A research study of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and behavior referrals in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students

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A RESEARCH STUDY OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, ATTENDANCE, AND BEHAVIOR REFERRALS IN THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH, AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

by
Jennifer Gonnella

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 6, 2003

Approved by 
Professor

Date Approved

2003 Jennifer Gonnella
ABSTRACT

Jennifer Gonnella

AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH STUDY OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, ATTENDANCE, AND BEHAVIOR REFERRALS IN THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH, AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

2002/2003

Dr. Klanderman/Dr. Dihoff
Maser of Arts in School Psychology

This study examined the effect of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and behavioral referrals in third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students in School Uniform Elementary School, a pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school located in a small, rural community in Southern New Jersey. Academic achievement was recorded for fifth and sixth grade students using the National Percentile Rank on the Terra Novas (n=63). Attendance was recorded for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students by counting the number of days absent (n = 117). The number of written discipline referrals were recorded for students in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade (n=117). Paired sample t-tests were utilized for each variable before and after school uniforms were instituted. The results demonstrated that a school uniform policy did not show a significant effect on academic achievement, attendance record, and discipline referrals. Although no differences were noted, the data indicated that these variables were moving in the desired direction.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study is dedicated to Mr. Panas and Mrs. Chappius for their hard work, dedication, patience, and efforts in standing up for what they believed in. Thank you both for making the world a better place. To my future husband and my best friend, Richard C. Panas whose inspiration, encouragement, humor, understanding, and input have been invaluable to me. To Rileigh and Nikki who reminded me that play time is important. Many thanks to Mom and Joe for their love. And finally, to Dr. Klanderman and Dr. Dihoff, two of Rowan University’s best professors, who spent a lot of time answering (redundant) questions and keeping me on track.
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Chapter I

Introduction

Need

Do school uniforms fit in public schools?

Working six years as a school counselor, it has been frequently observed that students as young as third grade are preoccupied their looks and what their peers think of them. Clothing, although a way of expressing individuality, can determine whether or not a student will be accepted and liked by others. Those students who have difficulty keeping up with the latest trends and fashion styles risk being teased an bullied. This can cause anxiety and an overwhelming sense of pressure and stress. One way schools can alleviate this pressure on students is to initiate a school uniform policy.

School uniforms seem to offer many positive benefits. For example, wearing similar type of clothing can decrease teasing and allow children to feel included and part of a group. In addition, school uniforms can act as social equalizers and positively affect peer pressure among other students. School uniforms also build school unity and pride throughout the community. Furthermore, school uniforms are offered at a lower cost than the latest expensive fashion trends. As a result, students are more focused on their school work and less occupied with their image.

There has been a great debate surrounding the effectiveness of school uniforms as well as debates on how and when to implement school uniform policies. Some argue that school uniforms may infringe upon a students’ rights to free speech and expression. Others argue that school uniforms will not decrease distinctions between students.
Because of the controversy surrounding the arguments, administrators and parents across the country are struggling to decide whether to implement a school uniform policy. Considering the lack of empirical research between school uniforms and students' academics and behavior, it seemed appropriate to further explore this topic.

**Purpose of the Study**

In an effort to decrease name calling and increase academic grades and scores, School Uniform Elementary School, a pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school located in a rural community in Southern New Jersey, became the first school in its county to introduce the idea of a school uniform policy. As expected, it brought great controversy to the school and community. Many parents agreed and supported the idea of adopting uniforms and a strong dress code. And yet, others felt that a school uniform policy would infringe upon a students' First Amendment Rights and would have no impact on reducing teasing or affecting students' behavior. In November, 2000, School Uniform Elementary School surveyed over 200 school parents and found that a uniform policy would be greatly supported because it would “provide a better learning environment” for their children. Parents and students, supporters and non supporters, were able to verbalize their opinions at several school board meetings. With input and support from the superintendent, administration, parents, and staff, the uniform policy was presented to the Board of Education and approved on December 6, 2000 with a five to three vote. Although widely accepted, some parents continued to disagree and debate the effectiveness of the policy. As a result, eighteen families legally challenged the school’s decision arguing violation of the First Amendment Rights of free speech and expression (Dare, Vineyard, Schaeffer, Misero, Fisher, Kurman, Presley, Dilks, Dordell, Goldey, Clour, Bacon, Turner, Livingston, Howell, Owen, Westfield, Zurlo v. School
Uniform Elementary School, 2000). On November 9, 2001, Superior Court Judge G. Thomas Bowen dismissed the claim stating, “There’s no argument made as to the violation of freedom of expression by any school requiring a uniform dress code policy. Standard dress or uniforms are common” (Katalinas, 2001, pp. A1). Few research studies have formally evaluated the effect of school uniforms on achievement, attendance, and behavior in students. This document is necessary to explore whether or not there is a statistical significant link between uniforms and these factors.

**Hypothesis**

This paper will examine the effect of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and behavioral problems in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in School Uniform Elementary School. Test scores, attendance records, and discipline referrals will be compared from the 2000-2001 school year before a school uniform policy, to the 2001-2002 school year when a school uniform policy was initiated. The dependent variables are test scores, attendance, and written discipline referrals. The independent variable is school uniforms. Academic achievement will be measured using the standardized test scores from the Terra Novas. Attendance will be measured by recording the number of days absent for each student. Behavior problems will be measured by the number of discipline referrals turned in to the principal’s office. It is hypothesized that a mandatory school uniform policy has had a statistical difference in academic achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals.

**Background of the Study**

School uniforms used to be the trademark of private and parochial schools for years. Uniforms seemed to begin as a way of separating these students from public schools. In time, it was found that school uniforms provided unity for the school and
helped lower class, disadvantaged students. Those who could not afford to buy expensive, designer school clothes throughout the year could afford reasonably priced uniforms. In addition, those schools with mandatory uniforms were found to have achieved higher test scores and have less problems with behavior referrals (Education Commission of the States, 2000).

Public schools began looking at the positive effects school uniform policies had on students and considered developing similar programs. In 1969, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (Dowling-Sendor, 2001, pp.3) was the first court case that brought attention and set the trend for mandated dress codes in school. In this case, the Iowa School District sent three students home from school for wearing black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. At a time when there was much controversy over political beliefs and rebellion against rules, the children sued the school stating they had a right to stand up for what they believed. The high court agreed and ruled in favor of the children. The court stated that the children had a right to express their political views in this manner, provided it did not hurt others (Dowling-Sendor, 2001, pp.3).

This ruling set the stage for future court cases involving a student’s right to free expression. However, many of these cases dealt with trivial issues such as the right to wear earrings, the right to wear baggy pants, the right to wear hair a certain way, and the right to wear hats and other miscellaneous items (Dowling-Sendor, 2001, pp.5). Because the courts were flooded with court cases involving petty issues, the Supreme Court ruled that, “mere expressions of individuality or affiliation may be restricted if there is some reasonable basis for doing so” (Majestic & Smith, 1990, pp.4). This ruling gave school officials permission to enforce some dress regulations that were consistent with school discipline (Majestic & Smith, 1990, pp.4).
The first public school to adopt uniforms was Cherry Hill Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland in 1987. This adoption caused widespread attention making school uniforms a hot topic. In 1994, Long Beach California School District participated in a pilot study and became the first school in the nation to require formal uniforms in their elementary and middle schools. (White, Kerry, 2000, pp.2). This was done in an effort to decrease school crime and gang related issues. School officials found that enforcing a school uniform policy decreased school crime and the number of suspensions and increased attendance and grades (White, Kerry, 2000, pp.2). With this information, President Clinton brought to attention the importance of school uniforms in his 1996 State of the Union Address (Jackie Robinson Academy, 1994). In his speech, President Clinton encouraged school uniform policies in all 16,000 United States school districts. The reasoning for supporting school uniform policies “...is one step that may be able to break this cycle of violence, truancy, and disorder...” (Jackie Robinson Academy, 1994). Shortly after his speech, the United States Department of Education published its Manual on School Uniforms and distributed this manual to school districts nationwide. Following this, the New Jersey State-Level Policy regarding school uniforms was signed into law on July, 1996 (Assembly Substitute for Senate Committee Substitute for Senate, Nos. 540 and 897 and Assembly, No. 920., 1996). It states, “A Board of Education may adopt a dress code policy to require that students wear a school uniform if the policy is requested by the principal, staff, and parents of an individual school and if the board determines that the policy will enhance the school learning environment” (Assembly Substitute for Senate Committee Substitute for Senate, Nos. 540 and 897 and Assembly, No. 920., 1996).

Another breakthrough for school uniforms occurred in 2000 when a recent national
study, commissioned by Lands’ End clothing merchant and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), surveyed 755 principals from schools of varying sizes and backgrounds. The study found that over two thirds of principals strongly supported school uniforms. Almost 85% of principals at these schools with a uniform policy in place found that uniforms positively influenced their schools image in the community. Four out of five principals (79%) at schools with uniform policies felt that uniforms had a positive effect on classroom discipline, and 72% noted a positive difference in school spirit. In addition, more than two thirds of the principals (67%) noted improvements in school work. Half of the principals reported no impact on attendance but 40% showed an improvement in attendance once the uniform policy was in place. While some schools used statistics, most schools recorded improvement using basic observation throughout the school. Although the idea of mandating school uniforms is increasing, 71% of the principals surveyed said uniforms were not being considered at their schools, and one in ten principals said that the most important reason for not having a school uniform policy was that parents were resistant.

California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and many other states have enforced school uniform policies (Dowling-Sendor, Benjamin, 2001). Furthermore, the New York City School Board now requires students in all elementary and middle schools to wear uniforms (Fossey & DeMitchell, 1997, pp.2). Schools nationwide are beginning to understand the importance and impact uniforms have on students.

Since the ruling of mandating school uniforms was passed in 2000 for School Uniform Elementary School, schools in the surrounding counties have followed the change to enforcing uniform regulations. For example, on December 9, 2000, a school in Vineland,
New Jersey became the first public school to start a voluntary uniform policy (Quinn, 2000, pp.C1). This volunteer program allows families to exempt children from wearing a uniform. In another area school, a uniform policy became implemented and included all elementary and middle schools in their district (Jones, 2001, pp.A1). In September, 2001, another neighboring district also required their elementary, middle, and high schools to adopt the policy as well (Marciano, 2001, p.C6). In addition, the County Vocational High School observed these trends and launched a school uniform dress code policy on September, 2001 (Jones, 2001, pp.A1).

Research studies seem to agree that school uniforms have increased school pride, decreased school discipline referrals, reduced peer pressure, and helped students stay focused on school work. In addition, school uniforms can be cost savers for parents because students require fewer, more basic items in their wardrobe. Schools can help families in need through clothing drives, donations, and grants from businesses. Establishing school uniforms will not solve all the problems in a school. However, other initiatives in conjunction with implementation of a school uniform code seem to significantly decrease discipline problems and provide children with a loving, safe, and nonjudgmental environment.

Definitions

The following terms will be used:

*Academic achievement*: defined as a student's standardized test score. This is measured using the Terra Novas.

*Attendance*: defined as the number of days a student attends school. One full day of not attending school will be considered an absence.

*Behavioral problems*: defined as any action from a student that constitutes a
violation of the school rules. It will be measured by the number of written referrals submitted to the principal’s office.

*Honor Roll:* defined as an award given to any student who achieves A’s and B’s in all area subjects in school.

*Principal’s List:* defined as an award given to any student who achieves A’s in all area subjects in school.

*School Uniforms:* defined as a particular type, color, and/or style of clothing to be worn by students in an educational setting and mandated by school administrators and school board policies.

**Assumptions**

It is assumed all teachers have the same expectation of their students in delegating discipline referrals for inappropriate behavior. It is also assumed that students took the standardized test to the best of their ability. The scores from these tests are presumed to be the student’s true scores and reflect their true academic ability.

**Limitations**

In the 2001-2002 school year, School Uniform Elementary School, located in a rural community in Southern New Jersey, implemented a school uniform policy for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. It became the first elementary school in the district to adopt a formal school uniform policy. An informal investigation through student/teacher observation supported the effectiveness of the policy.

As a result, this study examined the effect of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and behavioral referrals. Because the sample size was confined to a small, rural, elementary school in Southern New Jersey, the conclusions from this study are generalized to School Uniform Elementary School and/or districts with similar
settings and policies. In addition, this study was limited to third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students.
Chapter II
Literature Review

Introduction

School uniforms have been long recognized as a firm requirement for attending private and catholic schools. These types of schools have reported some of the highest test scores and the lowest discipline problems in the country. As a result, educators have been intrigued with the possibility of bringing uniforms into public schools as well. As early as the 1960s, collaboration was taking place for organizing and creating dress code policies for public schools. Variations of school uniform trials have been adopted in many open concept schools during the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, school uniform policies have emerged as part of a nationwide school movement and school reform effort. At present, thirty-seven states strongly support the implementation of school uniforms as a policy in their districts.

Rationale for School Uniforms

In 1969, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (Dowling-Sendor, 2001, pp.3) was the first court case that brought attention to and set the trend for mandating certain types of clothing in schools. This case involved the Iowa School District who sent home three students for wearing black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. The students sued the school stating they had a right to stand up for what they believed. The high court agreed and ruled in favor of the children. The court stated that the children had a right to express their political views in this manner, provided it did not disrupt the learning environment and infringe upon the rights of others (Dowling-Sendor, 2001, pp.3).
This ruling set the stage for future court cases involving a students' right to free expression. However, many of these cases dealt with trivial issues such as the right to wear earrings, the right to wear baggy pants, the right to wear hair a certain way, and the right to wear hats and other miscellaneous items (Dowling-Sendor, 2001, pp.5). The courts became overwhelmed with petty issues, and the Supreme Court ruled that, “mere expressions of individuality or affiliation may be restricted if there is some reasonable basis for doing to do so” (Majestic & Smith, 1990, pp.4). This ruling gave school officials permission to enforce some dress regulations that were consistent with school discipline (Majestic & Smith, 1990, pp.4).

Long Beach, California School District was the first district to pilot a districtwide uniform requirement in September, 1993. In evaluating this program, the District found that crime decreased 36%, fights decreased 51%, sexual offenses decreased 74%, weapon offenses decreased 50%, assault and battery offenses decreased 34%, and vandalism decreased 18% (United States Department of Education, 1996, pp. 4[online]). School uniforms were attributed to an increase in school safety, an improved learning environment, a decrease in ethnic and racial tension, and promotion of positive behavior throughout the school. Dick Van Der Laan of the Long Beach Unified School District stated, “We can’t attribute the improvement exclusively to school uniforms, but we think it’s more than coincidental” (United States Department of Education, 1996, pp. 4[online]). As a result, a mandatory school uniform policy was created and enforced.

Based on these reports, other school districts have begun to follow. In 1995, Seattle, Washington began a school uniform policy for 900 middle school students. In this case, those students who wanted to opt out of wearing a uniform would have to attend
another middle school in the district. The principal of the middle school reported: “This year the demeanor in the school has improved 98 percent, truancy and tardiness are down, and we have not one reported incident of theft” (United States Department of Education, 1996, pp. 4 [online]). Out of the 900 students in this school district, only five students have elected to opt out of the policy and attend another public school.

Richmond, Virginia School District also found positive effects from implementing a school uniform policy. Results included improved behavior, increase in attendance rates, and higher student achievement. Kansas City, Missouri also began a school uniform policy in their elementary schools. Principal Philomina Harshaw stated, “the children feel good about themselves as school uniforms build a sense of pride. It forces adults to know a child” (United State Department of Education, 1996, pp.5 [online]).

Many other schools have chosen to participate and mandate school uniform policies. These schools are located throughout the United States including Memphis, Tennessee, Baltimore, Maryland, Norfolk, Virginia, and Phoenix, Arizona. Arizona School District reported that school uniforms have contributed to a decrease in students throwing objects by 68%, a decrease in truancy by 47%, and a decrease in fighting by 28%. The principal from this district said that “the main result is an overall improvement in the school climate and greater focus on positive behavior. A big portion of that is from uniforms” (United State Department of Education, 1996, pp.6 [online]).

The idea of school uniforms continues to grow. In an interview with Superintendent Jesse Gonzales of the Los Cruces, New Mexico Public Schools, he described how his schools have been affected by the school uniform policy. “School uniforms have raised our academic achievement, discipline, attendance, and overall environment of the schools”, he continues, “the kids feel better about themselves and the
staff feels better about the kids" (Gunnison, 2000, pp.1 [online]).

As a solution to improve academic achievement scores, the Ridley School District in Philadelphia is the first school in Pennsylvania to enforce the 1998 Pennsylvania State Law that supports school uniforms. John Cleghorn, director of support services stated, "we think it will reduce disciplinary problems, improve school spirit and classroom behavior, and make it easier for school staff to identify who belongs on campus" (White, 2000, pp.5, 6 [online]). For this school, school uniforms have proven positive results with better test scores and a safer school environment.

In School Uniform Elementary School, Principal Panas conducted a study comparing behavioral problems over an eight month period for the 2001-2002 school year (Panas, 2002, p.1 [memo]). Behavioral referrals were evaluated during the first year of the study when the children wore non-uniform clothing. These figures were compared to the behavioral referrals that occurred after the school uniform policy was initiated. As a result, the report states that discipline referrals dropped 21% (Panas, 2002, p.1 [memo]). In specific areas such as physical fighting and disrespecting peers, incidents dropped 45% (Jones, 2001, pp. A1). An academic impact analysis was also conducted to compare academic grades in students before and after the school uniform policy. The study found that the number of students achieving the Principals List increased by 13% (Panas, 2002, p.1 [memo]). In addition, the number of students achieving the Honor Roll increased by 14% (Panas, 2002, p.1 [memo]). Principal Panas concludes that his study has shown beneficial results stating, “I think it’s a great idea and a positive thing” (Henry, 2000, A6).

Benefits of School Uniforms

In schools that have implemented uniform policies, school officials have reported increased grades and higher test scores, better self-esteem within the students, and lower

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incidents of bullying and violence. Many reports seem to indicate that uniforms have a positive effect on classroom discipline and school work. In addition, uniforms seem to increase school pride and image within the community, making school a more positive learning environment. It also gives economically disadvantaged students the opportunity to afford reasonably priced uniforms instead of expensive clothing. This can be cost effective for parents because students will require fewer, more basic items in their wardrobe. According to USA Today, non-uniform clothing cost parents an average of $185 per child in 1998, compared to purchasing uniform clothing that cost parents an average of $104 per child (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2000, pp.1 [online]).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2000) conducted a telephone survey of 755 principals nationwide concerning the implementation and effects of school uniform policies. Regardless of whether or not its school held a uniform policy, it was reported that principals, in general, strongly feel that implementing a school uniform policy creates positive effects within the school. In this survey, it was reported that 84% of principals felt uniforms significantly improved the school's image with the community, 79% of principals felt uniforms improved classroom discipline, 76% felt uniforms reduced peer pressure, 72% felt uniforms increased school spirit, and 62% stated uniforms increased student safety (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2000, pp.1 [online]). EducationWatch (2000) reported that in a survey of 5,500 principals who attended that National Association of Secondary School Principals Conference in 2000, 60% of the principals believed that mandatory dress codes will "reduce violent incidents and discipline problems and lead to greater academic achievement" (pp.1 [online]).
Political Movements toward School Uniforms

In 1988, the Educational Commission of the States printed a school uniform and dress policy for every state. The New Jersey State policy reads, "Upon the request of the principal, staff, and parents of students at school, the local board may enact a dress code, provided the board finds the policy will improve the school’s learning environment" (pp. 2[online]). The Education Commission also requires schools to adopt a clause to help economically disadvantaged students finance school uniforms, as well as forbidding students from wearing gang-related clothes. Furthermore, in the *State of New Jersey Policy on Uniforms, Chapter 11, Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes* (1996), the Legislature fully authorizes schools to mandate school uniforms as a way of "prohibiting clothing indicating membership in certain gangs, experience greater school pride, and improve behavior in and out of the classroom"(pp.2).

Recent attention brought to school uniform requirements can be attributed to the efforts of President Bill Clinton. In his *1996 State of the Union Address*, President Clinton called upon school officials to increase school safety and decrease school discipline by mandating a school uniform policy. President Clinton stated "We can never rest until we have more of our children wearing the colors of school uniforms than the colors of gangs. We cannot rest until that is true," (Jackie Robinson Academy, President Clinton, 1996, pp.2[online]). In this speech, the President praised the Long Beach Unified School District in their efforts for creating the first, formal student uniform policy. President Clinton ordered the official policy book called, *Manual on School Uniforms* to be distributed to 16,000 school districts in the country. The *Manual of School Uniforms* teaches schools how to create and enforce a successful school uniform program. It encourages school officials and students to get parents involved and
treat school uniforms as part of an overall safety program (Jackie Robinson Academy, President Clinton, 1996, pp.2[online]).

Effective School Uniform Policies

The integration and implementation of school uniforms requires a strong support of school officials and community members. Parental support is critical for success. Parents can actively lobby schools to create a school uniform policy and have often led school task forces to draw up uniform guidelines. Achieving parental support also encourages the students to wear the uniforms (United States Department of Education, 1996, pp.1[online]).

A school uniform policy must also accommodate students whose religious beliefs are affected by a uniform requirement. Richard W. Riley, United States Secretary of Education stated in a guide he sent to superintendents throughout the nation in 1995:

Students may display religious messages on items of clothing to the same extent that they are permitted to display other comparable messages. Religious messages may not be singled out for suppression, but rather are subject to the same rules as generally apply to comparable messages...when wearing particular attire...under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act schools generally may not prohibit the wearing of such items. (United States Department of Education, 1996, pp.2[online]).

A uniform policy must also refrain from prohibiting students from wearing expressive items such as a political pin. These expressive items may be worn if the item does not interfere with the learning process or rights of others. Furthermore, it is recommended that schools can not restrict students in wearing uniforms with a political message. School districts should also make provisions to assist families who are unable to afford uniforms. Schools can do this by purchasing new ones, utilizing used uniforms, and involving community businesses to contribute (United States Department of Education, 1996, pp.3[online]).
Potential Barriers for School Uniforms

As some support school uniforms in making the policy a universal effort, others disagree with this program. Those who oppose have argued that school uniforms stifle creativity, diminish individuality, and encourage students to participate in more radical forms of expression such as body piercing and tattoos. A primary barrier that would diminish the implementation of a school uniform policy is lack of parental support. In November, 2000, Philadelphia Board of Education approved a policy that would require all students to wear a uniform to school. In the public hearing, a senior from the Philadelphia High School stated, “Now you are going to make us all the same. That just doesn’t seem right to me” (Snyder, 2001, pp.1 [online]). Others feel that schools “need to be dealing with kids who can’t write” and not focusing attention on uniforms (Moore, 2000, pp. 1[online]). Civil rights leaders feel uniforms infringe upon students freedom of speech and rights to expression. One research study was explored by David L. Brunsma and Kerry A. Rockquemore. These researchers examined the effects of student uniforms on attendance, behavioral problems, substance use, and academic achievement. The researchers obtained a nationally stratified random sample of 4,578 eighth grade students from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988. The researchers conducted different measuring scales to assess attendance, behavioral problems, substance use, and academic achievement. Three followup studies were conducted annually with the same students until they reached the tenth grade. The study found that student uniforms were not significantly correlated with absenteeism, behavioral problems, and substance use. However, a slight correlation was found between school uniforms and standardized achievement scores. Academic preparedness, pro-school attitudes, and peer groups were also studied and not found to be significantly higher or
lower in students who wore uniforms.

Conclusion

In response to growing levels of teasing and bullying in schools, it seems that many have come to view school uniforms as a positive way of reducing discipline issues and increasing academic achievement. School officials who have a school uniform policy in place seem to support the idea that uniforms have a significant impact in raising test scores and improving overall behavior problems throughout the school. However, most of these reviews have relied on self-observations and reports. There seems to be a lack of empirical research formally testing and supporting the influence of school uniforms. Despite this, school uniforms continue to emerge as the modern answer to school reform. This study will empirically investigate school uniforms and its impact on academics, attendance, and discipline referrals.
Chapter III

Design of the Study

Sample

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and behavioral referrals. The sample size consisted of 117 students from third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. However, the standardized test scores for third and fourth grade students were different from the other grade levels and could not be correlated equally. Therefore, the sample size for academic achievement contained 63 fifth and sixth grade students. The sample size for attendance and behavior referrals remained at 117 students and included third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. The ages of the students varied from 7 years-old to 13 years-old. Those students who did not attend this school for at least a two year period from 2000 to 2002 were not included in the study.

The school setting used in this study was located in a small, rural community in Southern New Jersey. Grades ranged from pre-kindergarten through eighth. There were two classrooms for each grade. There are no commercial stores in the town. The location of the school was in a rural setting and most students hold knowledge in the farming, fishing, and factory industries. In the 2000-2001 school year, before uniforms, this school had a total of 335 students. In the 2001-2002 school year, when a uniform policy was implemented, this school had a total of 328 students.

Measures

In this study, three variables were examined. Academic achievement was recorded...
for fifth and sixth grade students using the National Percentile Rank for standardized test scores on the Terra Novas. This was located in the students' cumulative file folder. Attendance was recorded for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. This information was located in the students cumulative folder in a locked filing cabinet in the school’s main office. Behavior was measured by recording the number of written discipline referrals that were reported to the Principal. These referrals are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal’s office. Test scores, attendance, and discipline referrals were taken from the 2000-2001 school year before uniforms were implemented and compared to the 2001-2002 school year after a formal uniform policy was enforced. Measures for anonymity were taken by assigning each student a random number for identification. Archival data was recorded in a notebook, which was kept in a locked filing cabinet by the administrator of this study.

**Design**

Data was collected and recorded in a small notebook. Variables that were used in this study include academic achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals. This study utilized fifth and sixth grade students for academic achievement. Academic achievement was measured using the Terra Nova scores. Attendance and behavior referrals were recorded for students in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The variables in each category were compared to the 2000-2001 school year when a school uniform policy was not in place, to the 2001-2002 school year when the school uniform policy became active. A two-tailed t-test for paired samples was utilized to determine if there was a significant difference in test scores, attendance, and behavior referrals before and after school uniforms.
**Testable Hypothesis**

The focus of this paper was to examine the effect of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and behavioral referrals in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. These variables were recorded prior to the school uniform policy and compared with the same variables after a school uniform policy was implemented. The dependent variables were academic achievement (as measured through standardized test scores), attendance (as measured by days absent), and written discipline referrals. The independent variable was school uniforms. The scientific hypothesis was as follows:

The Null Hypothesis is that there is no significant difference between school uniforms and academic achievement. The Alternative Hypothesis is that school uniforms will show a significant difference in academic achievement.

The Null Hypothesis is that there is no significant difference between school uniforms and attendance. The Alternative Hypothesis is that school uniforms will show a significant difference in attendance in students.

The Null Hypothesis is that there is no significant difference between school uniforms and behavior referrals. The Alternative Hypothesis is that school uniforms will show a significant difference in behavioral referrals.

**Analysis**

For this study, test scores, attendance, and written discipline referrals were tested for statistical significance using a two-tailed t-test for paired samples. The test compared the difference between these variables before and after school uniforms were initiated.

**Summary**

As mentioned previously, academic achievement, attendance, and written discipline referrals were recorded from the students’ cumulative files and referral files.
located in the school. Test scores, days absent, and discipline referrals were recorded for a
two year period from the 2000-20001 school year when students could wear nonuniform
clothing, to the 2001-2002 school year when a uniform policy took place. Academic
achievement was measured using standardized test scores on the Terra Novas. This
sample size contained 63 fifth and sixth grade students. Attendance was measured by
days absent, and behavior referrals were measured counting the number of discipline
referrals for each student. Attendance and discipline referrals contained 117 students in
the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. A two-tailed t-test for paired samples was
utilized to measure the effect of school uniforms on test scores, attendance, and written
behavior referrals for these students. It was hypothesized that a school uniform policy
does effect academic achievement causing better test scores, improved attendance
records, and fewer behavioral referrals. Based on these scores, the results will serve as a
benchmark for determining whether or not implementing a school uniform policy has
proven to be empirically effective in these areas.
Chapter IV

Analysis of Results

It was hypothesized that a school uniform policy would have a significant difference on academics, attendance, and behavioral referrals. Academic achievement was recorded for 63 fifth and sixth grade students using the National Percentile Rank for the standardized test scores on the Terra Novas. Attendance and behavior reports were recorded from 117 students in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Test scores, attendance records, and behavior referrals were documented for the 2000-2001 school year when it was allowable for students to wear nonuniform clothing, and the 2001-2002 school year when a school uniform policy became active. The test measurement utilized was a t-test for paired samples statistics.

Restatement of Hypothesis

The first null hypothesis was that there is no significant difference between school uniforms and academic achievement. The alternative hypothesis was that school uniforms will show a significant difference in academic achievement.

The second null hypothesis was that there is no significant difference between school uniforms and attendance. The alternative hypothesis was that school uniforms will show a significant difference in attendance in students.

The third null hypothesis was that there is no significant difference between school uniforms and behavior referrals. The alternative hypothesis was that school uniforms will show a significant difference in behavioral referrals.
Results

A paired sample t-test was utilized to compare scores on the Terra Nova, days absent, and discipline referrals before and after uniforms. Results indicated that there was no significant difference. The mean of the pre test scores on the Terra Nova was 60.1270 with a standard deviation of 27.0623 (n = 63). The mean of the post test scores on the Terra Nova was 60.0000 with a standard deviation of 25.1608 (n = 63). The mean of attendance before school uniforms was 10.4145 with a standard deviation of 2.4512, and after school uniforms was .9231 with a standard deviation of 2.2559 (n = 117). Before uniforms, discipline referrals had a mean of 1.0085 with a standard deviation of 2.4512. After uniforms, discipline referrals had a mean of .9231 with a standard deviation of 2.2559 (n = 117).

Analysis

Paired sample t-tests were utilized to compare scores from the Terra Nova, days absent, and written discipline referrals before and after school uniforms were instituted. The results demonstrated that implementing a school uniform policy did not show a strong effect with academic achievement, attendance record, and discipline referrals for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. Therefore, in all three hypotheses, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Although no significant differences were noted, further examinations indicated that test scores were going up and the number of days absent and written discipline referrals were declining.

Summary

Academic achievement was recorded for 63 fifth and sixth grade students using the National Percentile Rank for the standardized test scores on the Terra Novas. Attendance...
and behavior referrals were recorded from 117 students in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. A two-tailed t-test for paired samples was used to measure the difference between school uniforms and these variables. The present study was guided by three hypotheses: (a) Do school uniforms significantly effect academic achievement? (b) Do school uniforms significantly effect attendance records? and (c) Do school uniforms decrease the number of behavioral referrals? The results demonstrated that implementing a school uniform policy did not show a significant effect with academic achievement, attendance record, and discipline referrals for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. However, although there were no significant differences, a more detailed examination shows that test scores, number of days absent, and number of written discipline referrals were moving in the desired direction. A follow-up study using the same students for consecutive school years may have indicated a stronger, more significant effect of school uniforms on these variables.
Do school uniforms fit in public schools? The answer to this question was the focal point of interest for this study. There is no doubt that students can become overly concerned with their appearance. The latest fashion clothing tends to be worn by popular students who can afford the expense. Those who are unable to wear trendy clothes are becoming targets for bullies. This often leads to an increase in cliques, gangs, discipline problems, and violence. President Clinton gave more attention to this issue in his 1996 State of the Union Address when he publicly supported and encouraged schools to enforce mandatory school uniform policies. As a result, school uniforms continue to emerge as the modern answer to school reform.

Some research argues that school uniforms infringed upon a students’ rights to free speech and expression. Others stated that uniforms had a significant impact in raising test scores and improving discipline problems. The literature reported that schools with mandatory uniform policies have observed many positive benefits such as decreased teasing and bullying, less fights, and fewer discipline issues. In addition, it was reported that school uniforms increased test scores and grades. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2000) conducted a telephone survey of 755 principals nationwide concerning the implementation and effects of school uniform policies. It was found that principals, in general, strongly felt that a school uniform policy created positive effects within the school.

Most studies supported the idea of school uniforms, but few have empirically and
formally investigated the impact of school uniforms specifically on achievement, attendance, and discipline. This paper examined the effect of school uniforms on academic achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals in third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students in School Uniform Elementary School. School Uniform Elementary School was located in a small, rural community in Southern New Jersey. Academic achievement was measured for fifth and sixth grade students using the National Percentile Rank for standardized test scores on the Terra Novas \((n=63)\). Attendance was recorded by counting the number of days absent and discipline referrals were recorded by counting the number of written referrals for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students \((n=117)\). These variables were measured before and after a uniform policy took place. A two-tailed \(t\)-test for paired samples found that there was no significant difference between school uniforms and academic achievement, attendance, and discipline referrals.

**Discussion**

The results were surprising as most of the research supports the widespread effectiveness of school uniforms. It contradicted a previous study on School Uniform Elementary School, which revealed that discipline referrals dropped 21\% and students achieving the Principal’s List increased by 13 \% (Panas, 2002, p.1[memo]). However, it should be noted that this study was conducted with a sample population of third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students \((n=117)\), while the previous study utilized the entire school \((n=328)\). Although this study did not reach significance, the data collected seemed to be moving in the desired direction.

Do school uniforms fit in public schools? In my opinion, I would agree. Based on the research studies and information given on the literature, I believe school uniforms do improve test scores and can offer schools a sense of togetherness and pride. It seems to
decrease bullying and teasing and allows students to concentrate more on school work and less on outward appearances. However, the idea must be a collective effort from school officials, teachers, parents, and students.

Implications for Further Research

Future research is needed to determine the extent to which these results can be generalized to inner city or urban school systems where the number of students in attendance and behavior referrals covers a much broader range. Possibly using a different measure, such as an attitude survey, may have been more sensitive to the impact uniforms had on a students' academics and behavior. In addition, following the study for another school year may have shown a stronger effect, especially because the data seemed to be moving toward the right direction. A larger sample size for academic achievement would have been preferred. Perhaps a correlational study between elementary and high schools would provide more support. Furthermore, more research is necessary to evaluate the impact of school uniforms, especially using sample populations with more diverse cultures. If the results obtained in this study are confirmed in future studies, the implications in mandating a school uniform policy will become more widely accepted.
REFERENCES


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