

## **Should Schools Make it Mandatory That Students Wear School Uniforms?**

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Mandated school uniforms are common in some districts, while other campuses may just have loose guidelines, or a specific dress code for students to follow. Despite the debate, there are advantages and disadvantages to requiring students to wear uniforms to school. They may improve school climates, but they are not a quick fix for the complex problems that schools face.

### **Discipline**

When the Washoe County School District in Nevada switched to mandatory uniforms, they found that it improved their campuses. During the first year of uniforms at Sparks Middle School, the number of discipline referrals dropped by 10 percent and police report data showed a 63 percent decrease in incidents. 41 percent of the students said that they felt there was less gang activity on campus since the uniform requirement had been implemented. According to PBS, Long Beach School District in California reported 50 percent fewer school fights and muggings and a 74 percent decline in sexual offenses just one year after implementing a uniform policy.

### **Financial Implications**

Some opponents to uniforms say it is unfair to require this additional expense for a public school and a uniform policy might create a financial burden to some families. According to school uniform retailer JC Penny, school uniform pants, shorts, and skirts range from about \$15 to \$20 at regular price and tops are about \$7 to \$15. Parents could potentially purchase a week's worth of uniforms for between \$110 and \$175. These costs are comparable to back-to-school shopping costs for "regular" clothes. According to a 2012 survey on Parenting.com, families spend \$131 per child, on average, for back-to-school clothing.

### **Academic Achievement**

Proponents of school uniforms often cite increased academic achievement as a reason for schools to use such a policy. A study by Ryan Yeung in 2009 found that uniforms have little to no effect on boosting achievement levels. The data from primary and secondary school students from 1988 to 2004 showed that, while some eighth- and tenth-grade reading scores were higher for uniformed schools, data from other subjects yielded inconsistent and inconclusive results. Uniforms alone, he found, were not the cause of higher academic achievement, and there was little evidence to support the claim that schools who adopt a uniform policy will experience higher test scores.

### **Implementing a Uniform Policy**

Former Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, offered some suggestions in 1996 to schools considering uniform policies in his "Manual on School Uniforms." Parental support and involvement in creation of the policy is very important and will often help determine how students view the new policy. Efforts should be made to protect the religious rights of students with regard to dress, and schools might also consider offering help to families who might need financial assistance obtaining them. Schools should keep in mind that a uniform policy is not a quick fix by itself for issues like violence and bullying, but instead, it must be part of a comprehensive campus safety plan to address these issues.