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Background...

- The current trend towards wearing uniforms in school began in 1987 when an inner-city school in Baltimore, Maryland became the first public school in North America to adopt uniforms; followed by the implementation of a district-wide mandatory uniform policy by a school district in California in 1994. These two events coupled with the 1996 State of the Union address delivered by former President Bill Clinton, where he suggested that uniforms help keep schools safe, are cited as the catalyst for the recent trends towards schools and school districts implementing or piloting dress code / uniform policies.
- This review focuses on the effectiveness of school uniforms to improve student achievement and behaviour along with presenting best practices for adopting a school uniform or dress code policy in public schools.

Key Findings...

Impact of School Uniforms on...

Academic Achievement:

- In one study, elementary-school students in both rural and urban school districts demonstrated improvement in academic achievement for the first year following the implementation of the school-uniform policy (Shamburger, 1999). While in another, mandatory school uniforms in urban public high schools led to improvement in rates of attendance, graduation and suspension, but not in academic proficiency or expulsion rates (Draa, 2005).
- Many researchers agree that school uniform policies have the greatest impact on student achievement when they are part of a larger comprehensive school reform plan (Jones, 1998; Daugherty, 2002; Murray, 2002; Cheurprakobkit & Bartsch, 2005).

Social Benefits:

- An increased level of sense of belonging amongst students has been attributed to school uniforms (Mancini, 1997). Bodine (2003) and Stockton, Gullat & Park (2002) reported a positive correlation between uniforms and student achievement. Boutelle (2008) stated that uniforms bridge the social gap and level the playing field with regards to student attire. Likewise, Murray (2002) reports that uniforms have been linked to increased self-esteem and confidence amongst students. Further, he writes that uniforms focus students' energy on learning rather than on seeking peer approval for their outfits. Lastly both Murray (1997) and Stockton, Gullat & Park (2002) found that students rated their school's atmosphere higher after the adoption of school-wide uniforms.
- In a study by Lumsden (2001), principals indicated that uniforms have a positive impact on student behaviour. Likewise in another study, principals reported that school uniforms helped reduce peer sexual harassment and better prepared students for the work world (DeMitchell, Fossey & Cobb, 2000). In schools where reform is a focus, principals stated that school uniforms present a visible and public symbol of commitment to school improvement (Nash & Bhattacharya, 2009).

Economic Benefits:

- Schools uniforms can be beneficial to all families by lowering clothing costs (Anderson, 2002; Firmin, Smith & Perry, 2006).

School Safety:

- In a study designed to measure the impact of uniforms on gang activity within schools, teachers reported lower levels of gang presence (Stafford & Wade, 2003). Results from another study (Wilson, 1999) which focused on principals perception of violence within schools, showed that principals of schools where uniforms are worn, reported lower levels of perceived violence within their schools. Similarly, Boutelle (2008) reported anecdotal evidence from principals that uniforms reduce the level of gang presence within schools. However, students report that uniforms make no difference to the level of violence or gang related activities within their schools (Stafford & Wade, 2003).
- Another study reported a statistically significant decline in the number of discipline infractions, out-of-school suspensions and juvenile referrals after the adoption of school uniforms (Shamburger, 1999).
- Petersen (2008) suggests that a school policy alone will not prevent school violence; but that uniforms may help to contribute to a safe school climate when included in a comprehensive school safety framework.

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Cautions about Research on School Uniforms

- There is some debate about the overall impact of school uniforms on students (King, 1998; Lumsden, 2001; Anderson, 2002; Schachter, 2005; Konheim-Kalkstein, 2006).
- Studies conducted by Brunnsma & Rockquemore (1998, 2003) find no significant correlation between school uniforms and their impact on students' self-esteem, behaviour, school safety or academic achievement.
- One study suggested that a tightened dress code may be just as effective as having school uniforms (White, 2000).
- Wade & Stafford, in their 2003 study, report that although uniforms contribute to positive school climate, they have no direct impact on substance use, behaviour issues, attendance, academic achievement, students' self-perception and students' perception of gang violence.
- A few researchers express concern about the quality of research in the area of school uniforms impact on student behaviour and academic achievement and therefore, say that drawing generalized conclusions about study findings should be done cautiously (Wilson, 1999; Brunnsma & Rockquemore, 2003).

Best Practices

- Schools / school districts interested in implementing school uniforms should consult with parents, teachers, students, and community leaders.
 - ◆ One study cited parental support as a key factor in regards to compliance in wearing uniforms (Schachter, 2005). Anderson (2002) suggests that school districts should explain why uniforms are being implemented and clearly define the specific guiding principles of a dress code policy.
- Provide alternatives to mandatory policies.
 - ◆ If not, be prepared to enforce the dress code (Essex, 2004). DeMitchell, Fossey & Cobb (2000) reported that although most principals (68%) support dress codes within their schools, many of them are cautious about implementing mandatory uniforms due to challenges, legal or otherwise, they may face.
 - ◆ Having opt-out provisions may help to protect schools / school districts from legal challenges (Lumsden, 2001).
 - ◆ Isaacson (1998) provides the following five alternatives (listed from least to most restrictive): do not institute a dress code; institute a dress code that outlines general goals, and let principals implement policies at the grass roots level; institute an itemized dress code that can be applied throughout a district; authorize a voluntary uniform policy; authorize a mandatory uniform policy with a clearly defined opt-out provision
- Be careful not to restrict religious, political, and other expressions.
- Consider legal ramifications of the final policy / decision.
- Make uniforms available and inexpensive.
- Provide flexibility and assistance for low-income families.
- Implement a pilot program.
- Align uniform / dress code policy with school safety framework.

The literature is mixed about the impact school uniforms have on improving student behaviour and academic achievement. Some studies report that school uniforms increase safety in schools, act as equalizers amongst students, boost self-esteem and feelings of belonging and, in some cases, improve test scores; while others show no effect or negative effects, leading many to agree that more empirical research needs to be done before generalized conclusions can be made. If a school / school district is considering adopting uniforms in their setting, the list of best practices above has been developed based on the experiences of others who have journeyed down the path.

BOTTOM LINE ACTIONABLE MESSAGE

The articles summarized below were reviewed in preparation of this BLAM.

The following search terms were used to retrieve articles:

- uniforms, school uniforms, clothing; mandatory school uniforms
- student attitudes, student behaviour, student achievement, academic achievement, school environment
- middle school, elementary school, education
- uniform policy, policies
- students, children
- effects of uniforms on academic achievement; effects of uniforms on behaviour
- empirical research on uniforms

References:

This list provides information for literature and resources used in preparing this BLAM.

Anderson, W. (2002) School Dress Codes and Uniform Policies Policy Report. Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Abstract

Opinions abound on what students should wear to class. Some see student dress as a safety issue; others see it as a student-rights issue. The issue of dress codes and uniform policies has been tackled in the classroom, the boardroom, and the courtroom. This Policy Report examines the whole fabric of the debate on dress codes and uniform policies through a collection of short reports; policy recommendations; and opinions by administrators, teachers, students, and civil libertarians. Topics of reports include background and history of dress codes and uniform policies in the United States, focusing on the past 15 years; arguments for and arguments against dress codes and uniforms; anecdotes from schools that have implemented dress codes or uniform policies; a recap of research findings on the effects of dress codes and uniform policies; a roundup of legal actions and important court decisions regarding dress codes and uniform policies; and a state-by-state listing of policies on student dress. Guidelines for developing, implementing, and enforcing school dress codes and school-uniform policies are offered from a variety of sources. Also included in the report are a sample dress code and 51 references.

Bodine, A. (2003). School uniforms, academic achievement, and uses of research. *Journal of Educational Research*, 97(2), 67-71.

Abstract

School uniforms are being advocated for a range of social, educational, economic and familial reasons. Data presented in this article show a positive correlation between uniforms and student achievement for the total sample of participants.

Boutelle, M. (2008) Uniforms: Are they a good fit? EDDigest.com

Abstract

The article discusses the pros and cons of schools adopting mandatory school uniforms for students. It also emphasizes the positive aspect of schools adopting student uniforms, including an increased focus on academics rather than clothing fashions. The author also addresses exceptions to such rules, including students who opt out of the dress code, as is allowed under California law. The author also discusses empirical data to support the advantages of adopting school uniforms.

Brown, T.J. (1998) Legal Issues and the trend towards school uniforms.

Abstract

This paper discusses the adoption of mandatory and voluntary uniform policies in school systems across the United States. Mandatory policies have been adopted by 6 of the nations largest districts--Birmingham, Chicago, Dayton, Long Beach, San Antonio, and Oakland. Approximately 35 other districts have voluntary policies, and countless others are considering implementation of some type of uniform policy. The trend toward uniforms actually began in the late 1980s, primarily in inner-city location. The paper discusses the factors that have encouraged the adoption of a school uniform policy as well as what opponents of such a policy have to say. Legal challenges to uniform policy have arisen as school districts have adopted mandatory uniform codes.

Brunsmas, D., & Rockquemore, K. (2003). Statistics, sound bites, and school uniforms: a reply to Bodine. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 97(2), 72-78.

Abstract

The extant literature is largely anecdotal, often methodologically flawed, often unpublished, or published without peer review and sometimes funded by uniform supply companies. In this article the authors reflect on the policy implications of related studies. By doing so, they hope to increase academic interest in the school uniform debate and to encourage further empirical analyses of the effects of existing policies.

Brunsmas, D. L., & Rockquemore, K. (1998). Effects of Student Uniforms on Attendance, Behavior Problems, Substance Abuse, and Academic Achievement. *The Journal of Education Research*, 92(1), 53-62.

Abstract

Mandatory uniform policies have been the focus of recent discourse on public school reform. Proponents of such reform measures emphasize the benefits of student uniforms on specific behavioral and academic outcomes. Tenth grade data from The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 was used to test empirically the claims made by uniform advocates. The findings indicate that student uniforms have no direct effect on substance use, behavioral problems, or attendance. Contrary to current discourse, the authors found a negative effect of uniforms on student academic achievement. Uniform policies may indirectly affect school environments and student outcomes by providing a visible and public symbol of commitment to school improvement and reform.

Cheurprakobkit, S., Bartsch, R.A. (2005) Educational Research. Vol 47, No. 2, pp- 235-250

Abstract

This statewide study surveyed 215 principals of middle schools and high schools in Texas, USA. It examined the effectiveness of activities on school crime by three main methods: (1) what activities the school was doing to combat crime (e.g. police/guards, school uniforms, metal detectors, drug education programs, character education programs, closed campus, surveillance, student court activity, rewards for attendance, etc.); (2) cooperation with outside sources (i.e. police, parents, school district, judicial branch); and (3) principals' comments on what helps and hurts school efforts to alleviate school crimes. Data from these principals regarding drug crime and interpersonal crime in schools were correlated with the data on school activities and outside cooperation. The study also used nine critical elements of promising violence prevention programs introduced by Dusenbury et al., as a framework to evaluate Texas school measures to combat school crimes. The study's findings and policy implications were discussed.

Daugherty, R. F. (2002, Winter). Leadership in action: Piloting a school uniform program. *Education*, 123(2), 390-393.

Abstract

Research has consistently recognized a strong relationship between economic disadvantage and low norm-referenced test scores. Many schools with low academic achievement scores, low attendance rates, and high transiency percentages have high rates of students eligible for free or reduced lunches which researchers frequently use as a poverty indicator. Similarly, studies have found that the strongest predictor of school crime is the nature of the surrounding community, i.e., communities with high levels of poverty and crime tend to have schools with high levels of crime (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1985).

In the Washoe County Schools, which include the cities of Reno, Sparks, and a portion of Lake Tahoe, one of the middle schools fitting the above socioeconomic profile has been working, not only to overcome such perceived obstacles, but to strive for excellence. Led by Principal Debbie Feemster, the faculty, staff, and students at Traner Middle School have already improved reading scores on the norm-referenced TerraNova examinations. According to a school performance report (1999-2000), truancy rates and the number of school suspensions have also declined with the implementation of a peer mediation program, family liaisons, and a family focus center.

In an effort to further enhance academic and social goals, the school's parent/teacher organization discussed, researched, and voted to pilot a school uniform program commencing November 2000.

DeMitchell,, T. A., Fossey, R., & Cobb, C. (2000). Dress Codes in the Public Schools: Principals, Policies, and Precepts. *Journal of Law and Education*

Abstract

Responses from 157 principals (65 percent of a national sample) showed strong support for dress codes. Research focuses on the perception of school principals regarding dress codes, analyzes dress codes for common features, and proposes a constitutional standard of review for contested dress codes.

Draa, V. A. B. (2005). *School uniforms in urban public high schools* (Doctoral dissertation, Youngstown State University)

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the implementation of a mandatory uniform policy in urban public high schools improved school performance measures at the building level for rates of attendance, graduation, academic proficiency, and student conduct as measured by rates of suspensions and expulsions. Sixty-four secondary schools serving students in grades 9-12 in Ohio's eight largest cities were included in this study. Four comparisons were used to ascertain if the school uniform policy influenced improvements in school performance measures, employing a time-series quantitative design. These four methods were used to control for other plausible explanations for improvements by grouping schools locally and statewide, and by matching similar schools based on enrollment demographics and administrators' survey responses. Analyses employed ANOVA and t-tests with Cohen's d for small sample size. Through these four comparisons, a pattern emerged that indicated improvement in rates of attendance, graduation, and suspension, but not in academic proficiency or expulsion rates in these schools with uniform policies. It was also determined that schools with uniform policies had higher proportions of economically disadvantaged and minority students than the larger population of urban public high schools. Implementation of a uniform policy in these schools may be effective for improving rates of attendance, graduation, and suspensions. These results may be important considerations for urban public schools seeking alternative means to improve their performance outcomes.

Essex, N.L. (2004) Zero tolerance and student dress codes. *Principal*, v80 n3
p38-39 Jan 2001

Abstract

Principals desiring to develop a school-uniform policy should involve parents, teachers, community leaders, and student representatives; beware restrictions on religious and political expression; provide flexibility and assistance for low-income families; implement a pilot program; align the policy with school-safety issues; and consider legal ramifications

Firmin, M., Smith, S., Perry, L. (2006) School Uniforms: A Qualitative Analysis of Aims and Accomplishments at Two Christian Schools. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*. Vol 15, No. 2. pp 143-168.

Abstract

Employing rigorous qualitative research methodology, we studied the implementation of two schools' uniform policies. Their primary intents were to eliminate competition, teach young people to dress appropriately, decrease nonacademic distractions, and lower the parental clothing costs. The young people differed with adults regarding whether or not the objectives relating to competition and distractions were met. Both adults and young people agreed that the goal of learning to dress more appropriately was met, yet they differed on how accomplishment was achieved--and also on how they understood appropriate dress. Data from both schools was generally comparable, with four notable differences.

Isaacson, L. (1998) Student Dress Policies. ERIC Digest # 117

Abstract

Educators and the public are divided over the value of implementing school-uniform policies in the public schools. This digest examines arguments for and against school-uniform policies, identifies legal considerations, and offers guidelines for implementing policies on student dress. Most parents have responded favorably to uniform policies, while children's attitudes vary. The legal issues involve First Amendment claims and liberty claims. Experts recommend that policymakers address three key questions: Are the requirements legally defensible? Do they actually restore order? Are less restrictive dress codes a better alternative? For example, policymakers can consider five alternatives ranging from least to most restrictive; (1) Do not institute a dress code; (2) institute a dress code that outlines general goals, and let principals and local school officials formulate and implement policy at the grass-roots level; (3) institute an itemized dress code that will be applied throughout the district; (4) authorize a voluntary uniform policy; and (5) authorize a mandatory uniform policy with or without a clearly defined opt-out provision. The policymakers should decide whether to let schools choose their own uniforms and whether to offer financial help to low-income families.

Jones, C.A. (1998) Preventing School Violence: A review of the Literature.
Paper presented at the annual meeting of the mid-south Educational
Research Association

Abstract

This report reviews the research on violence in public schools in the U.S. Recent books and articles were analyzed to determine the extent of the problem so as to identify motives that lead students to commit acts of violence, and to survey various types of programs designed to prevent violence. Results show that violent acts occur in over half of public schools in the U.S. These incidences occur most often in urban schools but they also happen in rural schools. The data available on violence are generally obtained through self-reporting data, and often statistics are not kept in a precise way, making it difficult to determine the exact number of violent incidences each year. Despite this lack of precision, a variety of program and strategies have been designed to prevent violence in the schools. There are curricular programs that involve character education or conflict mediation; programs that encourage students to feel connected to a responsible adult; and zero-tolerance policies and schools that require students to wear uniforms. Steps are identified that can help schools design a program that will meet their specific needs. Starting early in socializing children is deemed important.

King, K. (1998). Should school uniforms be mandated in elementary schools?
American School Health Association Journal of School Health

Abstract

A general review of research discussing both the positive and negative aspects of implementing school uniforms is presented. There article states that there is no empirical evidence that requiring elementary school students to wear uniforms significantly improves school behavior, but controversy over this issue continues. Supporters for schools requiring uniforms feel students will have less stress when competing for fashion is not an issue, while those against this requirement believe it will not ensure or improve school safety. Twelve states permit school districts to require student uniforms. In the last section of the article, the author suggests areas for future research including perception studies, studies with experimental design, trend analysis of already conducted research, and studies that compare schools with dress codes versus uniform policies.

Konheim-Kalkstein, Y.L. (2006) A uniform look. *American School Board Journal*

Abstract

The article explores the issues associated with school uniforms, particularly in the areas of violence prevention, school climate and finances. The arguments presented by supporters and opponents of school uniforms are discussed. Proponents have said that school uniforms have many benefits such as the fact that it can lead to improved discipline and classroom behavior and increased school attendance. Opponents, however, argue that requiring school uniforms violates students' rights and that uniforms are not responsible for decreased violence. In exploring the advantages and disadvantages in requiring school uniforms, this article highlights several researchers and articles associated with the issue.

Lumsden, L., Miller, G. (2002) Dress Codes and Uniforms, National Association of Elementary School Principals, Research RoundUp

Abstract

Students do not always make choices that adults agree with in their choice of school dress. Dress-code issues are explored in this Research Roundup, and guidance is offered to principals seeking to maintain a positive school climate. In "Do School Uniforms Fit?" Kerry White discusses arguments for and against school uniforms and summarizes the state of research in this area. Deborah Elder evaluates the implementation and effects of a mandatory uniform policy at two middle schools in "Evaluation of School Uniform Policy at John Adams and Truman Middle Schools for Albuquerque Public Schools." Todd DeMitchell and colleagues, in "Dress Codes in the Public Schools: Principals, Policies, and Precepts," report on principals' views on dress codes and look at sample policies. In "School Uniforms: Can Voluntary Programs Work? Experimenting in an At-Risk School," Richard Dougherty describes the adoption of a voluntary uniform policy at a middle school. Benjamin Dowling-Sendor examines a school-uniform case and discusses legal elements.

Lumsden, L. (2001) Uniforms and Dress Code Policies, ERIC Digest # 148

Abstract

This digest examines schools' dress-code policies and discusses the legal considerations and research findings about the effects of such changes. Most revisions to dress codes involve the use of uniforms, typically as a way to curb school violence and create a positive learning environment. A recent survey of secondary school principals found that 70 percent of principals believe that mandated uniforms would reduce discipline problems. However, people who oppose uniforms caution against unnecessary routinization, authoritarianism, and infringement of the freedom of expression. Opponents also claim that the lack of conclusive evidence whether uniforms have a positive impact should give uniform proponents pause. Research on the effects of uniforms has been mixed because most studies rely on informal observations. As far as the legality of such codes is concerned, legal rulings have been ambiguous, though federal courts consistently uphold school districts' rights to establish regulations for the routine operation of schools. However, the courts want to know how the policy affects education, and school administrators must realize that policies are more likely to succeed when parents are involved from the beginning. Also, having an "opt-out" provision can protect schools from legal challenges. Possible alternatives to uniform include teaching conflict-resolution skills and increased security.

Mancini, G.H. (1997) *School uniforms: Dressing for success or conformity?* Education Digest, 0013127X, Dec97, Vol. 63, Issue 4

Abstract

Presents an article concerning school uniforms in the United States condensed from the October 1997 issue of 'Middle Ground.' Effectiveness of wearing uniforms; Uniforms as a way to reduce economic competition among students; Advantages and disadvantages of wearing uniforms.

Murray, R. (2002). 'Tinkering' with Student Dress: A Review of School Uniform Law. Thresholds in Education, 28, 1.

Summary

This article summarizes some research on the impact of school uniforms on student conduct, student achievement and gang activities within schools. It also addresses the legal implications of implementing school dress codes or uniform policies.

Murray, R. K. (1997). The Impact of school uniforms on school climate. NASSP Bulletin. 81 (593), 106-1 12.

Abstract

To determine effects of uniforms on school climate, students in two Charleston (South Carolina) County middle schools were surveyed in Spring 1996, using NASSP's Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE) School Climate Survey. Students in the uniform school rated climate as more positive in 9 out of 10 subscales. School uniforms are no panacea, but can significantly affect student perceptions of school climate. (25 references) (MLH)

Nash, N.W., Bhattacharya, K. (2009) Urban middle school principal's perception of a school uniform policy. *Research and Practices in Social Sciences*, Vol 4, No 2, pp-46-64

Abstract

This qualitative study uses a narrative approach in an effort to study three middle school principal's perceptions of a district-mandated school uniform policy. The principals, who are employed in a mid-south urban school district, report not only their perceptions of the uniform policy but also the varied modifications their students make to the uniform policy. Data sources consisted of existing literature, interview transcriptions and district policy handbooks. The findings reveal that although principals are advocates of the school uniform policy, their students have begun to make modifications that are not aligned with the district's initial implementation goals. This has, according to the participants, created perplexity and is counterproductive to an effective teaching and learning environment.

Pedzich, J. (2002). Student Dress Codes in Public Schools: A Selective Annotated Bibliography. *Law Library Journal*, Vol 94: 1.

Abstract

The author compiles and summarizes recent educational and legal literature on the constitutionality and viability of student dress codes in public schools. The annotations cover the legal issues and practical problems of drafting and enforcing dress policies that will pass the scrutiny of the courts.

Petersen, R. (2008). Fact Sheet # 6: Student uniforms. *Consortium to Prevent School Violence*.

Abstract

In this fact sheet, Petersen provides a background on recent research in the area of school uniform policies, as well as provides recommendations for schools / school districts interested in adopting a new policy. The last section of the article provides cautions about the effectiveness of dress codes in curbing violence in schools.

Rodriguez, J. (2005). The Effects of School Uniforms on Self Esteem. *The Graduate School at Rowan University*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine whether school uniforms have an effect on self esteem. The hypothesis was that school uniforms would increase self esteem. There were 87 total participants in this study; 41 students had uniforms and 46 did not. The Rosenberg Self Esteem scale was used to measure self esteem. The questionnaire was given to teachers to administer to the children in their classroom. An independent samples t test was performed to analyze the data. Results were not significant showing that school uniforms did not have an effect on self esteem.

Schachter, R. (2005) Do clothes make the student? District Administration.

Abstract

The article discusses whether a school dress code can really help improve student discipline. Schools which have followed the policy say that it helped bring a sense of unity and discipline in students but David Brunnsma, a sociologist at the Missouri University says that no evidence of its positive or negative influence is found in research so far. Parents' role is also considered important in the matter and a telephonic survey showed 86% parents supporting a dress code.

Shamburger, P.S. (1999). The influence of a mandatory school uniform policy.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Career and Technical Education. Orlando, FL.

Abstract

This essay examines the influence of a mandatory school-uniform dress code on academic achievement and discipline infractions. In addition, student gender and type of school district were compared to show the influence of this policy. Only schools that implemented a mandatory school-uniform policy in 1996 and had data for discipline infractions and academic achievement for the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years were eligible for inclusion in the study. Subjects consisted of students in a southern Florida school district located in a predominately rural area. The final sample included 6 middle schools and 80 elementary schools from 2 school districts. Results show that elementary-school students in both rural and urban school districts demonstrated improvement in academic achievement for the first year following the implementation of the school-uniform policy. The discipline infractions of out-of-school suspensions and juvenile referrals had a statistically significant improvement. Middle-school students did not have a significant decrease for discipline infractions for the school year 1996-97. The numbers of students not promoted to the next grade showed a significant effect by district type but not by gender. Further research is needed on the importance of dress to influence educators as they help students achieve a healthier self-esteem.

Stafford, M. E. & Wade, K. (2003). Public school uniforms: Effect on perceptions of gang presence, school climate, and student self-perceptions. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(4), 399-420.

Abstract

This study attempts to clarify the relationships between public school uniforms and some of their intended results: student self-worth and student and staff perceptions of gang presence and school climate. The instruments used in the study included a questionnaire on gang presence and identity, the National Association of School Principals Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, and the Harter Self-Perception Profile for Children. Participants consisted of 415 urban public middle school students and 83 teachers. Findings indicate that, although perceptions did not vary for students across uniform policy, teachers from schools with uniform policies perceived lower levels of gang presence. Although the effect size was small, students from schools without uniforms reported higher self-perception scores than students from schools with uniform policies. Student and teacher perceptions of school climate did not vary across uniform policy.

Stockton, C., Gullatt, D., Parke R.D. (2002) School Uniforms: Policies and Procedures. Research in Middle Level Education Online, Volume 24, No 1

Abstract

This research summary addresses both student and teacher perceptions about the importance, value, and level of implementation of school uniform use in the Bossier Parish School District in Louisiana. Summative data are also used to investigate the relationship of uniform use with evidence of both improved student academic gain and school learning climate. Participants in the study included 1,680 students and 285 teachers in the above north Louisiana public school district composed of 16,000 students and 1,250 teachers. The perceived implementation of school uniforms varied significantly between types of schools. Students perceived the level of implementation to be greater for elementary and middle schools than they did for secondary schools. Student achievement improved at the middle and secondary schools and attendance improved at the secondary schools.

US Justice Department & US Department of Education (1996) Manual on School Uniforms

Abstract

In response to growing levels of violence in American schools, many communities are deciding to adopt school-uniform policies as part of an overall program to improve school safety and discipline. This document provides the following guidelines for parents, teachers, and school leaders who may consider adopting a school-uniform policy: (1) Get parents involved from the beginning; (2) protect students' religious expression; (3) protect students' other rights of expression; (4) determine whether to implement a voluntary or mandatory policy; (5) consider whether to have an opt-out provision in the case of a mandatory policy; (6) do not require students to wear a message; (7) assist families that need financial help; and (8) treat school uniforms as part of an overall safety program. Proponents assert that school uniforms may decrease violence and theft among students over clothing; prevent the wearing of gang colors and insignia; instill student discipline; help students and parents resist peer pressure; help students focus on school work; and help school officials identify intruders. The document also highlights policy models implemented in schools in the following communities: Long Beach, California; Seattle, Washington; Richmond, Virginia; Kansas City, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee; Baltimore, Maryland; Norfolk, Virginia; and Phoenix, Arizona.

White, K. (2000). Do School Uniforms Fit? School Administrator, 57(2), 36-40.

Abstract

In 1994, Long Beach (California) Unified School District began requiring uniforms in all elementary and middle schools. Now, half of all urban school systems and many suburban schools have uniform policies. Research on uniforms' effectiveness is mixed. Tightened dress codes may be just as effective and less litigious.

Wilson, R.E. II (1999) Impact of School uniform dress code on Principal perception of Violence. Southeastern University

Abstract

This report describes a national telephone survey of randomly selected middle and high school principals to measure the impact of school-uniform dress codes on perceived level of school violence. In addition to measuring the impact of school uniforms on principals' perception of violence, selected variables such as region, gender, and educational level were measured to assess for significant differences in principals' perception of violence. The aim was to develop a study that addressed the issue of school uniforms in such a way that the results could be generalized to other middle and high school populations across the United States. In addition to examining the history of the first district-wide uniform dress code implementation, this study cited specific empirical inquiries that have provided support for and criticism against the use of school uniforms as an alternative in addressing the problem of school violence. A total of 141 school administrators within four geographic regional urban school districts were surveyed during the spring 1999 school semester. Parametric tests of statistical significance were utilized to measure the hypotheses under investigation. The findings of this study yielded significant differences among three of the variables measured. There are important implications resulting from this study that merit further inquiry regarding the impact of both school uniforms and the problem of school violence.

Additional Resources:

This list provides information for additional literature and resources on the subject of school uniforms. These resources were not used in preparing this BLAM.

Brunsma, D. L. (2001). Uniforms: A Critical Review of the Literature.
Monograph for Phi Delta Kappan's Policy Into Practice Series.

Abstract

The debate surrounding the effectiveness of school-uniform policies, as well as discussions concerning when and how to implement them, is rooted in anecdotes. This review summarizes anecdotal literature on which the current debate is based and critically reviews the empirical literature, including theoretical underpinnings, findings, and suggestions. The anecdote-based literature relies on attitudes, personal experience, and hearsay, ignoring available research. Empirical literature includes small-scale studies of effects, such as case studies of schools that implemented mandatory school-uniform policies, and large-scale studies that compare nationally representative samples of students enrolled in schools implementing uniform policies with students enrolled in schools not implementing such policies on a variety of outcomes. Many methods used are flawed because different factors are not accounted for, such as design of uniform policies in different schools studies, and racial and socioeconomic status. Still, results of qualitative studies lay the groundwork for creating theories on uniform policy effectiveness and defining related issues requiring further research. These results will direct policymakers away from conjecture, emotion, anecdotes, and assumptions. One suggestion is that a uniform policy be part of a larger comprehensive plan that focuses on students' academic success.

Brunsma, D.L. (2004) [Book] The School Uniform Movement and What It Tells Us About American Education: A Symbolic Crusade.

Summary

Brunsma reviewed past studies on the effect of uniforms on academic performance. He also conducted his own analysis of two enormous databases, the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study and the 1998 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. Brunnsma concluded that there is no positive correlation between uniforms and school safety or academic achievement.

Caruso, J. (1996). Individuality vs. Conformity: The issues behind school uniforms. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80(581), 83-88.

Gregory, N. (1998). Effects of school uniforms on self-esteem, academic achievement, and attendance, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, university of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, Arizona.

Abstract

The purpose of this casual comparative study was to examine if there are statistically significant differences between the self-esteem, academic achievement, and attendance of selected students who attend uniform or non-uniform inner city middle schools. Three research questions were addressed: (a) are school uniforms significantly related to self-esteem, (b) are school uniforms significantly related to achievement, (c) are school uniforms significantly related to attendance? Student achievement averages in mathematics and language arts were compiled for each participant from two demographically similar inner city middle schools. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory was administered to 335 randomly sampled sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. Survey responses and grade averages from the school with a school uniform policy (n = 165) and survey responses and grade averages from the school without the school uniform policy (n = 170) were analyzed through the use of the SPSS-X Computer Batch System using the alpha level of $p < .05$. For the comparative analysis, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure was employed to determine if significant differences existed between the two groups in self-esteem, achievement, or attendance. Each hypothesis was tested at the alpha level of $p < .05$. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed a significance ($p < .05$) between the responses in the subscales: Total Self, General Self, and School-Academic. Grade level was noted as being significant on both subscales. Significance among survey responses were not found in the following subscales: Social Self-Peers and Home-Parents. The ANOVA determined significance in self-esteem, attendance and achievement between the school with uniforms and the school without uniforms.

Ryan, R., & Ryan, T. (1998). School uniforms: Esprit de corps. *The School Community Journal*, 8(2), 81-84.

Stanley, M. S. (1996). School Uniforms and Safety. *Education and Urban Society*, 28(4), 424-435.

Abstract

Policy issues related to school uniforms include legal concerns about requiring uniforms, the implications for parents who oppose uniform policies, and how to provide uniforms for children in families that are low-income or indigent. Courts have stricter dress codes, but legal opinion varies about how courts might decide on the constitutionality of mandatory public school uniforms. Among issues that school districts should consider before establishing a policy are whether everyone is involved in the process and what the consequences will be for not wearing a uniform. Longitudinal research on the Long Beach policy began in the spring of 1995 through a survey of students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Results from the first year indicate that the Long Beach schools are remarkably safer, although it is not clear that these results are entirely attributable to the uniform policy. Survey results indicate that adults, particularly school administrators, perceived that uniforms had a positive influence on student behavior. However, students reported that they did not feel safer going to and from school and did not believe that uniforms reduce behavior such as fighting or promote feelings of belonging to the school. Further research is examining the differing opinions of adults and students.

Stevenson, H. L. (1999). *An analysis of requiring school uniforms and its impact on student behavior: Implications for school reform*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas southern University.

Zirkel, P. A. (2000). Dress Codes Legal Brief. NASSP Bulletin

Abstract

Requiring a single uniform is recommended for schools which want to enforce a dress code. It is imperative that uniform policies do not target particular clothing so as not to be discriminatory.