

5-1997

School Uniforms: Background of and Descriptive Research

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SCHOOL UNIFORMS:
BACKGROUND OF AND DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH

FINAL THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development

State University of New York

College at Brockport

in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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May, 1997

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Research Question

Can school uniforms have an influence on acceptable student behavior in many school systems?

Description of Thesis

This study will examine the pros and cons of implementing a public school uniform policy along with the laws involved. By analyzing and comparing a few school districts which have created a uniform policy, a conclusion can be made about whether our public schools would have better environments if the students were dressed in uniform. This study includes information on both elementary and secondary schools in urban and suburban settings.

Where schools were once a "safe haven", they are increasingly becoming a site of weapon possession, violence, gangs and students with low academic achievement.

Monroe County schools have experienced a rise in violence and other inappropriate behavior. "A study conducted by the Juvenile Prosecutor's Office found that violent crime among juveniles has increased almost 50 percent over four years. The study found a concentration of offenses in the assault, robbery, menacing and weapon use categories." (Juvenile Violent Offenses, 1994)

The Rochester City School District is dealing with an increase in offenses and dangerous student behavior. The New York State United Teachers (1993) did a

study in 1992 finding 219 assaults on teachers, 134 assaults on students and 410 cases of weapons possession on school property in the Rochester City School District.

Educators have a difficult time utilizing their instructional time most efficiently when they are forced to deal with ongoing anti-social behavior, such as violence, classroom interruptions, and gang occurrences. It is the responsibility of educators, as well as the community, to develop a "safe haven" for students and teachers, in order for the educational process to proceed and a non-violent atmosphere to flourish.

A review of the literature revealed a limited amount of information is available regarding the effects of uniform programs in public schools. No studies have been found that link the wearing of uniforms to outcomes such as student achievement and discipline. This amount of research and information is necessarily limited because relatively few public school systems have implemented such policies. (Virginia State Department of Education, 1992, p.1)

Even though there are no complete formal studies, linking public school uniforms to the deterrence of violence, there are informal statistics presented by school districts that claim a public school uniform policy has helped their school get back to the basics of educating its students. These school districts believe that the implementation of a school uniform policy has been a blessing. I will later look at a

few of these schools along with the informal data they have collected.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to analyze the information obtained to determine whether public school uniforms are able to help deter violence, gangs, weapons possession, so that an increase in school safety, student academic achievement and self esteem are realized.

Also, this investigation will attempt to accomplish the following:

- * provide the pros and cons of implementing a mandatory and/or non-mandatory/voluntary public school uniform program.
- * provide baseline data for incidents of violence in selected school districts around the country.
- * gather data about how to implement a school uniform policy without violating the First Amendment.
- * formalize an opinion about whether a public school uniform policy is the answer to the problems mentioned above.

Definition of Terms

Violence - "rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment sometimes resulting in death." (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1989, p.1595)

Gang - "a group of youngsters or youths who associate closely, often, but not exclusively, for social reasons and/or for some criminal or other antisocial purpose." (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1989, p.582)

Uniform - "to clothe in or furnish with a set of similar garments in order to obtain a

single form or pattern." (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1989, p.1552)

Opt-out - students have the option not to wear a non-mandatory/ voluntary school uniform, as long as there is parental consent.

Dress code - "not the same as mandatory uniforms. May only require young male scholars to wear a necktie to class and not wear a hat, but leave choice of colors and design up to them." (Donohue, 1996, p.20)

Chapter Two:

Review of Literature

The decision to adopt a uniform policy is made by the states, local school districts and individual schools. School uniforms can be either mandatory or non-mandatory/ voluntary. It is up to the school district to determine which uniform policy it plans to have. Most schools that are in favor of a uniform policy believe:

A safe and disciplined learning environment is needed for a good school. Students need to feel safe and secure, learn basic American values and the essentials of good citizenship, are better students. With the increase of school violence, teachers, parents and school administrators feel the need for school uniforms as a positive and creative way to increase school safety and reduce discipline problems. ("Manual on School Uniforms", 1996, p.3)

By having students wear uniforms, a greater focus can be placed on academics rather than disciplinary actions; this could increase students' performance.

Not only are there people who believe a school uniform policy is a blessing, there are just as many people who oppose the implementation of school uniforms. The following information is a list and description of the pros and cons that people claim when a school uniform policy is implemented.

Pros and Cons

Pros

Advocates of public school uniforms claim there are many advantages or benefits to instituting either a mandatory or non-mandatory/voluntary school uniform policy. The following information will give a brief overview about why a public school uniform policy should be implemented. Such benefits include, but are not limited to:

1.) Decreasing violence and theft - Competition over appearance has placed a large emphasis on designer clothes and expensive jewelry. This has resulted in an increase in both verbal and non-verbal violence, along with theft in the schools. Certain types of clothing and accessories have come to distinguish between the "haves" and the "have nots", and many times, students find themselves in life threatening situations because of it.

By instituting a school uniform policy, a feeling of "oneness" can be promoted by removing the messages of social and economic status carried by clothing, rather than the segregation that occurs without uniforms. "Uniforms would help discourage violence in the schools because students would no longer have to fight over who looks better or want to cause harm in an attempt to take another student's trendy clothes." ("Will School Uniforms Help Curb Violence?", 1996, p.12) "The uniform's positive benefits will lessen negative situations that could lead to school violence." ("Will School Uniforms Help Curb Violence?", 1996, p.15)

2.) Deterrence of gang influences - Gangs have become a growing concern in our public schools. These groups generally wear a certain color or

insignia in order to distinguish themselves from each other. At times, non-gang member students are unable to wear certain articles of clothing or colors because they don't want to be mistaken as a gang member. "Reports say that gang wearings convey messages of threat, intimidation, fear and challenge to rival gangs."

(Gluckman, 1996, p.3)

The research on gang activity in the public schools has not yet been proven, but "evidence shows gang violence has increased, dropout rates have increased and standardized test scores have declined. It would be presumptuous to say one causes the other, but there's a strong inference that such a correlation exists."

(Gluckman, 1996, p.5)

Safety in our schools is a major concern. By instituting a school uniform policy, the fear that students have by attending a gang-populated school could be diminished, if not eliminated. Everyone would be dressed the same so differentiating between gangs, along with gang activity would be decreased. Therefore, the educational process could continue in a more positive atmosphere.

Kilpatrick believes (cited in Kohn, 1997) that if "repeated messages" do not work, then you simply force students to conform: "Sometimes compulsion is needed to get a habit started".

3.) Decreasing peer pressure - Peer pressure is among all people and more so if you're a teenager. This is a part of human nature that has limited control. Both the fashion and advertising industries, along with other parts of the media in our culture, contribute to the peer pressure we all experience. Not only do students

feel the pressure to conform, but so do parents. Students are pressured into wearing the "coolest" clothes so they can "fit" in with their peers. Making a fashion statement is the way to be accepted and liked amongst one's peers. Students release some of that pressure by insisting that their parents buy them the latest trend in clothing. Parents are placed in a situation of purchasing expensive and/or "hip" clothes that soon go out of style just so their youngster is liked and/or does not get harassed in school.

School uniforms give parents and students "another tool in the war against social pressures" (Atkins and Scholosberg, 1996, p.1) and allow students to put less emphasis on trendy clothes and more emphasis on a useful education. For students, this means more time to sleep in the morning because they would not have to spend endless amounts of time deciding on what to wear to school. If this means more sleep, then the students will be more alert to focus on their studies. "Uniforms also enforce a valuable principle that people ought to be judged by their character and not by their appearance." (Forbes, 1996, p.26)

4.) Decrease in clothing costs - In the past, parents have spent a large amount of money each August purchasing head-to-toe school clothes for their youngsters. Presently, "the International Mass Retail Association (IMRA), polled its members - stores such as Walmart, Kmart, and Burlington Coat Factory - and found that students/parents are buying only school supplies in August and buying clothes later in the year or year round. They want to see what their friends are wearing. Retailers also said that young shoppers tend to buy clothes as they need and want

them." (Hanson, 1996, p.43) Students may seem to forget that the purpose of school is learning, not making a fashion statement.

By instituting a uniform policy, the economic burden that parents face could be depleted, if not eliminated. Parents could spend less money each year on clothing costs because they would only need to purchase a few uniforms for the year instead of trying to stay updated with the changing fashions. "A recent IMRA poll of consumers found that 52 percent of those surveyed favored government proposals requiring uniforms for public school children because parents want to save money." (Hanson, 1996, p.43) Uniforms could carry over year to year, so graduating students could either donate or sell their uniforms to the new incoming students. This again is helpful to one's budget since one would not have to purchase new clothes each year.

For those families and/or students who still could not afford the uniforms, either the school district itself or local business owners would donate the funds in order to supply those families with the recommended or mandatory uniforms.

5.) Increase in academic performance - Data collected around the country, conclude that the overall student performance is declining in the public schools. Standardized test scores are dropping along with academic scores across the board. By having a school uniform policy, the emphasis could be on learning which could improve students' educational performances. "Students who attend schools with a uniform policy attend more frequently, and when in school concentrate on their education rather than their social arrangements. As a result,

their academic performance increases as well." (Caruso, 1996, p.86)

Concentrating more on studies and that education is more important than the way one dresses is the message schools are trying to get across and school districts are trying to communicate that message to their youngsters.

6.) Increase student self esteem - Students may develop low feelings about themselves and are often prejudged by their peers when they are wearing hand-me-downs (useable, but outgrown clothing handed down to younger siblings) or believe they do not have trendy clothes. This attitude is very destructive to one's self esteem which can have a devastating impact on how one contributes to society as an adult. "Uniforms eliminate this prejudice" (Caruso, 1996, p.84) because students are not able to tell the "haves" and the "have nots" apart from each other.

Schools in New York City are thinking about requiring uniforms for students in the primary grades for the sole reason of developing self esteem. "Schools Chancellor, Rudy Crew, believes if students from kindergarten through third grade wore uniforms, their self-image would be based on academic performance instead of a wardrobe." (Democrat & Chronicle, 1997, 2B) This school system believes without high self-esteem, students would tend not to spend as much time in school and therefore their academics could suffer.

With the New York State Standards being implemented, raising students' academic performance is the main concern; this, Crew (1997) believes could be linked with students' self-esteem.

7.) "Promotes conformity to organizational goals" (LaPoint, Holloman, Alleyne, 1993, p.33) - "Experts in psychology generally agree that clothing and appearance influence individual and group behavior." (Caruso, 1996, p.85) Clothing can provide a sense of unity, which in turn, may increase one's self-esteem. Uniforms may be able to instill students with a sense of discipline and morale, which is needed in today's schools for a positive education. There is a saying that states, "you act the way you are dressed." If that saying is true, and one dresses appropriately for school, then one will act accordingly and take pride in how one looks. This can result in a decrease in disputes, an increase in attendance and in the honor roll.

There are dress codes for sports teams and even in the work force, like at McDonald's and the United States Postal System, where people are forced to wear uniforms in order to be employed. Having students wear uniforms in school prepares them for real life situations where they may have to conform by wearing a uniform.

8.) Able to recognize intruders - Many school districts' main concern is safety, and many of them consider their schools safe. But, schools house many youngsters, and any intruder could walk in and "snatch" a youngster, with a small chance of being detected. Some schools do not lock entrance doors around their building because they want to have an "open-door" policy. Instead, they put up signs inside the building instructing visitors to sign in at the office. If an intruder wanted to "snatch" a child, he/she would not take the time or the chance of being

caught by signing in at the office.

"Every administrator of a large school knows the potential for problems of disruption and violence when outsiders, including gang members, gain access to a school without a process of ready identification." (Cohn, 1996, p.23) A uniform policy can promote the safety issues we all fear by allowing school officials to more easily recognize intruders in the school. By and large, this would increase the safety of our public schools today.

Cons

The idea of implementing a public school uniform policy appears to have favorable intentions - protect students and provide a valuable education, but not all people believe so. There are many people in society, including students, parents, educators and school officials, who have opposed the idea of a school uniform policy. The following information will look at the reasons why some disagree with such a hopeful policy.

1.) Infringement of First Amendment rights (see Chapter three for more detailed information) - Freedom of expression through appearance is one's constitutional right, although many school officials are trying to get around that right by claiming a school uniform policy is to regulate students for health and safety issues, not for conforming issues. Some adults are upset because students are not able to show their personality through their dress, and they believe it lessens the students' individuality.

The Supreme Court has determined that students choice of

dress as a means of personal expression can be regulated by school officials even though they have extended First Amendment protections of political speech to nonverbal acts of communication. It is not clear, however, whether the guarantees of privacy and free speech apply to student's choice of dress. (Caruso, 1996, p.86)

2.) Does not deter violence and gang activity - "Those who oppose school uniforms feel that they will not deter violence or gang activity because these acts are not a result of the school environment." (Caruso, 1996, p.86) Many of the students who participate in violent activity and gangs come from an unhealthy environment containing aspects such as substance/physical abuse, parental influence, lack of family values and cultural traditions; those factors encourage students to participate in such violent acts. If a uniform policy was implemented, gangs would use other means of distinguishing themselves from each other, like permanent markings such as tattoos and scars. A uniform program "proceeds by trying to "fix the kids", and it ignores the accumulated evidence from the field of social psychology demonstrating that of how we act and who we are reflects the situations in which we find ourselves." (Kohn, 1997, p.431)

Some believe, if violent activity in the schools is such a burden, then the school should work more closely with the law enforcement to ensure a safe environment. Schools alone cannot deal with the social issues at hand and eliminate gangs and violence, just by implementing a school uniform policy. If

these issues are not dealt with appropriately, then violence and gang activity will continue. Schools need to use outside assistance, such as the law enforcement, in order to "win" back their schools from the ongoing destruction.

3.) "Social classes among students will remain" (Caruso, 1996, p.87) -

Opposers for a school uniform policy believe students will continue to segregate based on social class even with the implementation of school uniforms. They will wear accessories and learn to distinguish themselves through academics, sports and extra curricular activities, rather than by the way one dresses. The idea of creating a "oneness" is a falsity educators want parents and students to "buy" into. In reality, students and society alike have different social classes, and the implementation of school uniforms will not eliminate such classes like the "haves" and the "have nots."

4.) "School uniforms are an economic burden" (Caruso, 1996, p.87) -

It is not unusual for some families to have more than one child who may attend different school buildings within the same district. Therefore, if a school uniform policy is implemented, parents would need to purchase different uniforms without the option of using them for another child. Such a policy would also eliminate the hand-me-down option that many multi-child families rely on in order to tackle the economic hardship of purchasing new clothes each year.

5.) Intrusion into lives of parents and students - Parental rights and duties are violated when a uniform policy is enforced because parents no longer have the right to socialize their children according to their own values and social

class. For students, their individuality is restricted along with the natural process of identity experimentation through clothing. By conforming and eliminating every form of an individual's expression, our schools will only be left with soldiers and not students.

Summary

According to the information reviewed, there is no clear-cut answer about whether or not implementing a school uniform policy is the best procedure for our public school systems and/or our students. It seems that both the pro and the con sides have valid arguments, but without solid evidence and/or statistics, it is hard to say which side has the higher validity and the better argument. This seems to be such an unprecedented topic that not even the Supreme Court can decide whether or not "a student's right to freedom of expression or the need for a safe school environment" (Caruso, 1996, p.88) is the best justice. Meanwhile, it seems there will continue to be a debate about the uniform policy in our public school system and as to what is best for our students. I have presented two sides of the issue.

Laws on School Uniforms

In order to implement a public school uniform policy, one must be aware there are rights that people have about whether a uniform policy can be implemented at all. The First Amendment right to free speech is the most fundamental of these. Many believe that instituting a public school uniform policy violates that right, since the school districts are restricting the students' rights to symbolic speech, a form of the First Amendment. However, there are ways to

interpret the First Amendment clause and to implement a uniform policy in a legal manner. School officials must be extremely careful when discussing a uniform policy, by stressing that the implementation of the uniform policy is not to have students conform, but to protect the students against violence and to improve their educational right. President Clinton strongly agrees with the implementation of public school uniforms. That belief guided him in instructing Education Secretary, Richard Riley, in "supplying interested schools with a 16-page booklet advising administrators on how to implement a standardized dress without risking lawsuits." (Hanson, 1996, p.43) This booklet was later mailed to 16,000 school districts around the country.

On January 23, 1996, President Clinton briefly addressed the topic of standardized dress in his State of the Union address. He recommended "that public schools adopt uniforms as a remedy for spasms of violence that range, in some schools, from fighting in the classroom to assaulting teachers and carrying weapons to school." (Donohue, 1996, p.18) He continued his speech about education by saying, "I challenge all of our schools to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship. And if it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms."(Donohue, 1996, p.19) Although the topic of uniforms contained only a small portion of the President's speech, it was powerful enough to keep the nation "buzzing" about school uniforms, especially those who disagree with his belief. According to Kohn (1997),

the premises here are first, that children's character can be improved by forcing them to dress alike, and second, that if adults, object to students' clothing, the best solution is not to invite them to reflect together about how this problem might be solved, but instead to compel them all to wear the same thing (p. 430).

It has clearly been stated that President Clinton is in favor of implementing a dress code policy in the public school systems. On February 24, 1996, the President went to support his opinion in Long Beach, California, which is the first public school district to implement a mandatory uniform policy in 1994 (see chapter four for more information). President Clinton again mentioned, as he did in the State of the Union address, that a uniform policy should be addressed in order to decrease gang activity.

Congress frequently passes laws that affect the rights in the Bill of Rights. It is up to the Supreme Court to decide whether it restricts an individual's freedom and therefore declared unconstitutional. As in the public school uniform policy issue, the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of school districts as well as opponents in separate cases.

There are three different types of freedoms of speech. Pure speech is the speech that is only spoken in words like in debates and public meetings. This type of speech has the greatest protection under the First Amendment. Speech-plus, is speech combined with action as in demonstrations and picketing. In this case, the

speech portion can be protected under the First Amendment, while the action portion is able to be regulated. Symbolic speech, is considered to be "action that conveys a message in itself, without the use of spoken words. This is also known as expressive conduct and is recognized by acts such as flag burning and wearing black arm bands to school." (Monk, 1995, p.6)

Some parts of symbolic speech are protected under the First Amendment, while others may not be. Freedom of speech has limits as you can see. Such limits include obscenity, fighting words, speech in public schools and speech that may be damaging to a person's reputation by stating false information, which may lead to illegal actions.

Summary

It is clear from the research reviewed that it is difficult for any school system to set higher dress, behavior and academic standards without being prepared. These school districts will be challenged vigorously and they must defend their views and beliefs if a uniform policy is to be implemented.

Too often school systems adopt a "controversial" policy without sufficient attention to the allocation of resources to defend the initiative. Nothing is worse than starting down a path to higher standards for students and then abandoning the cause at the first sign of trouble, such as a legal challenge. (Cohn, 1996, p.25)

If school districts feel they must "stretch" the rights, protected by the Bill of

Rights, in order to make their school districts and the educational process more valuable, they must provide good reason and valuable concerns for doing so. It must be in the best interest of the children and not for control issues.

The First Amendment was adopted many years ago to protect the different forms of speech that Americans encounter each day. These rights allow Americans to live freely without restrictions by any person, including the government. Because our society is changing, or maybe progressing, the rights issues are very different then they were when the Bill of Rights was first written. Since the Supreme Court is the highest Court in the United States, it has the power to decipher the original Bill of Rights to determine what is lawful and what is deemed unconstitutional by today's standards.

In the state of Virginia, the Board of Education has, for two reasons, decided to develop a Bill related to school uniforms. First, for the current educational reform movement, and second for the parents' concerns over the cost of and their children's preoccupation with, designer clothes and footwear. Both of these reasons agree that their common goal is to "establish a school environment conducive to learning, by eliminating one pervasive, stigmatizing distraction." (Virginia State Department of Education, 1992) Suzanne F. Thomas, the President of the Virginia Board of Education signed House Bill 1206 which is an Act relating to the wearing of uniforms in public schools. The Bill was approved on April 3, 1991. It was prepared by the Virginia Department of Education and meant to serve as a practical guide for planning, implementing and evaluating a school uniform policy. The House Bill 1206

directed the Virginia Board of Education to develop model guidelines, by January 1, 1992, for the school board of the City of Portsmouth to use in establishing school uniform policies and procedures.

Chapter Three:

Descriptive Research

Manual on School Uniforms

Implementing a school uniform policy is difficult to do especially since the Supreme Court decided back in 1969 that the right to individual dress was protected under the First Amendment. Even if school districts decide to implement a school uniform policy, many parents are often backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, and they file lawsuits against these districts. "Nevertheless, the courts increasingly are finding in favor of dress codes, especially if schools can demonstrate that school uniforms improve the classroom climate and reduce incidents of violence." (Hanson, 1996, p.42) Since there is a growing number of incidents of violence and gang activity in the American schools, many districts find no other way to improve school safety and discipline, but to implement a uniform policy. The following information is for parents, teachers, and school officials who may consider adopting a school uniform policy.

There are a number of steps to take in order to have a successful uniform policy. The first step is the most important and it is to get the parents and the community involved from the beginning. If the parents are supportive, then it will encourage students to wear the uniforms on a daily basis. Some parents desperately want a uniform policy in their school district, and they have gone so far as to lobby their schools to adopt a policy for better disciplinary procedures. The parents have even provided input as to a design for the uniforms, and they have

taken it upon themselves to make the uniforms by hand.

Not only are the parents important in this process, but having a stable school board is also very important when considering the adoption of a school uniform policy. "Major policy changes that directly affect all students and parents cannot be considered when a school board is unstable or dysfunctional." (Cohn, 1996, p.25)

The second step to a successful uniform policy is to protect the students' religious expression. Some religious affiliates show signs of apprehension to wearing a uniform to school because it is against their religious beliefs. This is protected under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act which exempts students from wearing a required uniform if it is against their religion.

Protecting the students' other rights of expression is the third step to follow. Students may be restricted from wearing gang activity clothing, but they cannot be restricted if they wish to express their beliefs by wearing buttons, for example, for political candidates. "Students also cannot be forced to wear a uniform or other material that bears expression of a political candidate because it undermines the integrity of the uniform." ("Manual on School Uniforms", 1996, p.2) It has to be the choice of the students if they wish to bear something politically, but they cannot be forced to wear it as part of a uniform policy. The uniforms have to be general to the entire population.

The school district must determine whether to have a mandatory or non-mandatory/voluntary school uniform policy, and it must be conveyed to both the parents and to the students. If a school opts for a non-mandatory/voluntary uniform

policy, the students have the right to choose whether they wear the uniform or not. The school may opt for a mandatory uniform policy if it feels it is necessary, but it must provide proof that it is for the safety and educational purposes of the students in order for it not to violate the First Amendment.

If a school opts to make a uniform policy mandatory, it must also decide whether students have the option of choosing to opt-out of the policy. Some schools allow students to opt-out of the school uniform policy by parent consent only. Other schools have a no opt-out policy because of the disruptive behavior in the school. If a student or parent want to opt-out of the policy and the school district does not allow an opt-out option, then the student must attend another school. This action by the school could be vulnerable to legal action by the parent, so "the school must support that disruption of the learning environment has reached a point that no other lesser measures would be effective." ("Manual on School Uniforms", 1996, p.3)

In order for school uniforms to be worn by all economic classes, schools must assist families that are in financial need. Most uniforms are less expensive than regular clothing, but the cost can still be a burden to some families. Some examples of types of assistance include, a.) the school provides uniforms to those who cannot afford them, b.) the community and local business leaders provide the uniforms or the financial help to the families in need, c.) the school parents work together to provide for the economically disadvantaged and d.) used uniforms from graduates or transferring students are given to new incoming students.

All teachers and school officials must treat the uniforms as part of an overall safety program in the school district in order for the students to want to accept the new policy. Both the principal and the faculty of each participating school should be committed and enthusiastic about the school uniform policy. The school must be aware that implementing a uniform policy cannot solve all problems in the school, but that they can be a positive factor towards discipline and safety which could mean a result to higher academic performances by the students.

A uniform policy should begin at the elementary level. If the policy begins at that level and the students are used to wearing uniforms, it won't be such a big issue when they get to be teenagers. The students will then identify and express themselves by other means, rather than by dress.

In order to maintain and continue a school uniform policy, one needs to keep it running smoothly. Having active and enthusiastic parental participation will help manage the program and keep it enforced. There must also be a method and/or procedure for reordering of uniforms. Rapid delivery is the key in order to accommodate students and to get the uniforms transferred over in a timely manner. Evaluation is the most important aspect in continuing and maintaining a uniform policy. The evaluation should be conducted by school administration in the areas of self-esteem, behavior/discipline and achievement of the students, since these are the most important reasons for implementing the uniform policy.

By following those suggested steps, not only will the uniform policy have a higher possibility of success, but the students will hopefully enjoy school and the

educational process a lot more. In order to be a success, parents and other local support and involvement is the key.

Comparison Study Between Schools

According to the 1990 Census of population and housing summary (see Appendix A), we can draw some conclusions about the city in general and the students that attend the Long Beach City School District. The city houses 429,433 people with about 56 percent of them being white. The other dominant races include Hispanics and Asian or Pacific Islanders. About 60 percent of the whites from the ages of 18 to 64, live above the poverty level whereas, 5.8 percent of whites, from the ages of 18 to 64 live below the poverty level. The majority of other races, which includes, Hispanics and excludes African Americans, American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, Asian or Pacific Islanders are below poverty level. The primary and high schools in the district seem to be very multicultural, with whites again being dominant. There are also many Hispanics and Asian or Pacific descendent, in the school district. Most students attend public schools and come from a married couple family or from a single female household with no husband present.

Before the implementation of a school uniform policy, crime and violence was prevalent in all of the schools, along with sexual offenses and weapons possession. Parents and students were afraid to walk through some of the schools courtyards because of the loitering teenagers who were dressed in sloppy, oversized clothing often represented by gangs. The shouting of vulgar sayings, by the students, to the people who passed by, caused much fear. Any parent would not want their

youngster to attend this type of school.

The District Superintendent, Carl Cohn, decided to do something about the graffiti, profanity, roughhousing and all around violence in the schools. Before implementing a mandatory uniform policy, a number of public meetings and surveys took place. A sample ballot went out to all of the teachers that were employed in the Long Beach Central School District.

At the Rogers School, a school in a suburban, middle-class neighborhood, many of the teachers were skeptical, thinking that the students wouldn't wear the uniforms and they would spend most of their time trying to enforce the rule. The teachers gave the new uniform policy the benefit of the doubt and overwhelmingly voted in favor for the policy.

On June 14, 1994, ballots went out to parents, and they were given two days to vote. Some parents voted in favor of the uniforms because they knew they wouldn't have to spend as much money on clothing, while other parents were against the policy mostly because their children were against it. A local newspaper took a survey and found that 80 percent of parents favored the new dress code. The district required an approval of two thirds of the parents in order to start the implementation of the new uniform policy. The district received an approval by the parents of two to one, which began the implementation of the new uniform policy in mid-July 1994.

On August 24, 1994, California's governor, Pete Wilson, signed a bill allowing school districts to choose uniforms for their students in order to promote

positive behavior. In September 1994, the Long Beach Central School District, in southern California, decided to try the new idea and became the first public school district to introduce a mandatory school uniform policy. The school district at that time had about 60,000 students in 56 elementary schools and 14 middle schools. The new uniforms were to be a white shirt with a collar, and black skirts, walking shorts or trousers. Sweat shirts, sweaters and jackets that were worn were to be brick-red.

While many parents praised the new uniform policy, there were four parents, who were lawyers, who objected to it. "Those four sought a temporary restraining order to block the uniform requirement. One day, a few protestors showed up at the Rogers School and passed out fliers calling the school uniform policy unconstitutional. Within days, the U.S. District Judge of California, Manuel L. Real, denied the parents' petition, saying he found no "irreparable injury" in the action of the board of education." (McDaniel, 1996, p.82)

A second legal challenge

came from a group of attorneys at the Legal Aid Foundation of Long Beach. They claim to fully support the mandatory uniform policy, but they argue the school is denying poor children its benefits by refusing to make the program an entitlement one. They claim that poor families are going without food, utilities, and rental payments in order to purchase "expensive" uniforms. Their complaint demands that the school district provide six full

sets of uniforms free to every youngster who qualifies for free or reduced price lunch." (Cohn, 1996, p.24)

Again, the Long Beach Central School District won this case by stating "the poor people in the community still have respect, dignity, and individual initiative. The last thing they need is one more government entitlement designed to foster greater dependency." (Cohn, 1996, p.24)

The first day of school in September 1996 was a surprise. Of the 750 students in the Rogers School, 15 were out of uniform on the first day of school. Later that week, parents and other volunteers instructed the few students, not following the dress codes, to some donated uniforms for them to wear. Now all of the students follow the dress code.

At the Whittier Elementary School in Long Beach, a school particularly in a poorer neighborhood, school attendance had risen to a high of 96 percent since the uniform policy took affect. The school's Vice Principal, Wendy Claflin stated "uniforms protect students from gangs and other students so Whittier students are not afraid to come to school." (Caruso, 1996, p.84)

The hesitation by the district teachers had taken relief. They did not have to enforce the uniform rule because the students did it themselves. The teachers claimed they had noticed the change in the attitudes in the classroom, which created a better classroom/learning environment. The students seemed to be calmer and more polite. Since the students look alike, the racial and ethnic tensions also seemed to decrease, if not disappear.

Many permissive parents, civil liberties interest groups, timid legislators and a biased news media thought that the uniform policy would never be implemented, but since it has, they have been amazed at the results. In the first year of the program, the Long Beach City School District had seen a drop in overall school crime in the district by 36 percent, student suspensions dropped 32 percent (9 percent in the high schools), fights decreased 51 percent, sex offenses decreased 74 percent, weapons offenses decreased 50 percent, assault and battery offenses dropped 34 percent, vandalism dropped 18 percent and attendance and test scores increased. "The Long Beach School District has been working hard, since the new policy, researching whether other initiatives or interventions contributed to such impressive results." (Cohn, 1996, p.23) As you can see, all parts of the school system, suburban and urban, have benefited environmentally and educationally from the new uniform policy. Some of the suburban schools did not necessarily need to implement a mandatory school uniform policy, but they did so to keep the urban gang influences from spreading to their schools. "According to Long Beach police chief, William Ellis, schools have fewer reasons to call the police. There is less conflict among students. Students concentrate more on education, not on who's wearing \$100 shoes or gang attire." ("Manual on School Uniforms", 1996, p.4)

There are many other school districts throughout the country that have gone to either a mandatory or non-mandatory/voluntary uniform policy. The following information provides a few examples of school districts, along with the 1990 census of population and housing summary for those districts, that have adopted school

uniforms as part of their strategy to help their schools against crime and violence. Some of those cities include, but not limited to, Richmond, Virginia; Seattle, Washington; Kansas City, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee; Baltimore, Maryland; Norfolk, Virginia and Phoenix, Arizona.

By looking at the 1990 Census of population and housing summary (see Appendix B), we can safely state that the city of Richmond, Virginia houses 203,056 people with more than 50 percent of the city being of African American descent. Therefore, the schools consist of mainly African American children. About 47 percent of the African American people, from the ages of 18 to 64, live above the poverty level with another 13 percent, from the ages of 18 to 64, living below poverty level. This gives a clear picture of what the city of Richmond, Virginia along with its school system is like.

Richmond, Virginia: In 1994, the Maymont Elementary School for the Arts and Humanities implemented a voluntary uniform policy for their 262 elementary school students. Community support from business and other leaders helped those financially in need. In 1994-1995, the first year of the program, 30 percent of the students wore the uniforms. Currently, the status is at 85 percent. The school has seen an increase in positive behavior, attendance and student achievement.

Seattle, Washington: This school contains 900 middle school students, and it established a mandatory uniform policy at the South Shore Middle School in 1995. The students are able to opt-out of the uniform policy with parental consent. Those students who do opt-out must attend another middle school in the district. For those

students/families that cannot afford the uniforms, local businesses help contribute financial support to the uniform program. The school believes the uniforms are durable and reusable from year to year. Since the implementation of the uniform policy, the demeanor has improved 98 percent, tardiness is down and there has been only one incident of theft in the school.

Kansas City, Missouri: The George Carver Elementary School which houses 320 elementary students adopted a mandatory uniform policy in 1990. Students are not able to opt-out of the uniform policy because it is a magnet school to which parents and students apply knowing about the uniform policy. The state and school district pay for the uniforms with the magnet school funding so the students receive the uniforms at no cost to them. Since there is generally no crime in this school, it is the attitudes of the children and the sense of pride they feel that has been observed throughout the school.

Memphis, Tennessee: The Douglas Elementary School has a voluntary uniform policy which was established in 1993 for the 532 elementary students. A business partner with the school in Memphis is the main financial support for those in need. From Monday thru Thursday, 90 percent of the students elected to wear the uniforms. Fridays are casual days where none of the students wear the uniforms. Since the implementation of the uniform policy, the competitiveness among designer clothing, in the school has decreased, especially in grades four, five and six.

Baltimore, Maryland: Uniforms are voluntary for the 950 elementary school

students at the Mt. Royal Elementary/Middle School. The policy was implemented in 1989 and "has enhanced the tone and climate of the building." (Manual on School Uniforms, 1996, p.6) If students cannot afford the \$35 uniforms, there is a store in the school that provide the uniforms free to the students. Upon graduation, 90 percent of the graduating eighth graders donate their uniforms to the school store.

Phoenix, Arizona: There is a mandatory uniform policy at the Phoenix Preparatory Academy which houses 1,174 middle school students. The students have the option to opt-out of the policy with parental consent, but the students then must attend another middle school in the district. The uniform option was implemented in 1995 and the school has seen, since then, an overall improvement in the school climate and a greater focus on positive behavior." (Manual on School Uniforms, 1996, p.6) The cost of the uniforms are \$25-\$30, and a grant from local foundations assists families who cannot afford them.

Summary

After reviewing the researched material, it seems that implementing a uniform policy has nothing but benefits, especially in schools that have had high crime and violence in their district. It is difficult to say whether the schools mentioned above would have the same statistics if the uniforms were eliminated. Except for the data collected on the Long Beach City School District, the information obtained failed to state the destruction the schools were facing before the implementation of the uniform policy. Since the Long Beach Central School District was the first public school to implement a mandatory uniform policy, I would have liked to have seen

more research following their implementation date and the current climate of the school today. Most of the statistics and information collected were from the first year of implementation. Since it has been almost three years since the implementation of the uniforms, the school should have documented and made available to the public the new findings; and if there was any other correlation between the decrease of violence with the uniform policy. The material that I found did not state the school has published such a document or information.

As far as the other schools mentioned above, it was clear by the dates of implementation, that not all of the schools were public since Long Beach, California was the first public school to implement a uniform policy in 1994. One school clearly stated it was a charter school, but it would have been helpful to state whether the other schools were either public or private. Without knowing this information, it is difficult to correlate a study between the Long Beach Central School and the other schools listed. The only information I can correlate is on the racial, ethnic and economic status' of both Long Beach, California and Richmond, Virginia. Since the information that was stated on the racial, ethnic and economic classes of the students in some cities was from 1990, it is difficult to make a conclusion as to whether a uniform policy is for cities with certain racial, ethnic and economic background. It can only be assumed that a uniform policy works for all schools in all racial, ethnic and economic classes.

It was helpful to find that a uniform policy is beneficial for students no matter the school size, and we can clearly see that from the information collected. I have

looked at programs ranging from 60,000 students to 262 students. The issue of implementing a uniform policy and its acceptance is not based on size, but whether the community and/or parents would approve such a policy. And, it helps when there is financial assistance available for those in need. Once the community is for a uniform policy in their school district, then the implementation of it seems to be much easier.

Chapter Four:

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

In 1994, the Long Beach Central School District did an amazing thing. It implemented a mandatory public school uniform policy in its district. Since that date, other public schools have tried to implement the same policy, some with success and others without. Statistics in most media presentations show that students across the nation have low academic scores, violence is increasing in the schools along with gang activity. School seems, in many municipalities, no longer a place of education, but a place of fashion and weapons possession. Some districts believe by implementing a school uniform policy, they can reverse some of these destructive actions and make their school a little safer.

Since the beginning of violence in the schools, uniforms have become the latest tool in the struggle to keep students' minds on their studies instead of on expensive clothing. Many public schools believe violence is out of control in their schools and implementing a uniform policy will enable the school administrators to "take back" their schools. They believe, by exercising such a policy, they will empower students to work harder and take pride in themselves and their school. They also believe that when a student looks good, the student tends to act differently, which can lower the violent activity in the schools. "Whether students are in first grade or eighth grade, they are all in school for the same reason - to learn. Too often clothes distract kids from that goal." (Hanson, 1996, p.43)

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search of the literature revealed that little information is available regarding the implementation and effects of uniform programs in public schools. No studies have been found that connect the wearing of uniforms to outcomes such as student achievement and discipline. This amount of research and information is necessarily limited because relatively few public school systems have implemented such policies. (Virginia State Department of Education, 1992)

Throughout my research and study, I chose to focus on violence, gangs, weapons possession and academic achievement as a source of support for school uniforms. Of course, there are other situations, that I did not address, which people believe school uniforms can help curb, correct or eliminate. Such actions include teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, absenteeism/tardiness and drop out rate.

When I first began doing my research, I was in favor of a public school uniform policy. I believed, and still do believe, that students act the way they are dressed and a school uniform policy could promote a healthy environment for its school district. Since there is still no formal data that correlates school uniforms with the deterrence of violence, it is difficult for me to form a solid opinion as to whether or not uniforms are for all schools. From the data collected, I can conclude that I find school uniforms appropriate for districts which need help curbing violence and gang activity.

I don't believe a uniform policy should be implemented if a district wants to

make each student "equal" based on social and economic status, in order for each student to have the same chance for a favorable education. As I have found in my research, a school district cannot legally implement such a policy for those reasons. If a uniform policy was implemented, by any chance, for those reasons, I believe that the students would find other ways to distinguish themselves by social and economic classes. They could do so through academics and extra curricular activities. In order to implement a uniform dress code, the district would have to provide evidence that the policy is for curbing violence and gang activity, not for the idea of distinguishing between social and economic groups.

I don't think peer pressure will be eliminated if a uniform policy is enforced because there are other types of peer pressure, like academic and athletic peer pressure that can occur between youngsters. A uniform policy assists the school to have a safer environment and it diminishes disciplinary actions in the classroom. I believe that schools have the responsibility to educate and provide a safe environment for all students. For students to have the right to the best education, I believe it is the responsibility of the school administrators to find a way to promote that right and if that means implementing a uniform policy, then that is what would have to be accomplished. I think the students who want a good education, and are in school to learn, would feel very encouraged if a uniform policy was implemented. They no longer would have to feel unsafe by attending school, and it may help them appreciate school a little more.

From being in the classroom and dealing with parents, I can state from my

own experiences, that parents have a great influence on their youngsters. I feel if the parents do not like the idea of a school uniform policy, then the students will tend to have the same view. When I did my student teaching in the fourth grade at Churchville Elementary School, I informed the class that I would be completing my thesis the following semester on school uniforms. At the time of my student teaching, the school did not have a uniform policy in place. I had a discussion with the class about the pros and cons about a uniform policy, and then I asked them their opinions, ideas and concerns about having to wear a standardized uniform. I found that the students who were teased often and not popular preferred a uniform policy, whereas the popular students did not. It was not the idea of violence that made the unpopular students prefer a uniform policy, since there were no issues of violence that I found in this suburban elementary school. The unpopular students also could not give me a reason as to why they would want a uniform policy. I could only conclude that they would feel a uniform policy would diminish or eliminate the distinction between social and economic classes, and those unpopular students would have a greater chance of feeling equal.

Appendix A

1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary

Long Beach City, California: Population 429,433

RACE OF HOUSEHOLDER BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE AND PRESENCE AND AGE OF CHILDREN:

White:

Family households:

Married-couple family:

With own children under 18 years 16,950
No own children under 18 years 28,456

Other family:

Male householder, no wife present:

With own children under 18 years 1,254
No own children under 18 years 2,230

Female householder, no husband present:

With own children under 18 years 4,444
No own children under 18 years 4,651

Nonfamily households 52,732

Black:

Family households:

Married-couple family:

With own children under 18 years 3,732
No own children under 18 years 2,302

Other family:

Male householder, no wife present:

With own children under 18 years 692
No own children under 18 years 509

Female householder, no husband present:

With own children under 18 years 4,888
No own children under 18 years 1,625

Nonfamily households 6,178

American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:

Family households:

Married-couple family:

With own children under 18 years	241
No own children under 18 years	161

Other family:

* Male householder, no wife present:

With own children under 18 years	12
No own children under 18 years	12

Female householder, no husband present:

With own children under 18 years	68
No own children under 18 years	92

Nonfamily households	472
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Asian or Pacific Islander:

Family households:

Married-couple family:

With own children under 18 years	5,714
No own children under 18 years	2,340

Other family:

Male householder, no wife present:

With own children under 18 years	316
No own children under 18 years	587

Female householder, no husband present:

With own children under 18 years	1,444
No own children under 18 years	717

Nonfamily households	2,711
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Other race:

Family households:

Married-couple family:

With own children under 18 years	6,088
No own children under 18 years	1,401

Other family:

Male householder, no wife present:

With own children under 18 years	771
No own children under 18 years	765

Female householder, no husband present:

With own children under 18 years	1,697
No own children under 18 years	656

Nonfamily households	2,236
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SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND TYPE OF SCHOOL:

Universe: Persons 3 years and over

Enrolled in elementary or high school:

Public school	63,977
Private school	5,119

RACE BY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT:

Universe: Persons 3 years and over

White:

Enrolled in elementary or high school	27,654
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Black:

Enrolled in elementary or high school	12,764
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American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:

Enrolled in elementary or high school	457
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Asian or Pacific Islander:

Enrolled in elementary or high school	14,282
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Other race:

Enrolled in elementary or high school	14,676
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Hispanic:

Enrolled in elementary or high school	24,268
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POVERTY STATUS IN 1989 BY RACE BY AGE:

Universe: persons for whom poverty status is determined

Income in 1989 above poverty level:

White:

18 to 64 years	144,867
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Black:

18 to 64 years	28,160
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American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:

18 to 64 years	1,509
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Asian or Pacific Islander:

18 to 64 years	26,841
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Other race:

18 to 64 years	26,142
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Income in 1989 below poverty level:

White:

18 to 64 years	14,074
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Black:	
18 to 64 years	6,364
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:	
18 to 64 years	283
Asian or Pacific Islander:	
18 to 64 years	6,763
Other race:	
18 to 64 years	9,069

Appendix B

1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary

Richmond City, Virginia: Population 203,056

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND TYPE OF SCHOOL

Universe: Persons 3 years and over

Enrolled in elementary or high school:

Public school	24,399
Private school	2,946

RACE BY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Universe: Persons 3 years and over

White:

Enrolled in elementary or high school 5,464

Black:

Enrolled in elementary or high school 21,603

American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:

Enrolled in elementary or high school 8

Asian or Pacific Islander:

Enrolled in elementary or high school 184

Other race:

Enrolled in elementary or high school 86

Hispanic:

Enrolled in elementary or high school 270

POVERTY STATUS IN 1989 BY RACE BY AGE

Universe: Persons for whom poverty status is determined

Income in 1989 above poverty level:

White:

18 to 64 years 48,694

Black:

18 to 64 years 50,997

American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:

18 to 64 years 284

Asian or Pacific Islander:

18 to 64 years 729

Other race:	
18 to 64 years	348
Income in 1989 below poverty level:	
White:	
18 to 64 years	6,094
Black:	
18 to 64 years	14,040
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut:	
18 to 64 years	68
Asian or Pacific Islander:	
18 to 64 years	232
Other race:	
18 to 64 years	56

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