Public school uniforms: will school uniforms fit the growing needs of a regional high school?

Jeanette Seeman
Rowan University

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PUBLIC SCHOOL UNIFORMS
WILL SCHOOL UNIFORMS FIT THE GROWING NEEDS OF A REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL?

By
Jeanette Seeman

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of the Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University May 2005

Approved by
Dr. Kern

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This study examined the need for a uniform dress policy at Clearview Regional High School. The subjects included 285 students along with 3 high school administrators and 65 teaching faculty and staff. The students completed a 7-item survey consisting of five structured multiple-choice questions, and two unstructured open-ended response questions. The survey also provided the opportunity for the students to express additional comments. The survey measured the students' grade level while measuring the students' opinions regarding a uniform dress policy at Clearview Regional High School. The administration and faculty completed a 7-item survey consisting of five structured multiple-choice questions, and two unstructured open-ended response questions. The survey also provided the opportunity for the administration and staff to express additional comments. The survey measured the years of educational experience of the administration in the high school and teaching staff along with the opinions of these professionals regarding a uniform dress policy for the high school students. The findings suggest that the teaching staff expressed a need for a uniform policy in the high school, while the students and administrative staff felt otherwise.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Public school systems across the nation have, since their inception, required a dress code. Over the course of the last century, dress codes have changed to meet the ever-evolving attitudes of our culture and especially our fashion industry. Most recently, school districts across the country have been studying and, to a great extent, even implementing the concept of uniforms in school. Motivated by the need to take away the focus from individual style and appearance among students, school districts wanted to create a learning environment conducive to the educational process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher and student opinions regarding a uniform student dress policy at Clearview Regional High School. With the ever-increasing enrollment in the district, the teachers and administrators in the high school have experienced difficulty monitoring the board of education approved dress code policy over the past few years. According to the high school assistant principals, Teachers and administrators have found the dress code policy ambiguous in language and lacking in description of consequence (T. Triola, personal communication, September 14, 2004). The adoption of a uniform dress policy for students would propose to remedy the existing dress code problems as well as to increase the overall students’ learning environment (United States Department, 2004). This study was conducted to determine
whether a uniform policy was desired and considered necessary at Clearview Regional High School.

Definitions

*Dress Code:* A dress code is a set of rules, as in a school, indicating the approved manner of dress.

*ISLLC:* ISLLC is an acronym for the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, which is a consortium of educational associations working together to promote professional development for school leaders.

*School Policy:* A school policy is a plan or course of action in a school intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters.

*School Administrator:* A school administrator is one who administers affairs in a school; one who directs, manages, executes, or dispenses; a leader.

*1st Amendment:* The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” – *The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.*

*14th Amendment, Section 1:* The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. 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 to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of
the laws." - *The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.*

*ACLU*: **abbr.** American Civil Liberties Union, this is an organization committed to
conserve America’s original civic values - the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

*Elitism*: Elitism is the belief that certain persons or members of certain classes or
groups deserve favored treatment by virtue of their perceived superiority, as in intellect,
social status, or financial resources.

*Educational Reform*: Educational reform intends to provide improvement or a change
for the better to an educational system.

**Limitations of the Study**

Although the research for the background information of this study was represented
by educational institutions across the United States, the research conducted concerning
the opinions and feelings about uniforms in the public schools was limited to the students
and staff of Clearview Regional High School. The middle school staff and students,
although included in the district, were not a part of this study. Because this particular
high school is located in middle to upper-class community in South Jersey (New Jersey
School, 2004), the findings of the research may not be valid nor applicable to high
schools across the state of New Jersey nor those across the country. The research was
conducted over only a few months and at the beginning of the school year.

**Setting of the Study**

This study was conducted at the high school in the Clearview Regional High School
District, which includes both rural and suburban areas of Harrison and Mantua
Townships in southern New Jersey. The total population in these areas is approximately
23,000. The socio-economic status of these communities is middle to upper class including occupations in the executive, professional and farming industries. The community is growing and the farmland is diminishing. The dominant political representation in these townships has slowly shifted from democrat to republican with the influx of affluent homes being constructed and bought on the once harvested farmland (New Jersey School, 2004).

The Clearview Regional High School District services students living in either Mantua Township or in Mullica Hill. Both townships have experienced tremendous growth in population over the past 10 years creating obstacles for the educational system. The Clearview Regional High School District is currently working on its second addition to both the middle school and high school to accommodate the continued student enrollment.

The Clearview Regional High School system is composed of both a middle school and a high school. Both schools are located on one campus with athletic fields and facilities used by students, faculty, and community groups. The sending districts of Harrison Township and Mantua Township make up the student population in both buildings. The regional school population is 98% Caucasian. The middle school population, grades seven and eight, is composed of 815 students this year. The middle school faculty is made up of 75 teachers and 2 classroom aids with an administrative staff of one principal and one assistant principal. The student population in the high school is 1,421. In the high school, the faculty is composed of 112 faculty members and 3 classroom aids. Two Assistant principals and one principal make up the administrative team in the high school. Both schools offer extensive programs across the curricula including an accelerated math
lab in the middle school, the communications academy in the high school, the Cisco business-to-work program, and 7 advanced placement courses in the core curriculum courses at the high school. Last year alone, 1.7 million dollars in scholarship money was awarded to the graduating seniors. After graduating from Clearview Regional High School, 92% of the students attend college or a trade school (New Jersey School, 2004)

The Significance of the Study

With the population growth and limited building capacity that the Clearview Regional High School District has experienced over the past few years, the high school administration and staff have expressed concerns of increased disciplinary referrals and decreased academic achievement (T. Triola, personal communication, September 14, 2004). Suffice to say, educational problems have arisen at Clearview Regional High School as a direct result of the ever-increasing student population; as the student population has drastically increased over the past few years, the number of disciplinary referrals have increased as well as the number of dress code violations. Teachers have expressed that valuable educational time has been wasted as a result of addressing these dress code violators. Without the opportunity to provide for smaller class size, additional teaching positions, or immediate building space, this study was conducted to determine whether the teachers, administrators and students believe that a uniform dress policy would provide an opportunity to improve the overall learning environment at Clearview Regional High School.
Relationship of the Study to ISLLC

A uniform policy is an educational movement of change; a reform effort to continue to improve the academic success of students through advocating a school culture conducive to learning. ISLLC Standard 2, *Student Learning and Staff Professional Growth*, states that an educational leader must promote and sustain a school culture through knowledge understanding of a change process (Council of Chief, 1996). The intention of a school uniform policy is the assurance of a safer and more supportive learning environment as the disposition of Standard 2 describes (Ibid). Also stated in Standard 2 is the need to assess the school climate regularly; the dress code should be a part of this assessment (Ibid). Fashion styles change regularly and students become subjected to the peer-pressures of these styles, often inappropriate for school. As a leader, administrators must identify and address these educational barriers to ensure that the school is organized and aligned for success. Through the development of the policy, an administrator must consider all of the parties that the policy will affect. ISLLC Standard 4, *Effective Community Relations*, describes a successful leader as one who promotes the success of students through a collaborative effort while maintaining a knowledge understanding of a diverse school community and of school leadership in a modern society (Ibid). Although a uniform policy promotes students’ dress to be “uniform”, an administrator must consider the dynamics of the student body and community within the school system and the diverse backgrounds integrated in the school culture. Creating a uniform policy that best represents the school population needs the collaborative help of all of those affected by the policy; students will be required to follow the policy while teachers and administrators will be required to enforce the policy (Ibid). A successful policy must be
created through the efforts of the administrators, teaching staff and students. Without inviting contributions from the students themselves, creating a uniform policy that would best service the students would be difficult to create and then enforce. In today’s modern society, developing a policy to meet the needs of teachers and students is accomplished through a collaborative process facilitated by an engaging leader working toward a safer and more effective learning environment (Ibid).

Organization of the Study

This study as organized as follows:

Chapter 2, Review of the Literature, will include the review of studies on both the promotion and resistance to uniform policies in the public schools. Chapter 3, The Design of the Study, will define the subjects of my study; the procedures used, and the methods of gathering data. Chapter 4 Findings presents the findings from the data collection in the form of tables and figures. Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study, contains the conclusion and recommendations based on the findings and discussion for future research.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

The literature review revealed the controversy that public school uniform policies provoke. The data collected in this research may help to close this gap in the research and help define the foundation of the desire for or of opposition to public school uniform policies.

The evolutionary concept of mandating students to wear uniforms to school has initiated extensive research across the educational spectrums, of administrators, faculty, students, and community. Much of the research has shown a positive reception of this ever-growing desire by public schools to incorporate a uniform policy. According to June Million, Director of the Public Information of National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the topic of uniforms in the public schools was the one she was most frequently asked about during the year 2002 - 2003 (J. Million, personal communication, March 26, 2003). Public school uniforms was the topic that received the most “hits” on the NAESP website (Toto, 2003). Million stated that industry had reported an increase in uniform sales over the past few years suggesting that more and more public schools were adapting the idea of uniforms (J. Million, personal communication, March 26, 2003).

As of 1997, 3% of public schools of the nations’ public schools required students to wear uniforms to school (National Center, 1998). According to the NAESP, the implementation of uniforms in the public schools across the nation has shown a dramatic
increase. “Results of NAESP’s February, 2000, telephone survey of 755 principals nationwide showed that one in five (21%) public schools had uniform policies” (NAESP, 2000, p. 2). This research was relevant to administrators because the investigation and implementation of school uniform policies across the U.S. was now a trend. The importance of this issue is almost an obligation for school administrators to research. Parents, students, and teachers were willingly gathering information on the implementation and outcomes of school uniform policies (Toto, 2003). Administrators must stay abreast of the migration toward the population of these policies.

Several studies have suggested that the hope for academic and disciplinary improvement were the top two motivating factors for implementing uniform policies (Peters-Coleman, 1996; McCarthy, Cambron-McCabe, & Thomas, 1998; Speer, 1998; Wilson, 1998; Wingert & Pan, 1999; McCarthy, 2001; Gilfillian, 2003). In addition, safety, the muting of socio-economic differences, the discouragement of gang activities (Speer, 1998), and a renewed sense of pride (Peters-Coleman, 1996) were motivating factors as well. Spoer (1998) even suggested that school employees should wear uniforms instead of a simple badge. The recognition of the employees as a unit was described the same way, as a way to boost self-esteem and pride. Through a research study comparing two middle schools, one with a uniform policy and one without, Wingert and Pan (1999) revealed that a uniform policy does affect student attitudes positively. The lead researcher in that study concluded that those students who did wear uniforms felt as if they were part of a team (Wingert & Pan, 1999). Gilfillian (2003), a reporter for the Atlantic City Press who seems to be following the implementation of the
uniform policy in Middle Township New Jersey, suggested that districts such as Middle
Township intend to improve school community and pride with the uniform policy.

The Long Beach Unified School District in California implemented a pilot uniform
policy in 1989 to determine the effects that required uniforms might have on student
behavior and achievement (Wilson, 1998). Because the district reported a decrease in
absenteeism and racial tensions and an improvement in academic achievement, the
parents and administrators were satisfied with the success of the policy (Wilson, 1998).
Furthermore, the Long Beach policy allowed parents to apply for an exemption to “opt
out” of the uniform policy for those who felt their 14th Amendment rights were being
violated (Wilson, 1998). However, less than 1% of the parents in the Long Beach district
(2001) all agreed that districts planning to propose uniform policies should allow for such
an “opt out” clause for parents and students. Parents had the opportunity to apply for an
exemption so their child would not have to wear the required school uniform, thereby
allowing the parents to ultimately have the final decision (McCarthy, 2001). In the event
that a family was unable to financially take on the cost of the uniforms, parents were able
to apply for district aid to assume the cost of the required uniforms (Wilson, 1998; Spoor,
1998; Speer, 1998; Peters-Coleman, 1996). “Free expression rights may be limited by
policies that are reasonably designed to take into account the special circumstances of the
educational environment” (McCarthy et al., 1998, p. 131). This statement suggested that
students could not claim violation of the 1st or 14th Amendments as an argument against
the implementation of required uniforms. McCarthy (2001) and Wilson (1998) both
suggested that, because of the Supreme Court ruling in the cases of Bethel School District
v. Fraser (1986) and Hazelwood v. Kulmeier (1988), public schools would be supported legally for the implementation of school uniform policies to improve student learning. In the landmark court case of Tinker v. Des Moines (1969), Justice Fortas speaks for the majority on dress policy when saying, "... In the absence of a specific showing of constitutionally valid reasons to regulate their speech, students are entitled to freedom of expression of their views" (Herbeck & Tedford, 2001). Justice White concurred with the statement read by Justice Fortas describing the difference between “communicating by words and communicating by acts” (Herbeck & Tedford, 2001). Although the majority of the Supreme Court Justices agreed that students’ freedom of expression in the public schools, in terms of dress, should not be controlled by the schools, Justice Black dissented. In his dissent he explained that some of our country’s greatest problems undoubtedly are bred in our schools. Justice Black described the decision to allow this type of freedom of speech in the schools as one of a disgrace to our public school systems surrendering the control of the school and its policies to that of the students (Herbeck & Tedford, 2001).

A small percentage of the research stated that there is no empirical data that uniforms alone produce positive changes in student behavior and academic success in the public schools (Wilson, 1998; Wingert & Pan, 1999). Wingert and Pan also suggested another form of resistance to these uniform policies. Critics fear the loss of student creativity with the school uniform policies. Others believe that student expression through clothing gives teachers’ insightful messages about students’ thoughts (Wingert & Pan, 1999). Dave Oland, a social studies teacher of ten years in a Kansas City high school, was encouraged by his principal to lead a committee to conduct research on the impact uniform dress
policy would make on student academic achievement and disciplinary improvement (Morse-McNeely & Oland, 2002). Mr. Oland stated that the committee “found no hard evidence that uniforms had any significant impact on improving achievement, only scattered anecdotes” (Morse-McNeely & Oland, 2002). Mr. Oland further stated that student uniform dress codes inhibit student creativity while promoting conformity. Mr. Oland believed that students have the right to display and celebrate the individuality enhanced by freedom of dress; teachers should nurture the development of such individuality and take the time to develop more meaningful relationships with the students (Morse-McNeely & Oland, 2002). Sudden changes in the way students dress may be signals for teachers or counselors to identify students who need to be addressed (Wingert & Pan, 1999). Pat Morse-McNeely, a retired educator of 26 years, had worked in many avenues of the educational system, including a guidance counselor, and believes that, based on her own experience and research, that school uniform policies are beneficial to students’ academic achievement and student behavior. (Morse-McNeely & Oland, 2002). She claimed that the implementation of a “very detailed dress code” (Morse-McNeely & Oland, 2002) in South Houston Middle School raised the overall student grade average 2 letter-grades in one year as well as improving school discipline. Ms. Morse-McNeely also stated that through the research and personal experience of her own over the past twenty-six years regarding student dress codes and uniforms, students also benefit through the sense of unity that a uniform dress policy creates. While Mr. Oland believed that uniforms promote conformity, Ms. Morse-McNeely agrees; she expressed that without it our schools and society would have chaos.
Using tenth grade data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1998, research was conducted on the direct effects that school uniforms have on attendance, behavior, drug use, and academic achievement (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998). The study was conducted to disprove the benefits that have been measured by the proponents of the educational reform toward uniform policies. The subjects studied included students from public and private schools across the nation; data collected on these students included academic achievement, peer social group attitudes, and behavioral records. Although the students were studied for more than four years, the researchers focused on the data from the student’s tenth grade year. The results of the research indicated that wearing uniforms had little or no effect on student behavior. In fact, the research suggested that wearing uniforms created a negative effect on student academic achievement. The research also indicted that no relationship existed between the wearing of uniforms to attendance improvement or decreased substance abuse (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998).

The ACLU opposes the implementation of dress codes and school uniform policies, stating that the reasons for educational distractions and safety simply do not justify the potential to smother a student’s right to freedom of expression (Speer, 1998). Peters-Coleman (1996) stated that parents believed that uniform policies stifle individuality and creativity. Others declared that uniforms “foster elitism and might be construed as an attempt to privatize public schools” (Peters-Coleman, 1996, p. 37).

Clearly these are justifiable concerns, but the benefits, as supported by the data, appeared to outweigh the cost to individual student freedom of expression. Wilson (1998) suggested that maintaining a safe school environment was considered a compelling state
interest over the restraints of freedom of expression. The reality seems to be that, in the end, the protection provided by the U.S. Constitution will not uniformly protect the students within the school systems on the issue of uniform policies.

“More and more public schools are trying uniforms on for size. The federal government from Clinton on down promotes them” (Speer, 1998, p.40). The Bush Administration supports and promotes the implementation of school uniforms as well (National Education, 2003). The concept of school uniforms to varying degrees across the country has been part of the reform in public education provide an educational environment which promotes the greatest academic success for students. In an attempt to support this goal, as the research demonstrates, public school districts will likely make the move to uniform policies over time.
Chapter 3
The Design of the Study

Description of the Research Design

The purpose of the study was to determine if the faculty and students of the Clearview Regional High School District desired a uniform dress policy for students. In order to attain this information, feedback needed to be obtained from the high school administration, staff, and students with regard to their feelings concerning a student uniform dress policy. The research methodology used to attain this information will be quantitative in nature.

Development and Design of Research Instruments

With input from the faculty dress code committee and one of the high school administrators, an anonymous and voluntary survey was developed for both the students and the staff to complete. The intent of the survey was to determine whether the administration, students, and staff of the high school felt a need for a uniform dress policy for students. The survey inquired about individual feelings regarding existing student dress in the high school. The survey also consisted of questions regarding the support of a student uniform dress policy in the high school.

The student survey was comprised of seven questions; five structured multiple-choice questions, and two unstructured open-ended response questions. Each individual was also given the opportunity to place additional comments on the back of the survey. A letter of transmittal accompanied each survey stating that the survey was voluntary and
anonymous. Student surveys were placed in only those teachers’ mailboxes that have a homeroom. A letter to each teacher explaining the distribution and collection process was included with the surveys. The surveys were distributed to students in grades 9 – 12 during homeroom by their respective homeroom teachers.

The staff survey was comprised of seven questions; five structured multiple choice questions, one open-ended question requesting job title/position, and one open-ended question requesting an explanation as to why or why not each professional would like to see a uniform policy implemented in the high school within the next year. Each survey provided for the opportunity to place additional comments on the back of the survey. The survey included a letter of transmittal explaining that the completion of the survey was voluntary and would remain anonymous. A total of 95 surveys were distributed.

Sampling

The student population of Clearview High School is 1,421 consisting of students from grades 9 - 12. The male population consists of 740 students while the remaining 681 students are female. The population consists of 390 9th grade students, 358 10th grade students, 360 11th grade students, and 313 12th grade students (New Jersey School, 2004). The socioeconomic status of the high school includes little racial or ethnic diversity. The student population is 96% white, 2% African American, 1% Asian, 1% Hispanic, and 0% American Indian (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004).

The high school is staffed with one principal, two assistant principals, 112 teaching staff, and 3 classroom aids. The population used for this study consisted of a random sample of the student body in the high school as well as the voluntary participation of the teaching and administrative staff.
The methodology used to survey the student population was a cross-sectional design to provide comparative data across the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes. In an attempt to survey an equal percentage of students from each of the four classes, 20% of each class was sampled. Surveys were distributed to 78 freshmen, 72 sophomores, 72 juniors, and 63 seniors. The students were randomly chosen for the survey completion by homeroom teacher from a list posted in the main office of the high school.

In an effort to attain the best cross-sectional design for the administrative and staff population, a survey was distributed to all of the teaching staff, including classroom aids, of Clearview High School through the inter-office mail system.

Data Collection Approach

The administrative and teaching staff was asked to complete the survey within a 4-day time period and return the survey to the main office. All directions and requests were explained through a letter of transmittal.

Students were asked to complete the survey during an extended time period in homeroom. Students returned the completed surveys to their respective homeroom teachers; these teachers then delivered the surveys to the main office for collection. All instructions were explained through a letter of transmittal to the students and the homeroom teachers.

The data was organized into two groups: staff surveys and student surveys. The staff surveys were organized by years of experience in education. The student surveys were organized by grade level.
Data Analysis Plan

After the data from the student and teacher surveys was collected and organized, the data was analyzed using a descriptive approach. The staff and student surveys were analyzed to determine whether an educational reform movement toward a student uniform dress policy would be supported at Clearview Regional High School. Student feedback was organized by grade level to determine if a relationship existed between student grade level and increased support of a student uniform dress policy. Staff feedback was analyzed to determine whether or not the staff of Clearview Regional High School would support a student uniform dress policy. The data also measured a relationship between years of experience in education and the desire for a student uniform dress policy.

The analysis of the survey data will help the Clearview Regional High School administration clearly identify whether this organization is prepared to begin to move toward the reform of its existing dress code policy. This study is a contribution to the educational reform that the growing district of Clearview will experience during the coming years. With the increasing population and student enrollment that this district continues to experience, the educational obstacles continue to grow as well. These obstacles include increased class size, limited use of facilities, increased disciplinary problems, and the loss of a, once-considered, individualized educational environment. Parents, educators, and students will search for solutions to these obstacles, including methods to manage the changing climate of the organization. This study offers a possible solution for these obstacles. The research can be used to determine whether a student
uniform dress policy would, over time, be effective and accepted by the high school staff and students.
Chapter 4

Research Findings

Findings

The analysis of the data through the use of the two survey instruments revealed significant information related to student and staff opinions concerning a uniform dress policy at Clearview Regional High School. The analysis of the student data illustrated that 66.7%, 190 of 285, of the student population sampled were not in favor of a student uniform policy implementation at Clearview Regional High School within the next five years. Surveys were distributed to 78 freshman, Group 1, 72 sophomores, Group 2, 72 juniors, Group 3, and 63 seniors, Group 4. The percentage of students in each group who were not in favor of the implementation of a uniform policy were as follows: 78.2%, 61 of 78, were not in favor from Group 1, 75.0%, 54 of 72, were not in favor from Group 2, 70.8%, 51 of 72, were not in favor from Group 3, and 38.1%, 24 of 63, were not in favor from Group 4. The analysis of the student data revealed that the majority of students in each Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 were not in favor of a uniform dress policy. The majority of the students in Group 4, 61.9%, 39 of 63, were in favor of the implementation of a student uniform dress policy within the next five years (See Figure 1).
From the 130 faculty and staff surveys that were distributed, 59 surveys were completed and returned. This was a 45.3% return rate of the faculty and staff surveys. From the 59 correctly completed surveys, the data analysis showed that 8 of these Clearview faculty and staff members had less than 4 years of work experience, Group A, 21 of the staff members had 4 to 10 years of work experience, Group B, 9 of the staff members had 11 to 15 years of work experience, Group C, and 21 of the staff members had over 15 years of work experience, Group D. When asked through the use of the survey if each staff member would like to see a uniform policy implemented in Clearview
Regional High School within the next five years, 62.5%, 5 of 8, of the staff members in
Group A were in favor of a uniform policy, 66.6%, 14 of 21, of the staff members in
Group B were in favor of a uniform policy, 77.8%, 7 of 9, of the staff members in Group
C were in favor of a uniform policy, and 61.9%, 13 of 21, of the staff members in Group
D were in favor of a uniform policy. Each group revealed a majority in favor of a uniform
dress policy implementation. After analyzing the data of the surveyed faculty and staff as

Figure 2
Survey Results

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a whole, 39 of the 59 (66.1%) staff members who completed the survey were in favor of
the implementation of a uniform dress policy within the next five years, therefore, 20 out
of 59 (33.9%) were not in favor of the implementation a uniform dress policy within the next five years (See Figure 2).

The faculty and staff surveys were also analyzed according to position held at Clearview Regional High School. Out of the completed and returned surveys, the data indicated that three of the staff members who completed the survey were administrators, three of the staff members were administrative assistants, and 53 of the staff members were teachers. Although surveys were distributed to guidance counselors and teacher’s aids, educators in these positions did not return surveys. The analysis of the data revealed that 33.3%, 1 of 3, of the administrative staff in the high school is in favor of a uniform dress policy implementation within the next five years. Out of the three administrative secretaries that completed the surveys, 100%, 3 of 3 were in favor of the implementation of a uniform dress policy. Out of the 53 surveys completed by the teaching staff in the high school, 66.0%, 35 of 53 were in favor of the implementation of a uniform dress policy for students in the high school within the next five years.

Analysis

The data analysis of the student surveys revealed that students in grades 9 through 12 at Clearview Regional High School do not support the implementation of a student uniform dress policy within the next five years. The analysis of the student data also revealed that 66.7%, 190 of 285, of the student population that was surveyed as a whole did not want to see a student uniform policy implemented within the next year. Although the reasons for this opposition stated by the students were not research based, the data supported the findings of Wingert and Pan suggesting resistance to these uniform policies. Critics fear the loss of student creativity with the school uniform policies.
(Wingert & Pan, 1999). The students expressed their fears of losing their freedom of expression with a uniform policy through the open-ended section of the survey. These statements were conclusive with the research findings in the literature which stated that one of the drawbacks of a uniform policy would be the potential to smother a student’s right to freedom of expression (Speer, 1998). Surveys were distributed to 78 freshman, Group 1, 72 sophomores, Group 2, 72 juniors, Group 3, and 63 seniors, Group 4. The percentages of the students in each group that were not in favor of the implementation of a uniform policy were as follows: 78.2% of the students from Group 1, 75.0% of the students from Group 2, 70.8% of the students from Group 3, and 38.1% of the students from Group 4. Although the students as a whole population, and when represented as mutually exclusive groups through grade levels, did not support the implementation of a uniform policy, a negative correlation did exist. As the students’ grade levels increased, the percentage of students opposed to a uniform policy decreased.

The assumption of the researcher was, in fact, that a relationship would exist within the population of the students across the grade levels in the high school in reference to a uniform policy.

The data analysis also revealed that those students who chose to answer the “why or why not” question to the implementation of a school uniform policy, showed correlations in their responses. Most students in Groups 1 and 2 chose to answer why each did not want a uniform policy giving reasons such as:

1. “I can chose my own clothes”
2. “I hate uniforms”
3. “We should be able to dress the way we want to dress”
4. “Because they are stupid”

5. “I won’t be able to express myself”

Although these responses were not directly found in the literature, the underlying sentiment is this, that students fear the loss of their freedom of expression. Wingert and Pan (1999) stated that the ACLU opposes the implementation of such policies for the above stated reason. The research of Peters-Coleman (1996) is conclusive with this concern, continuing to explain that these uniform policies stifle and inhibit individuality and creativity.

Most students in Groups 3 and 4 chose to respond to why each would chose the implementation of a school uniform policy stating the following reasons:

1. “The positive results outweigh the negative results – academic focus”

2. “It would make everyone equal in the eyes of their peers”

3. “Cost effective for our parents”

4. “Less gossip and stress”

5. “More time in the morning – less to worry about and more time to be a student. Makes life easier”

These comments support the findings Wilson (1998) revealed in the Long Beach Unified School District in California. The older students seemed to direct their focus more toward the academic benefits of attending school rather than on the social pressures of clothing. The motivation to help dissolve socioeconomic differences was another positive result of a uniform policy that students had listed. Speer specifically (1998) discussed this motivating factor in the literature. Students in favor of a uniform policy
wanted to be considered equal regardless of what each was wearing to school and felt that uniforms would create a sense of equality.

In an effort to represent the student population as a whole, a random sample was taken from each of the four grade levels at random time periods and in random homerooms. Because an equal percentage of students from each grade level was surveyed and analyzed, this data seemed to be conclusive and representative for the entire school population. Therefore, one can generalize the results to the entire student population. One should not, however, generalize these results to the populations of non-similar high schools. These results are conclusive for the student population of Clearview Regional High School only.

The data analysis showed that the majority of the staff at Clearview High School was in favor of the implementation of a uniform policy in the high school within the next year. However, a correlation did not exist between this response and the number of years of experience of each staff member. The data revealed that the percentage of staff members in favor of a uniform policy increased as the number of the years of experience of the staff members increased. This trend continued only through the group with 11 to 15 years of experience. The group with over 15 years of experience showed a smaller percentage of those in favor of a uniform policy than did the group of 11 to 15 years of experience, discontinuing the positive correlation.

The data from the staff survey should not be generalized due to several circumstances. Not only was the return rate only 45.3%, but also the number of staff members in each group was not equally represented. Furthermore, because of the incomplete return rate, each department of the high school was not represented. Of those departments
represented through the survey, there was not an equal amount of staff members represented for each department.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Conclusions

This study explored the issues surrounding student school uniform dress policies and the possibility of implementing such practice in a public regional high school. Data was collected from two separate groups using a survey instrument. Faculty were surveyed regarding their opinion on the use of a school uniform dress policy focusing on whether they would support the implementation of such a policy in the Clearview Regional High School system. The student body was surveyed likewise. The similarities of the data collected from the surveys supported the conclusion that the longer the faculty member or student was in the school system, the less likely they were to be concerned either way regarding the practice of a uniform dress policy. Suggesting that both student and faculty felt somewhat disinfect ed if they were preparing to exit the organization, whether by graduation or retirement. The similarities, however, ended at this point based on the survey data.

The student data collected revealed that a positive correlation did exist between the grade level of a student and the support of a uniform dress policy. As the grade level of the students increased, the percentage of the support of a uniform dress policy increased. Although three out of the four groups revealed that a minority of the students was in favor of a uniform dress policy, Group 4, represented by students in 12th grade, supported the implementation of a uniform dress policy with a 61.9% majority. However, the validity of the data collected from the students representing Group 4 was questionable.
The students representing Group 4 were just months away from graduation. These students would not witness the implementation of a uniform policy, as they would graduate before a policy could ever be accepted in the district. Their intentions for supporting a uniform dress policy for students were unclear. In conclusion, students and staff, who will attend the school over the next few years or had a vested interest, were clearly opposed to a uniform dress policy for students.

Implications

This project did not impact the organization on the short term, but did begin the discussion about student uniforms and appropriate dress. The topic of student school uniforms should be visited at a later date at Clearview Regional High School. This school district should continue to evaluate the school culture and climate in an effort to create environments that are conducive to higher standards of learning. Application of a student uniform dress policy could support increased standards as confirmed in the Long Beach Unified School District in California (Wilson, 1998). The survey instrument used in this research project should be a part of the school climate evaluation. By returning to the issue of student uniform dress policies through the use of the survey instrument data collected, the members of the organization might be inclined to research the concept of a uniform dress policy for students.

The teachers’ awareness was heightened as a result of this survey instrument. Professional conversations resulted after these surveys were completed. Teachers began to discuss their opinions regarding student uniform dress policies. The level of concern was raised for teachers as well as for students in the high school. Teachers should be surveyed often to enhance understanding of their points of view regarding the benefits of
school uniform policies. Faculty feedback can be invaluable to continued study of this issue. Faculty committees would also enhance the data because information gathering could be more comprehensive regarding the overall position of the staff on the topic of school uniforms and its impact on academic performance.

The level of concern over the issue of a student dress policy for the students in the high school was raised as well. Students were aware that uniform dress policies were being considered. The information gathered through the use of the survey instrument revealed that students remain adverse to the idea of student uniform dress policies. However, if students are informed about the benefits of such a policy, over time they may become more willing to accept the implementation. The data collected showed that as the students aged, their acceptance of a student uniform policy grew stronger. Continued inclusion of their concerns over such a policy could make the transition to such a policy more successful.

Leadership Growth

The leadership growth that occurred as a result of this study was a direct result of the awareness of organizational change. ISLLC Standard 2, *Student Learning and Staff Professional Growth*, states that an educational leader must promote and sustain a school culture through knowledge understanding of a change process (Council of Chief, 1996). A school administrator should value and be committed to a safe and supportive learning environment for students and staff (Ibid); through the use of the survey instrument, the awareness of student dress and the educational issues attached to them were heightened among the students and staff at Clearview Regional High School. A leader must be
prepared with knowledge, support, and strategies to continue the dialogue and
development of this change process.

ISLLC Standard 2, *Student Learning and Staff Professional Growth*, also states that an educational leader must engage in activities to assess the school culture and climate regularly (Council of Chief, 1996). Addressing the concerns of student dress is one way to evaluate a school’s climate. Changes in the expectations that society places on young children are sometimes difficult to recognize as adults. Through the anonymous student survey instrument, questions were answered, dialogue began, and the culture of the student population became easier for the school leader to assess. Faculty opinions concerning student dress, although anonymous in the survey, became evident through dialogue. The issue of student dress lead to discussions about faculty dress; staff members openly shared their opinions about both topics. A leader must be ready to listen and communicate effectively the goals of the study while continuing to share the vision and participation with the faculty, staff and students (Ibid).

ISLLC Standard 4, *Effective Community Relations*, states that a successful school leader must respond to diverse interests and promote student success through effective community relations (Council of Chief, 1996). An educational leader must value collaboration with informed families and students to foster participative decision-making (Ibid). A uniform policy for students would not be effective without the support of the community. A leader must recognize the value in creating parental relationships while developing an informed community with research-based information regarding the issue of school uniforms. Creating a uniform policy that would be most effective for a school district needs the collaborative efforts of all of those who will be affected by the policy,
including teachers and staff. A leader must be willing to share in the decision-making process, while ensuring the success of the process through taking and accepting responsibility for school improvement (Ibid).

Organizational Change

The Clearview Regional High School organization experienced a change in attitudes and awareness of the issues surrounding student uniform dress policies as a result of this research project. Student and faculty conversations developed with regard to the existing dress code policy and its effectiveness. Students were likely to defend the existing dress code policy in conversation with the fear that a uniform dress policy for students might be developed. Students blamed the ineffectiveness of the existing student dress code policy on the inability of teachers and administration to enforce the policies and procedures as written. Dialogue began among the faculty with regard to personal feelings and experiences about uniform policies as well as about the educational benefits that a uniform policy might bring to this organization. The staff recognized that an increased level of concern regarding student dress was evident after the survey instrument was completed. The survey instrument raised the level of concern of both the students and staff of Clearview Regional High School, yet both groups realized that the development and implementation of such a policy was highly unlikely. Throughout the conversations, the common thread seemed to be that, although uniforms may help to address the student dress problems and to increase student academic achievement, the organization would not embrace the time and effort needed to create and implement a uniform policy. The staff and students felt that the administration would attend to issues concerning student discipline, staff development, and curricular concerns before even considering a student
uniform dress policy. These are changes the organization would experience the least amount of disruption to the already existing comfortable climate. The members of the organization felt confident that the decision toward making change to implement a uniform dress policy for students would not be one made in the near future at Clearview Regional High School.

Further Study

The awareness has been heightened at Clearview Regional High School concerning the implementation of a student uniform dress policy. What remains to be seen is whether or not a policy will be adopted in the near future. Further study must be conducted in order to ensure that discussion continues and that the level of awareness recently created concerning public school uniforms continues.

The faculty and students should be provided with research-based information supporting the initiative for uniform dress policies in the public schools. The faculty and students should then be surveyed again after research concerning uniform dress policies has been communicated to them effectively. Informing the staff and students with research-based information may also encourage involvement among the staff and students with the creation and implementation of a uniform dress policy. Further study is necessary for the consideration of a student uniform dress policy for this school district. Furthermore, if such a policy is put into place, continued research, and periodic evaluation of the new uniform dress policy for students should be conducted in order to ensure its success and effectiveness. Faculty, parents, and students should be involved with the process of evaluating the uniform policy after its implementation. Feedback from parents and students is crucial to sustain a student uniform dress policy; students
will be required to wear the uniforms and must be given the opportunity to discuss opinions and feelings as the process begins. Through the evaluation, enhancements to the policy can be made in collaboration with the parents, students, and administration. Input from faculty and staff members concerning the educational benefits witnessed due to the student uniform dress policy implementation will help determine its success. A uniform dress policy for faculty and staff might also help sustain the student uniform policy success. Faculty and staff members are role models for students and can help promote a student uniform dress policy through supporting one for the staff as well (Spoor, 1998).

An administrator must have knowledge understanding of research on schooling and be able to create effective relations with the community by providing for opportunities to share in the decision-making process for a school (Council of Chief, 1996). Through continued research and effective communication with the community, the implementation of a uniform dress policy for students may be possible for the Clearview Regional High School District in the future.
References


