

# The benefits of school uniforms as a mandatory

[Education](#), [School](#)



In a time when the academic status quo is coming into question throughout America, educators, civic leaders, parents, students, and legislatures are left cycling through a myriad of standardized options to ameliorate the system. From gender-segregated classrooms to the implementation of national standard tests grading both students and teachers, suggestions abound on ways the American public might make its school system a better functioning environment for the socialization and academic study of its children.

Among many other suggested and sometimes implemented deviations is the option of school uniforms as a mandatory part of American schools. Already a part of many school environments, usually private, parochial, or urban, uniforms come with a heady line of debate to the forefront of systematic discussion.

Those in support of uniforms in both primary and secondary school environments stand in staunch opposition to those who suggest it might not only detract from the creative development of a child but may ultimately be a waste of time, money, and effort. Many critics of the school uniform movement proclaim that uniforms cannot "fix" anything about the failings of the American school system, and that it is, in fact, the morals, attitudes, and determination of those in the academic environments that create good schools, not uniforms.

Yet, the detractors seem to fall short of reasons to not use school uniforms; those schools that have implemented them as a regimented part of school life support the uniforms as a mechanism to focus children on their work and

away from each other, equalize the exceedingly hierarchical playing field of consumer popularity supported by the capitalist marketplace, and undermine the social tensions prevalent in the teenage years that account for so much wasted time, effort, and emotion during the classroom day.

Contemporary American culture supports the performance and display of class and status as an important component of society; American schoolchildren replicate these trends, particularly those associated with familiar celebrities and elite brands, overpopulate the classic schoolyard. As a result, a culture of dress code policies and school uniforms have been instituted to counteract the peer competition, ostracism, tensions, and even theft that distract children from their schoolwork.

Holloman, Lillian O. Dress-Related Behavioral Problems in the Public School Setting: Prevention and Policy - A Holistic Approach. " The Journal of Negro Education. Vol. 65, No. 2, Educating Children in a Violence Society, Part I. (Summer, 1996. ) p. 267-281. In her review of the uniform policy of urban schools, Holloman reflects on the current violence that infects public schools where there is no system in place to counteract the social problems set in motion by the capitalist-spawned problems of material competition.

She addresses not only the problems these play in all schools, particularly in terms of stress, the development of male-female relations, and socialization of American school children, but carries her discussion further to the way these issues play out in lower and working class ethnic groups. She says that while students at all schools must face the issues of material competition

represented by clothing in the classroom, it is a situation far more exaggerated for the urban black demographic.

She includes the work of other sociologists and academic thinkers in her analysis of the school uniform option for the public schools most frequently attended by blacks. In this environment, she discusses the frighteningly frequent occurrence of violence as a result of material competition between students, with armed assailants stealing one student's jacket in the middle of a school day in Washington, D. C. While national attempts at school security have limited the level of danger in the schools, it has not limited the violence nor the lasting psychological effects it has on impressionable teens.

Because the emotional implications of the violence that frequently ensues as a direct result of the clothes student wear to school in urban black environments, Holloman fully encourages the use of school uniforms, even if they detract from a student's ability to cultivate a unique sense of self through physical expression. Holloman weighs the costs and benefits of the uniform, but ultimately sides with the student's safety, suggesting that time outside of school will be enough to encourage individuality among students.

Likewise, she says, students are at school to learn, and positioning them in the safest environment to do so is the responsibility of all academic communities. Meadmore and Symes, Daphne and Colin. " Keeping up Appearances: Uniform Policy for School Diversity? " British Journal of Educational Studies. Vol. 45, No. 2. (Jun. , 1997. ) p. 174-186. Meadmore and Symes analyze the policies pertaining to school dress codes that instituted standard uniforms across the whole of Australia. They investigate the

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devolution and marketization of schools, as well as the growing state control over local practices.

While their work is Australia-oriented, they strictly examine the social themes at play internationally that cause teenagers to misuse their freedom of dress in schools to a point that uniforms are a suitable tool to address the need of schools to control what goes on inside their walls. Likewise, Meadmore and Symes take an in-depth look at the transformation of schools over time, since formalized schooling in Australia has its roots in the private/public system of England, where uniforms have been traditionally mandatory.

The English system, along with a desire for proper socialization to "the American way" for immigrant children in the 19th century, was the basis for the American school system's development, and its lack of uniforms is particularly interesting. Since public schools do not traditionally require uniforms in the halls of America while private schools, modeled more strictly on the elite British schools usually do, the work of Meadmore and Symes is easily extrapolated and integral to the academic discussion of the viability of uniforms in schools. Jacobson, Paul B. "Personal Expenses of High-School Students." *The School Review*. Vol. 52, No. . (Jun. , 1994. ) p. 350-355.

Jacobsen, a well-respected University of Chicago academic sociologist, states that 'secondary education has always been selective.' While this double entendre refers to the past of secondary education as something only afforded to the privileged and now those only adept enough to swim the seas of high school, its significance is important in the modern day American

school system. While education still takes place in these schools, he says, it is clear that the education has also left Western Civilization and extended to the malls, shops, and boutiques where clothing becomes a mark of who a student is.

It is not about sweaters to stay warm or long skirts, demure in their affiliation with a religious group or cultural standard, but instead about carefully relating brand and styles to characteristics populated by society's superstars to make a statement about who you are on the inside with each item of clothing. While this is not necessarily inherently bad, it is a powerful beast that changes the face of modern education.

Jacobsen denounces free clothing choice at school not because of this reason but because of how it plays out in society; many parents and students cannot afford to play this game with attire in the schoolroom setting, which is already augmented in cost by musical instruments, school supplies, and athletic gear. As all of these aspects of education increase in expense, parents and students should not be forced to keep up to merely stay afloat in the mean world high school society, and as a result, he says, uniforms are a necessary alternative to the status quo.

Brunsma, David L. *The School Uniform Movement and What it Tells us About American Education*. Washington, D. C. : Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2004.

Brunsma provides the most thorough and sizeable analysis of the issues in the American school uniform debate. He examines the impetuses, debates, legal issues, and effectiveness of policies where uniforms have been implemented throughout the United States, further embellishing the work

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with anecdotal components that remind the reader that the issue of uniforms, while seemingly minor, actually has large ramifications on the future of American school systems and the expectations made of American children.

His debates analyze both sides of the argument, as well as providing a comprehensive history and case study review. While Brunson's conclusion is that uniforms do not make schools better, his intellectual review of the current literature on the matter disengages the reader from his opinion and, ironically, supports the implementation of a uniform code.

His position is based on a simplistic desire to remain in a non-commercialized world where Gucci and Yves St. Laurent have not invaded the seventh grade classroom, but his review of case studies reveals that it in fact has. The evidence he presents clearly supports the use of uniforms, as the difference between a Sears-bought turtleneck and one purchased at Saks are far more insignificant than the way materialism plays out throughout an entire wardrobe.

His analysis, while contrary to his personal opinion, shows that uniforms boost school climate, morale of students, work to eliminate high levels of competition, and support a focused academic atmosphere. All of these works, in addition to the great bevy available in academic journals, newspapers, and bookshelves, provide a great source of questions from which one can more strictly analyze the issue of school uniforms in the American classroom setting and the questions with which one needs to examine the costs and benefits of their implementation.