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A Comparative policy analysis on the effectiveness of implementing student uniforms in public school districts within the United State from 1993 through 1998

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**A COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS
ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF IMPLEMENTING
STUDENT UNIFORMS IN PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS
WITHIN THE UNITED STATES FROM
1993 THROUGH 1998**

by

Desiree Hiestand

**Master of Public Administration
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**A professional paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Policy Analysis On The Effectiveness Of Implementing Student Uniforms In Public School Districts Within The United States From 1993 through 1998

by

Desiree Hiestand

**Leonard E. Goodall, Ph.D., Examination Committee Chair
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The purpose of this study is to compare and analyze student uniform policies in public school districts within the United States and to ascertain whether or not they are effective. Available information from America's 70 largest school districts is collected and compared to determine if the policies are feasible. Findings indicate there is a broad spectrum of ways in which the districts address student attire and imply that most of the districts are not adapting uniform policies, but are leaving the decision up to individual schools and to the parents. Districts that are adapting policies boast favorable results. Although statistical data is scarce, there is substantial anecdotal evidence suggesting that uniform policies are very effective in producing the desired behavior among students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Studies indicate that educational standards are decreasing in the United States while student behavioral problems are rising (U.S. Department of Education, FRSS 63,1997). The rise in disciplinary problems amongst our nation's school-age children should be of concern to us all as they detract from a learning environment and produce grave social and financial consequences. Studies show that those students who consistently have disciplinary problems in school are more likely to commit crimes (Goffredson & Hirschi, 1990; Loebeer & Le Blanc, 1990). A number of methods have been used within the school system in attempt to improve academic performance and minimize behavioral problems, including smaller class sizes and a myriad of teaching techniques. Currently, there is a trend of public schools adapting student uniform policies in hopes of curbing specific behaviors while encouraging others. Should the implementation of uniform policies produce desired results, it may be considered a valuable tool in the public school system and to our society as a whole.

A recent report done by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) reveals that only 19 states have educational standards that are "generally clear and specific and grounded in particular content to meet the AFT's common core criterion" (Making Standards Matter,1998). Of the nationwide standards that we do have, results are on the

decline. In 1992, Only 20 percent of eighth-graders could do seventh-grade math (Rosemond, 1995).

The lowered standards accumulate and surface more noticeably through high school. In 1993, the Secretary of Education released findings from reading comprehension tests, which showed that only 37 percent of all high school seniors are able to read at their grade level. Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of college-bound high school seniors dropped nearly 80 points since the 19950s. Sadly, the reduced scoring resulted even after the nationwide spending per public school student increased by 50 percent from 1980 to The decreased aptitude does not stop there. A full eighty percent of the adults who apply to work at a Motorola factory flunk the company exam seeking competency for fifth-grade math seventh grade English (Zinsmeister, 1997).

A major deterrent to effective learning is student discipline. Unfortunately not only the quantity, but the severity of student disciplinary problems is escalating. Whereas in 1940 the major student disciplinary problems listed by teachers were talking out of turn, chewing gum and making noise, in 1990 teachers listed drug abuse, alcohol abuse and pregnancy as the top disciplinary problems (How Times Have Changed). Several violent acts such as fighting, robbery, and vandalism have taken place on school grounds. A series of shooting rampages have claimed the lives of students and teachers giving rise to the Gun-Free Schools Act (P.L. 103-382, 1994). This act was intended to create gun-free school zones. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act allocates funds contingent on a state's enacting a "zero-tolerance" policy for weapons on school grounds.

Student disciplinary problems also affect citizens financially. In 1998, President

Clinton set aside a whopping \$2 million of taxpayer money to help school districts better collect information on school violence (1998, as cited in Portner, 1998). That money will just be used to collect the information. Once statistics have been sifted through and analyzed, undoubtedly even more funding will go toward preventative and rehabilitative measures.

A number of methods have been used in attempt to increase student academic performance, including reducing class size and unstructured "Open School" reforms. Additionally, New Math, Whole Language, Cooperative Learning and Outcome-Based Education have been tried in America's school system. A recent trend in public schools is the implementation of student uniform policies (U.S. Department of Education, FRSS 63,1997).

HISTORY

Students at parochial schools have long since had the reputation of wearing uniforms and of upholding higher academic standards since their inception in the mid-19th century. While enrollment in private schools has declined since the 1960s, disciplinary problems in public schools have risen. Public schools seem to be following suit of their private school counterparts by adapting student uniform policies, (Microsoft Encarta 97 Encyclopedia), perhaps in hopes of improving academic standards as well.

On January 18, 1994, the Board of Education of the Long Beach Unified School District voted to adapt a student uniform policy for grades Kindergarten through eighth, with the primary intent of decreasing violence. Besides being the first public school district in the nation to require student uniforms in decades, it is also the third largest

school system serving 58, 500 students. Since the implementation of the policy, the school district has boasted favorable results. There has been a dramatic decline in suspensions, assault and battery incidents, vandalism, fighting and robbery. As a welcomed side effect, there has been an increase in parental involvement.

Many schools are considering uniforms because the seventh goal in the National Education Goals states that by the year 2000, "all schools in America will be free of drugs and violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol, and offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning." Increased popularity is also being gained because President Clinton publicly praised the Long Beach School District's efforts and supported the use of school uniform policies during his State of the Union Address in January. A month later, on February 23, 1996, he released a memorandum to the Secretary Of Education. In the memorandum, he confirmed the deterioration of the quality of our national education system and referred to a study from Long Beach which showed that the learning environment improved after students began wearing uniforms. The President also directed the distribution of the "Manual of School Uniforms" to the 16,000 school districts across the United States and urged the districts to consider adopting a uniform policy within their schools. Since the release of the memorandum, several public schools have begun implementing student uniform policies (U.S. Department of Education, FRSS 63,1997).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The null hypothesis for the policy analysis is that the implementation of student uniform policies within public schools does not influence the student behavior that school districts aimed to modify prior to the policy. The study will reveal students attending schools with a uniform policy will act similarly the way they acted prior to their wearing uniforms.

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY ANALYSIS

The purpose of this policy analysis is to examine, compare and analyze the means and effectiveness of implementing student uniforms in public school districts within the United States, between the years 1993 and 1998. The paper will examine the issue as it has developed on the federal scene and it will consider how such a policy would impact other school districts, based on the results from schools with an established uniform policy.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POLICY ANALYSIS

Should the implementation of student uniforms in public schools aid in the modification of targeted student behavior, and in achieving desired results, then it would indicate that other public school districts with comparable problems can achieve similar desired results by establishing a uniform policy also. It would also serve to increase the awareness of school faculty and of parents who are part of the decision-making process in making school policies and who may provide a better use of public resources.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Public Schools – In this policy analysis, the term “public schools” will refer to schools that include the classes of Kindergarten through Eighth Grade since those are primarily the grades for which school districts have adapted uniform policies.

Uniform - The definition of “uniform” for the purpose of this policy analysis, will be considered student attire that is standardized according to respective school policy. Additionally, the uniform will include attire that shall be worn rather than attire that is prohibited as cited in the individual school dress codes.

Mandatory Uniform Policy – For the purpose of this policy analysis, “Mandatory Uniform Policy” will be uniform policies which have been passed by the respective Boards of Education. Although public schools with a uniform policy infer that they have a “mandatory” uniform policy, the term it is actually misleading. Most schools with the mandatory uniform policy offer an “Opt Out” alternative which allows students to opt out of the uniform requirements providing the request has been approved by parent(s) of the student and school officials.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Most of the literature found regarding the wearing of student uniforms in public schools can be placed into three categories. In order of the quantity found, they are:

1) the sentiments of teachers and administrators, parents, and students, 2) the effects of wearing the uniforms, and 3) the legal ramifications of instituting a uniform policy within a school. There are nearly as many writings from people whom a uniform policy would or might affect, as there are opinions from people whom it does affect.

Interestingly, proponents of the wearing of student uniforms focus on the prevention of disciplinary problems rather than the promotion of scholastic aptitude/academic performance.

SENTIMENTS OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS

Teachers and administrators who have expressed written opinions are in favor of uniform policies. There are writings about case after case of noticeable behavior modifications within classrooms and schools. Also topping the literature is speculation about how it would affect student behavior. The literature reveals teachers and administrators unanimously agree that student behavior has, is, or would be, greatly improved by a uniform policy. School officials believe wearing uniforms gives

students a visual and mental cue that school is a formal learning institution and is to be taken seriously. The only unfavorable remarks made by school officials refers to the lack of hard evidence about the direct effects of wearing uniforms.

A few criticisms surfaced about the study from the Long Beach School District. Speculators divulge that the district reached an all-time high in violence incidents just prior to enacting their uniform policy and that the results were self-generated. The district also began other concurrent measures of discipline, such as increased hallway patrol in between class times. Skeptic school officials believe that any, or all, of those factors could have skewed the results of the study.

Most of the parents are in favor of uniforms with a few oppositions sprinkled throughout the literature. By and large, parents agree that uniforms make it much easier to shop for school clothes and that the cost of uniforms is much less than buying faddish clothing for their children. Most view the uniform policy as a positive step being taken by school officials toward putting the focus back on schoolwork. The majority of parents who agree with uniform policies also state that it is a mental ease knowing that their children would not mistakenly wear gang colors or get teased for not wearing stylish clothing or accessories. Moreover, many parents note a marked favorable change in their children's attitude about school after wearing uniforms.

Some parents are opposed to school uniform policies. The chief complaint being that uniform policies take away their parental rights and their child's freedom of expression and right to choose. Others think that uniform policies are a superficial cure for much deeper issues facing the school system such as large class sizes, inadequate funding, lack of current scholastic material and the need for tighter school security. A

small number of parents assert that the policies have racial bias since they tend to focus on clothing associated with minority gangs and ignore other groups such as white supremacist gangs. Fewer yet argued that there should be uniform policies set forth for the teachers.

Students appear to be equally divided in their opinions about uniform policies. The most notable points being that students who favor uniforms are actually affected by a policy and are more eloquent in their expression about it. The vast majorities that disagree with the policies are not currently affected by one and are much more adamant about their beliefs. One other point of mention is that there are nearly as many entries from students requesting information about uniform policies as there are from students sharing their views on the topic.

Students in favor of uniforms say that it is a convenience, allowing them to concentrate on schoolwork rather than having to brood over what to wear each day. They also say they believe it puts all students on equal footing and that they feel safer. Rather than feeling stifled in their individuality, they claim to have become more resourceful and have learned to stand out based upon their accomplishments in academics and extra-curricular activities. An eighth grader, Nick Duran, from a middle school in Long Beach summed up the sentiments of students in favor of uniforms, "The good thing is people judge you on your inner characteristics rather than what you wear."

Like parents, students who are opposed to uniform policies list freedom of expression and right to choose as their primary complaints. Student, Hector Gonzales, at Rogers Middle School in Long Beach says, "It's like we're all in jail" (1996, as cited in Portner, 1996).

Another student, Gan Luong says, “uniforms are totally bogus” (1996, as cited in Portner 1996). Alicia Nunez complains that, “You come to school to get an education, not for them to tell you how to dress” (1996, as cited in Portner, 1996). Those in opposition vehemently protest and accuse adult policymakers of being hypocritical. They say on one hand school officials emphasize cultural diversity, individuality and personal decision-making skills, yet on the other, the adults are making them conform.

As a side note, in 1996 the American Civil Liberties Union held focus groups with high school students and asked what measures they thought would help end school violence and a uniform policy did not make the list. Instead, students made suggestions such as securing school entrances, offering conflict resolution techniques, and providing more extra-curricular activities as solutions to decrease violence (Siegel, 1996).

EFFECTS OF WEARING STUDENT UNIFORMS

The writings about the favorable effects of wearing uniforms outnumber the unfavorable. However, both contain a voluminous amount of subjective, intangible effects. Both sides agree that uniforms produce a notable difference in student behavior.

The most grounded positive effect is that uniforms serve to neutralize the temperament of students who would otherwise sport gang-related attire and agitate one another. It is contended that the wearing of gang-related attire and certain sportswear puts other students in a defensive, aggressive, or frightened mode, and distracts from learning. The literature also suggests that uniform policies make school grounds safer since it is easier to detect intruders

The other most noteworthy positive effect is that uniform policies make students’

A handful of opponents complain that uniform policies create a financial burden for them since they must to buy uniforms, as well as casual clothing, for their children. A few alluded that uniform policies could even hurt the economy by reducing retail sales (Cole, 1997).

LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

Those who are opposed to student uniforms are blatantly confident it violates their rights as citizens. The controversy about the constitutional rights involves the First Amendment's protection of speech and expression, and the Fourteenth Amendment's abridgement of privileges. The First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech." (U.S. Constitution) may be found violated because "non-verbal conduct that has a communicative impact is sometimes found to fall within the protection of free expression" (Murphy, 1991). The Fourteenth Amendment reads, "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." (U.S. Constitution). This amendment may be considered violated if a "school interest is not proven to outweigh the personal liberty interest" (Wallace v. Ford. 1972).

Since the state must pay for anything it mandates, they do not require districts to have uniform policies, but rather, encourage districts to adopt them (Cole, 1997). That leaves districts and individual schools somewhat vulnerable for lawsuits without the protection of their state. Oddly, most of the reported cases dealing with student

chief lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, says that “as long as no threat to the safety of a school exists and there is no disruption to the educational process, mandatory uniforms really should be of no concern to the schools” (1997 as cited in Cole, 1997). If a district does not, and will not comply with the aforementioned elements, it would be legally in their best interest to institute a strict dress policy instead.

Wording of a dress code is significant. The policy should not express a school official’s personal prejudice. That is, it should “not be based on a rational purpose related to the educational mission of the school, but to forbid conduct that would materially disrupt or interfere with the educational process or threaten the safety of other students” (Khun, 1996). Additionally, policies should be content neutral. They are not to be aimed at suppressing any particular message, they should offer alternative channels of communication such as the wearing of buttons. Of course, the policy must apply equally to all students regardless of their particular selected type of clothing.

Uniform policies should also include financial assistance for those who may not be able to afford uniforms. The Manual on School Uniforms list four types of assistance: the school district provides uniforms to students who cannot afford to purchase them; community and business leaders provide uniforms or contribute financial support for uniforms; 3) school parents work together to make uniforms available for economically disadvantaged students; and 4) used uniforms from graduates are made available to incoming students.

Lastly, the most significant preventative measure in avoiding litigation is to include an “opt out” provision. Since “every child in the country has the right to a public school education, that right can not be conditioned upon compliance to a uniform policy

(Siegel, 1996). Referring again to the Long Beach study, less than one percent of the parents/guardians are requesting that there students “opt out” of wearing uniforms.

SUMMARY

Overall, the literature suggests that the wearing of student uniforms will decrease violence among students--particularly gang-related violence, decrease disciplinary problems, and neutralize the socioeconomic disparity among students. The theory is that students who wear desirable clothing/accessories, such as designer jackets or sneakers, invoke other students to become envious to the point of disruption and violence. The majority of administrators, teachers, parents, and students who are affected by uniform policies are in favor of them. Parents and students who oppose uniform policies claim that violation of rights is the main reason for their disfavor. School districts may avoid litigation over their policies providing they include legal provisions prior to their implementation of a mandatory student uniform policy.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data collection was primarily from obtaining school district policies, from interviews with school representatives, from journals and from accessible information on the Internet. The 70 largest school districts within the continental United States (Appendix 1) were contacted to find out which have uniforms policies. Interviews were conducted telephonically (Appendix.2) with school district representatives.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The data was analyzed by comparing district uniform policies and by identifying the reasons the different school districts had for implementing their policies. The findings each school district observed after the implementation was collected and analyzed. Consistencies were then noted and grouped to see if any patterns surfaced. Particular attention was paid to annotate if the wearing of student uniforms resulted in the anticipated outcome as identified by the literature—to decrease violence, to decrease disciplinary problems and to equalize the financial disparity of students.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Many of the nation's largest school districts within the continental United States have in some way instituted uniform policies. Although the measures vary considerably, the districts are using means that suit their communities best. The following are findings from available district policies.

The largest school district, New York City Public Schools, New York, does not practice a policy now, but their school board voted unanimously in March of 1998 to institute a district-wide uniform policy for elementary schools to take effect in September of 1999. Currently, there are 229 of the district's elementary schools using uniforms on a voluntary basis (Steinberg, 1998). The policy will affect more than 500,000 students and was initiated by the school board president, William C. Thompson Jr., to "create a better educational climate". The reform is also supported by New York's Major Rudolph W. Giuliani and Schools Chancellor, Rudy F. Crew (Keller 1998). The style and colors of the uniforms will be decided upon by individual schools and there will be an opt-out provision for both schools and students. Parents who need financial assistance will receive aid from local district offices.

The Dade County School District in Florida established a policy on a voluntary basis for three years before it became implemented in 1998. The initial reasons for the implementation were to firm up the dress code, minimize gang-related violence and most

of all, to heighten school unity and pride. Schools vote upon and decide which uniforms will be used from khaki, blue or black bottoms and polo-style tops. The schools must assure that financial assistance is available for families that are in need of it. It has been noted that drug-related incidents and truancy has significantly reduced, but the district does not attribute it solely to the wearing of uniforms (C. Golden, personal communication, January 1999).

Prince George's County Public School District in Maryland has a policy regarding "how a school, other than a Traditional/Classical Academy magnet, could establish a voluntary or mandatory school uniform requirement" (Administrative Procedure, 1998). Before the policy was implemented in 1998, a dress code task force was established in 1996 to "better inform parents of the current policy that schools have the option to choose uniforms at their chil's(ren's) school with a majority vote" (Adoption of Dress...1996).

The Superintendent of Schools has authorized a specific uniform with various electives. Schools may select from a series of blue bottoms and white, polo-style tops. Schools may opt for girls to wear plaid skirts or jumpers.

The Milwaukee School District in Wisconsin has a very brief uniform policy. In entirety it reads:

The superintendent or his/her designee may approve the establishment of a voluntary dress code in a school provided the following conditions have been met:

1. A majority of the parents and of the staff voting on the establishment of a voluntary uniform dress code vote in favor of it.
2. The voluntary uniform dress code does not impinge upon whatever liberty interest a student may have in his or her mode of dress and the student is still free to dress as the student or student's parents wish.

3. The school and its staff agree not to take any action against students who choose to reject uniforms and not to exert any undue pressure on these students to persuade them to wear uniforms.

(Milwaukee Public...,1995)

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, in North Carolina, authorizes schools to implement student uniforms in the form of a brief policy that was adopted in 1995. The reason given for the implementation is to “allow students to focus on instructional objectives of the school, favorable impact student attitude, promote harmony among students and enhance the image of the school”. The district policy instructs schools that are interested in adapting a policy to work together as a team. The team should comprise of the principal and staff, the School Advisory Team, PTA, School Planning and Management Team and should address the following:

1. Educational value of uniforms
2. Type, cost and color of uniforms. Schools may choose blue, khaki, white or a combination thereof for their uniforms.
3. Provisions for an adequate number of uniforms for students. No student shall be denied uniforms based on inability to pay
4. Involvement of parents in implementation of the plan
5. Enforcement of the plan, including consequences/procedures for failure to wear uniforms

Additionally, the parents are to be surveyed to determine if they are in favor of students wearing uniforms. If at least 70% of the surveys are returned and 80% of those are in favor of the uniforms, the plan may be submitted to the Superintendent and the Board of Education for approval (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 1996).

The Long Beach Unified School District in California with 82 schools serving 80,520 students, is the premier school district in the country for mandatory student uniforms. One of the driving forces behind the initiative was parents’ fearing that their children might be attacked for inadvertently wearing colored clothing or accessories that

could provoke rivalry among local gangs.

The district began a pilot program in 1989 at several schools and found that it decreased ethnic and racial tensions. The district has required a common uniform since 1994 for all of its 56 elementary and 14 middle schools, affecting 58,500 students. The policy allows each school to determine the uniforms its students will wear. Most of the uniforms within the district consist of navy blue or black pants, shorts, skirts, shorts or jumpers; and white shirts or blouses.

There is cause for the district to address financial concerns. About 66 percent of the district's elementary and middle school students qualify for a free- or reduced-price lunch. Besides falling in accordance with the district policy, each school must also develop an assistance plan for families that cannot afford to buy uniforms. The district operates a boutique shop funded by private donors where needy parents and students can shop for uniforms, shoes and backpacks.

Uniforms in the Long Beach School District draw a high level of community support. Local donors and organizations have provided more than \$160,000 in uniforms to students. In an unofficial survey conducted on January 18, 1994, more than 80 percent of Long Beach Press-telegram readers who responded said they support the use of uniforms.

The district does offer a student opt-out alternative with parental consent, but only 500 parents have petitioned for that option. Students who opt-out of wearing uniforms must follow the district's K-12 dress code:

- Students must be clean
- No oversized or sagging clothing
- No open-toed shoes or sandals

- No jewelry that could cause injury
- No beepers or pagers
- No gang-related clothing
- No hats, unless part of a school uniform or medically required
- No sunglasses in class unless medically required
- No bandanas, rags, gloves, or gang-related decorative articles
- No visible gang-related tattoos.

The California Education Code was amended in 1994 to allow public schools to implement uniform dress codes. The amendment replaced a provision that allowed school districts to prohibit students from wearing gang-related apparel, and authorized the schools to implement a uniform dress policy as part of its school safety plan. The two main reasons for the code's amendment were that the difficulty and time required to educate teachers and faculty about gang attire distracts from the educational time teachers should be spending with students. Also uniforms protect the students from being targeted as gang members and increases their safety.

After one year (September 1994 through June 1995) the district released what they believe to be the statistical results of what occurred while the uniform policy was in place. Overall school crime decreased by 36 percent. Sex offenses decreased by 74 percent, student suspensions decreased by 32 percent and incidents of vandalism decreased by 18 percent. Fighting dropped 51 percent, robbery decreased 65 percent and extortion decreased 60 percent. Assault and battery decreased 34 percent. Chemical substances in the schools decreased 69 percent and assault with a deadly weapon decreased 50 percent. Additionally, they currently have a record-level high of student attendance. Officials also say that students are earning higher test scores.

The Mobile County School District in Alabama has 88 schools serving 65,602 students. The initiative for a uniform policy began with parents and community

members urging. The original intent for implementing the policy was to diminish the threat of gang-related violence, minimize disruption, improve the learning environment and to ease the financial hardship of parents.

To begin the process, the Board evaluated the feasibility of adopting a policy by comparing the results of nearby Magnet schools and schools with a voluntary uniform dress policy. With great parental and community support, a policy was undertaken. The statement of the policy reads, "All elementary, middle and high schools in the Mobile County Public School System, with the exception of the Magnet Schools shall implement, within the parameters set forth below, the mandatory uniform policy beginning with the 1997-98 school year. This policy shall not apply to the Magnet Schools as they have already adopted uniform dress provisions. The term "school" as used throughout this policy shall mean all elementary, middle and high schools in the Mobile County Public School System with the exception of the Magnet Schools." (JCDB) Each school is responsible for selecting the type and colors of uniforms and for establishing compliance measures. Each school must also seek out the availability of financial support for needy families. The policy is unique from others found in that it not only applies to primary, elementary and junior high school students, but to high school students as well.

An enactment by the legislature of Alabama passed a bill for a mandatory uniform policy in May 1997 allowing the Mobile County district to require uniforms as a "reasonable way to provide some protection for students" (AL State Legis. S. 80). Implementation of the policy was to become effective by November 3, 1997. The board stipulated in the bill that "the board of school commissioners shall not be responsible for

the purchase of school uniforms for indigent students, however the board may authorize programs to promote donations of funds and/or uniforms to assist indigent students” (AL St. Legis S. 80).

There is not an opt-out provision available within the Mobile Country School System. Rather the state bill declares, “Disciplinary action will be taken to enforce compliance with policy. Students who do not comply with policy will be denied admission until such time as they are in compliance, in accordance with the intent of State Legislature” (JCDB V. Compliance Measures). Schools may also suspend students for violating the local school uniform dress code.

Principals notice a dramatic difference in student behavior and a drop in disciplinary problems. Numerous accolades have been given to the uniform policy including observed enhancement of school safety, improved learning environment, reduced ethnic and racial tensions, and a bridged socio-economic difference between children. The uniforms are also said to have promoted good behavior, improve children’s self-respect, and self-esteem, and have produced a cost savings for participating families.

Students were initially opposed to wearing uniforms, but have become in favor of it since seeing the advantages after the first year. Elementary students love the uniforms while high school students are still somewhat opposed to them says S. E. Pryor, Communication Technician, (personal communication, February 1999).

For further testimony, state legislation calls for an annual evaluation from each of the schools participating in the policy for the first three years. After that time, the evaluation of the policy may be included in the schools’ regular review process. The results are to be used to consider modifications to the policy.

The Boston School District in Massachusetts with 123 schools and 63, 293 students has district-wide policy that requires schools to address and adapt one of three variations of a uniform policy. The final decision is voluntary and up to individual schools. The initiative to begin a policy was based on the belief that the wearing of uniforms improves the learning environment, minimizes disruption, reduces tension, promotes self-esteem, improves student behavior and is cost-effective for parents.

The policy evolved from a work group established in 1996 by the Superintendent to prepare a report on the issue. The results were brought up for the Leadership Team to discuss and later, presented to the School Committee. The report was based upon pilot uniform efforts implemented in the district's schools from the previous three years. The City of Boston In School Committee specifically addresses the issue of a uniform policy within their district. Their policy is unique in that it offers schools three options from which to chose, but stipulates that schools must at least consider and vote upon one of the three options. The policy proceeds to specify how to present the options, how voting procedures are to take place and how to implement the policies. The district policy reads in part, "All elementary and middle schools in the Boston Public Schools shall establish a school-site school uniform policy in accordance with the parameters set forth herein. The policy options from which each School-Site Council shall consider and select one of are as follows:

A Voluntary School Uniform Policy: This policy is one in which the school prescribes a standard student uniform but allows the parent to make the decision concerning their child's participation.

A Mandatory School Uniform Policy: This policy is one in which the school prescribes a standard student uniform and requires all students to participate unless the parent seeks an exemption from the policy.

A No Uniform Policy: This policy provides freedom to the student and parent in the selection of dress, provided it complies with the “reasonable standards of health, safety and cleanliness” requirements of state law (G.L. Ch. 71, s. 83) and with established school dress codes.

The decision at the elementary and middle schools is left up to the School-Site Councils. At the high school level, the policy states that “students shall also be canvassed to determine their preference.” In this sense, all of the district’s students are affected by the policy. Of the 123 schools reporting to the district, 23 schools have a mandatory uniform policy, 54 have a voluntary policy and 46 have no uniform/special dress code.

The district policy directs schools to have liberal opt-out provisions. The policy states that “No student shall be subject to internal detention, suspension or expulsion from school and/or be penalized academically as a result of not complying with the school-site policy.” It also requires each school to create “incentives” and “positive reinforcement measures” that encourage compliance with the adapted school policy. Lastly, the district policy specifies that parents/guardians may request exemption for their students.

The schools are not responsible for providing assistance to financially challenged families who cannot afford to buy uniforms. Instead, the policy mandates that “no student shall be considered in violation of a school-site uniform policy if their circumstances involve financial hardship.”

The district policy instructs schools to conduct annual evaluations of the effectiveness of school policies. It reads that “each School-Site Council shall consider either continuation of their uniform policy or a change to a different uniform policy on or before the second Friday of April each year.” The methods of evaluation are left for the

schools to determine.

Feedback about uniforms from teachers, administrators and parents is favorable. The uniforms are said to be attractive, economical and parents/guardians claim there are fewer problems getting children dressed for school in the mornings. Uniforms are further given credit for helping to generate school spirit, increasing students' self-esteem, and eliminating the competition for brand-name clothing. The uniforms appear to enhance safety issues since students are easily identified. Some staff members are so enthusiastic and supportive of the policies, they are choosing to wear uniforms as well.

The San Francisco Unified School District in California with 111 schools serving 61,889 students provides the foundation for instituting a uniform policy, but leaves the decision up to the schools. The Board then has the final approval authority. The district chose to address the issue of student uniforms in its policies because of community support and because of the nationwide attention uniforms have been receiving.

The purpose of the district's policy is stated: "Pursuant to the provisions of Education Code 35183, the Board of Education of the San Francisco Unified School District hereby authorizes the adoption by individual schools of a uniform policy as follows: The Board recognizes that, in order to promote student safety and discourage theft, peer rivalry and/or gang activity, the principal, staff and parents/guardians/caregivers at a district school may wish to establish a reasonable dress code requiring students to wear uniforms. Such a dress code may be included as part of the school safety plan, pursuant to Education Code 35294.1, and must be presented to the Board for approval." In schools where a policy is approved, the principal, staff and

parents/guardians jointly decide the types and styles of uniforms.

The district policy mandates that an opt-out provision be offered. The policy further dictates that “Students shall not be penalized academically, otherwise discriminated against or denied attendance to school if their parents/guardians/caregivers choose not to have the student comply with the school uniform policy.”

Financial considerations are expressed in the district policy. Prior to implementing a uniform policy, the principal must ensure that available resources are identified to assist economically disadvantaged students in attaining uniforms. Each school is responsible for developing assistance plans for families that cannot afford to buy uniforms. The school principal must establish criteria for determining student eligibility for financial assistance for the purchase of uniforms. The principal shall also establish a method for recycling or exchanging uniforms. In this way, community support for the uniforms is taken into consideration before a policy is implemented.

The district does not track the effectiveness of the uniforms but J. Kell (personal communication, January, 1999) relays that “every school that has one, is pleased with the outcome.”

The San Antonio Independent School District, has 111 schools and serves 60,794 students. The uniform policy was implemented to increase student achievement, decrease classroom distractions, increase safety and to ease the financial burden of parents. The purpose of the district’s dress code is “established to teach grooming and hygiene, instill discipline, prevent disruption, avoid safety hazards, and teach respect for authority” (SA ISD 015907 Student Conduct: dress code).

“Uniforms made up of khaki shorts, skirts, skorts, jumpers and trousers and white

long-and short-sleeved blouses and shirts shall be worn by all students enrolled in each District school” (SAISD) Also “unconventional” colors or hairstyles (e.g. mohawks, spiked hair ore designs) causing distractions are prohibited” (SAISD). All oversized clothing is prohibited from being worn to school, specifically, “bagging” or “sagging” pants. All pants are to be worn at the waist. Tight fitting pants such as tights, bicycle pants or spandex are also prohibited. Belts must be put through the belt loops on the pants, and all shirts, including any type of jersey, should be tucked in at all times. Visible body piercing jewelry is forbidden except for ear piercing and no gang-related attire will be permitted.

The policy applies to all District campuses and facilities and to any locations off-campus where District students are receiving classroom instruction such as official class field trips, internships, or other programs hosted outside the District. If the principal determines that a student’s grooming or clothing violates the dress code, the student is given an opportunity to correct the problem at school. If not corrected, the student will be assigned to in-school suspension, or be subject to other appropriate disciplinary consequences as determined by the principal, for the remainder of the day or until the problem is corrected.

The district does offer an opt-out alternative at the parent or guardian’s request providing an acceptable reason is given for consideration. The reason(s) must state a bona fide religious or philosophical objection to the policy as deemed by the Board. The policy bestows to the principals the authority for all, or part, of the student body to vary from the uniform and establish a particular mode of attire for special occasion days.

The Superintendent must maintain federal and local compensatory funds available

for the clothing needs of the educationally disadvantaged students who cannot afford to purchase the uniforms. Any funds donated for the purpose of purchasing uniforms must be set aside and used only for that purpose.

No hard data exists on the effectiveness of wearing uniforms in this district since it was implemented only on August 1998. Communications Specialist, Sean Hoffman, (personal communication, February, 1999), predicts that it is “not likely that hard data will ever be provided, as it is hard to pinpoint the variables.” The disciplinary referrals, especially those involving dress-code violations have decreased significantly.

The East Baton Rouge Parish School District in Louisiana includes 105 schools and 60,761 students. The superintendent of the school district who is very research based, was the driving force behind the push for uniforms. Also several parochial and private schools in the area wear them and inspired the public district to consider their use. The primary intention for the policy was to ease the financial burden of the lower income population and put students on an equal footing according to J. Madere, Public Information Officer (personal communication, February, 1999).

The district implemented its policy in August of 1998 and it currently affects Pre-Kindergarten through Fifth graders. The policy will extend grades Sixth through Eighth next year. The Pre-Kindergarten through Fifth-grade students must wear navy blue bottoms, white collared top with no logos. Sixth through Eighth graders will wear khaki bottoms and navy blue tops. The reason for standardized uniforms throughout the schools is because there is a high rate of transfers within the district and the schools want to alleviate the financial burden on parents of having to buy new uniforms.

Louisiana State legislature passed a bill giving school districts the right to require

uniforms providing the schools offer an opt-out provision. Disciplinary procedures for students who do not comply with the policy involve a letter of reminder sent to the parent/guardian on the first offense; a telephone call from the principal to the parent/guardian for the second offense; a parent or guardian is required to attend a conference with the principal on the third offense; and 1-2 day suspension for the fourth offense.

In order to provide economic aid to those in need, the district works closely with Saint Vincent De Paul's which provides resources for the homeless and low income. Schools also collaborate with local television stations to sponsor uniform drives and to raise money for families in need. Schools maintain an updated list of family names who are eligible for assistance to provide to donors. In addition, the Baton Rouge Teachers Federal Credit Union has a bank account set up for donations to help students buy uniforms.

The Legislature of Louisiana enacted a Dress code: authorization, notification requirement (Section 1. Regular Session 17:416.7) in 1997. The act reads as follows: "Each city or parish school board may adopt such rules and regulations as it deems necessary to require a school dress code which includes the use of uniforms. Each school may select a uniform for its students and display such uniform prior to the beginning of each school year. If a city or parish school board chooses to require a school dress code as provided in the Section, it shall notify, in writing, the parent or guardian of each school student of the dress code specifications and their effective date. Nothing herein shall require the additional expenditure of school or school board funds."

No formal studies have been done but principals report greatly improved

behavior, more focus and increase morale among the students. Some of the specific improvements noted by the district are as follows:

- Fewer discipline problems
- Uniforms encourage students to express their individuality through personality and achievements, not outward appearances
- Uniforms are inexpensive
- Competition to dress as well as-or better than- everyone else is eliminated
- Children are not made to feel inadequate because their families cannot afford expensive trends or designer labels
- Uniforms put the focus on academics, not fashion
- Uniforms eliminate morning arguments and indecision over what to wear
- Uniforms help school officials recognize intruders
- Uniforms give children a sense of belonging and pride in their school

(Mathews, G. S., 1998)

Parents are also said to “praise the cost of the uniforms, saying they are cheaper to buy than trendy clothes and cheaper to maintain” (King, 1997).

The district does not give uniforms full credit for the improvements. In 1998, Baton Rouge voters approved “a tax which...will provide new truancy officers, alternative schools and alternative classrooms for troublesome students” (Student uniforms for..., 1998).

The Davis School District in Utah, maintains a policy that “does not officially encourage or discourage school uniforms”, but “the board authorizes, consistent with state law, school officials and school communities to adopt policies on school uniforms at the school level. A school community that wishes to adopt a school uniform dress code must follow the rules set forth below.” The policy goes on to require that each school community address the following points:

- Justification for School Uniforms for legally appropriate reasons, Specifically “in order to help avoid the disruption of the classroom atmosphere and decorum and prevent disturbances among students.”
- School Uniform Policy Development in which either the principal or community council must hold at least one public hearing on the proposed policy so that parents, students, and faculty have an opportunity to comment and voice their opinions.
- Voting. At least 50% plus one of the votes is required to adapt an opt-out policy; 66% of the votes are needed to adapt a mandatory uniform policy, with no exceptions.
- Notification. A school that adopts a uniform must ensure adequate communication to parents.
- Finances and Fee Waivers. No student shall be denied attendance at School, penalized, or otherwise subject to disciplinary measures for Failing to wear a school uniform by reason of financial hardship. For that reason, schools must develop procedures to provide financial assistance to those in need.
- Compliance. A school that adopts a school uniform policy shall develop incentives and positive reinforcement measures to encourage full compliance with the uniform policy. A school should resort to disciplinary action only when positive measures fail to ensure compliance.
- Exemptions. Parents who do not wish to partake in the school Uniform policy can either opt-out if the school provides that alternative, or request for a transfer.

(Student Dress and ..., 1998).

Aside from the school districts above, several others have adapted uniform policies including:

- Los Angeles Unified, California
- Palm Beach County School District, Florida
- Albuquerque Public Schools, New Mexico
- Orleans Parish School Board, Louisiana
- Fresno Unified, California
- Polk County School District, Florida

As a matter of interest, some districts are apathetic about the increased popularity of student uniforms. For example, an Information Specialist from the Philadelphia City School District, Paul Hansen, (personal communication, January, 1999), relays that the

Pennsylvania mandate for uniforms never went through so districts do not get involved. The decision is left entirely up to individual schools. If the district supports any type of uniform policy, it is what he terms "Double Voluntary". Double Voluntary meaning that the policy must first be voluntarily agreed upon at the school level and by the parents, and also each day the parents must voluntarily enforce it with their children. The district does not encourage or discourage the wearing of uniforms, but leaves it up to the parents. Individual schools contract with the suppliers of the uniforms and orchestrate all of the details.

The Clark County School District in Nevada permits individual schools to make the decision about whether or not to have uniform policies. Ray Willis, Director of Public Information, states that the "notion of student uniforms has not met with a great degree of success in the Clark County school district." Rather, it is considered "somewhat of a buzz word and cosmetic cure, without a concrete evidence to back its claim" (personal communication, February, 1999).

Besides uniform policies, school districts throughout the country are using other approaches to address the issue of student attire. A creative way of confronting the topic is being taken by the Mesa Unified School District in Arizona with 71 schools serving 70, 035 students. The district does not have a uniform policy per se, but instead enforces strict "mandatory dress standards". Similarly, the Oakland Unified School District maintains a three-page "dress code".

Regardless of the current means districts have in place for addressing student attire, it is likely that each will have to at least consider implementing uniform policies in the near future. Nearly all of the districts contacted revealed that although there was not

a district wide policy, at least some of their schools are practicing a successful uniform policy. In addition to the districts listed above, the Granite School District in Salt Lake City Utah and the Duval County School District in Jacksonville Florida are in the process of doing a feasibility studies to determine if a district policy would be of benefit in their area. The State Board of Education has recently given school districts in Washington the right to mandate uniforms. The National Association of Elementary School Principals conducted a survey of heads of public elementary and middle schools in 10 states, and found that 11 percent of the 958 principals who responded required uniforms at their schools and 15 percent were considering such a policy. The survey also revealed that almost two-thirds of the schools with policies had adopted them within the past two years (Starr, 1998). Further, another national survey of 5,500 secondary school principals revealed that 70 percent said they thought uniforms could cut down on violence in the schools (Currie, 1996). Still another recent U.S. Department of Education survey estimates that 41 percent of white parents and 64 percent of African-American parents support a standardized dress policy for school children (Currie, 1996).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

The most glaring finding is that the implementation of uniform policies is not as popular as expected at the district level despite the national attention it has received. Districts are for the most part, delegating that decision, implementation and enforcement down to the school level. Schools are left to decide upon a policy independently through their Parent Teacher Associations and Parent-Teacher Organizations or through their School Board Decision Making Council. There is no formal encouragement or discouragement of adapting uniform policies. School districts that have considered the issue are showing a plethora of ways to monitor student attire. The mildest course of action being taken is that school districts are not addressing the issue at all and the most severe action being taken is states passing legislation to allow school districts to require uniform policies. Most of the districts are taking moderate courses of action. Reasons for a uniform policy are similar nationwide, mainly to decrease violence and to improve the educational environment. Another finding is that school uniforms are alike nationwide and do not seem to be affected by regionalism. Once the uniform policies are

implemented, the districts or schools all agree upon the effectiveness and insist the uniforms improve student behavior. However, the effectiveness is not generally tracked. School officials attribute the uniforms as one of the factors affecting the change. There is a broad spectrum of ways in which the districts approach uniform policies, yet they each fall into one of 4 categories: 1) There is no mention of uniforms in the district policy; 2) The district condones the use of voluntary uniform policies and institutes a section that outlines general goals; 3) A district-wide uniform policy is set in which all schools within its realm must adapt; and 4) State legislature supports a district-wide uniform policy with no opt-out provisions.

One of the most widely found responses is that there is no mention of uniforms in their district policies. Representatives from school districts falling into this category say they leave that entirely up to the individual schools to research, consider, implement and enforce. The benefits are that it gives the schools the opportunity to assess the need for uniforms and create a policy with the cooperation of parents and the community. It gives schools flexibility and empowerment and draws buy-in from the parents. A disadvantage is that schools do not have the guidance, support and resources of the district from which to draw and they are left to grope to establish a policy. A trial period and a strong parental buy-in are required up front for the schools that do adapt uniform policies in this category.

The other most widely found response is that districts address the usage of uniforms in their policies and provide loose guidelines for school districts to follow. The districts also provide legal considerations and offer references for the schools. The benefits are that the schools have the support of the district while still being given the

flexibility of the actual decision-making process. The implementation of a uniform policy, the enforcement of it and the tracking of effectiveness are left up to the independent schools.

Another form of management is one in which districts implement a dress code for all of its schools to adhere to. Again, this gives the schools the comfort of having district support for the policy but is a little more constrictive if the district delegates what types of uniforms will be worn. There is added protection for individual schools, but a decreased span of control and flexibility over the policy. This form is more of a top-down approach without as much parental buy-in.

The strongest form of the uniform policy, and least used, is when the state passes legislature for districts to require uniform policies. Schools and districts are supported by the state. An advantage is that all students must wear uniforms and do not have the option of transferring to another school without a uniform policy. This form of management is more restrictive however the policy may do more good to the community as a whole since it dilutes destructive behavior community wide rather than just at certain schools.

Although many of the largest school districts are implementing school uniform policies to some degree, the majority of those districts do not statistically track the effectiveness once they have been instituted. It is as though once policy makers and parents have been persuaded to adapt student uniforms, the psychological buy in has occurred and there is no need for further evidence. The burden of proof is taken into consideration before implementing a policy. Nevertheless, the verbal accounts of the uniforms indicate that the policies are extremely effective in creating the atmosphere the

polycymakers anticipated. Decreased violence, increased discipline and a more neutral socio-economic climate between students are all said to result after implementing a policy. School officials admit that uniforms are not the sole reason for improvements at their schools and several grant that they have been taking concurrent measures to tackle their schools' specific concerns.

In each of the districts where uniforms have been adapted, there are reported unintended consequences that are quite favorable. There is greater parent participation and a heightened sense of school pride. Community support is said be overwhelming. The uniforms tend to be perceived as a visible sign of seriousness and respectability. A couple of school officials say that they believe the uniform policies have decreased the stronghold and influence of gangs not just within the confines of the school campus, but within the community as well (San Antonio and Dade County, 1999, January).

The typical uniforms nationwide consist of navy blue, khaki or black bottoms including pants, skirts, shorts, skorts, or jumpers. Some schools offer plaid skirts or jumpers for girls. The policies also specify the length of the shorts, skirts and jumpers. Most stipulate "knee-length" or not higher than three inches above the knee. Tops are most often collared, solid-colored shirts or blouses without logos of any kind. White, navy blue, and red tops are most preferred for policies although some choose their school colors instead. Policies also prohibit the wearing of jeans or sweatpants. The similarities of the basic school uniforms across the country are so profound that national retail stores are carrying lines of uniforms. Some of the major retail stores carrying a uniform line include: Lands' End, JC Penny, Sears, Target, Mervyn's and Wal-Mart.

Another point of interest is that most of the uniform policies go on to give

guidelines about accessories. Many include acceptable colors for outerwear such as sweaters and jackets. The majority of uniform policies specify the types of shoes to be worn, with black or brown oxford-style, closed-toe shoes being chosen most frequently. Most of the policies prohibit the wearing of athletic shoes and “starter jackets”. The typical colors allowed for belts are black, brown or blue. Favored colors for socks include black, khaki, white, navy and red (for girls).

Some flexibility is included in the policies such as provisions for wearing uniforms for nationally recognized youth organizations like Girls Scouts and Boy Scouts and for the wearing of school-sponsored teams and club uniforms. Some policies also include “free dress days” or “spirit days” in which the students may deviate from wearing uniforms. The policies also include accommodations for religious beliefs and the wearing of religious articles so long as the article does not detract from or do not contribute to disruption by infringing on the rights of others. The allowable articles may not substantially cover up or replace the uniforms.

The following tables itemize the ways in which school districts are addressing student uniform policies:

DISTRICT	COURSE OF ACTION			
	No Policy	Consider. Policy	Uniform Policy	State Legis.
New York City Public Schools, New York		X		
Los Angeles Unified, California			X	
Puerto Rico Department of Ed., Puerto Rico **				
City of Chicago School District 29, Illinois	X			
Dade County School District, Florida			X	
Philadelphia City School District, PA	X			
Broward County School District, Florida	X			
Houston ISD, Texas	X			
Hawaii Department of Education Hawaii **				
Detroit City School District, Michigan	X			
Clark County School District, Nevada	X			
Dallas ISD, Texas	X			
Hillsborough County School District, Florida	X			
Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia	X			
Palm Beach County School District, Florida			X	
San Diego City Unified, California	X			
Duval County School District, Florida		X		
Orange County School District, Florida	X			
Prince Georges County PS, Maryland			X	
Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland	X			
Baltimore City Public School System, Maryland	X			
Memphis City School District, Tennessee	X			
Pinellas County School District, Florida	X			
Baltimore County Public Schools, Maryland	X			
Milwaukee School District, Wisconsin			X	
Jefferson County, Kentucky	X			
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina			X	
Albuquerque Public Schools, New Mexico			X	
De Kalb County School District, Georgia	X			
Orleans Parish School Board, Louisiana			X	X
Jefferson County R-1, Colorado	X			
Gwinnett County School District, Georgia	X			
Cobb County School District, Georgia	X			
Wake County Schools, North Carolina	X			
Long Beach Unified, California			X	
D. C. Public Schools, Washington D.C.	X			
Fresno Unified, California			X	
Virginia Beach City PS, Virginia	X			
Austin ISD, Virginia	X			

Cleveland City SD, Ohio	X			
Fort Worth ISD, Texas	X			
Polk County School District, Florida			X	
Jordan School District, Utah	X			
Anne Arundel County P S, Maryland **				
Nashville-Davidson County SD, Tennessee	X			
Mesa Unified School District, Arizona	X			
Brevard County School District, Florida	X			
Mobile County School District, Alabama			X	
Denver County 1, Colorado	X			
El Paso ISD, Texas	X			
Boston School District, Massachusetts			X	
Columbus City SC, Ohio	X			
Tucson Unified District, Arizona	X			
San Francisco Unified, California			X	
San Antonio ISD, Texas			X	X
East Baton Rouge Parish SB, Louisiana			X	
Atlanta City School District, Georgia	X			
Davis School District, Utah			X	X
Northside ISD, Texas	X			
Guilford County Schools, North Carolina	X			
Volusia County School District, Florida	X			
Fulton County School District, Georgia	X			
Jefferson Parish School Board, Louisiana **				
Portland School district 1J, Oregon	X			
Greenville County SD, South Carolina	X			
Seminole County School District, Florida	X			
Knox County School District, Tennessee	X			
Oakland Unified, California	X			
Cincinnati City SD, Ohio	X			

** Unable to contact district

The most frequently cited reasons for adapting uniform policies in public schools are to decrease violence, to improve the educational atmosphere and to neutralize the socio-economic disparity among students. Despite the lack of empirical evidence available about the effectiveness of uniforms, there are enough accounts, testimonies and anecdotal evidence to conclude that uniforms do make a significant change for the better.

The paramount reason given for implementing uniform policies is to reduce violence. The policies unequivocally reduce the incidents of violence at the elementary and middle school level and have proven to be effective. The violence is decreased most noticeably at schools that were previously laden with gang members. Speculations are made that by wearing uniforms, opposing gang members are not able to distinguish each other thereby reducing the chances of them agitating one another. The inconsistency that surfaces is that incidents of violence occur more often at the high-school level. A study of Violence and Discipline Problems in the U.S. found that “crime and violence were more of a problem in middle and high schools than in elementary schools”. The majority of uniform policies apply to elementary school students and do not extend to the high school. It is conceivable that the policies serve as an invaluable preventative measure by impeding gangs from influencing students in the grade-school level.

Another most widely given reason for implementing school uniforms is to provide a better learning environment. This factor is highly intangible, but descriptive verbal accounts of the effects are favorable. The uniforms seemingly remove some of the disruptive factors involved in breaking students’ focus. The uniforms bring with them a physical and psychological aspect that invokes seriousness among the students.

The third most given reason for implementing a uniform policy is to level the socio-economic disparity of students. Although the measurement of this factor is somewhat intangible, teachers, parents and students all agree that uniforms mask the financial disposition of students. Uniforms have the most immediate and direct effect in producing this outcome. Even the students who disapprove of uniforms declare that “uniforms make them look all the same.” Based upon this policy analysis, student uniforms invariably produce the desired results.

A fourth reason for implementing uniforms is to ease the financial burden on parents associated with buying students’ school clothes. This reason was not initially revealed in the literature review, but surfaced during interviews with school representatives. The hearsay is that uniforms are extremely effective in producing this outcome. Parents all along the economic spectrum express financial relief by purchasing uniforms as well as gratitude for no longer having to keep current with trends.

School districts are experiencing even further effects from uniform policies such as enhanced safety, increased school spirit and pride, ease of noticing trespassers, and increased cohesiveness within the community. As the literature review suggests, school officials claim that the uniforms bring unanticipated, albeit welcome side effects to their schools. Parents/guardians become more involved and students are said to act more dignified. Some schools claim an increase in academic scores since implementing their policies. One insightful comment from a school teacher is, “It appears that many students and parents perceive that a school where students wear uniforms is a school that emphasizes discipline and a better education...” (Philadelphia Report No. 8919, 1989).

Additional positive evidence is provided by a study conducted by The National

Association of Elementary School Principals. 958 principals in 10 states were asked to assess how uniforms influence school life. Specifically, the principals were asked, "In schools having a student uniform policy, how important are uniforms in positively affecting the following factors?" The findings show a significant difference between schools with a policy and those without. A summary of the study's findings is as follows:

<u>Factors</u>	<u>With Uniform Policy</u>	<u>Without</u>
Image in the community	86%	65%
School spirit	81%	61%
Classroom discipline	80%	64%
Peer pressure	75%	77%
Student safety	75%	46%
Student achievement	52%	45%
Attendance	48%	32%

(Education Week, April 15, 1998).

The notion of public schools adapting uniform policies is relatively new, making long-term studies unattainable. The elements of the policies all converge on student behavior and the people in the student's support systems hold well-defined expectations. It is conceivable that the increased attention brought about by uniforms is producing a Hawthorne Effect (Paliokas & Rist, 1996) amongst the students and/or the concentration on behavior produces a self-fulfilling prophesy among the students as well.

The findings from this study indicate that there is stronger participation in wearing uniforms at the lower grades. Student support diminishes as they advance through the grades. Also, it seems as though a solid uniform program may take three years before achieving close to 100% participation without state legislation. Schools are

careful to do research, involve the parents and community and to establish a trial period for the uniforms.

Some of the factors associated with large school districts may account for an increased use of student uniforms. For example, larger school districts also have larger school sizes and a higher mean pupil-teacher ratio (NCES study 98214). Also, the proportion of minority students in the 100 largest school districts are almost double that proportion of minority students in all schools (65% versus 36%). Based on the comments from school officials, there appears to be a correlation between schools that adapt a policy and the percentage of students who qualify for the free- or reduced-price lunch program. This suggests that larger schools districts have more students, including minority students, more diversity, more of a propensity for gangs and more families requiring financial assistance. The increased diversity in large schools may lead to more of a need for curbing disciplinary problems and an increased likelihood for considering the use of school uniforms.

Most school districts are not adapting uniform policies for their schools, but are leaving the decision up to the individual schools and the parents. Hard proof of the impact of uniforms from districts with a policy is scarce. Anecdotal evidence indicates that uniforms are effective in producing the desired results, although it is not possible to measure to what degree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The amount of concrete evidence on the effectiveness of uniforms is limited. If a single school initiative is making such profound changes as some claim, a more extensive study is required to accumulate the findings. The NCES is required to collect data to determine the “frequency, seriousness, and incidence of violence in elementary and secondary schools” in response to Congress passing the Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities Act of 1994. A survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,234 regular public elementary, middle and secondary schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia in spring and summer of 1997 (NCES). Since the methods and resources are already available, I recommend the NCES do a similar study using schools with uniform policies as a nationwide effort. The results would provide a more comprehensive view about the effects of uniforms and would provide a useful tool for school districts to gauge their decisions. Additionally, if the President of the United States stands up in front of the nation and endorses an educational initiative, more accurate studies should be conducted to measure tangible factors (number of drug incidents, frequency of disciplinary problems, test scores) to support his claim.

School districts should take a proactive stance on the issue of student uniforms and at least address it within their policies to guide the schools within their realm. It would also behoove the schools if districts were to provide a list of readings on the topic such as references, case studies, and sources of information from other schools. Since uniform policies are a fairly recent initiative that “have not yet been legally tested through to the Supreme Court” (Paliokas & others, 1996), the district’s involvement up front could prevent legal ramifications.

Finally, any measure that puts the emphasis back on scholastic achievement, decreases disciplinary problems and increases pride both in the students and the community is well worth under consideration of implementing. Although many of the improvements are not measurable, the outcomes are beneficial to the students, communities and to us as a country.

APPENDIX 1

Appendix A. The 500 largest public school districts in the United States and outlying areas: School year 1995-96

Rank	Students	Agency name	Mailing address	City	ST	ZIP	Schools	Telephone
1	1,049,039	New York City Public Schools	110 Livingston St	Brooklyn	NY	11201	1,108	718-935-2800
2	647,612	Los Angeles Unified	450 N. Grand Ave.	Los Angeles	CA	90012	642	213-625-6251
3	621,121	Puerto Rico Department of Education	Avenida Teroniente Gonzalez	Hato Rey	PR	00919	1,561	809-754-1130
4	412,921	City of Chicago School District 29	1819 W Pershing Rd	Chicago	IL	60609	555	312-535-8000
5	333,817	Dade County School District	1450 NE 2nd Avenue Suite 403	Miami	FL	33132	322	305-995-1429
6	210,503	Philadelphia City SD	Parkway at 21st Street	Philadelphia	PA	19103	258	215-299-7000
7	208,359	Broward County School District	600 SE Third Avenue	Fort Lauderdale	FL	33301	192	305-765-6271
8	206,704	Houston ISD	3830 Richmond Avenue	Houston	TX	77027	272	713-892-6000
9	187,104	Hawaii Department of Education	PO Box 2360	Honolulu	HI	96804	246	808-832-5880
10	173,750	Detroit City School District	5057 Woodward	Detroit	MI	48202	268	313-494-1075
11	166,788	Clark County School District	2832 East Flamingo	Las Vegas	NV	89121	198	702-799-5310
12	148,839	Dallas ISD	3700 Ross Avenue	Dallas	TX	75204	203	214-824-1820
13	143,192	Hillsborough County School District	PO Box 3408	Tampa	FL	33601	172	813-272-4050
14	140,820	Fairfax Only Public Schools	10700 Page Ave	Fairfax	VA	22030	210	703-246-2631
15	132,215	Palm Beach County School District	3340 Forest Hill Boulevard	West Palm Beach	FL	33406	133	407-434-8200
16	130,360	San Diego City Unified	4100 Normal St.	San Diego	CA	92103	164	619-293-8686
17	123,910	Duval County School District	1701 Prudential Drive	Jacksonville	FL	32207	155	904-380-2115
18	123,165	Orange County School District	PO Box 271	Orlando	FL	32802	157	407-849-3209
19	122,415	Prince Georges County Public Schools	14201 School Lane	Upper Marlboro	MD	20772	179	301-852-6000
20	120,291	Montgomery County Public Schools	850 Hungerford Drive	Rockville	MD	20850	181	301-279-3000
21	109,980	Baltimore City Public School System	200 East North Avenue	Baltimore	MD	21202	180	410-388-8803
22	109,286	Memphis City School District	2597 Avery Avenue	Memphis	TN	38112	163	901-325-5300
23	104,335	Pinellas County School District	301 Fourth Street SW	Largo	FL	34640	147	813-588-6011
24	101,564	Baltimore County Public Schools	6901 North Charles Street	Towson	MD	21204	158	410-887-4074
25	98,378	Milwaukee School District	PO Box 2181	Milwaukee	WI	53201	155	414-475-8001
26	93,070	Jefferson County	PO Box 34020	Louisville	KY	40232	150	502-473-3251
27	89,544	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	PO Box 30035	Charlotte	NC	28230	126	704-379-7000
28	89,019	Albuquerque Public Schools	PO Box 25704	Albuquerque	NM	87125	122	505-842-8211
29	87,291	De Kalb County School District	3770 North Decatur Road	Decatur	GA	30032	106	404-297-2300
30	85,586	Orleans Parish School Board	4100 Touro Street	New Orleans	LA	70122	121	504-286-2700
31	85,495	Jefferson County R-1	P O Box 4001	Golden	CO	80401	142	303-982-6500
32	84,555	Gwinnett County School District	52 Gwinnett Drive	Lawrenceville	GA	30245	71	404-963-8651
33	82,870	Cobb County School District	PO Box 1088	Marietta	GA	30060	86	404-422-9171
34	81,438	Wake County Schools	PO Box 28041	Raleigh	NC	27611	98	919-850-1600
35	80,520	Long Beach Unified	701 Locust Ave.	Long Beach	CA	90813	82	310-436-9931
36	79,802	District of Columbia Public Schools	415 12th Street, NW	Washington	DC	20004	186	202-724-4222
37	77,880	Fresno Unified	Ed. Cntr., Tulare & M Sts	Fresno	CA	93721	89	209-441-3000
38	77,106	Granite School District	340 E 3545 S	Salt Lake City	UT	84115	97	801-263-6100
39	76,508	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	PO Box 6038	Virginia Beach	VA	23456	82	804-427-4326
40	74,772	Austin ISD	1111 West 6th St.	Austin	TX	78703	103	512-499-1700
41	74,380	Cleveland City SD	1380 E 6th St	Cleveland	OH	44114	131	216-574-8000
42	74,021	Fort Worth ISD	100 North University Dr.	Fort Worth	TX	76107	129	817-871-2000
43	72,807	Polk County School District	PO Box 391	Barlow	FL	33830	119	813-534-0521
44	71,702	Jordan School District	9361 S 300 E	Sandy	UT	84070	72	801-567-8100
45	71,383	Anne Arundel County Public Schools	2644 Riva Road	Annapolis	MD	21401	111	410-224-5000
46	70,913	Nashville-Davidson County SD	2601 Bransford Avenue	Nashville	TN	37204	122	615-259-8419
47	70,035	Mesa Unified School District	549 N Stapley Dr	Mesa	AZ	85203	71	602-898-7700
48	65,621	Brevard County School District	2700 Saint Johns Street	Melbourne	FL	32940	83	407-631-1911
49	65,602	Mobile County School District	PO Box 1327	Mobile	AL	36633	88	334-680-8227
50	64,322	Denver County 1	900 Grant Street	Denver	CO	80203	112	303-764-3200
51	64,260	El Paso ISD	P. O. Box 20100	El Paso	TX	79998	80	915-779-3781
52	63,293	Boston School District	26 Court	Boston	MA	02108	123	617-635-9050
53	63,082	Columbus City SD	270 E State St	Columbus	OH	43215	144	614-365-5000
54	62,317	Tucson Unified District	1010 E Tenth St	Tucson	AZ	85717	110	520-617-7233
55	61,889	San Francisco Unified	135 Van Ness Ave.	San Francisco	CA	94102	111	415-241-6000
56	60,794	San Antonio ISD	141 Laredo St.	San Antonio	TX	78210	111	210-299-5500
57	60,761	East Baton Rouge Parish School Board	PO Box 2950	Baton Rouge	LA	70821	105	504-922-5400
58	60,209	Atlanta City School District	210 Pryor Street SW	Atlanta	GA	30335	102	404-827-8000
59	58,782	Devis School District	45 E State St	Farmington	UT	84025	75	801-451-1251
60	57,409	Northside ISD	5900 Evers Road	San Antonio	TX	78238	74	210-647-2100
61	57,211	Guilford County Schools	PO Box 880	Greensboro	NC	27402	93	910-370-8100
62	56,788	Volkusia County School District	PO Box 2118	Deland	FL	32721	71	904-734-7190
63	56,338	Fulton County School District	786 Cleveland Avenue SW	Atlanta	GA	30315	55	404-768-3600
64	56,021	Jefferson Parish School Board	501 Manhattan Boulevard	Harvey	LA	70058	83	504-367-3120
65	55,130	Portland School District 1J	PO Box 3107	Portland	OR	97208	101	503-249-2000
66	54,619	Greenville County School District	PO Box 2848/301 Camperdown Way	Greenville	SC	29602	92	803-241-3457
67	54,603	Seminole County School District	1211 Millonville Avenue South	Sanford	FL	32771	55	407-322-1252
68	52,627	Knox County School District	PO Box 2188	Knoxville	TN	37902	86	615-594-1800
69	52,452	Oakland Unified	1025 Second Ave.	Oakland	CA	94608	89	510-836-8100
70	52,172	Cincinnati City SD	2651 Burnet Ave., PO Box 5381	Cincinnati	OH	45201	82	513-475-7000

APPENDIX 2

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Hi, I am a student doing a research project on student uniforms; may I speak with someone who can tell me about your district's policy?

After being transferred and connected to the appropriate officials, the following questions were asked:

Does your district have a uniform policy?

How many schools does it affect?

What were the reasons for initiating a policy?

How did the policy evolve?

What is the policy?

Does the policy provide an opt-out alternative?

Does the district provide assistance for those who need financial help?

What have been the results since students have been wearing uniforms?

Does there seem to be community support for the policy?

Does your district have a web site address that displays the policy or any more information?

Thank you so much for your help.

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