

Rowan University

## Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

7-17-2012

### Student perceptions of school uniforms: a comparative study of students participated in school uniforms and those who did not

Jonathan Mimmo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Child Psychology Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Mimmo, Jonathan, "Student perceptions of school uniforms: a comparative study of students participated in school uniforms and those who did not" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. 146.  
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/146>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

**STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN  
SCHOOL UNIFORMS AND THOSE WHO DID NOT**

by  
Jonathan J. Mimmo

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Psychology  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
at  
Rowan University  
May 1, 2012

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.

© 2012 Jonathan J. Mimmo

## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to my parents who have always been there for me and made this endeavor possible. I would also like to dedicate this manuscript to Elsa whose unwavering support has been a constant source of inspiration.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Dr. Roberta Dihoff and Dr. Terri Allen have been essential to the writing of this thesis. Their constant encouragement and supervision has guided my efforts and I would like to thank them for their contributions. I would also like to thank Dr. Meg White whose willingness to help was greatly appreciated.

## **Abstract**

Jonathan J. Mimmo

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN SCHOOL UNIFORMS AND THOSE WHO  
DID NOT

2011/12

Roberta Dihoff, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in School Psychology

The institution of mandatory school uniforms into public schools has been met with resistance despite research suggesting that a uniform policy can be a useful tool in improving a school's behavioral climate. The attitudes and perceptions held by students who may or may not have participated in a school uniform policy were examined to determine what effect experience might have on perception and attitude. Surveys were administered to college students to examine their held perceptions and attitudes about school uniforms. The subjects were grouped according to their uniform participation history (with or without experience), and the scores were compared across the two populations. It was hypothesized that students who have participated in school uniform policies would have a more positive attitude of uniforms than students who have no experience. Ninety-seven students (n=97) were surveyed and the data collected revealed a significant difference in the two groups' perceptions. Students with school uniform experience reported a more positive attitude toward school uniform policies than students with no experience. The implications and further directions for this study are discussed.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	v
List of Figures	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Statement of the Issue	1
1.2 Purpose of the Study	2
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
2.1 Introduction of the Issue	6
2.2 History of School Uniforms	8
Chapter 3: Methodology	21
3.1 Participants	21
3.2 Materials	22
Chapter 4: Results	24
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion	26
5.1 Summary and Integration of Results	26
5.2 Implications	28
List of References	31
Appendix A: Survey	34

## List of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1 Mean Scores of Subjects' Responses	25

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Issue**

School uniform policies are mainly associated with private schools, but the possibility of their use in public schools as a means toward improving the behavioral climate has become a popular issue of debate in education. The idea of implementing school uniform policies in public schools became increasingly popular beginning in the 1990s when the U.S. Department of Education cited the positive results of a school uniform policy in a public school in Long Beach, California (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The U.S. Department of Education's *Manual on School Uniforms* (1996), which was nationally distributed to public school districts, discussed the possible benefits of a mandatory school uniform such as decreasing violence, instilling discipline, and helping students focus on their school work. School uniforms are sometimes viewed as an oppressive way of reducing student freedom. Some critics suggest that school uniforms may lower students' creativity and affect their ability to properly express themselves (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998). School-wide uniform policies force students to all dress similar and some feel that taking away students' freedom of expression may decrease their creative ability in some areas of educational development (West, Tidwell, Bomba, & Elmore, 1999). School uniforms attempt to foster equality through dress in student populations, which might be a possible way to address and possibly lower the prevalence of clothing related bullying. A school uniform policy may

help build a sense of school pride among the student population, and may also be able to bring students and the school community closer together. There are many perspectives on this issue, but the majority of the people vocal in this debate are removed from the issue directly. This study attempts to address the lack of student perspective on the issue of school uniform use in education.

Students closely removed from high school may have valuable insight into the pros and cons of school uniform use. Recent graduates from schools both with and without school uniforms can offer insight as to why they are in favor of dress codes being implemented, why they might be opposed to them, and the reasons behind these feelings. It is important to document the perceptions of these students because they are closely removed from schools that may be considering school uniform policies. Students this close to the issue can empathize with the school-aged population and identify with their feelings on the issue. It is students who can better describe how a dress code might affect their education positively or negatively. Understanding the perspectives of students who did or did not participate in school uniforms can be a useful way to determine whether a dress code can be a useful tool in making schools safer and education more effective.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions held by students about school uniforms. Comparing the perceptions of those who participated in school uniforms with those who did not can offer valuable insight as to how participation might affect perception. This study was conducted to further add to the

literature on school uniforms by comparing the perceptions held about school uniform use between students who wore school uniforms and those who did not.

Recent high school graduates can offer insight into how students perceive the effectiveness of school uniforms at enhancing the educational process. Student dress is a controversial topic in every school community. Dress codes exist at all levels of education, mainly to keep the children from wearing items that might be considered controversial or suggestive in any manner. A uniform policy could be useful to address what limits the school would like to impose in their dress code rules. The way a student dresses often places them in certain cliques or accentuates differences between individuals. With bullying being such a predominant issue in education right now, exploring ways to address this issue is of the utmost importance. School uniform policies could be considered as a possible option towards lowering the prevalence of clothing related bullying. Examining the perceptions of school uniforms held by students who have experienced issues that might be cured by uniform dress is way to determine if further exploration of school uniform implementation could be necessary and useful.

A sample population of college students from a small northeastern university was used to explore the perceptions they might hold about school uniforms. A researcher-created survey was used to help examine the perceptions and attitudes these students were willing to share on the topic. The perceptions and attitudes held by students who at one time participated in a school uniform policy were compared to those of students who have never participated in a mandatory school uniform.

## **Research Questions**

- What are the perceptions of school uniforms held by students who participated in school uniform policies?
- What are the perceptions of school uniforms held by students who have never participated in school uniform policies?
- How do the perceptions of these two populations compare or contrast?
- What are the overall student perceptions of school uniform use and effectiveness?

## **Hypothesis**

Students who have participated in a school uniform policy will have a more positive perception of school uniforms than students who have never participated in a school uniform.

## **Operational Definitions**

- Uniform – “dress of a distinctive design or fashion worn by members of a particular group and serving as a means of identification” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2011).
- Dress Code – “formally or socially imposed standards of dress” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2011).
- Perception – “awareness of the elements of environment through physical sensation” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2011).

## **Assumptions**

It is assumed that all participants in this study are aware of school uniform policies and their application in education.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include sample size, diversity of sample, and ratio of students with school uniform experience to students without school uniform experience.

**Summary**

Chapter two will present a review of the literature regarding uniforms, their use in education, and a discussion of the proponents and contestants of school uniform policies.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction of the Issue

“A safe and disciplined learning environment is the first requirement of a good school. Young people who are safe and secure, who learn basic American values and the essentials of good citizenship, are better students” (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. 1). Safety is an essential component of any learning environment. Functioning in any social setting is extremely difficult without feeling a level of comfort. Erikson’s (1968) person-in-environment perspective describes schools as one of the most important aspects of an individual’s social development. Apart from home and one’s family, the school setting is one of the most prominent environments in an individual’s social development. Not only is the social development largely affected, but it is during these formative years that educational development is fostered. It is the job of each institution of education to provide a safe and healthy environment for their students. Lopez (2003) suggests that dysfunctional schools, among other things, “can hinder the social and emotional development of children as they strive to solidify positive self-concepts of who they are and where they fit into the environment” (p. 397). Creating safer and healthier school environments is pivotal for both the social and educational development of students. One possible way of improving the safety of schools is through the institution of mandatory school uniforms. The U.S. Department of Education states in its *Manual on School Uniforms* that “uniforms by themselves cannot solve all of the problems of school discipline, but they can be one positive contributing factor to discipline and safety” (p. 3).

One of the first public school districts to adopt a school uniform policy was Long Beach, California in 1994. The effects resulting from this policy caused a dramatic shift in federal policy concerning school uniforms in public schools. The Long Beach Unified School District's published results were extremely positive, gained national notoriety, and influenced a push towards implementation of mandatory school uniforms in public schools nationwide. "In his 1996 State of the Union Address, Bill Clinton challenged schools 'to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship. And if that means that teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms'" (Boutelle, 2008, p. 36). A few weeks after the State of the Union Address, the President ordered the Department of Education to distribute manuals detailing school uniform implementation to the nation's 15,000 school districts (Portner, 1996). Until this point, school uniforms in the United States primarily existed in Catholic and parochial institutions. The idea of implementing school uniform mandates into public schools has become a controversial and widely addressed issue in education ever since the push for uniforms began to gain momentum as a result of federal encouragement. To fully grasp the purpose of implementing uniform dress in schools, the reasons for and against uniform dress code must be explored in today's society, but also throughout their history. The attitudes and perceptions of school uniforms must also be examined including those held by students who may or may not be directly affected by the implementation of a school uniform.

## **History of School Uniforms**

There are many arguments both for and against the implementation of uniforms in educational settings. Understanding the initial reasons and ideas behind the purpose for mandatory school uniforms is critical when examining their existence in education.

Hesapcioglu and Meseci Giorgetti (2009) noted that although there has been extensive research into the functions of school uniforms, “studies which focus on the origins of school uniform are neglected” (p. 1740). Examining the history of uniforms in educational settings teaches us about what they originally represented, why they were created, and why they were originally used in school settings. The initial motivation to have students dress in a uniform manner in school reflects the ideals of both the institution that introduced them and the society as a whole at the time.

Hesapcioglu and Meseci Giorgetti (2009) describe the common design of early uniforms reflecting religious tradition and religious habit. According to their research, education was controlled by secular clergy in eleventh century France. Rae (1990) identifies Christ’s Hospital in England in the sixteenth century as what was probably the first use of a uniform in an educational setting. Rae described the first school uniform as a “monastic cassock” (p.ix). Davidson (1990) explained the uniforms as a way to instill discipline and obedience in the students. They were expected to behave in a similar manner as the monks they resembled. This was the first example of the usefulness of school uniforms. Uniform dress codes sought to instill consistent student behavior in the schools where they were instituted. They were also used to signify the class of the students who wore them. “These early uniforms at Christ’s Hospital were designed to

emphasize the lower status of the children who wore them – the charity children” (Brunsma, 2004, p. 5). Brunsma continued, “This interesting fact, that uniforms were actually used to distinguish the lower class from everyone else in British society, is important for our understanding of the contemporary reality of school uniform discourse in American society” (2004, p.5). Hesapcioglu and Meseci Giorgetti (2009) discussed the French Revolution, and its influence on the school uniform. During this period, the school uniforms took on a “military character” (p.1743). The purpose of these uniforms was to instill obedience and incorporate a sense of nationalism. Uniforms began as a tool to influence student behavior and provide an identity to those who wore them.

A historical review of school uniform policies reveals the original intentions of their use in educational settings. The uniform represented the beliefs and morals that were stressed in the schools at that time. Structure and a level of obedience were instilled through the use of a uniformed dress code. Uniforms were also used to create a sense of community within the student population and potentially the nation in some instances. In addition, school uniforms were originally designed to identify students as members of a specific class as Brunsma (2004) indicated. This was an effective method of portraying the students as members of one distinct class. Essentially, this creates a level of equality among the students who participated in these early uniforms. The original purposes of the institution of school uniforms are still cited as a reason for their use today. The debate for and against school uniforms has existed as long as they have been implemented. Through this exploration of the history of school uniforms, we can better understand how uniforms can be used, and why, if at all, they should be.

## **The Case for School Uniforms**

“In response to growing levels of violence in our schools, many parents, teachers, and school officials have come to see school uniforms as one positive and creative way to reduce discipline problems and increase school safety” (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. 1). The Long Beach Unified School District was one of the first public school districts to implement a mandatory school uniform into their policy. Lopez (2003) highlighted the support of parents and community members in favor of school uniforms for helping to initiate the school uniform policy. In order to improve school safety issues, the district community decided that implementing school uniforms was one way to help improve the school climate as well as safety and performance issues. The school district was met with positive results through early evaluation. Overall, the LBUSD saw improvements in school attendance, academic achievement, and school safety (Lopez 2003). Lopez also identified that ethnic and racial tensions were lowered, and gang related activity was also reduced.

The LBUSD school uniform policy was nationally recognized, and President Bill Clinton visited the schools and was impressed enough to acknowledge the issue in his 1996 State of the Union Address (Firmin, Smith, & Perry, 2006). The Department of Education issued the *Manual on School Uniforms*, and the movement to implement school uniforms in public schools became a national issue. Some of the potential benefits of school uniforms, as described in the *Manual on School Uniforms* are:

- Decreasing violence and theft – even life-threatening situations – among students over designer clothing or expensive sneakers;

- Helping prevent gang members from wearing gang colors and insignia at school;
- Instilling students with discipline;
- Helping parents and students resist peer pressure;
- Helping students concentrate on their school work; and
- Helping school officials recognize intruders who come to the school (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. 1)

The manual describes effective ways of implementing school uniforms into school districts. It is evident through the Long Beach study that one of the most important factors in properly implementing uniform policies is having parental and community support. The subject is very controversial and it is important to have a unified support system in place when deciding if a school uniform is right for an individual community. Researching the effectiveness of school uniforms in districts that have tried mandatory school uniforms is one way to explore their effectiveness.

Decreasing school violence is a major focus in education today. Bullying is a prominent issue across the nation in U.S. schools, and finding ways to reduce school bullying is a priority on the federal level. With bullying being such a hot topic in education today, finding possible improvements that could be made to alleviate this problem are widely sought after. One such method could be implementing school uniforms. Scherer (1991) noticed that at Victor Berger Elementary School, an African-American Immersion School, student victimization decreased as a result of the school uniform the students were wearing. Clothing-related fights were reportedly down, and the teachers attributed this welcomed change to the school uniform policy.

The U.S. Department of Education (1996) describes the positive effects of the school uniform policy that was instituted in Long Beach, California in the *Manual on School Uniforms*. This policy was put into action in 1994, and it was extremely effective in reducing school violence. “District officials found that in the year following implementation of the school uniform policy, overall school crime decreased 36 percent, fights decreased 51 percent, sex offenses decreased 74 percent, weapons offenses decreased 50 percent, assault and battery offenses decreased 34 percent, and vandalism decreased 18 percent” (p. 3).

School uniforms may also represent an effective way to remove gang related activity from schools. By mandating what must be worn in school, administrators remove the possibility for gang related attire to be displayed through student clothing. Ryan and Ryan (1998) suggest that gang communication in schools may be prevented with school uniforms. “In schools, gangs mainly communicate through sporting colors and other insignia” (p. 81). By reducing a gang’s unity in attire and ability to communicate openly, their influence in the school lowers. “By preventing the wearing of gang colors and display of gang related paraphernalia, schools send a zero tolerance message to gangs that reside in their community that they will not be allowed influence in the school system” (Ryan & Ryan, 1998, p. 81). Wade and Stafford (2003) found that teachers in schools with uniform policies perceived lower levels of gang presence. Removing the student’s ability to freely display gang related clothing can help to keep gang related activity out of and away from the school. Gursky (1996) identified school uniforms as an effective method to identify possible intruders or strangers in and around

schools. Keeping students in identifiable dress makes intrusion of school zones easily detectable. All of these positive effects of school uniforms could possibly serve to make schools safer and less susceptible to violent activity.

Some proponents of school uniforms cite increased levels of achievement among school populations who participate in mandatory school uniforms (Thomas, 1994). Elder (1999) identified an increase in honor roll students at a public middle school where uniforms had been established. One possible explanation could be that school uniforms increase the level of focus in the student population. The students may be less distracted by their dress and the dress of their peers, and more focused on the learning process. School uniforms were only one in a series of changes in Elder's (1999) example, however their presence is notable. Thomas (1994) also describes students who participate in school uniform policies as having higher levels of preparedness. School uniforms may not be the single answer to improving student achievement, but it is important to recognize any possibility of improvement in education and attempt to determine the reason for it. If school uniforms are a possible cause, they are worth the examination to determine if their use is effective.

Caruso (1996) described the environment of a school and its relation to dress as a competitive atmosphere. Many students are distracted by their dress and appearance in school, and less focused on their education. Students from lower income families may feel inadequate with their dress compared to other students. This could be a source for bullying and even school violence. The feeling of inadequacy in dress may also cause students to struggle with attendance. The cost of school wardrobes for students from a

lower SES could be alleviated by enforcing a school uniform. Although purchasing the uniform may seem like a burden to place on students, families would be less pressured to update wardrobes for school. Caruso (1996) suggests that the use of school uniforms could help families better afford school attire by mandating uniform dress. The students could feel less of a stigma, and the sense of belongingness could be enhanced through unity in dress.

School uniforms have been identified by advocates as being an effective tool in improving student behavior. Gursky (1996) notes that proponents of school uniforms suggest these policies could help lower suspension rates and substance abuse within the student population. Gentile and Imberman (2009) conducted a study in a large urban school district in the southwest that found school uniforms have positive effects on improving school attendance rates. Improving the behavior of the student body is an important aspect to toward improving education in schools. If school uniforms can possibly attribute to improving student behavior, their application needs to be further explored to better understand how and why this might occur.

Bodine (2003) describes the school uniform debate as changing from what was once a movement to level the playing field for students from lower income communities to becoming a movement that is focusing on improving the overall school climate through the use of school uniforms. Bodine described how the students' "common dress was also advocated for simplicity, practicality, and frugality" (p. 67). This idea of commonality has given way to new beliefs that school uniforms can do more for the educational process than just the sense of equality of dress. Brunσμα and Rockquemore

(1998) suggest that advocates of school uniforms even attribute their use to psychological outcomes such as increased self-esteem and feelings of unity among the students partaking in the similar dress. Jarchow (1992) noticed an increased feeling of school spirit exists in student populations in New Zealand as a result of school uniform policies. School uniforms exist as a technique to improve school climate and the overall educational environment. Their positive effects have been examined, but there are further questions as to exactly how responsible the uniforms themselves are for the improved conditions in these examples. “Relatively little empirical research has been conducted to date for how the implementation of uniform policies have worked and not worked successfully” (Firmin, Smith, & Perry, 2006, p. 147). There is much research to do on this subject to further explore how effective uniform policies can be.

### **The Case against School Uniforms**

School uniforms do show some signs of positive effects in schools, but there are also many opponents of these policies. Research into the effectiveness of school uniforms is very lacking (Firmin, Smith, & Perry, 2006). The need for more concrete and data backed evidence into the usefulness of school uniforms in improving education exists, and many people have issues with uniform policies for a variety of reasons.

Those who oppose school uniforms point to the lack of empirical evidence that supports the claims made by uniform proponents (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998; LaPointe, Holoman, & Alleyne, 1992). Brunsma and Rockquemore (1998) found that student uniforms had no direct effect on substance use, behavioral problems, or attendance in their study of tenth grade students. They even noticed a negative effect of

uniforms on student academic achievement. Bodine (2003) disputed these findings of negative effects of school uniforms, but the debate rests on the fact that there is a limited amount of research available to properly identify the positives and negatives that school uniforms offer. Further investigation is necessary to understand if uniforms can be effective tools in education, and if so, how they can be properly implemented to maximize their effectiveness.

Some opponents of school uniforms believe that the majority of uniform policies are implemented in urban areas and therefore being forced upon minority and predominately poor student populations (Brunsmas & Rockquemore, 1998; Thomas, 1994). Mandatory school uniform policies force these low income students to purchase and participate in this process. Gursky (1996) mentions the fact that some families struggle with the inability to afford school uniforms and the pressure these policies place on them. The American Civil Liberties Union is one group that has expressed concern in this matter (Gursky, 1996). Implementing school uniforms in public schools in lower socioeconomic school districts has a stigmatizing effect on the perception of these schools. "School uniforms in public schools are becoming associated with schools facing violence problems" (Walmsley, 2011). It is important that school uniforms do not simply become associated with schools that are perceived negatively regarding their school climate and student behavior.

A major concern that school uniforms supporters face is the idea that mandatory uniform dress reduces student creativity and restricts student individuality. "School uniforms suppress students' individuality by mandating standardization of appearance

and removing student expression” (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998). Violation of students’ right to freedom of expression is a major concern for some researchers (West, Tidwell, Bomba, & Elmore, 1999). Infringing on students’ right to self-expression through dress may restrict students from expanding on or realizing their creative potential. Enforcing uniform dress could also possibly give a bad example of conformity to the students (West et al, 1999).

There have been many court cases concerning school uniforms and students’ First Amendment rights to express themselves through dress. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* is one example of litigation that protected the students’ right to express themselves within limits. In this case, students were suspended for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War (Mitchell & Knechtle, (2003). The court ruled that preventing these students the right to wear the armbands was a violation of the First Amendment, but the court affirmed that if any disruptions occurred as a result of the presence of the armbands, the school had the right to ban them. The overwhelming results of court cases relating to school uniforms and the First Amendment were ruled in favor of the schools right to enforce their dress code policies. “The law of the land strengthens proponents’ arguments” (Mitchell & Knechtle, 2003, p. 492). They continue, “The United States Supreme Court holds that the states have the power to control the conduct of students. Therefore, many states insist that the implementation of the school uniform policies and the need for student safety outweighs public school students’ rights to select school dress.

Opponents of school uniforms maintain that research on school uniforms that exhibits positive outcomes is largely unsupported by the empirical data that exists (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998). One possible reason for this is the suggestion that implementation of school uniforms may coincide with widespread changes in school policy (Wilkins, 1999). Wilkins (1999) suggests that schools may show improvement not only as a result of school uniform policies, but increased enforcement and involvement by both teachers and parents could also be a reason for the positive outcomes. “Uniform policies may indirectly affect school environment and student outcomes by providing a visible and public symbol of commitment to school improvement and reform” (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998, p. 53).

School uniforms have many advocates and opponents. Their existence in education is nothing new and may become more prevalent in the future. It is important to explore both the positive and negative effects school uniforms have on education to decide if their implementation is a possible way to improve a school system. Effectively enforcing the school uniform is pivotal when introducing a new policy to make the transition positive to parents and faculty, but most importantly to the students who participate in the uniform process. The attitudes and perceptions that the school community holds about school uniforms are very important to examine when exploring school uniform policies.

### **Attitudes and Perceptions of School Uniforms**

Relatively little research exists analyzing the public attitude held toward school uniform policies (West, Tidwell, Bomba, & Elmore, 1999; DaCosta, 2006). The attitudes

and perceptions about school uniforms that are held by members of school communities that do and do not have school uniform policies are important pieces of the debate for and against uniforms in schools. Understanding the public's perception of school uniforms can help to increase the existing research in the debate over school uniform implementation. Examining why those against school uniforms hold their opinions can help to explain why uniforms are viewed negatively, and can assist in finding ways to change negative attitudes held about uniforms in schools. West, Tidwell, Bomba, and Elmore (1999) surveyed parents of fourth graders in Mississippi to measure the attitudes they held about school uniform implementation in public schools. They found that a slight majority of the parents were in favor of instituting school uniforms. Parent perception of school uniforms is important, but understanding the attitudes held by those directly affected by the uniform policy, namely the students, is necessary to explore how school uniforms influence the student population.

A study conducted by DaCosta (2006) examined the reactions to a newly imposed school uniform policy. The study found that, "The overwhelming majority of students were opposed to and non-compliant with the school uniform policy, and that these responses were unrelated to school performance" (DaCosta, 2006, p. 49). The students that participated in this study were very recently introduced to the school uniform policy. It would be useful to reexamine the attitudes these students held about the uniform policy after an extended period of time. Murray (1997) compared student perceptions of school uniforms across two South Carolina schools, one with a uniform policy, and one without. The students in the school with the uniform policy rated the school climate as more

positive than the students at the non-uniform school. This comparative study examining these two student populations explores the student perception of school climate in relation to school uniform policy. Studies examining the perceptions of students who participate in school uniforms are useful toward understanding the effects these policies have on the student population.

The attitudes and perceptions toward school uniform policies held by students who participated in school uniforms and those who did not are important to examine to see how participation affects perception. Comparing the two populations' attitudes toward school uniform effects on education will help to explain how participation in a school uniform policy might improve the perception held by these students. There is very little research conducted on the perceptions held about school uniforms by students themselves, and adding to the research is a critical purpose of this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Implementation of school uniform policies in public education is often met with both acceptance and opposition. The research discussed in the literature review suggests that there may be some positive effects attributed to implementation of school uniform policies. A positive perception of school uniforms might be that they create a sense of unity between students and might contribute to a more positive behavioral climate in student populations. A negative perception of school uniforms might be that uniforms restrict a student's freedom of expression and lower a student's creative potential. The aim of this research was to examine the attitudes about school uniforms held by students who were directly affected by these policies. The attitudes of two populations of students, those of have participated in a school uniform policy and those who have not, were compared to examine the differences in perceptions of school uniforms between these two populations. The purpose of this study was to determine what effect participation has on perception or attitude about uniform policies in education.

#### **Participants**

Ninety-seven (n=97) college students from a northeastern university were randomly selected to participate in this study. Thirty subjects had experience participating in a school uniform policy, and sixty-seven had no experience participating in a school uniform policy. The students were not asked to indicate their gender or any

other background information other than their participation history with a school uniform policy.

### **Materials**

A survey was created to measure student perception and attitude about school uniform policies and the effectiveness of these policies in improving education. The survey consisted of ten questions that were answered using a 4 – point Likert Scale measuring the students' level of agreement with the statement provided. The scale's four points ranged from lowest level of agreement to highest level of agreement in the following levels: (1) Disagree, (2) Somewhat Disagree, (3) Somewhat Agree, and (4) Agree.

See survey Appendix A.

### **Design**

The experiment used a between-subjects design. The independent variable was student participation history in a school uniform policy. Subjects responded as either having participated in a school uniform policy during their education or never having participated in a school uniform policy. The dependent variable was the subjects' score on the survey.

### **Procedure**

Surveys were randomly distributed to college students both online and in classroom settings at a northeastern university. Ninety-seven (n=97) total surveys were completed and analyzed. Thirty of the subjects had experience participating in a school uniform policy and sixty-seven subjects had never participated in a school uniform

policy. The survey recorded the subjects' school uniform participation history and requested a response to ten statements regarding school uniform use. Participants listed their level of agreement with the statements using a 4 – Point Likert Scale ranging from (1) representing disagreement, and (4) representing agreement. The surveys were collected and grouped based on the participants' school uniform participation history. Students who had previously participated in a school uniform policy were placed in one group, and those who had never participated in a school uniform policy were placed in another. Each subject's responses were added up to reveal their overall attitude regarding school uniforms and their effectiveness on a scale of "0 – 40," with zero representing the lowest possible score and forty representing the highest possible score. A higher score indicated a more positive perception of school uniforms and their effectiveness. The scores were placed in an independent samples t – test to analyze the results. The subjects' mean scores were measured and compared across the two independent variables to measure the difference in student attitude and perception of school uniform policies between the two populations.

## Chapter 4

### Results

Ninety-seven subjects (n=97) completed the survey. Thirty subjects had experience participating in a school uniform policy, and sixty-seven subjects had no experience participating in a school uniform policy. The two groups of subjects, “uniform” and “non-uniform,” responded with their level of agreement to ten survey statements about the usefulness of school uniform policies. The responses were analyzed to determine if there is a difference in perceptions or attitudes about school uniform policies between students who have uniform participation experience and students who do not have any participation experience. The research was conducted to determine if participation has any effect on perception or attitude. It was hypothesized that students who have school uniform experience would have a more positive perception of school uniform policies than those students who had no school uniform experience. The responses to the surveys were analyzed to determine the subjects’ perception of school uniforms. A higher mean score indicated a more positive perception of school uniforms.

The mean score for “uniform” subjects was 30.0000 out of a possible 40.0000 and the mean score for “non-uniform” subjects was 24.9104 out of a possible 40.0000 as depicted in Figure 1. An independent samples t – test was conducted to compare the two populations’ mean scores yielding a score of  $t_{95} = -3.726$  and a significance (two tailed) of .000. Subjects who participated in school uniform policies revealed a significantly higher score than those who had never participated in a school uniform policy. Subjects

with experience wearing school uniforms were more likely to have a more positive perception of these policies and their effectiveness in a school environment. Subjects who had no history of participation in a school uniform policy were more likely to have a lower overall perception of school uniforms and their effectiveness in school policy than the group of students who have experienced wearing school uniforms.

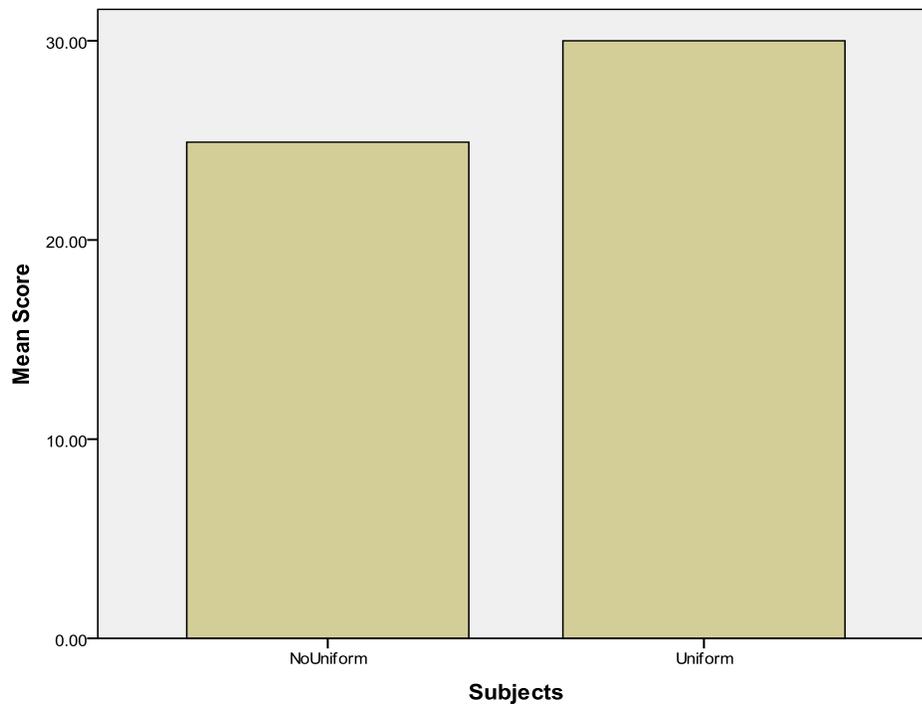


Figure 1 Mean Scores of Subjects' Responses

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **Summary and Integration of Results**

The purpose of this research was to determine if participation in a school uniform policy has any effect on the perception of the usefulness of uniform policies in education. It was hypothesized that students who had a history of participation in a school uniform policy would have a more positive perception or attitude about school uniforms than students who have never participated in a uniform policy in a school setting. The ninety-seven (n=97) subjects involved in this study listed their level of agreement toward ten statements describing the effectiveness or usefulness of school uniform policies. The scores recorded through these surveys were analyzed by comparing the responses of “uniform” students and “non-uniform” students.

The results of the study indicate that there is a significant difference in responses between the two groups. Students who have participated in school uniform policies indicated a more positive attitude toward the usefulness of school uniforms in education. Subjects who had no experience with school uniforms showed a less positive attitude towards school uniform policies. The results of the study suggest that participation in a school uniform policy could positively influence one’s perception of uniform policy usefulness.

The research comparing these two populations is limited as discussed in the literature review. One study that revealed a similar result was Murray’s (1997) study of

two South Carolina schools. Murray's study revealed that students attending a school where uniforms were mandatory perceived their school climate as more positive than the students attending a different school with no uniform policy. Murray's study does not indicate that uniforms were the causal factor in the positive perception of the school's climate, but the difference in dress code policy at the two schools suggests that students participating in school uniforms are more inclined to have a more positive view of their school climate. The current study focused more specifically on student attitudes about uniform policies and the effectiveness of these policies, but the results are similar to Murray's findings. The questions included in the survey distributed to the subjects included the positive effects that school uniforms might have on a school's climate. The attitudes held by students who participated in school uniforms suggest a more positive school climate at schools with uniform policies, and suggest that uniforms might influence a more positive educational environment.

DaCosta's (2006) study examined the attitudes of students who were recently subjected to a newly imposed school uniform policy. These students were overwhelmingly opposed to the new uniform policy. These results conflict with the findings of the current study, but the immediacy of the students' reaction to the newly imposed uniform policy may be a result. A follow-up study to reexamine the subjects after a period of time could be useful to identify if the students' attitudes change over time. It could be suspected that imposing a uniform policy on unwilling students may be met with some opposition. It might be useful to explore the attitudes of students in a study where students attending a school with mandatory uniforms have the policy lifted

to explore the attitudes these students may have after the change. Both studies could be explored to see how students react to changes in uniform policies. These would also be useful in determining the proper way to implement a uniform policy using an effective transitional period. The current study suggests that perhaps the students included in DaCosta's study might change their attitude toward school uniforms after an extended period of time experiencing the newly imposed school uniform policy.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study suggest that much of the negative criticism of school uniforms could be a product of individuals who may have no experience participating in a school uniform policy. Research has indicated that school uniforms can have positive effects on the educational environment. Experiencing school uniform policies first hand may allow students to better understand their usefulness. Experimenting with uniform policies can serve to broaden the perspectives of students about the issue and help determine if they are opposed to uniform policies or not. Identifying that students who participated in uniform policies are more inclined to view them in a positive manner suggests that condemnation of such policies may be unwarranted. If the students subjected to these policies proclaim their usefulness, more schools may be willing to experiment with implementing uniforms to try to improve school conditions. Students who have experienced uniform policies are in a position to expand on the public perceptions of school uniforms. It is students and others close to the issue of school uniforms that offer the most valuable insight into the usefulness of these policies.

## **Limitations**

The sample size of this study (n=97) was relatively small for a study utilizing a short survey. While the ratio of students with school uniform experience to those with none was reasonable (30:67) considering the ratio of uniform schools to non-uniform schools, a more even amount of subjects in each group would be a stronger source of subject responses to analyze. The subjects that participated in this study were comprised of a relatively small range of regional and racial specificity. A broader subject pool would be more useful to explore perceptions across a more culturally diverse population. This study could easily be recreated using different populations to address these issues. The survey used in this study was created by the researcher and the statements used within were not based on any empirical evidence. One statement in particular consisted of a double negative that may have confused some participants. While minor, it would be necessary to investigate what effect, if any, this had on subject responses or the survey as a whole.

## **Further Directions**

Further studies may want to examine the reasons for the attitudes shared about school uniform policies. Students may have different reasons for having strong feelings either for or against school uniforms, and these reasons may offer explanations into how uniforms are viewed by students who have either worn school uniforms in the past or have not. Searching through student responses on the effectiveness of school policies could allow for the identification of reoccurring themes that might help to reveal why

uniforms are promoted or opposed within these populations. Identifying the trend of perceptions as indicated in this study is the first step in understanding how useful uniforms can be in education. It is what we can do with this information that can help us understand how effective uniform policies can be, and how they can be implemented properly to help improve the educational landscape for students of all ages.

## List of References

- Bodine, A. (2003). School uniforms, academic achievement, and uses of research. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 97, 67-71.
- Boutelle, M. (2008, February). Uniforms: Are they a good fit? *Education Digest*, 73(6), 34-37.
- Brunsma, D. L., & Rockquemore, K. A. (1998). Effects of student uniforms on attendance, behavior problems, substance use, and academic achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 92(1), 53-62.
- Brunsma, L. D. (2004). *The school uniform movement and what it tells us about American education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Caruso, P. (1996). Individuality vs. conformity: The issue behind school uniforms. *NAASP Bulletin*, 80(581), 83-88.
- DaCosta, K. (2006). Dress code blues: An exploration of urban students' reactions to a public high school uniform policy. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 75(1), 49-59.
- Davidson, A. (1990). *Blazers, badges and boaters: A pictorial history of school uniform*. Great Britain: Scope Books Ltd.
- Dress Code. (2011). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dress+code>
- Elder, D. L. (1999). *Evaluation of school uniform policy at John Adams and Truman Middle Schools for Albuquerque Public Schools*. Albuquerque: The Department of Research, Development & Accountability.
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Firmin, M., Smith, S., & Perry, L. (2006, Fall). School uniforms: A qualitative analysis of aims and accomplishments at two Christian schools. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 15(2), 143-168.
- Gentile, E., & Imberman, S. (2009). *Dressed for success: Do school uniforms improve student behavior, attendance, and achievement?* (No 2009-03, Working Papers, University of Houston). Retrieved from <http://www.uh.edu>

- Gursky, D. (1996). "Uniform" improvement? *Education Digest*, 61, 46-48.
- Hesapcioglu, M., & Meseci Giorgetti, F. (2009). The origin of black smock and white collar. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 9(4), 1739-1750.
- Jarchow, E. (1992). Ten ideas worth stealing from New Zealand. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73, 394-395.
- LaPoint, V., Holloman, L., & Alleyne, S. (1992, October). The role of dress codes, uniforms in urban schools. *NAASP Bulletin*, 76, 20-26.
- Lopez, R. A. (2003, Fall). The Long Beach unified school district uniform initiative: A prevention-intervention strategy for urban schools. *Journal of Negro Education*, 72(4), 396-405.
- Mitchell, H. W., & Knechtle, J. C. (2003, Fall). Uniforms in public schools and the first amendment: A constitutional analysis. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(4), 487-494.
- Murray, R. K. (1997, December). The impact of school uniforms on school climate. *NAASP Bulletin*, 81(593), 106-112.
- Perception. (2011). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perception>
- Portner, J. (1996). Department to issue guidelines on school uniforms. *Education Week*, 15(24). 27.
- Rae, J. (1990). Foreword. In A. Davidson, *Blazers, badges and boaters: A pictorial history of uniform* (pp.ix-xi). Great Britain: Scope Books Ltd.
- Ryan, R. P., & Ryan, T. E. (1998). School uniforms: Espirit de corps. *The School Community Journal*, 8(2), 81-84.
- Scherer, M. (1991). School snapshot: Focus on African-American culture. *Educational Leadership*, 49, 17-19.
- Thomas, S. (1994, October 20). Uniforms in the schools: Proponents say it cuts competition: Others are not so sure. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 11, 44-47.
- Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District, 393 U.S. 503, 511 (1969).
- Uniform. (2011). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/uniform>

U.S. Department of Education. (1996). *Manual on school uniforms. Updates on legislation, budget and activities*. Retrieved October, 21, 2011, from <http://www.ed.gov/updates/uniforms.html>.

Wade, K. K., & Stafford, M. E. (2003). Public school uniforms: Effect on perceptions of gang presence, school climate, and student self-perceptions. *Education and Urban Society*, 35, 399-420.

Walmsley, A. (2011, March). What the United Kingdom can teach the United States about school uniforms. *Kappan Magazine*, 92(6), 63-66.

West, C. K., Tidwell, D. K., Bomba, A. K., & Elmore, P. A. (1999). Attitudes of parents about school uniforms. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 91(2), 92-96.

Wilkins, J. (1999). School uniforms. *Humanist*, 59, 19-22.

## Appendix A

### Student Perceptions of School Uniforms

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate student perceptions/attitudes of mandatory school uniforms. The research, entitled “Student Perceptions of School Uniforms: A Comparative Study of Students Who Participated in School Uniforms and Those Who Did Not” is being conducted by Jonathan Mimmo of the Psychology Department, Rowan University, in partial fulfillment of his M.A. degree in School Psychology. For this study you will be asked to rate your feelings towards school uniforms and their effectiveness in improving the educational process. Your participation should not exceed 15 minutes. There are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Participation is voluntary, and consent will be assumed if the questions have been answered. You must be at least 18 years old to participate, and comprehension of the questions (English) is mandatory. The data collected will be evaluated and submitted for publication in a research journal. Your responses will be anonymous and all data gathered will be kept confidential. Participation in this survey will in no way have any effect on your class or university standing.

By taking this survey you agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that you are in no way identified. Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study, please contact Jonathan Mimmo at [mimmoj13@students.rowan.edu](mailto:mimmoj13@students.rowan.edu) or his faculty advisor, Dr. Roberta Dihoff at [dihoff@rowan.edu](mailto:dihoff@rowan.edu).

*Please select one:*  
 Have you ever attended a school where uniforms were mandatory?  Yes  No

<i>Please circle the number that best describes your level of agreement with the statement.</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
School uniforms boost school spirit and increase the sense of a school community.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms are an effective way of improving student academic achievement.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms improve student focus by reducing in-class distractions.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms are an effective way of improving student behavior.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms are an effective way of reducing clothing related bullying.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms reduce the prevalence of clothing related cliques.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms are an effective way of reducing gang related behavior in school.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms do <i>not</i> reduce student creativity.	1	2	3	4
School uniforms are a cost effective alternative to non-uniform student school wardrobes.	1	2	3	4

Overall, I feel school uniforms are an effective way to improve education.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
--	----------	----------	----------	----------

*Thank you for completing this survey!*