

School Dress Policies: Do We Really Need Them?

by Stephanie Busse

Do you like being told what you can or cannot wear? Of course not! Neither do many of today's elementary, middle, and high school students. In Stephen Daniels' article "School Dress Codes Are Necessary and Constitutional," Daniels believes school uniforms and dress codes have a positive impact on students, promote school safety, improve self-esteem and school unity, and are in the school's best interest.

Daniels, the director of research for the North Carolina Family Policy Council, states that in a survey of principals, "students stay more disciplined and focused in their studies and feel less peer pressure," with the presence of uniforms. Daniels attempts to appeal to principals and those with school-aged children. With this audience in mind, he writes an essay about why every school should have dress policies in place.

After giving an overview of the benefits and positive impacts of school uniforms—some of which have even been acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Education—Daniels goes on to introduce his first point: Uniforms promote school safety. He argues that dress policies are a necessity in order for all students to be safe. Designer and name-brand clothing worn by some students is very costly. Having such clothes in one's possession, "often puts the students at risk of theft and violence from other students," says Daniels. Uniforms would promote student safety by reducing the chance that expensive clothing will be stolen. Also, as gangs continue to be a problem in larger cities, the wearing of gang clothing, "can cause intimidation and fear in schools."

In this section of the article, Daniels shares several interesting facts gathered from an observation of California's Long Beach school district. Among these, he states, "crime in the school district has dropped by 91 percent... vandalism is down 69 percent." He uses these statistics as another way to convince the reader that school dress policies are a necessity.

For his second point, Daniels addresses the issues of self-esteem and school unity. Uniforms put students on an equal playing field, where no one is judged on how he or she dresses. "Poorer students do not feel and are not treated as inferior because they don't have nice clothes," argues Daniels. Many school officials also believe that having students dress alike promotes a sense of "school unity" and belonging.

Daniels' last point is that "dress codes do not infringe on rights." We have all heard of cases where a student sued the school district over a matter of dress, stating that these dress codes are unconstitutional. Examples of multiple cases on the subject of student's freedom of expression through dress are included in this section of the article. To end the section, Daniels presents the argument that "Most courts agree that student dress policies may be established..." He concludes by once again giving his opinion that the positives of school dress policies will far outweigh the negatives.

I have mixed reactions to Daniels' article. Although I would despise wearing uniforms, I do agree that a dress code needs to be in place at every school. Without a dress code, inappropriate clothing will be worn in school. This can cause unnecessary distraction that is counterproductive to learning. A high school is not a club; it's a place for learning. Students should dress appropriately for the opportunity to learn.

Also, in a small school such as mine, school uniforms would not be effective. With less than fifty students in the high school, we don't have problems with things like gangs. I think I am just as safe without wearing a uniform to school as I would be with one. However, in large schools I am sure that theft and gangs are major issues. In that case, I would say uniforms would be beneficial to the students.

The article is persuasive enough, but I think it is written with very biased research. The quotes and statistics in the article were all supportive of dress policies. Principals seem to be the only people asked to comment. What about the parents? What about the students? Shouldn't their opinions be taken into account as well?

Also, although Daniels cites statistics presented by the U.S. Department of Education as well as many school principals, he only acknowledges their opinions. Only once in the article does he use concrete numbers to back up his argument. So even though credible sources were used, the information is still somewhat indefinite.

So in conclusion, I would say that a dress code is always a necessity, but uniforms should only be used in extreme situations. After all, kids are kids, and we need some way to express ourselves. Why not let it be through dress-code appropriate, but not uniformed clothing?

Work Cited

Daniels, Stephen. "School Dress Codes Are Necessary and Constitutional." *Students' Rights*. Ed.

Jamuna Carroll. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2005. *Opposing Viewpoints*. Rpt. From "Student Dress Policies: The Success of School Uniforms and Dress Codes." *Findings* (May 2001). *Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context*. Web. 17 Nov. 2012.