



### **Do School Uniforms Make a Difference in Academic Performance?**

**Q.** My niece attends a charter school and they wear uniforms. My sister thinks that wearing uniforms helps improve academics in schools. Is this true?

**A.** Well, it depends on whom you ask. If you ask people who went to Catholic or other religious schools, other private schools or who went to school outside of the USA where everyone wore uniforms; they would tell you yes! Those who never wore uniforms may take another view on the subject! Researchers are divided over how much of an impact - if any - dress policies have upon student learning. A 2004 book makes the case that uniforms do not improve school safety or academic discipline. A 2005 study, on the other hand, indicates that in some Ohio high schools uniforms may have improved graduation and attendance rates, although no improvements were observed in academic performance. In the 1980s, public schools were often compared unfavorably to Catholic schools. Noting the perceived benefit that uniforms conferred upon Catholic schools, some public schools decided to adopt a school uniform policy. President Clinton provided momentum to the school uniform movement when he said in his 1996 State of the Union speech, "If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms."

## **The Pros and Cons of School Uniforms!**

### **According to proponents, school uniforms:**

- Help prevent gangs from forming on campus
- Encourage discipline
- Help students resist peer pressure to buy trendy clothes
- Help identify intruders in the school
- Diminish economic and social barriers between students
- Increase a sense of belonging and school pride
- Improve attendance

### **Opponents contend that school uniforms:**

- Violate a student's right to freedom of expression
- Are simply a Band-Aid on the issue of school violence
- Make students a target for [bullies](#) from other schools
- Are a financial burden for poor families
- Are an unfair additional expense for parents who pay taxes for a free public education
- Are difficult to enforce in public schools

### **Most school districts have dress codes which are different from wearing a uniform everyday! Some examples include:**

- Decorations (including tattoos) that are symbols, mottoes, words or acronyms that convey crude, vulgar, profane, violent, gang-related, sexually explicit or suggestive messages
- Large or baggy clothes (this prohibition can be used to keep students from

excessive "sagging")

- Holes in clothes
- Scarves, curlers, bandanas or sweatbands inside of school buildings (exceptions are made for religious attire)
- Visible undergarments
- Strapless garments
- Bare midriffs, immodestly low-cut necklines or bare backs
- Tights, leggings, bike shorts, swim suits or pajamas as outerwear
- Visible piercings, except in the ear
- Dog collars, tongue rings and studs, wallet chains, large hair picks, or chains that connect one part of the body to another

## What Research Says About School Uniforms!

Virginia Draa, assistant professor at Youngstown State University, reviewed attendance, graduation and proficiency pass rates at 64 public high schools in Ohio. Her final analysis surprised her: "I really went into this thinking uniforms don't make a difference, but I came away seeing that they do. At least at these schools, they do. I was absolutely floored." Draa's study concluded that those schools with uniform policies improved in attendance, graduation and suspension rates. She was unable to connect uniforms with academic improvement because of such complicating factors as changing instructional methods and curriculum. University of Missouri assistant professor, David Brunσμα reached a different conclusion. In his 2004 book, [\*The School Uniform Movement and What It Tells Us About American Education: A Symbolic Crusade\*](#)

, Brunσμα 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. Brunσμα concluded that there is no positive correlation between uniforms and

[school safety](#)

or academic achievement. Meanwhile, the movement toward uniforms in public schools has spread to about a quarter of all elementary schools. Experts say that the number of middle and high schools with uniforms is about half the number of elementary schools. If uniforms are intended to curb

[school violence](#)

and improve academics, why are they not more prevalent in middle and high schools, where these goals are just as important as in elementary schools? Because, says Brunσμα, "It's desperately much more difficult to implement uniforms in high schools, and even middle schools, for student resistance is much, much higher. In fact, most of the litigation resulting from uniforms has been located at levels of K-12 that

are higher than elementary schools. Of course, this uniform debate is also one regarding whether children have rights, too!"

The debate over uniforms in public schools encompasses many larger issues than simply what children should wear to school. It touches on issues of school improvement, freedom of expression and the "culture wars." It's no wonder the debate rages on.

Information gathered from <http://www.greatschools.org/find-a-school/defining-your-ideal/121-school-uniforms.gs?page=3>

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