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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT AND OVERALL CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

by  
Bobbi Jo Adams

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
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Approved

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## ABSTRACT

Bobbi Jo Adams

### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND OVERALL CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

2006/07

Dr. Roberta Dihoff

Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of the study was to see what effect school uniforms had on students academics and behavior. Subjects were seventh and eighth grade students, from a school which recently implemented a uniform policy for the 2006-2007 school year. Their academic and discipline records were collected from the current and previous year. Students from the previous year, who were not required to wear uniforms, were placed in the control group (n=55). Students, who were now required to wear uniforms, were placed in the experimental group (n=55). A *t*-test for independent samples was run on the data. No significant difference was found. However, it was noted that students in the control group had higher GPA's and lower number of disciplinary referrals than students in the experimental group. Surveys were handed out and completed by nine of the teachers in the school, regarding their perspective on the effectiveness of the uniforms on students' academics and behavior. It was found that the majority of the teacher's viewed the uniforms as having a positive effect on the student's behavior but a mixed view on academics. Overall, the majority of the teacher's rated the uniforms as very effective. Implications for further research are discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Need

Do the clothes make the student? School uniform policies have recently been enforced by many schools around the state. Administrators believe that students who arrive dressed for success will be ready to learn. Students' success can take on many forms--fewer absences, fewer referrals for behavioral problems, fewer expulsions, better grades and, in some cases, significantly higher achievement (Polacheck, 1996). The way a student dresses can have an impact on school safety, academic success and create a positive, productive learning environment (Lumsden, 2001).

Parents have shown mixed feelings towards the mandatory uniform policies. Some feel it "could help reduce problems associated with dress" (California, 1997) and others argue that it infringes upon the students' First Amendment rights to freedom of expression (Caruso, 1996). However, many schools already have dress codes in place that approve and disapprove certain dress attire. The administrators and faculty are the deciding factors to see if the standards are met but it is still a judgment call. Enforcing a new school uniform that everyone adheres too "can enhance students' self concepts, classroom behavior and academic performance" (Caruso, 1996), and also puts less responsibility on administrators and faculty to decide if the standards are met.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to see the impact that school uniforms had on student's academic achievement and overall behavior in school.



## Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the newly enforced uniform policy would have a positive effect on the student body. It was hypothesized that there would be an increase in the student's academic achievement measured by their grade point averages. It was also hypothesized that there would be a decrease in disciplinary referrals. Also, it was hypothesized that there would be an increase in student's overall behavior in the classroom measured by teacher surveys.

## Theory/Background

Uniforms were first instituted in 16th Century England at the charity schools for poor children. It was not until the 19th Century that the English public schools began instituting uniforms and even later for them to be widely accepted at state schools-- especially state elementary schools (Synott and Symes, 1995). The uniform was thought to increase school spirit and loyalty. In the United States, during the 1950's and 1960's the phrase "dress right, act right", was heard throughout schools in an effort to diminish delinquency. Increased gang activity in the 1980s lead school administrators to consider policies that required a more restrictive dress code (Anderson, 2002). There were many court cases about the implementation of the uniform policies and dress codes as an infringement on student's rights.

Cherry Hill Elementary, in Maryland, was the first public school to adopt a uniform policy. In 1994, the Long Branch School system in Southern California became the first public school district that required school uniforms (Anderson, 2002). This began a trend for uniforms in American elementary public schools, especially in urban school districts (Donohue, 1996). President Clinton mentioned school uniforms in his 1996 State

of the Union Address and the U.S. Department of Education mailed *A Manual of School Uniforms* to 16,000 school districts in the United States (Anderson, 2002). These acts lead to a steady rise of dress codes and uniform policies in schools.

Much of the current research on the effectiveness of school uniforms is mixed and evidence on both sides is anecdotal, not empirical (White, 2000). Nathan Joseph (1986) formulated an analysis of clothing as communication which provides a framework within which uniform proponents can be better understood. He asserts that clothing, as a sign, conveys information about values, beliefs and emotions (Brunsma and Rockquomore, 1998). He argues that uniforms act as suppressors of student individuality by making a uniform appearance and taking away the students freedom of expression.

Brunsma and Rockquomore (1998) support his findings and feel that mandatory uniforms “serve the function of maintaining social control within the school environment.” They suggest that the school uniforms are meant to convey the institutional values of the school. The school uniforms are enforced so the students will adhere to the goals of the school such as increased academic success, higher levels of productivity and attentiveness, and lower levels of disciplinary problems.

#### Definitions of Terms

1. Clothing- Nathan Joseph considered this term a sign that he defines as “anything that stands for something else.”
2. Academic Achievement- What the students accomplish in the classroom, measured by grades and test scores.
3. Mandatory Uniform- The school uniform that is strictly defined and enforced with no option to be modified.

4. Dress Code- Rules about the dress of the students that state what must not be worn.
5. Uniform Policy- Rules about dress of the students that state what must be worn.
6. Anecdotal Evidence- Evidence based on personal observation, case study reports, or random investigations rather than systematic scientific evaluation.
7. Empirical Evidence- Evidence derived from observation or experiment.
8. Curriculum-All the courses of study offered by an educational institution.
9. Formal Uniform- Uniforms with strict restrictions that have to be specific colors, brands, and styles as indicated by the school.
10. Informal Uniform- Uniforms that have to be the style and colors as the school chooses, but do not have strict restrictions.

### Assumptions

In this experiment, it was assumed that the teachers followed the standard curriculum of the school. It was also assumed that the students' knowledge accurately reflected the grade they were in and that the material covered in their classes was what could be expected from average seventh and eighth grade classes. Also, it was assumed that students were prepared for their exams and assignments. It was assumed that the teachers answered all the survey questions honestly and to the best of their ability.

### Limitations

This experiment had several limitations. First, the population that was used in the design was limited to middle class, seventh and eighth grade students from one rural

public middle school. Secondly, the length of the study allowed the experimenter to only conduct data for half of the current school year. A longitudinal study would probably show better results. Next, the sample size and diversity of the students were other limitations. Lastly, student records were chosen by their participation in after school club activities and may not be representative of the entire school.

### Summary

Chapter II includes a review of the research and ideas that relate to the effectiveness of school uniforms. This research includes court cases that cover the legal issues of school uniforms. This research also includes studies that support the claim that school uniforms have positive effect on students' academic success and overall behavior. It also includes studies that show contradictory results. Chapter III includes details about the design of the experiment. Chapter IV includes a review of the results of the experiment. Chapter V includes any conclusions that could be drawn from the experiment. This chapter also includes a discussion on research suggestions for the future. This includes how the experiment could be conducted differently and other mediating factors.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Many public schools in the United States have started implementing dress codes or uniform policies to deal with different issues within the schools. Literature on the effects of school uniforms was found to be somewhat limited and most of the research done was inconclusive. The research discussed below first starts out with articles dealing with the history of school uniforms and legal issues. The research further goes into recent studies conducted, starting with the main reasons for implementation school uniforms and continuing with other impacts uniforms have. The research ends with disputes against school uniforms and studies that show their ineffectiveness. The literature review ends with suggestions on how to successfully implement a uniform policy for schools.

Since the early 1990s, student uniform policies have been used as safety measures to help stop gang violence in the schools. Also, schools implemented uniform policies in hopes of helping students focus on school, save parents money on school clothes, help identify who belongs to the school and who does not, boost student self-perceptions, and heighten school pride. While school uniforms are rising in popularity, their effectiveness remains unclear. Most of the data that has been collected is either perceptual or quantitative.

### History of School Uniforms

Synott and Symes (1995) state that “the uniform governs and regulates both the outward and inward dispositions of the pupil.” The English uniforms were introduced

into the public school system in the middle of the 19th century, and emerged as a way to foster school affiliation, loyalty and pride (Synott and Symes, 1995).

Urban public schools have recently implemented school uniform policies to counter-balance gang related activity and rappers dress codes (Dussel, 2005). There have been several experiences of uniform codes in both public and private schools. Dussel (2005) argues that “contemporary America is the experience of the regulation of the bodies of more advantaged social groups which adopted a vestimentary code that is called the ‘preppy look’, which consisted of khaki or gray trousers, Oxford shirts with button down collars in white or light blue.” This style of uniform is seen today in modern public school uniform policies.

The idea that how one dresses effects how one behaves and performs is not a new concept. Schools in the 1950’s and 1960’s had campaigns to try and curb juvenile delinquency and slogans such as “Dress right, act right” were heard throughout schools (Anderson, 2002).

In the 1980’s, many school officials took another look at their dress codes and considered implementing uniform policies in a response to the growing amount of gang activities in their schools. The restrictive codes were put in place for the urgency of protecting the students from gang activity and to produce a safe school environment. Lane, Swartz, Richardson, and VanBerkum (1996) stated that “though gang members are known to intimidate others in various ways, their clothes have been a primary form of gang identification.”

The first public school to adopt the school uniforms was Cherry Hill Elementary in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1987. In 1994, Long Beach Unified School District was the first school district to adopt a district wide uniform dress code policy (Anderson, 2002).

School uniform policies really took off after President Clinton's 1996 State of the Union Address. He stressed that school uniforms would help promote security and would be safe for children. With the President's recommendation, the U.S. Department of Education mailed *A Manual of School Uniforms* to all school districts in the United States. Today, most of the states have some sort of dress code or uniform policy although "no state to date has legislatively mandated the wearing of school uniforms" (Anderson, 2002).

#### Legal Review of School Uniforms

"Opponents of uniform requirements allege that uniforms result in unnecessary routinization violations of students First Amendment rights, authoritarian regimentation, extraordinary expenditures on special clothing in an environmental tone that is harmful to education and learning as well as a cosmetic solution to deeper societal problems" (Brown, 1998). Being aware of students expression of dress and of the legal issues, in regards to implementing a dress code or uniform policy, are important factors school officials should keep in mind.

The major argument against school uniforms is that they violate the students First Amendment right. This Amendment states:

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the

government for a redress of grievances (First Amendment US Constitution.net).

In 1969, the Supreme Court had a case which acted as a guideline for lower courts in regards to students free expression rights. In *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* (1969), students wore black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. School officials forbid the armbands and the students were suspended. Uerling (1997) cites that “this case was one of the first regarding dress codes and appearance in schools.” The Supreme Court reversed the suspensions finding that the wearing of the bands were not disruptive and did not interfere with educational learning. They stated that the message conveyed by the armbands represented “pure speech”. The court concluded that student expression is protected unless it could be shown that a particular behavior would “materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in operation of the school or collide with the rights of other” (DeMitchell, Fossey, and Cobb, 2000).

Although that specific Court stressed the need for school officials to maintain discipline and order, the decisive factor in *Tinker* was that the government failed to produce any evidence that the armband actually caused, or might have caused, disruption in the school (Weisenberger, 2000).

The *Tinker* case was a win for students and the freedom of expression. However, a closer look at this case shows that it does not allow students to have free reign on wearing whatever they want. The Supreme Court found that “the problem posed by the present case does not relate to regulation of the length of skirts or the type of clothing to hairstyle or deportment. It does not concern aggressive, disruptive action or even group demonstrations. Our problem involves direct, primary First Amendment rights akin to



‘pure speech’ ” (Supreme Court as cited by DeMitchell et al., 2000). Therefore, the Supreme Court differentiates dress from primary First Amendment rights and student’s choice of clothing is not constitutionally protected (DeMitchell et al., 2000).

*Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986) was a case ruled by the Supreme Court, in 1986, which had a significant impact on students’ expression rights. The ruling in this case started giving school officials more discretion to restrict student dress. Matthew Fraser was running for student government and his speech contained sexual innuendos. He was warned prior to giving his speech that he was prohibited from using vulgar language. He was suspended and his suspension was upheld by the court. The Supreme Court held that vulgar or indecent student expression is not protected by the First Amendment in the public school setting (McCarthy, 2001).

Students must realize that their rights are protected by the First Amendment but these rights are not absolute and are not the same as adults. “The constitutional rights of students in public schools are not automatically coextensive with the rights of adults in other settings. While adults have wide freedom in matters of public discourse, it does not follow that the same latitude must be permitted to children in public schools” (Supreme Court as cited by DeMitchell et al., 2000).

The *Fraser* case had two major conclusions. First, it takes a hierarchical approach to free speech giving more value to political speech than vulgar speech. Secondly, it differentiates between content-based and content-neutral restrictions on free speech in school settings (Weisenberger, 2000). This case allowed school officials to determine what expression falls into what’s appropriate and what’s not.

In *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988) we see another case where the court upholds the schools decision. The principal of the high school removed articles, which he deemed objectionable, from the school paper before they could be published. One article dealt with teen pregnancy and the other talked about the impact of divorce on students. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the principals actions. Since the paper was school affiliated, school officials needed to be involved in regulating and editing what goes into the paper (Weisenberger, 2000). The court held that the school was a “closed forum” and had the right to exercise reasonable control of their school-sponsored newspaper.

*Canady v. Bossier Parish School Board* (2001) was another case involving students’ reaction against newly enforced uniform policies and saying that their rights were in violation. In 1997, the Louisiana Legislature passed a law allowing schools to enforce student uniforms. The Bossier Parish School Board wanted to see if the uniforms had a positive effect on behavior and academic achievement. They implemented a trial uniform policy in sixteen of their schools. Students retaliated and said the uniform requirement violated their “Fourteenth Amendment right to wear clothing of choice and First Amendment right to express their views and religions beliefs through attire” (McCarthy, 2001).

In *Canady*, teachers and school officials saw improvements in test scores and decrease in fights and behavioral problems. The court acknowledges the student dress as speech but determined that dress code speech was not totally protected in the school setting. The court held, “if policy furthers an important governmental interest, the interest is unrelated to the suppression of student speech, and the restriction of student speech is

incidental to the governmental interest, then the school uniform policy would not violate the First Amendment” (Supreme Court as cited by Bell, 2001).

In *Littlefield v. Forney* (2000), parents were in protest of the uniform policy and requested that their child be exempt from it. The parents were denied and they brought it to court to challenge the school. The parents argued that the uniform policy violated their rights as parents to control their child’s upbringing and education. They said their child’s First Amendment rights were violated and the policy undermined their child’s freedom of expression and religious freedom. The 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court held that students’ free speech right to select their own clothes was not absolute and following *Canady*, that right is balanced against the schools boards stated interest. The judge ruled that the students’ free speech was not violated, nor was the parents’ right to control their child’s upbringing hindered. The reasons for the school uniform policy were for the good of the school (Lumsden and Miller, 2002).

In *Bannister v. Paradise* (1970), the court ruled the wearing of blue jeans was not a constituted right of expression nor protected by the First Amendment (Brown, 1998). The court allows schools to sanction students who were dressed inappropriately and unsanitary. The court held that the wearing of proper clothing to avoid distracting others and to avoid a disrupting environment was appropriate (Uerling, 1997).

In *Richards v. Thurston* (1970) the court decided that “no right is held more sacred or is more carefully guarded by the common law than the right of every individual to the possession and control of his own person, free from all restraint or interference from others, unless by clear and unquestionable authority of law” (Brown, 1998). This

case felt that student dress involved personal liberty and therefore undermined mandatory uniform policies.

*Bivens ex. rel Green v. Albuquerque Public School* (1995) was a case where students of the Del Norte High School challenged the dress code which prohibited the students from wearing saggy pants. The students said their First Amendment rights were violated. The court held that the dress code was not unconstitutionally vague and since the specific student had low grades, multiple absences, and multiple verbal warnings about the saggy pants, their long term suspension was upheld. The court justified the schools decision in that wearing saggy pants was not speech for First Amendment purposes.

Sometimes a student's age needs to be taken into consideration when assessing the extent of a students free speech rights. This was shown in *Baxter ex rel. Baxter v. Vigo County School Corporation* (1994). The young student was wearing expressive T-shirts to school with inappropriate slogans on them. The school felt the student's rights were not violated. The court agreed.

*Chalifoux v. New Cancy Independent School District* (1997) was a case involving gang-related attire. The New Cancy School dress code prohibits the wearing of any gang-related clothing in the school setting. School officials prohibited the students from wearing rosaries because the local police considered rosaries "gang-related apparel", although it was not included in the school's handbook. The court applied *Tinker* and stated that the rosaries were a form of "pure speech". They found they were for the purpose to communicate their faith with others. Also, the school did not provide substantial evidence that wearing the rosaries would cause a disruption or interfere with

educational learning. Therefore, the court held that the school prohibiting the students from wearing rosaries violated the First Amendment.

#### Increased Safety Concerns With Regards to School Uniform Policies

Huff and Trump (1996) gave frightening statistics in regards to the increase in gang presence in schools. “Gang presence has been on the rise in the U.S. increasing from 58 in 1960 to 800 in 1992 and still increasing” (Huff and Trump, 1996).

“School safety is an area of increasing scrutiny in the wake of increase gang activity and violence in schools” (Wade and Stafford, 2003 and Konheim-Kalkstein, 2006). After Columbine and other school shootings many schools looked for ways to increase security measures and making their schools safer. “In the wake of school shooting, communities and schools are much more willing to embrace uniforms as well as a number of other strategies to enhance student safety” (White, 2000).

Marchant, Paulson, and Rothlisberg (2001) also found that students’ perceptions of an overall school environment that is safe and supportive, is critical to their school success.

A survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2000) showed that 62% of principals who had a uniform policy noted a positive effect on student safety. They also point out that uniforms prevent children from wearing gang colors. King (1998) states in an article that students who “feel safe, secure and free from threats of violence get better grades” and also having uniform policies can lead to a decrease in violence, so that the kids can feel safer going to school.

Todd DeMitchell gives further support of principals’ acceptance of uniforms and the positive effect on increasing safety. He conducted a survey and asked principals to

state why a dress code was needed or not. From the results, 68% of principals replied that a dress code was needed and reasons given included fighting, the encroachment of gangs, improving self discipline and reducing disruptions (DeMitchell et al., 2000).

Parents also support the belief that dress codes can increase school safety.

Woods and Ogletree (1993) administered a survey to measure parents' opinions of the uniform dress policy. With regards to safety, 80% of parents believed wearing uniforms provided some degree of safety and 77% felt the dress code provided some measure of safety against gangs (Woods and Ogletree, 1993).

Many parents, teachers, and policy makers believe that school uniforms policies would decrease behavioral problems, violence and perception of gang activity. Evidence for this was seen in the Long Branch public school district in California. In 1994, they became the first public school district to implement a mandatory school uniform policy. After the first year, school officials reported a 50% decrease in fights, a 34% decrease in assault and battery, a 74% decrease in sexual offenses, and a 66 % decrease in robberies (Kennedy, 1995). Five years after implementing the uniform policy, the overall crime rate in the school had dropped 91% (Chatterjee, 1999).

Deborah Elder (1999) conducted the evaluation of school uniform policy at John Adams and Truman middle schools for Albuquerque Public Schools. She gave the parents, students, and teachers of both schools surveys to provide information regarding perceptions of impact of uniform policy. With regards to school uniform effect on decreasing violence she found that 80.5% of teachers, 60.8% of parents and only 20.7% of students agreed with this statement. Whether uniforms helped decrease gang activity she found 89.8% of teachers, 69.4% of parents, and 23.3 % of students agreed that they

did help (Elder, 1999). Her study concludes the majority of parents and staff both see the benefits of school uniform, but most of the students were against them.

Holloman and associates (1996) found that certain dress and clothing can be accompanied by serious problems including theft, assault, and even murder. They support that dress code and uniform policies have reduced such problems. Holloman and associates (1996) offer four arguments for and against dress codes that schools and parents should consider:

1. the right of youth to express their identity through dress and adornment practices and choices versus the desire to make school places in which student health and safety needs are met;
2. the right and responsibility of educational policymakers to determine school policy versus the role of various human rights organization such as the American Civil Liberties Union, whose objective is to protect the rights of students to look and dress as they desire;
3. the right and responsibility of parents to socialize their children in accordance with their own family values, which may conflict or compete with educational policies;
4. the role and responsibility of clothing and accessory manufacturers, retailers, advertisers, media, and celebrity endorsers to make, sell, and market to children and adolescents goods that may be questionable and undesirable for wear in school settings.

This research concludes that school dress policies and practices should be sensitive to these background influences (Holloman and associates, 1996).

Chuerprakobkit and Bartsch (2005) conducted a study to see if security effects decreased violence in middle and high schools in Texas. Part of the new security measures included implementing a school uniform policy. They found that the school uniform policy was the least popular measure and it only had a 4% decrease during the five year period. However, they did find that school uniforms were related to less drug crime in schools (Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch, 2005).

Sue Stanley (1996) found that school uniforms reduce the emphasis on fashion wars and reinforce the acceptability of more practical, less costly school clothes. She also concluded “uniforms have a positive effect on school safety” (Stanley, 2006).

A study done by King, Walker, and Minor of Delta Kappa Gamma (2002) also found that when students were dressed for learning they behaved better and followed the rules. Also, that school uniforms put the students on an even level.

John Donohue (1996) quotes President Clinton’s 1996 State of the Union Address which talks about adopting uniform policies as a result of increase in school violence. Clinton recommends “ that public school adopt uniforms as a remedy for the spasms of violence that range, in some schools, from fighting in the classroom to assaulting teachers’ and carrying weapons to school” (Donohue, 1996). It was this statement that sparked the increase in uniform policies throughout the United States.

#### Other Possible Benefits of School Uniforms

Evans and Kremer (2005) conducted a study in Kenya and introduced school uniforms through a lottery and wanted to see if having the uniform had an effect on school performance. They found that having a school uniform significantly increased school attendance and participation and they found this was more significant in girls.



La Pointe, Hollomon, and Alleyne (1993) reported that uniforms serve as a good way to maintain order and discipline in the classroom.

Uniforms are believed to bring more focus into the class room. Stover (1990) states that “by implementing a school uniform policy, status symbols are less apparent, peer competition would be significantly reduced and the emphasis in schools would return to academics.”

Stanley (1996) found that school pride was another reason that schools implement uniform policies. The study was conducted at Long Beach Unified School. Though no conclusive statistical data was obtained, the overall perception was that school environment and safety were improved. They also found mixed results with the students about school pride. The majority of the middle and high school students reported that school uniforms did not make them feel more a part of the school. They only saw an increase in school pride in elementary students (Stanley, 2006).

School environment has a direct link to student behavior, achievement, and self-esteem. Research done by Murry (1997) support that a positive environment breeds positive results. Students have higher achievement, higher self-esteem and lower drop out rates when they view their school environment positively. Promoting school connectedness with students can increase their well being (McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum, 2002). “Traditional school success is perceived as one of the benchmarks of academic success” (Meadmore and Symes, 1997).

#### Disputes against School Uniforms and Contradictory Findings

Tucker (1999) conducted a survey at two schools in Minnesota that had just implemented uniforms. The CASE school climate survey tested teacher perceptions on

safety, academic achievement, disciplinary problems, community climate, student/teacher relations and student behavior. The survey revealed that the teachers believed the uniforms created a safer environment, although no significant differences in achievement or perceptions of safety were revealed (Tucker, 1999).

Barbara White and Gloria Beal (1999) conducted a study to determine the perceptions of in-service and pre-service teachers about violence in schools. They found that school uniforms did not have a significant effect but in-service teachers favor uniforms as a way to reduce the school violence more than pre-service teachers (White and Beal, 1999). It was concluded from their study that although there is a lack of empirical evidence to support school uniforms, they shouldn't be ruled out as a means to control school violence (King, 1998).

Rebecca Raby (2005) conducted a study that links school uniforms with gender and race. While race is only mentioned in terms of anti-racism policies, it is also an underlying issue, as most school policies ban any indicators of gang affiliation (Raby, 2004). Raby's statement is supported by Anne Bodine (2003) where she expresses concern that gang and violence is used to defend uniforms, for "gangs" may be perceived as code for "ethnic minorities".

Wade and Stafford (2003) found from their study that teachers from school with uniform policies did perceive statistically significant lower levels of gang presence. They also reported that although uniforms contributed to a positive climate, they had no direct impact on substance abuse, behavior, attendance, academic achievement, students self-perception and students perceptions of gang presence. Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch

(2005) found similar findings that many issues were found to be non-supportive of the uniform code.

Norum's (1998) study found that although school uniforms were thought to be less of a financial burden on parents, this was not that case. The research shows that families, who do buy uniforms, spend more on clothing on average with out these additional costs. "The implementation of uniforms did little to decrease the students' desire for expensive fashionable clothing; instead it just changed the setting they were able to wear them" (Norum, 1998). In fact, requiring uniforms was more of a financial burden on parents because not only did they have to buy regular clothes, they also had to buy the uniforms.

Brunsma and Rockquemore (1998) conducted a study to compare the effects of uniforms on tenth grade students. They wished to determine the effectiveness of uniforms in general on student's attendance rates, behavior, and academic achievement, and substance abuse. Their results showed that uniforms had no significant effect on any of these variables and concluded that school uniforms were not effective at the high school level (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 1998).

Long Beach Unified School District showed suspensions significantly decreased. However, no direct correlation was found between the results and uniforms (Stanley, 1996). Chatterjee (1999) found that five years after the school implemented the uniform policy, suspensions were down 90%.

Hughes (1996) conducted a study to see not only the effect of school uniforms but also if there would be a different impact between formal and informal uniforms. Informal uniforms did not have strict restrictions; they just had to be the school colors. Formal

uniforms had to be specific brands and styles as indicated by the school. They found a 30% decrease in disciplinary referrals after the uniform policies were put into effect. The formal uniform decreased less than the informal, at 11% to 45%; however, the informal school had more infractions made (Hughes, 1996).

Wade and Stafford (2003) found interesting results in the opposite direction in regards to self-perception and school uniforms. They believed that students who wear the uniforms would have higher self-perceptions but this was not the case. They found self-perception results were significantly higher in students who did not have to wear the uniform. Wade and Stafford (2003) felt this result was found because those students were forced to wear a uniform and this may have made the individual feel unattractive or unconfident, which lowers their self-perception.

Sharon Pate (1999) found mixed results with her study. She reported a significant improvement in academic achievement in elementary-school students but no significant decrease in discipline infractions among middle schools students (Pate, 1999).

Brunsma (2006) conducted actual empirical research on the effectiveness of school uniforms. He found that many public schools are implementing school uniform policies without any scientific support of their effectiveness. From his findings he shows the school uniforms do not impact a schools climate. Also, that school uniforms do not significantly implicate success or failure of academic achievement. He found that attendance rates were not impacted by uniform policies either. Brunsma (2006) states that “what is clear from the research is that school uniforms, as a policy and strategy, do *not* play a role in producing more parental involvement, increased preparedness, positive

approaches toward learning, pro-school attitudes, a heightened feeling of school unity and safety, or positive school climates.”

#### Suggestions For Mandating Uniform Policies

The U.S. Department of Education (1999) sent out a *Manual on School Uniforms* to help schools implement uniform policies. Schools will find greater success and acceptance if they take the following steps:

1. Get parents involved from the beginning.
2. Protect students’ religious expression.
3. Protect students’ other rights of expression.
4. Determine whether to have a voluntary or a mandatory school uniform policy.
5. When a mandatory policy is adopted, determine whether to have an opt-out provision.
6. Do not require students to wear a message.
7. Assist families that need financial help.
8. Treat school uniforms as part of an overall safety program.

Whatever policy is chosen, successful implementation depends on how parents and students feel about the policy, how accessible and inexpensive the uniforms are, having uniform policies in conjunction with other educational changes for the best benefits, and making sure parents and students are involved (Isaacson 1998).

#### Summary

In summary, the literature on school uniforms was limited. Most of the research shows no empirical statistics to support the use of school uniforms, but rather shows

supporting perceptual and quantitative statistics. Much of the evidence is contradictory concerning the success of school uniform policies and results seem to be inconclusive. Some researchers reported positive effects and some reported no change at all.

## CHAPTER III: DESIGN

### Participants

The participants in this experiment consisted of seventh and eighth grade students and teachers from a public, rural middle school in Southern Jersey. A mandatory school uniform policy was implemented in the current 2006-2007 school year which required the entire student body to wear a school uniform. The control group consisted of student's from the previous year when the uniform policy was not implemented. The experimental group consisted of student's who were required to wear school uniforms the current school year. In the control group, there were 29 students from the previous sixth grade and 26 students from the previous seventh grade. In the experimental group, there were 29 students from the current seventh grade and 26 students from the current eighth grade. The students were male and female, predominantly Caucasian or African American and their ages ranged from 11- 14 years old. There were 9 teachers that participated in the study. Teacher's were both male and female, and ranged in age from 23-65.

### Materials

The experimenter received academic and discipline records of the students from the previous and current school year from the principal of the school. A survey, prepared by the experimenter, consisted of fill in the blank, short answer, multiple choice, and Likert-type questions was used in this study (see appendix a). The questionnaire contained questions regarding the classroom behavior of the students and questions about student academics from the perception of the teachers.

Also, questions were asked about the teachers' opinion of the effectiveness of the school uniform policy.

#### Reliability/Validity of Scales

Face Validity was based on guidance and examination of the survey by six competent judges. Internal and External Validity of the survey were not measured.

#### Method

Student academic records were collected from last years sixth and seventh grade classes and also collected from the current seventh and eighth grade classes. The students first and second marking period grade point averages from each year were recorded. The number of student disciplinary referrals was also collected and the average number for each student was calculated and recorded.

The principal was briefed with an explanation of the current experiment and permission was granted to hand out surveys to the teachers. Surveys were dropped off in the teacher's mailboxes and boxes were sealed and left in the teacher's lounge where all surveys could be collected. An explanation of the experiment and the instructions were presented in the beginning of the survey and the teachers were asked to return the completed survey in the designated boxes. Teachers had a week to complete and return the survey. The surveys were then collected by the experimenter and the responses were analyzed.

#### Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable in this experiment was the school uniform. The dependent variables were students' academic scores, discipline records, and teachers' perception of academics, classroom behavior and uniform effectiveness. It was expected



that students' grades after the enforcement of the school uniform policy would be significantly higher than the students' grades before the enforcement of the school uniform policy. It was also expected that there would be significantly fewer disciplinary referrals after the enforcement of the school uniform policy. Also, it was expected that overall classroom behavior, as measured by teacher's perceptions, after the enforcement of the school uniform policy would be significantly better than the overall classroom behavior before the enforcement of the uniform policy. Overall, the school uniform policy will have a positive effect on student's academics and classroom behavior and a negative effect on disciplinary referrals.

#### Analysis of Data

The students' academic data from the control group was recorded for each student by grade. Also, the students' academic data from the experimental group was recorded for each student by grade. Data from the two control groups was combined to form one group. Data from the two experimental groups was also combined to form one group. An independent t-test was performed on this data at the .05 level to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the control group and the experimental group. The mean differences between the control groups' disciplinary records and the experimental groups' disciplinary records were also analyzed through the use of an independent t-test. Survey responses were analyzed by the amount of questions answered stating what effect they saw in student's classroom behavior and academics as a result of the uniform policies.

## Summary

In this study, students were chosen based on their participation in after school clubs. They were not randomly put into the experimental or control group because the school uniform policy affected the student body as whole. Students' were placed in the control group based on the previous school year which did not enforce a school uniform policy. Students' were placed in the experimental group based on the current school year where there was a school uniform policy. All factors were the same for both groups with the only differentiating factor being the school uniform. Academics records and disciplinary referrals were collected and independent t-tests were used to determine whether or not a significant difference existed between those in the experimental group and those in the control group. Teachers were asked to participate in the study to see their perception of the student's behavior in the classroom and change in academics after the enforcement of the school uniform and also their opinions on its effectiveness. It was expected that the student's in the experimental group would show positive effects in their academics and classroom behavior and a lower number of disciplinary referrals as a result of the school uniform policy.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Introduction

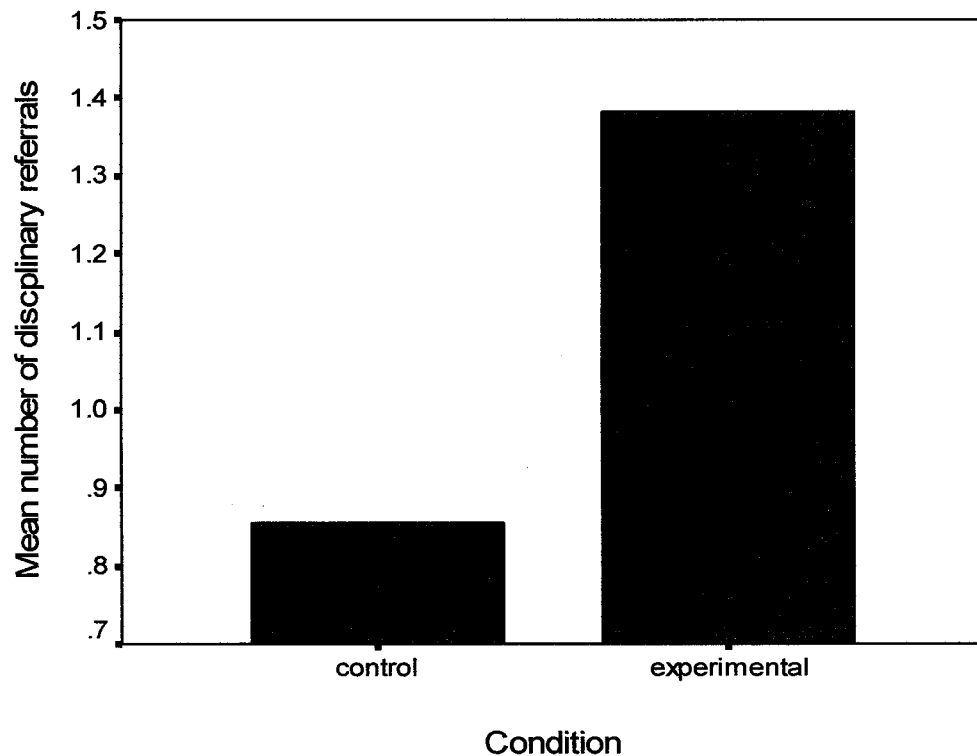
The purpose of this study was to discover the effect that school uniforms had on seventh and eighth grade students at a middle school in Southern New Jersey. It was hypothesized that those students in the experimental condition would show an increase in their academics during the study due to the uniforms. This would be supported by a significant increase in the student's grade point averages. It was also hypothesized that the students in the experimental condition would show a decrease in disciplinary referrals. Also, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive increase in student's overall behavior in the classroom after the implementation of the uniform policy. This would be supported by the measure of responses made in the teacher surveys.

### Results

During the course of the study, students went through their normal everyday classroom routines; doing the assigned homework and taking the regularly assigned quizzes and exams. The only change was the implementation of the uniform policy. Student's grade point averages from the first and second marking periods were collected. Disciplinary referrals for each student were also collected. Also, teacher responses to the surveys were analyzed. The data from both experimental groups was combined to form one group, and the data from both control groups was combined to form one group. There were 55 subjects in the control condition and 55 subjects in the experimental condition.

A *t*-test for independent samples indicated a non-significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in regards to mean disciplinary referrals. However, the average number of disciplinary referrals of the experimental group was slightly higher than the average number of disciplinary referrals of the control group (see figure 4.1). The mean number of disciplinary referrals for the experimental group was 1.38 with a standard deviation of 2.79 and the mean number of disciplinary referrals for the control group was .85 with a standard deviation of 2.08.

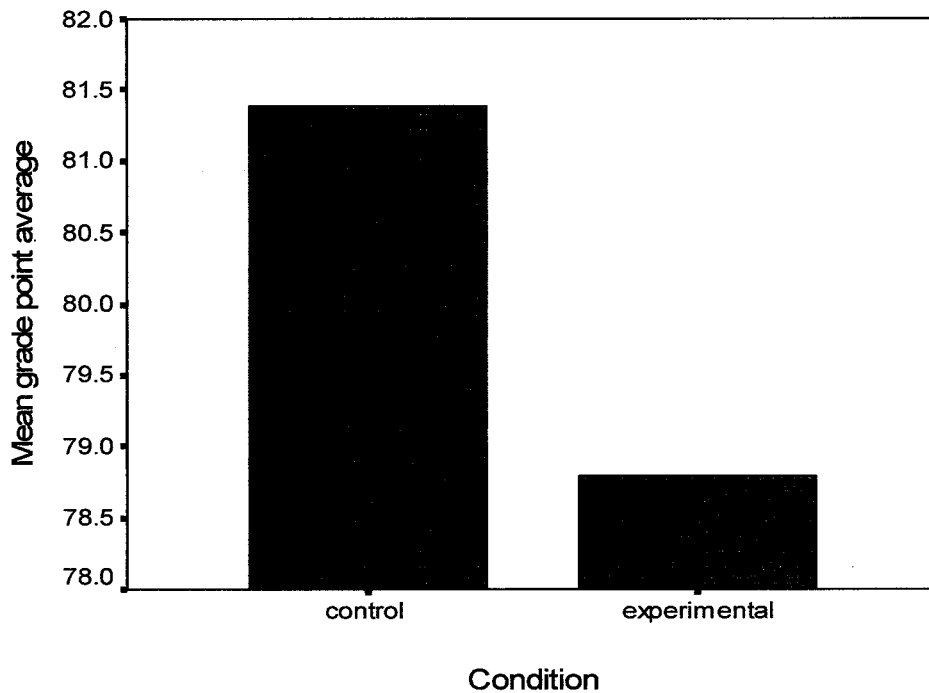
Figure 4.1 Mean number of disciplinary referrals for the experimental group and the control group.



In regards to mean grade point averages, a *t*-test for independent samples showed a non-significant difference between those in the experimental condition and those in the control condition. However, the mean grade point average for the control group was

slightly higher than the mean grade point average for the experimental group (see figure 4.2). The mean grade point average for the control group was 81.38 with a standard deviation of 11.19 and the mean grade point average for the experimental group was 78.70 with a standard deviation of 11.59.

Figure 4.2 Mean grade point average for the experimental group and the control group.



Towards the end of the study, 9 teachers filled out a survey regarding their perceptions of the uniforms. The questions in the survey related directly to the teacher's opinions on the uniforms and if they observed any changes within the students. These surveys assessed the view of the teacher about the uniforms effectiveness and what changes in academics and classroom behavior were seen.

Descriptive statistics were run on the survey data and the frequencies of the responses were found. A majority of the teachers responded that uniforms positively

effected the students behaviors (see figure 4.3). Seven of the teachers replied the uniforms do effect behavior, one replied it does not effect behavior and one was unsure. In regards to the effects of uniforms on academics, the responses were mixed (see figure 4.4). Four of the teacher's said the uniforms do affect academics, three replied it has no effect, and two of the teacher's were unsure. A majority of the teacher's replied that the uniforms were very effective (see figure 4.5). Seven of the teacher's responded that the uniforms were very effective, while only one replied the uniforms were hardly effective and one teacher was unsure.

Figure 4.3 Teacher responses in regards to the effect of uniforms on behavior.

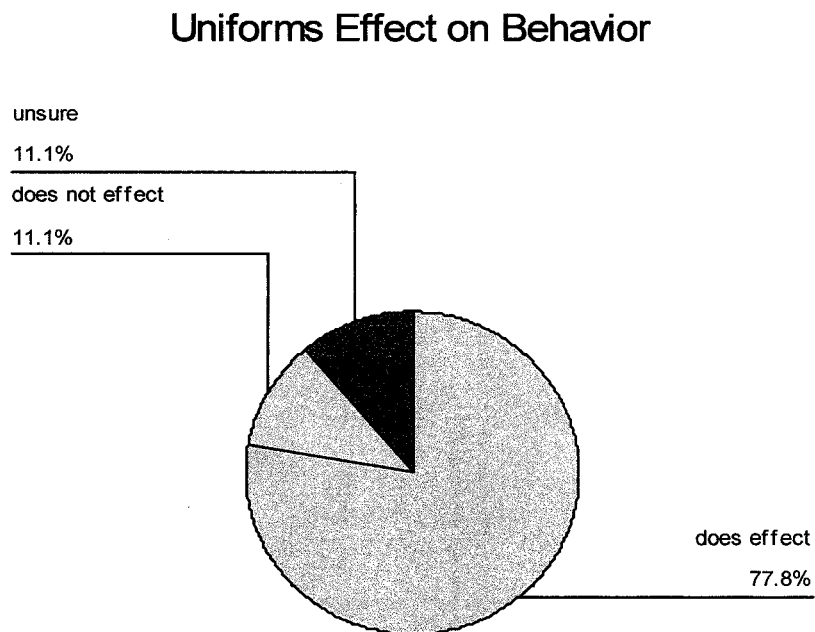


Figure 4.4 Teacher responses in regards to the effect of uniforms on academics.

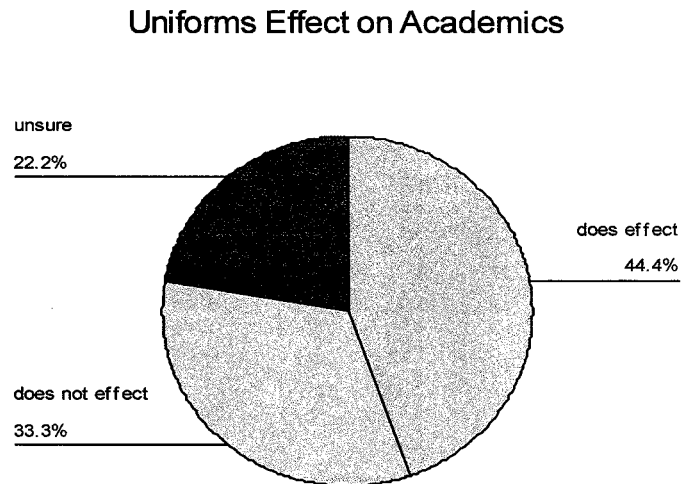
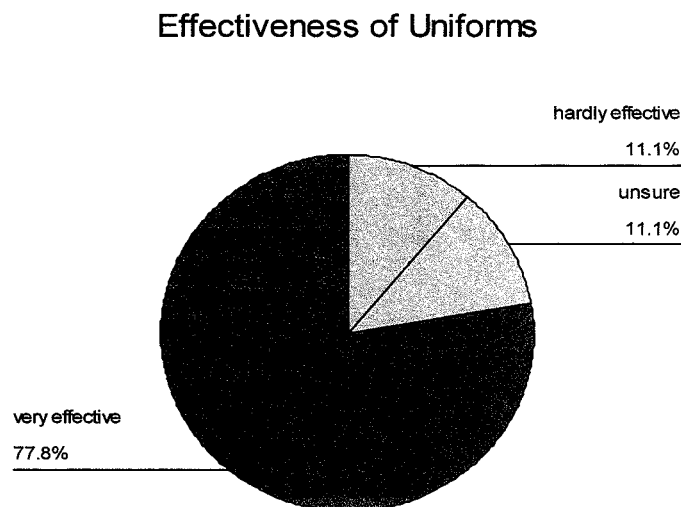


Figure 4.5 Teacher responses to the overall effectiveness of uniforms.



In summary, there were two independent samples *t*-tests conducted in this study. There was no significant difference found between the control group and the experimental group in regards to grade point averages or disciplinary referrals. However, it is important to note that the students in the control group had fewer disciplinary referrals than students in the experimental group. Also, the students in the control group

had slightly higher grade point averages than students in the experimental group.

Descriptive statistics were run on the data from the surveys and the frequencies of the responses were found. The majority of the teachers felt they saw an increase in student's behavior due to the uniforms but were mixed about the effect of uniforms on academics.

It was also found that the majority of the teachers rated that the uniforms as very effective.



## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Review of Results

After reviewing the data, it was found that there was no significant difference between the students in the experimental group and the students in the control group. There was no significant difference found between the mean number of disciplinary referrals in the experimental group and the control group. However, it should be noted that the control group had slightly fewer disciplinary referrals than the experimental group. This finding fails to support the hypothesis that students in the experimental groups would show a decrease in disciplinary referrals. It also fails to support the past research findings of Kennedy (1995) which found a 50% decrease in fights one year after the implementation of the school uniform policy.

The current study is supported by past research of Pate (1999), who also found a non-significance difference in disciplinary referrals among students. The finding in the current research could be the result of outliers in the data. There may have been a few students who may have been in serious trouble and had many referrals this year, which could have skewed the scores. Also, it should be taken into consideration that there may have been more disciplinary referrals in the experimental group as a result of the uniforms. This is supported by past research by Hughes (1996) who found that students who wore informal uniforms had more disciplinary infractions than students who wore formal uniforms.

There was no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in regards to the mean grade point average. Again, it should be noted that

the students in the control group had slightly higher mean grade point averages than students in the experimental group. This finding fails to support the current hypothesis that students in the experimental group will show an increase improvement in academic achievement. This finding also fails to support past research findings of Pate (1999). She found a significant improvement in academic achievement in the students after the implementation of the school uniform. This finding is supported, however, by past research conducted by Brunnsma (1998). He found that school uniforms do not significantly implicate success or failure of academic achievement. This finding could be the result of harder classes and harder material being given to the students. Last year the material might not have been as tough or as challenging to the students, where the material this year might be more difficult. Therefore, the findings might be the result of harder topics being covered this current year and not due to the uniforms.

The current study did find that the majority of teacher's did support the uniform policy. Teacher responses from the survey showed that they saw an improvement in behavior in the students. This supports the current hypothesis that the experimental group will show improvement in overall classroom behavior as a result of the uniforms measured by teacher perceptions. This finding is supported by past research of Elder (1999) who also gave teachers surveys about their perceptions of the uniforms. She also found that the majority of the teacher's felt the uniforms have a positive impact on classroom behavior. It is also important to note that the teachers were not sure how effective the uniforms were on student's academics, but they rated the overall effectiveness of uniforms very highly. The findings of the current study show that

although the teacher's believe that uniforms are effective and can positively impact classroom behavior, there were no significant differences found in any of the data.

#### Limitations

One limitation of the current study was the length of the study. Due to time constraints, the data collected was limited to the first two marking periods. This collection of data could have been too small to reveal accurate results. Unfortunately, the amount of data collected only allowed access to grades and disciplinary referrals for the first half of the school year. There might have been a significant difference if data was allowed to be collected from the entire year to show more accurate results.

Another limitation is how the subjects were picked for the study. Subjects were not randomly selected from their classes. Instead, data was collected from the students who participated in after school clubs from the previous and current school year. From this data, the students were randomly picked so that each group had the same amount of subjects. The way the subjects were chosen could have greatly limited the current study. It could be true that the subjects picked were not representative of the entire school. If data was collected from every student from the past year and the current year, more accurate results may have been found.

The survey given to the teachers could be another limitation of the study. The survey consisted of questions comprised by the experimenter and validity was not measured. Another limitation was the amount of teachers who actually responded to the survey. Twenty-five surveys were handed out, and only nine were completed and handed back in. A larger response might have produced different results or may have further strengthened the findings in the current study.

Another limitation of the study involves the sample size and diversity of the students. The study only had 55 subjects in the experimental condition and 55 subjects in the control condition, making 110 subjects total. All subjects were middle class and came from one small, rural middle school in Southern New Jersey; therefore diversity was also a limitation.

One last limitation of the study was the implementation of the uniform policy. This was the first year that the uniform was being introduced to the school and the students. It was a mandatory uniform policy however, it was not very formal. The uniform implemented was informal and did not have real strict restrictions. Students were told what color shirts and pants to wear and what was allowed and what was not. It was not required that all students had to have specific brands and specific styles. This allowed a lot of lead way and interpretation to what the uniform actually had to consist of. If there had been a stricter uniform policy implemented, than the results might have been different.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study were inconclusive. Results showed there was no significant difference between mean grade point average and disciplinary referrals as a result of students who had to wear a uniform (experimental condition) and of students who did not have to wear a uniform (control condition). The results from the teacher surveys did show the majority of the teacher's perceive the uniforms are effective especially with student's behavior. It has been determined that further research is needed to assess more accurate effects of uniforms on student's academic achievement and classroom behavior.

## Implications for Further Research

There is a need for more research of the effects of the implementation of school uniforms in all areas of the school climate. Most of the past research is based on student, parent and teacher perception and there are few studies that show empirical results. It is interesting that many schools are implementing school uniform policies without scientific support of their effectiveness. Further research should try to find more concrete evidence of the effectiveness of uniforms on student's grades, behavior, and attendance. It would be interesting to see how different uniforms vary in strictness and their effect on students. Would one get better results if the uniform policy was strict and not open to interpretation? It would also be interesting to see the effects of uniforms on high school students, since most of the research done at the middle or elementary levels.

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APPENDIX  
Teacher Survey

1. How many years experience do you have as a teacher?
2. What grade(s) do you teach?
3. What subject(s) do you teach?
4. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
5. How old are you?
6. In your opinion do you think the school uniform policy improves, limits, or has no effect on the learning environment
  - a. improves
  - b. limits
  - c. has no effect
  - d. unsure
  - e. no response
7. Do you think the school uniform policy has an effect on behavioral problems?
  - a. yes
  - b. no
  - c. unsure
  - d. no response
8. Do you think the school uniform policy has an effect on student's academic success?
  - a. yes
  - b. no
  - c. unsure
  - d. no response
9. If no please state possible reasons for no change or decrease in students grades.

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10. Do you think the school uniform policy has an effect on student's attendance?
  - a. yes
  - b. no
  - c. unsure
  - d. no response



