

Research Brief

School Uniforms

Question: What are the Pros and Cons of School Uniforms?

Summary of Findings:

Does clothing make the person or does the person make the clothing? How does what attire a student wears to school affect their academic achievement? In 1996, President Clinton cited examples of school violence and discipline issues that might have been avoided had the students been wearing uniforms (*School uniforms: Prevention or suppression?*). In his 1998 State of the Union address, he mentioned the positive impact uniforms had made in the Long Beach Unified School District, which has a highly diverse ethnic and socioeconomic population that is also the third largest district in California.

When students have continuous negative experiences in school, dropping out and delinquency tend to be the common responses. The role of schools is to provide a positive, safe and secure learning environment where students feel protected enough to explore and develop their intellectual and social competencies. Hard evidence that proves the wearing of uniforms provides a direct link to better academic achievement is not conclusive, however, there is evidence that supports there are fewer discipline problems/referrals and violence as well as higher attendance rates since the implementation of a uniform policy. What appears to have been overlooked in the data analysis is the effect of other programs that are often being implemented at the same time as the uniform policy and may also have a direct impact on the discipline and attendance issues. There are many arguments for and against school uniform policies. Listed below are those that appear frequently in the literature:

PROS:

- increases students' attention in class because they are not concerned about what others are wearing and peer cattiness
- improves classroom behavior because they have a sense of safety
- aids in higher academic performance because they feel safe in the learning environment

- helps prevent school violence, especially in the form of stealing expensive and/or significant clothing and/or jewelry
- levels the socioeconomic playing field
- provides a sense of community
- builds school pride
- makes the school physically safer because outsiders can be readily identified
- reduces the wearing of gang attire
- allows the administrators to employ more time supporting the school's programs and less time acting as the "dress code police"
- spends less on clothing because fewer wardrobe items are needed for school

CONS:

- reduces the students' responsibility in making mature choices about what to wear
- lessens opportunities for students to learn how to deal with others who are different from themselves
- minimizes students' First Amendment rights, the freedom of expression (although the courts have tended to uphold uniform policies)
- decreases the students' opportunities to believe the playing field is leveled and safe because of other items not covered in the policy such as jewelry, jackets, backpacks, etc.
- interferes with clothing worn as part of one's religious beliefs such as a yarmulke
- cuts down on attention in classroom and possible involvement in activities because there will still be cliques
- allows administrators to have more power over students due to controlling what students will wear
- spends more on clothing because they need to have different sets for school and out of school

If your school is considering implementing a uniform policy, according to the School Uniforms Manual (<http://www.ed.gov/updates/uniforms.html>), the following should be considered and in place:

- involve parents and students from the beginning. Develop and distribute a survey to them to solicit their thoughts and opinions. Invite them to help design the policy and select the actual attire.
- protect the students' rights of expression and accommodate religious beliefs.
- determine if the policy will be voluntary or mandatory. If it is mandatory, include an "opt out" policy (some districts allow students to transfer to another school where there is not a uniform policy).
- provide financial assistance for those who need it. Often local community groups have funds available to support this.
- regard uniforms as part of the overall safety program of the school.

Online Resources:

- Arguments about uniforms
Three major arguments against uniforms are provided in this article.
<http://www.angelfire.com/ca/bygranite/uniforms/args.html>
- Dress code blues: An exploration of urban students' reactions to public high school uniform policy
This piece examines the responses of 22 U.S. urban public high school students about the uniform policies at their schools.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3626/is_200601/ai_n17187799/print
- Houston Study
This brief article describes possible higher rates of suspensions in middle schools since the implementation of a uniform policy are described here. Other possible explanations are also included in this article.
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SchoolUniformsDebate/message/539>
- Manual on school uniforms
This is a description of the necessary components of a school uniform program.
<http://www.ed.gov/updates/uniforms.html>
- School dress codes and uniform policies

An overview of pros and cons of implementing a dress code policy and important components are provided in this article.

http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/policy_reports/dress_codes/intro.htm
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- School uniforms
This is brief overview in support of school uniforms. Included is a sidebar about the uniforms that Japanese students wear.
<http://712educators.about.com/cs/schoolviolence/a/uniforms.htm>
- School uniforms: Secondary school administrators
A brief list of pros and concerns about dress codes are listed in this piece.
<http://712educators.about.com/cs/schoolviolence/a/uniforms.htm>
- School Uniforms: Prevention or suppression?
This is an explanation of some of the cons of school uniform policies.
<http://www.gate.net/~rwms/UniformRay.html>
- The Long Beach Unified School District uniform initiative: A prevention-intervention strategy for urban schools
“This article describes the first, most extensive mandatory school uniform policy in place in the United States-that of Long Beach (California) Unified School District.”
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3626/is_200310/ai_n9248791/print
- The uniform blues
Published by Your Family, this article presents reasons against school uniforms.
<http://lifegetinit.fitdv.com/new/articles/article.html?artid=131>

Schools

- Millikan High School, Long Beach, California
Home page. Uniform requirements: white or navy top and khaki or navy bottoms.
<http://www3.lbusd.k12.ca.us:81/millikan/>

- Northwestern High School, Maryland
Home page.
<http://www.pgcps.org/~nwest/uniforms.htm>
- The school district of Philadelphia
All students in every school in Philadelphia are required to wear a uniform. It is up to the school to determine the policy. This is a list of all of its schools and a description of their required uniforms.
<http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/osm/uniforms/>
- Wilson Classical High School Long Beach, California
Home page. School uniform: white or burgundy collared top and khaki bottoms.
<http://www3.lbusd.k12.ca.us:81/wilson/index.php>

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By: Dr. Karen Walker Lebanon Valley College

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