A study released today found school uniform policies helped to improve school safety and student achievement, including grades and test scores, in three diverse public school districts. In light of the increased emphasis on student achievement since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Implementing a School Uniform Policy: A Case Study of Three Districts provides additional evidence that school uniform policies can be beneficial to student learning.

Five key and consistent findings emerged in Implementing a School Uniform Policy, which focused on the Denver Public Schools in Denver, Colorado; the Aldine Independent School District outside of Houston, Texas; and CEO’s District of Baltimore City Public Schools:

1) Regular use of uniforms can help to improve school safety;

2) Regular use of uniforms can help to improve students’ classroom behavior;

3) The affordability of school uniforms versus everyday clothing contributes to wide acceptance of the adoption of such a policy;

4) Uniforms can help to reduce student competition and concerns about "fitting in;”

5) Uniforms may contribute to improved student outcomes, including grades and test scores.

"Uniforms can play an important role in improving school culture,” said Dr. Scott Joftus, author of the study. "The common message we found in our research is that uniforms can help make schools safer, create positive learning environments; and improve student outcomes, including attendance, grades, and test scores."

The study also identified consistent strategies for successful implementation of school uniform policy:

* Focusing on parental involvement;

* Adopting policies at the school rather than district level;

* Keeping student rights front and center;
Providing financial assistance for needy students;

* Giving positive reinforcement to students, using a carrot rather than stick approach;

* Keeping uniforms simple and offering students some choice in style.

"This study offers additional evidence that school uniforms can be a very effective element of school reform policies. All students can achieve when given adequate structure, encouragement and resources," said Dr. Carl Cohn, the lauded former superintendent of the Long Beach (CA) Unified School District, which was the first school district to require uniforms in grades K-8. "School uniform policies bring a sense of order and discipline to the classroom environment and help students focus on why they're there: to learn."

The study was solely conducted by Scott Joftus Consulting, an independent research firm headed by Scott Joftus, Ed.D. Dr. Joftus has conducted research and evaluations for the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the University of Pennsylvania, Broad Foundation and the District of Columbia Public Schools, among others. He is the former policy director for The Alliance for Excellent Education and The McKenzie Group. The study was funded by French Toast, the country's leading manufacturer of children's apparel and school uniforms.

**Uncool in School: Dress Code Debate**

By GEORGE JUDSON

Published: October 05, 1995

Marc Peyser tries not to be too uncool about the way teen-agers dress. Hey, when he was in high school he was suspended for wearing shorts. He lets his son wear oversized, baggy pants, the kind that make some nervous adults cross the street and others want to grab the waistband and pull up.

"They don't look good, but I've learned to live with them," he said of his son's baggies. "You don't want him to have to look different from his friends."

But Mr. Peyser, a member of the Board of Education in this city of corporate headquarters, has had it with baseball caps. Kids have this hat thing, but he and some other school board members have a respect thing, and hats in class, they say, do not show respect. So Stamford has joined a growing debate over school dress codes across the country that asks, in the era of grunge, whose schools are these, anyway?
No hats, no bare midriffs, no see-through clothing, no underwear showing, no vulgar T-shirts, no sunglasses, no beepers, no cellular phones, no oversized jewelry that can be used as weapons: the more or less standard list of prohibitions that Stamford is considering for its high schools is a world away from dress codes in the 60's, when blue jeans were banned and skirts had to reach the knee.

But those who are unhappy about the new dress codes -- including principals and teachers, as well as students and civil-liberties lawyers -- ask whether they are really necessary, or whether they reflect the general unease of adults about the state of education, society and teen-agers.

In Stamford, for example, the proposed dress code is supported by adults like a group of executives who visited one of the two public high schools and later complained to the district superintendent about students dressed more for the street corner than the office.

"If you haven't been part of big groups of teen-agers, it can be very overwhelming to walk into a high school," said Anthony Markosky, the principal of Stamford High School. "And I've got 1,900 teen-agers."

In meetings with school board members, students complained that the board was concerned about image instead of education. The image Stamford wants to avoid, in big high schools where wealthy students from suburban neighborhoods mix with teen-agers from housing projects and immigrants from dozens of countries, is that of the inner city.

**Public School Uniforms: The Pros and Cons for Your Child**

*Published April 23, 2008*

*Written by Grace Chen*

The prevalence of uniforms in public schools continues to rise in the United States, as parents and school administrators exert efforts to keep our schools safe environments. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 10% of public schools have adopted uniform mandates.

Although uniforms have been a mainstay of private schools, public schools jumped on the bandwagon in 1994, when the California school district of Long Beach implemented school uniforms. According to the Long Beach school district, within one year after the implementation of uniforms, the fights and muggings at school decreased by 50%, while committed sexual offenses were reduced by 74%. Across the country, similar statistics abound; for example, at Ruffner Middle School in Norfolk, the number of discipline referrals decreased by 42% once uniforms were enforced.

Subsequently, fueled by these statistics, more schools across the country are implementing uniforms in public schools. Nonetheless, there are other statistics that argue that uniforms are not as beneficial as school administrators believe. Thus, the question still remains: are public school uniforms good for your child?
The benefits of public school uniforms: safer campus with renewed focus on academics

There are fundamentally two benefits associated with school uniforms: a focus on learning, as well as a reduction of violence on campus.

More conducive learning environment

Many school administrators and parents believe that uniforms create a better learning environment at school. First and foremost, students are not distracted by how they look, and therefore, spend more time learning at school. The peer pressures of stylish dressing with the “best” brands are alleviated, and students can focus more upon their schoolwork, rather than social appearances. In fact, the socioeconomic differences present among students are equalized with school uniforms, minimizing the pressure to “fit in” with the right clothing choices.

According to the School Administrator publication, along with school-reported statistics, the mandate of uniforms on campuses has reduced tardiness, skipped classes, suspensions, and discipline referrals.

In addition, with the visual uniformity present across all students, the instance of school pride has increased. Similar to athletic team uniforms, dressing cohesively increases pride, unity, and a renewed commitment to the school. With uniforms, a more professional tone is set in school, encouraging students to take their studies more seriously.

Creates a safer campus

Secondly, uniforms at school reduce the prevalence of violence, which is a major concern for many public schools. First and foremost, outsiders who do not belong on campus are easily identified, and thus, do not pose a great threat to the students.

Uniforms also reduce the “cliques” and gangs on school campuses. When it is not easy to identify members of gangs, the fights and violence decrease. According to PHS commentator Melissa Nitsch, “when everyone looks alike, there is less risk of being caught in gang fights for wearing the wrong color. With uniforms, no one is killed over a pair of Nikes or a Starter jacket.” Students can no longer be disrupted by who is wearing which gang color, and therefore, the campus is kept safer with less incidences of fighting.

The disadvantages: limitation of personal expression and comfort

Denial of self-expression

The opponents of public school uniforms, as outlined by the ACLU’s argument for the First Amendment, argue that uniforms stifle a student’s need for self expression. Students need to be encouraged to embrace their individualism, and uniforms deny that self-expression. According to opponents of uniforms, even preschoolers should have input into their wardrobe, and the need to encourage personality confidence and independence grows more important as the student becomes older.
Without the outlet of expression in their clothes, students may turn to inappropriate hair styles, jewelry, or make-up.

_Harms transition into adulthood_

Denying students their ability to express individualism and belief in a sub-culture, whether preppy, hip-hop, punk, or jock, could stymie the students’ transition from childhood into adulthood. Controlling the socialization process could harm the student as an adult, as they are not prepared for the real world, where they will indeed by judged by their appearances.

_Potential discomfort for students_

In addition, others argue that uniforms may not be comfortable for all students. As it is important to ensure that the student is comfortable in order to maximize learning outcomes, uniforms may stymie academic focus.

_The mixed responses_

Whereas some parents believe that uniforms are more cost-effective than purchasing the latest stylish clothes, other parents argue that the cost of uniforms is steep. Typically, uniforms are more expensive up-front, as the parent must invest in all of the staples; however, as the school year progresses, there are less purchases that need to be made. On the other hand, students cannot wear their uniforms outside of school, and thus, there is the double-cost of both uniforms and a casual wardrobe.

In conclusion, the decision of school uniforms is not a black and white one. The arguments are best summed up by Dr. Alan HIlfer, a senior child and adolescent psychologist: “Uniforms do eliminate competition, pressure, and assaults perpetuated by older kids on younger kids for their sneakers and possessions. They also allow some kids to focus better, especially in the lower grades... [However], clothes are a source of expression for children, and as kids get older, they become increasingly resentful of uniforms.”

Deciding whether uniforms are right for your child depends upon the individual circumstances. If your child has a high need for self-expression, then uniforms may create unhealthy resentment. On the other hand, if you believe that your child needs to focus more on academics than physical appearances, then uniforms may help level the social pressures associated with independent dressing. Understanding what elements are most important for you and your child will help you determine if school uniforms are a right fit.