

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN STUDENTS RECEIVING
DRESS CODE VIOLATIONS AND DISCIPLINE REFERRALS
AT NEWPORT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Nikki Nicholson

Arkansas State University

November 29, 2007

CHAPTER I

Introduction and Statement of Problem

Strict dress codes and uniform policies have recently become a popular intervention in public schools. Many administrators are at their wits end trying to figure out how to control discipline problems that have recently evolved, namely gang activity and school violence. Therefore, authorities have decided that tightening up the dress code policy will reduce or eliminate these and other discipline problems. Since students are limited as to what colors and types of clothes and accessories they may wear, they cannot so easily support their particular gang. It is so important for schools to provide a safe environment that is conducive to learning, thus school officials need to know what factors are causing school violence. While Newport Junior High School does not have extreme school violence problems, there are issues dealing with aggressive behavior towards students and adults and gang related behavior. Newport Junior High School does have a uniform policy to help deter some of these behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is 1) to determine if the same students at Newport Junior High School who violate the dress code are the ones receiving discipline referrals, 2) to determine who is violating the dress code based on demographic factors such as age, gender, grade, and ethnicity, and 3) to determine the level of proficiency on the benchmark exam of the students who violate the dress code policy.

Significance of the Study

Having a strict uniform policy requires a lot of work on the part of teachers and administrators. Everyone must work hard to make sure students stay in dress code at all times during the day. If these strict rules such as wearing an ID tag and tucking in their shirts do not reduce the discipline referrals then the school board should reconsider the rules. Also, if the same students who receive discipline referrals are the ones violating the dress code, then we should address the particular students instead of punishing the whole by making them wear uniforms. For these reasons, my study is very important to the future of the uniform policy at Newport Junior High School.

Limitations of the Study

Collecting the dress code violation data will be done at each entrance while students are changing classes. This study will not take into account what dress code violations are being committed in the classrooms, gym, or cafeteria.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Dress codes have been established in schools all across America. Administrators seem to believe that a stricter dress code reduces the risk of violence and creates a positive learning environment. Uniforms are becoming more popular with the recent outbreak of school violence. It is believed that uniforms reduce discipline problems while improving attendance, self-esteem and achievement. Many schools also hope to reduce gang-related problems through strict uniform policies.

Those who oppose uniforms say they are unnecessary, a violation of First Amendment rights, and just a “cosmetic solution to deeper societal problems” (Brown). While one of the reasons administrators have implemented uniforms is to reduce clothing costs, the opposition believes that uniforms actually increase clothing expenses due to having to purchase special clothing.

According to the article, schools should make clear “how the policy relates to its ability to educate students in a safe, orderly environment” (Lumsden). The dress code must be a part of how the school plans to achieve its purposes, whatever they may be.

The research on dress code and uniform policies does not show enough support or opposition to the idea. It is hard to find concrete evidence that uniforms actually improve anything. Most data that is collected is simply based on what principals, students, and others observe.

The problems discussed in the article are deep issues related to feelings and lifestyle. Uniforms and dress codes probably cannot fully correct these problems, such as racism and gangs. However, they can be combined with other measures in order to have a positive impact on the climate of the school, the students’ behavior, and success in academics.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

This study was designed to determine who is getting dress code violations at Newport Junior High School. It is important to know who is violating the dress code in order to determine how to make it a more effective instrument in the fight against school violence. If the students showing aggressive behavior are not the ones receiving the dress code violations, then the policy must be reevaluated to make it the most effective tool for reducing violence, aggression, and gang related activity.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to know who the dress code violators are based on demographic information and to see if there is a correlation between dress code violations and discipline referrals. Also, with the increased importance of the ACTAAP benchmark exams, this study will also show the level of proficiency of the students with dress code violations. The specific research questions are listed below:

- Who is receiving the dress code violations at Newport Junior High School based on demographic factors such as age, grade, gender, and ethnicity?
- Are the same students receiving discipline referrals as well as dress code violations?
- What level of proficiency on the ACTAAP are the students with violations?

Population

The population for this study is all students at Newport Junior High School with dress code violations for one week. There are a total of 251 students at Newport Junior High School. After one week of collecting data, there were 61 students with dress code violations or 24% of the total school.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data by writing down each student with a dress code violation as observed during hallway duty. Then, the researcher used systematic sampling to choose every other student from the population until a sample size of 55 was reached. Demographics, level of proficiency on the benchmark exam, and discipline referrals were collected in the principal's office.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using frequencies and crosstabs on demographics, ACTAAP proficiency, discipline referrals, and dress code violations

Ethical Treatment of Human Subjects

Since the researcher used past data and no student contacts were made, a protocol to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research was not necessary. The researcher did receive permission for doing the research from the principal of Newport Junior High School through a signature on the Letter of Informed Consent for Exempt Research.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation of Data

- Research Question 1: Who is receiving the dress code violations at Newport Junior High School based on demographic factors such as age, grade, gender, and ethnicity? After data was collected and analyzed in SPSS the researcher found that based on ethnicity, African Americans had the most dress code violations. Based on gender, males violated the dress code more. Based on age, 12 and 13 year olds had the most dress code violations. Based on grade, 8th graders had more dress code violations.

- Research Question 2: Are the same students receiving discipline referrals as well as dress code violations? By analyzing the data, the researcher found that 45.5 percent of dress code violators had no discipline referrals. When cross tabs were done, the researcher found that based on ethnicity African Americans had the most discipline referrals. Based on age, fourteen year olds had the most discipline referrals. Based on gender, males had the most discipline referrals. And, based on grade, 8th graders had the most discipline referrals.

- What level of proficiency on the ACTAAP are the students with violations? Based on ACTAAP proficiency, students who were proficient in both math and literacy violated the dress code more. However, when crosstabs were analyzed, the discipline referrals were for students who were either basic or below basic in math and either proficient or basic in literacy.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Due to an overwhelming amount of school violence and gang related behavior, school administrators have begun searching for ways to reduce this behavior. Many have found that dress code or uniform policies may help solve the problem. While Newport Junior High School does not have a major problem with violence and gangs, it does have a moderate problem with aggressive behavior. Newport Junior High School has adopted a uniform policy to help alleviate this problem.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the same students at Newport Junior High School who violate the dress code policy were the same ones receiving discipline referrals, to determine who was violating the dress code based on demographic factors such as age, gender, grade, and ethnicity, and to determine the level of proficiency on the benchmark exam of the students who violate the dress code policy.

The reason for the study is simple. Enforcing a strict dress code policy is a lot of work for teachers and principals. If the policy is not helping solve the problems it was intended to solve then it may not be the best solution. If the same students who are violating the dress code are also receiving the discipline referrals, then the policy is simply giving the bad kids another rule to break and the good kids another rule to have to follow.

The researcher discovered that the ethnicity receiving most of the dress code violations was African American. The gender receiving the most violations was male. Twelve and thirteen year olds were the age group committing the most violations and the grade with most violations was the 8th grade.

Based on the data collected, it was discovered that 45.5% of dress code violators had no discipline referrals. The researcher also found that African Americans also had the most discipline referrals, however fourteen year olds were the ones with the most referrals. Males were the gender with the most discipline referrals and eighth graders were the ones with the most discipline referrals.

Based on ACTAAP proficiency, students who were proficient in both math and literacy violated the dress code more. However, when crosstabs were analyzed, the discipline referrals were for students who were either basic or below basic in math and either proficient or basic in literacy.

According to the data collected and analyzed, the researcher can make several conclusions. First, based on demographics the researcher could conclude that African American males who are twelve to thirteen and in the 8th grade are the most likely group to commit dress code violations. Second, since 45.5% of dress code violators had no discipline referrals the researcher could make the conclusion that there is no relationship between dress code violations and discipline referrals. Third, since students with dress code violations were mostly proficient in math and literacy, the researcher cannot conclude that it is the slower students who receive dress code violations. It is in fact the students at the top academically who are receiving the violations.

REFERENCES

Lumsden, Linda. Uniforms and Dress-Code Policies (2001). ERIC Digest.

Pate, Sharon. The Influence of a Mandatory School Uniform Policy. Illinois State University, Dept. of Family and Consumer Sciences. ERIC Digest.

Wilson, Richard B. Impact of School Uniform Dress Code on Principal Perception of School Violence (1999). ERIC Digest.