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## ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a study to determine the effects of student dress on behavior while at school. The study took place at 5 high schools, 4 junior high schools, and 10 elementary schools during the 2000-01 school year. The total enrollment of the schools was 8,194. The study involved two or three sets consisting of three days each. One day was a dress-up day; one, a dress-down day; and one, a regular day. On each of these days, the principals recorded the number of discipline cases sent to the disciplinary office. To determine the effect of student dress on behavior, the study compared the number of discipline cases dealt with. There were 766 discipline cases in the total study. On recorded days of regular school dress, there were 233 cases; on dress-up days, there were 211 cases, a decrease of 9 percent; on dress-down days, there were 322 cases, an increase of 38 percent in discipline problems. The study concludes that the type of school dress does, in fact, have an effect on school discipline. Students tend to act the way they dress. (WFA)

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# THE EFFECTS OF DRESS ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

presented by

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**Mid-Western Educational Research Association**  
**Annual Conference**  
**Chicago**  
**October 24-27, 2001**

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# THE EFFECTS OF DRESS ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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## THE OBJECT

The object of this study is to determine the effects, if any, of student dress while at school on behavior in relation to school discipline problems.

## THE FORMAT

During the 2000-2001 school year each participating school principal was asked to conduct two or three sets consisting of three days each. One day was to be a dress-up day, one a dress-down day and one a regular dress day. On each of these days the principal was to record the number of discipline cases sent to the disciplinary officer that day. They were also to determine the severity of each incident as mild, moderate or severe.

In addition, the following directions were given to each participating principal:

Think of a way to introduce the dress-up/down days as a normal part of what you would do in your building. Be creative. PLEASE DO NOT tell the students this is an experimental or research project.

We would like to have a set of three (3) data collection days each semester, one of each type. We encourage you to use the optional third set if you can. This third set may be run at any time.

To keep the data as pure as possible, all three days in each set would be on the same day of the week (e.g. Friday). None of the days should be immediately before or after a holiday when school is not in session. They should not be on the day of a big school event (e.g. A big game, the prom, etc.). They should not be on proficiency test days.

Acceptable school dress and behavior are relative to local standards. While T-shirts and jeans might be regular school dress in one school district, they might be unacceptable in another. The same applies to behavior. In one school district mild swearing might be an everyday acceptable occurrence, while in others it might be an infraction punishable by varying severity. One principal included her standard of judgment of severity for each infraction that is probably a typical division of the three levels. Her division of severity of infractions was: mild – resulting in detention or less, moderate – resulting in Wednesday School (in school suspension), severe – resulting in suspension or expulsion.

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As each community and school has its own standards for dress and behavior, the determination of what constitutes dress up, dress down, and regular school attire was left to each principal to determine. The same applied for the determination of the severity of the infractions.

The purpose of this study was to determine any CHANGE in behavior on days students dressed a certain way. The purpose was not to determine what is universally acceptable and what is not.

### **THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The scope of the study was relatively large. It involved the participation of 19 separate schools: 5 high schools, 4 junior high/middle schools, and 10 elementary schools.

These schools enrolled collectively 8194 students including 3186 high school students, 1321 junior high/middle school students, and 3687 elementary school students.

In the study discipline cases on 153 days were recorded. This produced an aggregate of 1,253,682 student days.

During the course of the study 766 discipline cases were recorded and graded for severity.

### **THE RESULTS**

To determine the effect of student dress on student behavior in school we will use the number of discipline cases dealt with on days when the students are wearing their regular school attire compared to the number of discipline cases on days when students are wearing what is considered dress up clothes in their school. We will also compare the number of discipline cases on days of regular school dress with the number of discipline cases occurring on days when students are wearing dress down clothes.

After comparing the total discipline cases with how all students dress, we will make the same comparisons but broken down by grade levels: high school, junior high/middle school, and elementary school.

Looking at the severity of the discipline problems involved in this study we will use the same process and divisions. We will compare the aggregate numbers first and then compare by grade level.

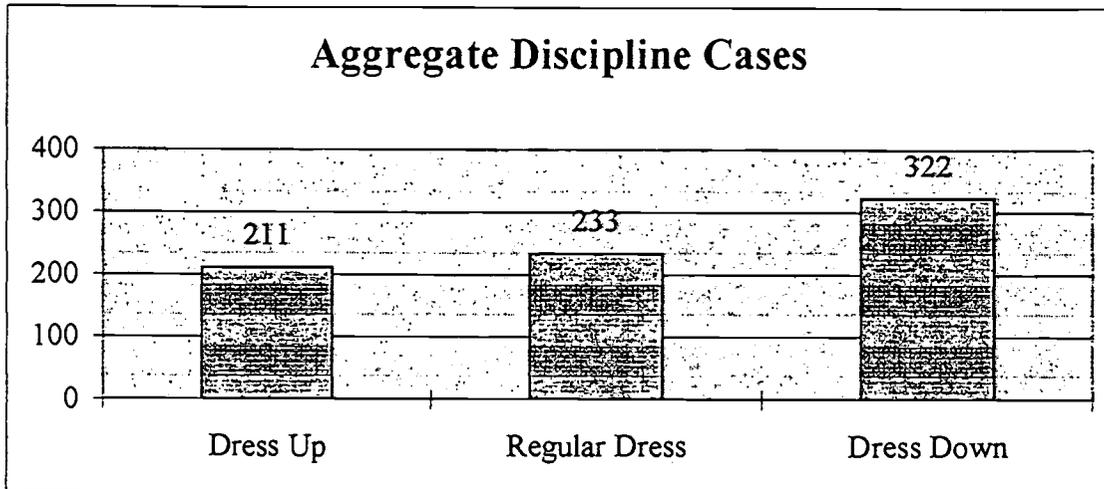
#### **1. The Aggregate Discipline Cases**

In the total study there were 766 discipline cases reported as being dealt with by the office staff.

On recorded days of REGULAR school dress there was a total of 233 cases dealt with by office staff.

On recorded days considered DRESS UP, there was a total of 211 discipline cases dealt with. This was 22 less cases or a decrease of 9%.

On recorded days considered DRESS DOWN there was a total of 322 cases dealt with by office staff. This was 89 more cases or an INCREASE of 38% more discipline problems.



## 2. Discipline Cases by Grade Level

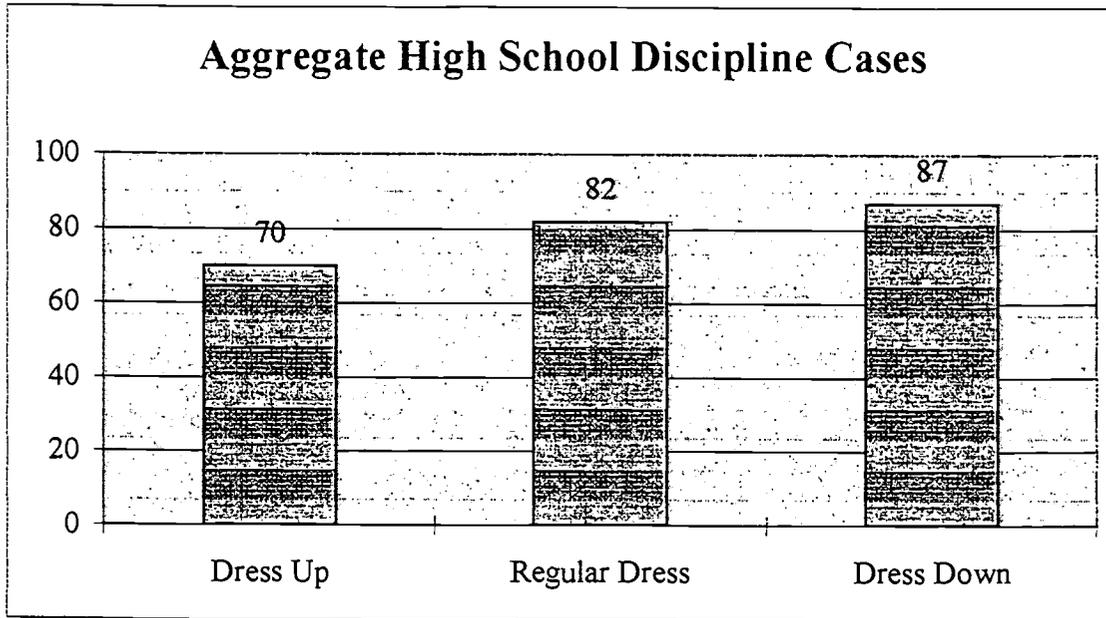
Separated by grade level the results are:

At the HIGH SCHOOL level on days of REGULAR school dress there were 82 discipline cases dealt with by the office staff.

On days when students were DRESSED UP there were 70 discipline cases, a difference of 12 less. This was a 15% DECREASE in discipline cases.

On DRESS DOWN days there were 87 cases of discipline dealt with by the office staff, a difference of 5 more. This was an INCREASE of 6% in problems dealt with.

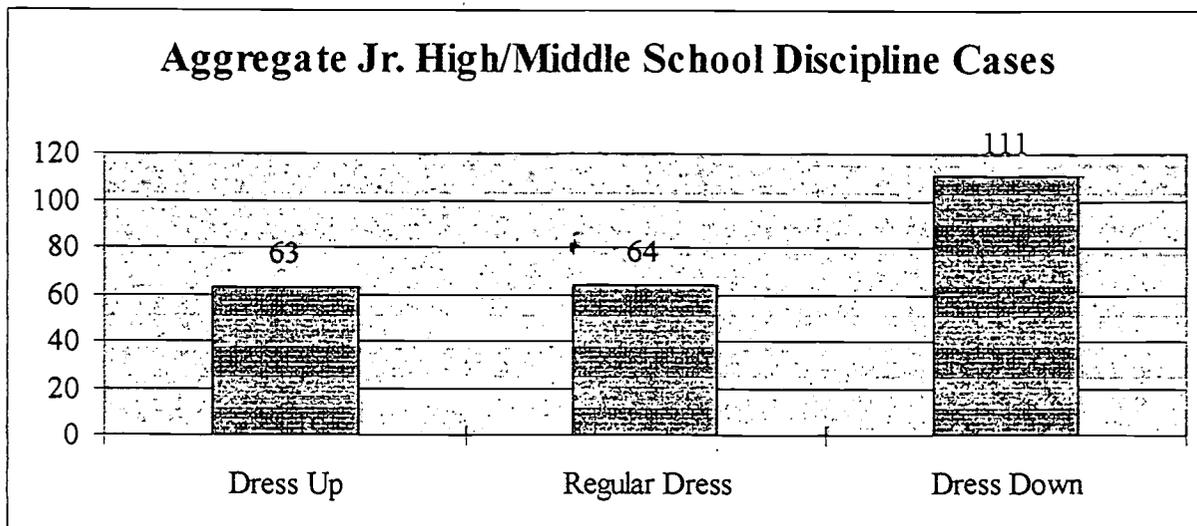
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At the JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL level on days when students wore REGULAR school attire there were 64 discipline cases recorded.

On days when students DRESSED UP there were 63 discipline cases, a difference of 1. This was a 1.5% DECREASE in discipline problems.

On days when students were wearing DRESS DOWN clothes there were 111 discipline cases recorded. This was a difference of 47 cases or an INCREASE of 73%.

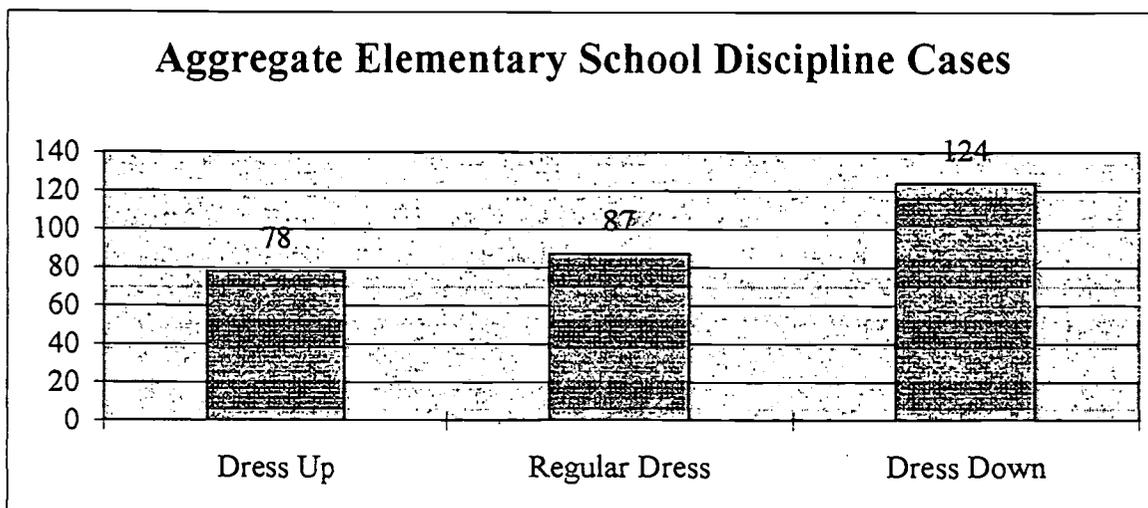


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At the ELEMENTARY SCHOOL level on recorded days of REGULAR school dress there were 87 incidents dealt with.

On DRESS UP days there was a total of 78 discipline cases. This was a difference of 9 cases or a 10% DECREASE.

On DRESS DOWN days at the elementary level there were recorded 124 incidents dealt with in the office. This was a difference of 37 cases or an INCREASE of 43%.



### 3. Aggregate Discipline Cases by Degree of Severity

In the total study there were 72 cases judged to be SEVERE, 172 cases judged to be MODERATE, and 522 cases determined to be MILD.

A. On days that students wore REGULAR school attire there were 30 cases judged to be SEVERE.

On DRESS UP days there were 15 cases recorded and judged to be SEVERE. This was a DECREASE of 15 or 50%.

On DRESS DOWN days a total 27 cases were determined to be SEVERE. This was a DECREASE of 3 or 10%.

B. On days students wore REGULAR school dress there were 44 cases of discipline deemed to be MODERATE.

On days students were DRESSED UP there were recorded 49 MODERATE incidents recorded. This was an INCREASE of 5 or 11%.

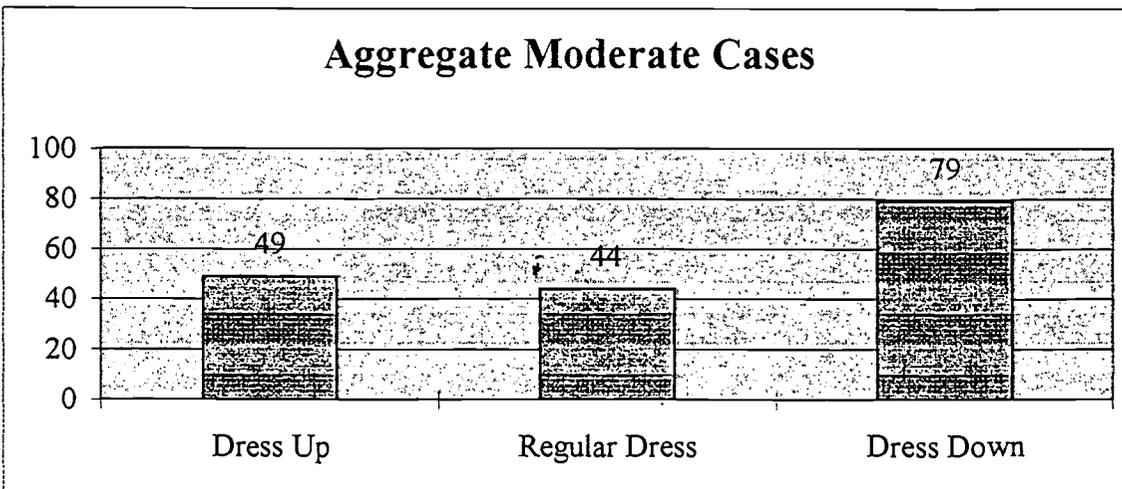
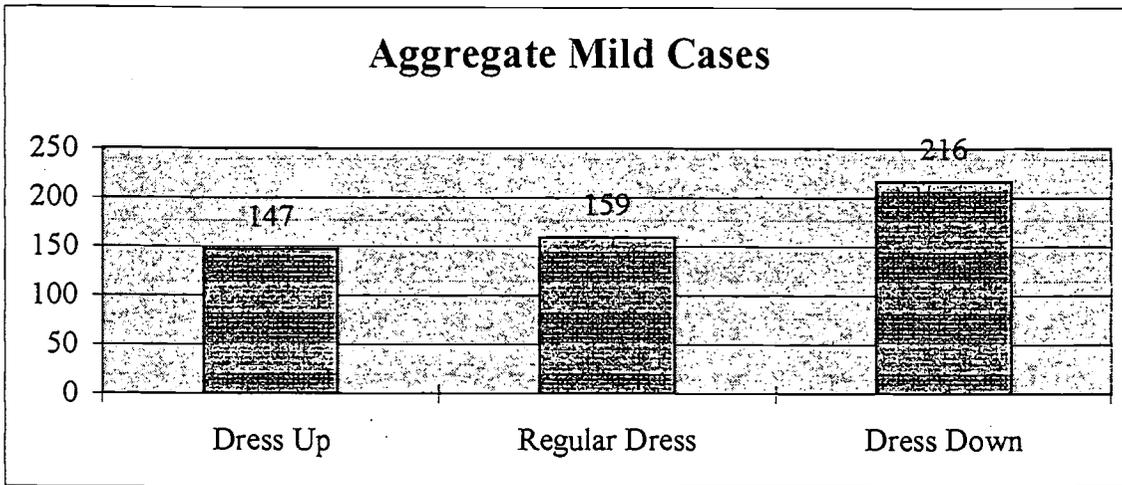
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During days students were DRESSED DOWN there were 79 discipline cases judged MODERATE. This was an INCREASE of 35 cases or 80%.

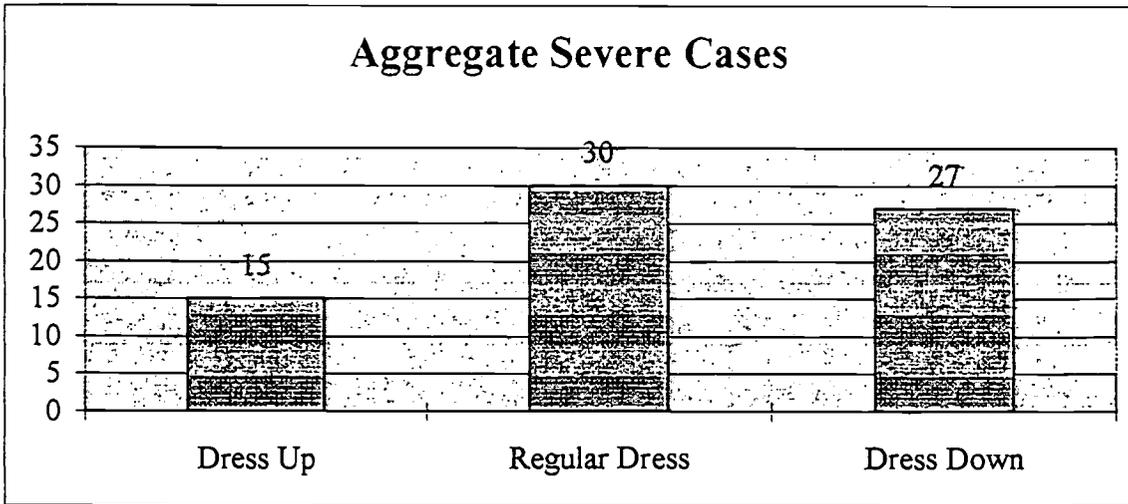
C. Looking at discipline cases considered MILD we find that on days of REGULAR school dress there were 159 such cases.

During DRESS UP days there were recorded 147 MILD cases of discipline. This was a DECREASE of 12 or 8%.

On DRESS DOWN days there were recorded 216 cases judged to be MILD. This was an INCREASE of 36%.

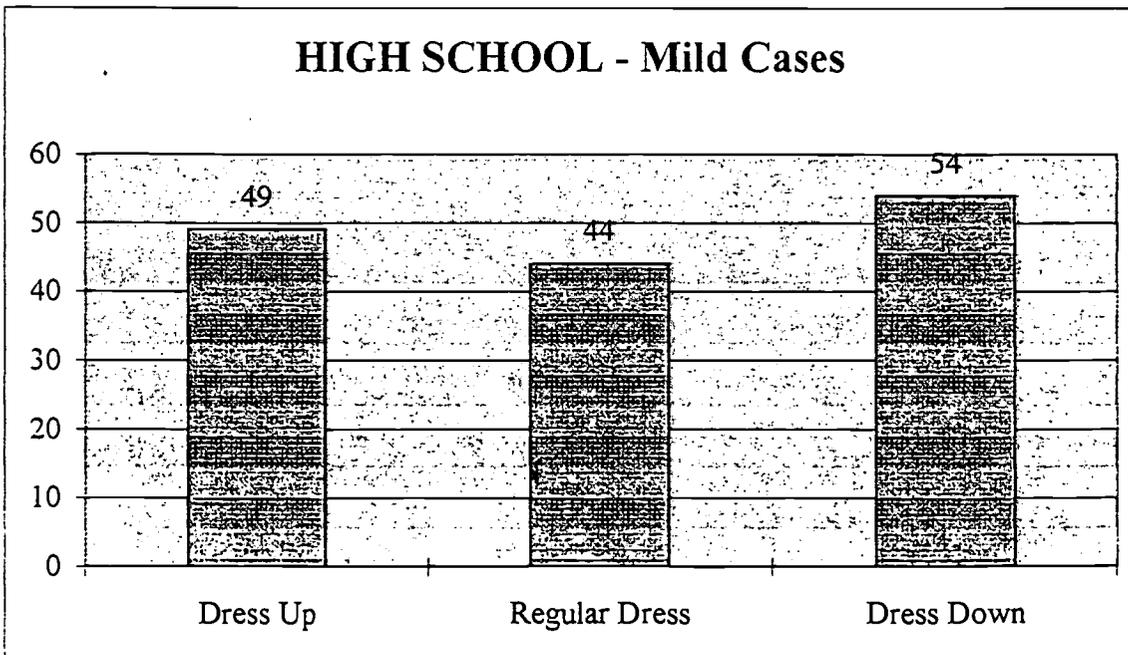


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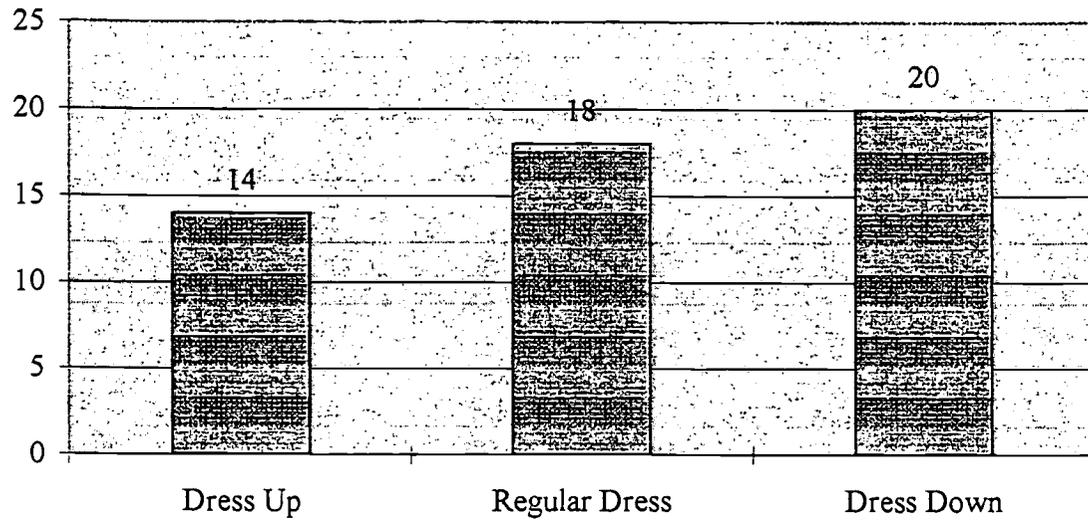
The severity of discipline cases was also analyzed at grade level divisions. These were divided into three categories: high school, junior high/middle school, and elementary school. The difference in severity of discipline cases by grade level is shown on the following graphs:

**HIGH SCHOOLS:**

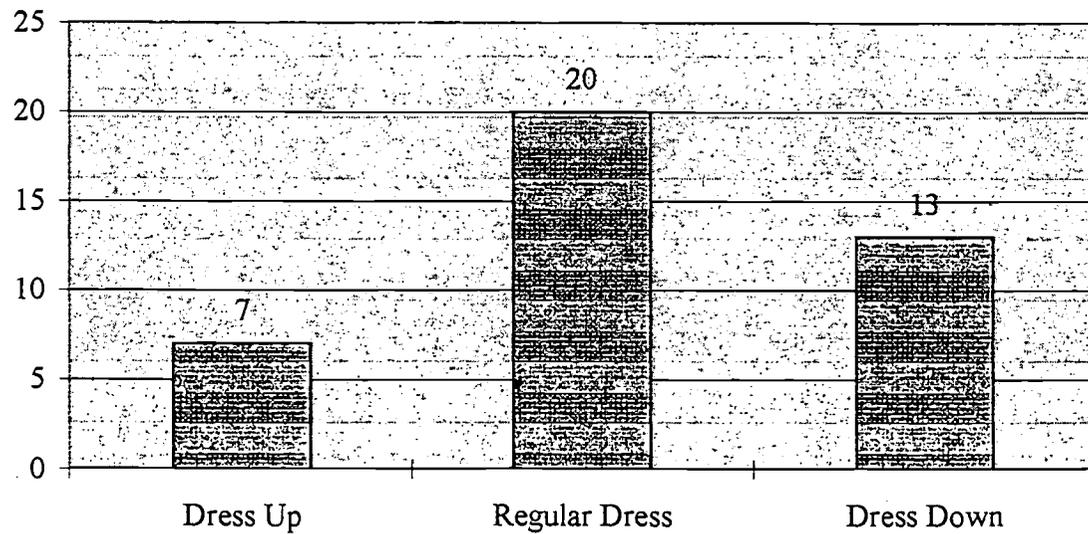


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### HIGH SCHOOL - Moderate Cases

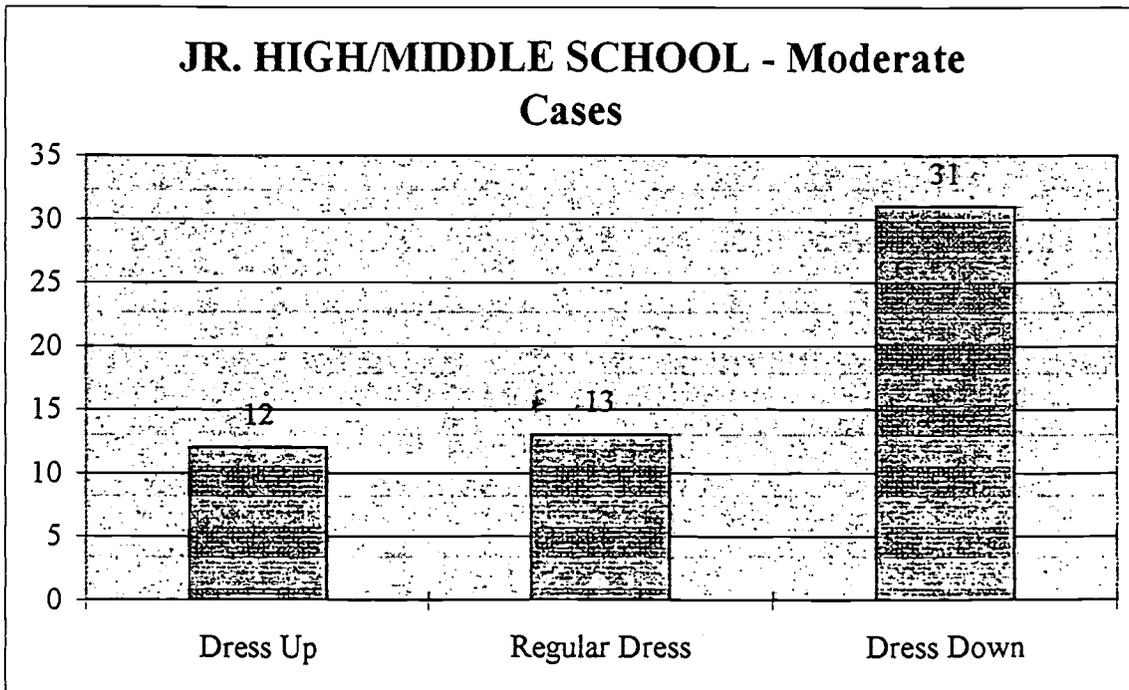
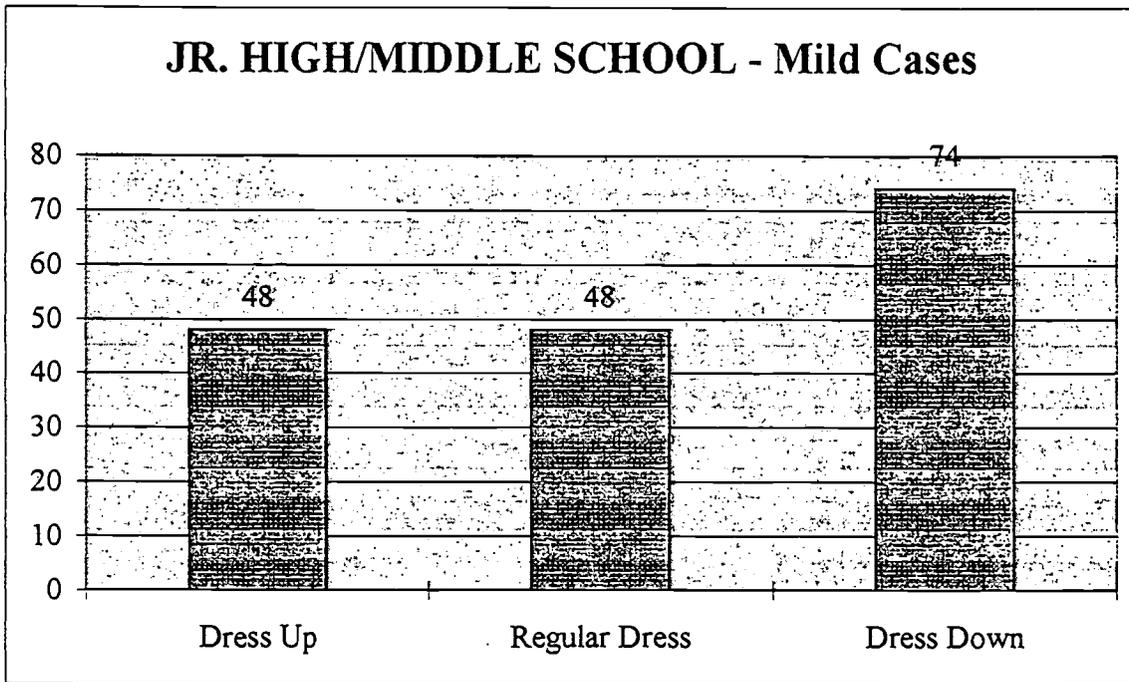


### HIGH SCHOOL - Severe Cases



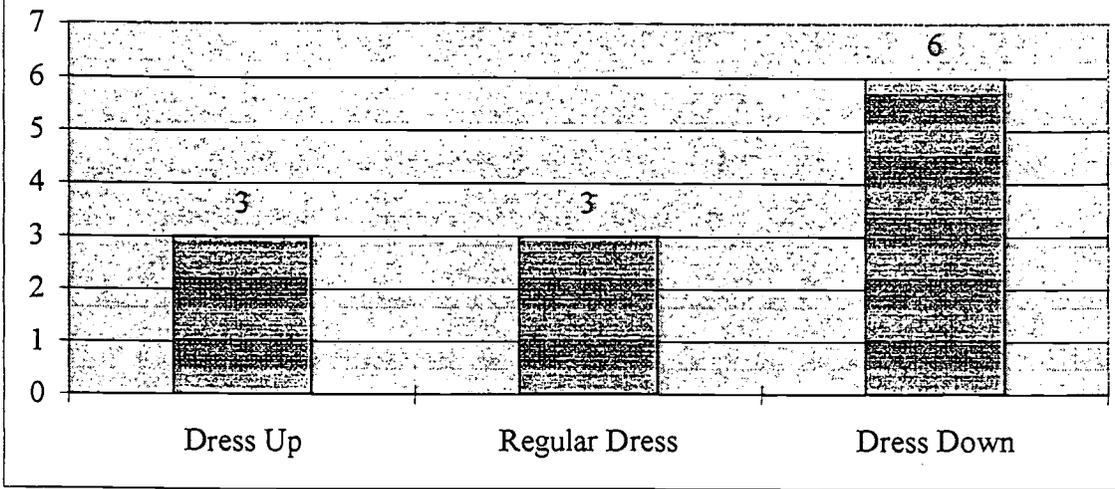
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JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOLS:



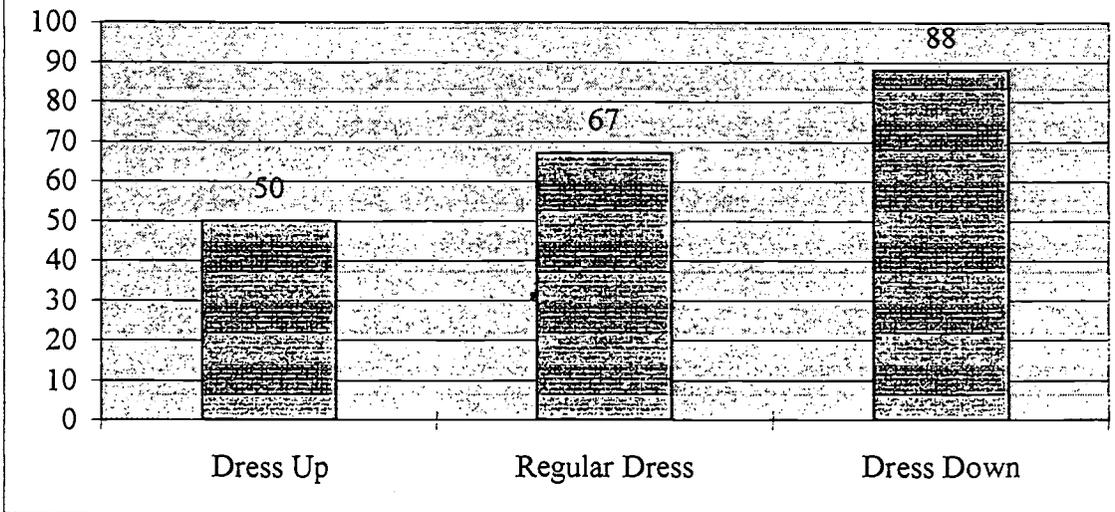
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### JR. HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL - Severe Cases



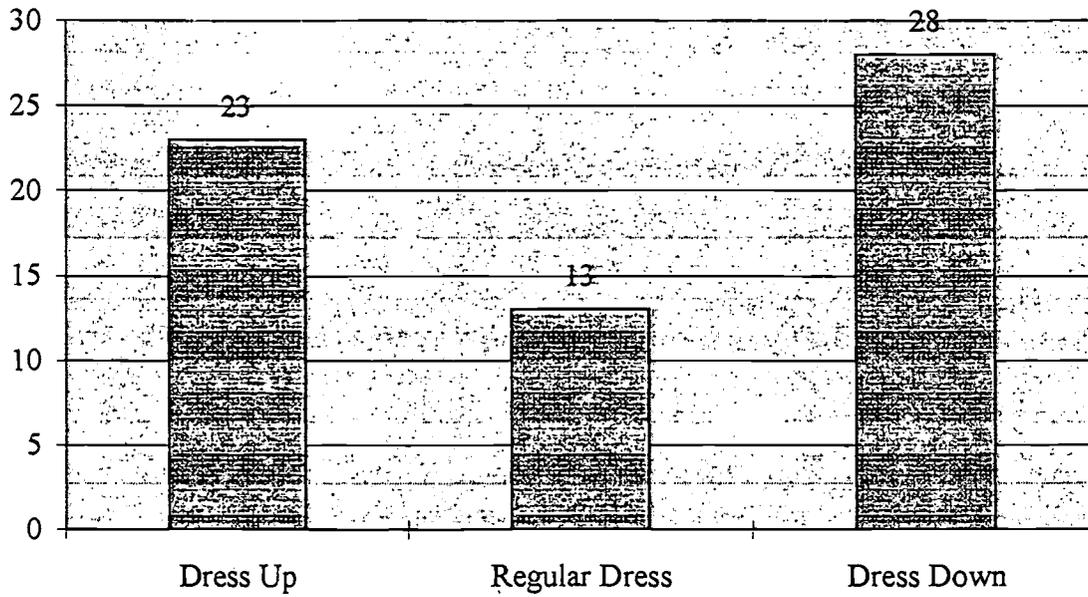
### ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - Mild Cases

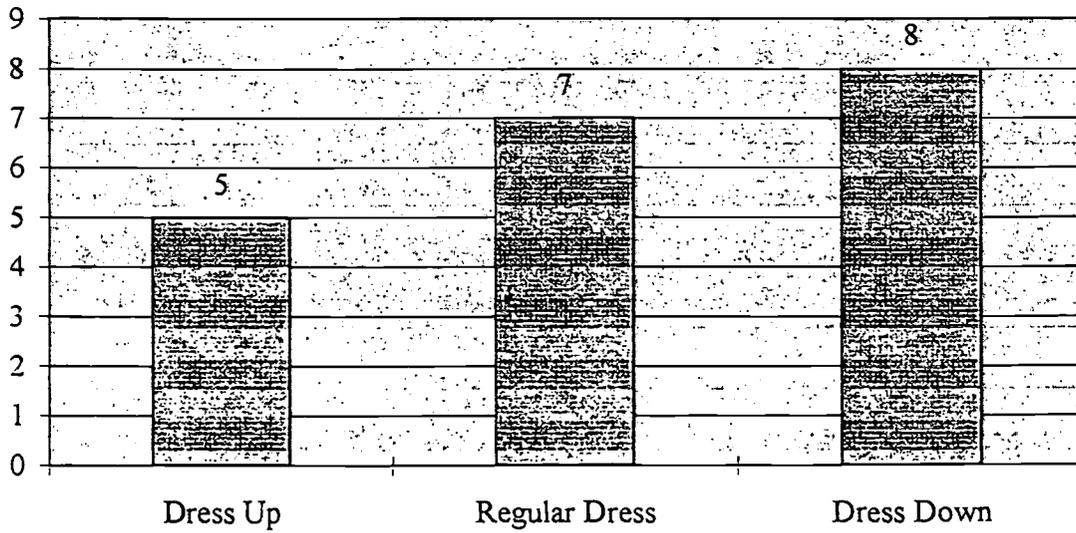


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### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - Moderate Cases



### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - Severe Cases



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## CONCLUSIONS

From this study we can conclude that type of school dress does in fact have an effect on school discipline. Students tend to act the way they are dressed. If they are dressed more formally they are more likely to follow the rules and tend to the business of school. If they dress less formally and more for play they tend to become more of a discipline problem.

In every instance and at every grade level there were less discipline cases on days the students dressed up and more discipline cases on days they dressed down. In the aggregate, discipline cases increased by more than one third, (38%), on dress down days compared to days the students wore regular school attire.

Looking at the degree of severity of cases as judged by the principal, we can conclude that in most cases, school dress also affects the degree of severity of infraction resulting in discipline cases. Even in the category judged most severe where there were more cases on days students wore regular school dress (30) than on both the dress up days (15) and on the days students dressed down (27), there were far more cases when students considered themselves dressed down than when they dressed up.

On days students were dressed down there was a large increase in the discipline cases judged moderate (80%) and mild (36%). These cases judged moderate and mild have more impact on the daily operation of the school and the amount of disruption in the classroom. More teacher time is taken up in dealing with these cases at the point where they happen. The sheer volume of these types of discipline cases (694 to 72) indicate they will have more impact on the climate of learning for all students as more teaching time is lost in resolving discipline problems in the classroom. These two categories of severity of discipline cases have much more potential for having a negative effect on learning and therefore, it behooves administrators to reduce this condition as much as possible.

## IMPLICATIONS

Since it is unrealistic to expect all schools to require all students to "dress up" every day for school and the return in improved discipline is comparably smaller, it seems logical to focus our efforts on the less formal or "dress down" form of attire. This has much more potential for making a positive impact on the volume and severity of discipline cases in the school. It is also more traditionally accepted to set a level of dress below which students may not go.

Creating and consistently enforcing a reasonable dress code that prohibits school dress that detracts from the business of learning seems the most productive direction based on the results of this study. A school administrator might reasonably expect that requiring less distracting and more businesslike clothing be worn to school will create a classroom atmosphere with less disruption due to discipline problems and therefore a more positive climate for learning for all children in the building.

<b>Aggregate Discipline Cases</b>	<b>Aggregate High School Discipline Cases</b>	<b>Aggregate Jr. High/Middle School Discipline Cases</b>	<b>Aggregate Elementary School Discipline Cases</b>
Dress Up 211	Dress Up 70	Dress Up 63	Dress Up 78
Regular Dress 233	Regular Dress: 82	Regular Dress: 64	Regular Dress 87
Dress Down 322	Dress Down 87	Dress Down 111	Dress Down 124

<b>Aggregate Mild Cases</b>	<b>Aggregate Moderate Cases</b>	<b>Aggregate Severe Cases</b>
Dress Up 147	Dress Up 49	Dress Up 15
Regular Dress 159	Regular Dress: 44	Regular Dress: 30
Dress Down 216	Dress Down 79	Dress Down 27

**HIGH SCHOOLS:**

<b>Mild Cases</b>	<b>Moderate Cases</b>	<b>Severe Cases</b>
Dress Up 49	Dress Up 14	Dress Up 7
Regular Dress 44	Regular Dress: 18	Regular Dress: 20
Dress Down 54	Dress Down 20	Dress Down 13

**JR. HIGH/**

**MIDDLE SCHOOLS:**

<b>Mild Cases</b>	<b>Moderate Cases</b>	<b>Severe Cases</b>
Dress Up 48	Dress Up 12	Dress Up 3
Regular Dress 48	Regular Dress: 13	Regular Dress: 3
Dress Down 74	Dress Down 31	Dress Down 6

**ELEMENTARY**

**SCHOOLS:**

<b>Mild Cases</b>	<b>Moderate Cases</b>	<b>Severe Cases</b>
Dress Up 50	Dress Up 23	Dress Up 5
Regular Dress 67	Regular Dress: 13	Regular Dress: 7
Dress Down 88	Dress Down 28	Dress Down 8



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