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-School Uniforms-

School uniforms, and the many variations of such, have existed within public and private educational systems worldwide for centuries as a means of easily representing a student's inclusion in a school’s community. It has also been stated that the implementation of a uniform policy provides a cheap and effective means of breaking down the societal barriers that exist between economic classes and the social hierarchy, children of lower income households able to mix with those of wealthier backgrounds without fear of scrutiny or bullying. In recent years however, controversy has sprung up from various sources, parents, government, the children themselves, over just how restrictive and confining a uniform policy can be for those involved. Some even go so far as to state the uniforms harm more than hurt a child’s education and personal development, suppressing one’s sense of self or individual expression. Protesters argue that wearing a uniform creates a sense of being a cog in the machine, that a child is encouraged to conform with the group similar to how an adult in the workplace acclimates, creating an unhealthy lack of personal confidence in distinguishing oneself which can translate into later life. Aside from the psychological issues, others cite the possible economization of schools with a uniform policy, that uniforms are merely a corporate means of drawing money from student’s families which while seemingly inexpensive can build up over time, an issue especially in a public school system in the United States where education is supposed to be provided without much personal cost and is counted as a personal freedom. A very possible influence on children throughout their formative years, the controversial question of “Should uniform policy be enforced in schools?” truly does have weight in and must be looked at from all angles.
 The idea or concept of school uniforms seems like an outdated abstract concept for many Americans. It’s not normally practiced by families and parents unless the student is attending a private school. Yet wearing a school uniform is quite the norm around the rest of the world. There are many benefits to wearing the same outfit to school, as generally students appear to perform better academically.

One of the biggest concerns in school nowadays is bullying. Bullying comes in the form of verbal, physical, and social harassment; also cyber bullying is extremely common these days and one of the strongest reasons is being different for not wearing the “proper or right” clothes. Most people feel they have a higher and a better social status as they are richer than others. To the contrary, wearing the same uniform allows children to maintain a level of understanding with less judgment about physical appearance or brand of clothing. Wearing a uniform impacts a sense of pride and belonging to students as they feel the connection to their school and students.

We could also think that wearing the same uniform could save parents money and channel it into something more useful the child could use. Another reason is that uniforms unite children and shape their personality according to their senses, moves, talents, potentials…etc and not by their outfit or accessories. One could argue that uniforms might erase the sense of individuality for children, however, that shouldn’t be the concern as children could wear whatever they want after school, which allows students to express themselves in new ways they learnt in school due to the concentration on more important topics that elevates their minds.

Many public schools adopted dress code and uniforms after then President Bill Clinton endorsed uniforms in 1996. Although, not every individual supported this new regulation, five public schools now required students to wear uniforms. Students believe that school uniforms restrict student’s freedom of expression. The first amendment states, “…It guarantees freedom of expression by prohibiting Congress from restricting the press or the rights of individuals to speak freely.  It also guarantees the right of citizens to assemble peaceably and to petition their government.” This means that the US guarantees that all individuals have the right to express themselves freely; yet, schools limited self-expression when addressing a uniform policy. According to the American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada “allowing students to choose their clothing is an empowering message from the schools that a student is a maturing person who is entitled to the most basic self-determination.” Students not only choose to dress in a certain way to look cool, but also to express themselves and to identify with certain social groups. According to the article *Arguments against School Uniforms,* students argue that they lose their self-identity when school restricts themselves through fashion. Moreover, parents also believe that they should be free to choose their children’s clothes without government interference. Parents believe that government is making decisions without the parents’ concern. Furthermore, they feel that the government is interfering with their private lives.

Uniforms have been implemented in the school system for centuries now and have had a big impact on how schools are run and how students act.  School uniforms are meant to save the student’s parents money by making the uniform style common and something that can be bought at their local Walmart, Target or Old Navy.  By making school uniforms common clothing, such as brown khakis, cheap colored or white shirts and black dress shoes, these make it easier for parents to not have to worry about buying designer clothing for their children.  Yes, you could make a case that some students that attend a private school or public school will want the expensive designer dress shirts, such as Ralph Lauren or Polo, but that is a slim few and should not cause mass chaos within the realm of other students.  When it comes to school, education is the number one priority, with mandatory school uniforms that is what you get.  School uniforms help low income families save money on clothes for their children because instead of buying designer clothes to wear to school, which adds up to a lot of money when you have 5-7 designer outfits per child, but when you have uniforms you only need a couple cheap uniforms that can be worn for school.  Of course your child would want other clothes for the weekend and by purchasing cheap uniforms for the weekdays, it allows you to buy a couple designer outfits for out of school activities.

Not only do school uniforms save parents money, they also bring students together and make the school feel more like a community.  By having everyone dress in the same clothing, it takes away the feeling of being different, which takes away the cliques that you would find at a public school with no uniforms.  During lunch time there would not be specific tables for jocks, nerds, cheerleaders, attics, and goths.  For example in the movie *Mean Girls,* there is a scene where they show the cafeteria and go through all the tables describing who sits at what table.  That is at a public school, where as with uniforms people would become friends with whoever they enjoy being with, not based on how they live their lives.

School uniforms have transformed from a private school necessity, to one that creeps into the realm of public education. The is in part due to the fact the last twenty years school uniforms have been turned into a one billion dollar industry. In recent years, Lands End clothing company alone spent three million on marketing efforts directed specifically at public school and districts. This is evidence to the fact that school uniforms are now being driven by commercial interest rather than an educational one.

As of 2014, “47% of high poverty public schools require uniforms.” (Procon) This seems almost backwards when considering the fact that high poverty communities will be less likely able to afford the extra expense. On average, the cost of a school uniform (including pants, skirts, multiple shirts, socks, jackets, etc.) is about two hundred and fifty dollars. For parents who are just getting their children set up in school, whether that is preschool or kindergarten, buying new sets of outfits is a requirement solely due to the fact that their child is growing at a rate faster than they are able to reuse the clothing. Though, even in Junior High and High School, each grade is required to wear a specific (and new) colored uniform yearly, once again forcing the parent to constantly buy new outfits. This greatly affects parents with multiple children. In a household with three children attending school that require uniform, the cost of school clothes alone is around seven hundred and fifty dollars per year. This total does not include the children who don’t fit into ‘standard’ sized clothing whose parents must pay the extra cost of having their child’s uniforms tailored. It is important to note that these expenses don’t account for the money parents will spend on clothing their children wear outside of school and to separate events.

The discipline that surrounds school uniforms is distracting and unnecessary to time that should be spent educating. When students make minor changes to their uniforms whether they are trying to stand out, or accidentally wore the wrong attire, they are both equally punished and shamed. Students cannot even wear a colored shoe lace because they are punished in a very exaggerated way. For example, I work in a public elementary school and when any of my students wears a colored shirt or jacket I have to send them to the office to call their parents to bring them the indicated garment. And even worse, the principal makes them wait in his office for hours until their parents show up, causing students miss lecture and falling behind. Punishing for not wearing their uniform does not make them better students; rather it only makes them feel like criminals, when they are punished in a ridiculous and exaggerated way.

 School uniforms are an important tool when it comes to decreasing bullying as well as gang violence on campus. Sixteen year old April Graham, a student in Santa Cruz California stated; “I think the uniforms are a good thing, because we do have days when we are allowed to wear what we want but let me tell you, they may as well call it “judgement day,” because all it does is make everyone feel as if they are in a competition for who is wearing the best clothes. Everyone feels judged and not all kids can afford the latest/coolest stuff, which probably gives them a chance to feel very uncool or like everybody is laughing at them.  Many students feel this way and are grateful to not have to be the target of bullying based on their wardrobe. Uniforms are important for decreasing gang activity in schools as well.   As for schools that are in a bad neighborhood, studies have shown that with uniforms, the amount of gang violence significantly goes down. Students and teachers alike do not have to worry about accidentally promoting gang activity by wearing certain colors that promote the local gang.  Also, students are not allowed to wear baggy pants down to their knees which can be a way for them to conceal weapons on campus.  Anything that keeps children and adults as well safer from gang activity in school is a good thing.

As shown above, many points exist in support or condemnation of a school’s uniform policy while many points of data seem different depending on the source. Some studies have shown that wearing a school uniform does decrease the amount of bullying that occurs on a daily basis while others reflect little to no change at all. School’s point to the ease of uniforms for families, creating a means for children to focus on school rather than fashion and for parents to spend less on clothing however others point to the increased school restrictions and the rising cost of supplying them in bulk. One of the larger points of argument however stemmed from the supposed lack of a student’s ability to express themselves which was hotly debated, some schools providing more variation for a pupil to express themselves through different colors or accessories, however some find this too confining while many remark on the issues created when a school takes a uniform policy too seriously with stories of harsh or unreasonable punishments for simple infractions being seen more and more frequently. From these perspectives it can be seen that in many cases it reflects a person to person and situation by situation basis with no simple answer in sight.

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