. Any mention of your name that occurs during conversation will be replaced by a nonspecific title, for example a 6th Grade Boy.
$\Rightarrow$ All group interviews and surveys will be stored in locked file cabinets and on password-protected computers, which requires a specific code to access, in a locked research office at Michigan State University for 10 years they will then be destroyed.

WHO DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTION OR AN ISSUE?

$\Rightarrow$ This research project will be overseen by Mariah Kornbluh a graduate student at Michigan State University and Jenna Watling-Neal, Ph. D. researchers in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. (IRB Research Protocol # Insert) If you have any questions, problems or concerns please feel free to call or email.
- Mariah Kornbluh: You can contact her by email: mkornblu@gmail.com. You can also contact her by phone (650)814-5056.
- Jenna Watling Neal, Ph. D.: You can contact her by email: jneal@msu.edu. You can also contact her by phone (517) 432-6708
❖ If you have questions or worries about your role and rights as a participant or would like more information you may contact, without even having to share your name, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program; telephone: 517-355-2180, Fax: 517-432-4503, or email: irb@msu.edu or regular mail: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

$\Rightarrow$ You do not have to participate. Whether you choose to participate will have no impact on your school experience. That means no one will be upset if you choose not to participate, not your teacher, principal, parents or us. If you choose to participate you have the right to skip a question, leave the group interview, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Printing your name below lets me know that you agree to participate in this study

.
_____

You're Name

Appendix E: Parental Verbal Consent Form

Protocol Obtaining Verbal Parental Consent

<u>Identifying students whose parents would like to give verbal consent:</u>
1. Researcher makes an announcement to the class. If a student's parent is okay with them participating in the study but would rather give consent over the phone then in writing, student should see the researcher during break, or leave a note for the researcher with the teacher.

Script:

> *Hey Everyone,*
>
> *I have a quick announcement. As you already know, I am doing group interviews with students, who were here last year, about your experiences in school and in particular school budget cuts.*
>
> *Some of you have told me that your parents were fine with you participating in the student focus groups, but would prefer to give permission over the phone.*
>
> *Today, I am going to be volunteering in your class for a few hours. Feel free to come find me and let me know if your parents would prefer I call them to get permission for you to participate in the study.*
>
> *If you need to go home and ask your parents, you can always leave a note for me with your teacher.*
>
> *Also let me know if your parents are more comfortable speaking in another language.*
>
> *Any questions or concerns? I will only be calling your parent, if you and parent, give me permission to call.*
>
> *Thank you!*

2. Researcher comprises a list of students whose parents would like to give verbal consent over the phone.

3. Researcher finds out from student when would be a good time to call parents.

4. If parent is available during the school day, student and researcher will make phone call together in the main office in a private room pre-arranged with the school principal.

5. If a parent is available in the evening, the student will tell the researcher an appropriate time to call the house. The student will be told to confirm all times with parents prior to the researcher calling.

6. If the parent primarily speaks in Spanish an IRB certified undergraduate research assistant will provide translation.

Parent Phone Consent Script

1. <u>Introduction</u>
   a. If a phone call is made during the day time. Student and researcher will go to the main office, step into private room to make phone call.
      i. Student will call the house first.

   b. For both day and night time phone calls. Researcher first confirms parent is comfortable with being called.

Hi there!

Thank you so much for your time. I just want to confirm you are <u>STUDENT NAME</u> parent or guardian?

And your name is? _____

Would you be open to having your child participate in the student focus group study?

- If Yes **Proceed**
- If No *(Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, I can go over the logistics of the study, along with you and your child's rights?)*

    o If Yes (Answer any concerns, proceed with consent process.)
    o If No (Thank the parent for their time, apologize for the inconvenience.)

Great let me go over the consent form with you, which will give you all the additional information about the study, regarding your and your child's rights.

Please stop me if you have any questions. Proceed to #2. Consent Form.

---

2. Consent Form:

<u>*Let me start by telling you what the point of this study is?*</u>

- ❖ *We are asking your permission to allow your child to participate in a research study to understand students' experiences of school budget cuts.*

- ❖ *This study will be conducted by me (Mariah Kornbluh) and my professor Jennifer Watling Neal, Ph. D. at Michigan State University.*

❖ *I encourage you to ask any questions or concerns before giving permission for your child to participate.*

If you do agree to participate your child will:

❖ *Have a group interview with other students in his/her school regarding their experience of school budget cuts.*

❖ *These interviews will be during school hours to avoid any hassles in transportation. Other activities will be provided for students who do not wish to participate.*

❖ *We will request your child assent (gives permission) to participate in the group interview before proceeding.*

❖ *After the group we will ask your child to fill out a brief (one page) survey regarding their experience in the focus group.*

❖ *In particular the survey asks if they felt their voice was heard.*

In Total:

❖ *The group interview will last forty-five minute to an hour. The survey will take approximately five to ten minutes.*

Let me address any potential risks:

❖ *First, none of the questions we will be asking your child in the group interview or survey seek out personal information or sensitive topics.*

❖ *However, some children may feel uncomfortable with the group interview process. Please know if your child feels uncomfortable at any point during the interview, they have the right to skip any question they want or leave the group interview at any point in time.*

❖ *In addition, your child has the right to skip any of the survey questions or refuse to take the survey at any point in time.*

In addition, there are also a few benefits:

❖ *Your child will be provided with snacks for participating in the study. There are no other direct benefits for you or your child for participating in the group interview. We hope information from students will help us understand student's experiences of the budget cuts.*

- ❖ *Together as a group your child and other students may come up with some solutions and potential changes they would like to see in their school that we could share with other students or school staff (like teachers and the school principal).*

- ❖ *Group findings will be used to provide school officials, staff, teachers and students with general information about student experiences of the budget cuts. Working with your child's teacher, group findings will be incorporated into the class social studies curriculum.*

I am now going to address how you and your child's privacy will be protected:

- ❖ *You and your child's confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No one can link your child's answers to your child's name. Your child's name will never be used in any publications or presentations.*

- ❖ *When findings are shared from this study, we will only indicate whether statements or quotes were said by a boy or girl, a 6th, or 7th grader. We will not share anything your child says in a way that they can be identified. No personal stories or identifiable information will be shared with parents, teachers, or other students.*

- ❖ *The only time we will break confidentiality and tell someone what your child specifically says is if we believe your child is in danger or someone else is, or if we are mandated to report a past behavior.*

- ❖ *The focus group discussion will be audio taped. Audio tapes of the interviews will be typed. Audio tapes will be destroyed following transcription. Any mention of your child's name that occurs during conversation will be replaced by a generic identity (i.e. 7th Grade Boy). In addition, your child's name will be removed from the survey. The survey will be given a non-identifiable ID number.*

- ❖ *All data will be stored in locked file cabinets and on password-protected computers, which requires a specific code to access, in a locked research office at Michigan State University for 10 years after which it will be destroyed. Only research team members and the Institutional Review Board (a group that makes sure participants' rights are protected) will have access to this data.*

If you do have any questions or concerns:

- ❖ *This research project will be supervised and conducted by myself, Mariah*

Kornbluh. I'm a graduate student at Michigan State University and Jennifer Watling Neal Ph.D., researchers in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. (IRB # 11-186)

- ❖ *If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please feel free to contact me…*
    - o *My address is the: Garden Level, Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. My email is: mkornblu@gmail.com. And my phone Number is: (650) 814-5056.*

- ❖ *And my professor and advisor who is overseeing the project is*

    - o *Doctor Jennifer Watling Neal. Her address is: Michigan State University, Department of Psychology, 127A Psychology Building, East Lansing, MI, 48824-1116. Her email is: jneal@msu.edu. And her office number is: (517) 432-6708*

- ❖ *If you have questions or concerns about your child's role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program; telephone: 517-355-2180, Fax: 517-432-4503, or email: irb@msu.edu or regular mail: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.*

- ❖ *Please know I have given STUDENT NAME a form with all of this contact information, if you would like, I can give them an additional copy.*

Now this study is asking for your permission. Your child does not have to participate.

- ❖ *Your participation is voluntary, you may choose not to participate at all, or may refuse to participate in certain procedures, answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence (e.g. this will not affect your child's education or class grade).*

- ❖ *Your child has the right not to participate in the study. If your child chooses to participate, they have the right to skip or not answer a question, leave the group interview, or withdraw from the study at any time.*

- ❖ *If your child withdraws from the group interview, he/she will return to the*

> *classroom where the teacher will be supervising an alternative activity.*
>
> *Do you have any questions or concerns?*

3. Collect Consent

> *Now I am going to ask you if you are comfortable having your child participate in this study.*
>
> 1. If (Yes) Record Consent on form.
>   a. *For my records I am going to record your child's full name (State Name) and that their parent gave verbal consent over the phone.*
>   i. *Food will be given during the focus groups. Is there any food your child can't eat?*
>   1. If, Yes (*What food is that?*)
>   2. If, No (Proceed)
>
> 2. If (No)
>   a. *Thank you for taking the time to speak with me.*

4. Record Consent on Verbal Parental Consent Form.

5. Thank Parents:

> *Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.*
>
> *Take care.*

Verbal Parental Consent Form

This form indicates that parental verbal consent given over the phone for:

_____   _____

Students Name   Date

_____   _____

Parents Name   Date

<u>Food Allergies</u>

Parents indicate that student:
- ☐ Does have allergies (Specify below).

_____

- ☐ Does not have allergies.

Appendix F: Recruitment Fliers

Figure 4: Student Recruitment Image

❖ **What is this about?**
- Mariah Konbluh and Jennifer Watling Neal, Ph.D. at Michigan State University would like to invite YOU to get involved in a research project discussing your experiences in school this year!
- We are particularly interested in learning:
  o How does this school year compare to last year?
  o What do you like about school?
  o What would you like to see change in your school?

❖ **What will I do?**
- Eat some delicious snacks!
- Participate in one group interview with other students for forty five minutes to an hour.
- Talk about important issues, changes you have noticed this year in school and ideas you have for improving your school.

❖ **What are the requirements?**
- Attended *Hayward* one year prior, 2009-2010.
- Need to be currently in 6th or 7th grade.
- Have your parents fill out a parent consent form.
- Sign a student assent form.
- Turn both forms into the office.

❖ **How do I get involved?**
- Go to the main office ask for parental consent and student assent forms for the study Student Discussions.

Figure 5: Parent Recruitment Image

What is this project about?
- To understand your child's and other students educational experiences around the impact of the current budget cuts.
- To be aware of what your child and other students view as crucial factors contributing to their educational success.
- Group findings will be used to provide school officials, staff, teachers and students with general information about:
  - The impact of the budget cuts on student experience.
  - Student identified important factors for academic success.
       *Please note your child's individual comments and ideas will be kept confidential.

Who can participate?
- Students who have attended *Hayward* at least one year prior.
- 6th – 7th grade students will be asked to participate.
- Focus group will range in length from forty-five minute to one hour.
- Snacks will be provided!

When will this be done?
- During the spring of 2012.
- Focus groups will be held after school to prevent any class disruption.

Who do I contact if I have questions?
- This research project will be supervised and conducted by Mariah Kornbluh and Jennifer Watling-Neal, Ph. D. researchers in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. (IRB # 11-186)
- If you have any questions or concerns please contact either researchers
  - Mariah Kornbluh by email at mkornblu@gmail.com or by leaving a message at 650-814-5056.

- o Jenna Watling Neal, Ph. D.: You can contact her by email: jneal@msu.edu. You can also contact her by phone (517) 432-6708

How do I get involved?
- Go to the main office ask for parental consent and student assent forms for the study Student Discussions.
- Forms need to be filled out by you and your child, When completed please return them to the main office.

Teacher Informational Flier

Figure 6: Teacher Information Image

What?
- To understand students educational experiences and the impact of the current budget cuts.
- To be aware of what students view as crucial factors contributing to their educational success.
- Engage students in dialogue around solutions to school improvements and reform efforts.

How?
- 6th – 7th grade students will be asked to participate.
- Students with parental permission will participate in a focus group ranging in length from forty-five minute to one hour.
- Snacks will be provided to students who attend focus groups.
- Focus groups will be held after school in order to prevent any disruption to instruction.
- Pending parental consent, focus groups will be tentatively conducted to be administered during the spring of 2012.

Who?
- This research project will be supervised and conducted by Mariah Kornbluh and Jennifer Watling-Neal researchers in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. (IRB # 11-186)

- If you have any questions or concerns please contact the researchers.
  - Mariah Kornbluh by email at mkornblu@gmail.com . You can also contact her by phone (650) 814-5056.
  - Jenna Watling Neal, Ph. D.: You can contact her by email: jneal@msu.edu. You can also contact her by phone (517) 432-6708

Why?
- Aggregated findings will be used to provide school officials, staff, teachers and students with general information about:
    - The impact of the budget cuts on student experience.
    - Student identified important factors for academic success.
    - Student insight on creative strategies for improvement.
    - Individual student insight will be kept confidential.
- Findings will also be used to learn more, in general, about the impact of the budget cuts on student experience, which is occurring state wide and nationally.
- Researcher would be willing to help form and facilitate a youth group at the school interested in meeting to discuss, strategize and offer solutions towards school improvement.

Appendix G: Focus Group Protocol

Student Focus Group Protocol

Introduction:
1. Thank you all for coming today! Let's go around the room and introduces ourselves. Please say your name and what you enjoy doing in your free time?

2. My name is (Mariah) and I'm from MSU. (Additional Note Taker/Recorder introduces self). (Students introduce themselves.)

3. Thank you all for taking the time to come talk today about your experiences in school.

4. Before we get started, I want to make sure that you receive all the information that you need to understand what we will be doing today.

Review Student's Rights:
- Today we are going to be doing a group interview with all of you regarding your experiences in school. I am particularly interested in how you feel this school year compares to other school years.

- The interview will last from forty-five minutes to an hour.

- After the group interview, I will give you a short one page survey to fill out. The survey will be asking you questions regarding whether you felt your voice was heard in the group interview.

- You are here because your parents have already given permission for you to participate.
  o You have also agreed individually prior to this group interview to participate.

- It is important you understand that it is still your choice to participate in this group interview and fill out the survey at the end of the group interview.
  o Whether or not you participate will have no impact on your school experience. That means no one will be upset if you choose not to participate, not your teacher, principal, parent or me.

- If you participate, my questions will be about what it is like to be a student at Hayward.

- If any of these questions make you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. You may stop answering them at any time.

- There is no direct benefit to you participating. But together as a group, we may come up with some solutions and potential changes you would like to see in your school that we could share with other students or school staff (like teachers and the school principal). In addition, I will be working with your teacher's to incorporate some of the group ideas into your social studies lessons.

- With that said, this interview is confidential.
  - That means our conversations are private, no one else will know what you specifically said.
    - The only time I will tell someone what you say is if you tell me that you are hurting yourself or that someone is hurting you.
    - If that happens we will let someone at the school know what you have said so they can check in with you and make sure you are safe.
    - If I do need to tell someone else, I will let you know ahead of time.
  - Other than that your parents, teachers, other students, the principal or other school staff will not know what you specifically say in this group interview.
  - Your name will not be used when findings are shared from this study. For example, I will only indicate whether statements were said by a boy or girl, a 6th or 7th grader.
  - To keep our interview private I need your support. Please don't talk to anyone else about other students' personal stories, experiences or struggles during this interview. If you have ideas you are interested in pursuing around bettering your school we can strategize more after the session.

- Now I know you have all agreed separately to participate in the group interview today, but now that we are about to start, I just want to make sure that everyone is comfortable participating? Is there anyone who does not want to participate?

[*Students, who decline to participate, leave the group. Undergraduate can escort student back to teacher's classroom, where an alternative activity is available.*]

5. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

6. During this conversation I hope to hear different points of view. There is no right or wrong answers to these questions. I expect that different people may have different experiences and different opinions, which is perfectly fine.

7. Everyone's thoughts and ideas are important to our discussion, but not everyone has to answer every single question.

8. (Recorder name) will be taking notes while we talk today. We will be using a digital recorder. We will use this only to make sure we have a complete record of what you say today. Once we type up the conversation, we will erase it from the recorder.

Ground Rules:
- Before we begin we will need to set a few ground rules.
- Does anyone have any important rules they would like to suggest for our discussion today?

*Go over if students don't make the following suggestions:

- Please speak one at a time. This is important. If everyone talks at the same time I won't be able to understand you on the recording. We want to be able to accurately record each of your thoughts and ideas.

- Because we are recording please try to keep your body as quiet as possible when others are speaking. Try to avoid making any additional noises the recorder may pick up. Feel free to let me know if we need a quick break so people can stretch and move about.

- To help us keep track of who says what, please say your name first each time you speak. (For example, "This is Mariah…) I will replace your name with a confidential ID number when I make a transcript of this conversation.

- This is a private conversation. I won't be telling anyone what you specifically say. We may present our conclusion as a group to the school around school improvement, but personal stories, struggles or experiences should not be discussed outside of this group, please respect each other's experiences.

- Also to help maintain each and everyone's privacy, please use first names only.

- Respect yourself and others. This means no cursing, making fun of people or interrupting one another.

Can well all agree to these rules?

Before we get started, does anyone have any questions or concerns?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (Note * Probe: Follow up if needed.)
1. Today we are going to discuss your experiences in school this year. Specifically, how does this school year compare to last year?
   a. * What is different about this school year compared to last year?

2. Did your school make any changes this year?
   a. *What kind of changes did your school make?

3. Why do you think your school made these changes?
   a. *What caused these changes to happen?
   b. What in your opinion was the most important change your school made?

4. How have these changes affected you?
   a. How have these changes affected…?
      i. *Other Students
      ii. *Teachers

5. If someone were to ask you, "What do you think you need as students to do well in school? What would you tell them?"

a. *What do you need from your school in order to do well?
b. Why is _____ important for you to do well?
c. Do you feel _____is offered in your school? Why or why not?
d. Thinking back to last year, do you feel _____ was offered? Why or why not?

6. What is hard for you and your classmates in school?
   a. What makes it hard for students to be successful?
   b. Do you feel _____ was as much of a challenge last year? Why or why not?

7. Now when I say the words "school budget cuts", what comes to mind?
   a. Let's say someone had never heard about the budget cuts, how would you explain it to them?
   b. *If group doesn't know. Inform students of what the budget cuts are, read script below. If they are aware of the budget cuts review what points have been addressed in discussion thus far, address any points missing, in particular the last sentence of the script:
      i. Let me give you some general information about the school budget cuts. Many schools have experienced a loss of school funding. School funding is the money given by state and local government. This money is used to run schools. Many schools in Michigan have had to make cuts to their school budget this year.

8. Do you think the budget cuts have impacted your school? If so, how?

9. Let's say you were in charge, how would you handle the budget cuts?
   a. *For example: What should your school make sure it keeps?
   b. *What might your school be able to do without?

10. We are coming to the end of our group discussion, how has this discussion been for you?
    a. If you were in my shoes what questions would you have asked?
    b. * What would your answers be?

Debriefing:
11. Did you feel your voice and opinion was heard in this group?
    a. How was this discussion for you?
    b. Does anyone have any concerns or questions?
    c. Would you like to get involved in more group discussions?

▪ Just a friendly reminder. The group information we came up with today along with other student groups discussions will be shared with your principal and teachers. Remember though no personal stories or opinions will be shared. That means your name will not be tied to any information.

▪ We are also going to be working with some of the solutions you and other students suggested regarding handling the budget cuts in your social studies class.

- With that said, does anyone have any questions or concerns?

Survey:
9. Thanks so much for participating in the group interview today. I am going to pass out a brief one page survey.
    a. This survey is interested in understanding if you felt your voice and ideas were heard in this group interview today.
    b. The survey will have personal statements. You will mark whether you agree or disagree with the statement. [Pass out survey].
    c. For example: The first statement is….
        i. My voice was heard in this group interview.
        ii. In the categories across you will circle the category that best fits how you feel about that statement:
            a. Strongly Disagree: You very much feel your voice was not heard in the group interview today.
            b. Disagree: You believe your voice was not heard in the group interview.
            c. Agree: You believe your voice was heard in the group interview.
            d. Strongly Agree: You very much feel your voice was heard in the group interview.

    d. Does anyone have any questions?
    e. I want to remind you that you have the right to:
        i. Not take the survey.
        ii. Skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.
        iii. Stop taking the survey at any point in time.
        iv. Ask us if any questions are unclear.
        v. Request to have one of us read you the survey questions. * I always do better on surveys when someone reads them out loud to me, so don't hesitate to ask?
            1. Would anyone like the survey to be read out loud to them?
    f. Once I receive your surveys, I will take them back to my office. I will remove your name from the survey with sharpie and give it an ID number. Again no one will know what answers you filled out.

Once students have completed survey:
10. Thank you all for participating! We can head back to class now; (undergraduate) will walk back with you. I am going to stay behind for a few minutes. If anyone felt uncomfortable in the group discussion, taking the survey or has any personal questions for me, feel free to stay after and we can chat.

You or your parents can always call the numbers on your assent sheet.
    Just a reminder the numbers are: [Write numbers on board/butcher paper].
        a. (650)814-5056 that's my number.

b.   (517) 432-6708 is my professor's number, Dr. Jennifer Watling Neal. She is in charge of this project, and has a lot of experience working with students. She would be happy to chat with you if you have any personal questions that you would rather ask someone else.

c.   If you have any questions or worries about your role and rights as a participant or would like more information you can also contact, without even having to share your name, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program; telephone: 517-355-2180, Fax: 517-432-4503.

Appendix H: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings

Table 5: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Descriptions of this School Year)

Theme: Description of this School Year	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: Um, how does this year compare to last year? S: Not that much better.	Current school year not much better than past.
	I: I was going to ask if other students were affected. S: I think everyone's affected in somehow with something that's happened this year.	The class has been affected by the changes this year.
	I: Do you think these changes have affected other students? S [Group]: Yeah. I: How so? S: Badly, cause everybody was talking about it. S: Sixth and seventh.	Sixth and Seventh grade students talking about changes in school.
	S: Because I'm pretty sure all of us would rather stay home and do something we do every day than actually come to school.	Rather be at home then school.
	S : Only thing I really like coming to school is…the friends	Come to school for friends.
	S: And tennis.	Come to school for tennis.
	S: They don't pay attention. Kind of like talk to a friend, I think that's why, some most people come to school, because they just want to come see their friends.	Most students don't pay attention want to see their friends.
	S: Last year we had more freedom.	Students had more freedom last year.
	S: Last year was better. I: Last year was better, why do you say that? S: Cause… S: There was a lot more fun. This year.	Last year more fun.
	S: Were not even in our own class that long, we are in our class for like an hour.	Not in own class long.
	S: Were more bored.	Due to changes in school this year, students more bored.
	S: Last year was better.	Last year was better.
	S: Like last year, it was fun but this year, I don't want to come here no more.	This year don't want to come to school.
	S: It's strict.	School is strict.
	S: It's boring. Yeah. It's boring and like, I	School is boring.

Table 5: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Descriptions of this School Year) (con'td)

Theme: Description of this School Year	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	don't know. The teachers don't make it fun, they make it boring like. I don't know.	
	S: Last year, it was fun. S: Like, okay. It was fun last year because they had whole bunch of people here that we knew like were good.	Last year fun knew people.
	S: But I don't know! It didn't really affect me. I don't care cause… I: Yeah? You're just going to be okay either way? S: Oh, no! I don't want to be here!	Don't want to be at school.
	I: So you're saying it's not so much fun to come to school anymore? S: I mean. I'll come. Umm but… I: Not the same as last year? S: No S: No last year was different.	School not the same as last year.
	S: ...so when I wake up in the morning, I'm like "oh… I got to go to school". Then I just go.	Not excited for school.
	I: How do you think these changes affected other students like your friends? What do they say? S: It's boring. I: It's boring? Yeah? And it's more this year? S: Mm hmm. S: Yeah.	Peers find school to be boring.
	S: Well some people from last year, feels like I am not coming here, next year, because come here because it's going to be retarded or crazy. But yeah, some people switched to different schools like SCHOOL11 and NEW SCHOOL.	Students from last year switched schools.
	I: And what about the students this year, how, do they talk about the changes? S: Umm… they say it's boring, umm…basically…	Students describe school as boring.
	S: …I would ask, why do you go to this	Question, why are you at the

Table 5: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Descriptions of this School Year) (con'td)

Theme: Description of this School Year	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	school? S: What was the reason you came here? S: Did your parents make you?	school?
	S: It's hard.	School is hard.
	I: Did you want to come here or did your parents make you? S: My parents made me.	Parents made me attend school.
	S: I came here because my mom couldn't find a school right away so she just sent me here. S: Yeah, because, my brother offered this school. Because my cousin goes, well not my cousin, well somebody I know goes here, and my brother offered this school.	Parents didn't know what school I should go to, ended up here.
	S: I was just moving from CITY, and my momma, umm… she didn't really know any place, either so I came here.	Parents didn't know what school I should go to, ended up here.
	S: My mom just made me come.	Parents made me attend school.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: You've had three teachers this year. S: Yes I: And why, did you have that last year? S [Group]: No	More teachers switching this year.
	I: No. So why this year so many teachers do you think? S: Because, they left the school.	Teachers left the school, resulting in a lot of switching.
	S: Just like, just teachers that have been here before that worked like years back and now they're coming back, so they're not really "new" new but they are new to, like, this year.	Teachers returning this year that had been at the school years before.
	I: But you guys had her last year right? Group: No I: No? Oh she's new too. S: She's not. She used to work for 3rd grade but then came.	Teacher new to sixth and seventh grade use to teach 3rd Graders.
	I: Do you have more new teachers this year than last year? S: You could say that. I: Yeah okay. S: Three.	More new teachers this year compared to last year, three new teachers.
	I: How does this year compare to last year? S: New teachers.	This year more new teachers.
	I: New teachers? How many new teachers? S: Uh like it's a lot of new teachers from last year.	This year a lot more new teachers.
	S: Like 5 or 6	New teachers: 5 or 6.
	S: We still got only 2... 3 old teachers. S: 4 of the old teachers.	Less teachers staying this year, 4.
	I: Your teacher last year is different from your teacher this year? How so? S: Different work.	New teachers have different work.
	S: Because the new teachers came from a real middle school, well one of our teachers did.	New teachers use to teach at a middle school.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher
Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	from SCHOOL3 and TEACHER1 came from SCHOOL4.	
	S: Just some of the teachers are gone.	Some teachers are gone this year.
	S: We got a new art teacher.	New art teacher this year.
	S: In TEACHER 2's class we had all these teachers.	Had lots of teachers this year.
	S: We had TEACHER3, TEACHER1, TEACHER2, TEACHER4.	Had lots of teachers this year, 4.
	S : Cause then at one point, one of our teachers had ELA Science S: We had to switch S: … and then we had, and then our homeroom we had Math and Social Studies. And then we had to switch to Math and Science in TEACHER 1's class and to ELA and Social Studies. Because our other teacher couldn't teach science.	New teachers only taught specific subjects had to keep switching classes.
	S: She couldn't teach. TEACHER1 couldn't teach social studies.	New teachers only taught specific subjects.
	S: Yeah so they had she said to switch, she was more familiar with science.	One new teacher switched from social studies to science because she was more familiar with teaching science.
	S: Because, we actually had a teacher in this room that taught us S: Law and Government. S: Yeah, but she went to SCHOOL11.	This year, not using courtroom, teacher who used it switched schools.
	S: Umm…the teacher taught us law and government. I: Okay, was that one of your electives? S [Group]: No. I: No, so the teacher just not here anymore? S [Group]: uh huh. S: Yeah she moved to umm…SCHOOL11.	This year, teacher switched schools.
	S: She went to umm…SCHOOL3.	Last year, teacher switched schools.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: Did your school make any changes this year? S: Yes. S: Yes, umm fewer teachers.	This year fewer teachers.
	S: We switched a few teachers out of this school. S: Two to three. S: No, four.	This year, teachers switched schools.
	S: Our math and science teacher got switched. S: And so did our English and Social Studies.	This year, teachers switched.
	S: We had a whole bunch of teachers that was great at what they did, but now we only have like a few teachers. Like TEACHER 14, TEACHER14, TEACHER14 was my homie. S: [Group Laughs] S: I did a whole bunch of stuff in his class for extra things. S: He took us to AMUSEMENT PARK. S: He made it fun for us. S: Now he's gone, he went to SCHOOL11.	Budget cuts cause loss of liked teachers.
	I: Umm. Anything else that you noticed that's different? S: The teachers. I: Yeah. What about the teachers? S: Um, like we switched teachers like three times this whole year. I: Was that different from last year? S: Mm hmm. S: We only had one. S: Well, we had two.	This year switched teachers.
	S: No, in like um TEACHER5 last year she was 7th and 6th grade teacher but now, she's now a 5th grade teacher room. They have lot of teachers like going in and going out. I: Yeah. And 5th graders too.	Previous teacher for grades switched.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Yeah.	
	I: Do you think teachers are affected by these changes? S: Yeah, they tired of switching schools. I: Yeah, I bet. Say more about that. S: They want to stay in one spot. Instead of bouncing around.	Teachers don't like switching schools, want to stay settled.
	S: Because they probably know all the other teachers where they were. I: Yeah. S: And here, and they we go they have to learn the other teachers and students.	When teachers switch have to meet new teachers and students.
	I: Or is there one you would say, this is the change that bothered me the most, it would be…? S: The teachers.	Teacher switching bothers the most.
	I: Um, what is it like to have a new teacher? Do you think- does it make it different? S: No. S: Not really. S: Not really.	New teacher doesn't make a difference in school.
	S: Yeah. I: Yeah? How so? Why'd you say yeah? S: Because you got like, I don't know, it's different though, because our teacher last year was different from our teacher this year.	New teachers are different from past teachers.
	S: Like you're not, like you're not used to the new teacher.	Not use to new teacher.
	S: Yeah, cause some teachers you knew for a while.	Hard to see teachers leave, knew them.
	S: I said I want my old teacher back. I: What were you saying there STUDENT? S: She said. She wanted our new teacher back, our old teacher back. S: Our old teacher back.	Want old teacher back.

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Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: I was about to leave.	Going to leave school too many teachers switching.
	S: And the teachers	Teachers make school difficult.
	S: Last year, there were better teachers.	Last year, teachers were better.
	I: Um, do you think these changes affect other students? S: Yeah. I: Yeah? How so? What have you heard people talk about? S: How, sometimes, they wish they had our old teachers back cause it was so much easier than. I: Yeah. S: …than it is now with our other teachers.	Students want old teachers back.
	I: What's it like to have a different teacher? S: Nerve wracking…	Having a new teacher is nerve wracking.
	S: It's weird. Because like you get used to one teacher and then another teacher comes, and then you like, I want the old teacher back. S: Like… we get used to one teacher and then like two days later, TEACHER2 come. And then.. S: TEACHER1 comes. S: Yeah, and then we don't want TEACHER2 no more, so we want the other teacher back and then… S: TEACHER4. S: TEACHER1 came, and then she acts like TEACHER2.	Get used to teacher, difficult to change want old teacher back.
	S: Cause, we used to be like 'Oh gosh. We want a different teacher from TEACHER3', and then TEACHER 1 came, and it was like 'Oh, my, we don't want her. She's kind of mean'.	New teacher mean.
	I: Any other ideas? No, do you think this was as much of a problem as last year? S: No, because, okay we had	New teacher mean.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	TEACHER7 as a fifth grade teacher. S: Some student got switched over too…TEACHER15. S: We had TEACHER7 and TEACHER15. Yeah, but like they, I don't know. They were good teachers. So…	
	S: Budget or something? I: Say more about that. S: I don't really know how that works. Like I guess maybe something going on with the money and they had to get different people, or something.	Teacher switching due in some way to budget.
	S: So like um TEACHER2 went from 3rd grade to 6th grade and TEACHER5 who was 7th grade went down to 5th grade so I think they're just kind of moving around and filling teachers in and taking some teachers out	Some of the teachers moved grades; school is shuffling teachers to fill in spaces and removing some teachers.
	S: She was the best teacher. S: Who? S: TEACHER5 S: but kids still didn't act nice to her but she was really nice.	One teacher was nice but some kids still weren't nice to her.
	I: Do you think the budget cuts have impacted your school? S [Group]: Yes. I: Yeah? How so? S: We have a lot less teachers.	Budget cuts cause fewer teachers.
	S: Losing teachers, if you like me, the teachers want to get paid an amount of money, but if you can't, if like the principal can't pay the teachers more money, they might lose the teachers.	Budget cuts can result in losing teachers, not enough pay.
	S: Most teachers just don't want to work here.	Teachers don't want to work at school.
	I: What other changes do you think might've been because of budget cuts? S: Our teachers. S: Yeah.	Budget cuts cause teachers to change.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: Why your teachers? S: Because S: They keep changing them.	
	S: Yeah because she umm, like, they going back to the…like…Mrs.…..She's used to be a 1st grade teacher. She came to 6th grade, she couldn't deal with us. So then she went back to 1st grade because she's used to teaching 1st grade. S: And that's when TEACHER 1 came.	Teacher switched, moved to grade hadn't taught, kids too much.
	S: But that's how it is like, that's why we get so many different teachers cause they putting teacher in a grade that they never taught before.	Reason for number of teachers, put in grade hadn't taught.
Subtheme: Changes in Teacher Instruction	S: We did better stuff. I: You did better stuff before? S: Like the penny thing. We got to make stuff out of straws. And she had put a whole bunch of pennies on there. S Group: Oh TEACHER4. I: Was that at the beginning of this year? S Group: Nods	Previous teachers had better activities.
	S: Yeah it was really fun last year. S: Like they made it fun… S: Like I know, when we worked in our social studies books last year, we had like it was like a game show, you play like, call it jeopardy or something, like she would ask a question, everyone would raise their hands and see who gets it and it was kind of like a game. S: and we'd get a piece of candy or something	Last year teachers made it more fun with games.
	S: This year all we do is write notes, read, write notes, whatever.	This year repetitive, just read and write.
	S: I like TEACHER 4 because like she actually would do stuff like with that straw tower with the pennies, that was actually pretty fun.	Last year teacher did activities.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: But TEACHER2 just has us like watch videos S: We watch videos like almost every day…	Don't like watching videos every
	S: Just reading in the social studies book and we have to do outlines in social studies and just has us read, and sometimes she'll just write them down and all we have to do is copy it. S: We don't really get asked anything in her class.	Don't like not being asked questions in class, instead copying and making outlines from a book.
	S: Like it's more homework	Have more homework.
	S: They did math in a fun way, not where we sit in there bored. S: Cause we used to play games. S: Talk a lot. you used to be able talk to your friends. Now you go to… S: You use to play with the games. S: Now…you got to… S: Division and multiplication. S: She taught us a fun way how to do it. S: percent's. S: Yeah, on the smart board.	Last year, teacher taught in a fun way.
	S: Yeah, cause which teachers teach a different way than others and then like our first teacher taught us a way to do umm in Language Arts and then our other…other teacher came and then she taught us a different way so we have to learn a whole bunch of different ways.	Switching teacher need to learn a different way.
	S: We don't go outside and do experiments like last year we did experiments	Last year experiments, this year none.
	S: Right, you can bring a blanket and like then during Christmas time you can bring a blanket and pillows. S: She provided, um, um, hot cocoa and all this stuff. She bought us. S: And peppermint sticks. We all got,	Last year teacher had fun activities.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	like treats you could bring. S: We got to watch a movie.	
	S: Like last year they used them to play games on them. S: That is provided.	Technology used last year.
	S: hmm…People actually use this court room. Now people just, it's just, it's where we go, come and watch, umm…do anything in this room. I: Oh, last year and this year not so much? S: We used to use it a lot though.	Last year used court room.
	I: Any other changes your school made this year? S: Umm, grades. First we get everybody in a class, most we had all A's, B's. Then we got different teachers. We had… S: It confused a lot of kids. S: Cause we went down to an, A from a D to like to a E.	With teacher switching students are confused grades drop.
	S: Yeah like. Cause, I usually get like good grades in math. But when we switched from TEACHER3 to the other teacher because they had totally different strategies and how to teach math so I really got confused.	New teacher with different strategies caused confusion, grades dropped.
	I: No, but it just, it doesn't bother you too much? S: It does. I: How does it bother you? S: Cause all my grades dropped.	Teacher switching bothers students grades dropped.
	S: But all our other teachers, they are giving too many speeches.	Current teachers give too many speeches.
	I: Are there any other ways that these changes that have affected you? S: Mm hmm. I got my game took away. I: You got your game take away? S: Because my grades dropped. From A	Grades dropped, punished at home.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	to a B.	
	I: Yeah? How do you think they're affected by it? S : It's either cause most of us in our class when we switched teachers, like our grades dropped and then I guess now they're actually focusing on teaching and like now focus and like get it up a little bit. And we all know [STUDENT] had good grades but all of a sudden she got an A minus! Group: Laughter S: When the hell did that happen?	Changing teachers led to kids' grades dropping, even kids that got good grades are not doing as well.
	S: and someone who probably won't give out homework so often… cause now we're just getting a ton of homework.	Would like less homework.
	S: Harder Homework.	Want more challenging homework.
	S: That stuff is just easy. Like, what's the point of doing this we already know how to look in a dictionary and find dictionary words?	Current homework is too easy, know how to do it.
	S: Then when we go to 8th grade we going to be behind…them going to be giving us harder work. S: Right, they going to be giving us harder work. We'll be like 'we're not used to this yet'.	Easy homework now puts them at a disadvantage for 8th grade.
	S: What I was thinking maybe like I think it'd be more fun if teachers feel like taught us more interesting topics then, like, for me, I mean some of this stuff is okay but some of it's really boring and I don't really want anything to do with it.	Want to be taught more interesting topics.
	S: I don't need this in everyday life.	Work not needed in everyday life.
	I: What's hard for you and your classmates in school?	Nothing hard about school. Homework repetitive doesn't

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Really nothing. S: Like we just don't feel like doing it and then we just kind of just don't care and then we- our grades drop, and then… Last marking period, I had a whole stack of papers in my desk of work that I hadn't done and it was all too easy that I didn't really feel like doing any of it. So I managed to get my grade up to a decent spot and I just kind of stopped there.	feel like doing it, able to just get grades decent then stop.
	I: Do you think umm, do you feel like you work last year was a little too easy or repetitive? S: No, it was actually fun! S: It was really fun!	Last year school work was fun.
	S: It was like kind of hard like TEACHER5 gave us, uh, 8th grade, I think a work sheet or something? S: She like had us work like above what we were normally doing so she actually get us prepared so now with TEACHER1 giving us easier work it gets kind of boring.	Last year teacher gave challenging work, 8th grade level, felt prepared, this year felt easier.
	S: Like TEACHER 1 in math, sometimes she'll explain it she'll like explain a lot to people who don't get it but if most the class gets it she like go your desk and try to help you.	Appreciate teacher explaining and helping students.
	I: Why were you about to leave for that? S: Cause we had to get back to all the, we had to change all the different like things. The teachers. It's not the teachers, but like a different work style.	Going to leave school too many different teachers with changed working styles.
	S: Yeah and like, things that we had learned before we had to learn all over again every time a new teacher came.	Re-learned school material each time a new teacher came.
	I: Does it affect your grades at all? S: Sometimes, sometimes it affects mine.	Having new teachers affected grades.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Sometime you just can't keep up with all your work and stuff.	Hard to keep up with work.
	S: More explanations. I: More explanations…what do you mean by that? S: Because when our teacher helps us… she uh…help us with the problems but she don't explain it more.	Need teachers that take the time to explain things.
	S: She explains it, it's just hard to like. I mean she explains it but she explains it a little bit harder than what we can do. S: like in her way, always.	Need teachers who provide explanations which make sense
	S: Yeah, then she put up that paper on the little Elmer thing for you to copy, but I told her copying is not helping me, it's just... S: Copying is copying. S: I mean like I hurry up and get done.	Teacher has them copying notes doesn't help.
	S: She does ten of our problems then we have like a ten pound less to do. S: But when we do work on our own we don't really get it	Teacher does the problem don't understand how to do the problem on their own.
	I: Like what makes school difficult? S: Math class.	Math class is difficult.
	S: Mine is science.	Science class is difficult.
	S: Now, they don't care.	This year, teachers don't care.
	S: I was talking about and they had better teachers last year. S: Cause, when they taught us stuff. S: We did more stuff. S: yeah, when they taught us stuff, like we actually learned something.	Last year teachers better, taught and students' learned.
	S: And plus cause we got only one math, since we got a math teacher, everything goes so quick, cause she tell you to do one assignment, we get that one, we have to get that one assignment in an hour and then we go to the next assignment on the	New teacher goes too fast in math, not helping with learning material.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	same day-on the next day. S: And that's too hard because you know some people struggle in math. She actually need to take her time and slow down and do more problems with us. S: She just does like five problems with us and then she makes us do the rest and some people… S: And she does that and she'll skip to one, like that's supposed to help us with the next couple S: and then some people don't get it and then when they raise their hand they get to ask…	
	S: You know some people might have a disability like math for me. S: Dyslexia. S: Sometimes with me math is kind of hard.	Math can be hard.
	S: I think that with our last teacher it was much better in science because we actually did projects but with our teacher now all we do is worksheets	Used to enjoy doing projects, new teacher only doing worksheets.
	S: I think that with our last teacher it was much better in science because we actually did projects but with our teacher now all we do is worksheets	Used to enjoy doing projects, new teacher only doing worksheets.
	S: But if we do more projects then that's how we learn more. S: Oh yeah.	Doing projects help learn.
	S: All we do is do the same thing over and over again.	School is repetitive.
	S: Because you get confused and they're, they're teaching a different way.	Teacher switching cause confusion, teaching a different way.
	S: Like I was saying last time when we had our first teacher we like, she taught us how to umm do it different than our second teacher and we got all A's in that	New teacher wanted to teach her way, different from old teacher didn't count past grades.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	class and then when our new teacher came, she didn't umm she didn't, take the grades that our other teacher had so, she made us restart with some whole, like another different thing that we didn't even know what to do. S : Yeah because she wanted to teach us, like her way I: Huh.. S: and then.	
	I: What about you, do you feel like it affected, has affected you in any way STUDENT? S: My grades. I: Your grades? S: Really bad.	Switching teachers affected grades.
	S: I really feel like TEACHER1. She'd be doing, she be flipping over. S: She doesn't do anything. All she does is look at the problem and see if it is done.	Teacher doesn't check if work done correctly.
	S: It's like my grades has went down a lot since they switched teachers and…	Since switching teacher grades went down.
	S: And then, you got the teachers are mad because of parents are calling	Teachers made parent's call about child's grades.
	I: So your parents have called to say what's going on? Yeah? S: Mm hmm. S: Cause they're tired of us of coming home with bad grades.	Parent's call school, upset coming home with bad grades.
	S: And you know how some kids get allowances like I do. I: Oh, so if you come back with something, you're not going to get an allowance cause of it? S: Yeah.	No allowance when grades are bad.
	S: It depends on what I get like, if I get As, I get like twenty to thirty dollars. But if I get a B, I get like ten to five. If I get a	Get allowance based on grade.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	C or below, I get no money.	
	S: But after I do chores. S: I earn extra money too.	Get allowance based on chores.
	S: Yeah. I always get A's and B's.	Always get good grades.
	I: Okay, do you think these changes have affected other students? S [Group]: Yes. I: How so? S: Like how we were saying before, like… S: It is just difficult for all of us. S: Kids ask other people for help, and if they don't know, they're stumped too.	School changes also affect other students' difficult for all students. Kids ask other people for help but if they don't know, everyone is stumped.
	S: And she'll do a question. S: And she'll do like, six dash two questions and she'll only ask five people. And I don't get why you can't ask the whole class. Because that way, we would all have, a question to ask, and then S: We'll get it. S…it'll be correct.	Teacher doesn't engage whole class, hard to ask questions then and learn.
	S: And then they got another thing because last year, when like STUDENT, he was, they were, that, STUDENT's whole class was in sixth grade. They actually built umm what was the thing called? One of those engines… It's a little, a small little engine that works that you got to push the button and it spins around. S: Oh those things that... S: Now we aren't to get to do nothing. I was looking forward to that.	Disappointed class activities last year not offered this year.
	I: Do you feel this was as bad last year? Like the being stricter and stuff. S: Nope. S: No. Last year was easier on us, like we got to learn more but. S: Yeah it was easier for us to learn.	Last year less strict, got to learn more.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher
Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Like she did fun games for us, she'll play the cupid shuffle, and we everybody would do it	Last year teacher had fun activities.
	S: Boring. S: Boring. I: Boring and why is it boring? S: Well some times its fun but sometimes it's boring. S: Yesterday was boring. S: It's boring, it's boring, but I like to do math.	Math can be boring.
	I: So one question I had for you was, is math more boring this year than last year? Or is it about the same? S: Last year it was actually kind of fun. S: It was actually kind of fun.	Last year math was fun.
	S: Yeah. This year it's, wait, its worse. Because last year when we did Math it was fun because we had a teacher that knew what she was doing.	Last year math was fun had a teacher knew what she was doing.
	S: Well I feel that TEACHER1 know what she doing because she's like a real middle school teacher, so. She came from SCHOOL4. And my brother had her, as a teacher too.	This year's math teacher knows what she's doing.
	S: I think TEACHER7 was fun, because, we never, actually, we use to usually just do worksheets. We didn't use to work in our Math books. S: Our textbooks. We didn't have that many books in our desk, we used to just share. S: We us to do stuff, cubic and stuff, the little cubic things.	Last year fun did not have to work in books did activities.
	I: Umm…okay, so and you do not enjoy TEACHER1 classroom. And that is because…? S: Her classroom is boring.	Don't enjoy one teacher's class, boring.
	S: And, now we have to like, actually, walk in a straight line automatically to	Changes in the hall walk in straight line no hanging out.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
Subtheme: Changes in Classroom Management	minutes just to like, you know, hang out in the hall.	
	S: I would say they would get stricter. I don't know if it was because of our behavior. But, last year we got to do more things. Like more possibilities we had. And now they just like you can't do this. You can't do that. S: Like when they let us actually walk down the hallway by ourselves. S: Right. S: They let us go to our different classrooms by ourselves.	Teachers stricter this year, provide less opportunity, last year more mobility.
	S: We raise our hand just to go use the bathroom.	Have to ask permission this year.
	S: No, ever.	
	S: Teachers were more friendly to us, this year they're like oh you can't do this like S: They're stricter.	Teachers stricter this year, more friendly last year.
	S: and now we just, like, he's [Teacher] just kind of, occupying us 'til the hours over. I: Yeah S: Like we just jump rope or just hang out until Friday comes and we have to go outside.	This year gym occupies students for the hour, not much to do.
	S: Last year, we actually worked. We had to…it was like, ten minute warm up, we didn't finish our warm up then we were in trouble. Like he was more strict on us, we want more strict but-like	Last year teacher was more demanding students did physical activity.
	S: But sometimes, he wouldn't let us do stuff.	Gym teacher wouldn't let students do some stuff.
	S: 'Because last year they treat us like 5th graders and little kids, this year they treat us like middle school kids.	Last year treated as little kids, this year treated as middle school students.
	S: The teachers are stricter.	Teachers are stricter this year.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: She be talking about how she chipped her tooth and stuff [Group Laughs]	Teacher tells personal stories.
	S: Well last year we got our work done, and then we got to do anything we want because we got our work done. This year we can't even get our work done, cause they.	Last year able to get work done.
	S: Well last year TEACHER 12 [OLD TEACHER] our told teacher, she umm, she didn't talk so much, and we can talk while she was she gave us our work, we just gone talk like she was talking. So we had a lot more time to talk than, well we do this year because they want it silent.	Last year, kids able to talk more amongst themselves to while teacher is talking.
	S: Just as long as we, just as long as we were quiet.	Last year, class was allowed to talk quietly while doing work.
	S: And if was getting our work done, but if we wasn't then she would say "go back to your seat" or stuff like that	Last year, only had to been in seat if work wasn't getting done.
	S: And this year we can't even move. Last year we could. We could sit next to a neighbor and we could have partners. This year, we got to do independent work.	Last year able to work in partners, this year all work is done independently.
	S: Now you got to just sit down in your desk, shut up S: Like no talking. S: … do you work.	This year, must do work quietly and seated.
	S: Can't get up. S: Can't get up. S: Can't use the bathroom. Got to ask, got to raise your hand. Got to get up. Got to be like 'can I go to the bathroom'? S: Then you got to sign your name on paper, because somebody peed in the trash can.	Must ask to leave desk.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Because the teachers not going to help you when she do like five problems, it still, she'll just doing by herself. She doesn't like help us on the way and then, when we're done, we ask other kids like did they get it so they can help us. And then…But, she won't let us do that.	Teacher won't help learn work and won't allow group work.
	S: And then when, and then when you want the teacher to do something for you, you ask them and he says 'no cause you're always bad.'	Teacher think students are bad doesn't help them.
	S: We don't even get to go outside for five minutes. What are you talking about? They are not going to let us.	Not allowed breaks or to go outside.
	S: She doesn't let us, get up and like get something to drink, or use the bathroom or anything like that. You have to raise your hand. And if you don't ask. You have to raise your hand. If you don't ask her how she wants you to ask her, the way she wants you to ask her, 'may I please use the bathroom'? You have to ask all nice and stuff. She does not going to. S: Let you go to the bathroom. S: Yeah, you're just going to have to sit there.	Teacher's class need to ask permission.
	S: Um, because like, like TEACHER3 our math and science teacher, well? S: Social Studies. S: Our math and social studies' teacher, she was supposed to teach 1st grade and then she just automatically end up to 6th grade, she didn't know what to do, cause we was wild and stuff.	Teacher switched, moved to grade hadn't taught, kids too much.
	S: TEACHER2 just sitting there STAFF come to the window. S: He knocks on the window. Then she	Teacher leaves class to chat, don't know what to do and get yelled at.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	Then she opens it and gives him so candy. And they sit there and talk for fifteen minute and we don't know what were supposed to doing. S: Then she gets mad at us. S: Were not doing our assignment. We're just looking, what do we do? S: They're sitting there, playing, throwing stuff and they playing. Then they'll be like, she'll be like why you aren't you doing your assignment. We don't know what to do? And then she'll get mad. I: Mm hmm… S: Both of them do.	
	S: And they weren't like. S: They didn't yell as much.	Last year teachers didn't yell as much.
	S: You got to work with people, partners. You didn't have assigned seats. You could move from your assigned seats once you got the assignment. S: We had assigned seats but it wasn't like permanent though. S: We didn't have to sit there all the time. S: You don't have to stay in one spot.	Last year got to work with partners, no permanent seats.
	S: It seems like they are treating us like elementary kids instead of middle school kids.	Treated like elementary school kids.
	S: Every time I get in trouble, like well I don't get in trouble. Just like when somebody says something to me. And I'll say something and she'll be like 'Nope, Nope' and I just can't say something.	Given no opportunity to explain, to the teacher, own side of the story.
	S: and maybe a cooler environment because right now in our classroom is really cold and she wouldn't even let me wear my jacket.	Classroom is too cold and teacher wouldn't let her wear a jacket.
	S: a lot of people are starting to like not like TEACHER 2 as much because she's always lecturing us, and she's such a	Dislike teacher won't let students talk and tells on students.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	snitch, yes. [Group Laughter] S: and she' won't let us talk	
	S: He doesn't even. Okay. We could be sitting here on the ground and he doesn't say nothing' to us. He doesn't tell us to get up, to go, interact, he doesn't, and he looks like he doesn't even care.	Gym teacher doesn't care.
	S: Not too strict but like… GYM TEACHER. But like, he was cool though. S: Because we had to do harder stuff and it was good.	Enjoyed gym teacher last year, did hard work.
	S: Especially since they both come from a real middle school, they are too hard.	New teacher too hard, came from a middle school.
	I: So what do you, coming from a real middle school… what does that mean?	New teacher treats the class
	S: They treat us like were in middle school. S: Yeah. S: Were not used to.	differently like in a middle school not use to.
	S: They should treat us like were usually do, get treated in this school.	New teachers should treat student as they have been in their current school.
	S: Like we had more freedom last year, basically like that.	Had more freedom last year.
	S: The teachers get them in trouble for no reason and they didn't do anything. I: So teachers' kind of are getting them in trouble? S: Yeah. S: It's the art teacher. I: It's the art teacher? … Um, is she new this year? S: Yeah.	New art teacher getting students in trouble.
	S: Yes, they're feeling like…TEACHER1. They've be telling, feeling like she needs to go back to SCHOOL4, because she too strict and rough. We'll not rough. But, I mean, she	Students feel teacher too strict.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	too strict.	
	I: And the teacher? What do you mean by the teachers? S: TEACHER 2, she talks too much.	Teacher talks too much.
	S: Yeah because when we go in there and she be giving us our work, and then we try to do our work, and she be telling us how to talk, and she be talking our ear off, tell all of her stories and we don't really want to know.	Teacher talks too much, hard to do work.
	S: I do Group Laugh S: I mean they're funny.	Teacher's stories funny.
	S: The time that she's in there talking with you, you can be using to learn.	Time teacher talking could be learning.
	S: Because like if you know this problem and your partner don't, then you can help them with that. If you don't know this problem and then your partner do, they can help you with that.	Nice to work with partner, can help one another.
	I: Okay, do you think other students would agree with that as well? S: Yeah, because they always ask about having partners.	Other student like working with partners.
	S: We got a lot of A students in our class. S: Right, well we got like four, five maybe at the most but we got like twenty-eight students. That's not a lot. I: But that those students maybe can help other students is that the idea? S: Yeah. S: mm hmmm S: If they let us have groups	Have students doing well in the class that can help others if work in groups.
	S: Then you got to raise your hand. 'They say no.' Then you raise your hand again. You got to ask if you can get some the water. 'They say no.' But another person get up and they go get some water.	Got to raise your hand to ask to get a drink of water. Teachers say no, but are inconsistent because some people get to get water.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: It's like we are at boot camp with TEACHER1, in TEACHER2 class we can relax, we can talk, do our work. S: Sit back and do whatever.	Teacher 1's classroom is strict. Teacher 2's classroom is more relaxed.
	S: You don't have to ask to get up to get a drink or go to the bathroom.	Enjoy class able to get up without asking.
	S: No, it's boring because she say every time we have like a project there's somebody that wants to take over and nobody is taking over anything we just want to help. And then when the people aren't listening then that's your only chance to do something. When you ask them to listen to you they're just in la -la land going' to, doing, other groups just doing' whatever they want to do.	Class has trouble doing projects; teacher won't let them do projects.
	S: Some people don't really work together and if we do more groups they could learn how to work together.	More group projects help people learn to work together.
	S: And appreciate each other. We just work by ourselves and then when she says, 'get into a group' it's like nobody wants to work with you.	More group projects learn to appreciate each other.
	S: I wish we could stay in our classroom all day. I don't going to TEACHER1, I like staying in our class.	Don't like one teacher's class.
	S: I didn't enjoy it sometimes. I: You didn't enjoy it sometimes? Why? S: She called my mom too much.	Didn't enjoy teacher called home.
	S: They want to suspend you for something they didn't told you already-	Teachers want to suspend you.
	S: The teachers. I don't know. They just yell out of nowhere.	Teachers yell unexpectedly.
	S: And if the teacher goes out of the classroom to talk to another teacher and then she come back in like ten minutes later laughing. I: Yeah. S: And that disrupts learning.	Disruptive for learning teacher leaves to chat.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: I don't know that makes me mad. S: She tells us to do our assignment and when she comes back in she's like…. S: She like why are you not all doing your assignment, we're like we don't know how to do it. S: Yeah, cause she'll be in the middle page. Okay this is her. 'Okay so you take the sign…' Okay she's talking and then she gets up and leaves the classroom. S: And leaves, out the classroom. S: How we get… number 1 through 5? S: We don't even know how to do it? S: Number 1 through 5 or the poetry or something like that. I: Yeah. S: We don't even know how to do it?	Angry teacher leaves class to chat, don't know what to do and get yelled at.
	S: Then she gets mad.	Teacher gets mad students don't know what to do.
	I: So they're a little more? S: Focused. S: Yeah, cause this year they just AHHHAAHH. [Mimics Laughing]. The other teachers, STAFF come they look at him, shut the blinds and keep going on.	Last year teacher more focused on helping students, when students got in trouble they were sent out of the room.
	S: It's like they don't care about our education. S: Yeah. S: I agree with her.	Feel teachers don't care about student education.
	S: Like they say when we have lunch detention, that they going to quit that, because it's our grade and… S: They're not worried about it.	Feel teachers don't care, quit lunch detention, make-up time for grade.
	S: But they were focused to get us where to like where were supposed to be. They wouldn't be playing around. S: If we got in trouble they would send us out automatically, because this year	Last year teacher focused on helping students.

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	they just say, they just call home, last year it was.	
	S: There were magnet things…. S: They're magnets it goes… S: Green, yellow, orange and red. S: Purple, red. Yeah it was good, warning loss of recess, phone call home and…. S: Suspension. S: And, if you were good your magnet moved down. If you lose, loss of recess, and you were being good, you could run on yellow and then you have recess again. But…	Last year behavior tracking system.
	S: Get more people focused…like when they moved their magnets they know to be good.	Behavior tracking helped stay focused.
	I: And why aren't they doing it this year? S: Because they said we too old for it. S: Yeah, they think were just, since were in the sixth and seventh grade, we're just older. S: We should know better.	No more behavior tracking system, adults say too old.
	S: I think like okay if we get yellow, then someone thinks 'oh my god I'm on yellow, I lost recess.' S: Then they will be on track to get it down. So they'll be like on the verge to re-focus and get it down, but some people they get them down to green, they act fool, and head back up.	Behavior tracking helped stay focused, sometimes when students got on a good track goofed off more.
	S: Some people move their magnets down. S: And other people move other people's magnets. S: Yeah, then they move their own magnets down.	Behavior tracing system flaw students moved on magnets at times.
	I: It's stricter? What do you think- why do you think people would be stricter? S: Because most people they behavior,	Teacher stricter because students act up, take advantage what they used to have, don't have it

Table 6: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Increased Teacher Attrition) (cont'd)

Theme: Increased Teacher Attrition	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	just act up, throw stuff. S: I think like maybe some kids don't actually know how hard or how easy this is compared to an actual middle school and I guess. They just don't really care about… S: They take advantage of what we have and now we don't have it anymore.	anymore.
	I: When you have… and this is...in your opinion, if someone's new to the school, do you think they're a little stricter? S: Maybe, I think maybe cause TEACHER1 was kind of laid back until she actually found out how we were or how most of the kids in our class were and that's when she started becoming more strict about certain things S: but she's still kind of nice to me, instead of TEACHER2 S: She can be nice sometimes but…	New teacher became stricter once she became familiar with how students were.
	S: Well were in middle school kids.	Are in middle school.
	S: I said, maybe because we getting older and our teachers just treat us like we're in middle school.	Students getting older, teachers start treating them like middle school kids.

Table 7: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Supplies)

Theme: Less School Supplies	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: He brings some materials from home. Because the school doesn't have that much dollars, he already spent his own money.	Gym teacher pay own money for gym materials.
	S: Well you can only get pencils like umm every month, I think. I: Every month. Did you used to get more? S: Yeah	Use to get more pencils, this year once a month.
	S: No, STUDENT we only get pencils like umm, you know how like at the beginning of every month teachers get new copies and stuff like that? We got that, but the teachers, it don't feel like the teachers hand out a pencil every month. I don't think they do it because they feel like they get fewer pencils more than enough for one month.	Don't get pencils very often.
	S: And the art class need all the stuff the most and she don't, we don't even have everything that we need.	Missing supplies in art class.
	S: So she [ART TEACHER] got to go out of her own buy pocket and buy stuff for us.	Art teacher use personal money buy supplies.
	S: Well computers like we need head phones and stuff like that, but. S: They don't provide it.	Computer class needs supplies.
	S: We used to get pencils, like 24/7. Like, every day. S: Like whenever we needed them. S: We'd go visit can like 'I get a pencil. Like, yeah, here.' S: Now like once a month. S: Had like a whole stack of pencils.	This year, students are given fewer pencils and less frequently.
	I: Do you feel more supplies; better food was offered last year more than this year? S: Yes.	Last year: more supplies, better food.
	I: Did you have more supplies to last year? S: Yeah, now this year.	Last year more supplies.
	S: Like there are less pencils and stuff	Less supplies this year,

Table 7: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Supplies) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Supplies	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	like that, and calculators.	calculators and pencils.
	S: Usually, on the first day of school the teachers give you a pencil box with… S: Pencils in it. S: Pencils.	This year had to buy own supplies.
	S: Usually, on the first day of school the teachers give you a pencil box with… S: Pencils in it. S: Pencils. S: And Markers. S: Notebooks. S: Yeah, notebooks but this year…we had to… S: We had to buy it ourselves. S: We opened it, we had nothing there, and we had to go get our books, our notebooks, and pencils…	This year had to buy own supplies.
	S: Since we in middle school now we got to buy everything that we need, so. I guess that's how it's going to be in a real middle school. I don't know.	In middle school had to buy supplies.
	I: She's in fourth grade. Did she have to buy supplies this year? S: No. I: So it is so middle school? S: I was the only one out of me and my sister that had to buy it, she already had her stuff.	In middle school had to buy supplies.
	S: My brother he had to buy his. I: Thanks for sharing that, what grade is he in? S: 5th.	Elementary students had to buy supplies this year too.
	S: And the, our teacher, our umm...social studies teacher, TEACHER2, umm...you sharpen your pencil she used to have a mechanical sharpener, but umm…someone broke it and so she stopped buying them anymore, and then she had crayon boxes, but then she took them away.	Teacher is not providing supplies anymore.
	S: And they only give the teachers this much, this much, paper.	Teachers have limited supplies.

Table 7: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Supplies) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Supplies	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: To last for the entire year. They gave TEACHER 1 about this much paper to last her for the entire year	
	S: They don't have like that many rulers.	Limited supplies.
	S: ...so they could buy school supplies.	Need to buy school supplies.
	S: That's what like our teachers like just bought a forty-five dollar sharpener because I guess the school couldn't get her one. S: And the 6th graders broke it. S: In just a day.	Teacher pay own money sharpener, broke in day.
	S: the teachers have to buy the school supplies. I: Yeah? S: Out of money. They don't get a lot of money. I: Yeah. S: And some teachers are like nice enough to buy sharpener, mechanical sharpener, and stuff like	Teacher not paid much have to buy their own supplies.
	S: but then the students break them.	Students break supplies teachers' pay.
	S: The art class needs the most stuff, because they do more like projects, project stuff.	Art class needs supplies.
	S: I don't know, cause like most teachers complain a lot.	This year teachers are complaining a lot.
	S: The teacher last year, she never complained about anything.	Last year, teacher didn't complain.
	S: Supplies.	Need supplies to do well in school.
	S: Yeah, more supplies because, in our classroom if we don't have a pencil or like, or our pencil broke, we can't get up and sharpen it. And if we ask the teacher to borrow a pencil sharpener or trade. S: She puts our name on the board. S: She says 'no.' And then that way you won't be able to do your work, because you don't have a pencil. If they had more supplies, then we would be able to do most of our work.	More supplies able to do work.

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Table 7: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Supplies) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Supplies	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Cause we need calculators to do our math problems, and pencils. Cause some people leave their pencils, and…umm…in the classroom that they switched from.	Need supplies to do work.
	And some people need more like paper, like scratch paper and stuff like that.	
	S: We need more pencils this year, cause you write and then it breaks than we have to sharpen in.	Need more pencils, always breaking.
	S: And then they get mad when we use pen, because they say when we mess up, we scribble it out when and it's a hot mess. S: I use it because, the pencils break too easy then I have to get up and sharpen it. S: Cause you get yelled at for sharpening your pencil.	Fewer supplies affect students: get yelled at for using pen and for sharpening pencil.
	S: Yeah, and then they talk like you all need to use erasable pens, I don't know where to get them from, I use a pen even though you're not supposed to.	Fewer supplies affect students: can't find correct pen to buy.
	S: In math like we use, I write a lot, like I use two journals a month.	Need supplies for school.
	I: So, can I ask how you both all kind of jumped at the gym, how do you think the budget cuts have impacted gym? S: A lot of less material or something. I: Materials? S: Like, all we really have are like ropes, better jump ropes. All we have is like two or three actual jump ropes. And the rest of it is just ropes tied together.	Budget cuts impact gym less material, jump ropes limited, tie rope together.
	S: Less supplies. I: Less supplies? What kind of supplies, do you feel like? S: Pencils... paper S: Definitely paper. I: No paper?	Budget cut cause less supplies: pencils and paper.
	S: I can't even get no pencils from here.	Budget cuts impacted school, can't get pencils.

Table 7: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Supplies) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Supplies	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: This, the budget cut so that they get only get a stack of papers like this big, every beginning of the month and then if they run out of it they have to wait till next month to get paper.	Due to the budget cuts, teachers are given limited supplies, if they run out of paper they have to wait until the next month.
	I: So, STUDENT, you asked one question why is our school so poor? Is that-was that one of the questions that you had? S: Yeah. I: Why do you think that's the case? S: Cause we don't have money. Our principal she isn't providing money to help with the supplies and they just and they haven't got anything to use to do their work.	School poor no money for supplies, and nothing to use to do work, principal not helping.
	S: And this year they're being cheap.	This year school being cheap.
	I: Why do we think there are fewer supplies this year? S: Because they broke. S: Because were going poor.	School poor fewer supplies.
	S: They should get us a little box, and give everybody five pencils and a little pencil sharpener. And then erasers and like. S: [Laughs] They don't have money for that.	Want more supplies but school doesn't have money.
	I: ...why do you think that that was the case and not so much this year? S: Because they being cheap. S: They go broke.	Reason for less supplies and good food is because school broke.
	S: And they cut the amount of paper and stuff. There's really not that much paper. S: Yeah, there's less money for um supplies….like…like…pencils	Budget cuts less money for supplies, cut amount.
	S: Because we don't got paper no more. We don't have pencils no more. We don't have sharpeners no more.	Budget cuts affected school, no more supplies.

Table 8: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Fewer Electives)

Theme: Fewer Electives	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: So what electives did you have last year? S: Well we had, computers. S: We had broadcasting. S: Art.	Last year major electives were: computers, broadcasting art.
	S: Okay…um…for then like minor electives, we have, like during this time. We would have. Like a… S: School Store. S: Cultural Class, like learning about the world. S: Fitness Class. S: Health and Fitness. S: There was another one, if you miss homework. S: Um...did we have a Spanish one? S Group: Yes, Spanish.	Last year minor electives were; school store, cultural class, health and fitness, Spanish, and one for catching up on homework.
	S: There was a whole bunch of them.	Had a lot of electives last school year.
	I: Well, so what do you have this year? S: We have three. That we get three days a week, which are art, computers, and broadcasting.	This year, three electives, three days a week: art, computer, broadcasting.
	S: We had more classes.	Last year more classes.
	I: Did you have more classes this year or did you have more last year? S: We had more last year	Last year more classes.
	S: We had more electives, we had more uh electives we had more, and we had more switching classrooms.	Last year more electives.
	S: And more majors	Last year had more major electives.
	S: We had major and minors.	Last year had more major and minor electives.
	S: Um we had, for majors we had… S: Spanish. S: No Spanish was a minor elective... it was Spanish, minor elective was Spanish, CSI, S: Newspaper. S: yeah, newspaper, major was computer lab, art and um… it was another class…. It was computer lab, art and it was a technical, it was a broadcasting class.	Last year major electives were: art, computer lab and broad casting, minors electives were Spanish, CSI, Newspaper.

Table 8: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Fewer Electives) (cont'd)

Theme: Fewer Electives	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: And instruments.	Last year instruments were an elective.
	S: Yeah, the minor ones were Spanish, CSI, and um I forgot the other one. S: Newspaper S: Band S: Cultural Awareness. S: Cultural awareness.	Last year minor electives: Spanish, CSI, Newspaper, Band and Cultural Awareness.
	I: And now how many do you have this year? S: None. S: One S: Three. S: None we don't get any… S: We have electives, S: We don't have a minor.	This year have no minor electives.
	S: Major we got three. But we all can't be in it, like we have to pick one class go to it, Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. S: Art, Technology and Broadcasting.	This year only have three major electives, have to pick one, Art, Technology and Broadcasting.
	S: We got to pick one at the beginning of the year and then we got to stick to it for the rest of the year.	Have to pick and stick to one elective.
	S [Group]: You can change in the middle of the year. S: Yeah, second semester S: Middle of the semester.	Allowed to switch electives in the middle of the year.
	S: And he had to leave, so then we had a different teacher. S: then she started new electives. S: So she started doing like, it was like a physical. We had to go outside to walk. Yeah, but then like at the end of the month, like at the end of every two months, she umm, either take us on a field trip to the YMCA.	Last year, teacher did physical activities for elective with fieldtrips.
	S: Ooh uh, fewer electives.	This year fewer electives.
	S: Like right now we only got three electives, computer labs and one of them is art.	This year, only three electives.

Table 8: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Fewer Electives) (cont'd)

Theme: Fewer Electives	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: We had a lot. S: We had like ten. S: We got to choose and it was like… S: We had like Spanish, Gym, theater…	Last year had a lot of electives.
	S: Umm…last year, we had more electives, this year we have like…uhhh S: Three. S: Three.	Last year more electives.
	S: Cause we have less electives.	Have fewer electives this year; reason school year is not much better.
	S: I think it's actually kind of good because now they actually give us study hall instead of having minor electives. Which I guess kind of helps some kids get their grades up.	No minor electives positive, students have study hall, time to get grades up.
	S: I would rather have some minor electives. I: What do you like about that? S: I would too. I: You would too just giving other kids perspective? S: Different language. S: We learn different stuff that will help us when we get older.	Rather have minor electives, able to learn different things use when older.
	I: Do you like having a lot? Or, was it nice to just have three? S: Mm….A lot.	Like having a lot of electives.
	I: Ok. So how does that feel? Compared to last year? S: Boring. S: Yes, because we have to stay in class more.	This year is boring; have to stay in class more.
	S: Cause if we have both major and minor then we have more time away from teachers.	If had major and minor electives more time away from teachers.
	I: What did you like about having a lot of electives? S: You could experience more.	Like electives able to experience more.

Table 8: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Fewer Electives) (cont'd)

Theme: Fewer Electives	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: Any other students talked to you guys about being frustrated that there's less electives this year? S: Yeah	Students talk about fewer electives.
	S: Were in TEACHER1 class for like two hours. S: Yeah it feels like we are in there forever.	Being teacher's class feels like a long time.
	S: We need like more choices like if we can do like arts and crafts	Need more choice in electives.
	S: And art is boring.	Art elective boring.
	S: You can choose like three and then you can go one, two three and you can pick a choice and then like a couple months later you can switch to whichever one again that way you can choose a different elective instead of just being in the same one.	Like a lot of electives, have choices.
	S: I was going to say that it's more to have more because you never know how many kids is going to get to a school and you might not have that many electives and then teachers be over stacking work for you and then you have to do this whole pile of work. While other kids is on computers playing games. Like outside and doing stuff but other kids got to stay inside and can't do nothing but like, like one elective.	One elective restricts kids, other kids have options.
	S: Other kids in a regular middle school they have they have four electives, in a regular middle school and we only have one.	Kids in a regular middle school have a lot of electives, this school doesn't.
	S: Because last year they had a lot more I think that we should do it this year too because instead of just having one elective you could switch to others and have more experiences, of other electives, instead of being stuck in one.	More electives better more too experience instead of being stuck.
	S: Oh, like she said because like you get to learn different things cause right now we only have like one main topic in our	More electives better more to choose and learn different things.

Table 8: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Fewer Electives) (cont'd)

Theme: Fewer Electives	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	elective, it's computers all you do is typing and stuff like if you have more you get to choose and it's just better.	
	S: Yeah, they got papers to grade and then we come back early. S: We need more time in our electives. Like maybe thirty minutes extra.	Less electives affects teachers, less time to grade students' work.
	S: Because if teachers got papers to grade, then their worried about how my paper grade this paper. S: Hour and fifteen minutes.. S: …you got parents called, and like 'where's our report card', 'I didn't get the chance to grade the work and putting on there.' Because they have both classes to do. 7th grade is a lot, and our class.	Teachers affected fewer electives, less time to grade, parents calling want to know child's grade.
	S: I wish you could have more electives.	Want more electives.
	S: I like having more electives. S:Um, because it have a choice to pick kind of, instead of, instead of just three	Enjoy having more electives, get to choose.
	S: Like, the elective thing, I want to have band again, because I liked the band. I: You like the band? Do you have band this year? S: No. S: No. I: No, oh. What instrument did you play last year? S: The clarinet.	Enjoyed elective no longer offered.
	S: ...the other electives back.	Want electives back.
	S: And like make it seem like a real middle school, causes they have a lot of classes in that hallway, but they use them for music and other stuff so…	More electives make it seem more like a real middle school.
	I: help me understand, why would having more electives make it more like a real middle school help you do better in school? S: Because we wouldn't just think of	More electives would make school not boring.

Table 8: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Fewer Electives) (cont'd)

Theme: Fewer Electives	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	school being boring, this is an elementary school, but if I could a real middle school. But it's not.	
	I: More electives, how would that help you to do better in school? S: You learn how to do more stuff.	Additional electives help learn more.
	I: So, how does it feel to have, to go from, how many did you guys list before? S [Group]: Like almost ten. I: Yeah, and to go down to three. S: Cause there's less teachers.	Less teachers reason for less electives.
	I So, you were saying teachers. So, there are not as many teachers to teach these electives? S: Mm hmm. I: Okay why, why do you think that is? S: Like, weren't like teachers like getting switched like in the beginning of the year? We had like three teachers.	Fewer teachers and teacher switching in the beginning of the year causes fewer electives.
	I: Um, so the budget cuts have impacted gym, have they impacted any other of your other classes? S: Our electives. I: Your electives. S: Mm hmm. S: From like ten ore more electives to like three.	Budget cuts impact electives, less electives gone from ten to three.
	I: Why do you think there's less this year? S: Because they broke.	Reason for less electives school broke.
	S: They don't have enough money to pay for the extra electives and stuff like that.	School not enough money for extra electives.
	S: Um, they don't have enough money to pay the guest teachers that come in for the electives. Like, my teacher just, my elective teacher had a baby, so yeah. And then umm…they like don't have enough money to make more electives. [I: Oh] Like pay.	School not enough money to pay extra elective teachers.

Table 9: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Activities)

Theme: Less School Activities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Like gym, we only do basketball or playing bowling or jumping.	Gym limited activities: bowling, jumping, and basketball.
	S: we didn't even have any field trips this year, the kindergarteners only had like two field trips out of the whole school year.	Fewer fieldtrips this year.
	S: And sometime she just makes up work for us to do.	Due to limited supplies, art class activities sometimes made up work.
	S: We got like at the end of the year but like two years ago we had a lot more things to do. I: You had a lot more things to do? S: But like last year there were a lot of things to do too. But now it's probably going to be shorter.	Last year there were more things to do.
	S: Oh and last year, um...I forgot to say this, but last year, we got to go on field trips, this year, there's no field trips. Like we got to go to AMUSEMENT PARK, we raised money for that like, we went to the capital, and we did all these things, all these things. But now we don't do that. It's just straight work. We don't even get to go outside.	Last year field trips, this year none.
	I: Right. Has all the students though have less field trips this year? S: None. No field trips at all. S: No field trips.	No field trips this year.
	S: Actually yeah, the little kids. They had a couple field trips. S: Oh, like they had START kids. That's it.	Little kids had a field trip.
	S: We also used to have a candy store with like items that you can buy…	Use to have candy store.
	S: Yeah, and we had a slip and slide, we had like a water thing, a water activity-	Last year fun activities.
	S: We got to get like tokens and stuff whenever we were good and didn't like- S: Or answered a question right. S: We had a store.	Last year fun activities, school store.

Table 9: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Activities) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Activities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Like, candy patches, like sour patches was like 5 coins. S: You could buy pencils, mechanicals, you could buy, umm... what's that thing... bouncy balls, you could buy bubbles-	Last year fun activities, school store student could purchase items.
	S: Yeah they did it easier for like pencils because like everybody needs pencil so they did like 1 token for pencils but sour patches and chips and stuff was like 5 tokens. And stuff like kites was like 10 tokens. S: Yeah for like 2 tokens you could get 20 jolly ranchers.	Last year fun activities, school store students could purchase items.
	S: We only had one field trip, and we have another one at the end of this month. I: So how many did you have last year? S [Group]: A lot. S: Ten, I don't know. S: I don't remember, I just remember we had a lot.	Had more field trips last year.
	S: Then we got tokens; we got to buy stuff from them.	Last year rewarded for good behavior.
	S: And there's not a lot of after school programming. There's only like Fire Friday and tennis, those are the only two last year there was a lot. S: Not two, three. S: Three. I: Three, but last year there was more? S: There were computers, tennis, Fire Friday and some more.	This year less after school programs.
	S: You get, well you only get to choose like three. But last year you got to choose which one you wanted. They have boy scouts, cub scouts I meant, they had basketball and they had a lot.	Last year more choices for after school programs.
	I: So, but there's less programs overall this year, afterschool this year? Is that right? Are there less afterschool programs this year?	This year less after school programs.

Table 9: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Activities) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Activities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Yeah, like three. S: A lot less. I: Yeah. A lot less. Okay. S: No four. I: Four? Any how many were the year before? S: Like a lot. S: Like seven or eight.	
	S: They'd like teach us like, cause when I went to SCHOOL 10, the um, well only for girls they had us do, I think it was, I forgot what it was called, but you know we had to walk on the beam.. I: balance beam? S: Yeah balance beam, we, had to do all that and she sometimes, like, had and she like taught us, like, actual stuff and like. She taught us about swimming and like, all the different things and how to save someone	Other school more gym activities.
	S: Or they could have a bake sale. They don't do nothing except for on Fridays, [S : Popcorn] and that's mainly when kids don't come to school because they feel like, we not about to do nothing S: What's the point? S: Yeah.	Fundraisers are on days when students don't come to school, nothing is happening.
	S: Yeah last year, we had a teacher. Well it was our major elective. He was making a school store but the principal wasn't helping us in the money that we raised for the school store. We was going to like get stuff for the school and stuff, but the principal wasn't helping us so it seemed like she don't really care so, we then just gave up.	Tried to do a school store for major elective, felt as though principal didn't care, no help given.
	I: So someone were to ask, why would, why would it be nice for students to have field trips? What would you say? S: You'll get to explore stuff. S: Yeah, you get to explore. You'll get to	Field trips are help you learn, a break from the class.

Table 9: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Activities) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Activities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	get out the class room, like you could still learn but you're not going to be always in a class room with a sheet paper.	
	S: We actually get to learn something and actually get to move around and do something. You actually get to explore what's what you going to come against when you're in real life.	With field trips can move, explore, exposed to real life.
	S: That you don't have to be stuck in one room the whole day	With field trips not stuck in one room all day.
	S: Have more field trips.	School needs to have more field trips.
	I: What's nice about having a field trip? S: You get to skip school. S: And you don't have to do no work. All you get to do is listen, sometimes just have fun.	Field trips, fun break from school.
	S: Yeah, cause they are going to need some fresh air. I: … why would you tell a teacher it's a good idea to have some field trips? S: Because some kids, don't like to… S: Stay in class, some kids need to move around and stuff like that… I: Yeah, sometimes people like to move around. S: And actually help.	Field trips time to move around.
	S: Last year I liked it because, last year they had debate, and that's what I was in. But now they don't have debate and then, I don't go to none of the afterschool programs because they boring. I: What do you like about debate? S: Because it's fun. I don't know.	Enjoyed after school program no longer offered.
	S: Oh yeah, debate like this year they try to bring it back because STUDENT wanted to be in it. But…umm…we had quit it, it wasn't debate. They said it was debate it wasn't. S: It was like some leadership law something, I don't know.	Enjoyed after school program no longer offered.

Table 9: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School Activities) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Activities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Then when we went after school it wasn't. It was just like… S: You just sit there. [S: Yeah]. It was basically making up bills, well umm… laws, I don't know, and bills whatever you call them. S: Bills. S: Bills S: It was EYL. But the thing we were in, you have to write stuff we needed, okay for instance. 'Criminals don't go to jail enough.' We had to put. 'Criminal needs to go jail for anything they do.' S: You had to make the bill. I: Oh, I see, so it wasn't what you had really enjoyed last year. S: Yeah.	
	S: That the school is getting their money cut, and that all the activities that they used to have are getting cut, also with the money and the teachers.	School's money is getting cut, all the activities used to have cut, and money for teachers.
	S: Like we have no activities, like everything that we like is getting cut because it costs more…	No activities, everything liked is cut.
	S: Uh… STAFF, he umm, he working on a field trip for us to go watch the... S: Some people. S: Not everybody though.	One potential field trip for some students.
	S: Well not everybody but they're people that are still going. S: For their safety.	One potential field trip for some students.
	S: They did more bake sales and stuff like that during lunch. S: We had two bake sales, on a Thursday.	Last year had bake sales.
	S: No activities.	Budget cuts mean no activities.
	S: We don't do as many bake sales as last year, because last year they did a lot.	Last year school had a lot of bake sale.
	S: I though this year, like when I heard about the active, activities that they were going to do at the end of the year. I think that they weren't doing as much this year, because they were planning for the end of	Less activities planning for end of year.

Table 9: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Less School
Activities) (cont'd)

Theme: Less School Activities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	the year stuff so.	

Table 10: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Overall Decrease in School Facilities)

Theme: Overall Decrease in School Facilities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: We had this, we had this, we did this thing in science and then we cut the lights off and we cut the light on and it was dirty. The floor was dirty. I: Yeah. S: It's like a umm germ thingy, but it's like a light and if you a spill a little part on, you can see all the dirt on the floor. It was nasty. Even, when you mop the floor it won't come up. S: We did that in science. S: Yeah, we did that in science. S: It was just dirty. The floor- we went around the whole class just doing it for fun and it was dirty.	Classroom is dirty.
	I: Did is it, I mean is it worse this year than other years? S: Yes.	This year the classroom is dirtier compared to other years.
	S: We had to clean our desks at the end of every week. S: Every, either every week or every two weeks we either clean our desks or help clean up the room. S: See this year we-she just have, we don't even clean the room.	Last year students regularly cleaned the room, where this year they don't.
	S: We just clean our desks like every-every month. S: Last year we cleaned our desk every two weeks.	Last year, students cleaned their desks more regularly.
	S: She doesn't have any colors.	Teacher has no colors in the room.
	S: We have no light in her room. She always keeps the window closed. I: Oh. S: In TEACHER2 room she has the windows open. We get to see outside at least.	Teacher no light in room, like seeing outside.
	S: And when her, her wall, is white.	Teacher has no colors in the room.
	S: Her room stank.	Teacher's room is smelly.

Table 10: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Overall Decrease in School Facilities) (cont'd)

Theme: Overall Decrease in School Facilities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Yeah they did this like two years ago, and then the rest of the stuff they did last year.	This year, nothing new has been done for the school building.
	S: Some of the computers are broke or got food all in it.	Computers are in poor condition.
	S: …they don't do anything to clean it or nothing. They just, its broke they throw it away.	Computers are not fixed, thrown away.
	S: Here, we get like bugs and stuff… like this year we had ants and like, it was like. S: Roaches. S: …a few years ago we got rats here and that was like disgusting, I didn't even want to eat the lunch.	School has had bugs and rats.
	S: I don't know what happened, but we just eat stuff and throw it on the ground.	This year have more littering.
	S: Probably some paint cause I almost fell asleep in TEACHER2's room cause there's nothing' but a bunch of white walls and posters.	Want a more colorful classroom.
	S: And kept the building clean, because I, I hate a dirty place.	School should make sure the building is clean.
	S: Then when we do that, she'll do nothing she'll like just sit there… S: and read one of those kids- S: Color. Draw. S: Kid magazines S: Read one of those kid magazines.	This year, teacher reads while students clean.
	S: The teachers can color the walls themselves all they got to do is buy paint, and ask a couple of students over the weekend to come paint it. I: To help? S: Yeah. S: Or ask the custodian.	Teacher could make the room more colorful.
	S: Toilets S: No, what they need to do is they need to have like different toilet seats though... S: There's one bathroom… they need a girl and boy bathroom because	Solution to budget cuts, have more toilet seats, boys and girls.

Table 10: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Overall Decrease in School Facilities) (cont'd)

Theme: Overall Decrease in School Facilities	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: There only like a couple classrooms that have two bathrooms.	
	S: Because our school…They're not doing enough changes like that they did to any other school. Our school has been the same for like, every…since I've been here, except for this. They just repainted the school like last year.	Budget cuts impacted school, nothing new is done to the facility.
	S: Because our teacher last year was like a clean freak. I: Okay. [Laughs]	Last year, teacher wanted a clean classroom.
	S: We got cracks in the walls.	School impacted by budget cuts, cracks in the wall.
	S: Oh… like the light fixtures.	School impacted by budget cuts, broken light fixtures.
	S: Like the cracks in the wall like he was saying.	School impacted by budget cuts, cracks in the wall.
	S: If I were to break one of these things at SCHOOL3, at SCHOOL3 they would be able to fix it real quick. But if I break something here… S: You have to wait like a week. S: If I break something.. S: Or a year. S: You got to wait a whole year for somebody to fix it.	School takes a while to fix things.
	S: No, they might make you pay for it. That's what they do, when they don't have the money to fix it. They just make us pay for it. They just make us pay for it. Like if we broke it. Like the sharpener.	School makes students pay to fix facilities.

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Table 11: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (School Closure)

Theme: School Closure	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: We're moving to NEW SCHOOL.	One big change moving to a new school.
	S: Because they're closing this building down.	Have to move closing building down.
	S: They were supposed to close it last year but they didn't.	School supposed to close last year.
	S: The school is closing, the program is not. I: Yeah. S: It's just this building.	School closing, program will stay.
	S: I'm glad. They're moving us. We got a way bigger building, much way better.	Glad moving to a new school building.
	S: There're probably way better teachers. S: Hopefully.	New school might have better teachers.
	S: They probably like have school kids like 'why middle school kids come here, we want to get out of there'. And now we're coming back.	Kids at other school are going to be asking why the middle school ids at their school are coming there.
	I: So, you think that other schools are also going to be affected by this, 'because this school's getting closed down yeah? S: They don't want us to go to their school. Which I'm not going to go to anyway…	Some students may not want students at their school.
	I: Are you, since you all are not going to be at this school anyway next year, are you… how do you feel about going to NEW SCHOOL? S: Uh, excited.	Feel excited get to go to new school.
	S: I might not go. Might go to a different school.	Not sure which school moving to?
	S: It might be rough over there, though.	New school could be rough.
	S: Kids talking about going to high school because they got 7th through 12th grade at SCHOOL6 and SCHOOL5.	May go to the high schools.
	S: Then again I think it'll be bad for the little kids to go to NEW SCHOOL because the kids, yeah the kids at NEW SCHOOL think they're all big and hard.	Switching schools hard for the little kids, new school students could be rough.
	I: So some of the younger kids might have a rougher time? S: Mm hmm Yeah? S: Mm hmm. Little Kids.	Little kids rough time new school.
	I: So do you all know where you're going next year or not necessarily yet?	Moving next year.

Table 11: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (School Closure) (cont'd)

Theme: School Closure	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: I'm moving.	
	S: SCHOOL7 or SCHOOL8.	Student is not sure which school they are going to.
	S: I think I'm going to SCHOOL8. I don't know.	Student is not sure which school they are going to.
	S: I'm moving to CITY.	Moving, new city.
	S: I don't know where I'm going I might go to SCHOOL 8 or uh SCHOOL10.	Student is not sure which school they are going to.
	I: Ok. So are you guys sad that this schools going to close, or? S: No. S: No, not at all.	Not sad school closing.
	S: It's not going to be different at NEW SCHOOL cause the teachers gone. All the teachers are just moving over there, it's in a different style.	New school will be similar, same teachers moving.
	S: Um, probably because the parents don't probably want them to go to a real middle school because well, at middle school because people is more, big kids that's going to be there.	Parents don't want kids going to a real middle school, scared big kids.
	S: And if they get, and like, because they got it's called a hall sweep, they got a class less than the time they go to be there. They're going to end up trying to run the halls, and not going to get them.	Worried not switching to class in time and getting into trouble.
	I: So...you feel like that the parents might be worried? S: Yeah.	Parents worried school closing.
	I: Do you think it's affecting other students? S: No, they're happy. I: They're happy that the school is closing? S: Mm…hmm...	Students are happy school closing.
	S: Well, the 7th graders, I mean, they weren't worry about the school closing or not because they still could go to a real mid school because they're 7th grade.	Seventh graders not worried for school closing, already leaving.
	S: They're just happy that the school is closing. And that their moving.	Students' are happy school closing.

Table 11: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (School Closure) (cont'd)

Theme: School Closure	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Some, well one of our teachers said that they'll be more electives over at NEW SCHOOL. For us to go to.	New school will have more electives.
	S: Like TEACHER2 she probably doesn't want to leave our school, because she knows the teachers well. Like STAFF.	Teachers don't want to leave, know other adults at school.
	I: ...how do you think they affect teachers? S: No job.	School closing affects teachers, don't have a job.
	S: Some teachers are happy. I: You think some of the teachers are happy? How so? S: Because the kids in the classroom bad and the teachers probably just don't like it.	Some teachers' happy school closing kids in the class are bad.
	S: Well with some people might be happy.	Some teachers' happy school closing.
	S: Some might be losing their job.	School closing, some teachers may lose their job.
	S: Probably because they job, cause some teachers trying to move to a different school then they can't. They should just go to NEW SCHOOL, because they got a good position at NEW SCHOOL. But if they try to go to a different school they might not be able to.	Some teachers may be stuck at new school, not be able to switch.
	I: Oh okay. So you think teachers are happy with this? S: Yeah, some are. I: Yeah? S: Yeah, some are really	Some teachers' happy school closing.
	S: This building it is getting closed down. I: It is getting closed down. How do you think the budget cuts had to do with that? S: They couldn't afford for this building to stay up any longer.	Budget cuts affect school. School closing can't afford to keep it open.
	I: And why do you think the reason is they're closing the building down? S: Because they're poor. S: They poor.	Reason school closing is it's poor.
	S: No cause they're poor.	Reason school closing is it's poor.

Table 11: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (School Closure) (cont'd)

Theme: School Closure	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Well I think it's because they don't have enough [S: budget] money right now… and they closing the school down.	Reason school closing doesn't have enough money.
	S: They don't have enough money and need to move to a bigger school. Cause they get more kids and school just needs more…	Reason for school closing doesn't have enough money need a bigger building for more kids.
	I: So with the budget getting cut, [S: They don't have as much money] they don't have as much money so students have to go to [S: different schools] different school.	Budget cut school doesn't have as much money have to go to new school.

Table 12: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Description of the Budget Cuts)

Theme: Description of the Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: when I say the word "school budget cuts", what comes to mind? S: Money.	Budget cut means money.
	S: Yeah, they got the budget is getting' cut.	Reason school does not enough money budget is getting cut.
	I: What does it mean when the budget gets cut? S: They start losing money.	Budget cut means school starts losing money.
	I: Oh. Umm, now when I say the words school budget cuts, what comes to mind? S: Losing money.	Budget cuts mean losing money.
	S: Less money.	Budget cuts mean less money.
	S: Less teachers	Budget cuts mean fewer teachers.
	S: Teachers get mad	Budget cuts make teachers mad.
	I: ...when I say the word school budget cuts what comes to mind? S: Cheap.	Budget cut means cheap.
	S: No money.	Budget cut cheap means no money.
	S: Broke.	Budget cut means broke.
	S: Always complaining.	Budget cuts mean always complaining.
	S: It's mad broke.	School is broke.
	I: Now, I got a next question for you? When I say the words school budget cuts? What comes to mind? S: Less money for the school. S: They give less money to the school.	Budget cuts means less money for school
	S: Broke.	Budget cuts means broke.
	I: What, what are budget cuts? S: When they take away, when they take away money.	Budget cuts are when they take away money.
	I: What causes budget cuts? S: The law.	Budget cuts are caused by the law.
	S: Losing students	Budget cuts are caused by losing students.

Table 12: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Description of the Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Description of the Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	I: So, what do you mean by that, what's making it poor? S: Uh…The government.	Government makes school poor.
	S: Like, yeah, they're wasting their money. S: On stuff we need.	Government is wasting needed school money.
	S: They whack, they cheap.	Government is not right, cheap.
	S: So somebody got a million dollars in the government, they don't have it they're just out in the streets.	Government is not giving money to those who need.
	S: But they don't use it for schools.	Government is not giving money to school.
	S: They use it…there's people stealing it from the government. S: Scandals! Scandals! I: Scandals? S: with women, and money, and children.	Money stolen from government.
	I: what causes budget cuts? S: The government. S: Yeah, like the government.	Government causes budget cuts.
	S: Teachers.	Teachers cause budget cuts.
	S: Buy stuff in other countries. S: I…like, I think our teacher told us that, the government was buying more stuff from other countries were losing money. S: Causes budget cuts.	Government buying from other countries causes budget cuts.
	S: This state going to go into debt. I: So it's a whole state problem. S: Yeah. S: Hm... S: This state going to go into debt.	Whole state going into debt.
	I: What do you think made those changes happen? S: School's broke.	Changes due to school being broke.
	S: I guess…they just cut them all.	Everything got cut.
	I: Do you think other students know about budget cuts? S: I think some people have heard the word, but they don't really understand- S: -know what it means. Like, I 'm pretty sure all the middle school students know what it means…	Middle school students know what budget cuts mean.

Table 12: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Description of the Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Description of the Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: ...and the younger kids who are wondering why everything's starting to. S: Go away? S: ...decreases I think they don't really understand what budget cuts means or like don't really know what's going on.	Younger kids know things are decreasing in school, may not know why.
	I: And you know you all should have these discussions with each other too S: We do…	
	S: We'll just be talking and they'll be like, 'you guys need to be quiet, why you talking about that?' You wouldn't last like a day in the real middle school. Compared to us you would be.	Students are discouraged from having discussion around school changes with one another.
	S: I and STUDENT are always talking about, like in the beginning of the year I don't think it was the beginning but somewhere in between the middle and the beginning we were like how stuff was really messed up. S: and decreasing.	Already had discussion with student around school changes, things being messed up and decreasing.
	I: Decreasing? So students are having these conversations… S: Probably right now.	Students might be discussing the changes in their classroom, right now.
	I: These changes affected you. So electives, teachers, school closing, how do you think they're affecting you? S: I don't know.	Unsure what affect these changes have.
	I: Okay. So did…did other students talk about being frustrated with this? No? S: Not that I know of.	Don't know if other students were affected.
	S: They using our money, they are using their dollars to get our money for school. I: Can you say more about that? S: They can be, they can have a lot more money if they had us dress down every Friday. S: Because, then we could pay a dollar every Friday. I: Oh so you mean the uniforms? S [Group]: Yes.	Student's money paying for school.

Table 12: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Description of the Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Description of the Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Because on Friday you can wear anything if you bring a dollar.	
	I: Oh, so on Fridays you can pay not to wear your uniform? S: Sometimes. S: Not every. The fourth Friday, last Friday each month	Fourth each Friday pay not to wear uniform.
	S: This year, we got a student government group and uh, we were supposed to be doing a fundraiser next week to uh get some money for a umm carnival this May 25th, we doing a carnival, and so next week we doing the fundraiser to get money to buy.	Currently doing fundraises for the school.
	S: And that's the only way we can make money is by selling stuff to kids.	School makes money by selling stuff to kids.
	I: Do you think the budget cuts have impacted your school? S: Yes.	Budget cuts have impacted the school.
	S: Because they not doing nothing to this school. Everything is still the same. If we try to, we umm… uh, like.	Budget cuts impacted school, nothing new is done.
	S: Why is the school poor? Why is the school so poor? Like, why don't they just have-why would they cut the budget issues?	Questioning why the school is poor, why have to have budget cuts.
	I: Always, who's always complaining? S: TEACHER1, TEACHER2 never complains about anything. Somebody stole her pencil sharpener, she wouldn't say anything.	Teacher 1 complains a lot. Teacher 2 doesn't complain even though someone stole her pencil sharpener
	S: Yeah because they don't have enough money to do things. S: Especially Teacher 1. S: Then that just, then they just complain about it.	Teachers don't have enough money to do stuff, complain about it.
	S: TEACHER1 cried. S: She cried because somebody in our class broke her pencil sharpener?	Teacher upset pencil sharpener broken.

Table 12: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Description of the Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Description of the Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meaning
	S: Yes	
	S: A lot.	Budget cuts impacted school a lot.
	S: The most.	Budget cuts impacted school a lot.
	S: A lot.	Budget cuts impacted school a lot.
	S: Just our school.	Budget cuts just impacted our school.
	S: Like everything.	Budget cuts have impacted everything in school.
	S: We got nothing.	Budget cuts have impacted school, have nothing.
	S: They only do, when they need money.	Bake sales done when school need money.
	I: Question, do you think the budget cuts have impacted your school? S: No, made it worse.	Budget cuts made school worse.
	S: Yes.	Budget cuts affected school.
	I: ...budget cuts are cuts in school funding, so has it had an effect on your school? S: Yeah S: Yeah, a lot.	Budget cuts affected school a lot.

Table 13: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts)

Theme: Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
	S: I'd probably do fundraisers, like me and STUDENT were thinking of like, somewhere at the end of the year we're going to throw this thing and we'd have like a carnival and like a car wash and some bake sales and we'd be outside all day having fun.	Fix budget cuts by holding a fundraiser.
	S: Loans.	Fix budget cuts by taking out a loan.
	S: Donations.	Fix budget cuts by taking donations.
	S: Eh...I would let, I mean I would give the money to provide what they need.	Handle budget cuts by providing what is needed.
	S: No, all these big kids up in here. This place would be booming, if umm, if all these kids are out in a regular middle school. And all these little kids come in here. S: That's true! S: It will save us more money.	Big kids make school poor, save money if only little kids.
	S: Like they them give back money from people who actually need it.	Government should give money to those who need.
	S: I would make, I would make sure that everything is used in this school. If I was principal, and if I could, and I could be in charge of this, everything right now it would be great. I would have little kids coming into school, going to 6th grade.	If in charge make sure school only go to sixth grade, for little kids.
	S: Like if there were empty rooms, we'd like have a part where there could be somebody could be doing something else… S: There wouldn't be empty rooms. S: …like over here you could have group sessions and over there you could have like, I don't know, book reading club.	If in charge would have no empty rooms.
	S: If I was in charge, I would still try to see if there was if we could get more money because last year… Like she said the	If in charge would try to get more money, make sure enough food.

Table 13: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
	lunches, like they couldn't make that much lunches and it was our whole class that the principle had to waste her own money and buy a pizza for us cause the umm…all the food was eaten and we didn't, there was no more food.	
	S: Like right now, if we weren't using this room, something else would be in this room instead of all this stuff that we don't use. S: This room is pretty empty right now. S: Like how they put that counter there… S: Or this could be a classroom…	If in charge would have no empty rooms.
	S: They need to quit changing classes!	Solution to budget cuts, stop changing classes.
	S: Like if you have an empty room like they have empty rooms	If in charge would have no empty rooms.
	S: They need to do a garage sale.	Solution to the budget cuts, sell extra materials.
	S: If they're not using these books or like whatever it is, like if it's something old that you could you can sell, sell it on e-bay or something.	Solution to the budget cuts, sell extra materials.
	S: If they don't need them, make us sell them, use more stuff for the classrooms.	Solution to the budget cuts, sell extra materials.
	S: They could sell these tables use them for, like, restaurants. Like send them to a restaurant they will want these here. S: They do not need these chairs because we have a lot of metal chairs like, not being used, like.	Solution to the budget cuts, sell extra materials.
	S: We could break these chairs down and build something with it.	Solution to the budget cuts, build things out of unused materials.
	S: If you were in it, how would you, like, control the school budget cuts? S: I would try to get as much money as I could, like, umm…have a bake sale.	Solutions to budget cuts get money have bake sales.
	S: I do fundraisers, carnivals and stuff like that. To raise money for the school.	Solutions to budget cuts have fundraisers.

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Table 13: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
	I: What would you make sure your school keeps? S: All the fun activities.	School should keep fun activities.
	S: …all the expensive stuff] like the TV up there… projector, Smart boards.	School should keep expensive materials: TV and smart board.
	S: Teachers	School should keep teachers.
	S: Our electives, or at least have like at least 5, I could say oh they dropped 5 of our electives, we only have 3 electives.	School should keep some electives, not cut so many.
	S: I'm a reader, I love this library.	Keep the library enjoys reading.
	I: Well, for example what would you make sure your school keeps? S: Paper, pencils. S: Paper, pencils.	School should keep paper and pencils.
	S: Supplies.	School should keep supplies.
	S: Art stuff.	School should keep art supplies.
	S: And Napkins	School should keep napkins.
	I: If-if let's say you're helping out with the budget cuts what does your school not need? S: Umm. Well they do need this because this is a law and government school so they keep this. S: I mean this is a law and government school.	School needs to keep law and government room.
	I: what would you for sure keep? S: The teachers. S: The teachers. S: The same teachers that made everything easier.	Solution to budget cuts, keep same teachers.
	I: Let me ask you this what would you make sure your school keeps? S: Pencils, and paper and pens.	School should keep supplies.
	S: Because we be running out of pencils S: You need it to write. S: … and pens and paper.	School should keep supplies.
	I: ...what should you make sure your school absolutely got to keep this? S: Textbooks.	School should keep textbooks.

Table 13: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
	I: ... what would you say you could get rid of that? S: Teachers. S: I know, we need to get rid of the mean ones.	School should get rid of mean teachers.
	S: What can we get rid of? It's like... This library [laughter] I say we don't really need this library…	Don't need the library.
	I: Any other ideas? STUDENT was there anything you think that the school could do without? To save money? S: Uniforms. S: Basically uniforms.	School could do without uniforms.
	S: They should get rid of stuff like that, like and this. S: These flags are not necessary. S: Cause, we don't really use this stuff. S: We don't even use this stuff. S: All these flags. Like we use to have a law and government teacher, we don't have one no more, what's the point of having all this, all these signs, flags and stuff.	School should get rid of court room decorations. Court room not used.
	S: No, they don't need this, really. S: Okay, it isn't like nobody do classes in here S: Except for us. S: …they just use these tables-except for TEACHER2- they just use these tables to come in and talk about stuff like, we doing right now. It isn't like they going to do mock trials and stuff.	School doesn't need to keep law and government classroom, doesn't use it.
	S: Well they don't need these tables, they can just use the uh courtroom stuff but they don't need these tables.	School can do without extra tables.
	S: This is just like a storage room. S: Only reason, that, I think the only reason, they cut us, because we got this, entire look at, this whole room, but nobody comes in here.	Law and government room can get rid of, just for storage.

Table 13: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
	I: Anything you just realize well we don't really need this. S: We don't need a lot of dry erase boards in our room.	School could use less dry erase boards.
	I: Mm hmm… S: It's just a waste of money. S: Yeah they buy all this stuff, but like nobody really comes in here, they just do it to.	School spends money on things not used.
	S: they just buy stuff for no reason… like they have tech right there and they got tech right there.	School buys stuff for no reason, technological stuff not being used.
	S: Like every classroom has a TV but nobody uses them. Like TVs like those and TVs and- S: They have a TV, but it's just, they have no cable. S: I know, like if you're not using them-	School not using materials, TV.
	S: Like before, like, when we had the white laptops, we used the white laptops all last year but now they're sitting in our room, nobody uses them. So, I've started using them because we had this blue cord that we could unhook and hook it up to the internet. And then somebody just took them away and I was like 'what?" I: So you were using it? S: Like the laptops, they're just sitting in our room, they can be used. They're worrying about like computers breaking but we have tons of laptops that we don't use that like, sometimes when we have free time in the class like 5 minutes we get on the computers and they work and they just don't do anything with them, they just leave them in our classroom.	School not using materials, laptop. Not letting students use materials either.
	S: We need that smart board, TEACHER2 don't use it. S: TEACHER2 have it, we don't need it. S: That was like a lot of money wasted.	Money wasted on technology teachers don't use.

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Table 13: Themes, Clusters, Significant Statements, & Formulated Meanings (Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts) (cont'd)

Theme: Proposed Solutions to Budget Cuts	Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
	S: She got that big whole thing in her classroom, in the back of her classroom, she don't even use it. S: She doesn't even use it. S: That was a thousand dollars that they wasted on the thing that she don't even use.	Money wasted on technology teachers don't use.
	S: And her son drew on it. S: Her son drew on it. They should make her pay for it. S: They should make her pay for that because her son drew on it.	Smart board ruined by teacher's son, teacher should pay.

Appendix I: Clusters Code Book

Table 14: Clusters Code Book

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
Description of This School Year (1)	Three Focus Groups (1,3,4)	**Description:** Students provided general and summative statements regarding their overall experience in school this year. **Clustering Rules:** Quotes gather in the cluster include students' description of: (a) general statements regarding their current school year, (b) general statements regarding last school year, (c) feelings toward school, (d) reasons why they think students come to school and (e) the reason that they attend this particular school.	**Meaning Statement:** Student enjoyed school last year but this year does not want go to school. **Quote:** *"Like last year, it was fun but this year, I don't wanna come here no more "*
Increased Teacher Attrition (2)	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** Students describe having an increase in teacher attrition this year compared to last year. Increased teacher attrition encompasses previous teachers who had taught at the school for years moving to a new school. Students had multiple new teachers come in to teach this year who ended up leaving. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' descriptions of: (a) former teachers who had taught at the school previous years switching schools (b) new teachers this year coming in to teach and leaving, (c) students reactions to teachers switching, and (d) their thoughts on the reason why there is so much teacher switching this year. This cluster also encompasses *two sub-clusters* in regards to teacher switching. Quotes regarding student	**Meaning Statement:** Budget cuts cause teachers to keep changing schools. **Quote: Interviewer:** *"What other changes do you think might have been because of the budget cuts?"* **Student:** "*Our teachers".* **Interviewer:** "*Why your teachers?"* **Student:** "*Because, they keep changing them"*

Table 14: Clusters Code Book (cont'd)

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
		observation and opinion on the differences in teachers specific to "classroom management" and "instruction" this year compared to last year are grouped in this cluster. It is important to note that this cluster does not include quotes regarding students' reactions to or interaction with substitutes.	
Sub-Cluster: Change in Teacher Instruction (2A)	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Sub-Cluster Description:** With-in the cluster of "More Teacher Switching This Year". Quotes specific to students identifying various changes in their teacher's instruction this year compared to last year, or across various teachers within the same year, are grouped together, as a "sub-cluster." Changes in teacher's instruction include differences in teaching style, curriculum, grading, and opportunity for interactive projects. In addition, students describe how changes in teacher instruction have impacted their overall experience of the class, school, parents and academically. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' descriptions of: (a) how former teachers taught class, (b) how current teachers teach the class, (c) student reaction to their classes and teachers this year compared to last year, including their grades, and (d) students preference in teaching style *specifically in regards* to current	**Meaning Statement:** Students did experiments outside last year but not this year. **Quote:** *"We don't go outside and do experiments, like last year we did experiments."*

Table 14: Clusters Code Book (cont'd)

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
		teachers versus last year. Quotes in this sub-cluster do not include statements regarding *general* preferences for a particular teacher attributes and teaching styles.	
Sub-Cluster Change in Classroom Management (2B)	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** With-in the cluster of "More Teacher Switching This Year". Students describe changes in how their teacher oversees the classroom compared to last year. Classroom management encompasses; teachers' rules and expectation of student behavior, opportunity for students to work in groups or with partners, disciplinary measures, and the teachers' overall focus and concentration for overseeing the classroom. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' description of (a) former teachers' management of the class, (b) current teachers' management of the class, (c) student reaction to their teachers' management style this year compared to last year including their teachers' focus and attention, and (d) their thoughts on the reason why teachers' rules and expectations changed this year.	**Meaning Statement:** This year students must do work silently and remain seated. **Quote:** *"Now you gotta just sit down in your desk, shut up, like no talking, do your work. "*
Less Supplies This Year (3)	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** Students describe having less school supplies this year compared to last year. Teachers and students often had to use their own money to buy school supplies. School	**Meaning Statement:** This year, students are given fewer pencils and less frequently.

Table 14: Clusters Code Book (cont'd)

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
Less Supplies This Year **(3)**	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	supplies include items such as: paper, pencils, and materials for art, gym and computers. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' descriptions of: (a) loss of school supplies, (b) teachers and students buying supplies (c) school supplies breaking, (d) how the loss of school supplies affects students' experiences in school, and (d) their thoughts on why they have less school supplies this year.	**Quote:** *"We used to get pencils, like 24/7. Like every day. Like whenever we needed them. We'd go visit can like. I get a pencil. Like, yeah, here. Now like once a month."*
Fewer Electives This Year **(4)**	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** Students described having less school electives this year compared to last year. Electives are alternative classes that provide students with a specialized subject outside of the general school curriculum. In previous years students had both minor and major electives. Minor electives are classes such as instruments or Spanish. Major electives are classes such as art, computers and broadcasting. This year students only have major electives. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' descriptions of: (a) electives they had last year (b) having fewer electives this year, (c) their reactions to having fewer electives, (d) how fewer electives affect their teachers and (e) their thoughts on the reason they have fewer electives.	**Meaning Statement:** Students like having more electives to experience more classes, instead of being stuck in one elective. **Quote:** *"Because last year they had a lot more I think that we should do it this year too because instead of having of just one elective you could switch to others and have more experiences of other electives, instead of being stuck in one."*

Table 14: Clusters Code Book (cont'd)

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
Less School Activities **(5)**	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** Students describe having less fun school activities this year. Fun school activities include: field trips, afterschool programs, and a school store. In addition, school activities encompass activities provided in classes such as; art and gym. Fundraisers are often used in the school to help fund school activities. Fewer fundraisers were conducted this year compared to last. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' description of (a) former school activities last years, (b) a lack of school activities this year, (c) reaction to having less school activities, and (d) their thoughts as to why there are less school activities this year.	**Meaning Statement:** Last year students went on field trips but did not this year. Students work straight and were not even able to go outside. **Quote:** "*Oh last year, ummm..I forgot to say this but last year we got to go on fieldtrips, this year, there's no field trips. Like we got to go to the AMUSEMENT PARK, we go to raise up money for that like, we went to the capital, we did all these things, all these things. But now we don't do that. It's just straight work. We don't even get to go outside.*"
Poor School Facilities **(6)**	Two Focus Groups (1,2,3)	**Description:** Students describe their school and classroom in poor condition this year. This includes the general upkeep and cleanliness of the building and classroom, along with having a colorful and warm classroom. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' description of: (a) the classroom condition, (b) the upkeep of the school building, (c) their reaction to the facilities both school wide and their classroom, and (d) their thoughts	**Meaning Statement:** At other schools, stuff gets fixed quickly, at this school it takes much longer to fix things. **Quote:** "*If I were to break one of these things at ANOTHER SCHOOL, they would be able to fix it real quick. But if I break it here. You got to wait a whole year for somebody to fix it.*"

Table 14: Clusters Code Book (cont'd)

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
		as to why the school facilities are in poor condition.	
School Closing This Year (7)	Three Focus Groups (1,2, 3)	**Description:** Students describe their school closing at the end of this year, and having to transfer to new schools next year. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' description of: (a) the school closing next year, (b) their reaction to school closing, (c) their ideas as to how school closing may affect other students and their teachers, and (d) their thoughts as to why the school is closing.	**Meaning Statement:** Budget cuts caused the school to close because it cannot afford to stay open. **Quote:** **Student:** *"This building it is getting closed down."* **Interviewer:** *"It is getting closed down. How do you think the budget cuts had to do with that?"* **Student:** *"They couldn't afford for this building to stay up any longer."*
Descriptions of the Budget Cuts (8)	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** Students articulate their understanding of the budget cuts. What words they associate with the budget cuts, what causes the budget cuts, what the school has and is currently doing to help with the budget cuts and how the budget cuts impact their overall school experience. **Clustering Rules:** Quotes gather in the cluster include: (a) words students associate with the budget cuts, (b) ideas regarding what causes budget cuts, (c) descriptions of the overall impact of the budget cuts, (Note this is not specific to any change associated with a specific cluster. For example: Budget cuts contribute to less school supplies, would be clustered with less school supplies. In	**Meaning Statement:** The government is wasting money that students need. **Quote:** *"Like, yeah, they're wasting their money on stuff we need."*

Table 14: Clusters Code Book (cont'd)

Cluster Name (#)	# of Focus Groups in Cluster	Definition	Example Quote
		addition, students may articulate not knowing what the exact impact of the budget cuts are on the school.), and (d) students' awareness of the budget cuts (For example: students discussing changes in school, or awareness in what the school is currently doing to help with the budget cuts.).	
Solutions to The Budget Cuts (9)	All Four Focus Groups (1,2,3,4)	**Description:** Students generated solutions if they were in charge how they would they handle the budget cuts. In particular, students are referring to actions that have not been done yet. Students generate ideas regarding what they would spare being cut, what the school could do without, along with observing resources not currently being used, such as; lab tops, smart boards etc. **Clustering Rule:** Quotes grouped in this cluster include students' description of: (a) handling the budget cuts if they were in charge, in particular (b) what should sparred being cut within the school, (c) what can be cut, along with (d) school resources that are not currently being used. Quotes that are in this cluster are specific to ideas students have, not current actions the school is taking to handle the budget cuts. Thus, quotes regarding current school fundraisers would not be grouped in this cluster.	**Meaning Statement:** School would save money, if older kids went to a regular middle school and only younger kids attended the school. **Quote:** *"No, all these big kids up in here. This place would be booming, if ummm, if all these kids are out in a regular middle school. And all these little kids come in here. It will save us more money."*

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[3] To protect the confidentiality of the school all references that include the name of the school or school district were given pseudonyms.

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