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Public School Uniforms

A Case Study of One School's Experience

by

Mary Louise Murphy

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

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## Doctoral Dissertation

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12/17/97

University of Washington

Abstract

**Public School Uniforms**

**A Case Study of One School's Experience**

by **Mary Louise Murphy**

**Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee**

**Professor Jerry Bamburg**

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More and more public schools are considering school uniforms as one way to help address very complex social and academic achievement issues in the classroom. Given the nature of public schools, and the democratic ideals of individualism and diversity which are generally taught and valued, mandating what students wear can be problematic. Despite the limited amount of research available, the poor quality of the research that does exist, and the difficulties of evaluating the impact of such a policy, many parents and teachers perceive that uniforms have a positive effect on students and the learning environment, and the number of schools participating continues to increase. Why is this phenomenon occurring? What is driving these powerful perceptions of parents, educators and the general public? What are the positive impacts of uniforms? Are there negative impacts of school uniforms on students, parents and educators that are being ignored? Can what has been common practice in other nations, as well as in the private and parochial education sector, make a lasting difference in U.S. public schools? Can the same conditions that contribute to the acceptance of uniforms in private and parochial schools be replicated in the public schools?

In an attempt to bring some insight to these larger questions, the school uniform phenomenon will be explored in a real life context by describing why and how one elementary school implemented a uniform policy. First, to better explain and put in context what happened at this school, there is a review and synthesis of the literature that includes historical and legal information, as well as applicable research on the sociological and psychological impact of clothing. Second, a chronological sequence of events from 1994 -1997 sets forth the decision making and implementation process at Puget Sound Elementary School (P.S.E.) as a policy requiring school uniforms was implemented. Multiple sources of data are used to analyze why and how the uniform policy was implemented and in what ways the school community was impacted. Third, the academic and behavioral impact of uniforms at P.S.E. is compared to the results from schools in four other districts that have implemented school uniform policies. The parent, teacher and student perceptions that were reported will be analyzed using the literature on the psychological and sociological impact of clothing, as well as by applying Heider's (1958) attribution theory. The conclusions and recommendations from this study may be valuable to practitioners and policy makers who are considering the implementation of a uniform policy in a public elementary or middle level school.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

A safe and disciplined learning environment is the first requirement of a good school. Young people who are safe and secure, who learn basic American values and the essentials of good citizenship, are better students. In response to growing levels of violence in our schools, many parents, teachers, and school officials have come to see school uniforms as one positive and creative way to reduce discipline problems and increase school safety (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996, p.1).

#### **Introduction**

The sixth National Education Goal mandates that by the year 2000, all American schools will be free of drugs and violence and will offer disciplined environments conducive to learning (Goal 6 Work Group, 1993). With less than three years until the turn of the century, educators across the country are taking actions on all fronts to accomplish this goal. Statistics suggest that the task will be difficult.

Approximately 1 million crimes occur annually in American work places. However, more than 3 million crimes of various types occur annually in this nation's 85,000 public schools (Sautter, 1995). While school crime in earlier decades was considered to be largely limited to troubled urban environments, it is well acknowledged that school disorder, crime and violence is now evident in suburban and rural districts as well, regardless of demographics, ethnic or racial diversity, economic vitality of the community or geographic location. Although these variables do make a difference in crime rates, more than 80% of the urban, suburban and rural school districts responding to a survey about violence in schools, said that school violence had worsened in the past five years (National School Boards' Association, 1993).

There have been various explanations for the increase in school disorder and crime (Lindquist and Molnar, 1995; Brendtro & Long, 1995; National School Boards' Association, 1993), including:

- Biological factors, such as increased incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome or other factors that compromise one's ability to develop stable social relationships.
- Poor parenting and child rearing conditions, insufficient bonding, ineffective or overly harsh discipline or other characteristics of an unsatisfactory family environment.
- Limited opportunity because of economic inequity, racial discrimination, and minimal exposure to positive role models. Such conditions may make criminal activity a more viable option for deprived youth.
- The pervasiveness of violence throughout society, the availability of guns, substance abuse, unsafe neighborhoods, television and other media which endorse violence as an appropriate response to frustration.

These factors are also combined with problems in some school environments that are conducive to disorder such as overcrowding, poor facilities, the frequent turnover of undertrained teachers and irrelevant curriculum leading to low academic achievement and frustration. In addition, frightened teachers and administrators sometimes fail to act decisively because they feel that certain populations of students cannot be disciplined and they are fearful of parent responses and litigation; or they just don't know what to do

because the problems seem to be so multi-faceted and overwhelming (Rossman & Morley, 1995).

Educators and citizens recognize that schools are microcosms of society, which reflect what is happening in the larger community in which they are located.

Nevertheless, the public expects schools to do what other institutions, including the family, have been unable to do. Schools are expected to be safe havens that protect children from the conditions of poverty, crime or family strife. In addition, they are expected to ensure academic achievement and impart appropriate values, attitudes and behavior. In an attempt to make some headway, educators continue to implement a plethora of strategies that can be summarized in four categories:

- Modifications of the physical environment and security
- Modifications of the organizational environment
- Introductions of specific educational and curricular strategies
- Promotions of collaborative arrangements with social service agencies, private business, and law enforcement agencies ( Brendtro & Long, 1995; Government Accounting Office, 1995; National School Boards Association, 1993; Saunders, 1994).

It is clear that ensuring a safe, productive school environment is a complex issue that must be addressed on many fronts. Experts recommend that educators select programs and strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in changing behavior and to target children at young ages to shape prosocial attitudes and behaviors early. It is also

important to eliminate conditions (overcrowding, inadequate security, evidence of gang influence, outsiders in the school etc.) that lead to disruptiveness and encourage efficient, effective handling of disorder, conflict and other factors that compromise safety (Sautter, 1995). This report addresses one of the organizational changes to improve the school environment that has commanded a lot of attention in recent years, the implementation of stricter dress and grooming codes, specifically the requirement for students to wear uniforms, either on a voluntary or mandatory basis (Curwin & Mender, 1997; Majestic & Smith, 1995, United States Department of Justice, 1996).

A conservative trend in the country made school uniforms very acceptable to many politicians because they are of no cost to the government and are a visible sign to the community that educators are really doing something to improve the school environment, especially in the inner city. With the dissemination of The Manual of School Uniforms by the Secretary of Education to districts around the country in 1996, many schools have become interested in such a policy. But the federal manual is very limited in its provision of practical, planning information and background which could be useful to school administrators who are considering the implementation of a uniform policy.

The purpose of this dissertation project is to provide an analytical report that includes a practical picture of the implementation of a school uniform policy that may be helpful to school administrators and practitioners. It will set forth the case study of one

elementary school, which implemented a voluntary student uniform policy for two years that ultimately became a requirement in the third. This case study will describe what worked and what did not, who benefited and who was hurt based on an analysis of achievement and behavior statistics, as well as parent perceptions from annual surveys. The results of this intervention will be compared to the data reported from schools in four other districts that have implemented policies requiring uniforms. In addition, the data will be analyzed and explained using information from studies in the psychological and sociological literature on clothing, as well as Heider's (1958) attribution theory. This theory describes how one individual's perceptions of another can influence the expectations and treatment of that person. The summary and conclusions from this case study will be applied to the four questions frequently asked about school uniforms:

1. Why did this phenomenon occur?
2. What is driving the positive perceptions of parents, community and educators?
3. Do uniforms have a positive impact on the school environment?
4. Are there negative impacts on parents, teachers and students?

### Definition of Terms

The concept of school uniforms is relatively new to American public schools, and there has been some confusion as to what a school uniform actually is. These definitions, classified by Joseph (1986), are provided to insure clarity of meaning for this report.

*Uniform* - The most rigid, constrained, required dress usually with specific insignia, which defines precisely the types and degrees of membership within an

organization and which converts the wearer into a group representative, subject to organizational norms (for example, a military academy, the Marine Corps etc.). Most public school uniforms do not fit into this category.

*Quasi-uniform* - This occupational dress is often confused with a uniform, but it doesn't have the legitimating insignia of a government agency like the Navy or the Army. Nor, however is this ordinary dress, because it always denotes an activity that is distinct from leisure and sometimes indicates an organizational affiliation. Quasi-uniforms (which include school uniforms, United Parcel Service uniforms, a surgeon's coat, the dark suit and tie, air line stewardess' attire etc.) provide organizational utility, some choice by the wearer and also reflect professional standards set by the organization.

*Dress Code* - Dress is the prerogative of the employee or the student and his/her parent. It is regulated only as far as attire interferes with the educational process, school activities or proves to be a hazard to the student's safety or the safety of others. (For example, some districts forbid hats, clothing that promotes the use of drugs, alcohol etc., or clothing with abusive or suggestive language.)

*Leisure Clothing* - The symbols of uniforms and quasi-uniforms indicate structure and positive organizational group affiliation and function. On the other hand, the symbols of leisure clothing announce respite from work, dedication to sports or other activities, looser structure and greater autonomy. "The wearing of leisure clothing or costumes is an attempt to escape from the controls of work and organizational duties,

although they themselves often involve arduous labor and conformity to other sets of norms. (For example, a sport's enthusiast may wear a uniform, trains and prepares extensively, and must conform to certain behaviors and rules that may be more demanding than the work place.) But generally speaking, leisure clothing of all varieties incorporates an indication of freedom from the norms of the workplace" (Joseph, 1986, p.208).

For the purposes of this report, school uniforms are considered quasi-uniforms. They are not true uniforms because they lack precision and legitimating insignia. But they are not ordinary clothing because they denote an activity that is distinct from leisure and an affiliation to an organization, the school (Joseph, 1986). When referring to school uniforms in this report, the word uniform will be used, the term commonly recognized by educators and the public. However it should consistently be interpreted as quasi-uniform according to the above taxonomy.

### Background and History

It is common for public school children in many countries around the world to wear uniforms to school. In the United States, school uniforms, once a badge of private or parochial school students, are becoming increasingly common on public school campuses. Private and parochial school educators have long felt that school uniforms reflect a symbol of the school's attitude toward education. A Seattle, Washington parochial school administrator stated that the uniform was an expression of discipline,

moral authority, the value of hard work, community spirit and self-control. She also believed that uniforms were a very economical way to clothe a child for school (S. Ford, personal communication, October 18, 1996). A Tacoma, Washington private school administrator indicated that uniforms tend to be a great equalizer in a school where some students have a great deal of family resources and others do not (R. Griffin, personal communication, October 18, 1996).

The trend toward public school uniforms began in large urban districts in the late 80's, where there had been growing problems such as poor academic achievement reflected in lower standardized test scores and an increase in discipline problems, including more school violence. Some of these concerns were considered to be related to student appearance, including gang attire (Stanley, 1996). In 1987, Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, DC experimented with school uniforms and 97% of the parents in the pilot schools favored them (McManus, 1987). By 1989, 74% of the schools in Baltimore had implemented uniform policies. In addition, 32 schools in Washington, DC, 44 schools in Miami, Florida and 30 schools in Detroit, Michigan had voluntary or mandatory uniform policies (Harris, 1989). By 1990, school uniform use had spread to Chicago, Illinois, and Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut ("Chilling,"1990). Since then, many inner city parents, principals, teachers and school boards have become interested in school uniforms as one method of improving the school environment. Currently, school districts in ten states have implemented mandatory or voluntary

uniform policies, mostly at the elementary or middle school level (Lewin, T.,1997; U.S. Department of Justice, 1996). Table I provides a partial list as an example of larger districts that have implemented a uniform policy.

Table I. Uniform Schools in Ten States - 1996

SCHOOL DISTRICTS	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS
Baltimore	120
Chicago	391
Dade County, FL	126
Dallas	84
Dayton	17
East Baton Rouge, LA	48
Long Beach Unified	70
New York	100
Oakland, CA	75
Washington, D.C.	41
	(Forest, 1997)

The initial motivation for uniforms was the belief that they may be one strategy that would help to break the cycle of violence, truancy and disorder that plagued urban schools ("All dressed", 1995; Posner, 1996). However, public schools that implemented uniform policies have also done so for many of the same reasons as parochial and private schools: in the belief that there will be a variety of benefits for students' self image, a diminution of the perception of differences between the "haves" and the "have nots", fewer discipline problems, promotion of group spirit and a decrease in emphasis on social

and ethnic status. In addition, it is argued that uniforms reduce clothing costs for families and that intruders on campus are more easily identified. The anticipated result of having students wear uniforms would be fewer distractions, and an improved focus on schoolwork. This better school environment is expected to positively affect student achievement (Kaiser, 1997; Loesch, 1995; Stanley, 1996 & Woods and Ogletree, 1990).

Despite the perceived advantages of having uniform dress codes, not all teachers, administrators, parents and students believe that such policies make a difference (Friel & Ripston, 1996; McCarthy, 1996; Stevenson, Chun & Wells, 1991; Woods & Ogletree, 1990). The restriction of student and parental rights to freedom of expression in appearance and intrusion into the private lives of students raises legal issues. The limited evidence linking uniforms to academic achievement, positive social behavior and improved school climate, are additional reasons for opposition to school uniform policy. Much of the debate, very visible in the editorial pages of newspapers and popular magazines around the country, revolves around differing values: individualism, diversity and informality vs. authority, discipline, order and conformity ("All dressed up." 1995; Atkins & Schlosberg, 1996; Buckley, 1996; Callaghan, 1995; "Chilling the fashion," 1990; Dress code," 1996; Finley, 1995-96; Friel and Ripston, 1996; Gifford, 1996; Golson, 1995; Goninan, 1996; "great uniform debate, 1996; Jarchow, 1992; Kelley, 1996; Kennedy, 1995; London, 1995; McCarthy, 1996; McDaniel, 1996; McGrory, 1996; "Much too uniform," 1994; Parker, 1996; Ramsey, 1995; Sanger, 1994; "School

uniforms,” 1996; “School uniforms growing in,” 1994; Stover, 1990; Tousignant, 1996; Tyson, 1996; “Value of school,” 1996; Watson, 1995; White, 1996; Working, 1996).

These values influence the way an individual perceives the problems in schools and the solutions to those problems. In addition, these values, as they have been discussed in the popular media, have generated many strong opinions. In a case like school uniforms, where hard data are unavailable and/or unreliable, and the issue is relatively subjective, opinions and perceptions have been important in shaping policy.

For example, Wesley Pugh (1990) describes the adoption of a uniform policy in the Philadelphia School District as not being based on hard data as much as on an implicit assumption, particularly among adults, teachers, parents and policymakers that the wearing of school uniforms would contribute to an improved school climate. He implies that the limited data available were sufficient because of the “mind frames of the policy makers, the public demands over the public needs, the positive perception of policy and the impact of the media” (Pugh, 1990, p.10). Similarly, because of the public’s concern about achievement and discipline in public schools today, even the President of the United States has responded and endorsed school uniforms as an effective way to work toward a safe and disciplined learning environment (Cimons, 1996; Clinton, 1996; Mitchell, 1996). In addition, a survey of 5500 principals by the National Association of Secondary School Principals indicated that 70% think uniforms could cut down on violence, bolstering the President’s efforts to push the idea (Kelley, 1996).

### Summary

The popular media and the results of limited studies tell us that parents believe that school uniforms cost less and eliminate the unhealthy competition among students to wear the latest fashions to school (Cohn, 1994; Stevenson, Chun & Wells, 1991; Woods & Ogletree, 1990). Many families also experience conflict when clothing chosen by children is deemed inappropriate. Thus, children are also involved in the debate. While they do agree that uniforms ease the pressure to buy the latest fashions, they do not support the wearing of uniforms and believe that they have no effect on their behavior ("Great Uniform Debate, 1996; Mason Middle School, 1996; 5 students at Mason Middle School, personal communication, February, 1997; 10 sixth grade students, South Shore Middle School, personal communication, February, 1997; J. Reed, M. Ejde & O. Bloomquist, personal communication, September, 1997). Conversely, many educators believe that students behave better and study more seriously when they wear uniforms (Behling, 1994; Guskey, 1996). They also believe that school often becomes a place to display fashion, which results in fights, theft, and general disruption (Lane & Richardson, 1992; Mancini, 1997).

However, the question of whether uniforms are really responsible for the positive effects attributed to them is still open. School Superintendent Carl Cohn claims that requiring uniforms in Long Beach elementary and middle schools has led to positive results that he would not have believed possible. But he also states that not enough is

really known to say with certainty that uniforms were the primary factor for the changes (Posner, 1996). Nor is it clear who was changed that led to positive gains in indicators such as discipline or attendance, the students, the teachers or the parents.

This chapter has presented background in order to put this case study in the context of the public school uniform movement. It also defines terms as well as states the purpose of this report.

Chapter II presents a literature review and related research. It discusses the relevant aspects of the sociology of clothing and the importance of sartorial signs as a means of communication throughout history. The implications of societal changes and the corresponding clothing changes as they relate to school uniforms will be examined as background for a better understanding of the current uniform movement in schools. Second, this chapter provides a different way of explaining the perceived effects of uniforms by integrating the social and psychological theories about clothing with attribution theory as one possible explanation for the impact of uniforms on the perception changes among members of the school community (Behling, 1994; Kaiser, 1987). These perception changes can influence expectations and behaviors of teachers, students and parents and thus produce the desired results (Cooper & Good, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1971). Third, the legal considerations of implementing a school uniform policy are reviewed. These include freedom of expression and equity issues. Fourth, an

overview of the data collected from practicing schools is presented as background information.

These data are organized around the areas that the uniform policy was expected to impact: student achievement, student behavior/discipline, order/safety, student interrelationships, student attendance, school climate and financial costs.

Chapter III sets forth a case study of the implementation of a policy requiring uniforms in one Puget Sound Elementary School (P.S.E.). A descriptive case study is utilized, using multiple sources of data. A chronological sequence of events that analyzes the impact of the uniform policy during three stages includes:

1. The 1994 - 1995 planning and decision making processes which resulted in the recommendation to implement a voluntary uniform policy;
2. The events and impacts that occurred during the first year of the implementation of the voluntary policy;
3. The planning and decision making process which led to the recommendation of a required uniform policy for the 1997-1998 school year.

Survey data, interviews and meeting minutes are used to analyze the impact of the uniform implementation from the perspective of the principal (the author), parents, teachers and students. The case study will illuminate why the decision to implement uniforms was made, how it was done and with what results from these different perspectives.

The building administrator is both a participant and the researcher in this case study, creating some limitations. The uniform policy was recommended by the principal and the building Steering Committee because of their belief that the uniform policy will have a positive effect on the school environment. This also resulted in a corresponding desire to make it work. Thus, despite all attempts at objectivity, the data analysis and interpretation can unconsciously reflect this bias. In addition, the staff has received much positive media attention because P.S.E. is the only public uniform school in the west Puget Sound region. Staff reports on the effects of uniforms in their classrooms will also likely reflect this positive bias.

Despite these limitations, the description and analysis of this single case study will contribute useful information about the issues associated with implementing a school uniform policy in one school in several ways. First, this case study offers a contrast to earlier studies that involved schools located in the inner cities with high minority populations. These schools were more impacted by poverty, violence and crime than P.S.E. and academic performance was poor. Second, previous studies have not considered the psychological and sociological impact of clothing through attribution theory as a possible explanation for the positive perceptions about the impact of uniforms by parents and staff. Third, the central office, staff, parent, student and community interactions, and the results or barriers that arose in this one school during the

implementation process, may help others who are considering the implementation of a uniform policy.

Chapter IV analyzes the impact of the uniform policy on student behavior, attendance and achievement. In addition, parent, staff and community perceptions of the impact of uniforms on school climate are discussed. Chapter V presents conclusions from the literature, conclusions from the case study, as well as recommendations for others considering the implementation of a uniform policy.

## **Chapter II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELATED RESEARCH**

There is, in modern times at least, an association between youth and the wearing of uniforms, and for good reason. The young are still in the preparatory stages of life; they are still in the process of socialization and training for specific skills and roles. In many educational contexts, the uniform is an important mechanism . . . . (Joseph, 1986, p.118).

#### **Introduction**

In this section, the psychological and sociological impact of clothing is reviewed, especially the impact of uniforms and their effect on the wearer and the group to which the wearer belongs. In addition, the impact of appearance and clothing on the attributions that the observer makes about the individual being observed is discussed using five studies as examples. Finally, school uniforms are added to Cooper and Good's (1983) expectation communication model revising it to include an additional variable which can influence the teacher's initial perception of a student's background and ability, as well as that of other school employees and students who come in contact with the child.

The impact of sartorial signs and communication on individuals, organizations and society as a whole is one element that is generally missing from the literature and discussions currently surrounding school uniforms. This information provides some insight that helps to clarify the potential positive, negative or neutral impact of uniforms on students and other school personnel in the school setting. It also helps to give the uniform debate some perspective and rationale.

Joseph (1986) indicates that the uniform became a metaphor for the recruitment of the young into society during the late 19th century. The young adolescent was

considered a “free-floating conglomerate” having outgrown childhood controls, but having not developed the maturity, skills and responsibility of adulthood (Joseph, 1986, p.122). Clothing, it was believed, modeled the relationship between the socializer and the youth, and described the appropriate channels of learning like boating, drill, the military, scouting, etc. Private military schools, boy scouts, and many other youth groups had some form of uniform, but did not intend to provide a military experience for the children. The intent was to use the uniform to assist in providing discipline and “.. to teach the rudiments of playing a responsible role in democracy” (Joseph, 1986, p.122). In addition, the uniform was used to implement a general socialization into adulthood, without any intent to prepare children for specific roles (Joseph, 1986). This remains true today (boy and girl scouts, sea cadets, candy strippers, little league, school uniforms etc.)

#### Sociology and Psychology of Clothing

According to Joseph, the uniform affects the wearer in several ways. First, the wearer’s self-image is shaped by the occupational norms which define the occupational status while they are at work or the status of student, while they are at school. The uniform emphasizes the dominance of the occupational status, i.e., student, and the definition of appropriate behavior in the setting in which it is worn, the school. It also may operate as a means of psychological identification to the wearer himself. Second, the perception of the group affiliation is instituted by the uniform and is ideally incorporated into the wearer himself. Uniforms underscore common membership,

allegiance to some set of rules and the probability of similar experiences. Even when the norms have not been internalized, students in uniform are more subject to constraints by peers and outsiders, who are aware of the norms to which they are expected to adhere. This is why medical students are often given white coats when they report for instruction at a hospital (Joseph, 1986).

Uniforms also promote democracy in schools by eliminating the appearance of social class differences, making it easier to promote pride and unity. Finally, the public plays an important role by reinforcing the norms relevant to the wearer. The public expects certain behaviors from nurses, policemen, students etc. and has certain expectations of them. "Public school uniforms enlist the general public as surrogate chaperones" (Joseph, p.159). Recognized in their uniforms, students are given a protected status by the public.

Attitude toward work can also be affected by clothing. In our society, the changing of clothes symbolizes the relationship between work and play. One often changes clothes when the work day is completed, because one is now entering a block of time which is free from the demands of work. "Fun clothing" is put on, tee shirts with pithy sayings, aprons, sweat suits, sports attire, depending upon the activity. Compare the difference in attitude when one has on this type of clothing and is engaged in leisure activity and when one has on occupational dress and is engaged in remunerative or schooling activity that must be taken seriously. If this symbolism is as strong in our

society as Joseph (1986) implies, it could be that students who wear sweat pants on the basketball court, in front of the television set, to the beach and in the classroom may not take one activity more seriously than the other. In any case, employers are asking educators to do a better job of preparing students for the world of work. That preparation includes practice in being on time and dressing appropriately for the workplace. Educators can begin to prepare students for their future in the world of work by presenting the school as their workplace. The uniform can help to separate acceptable workplace behaviors, those necessary to succeed in a school environment, from those more appropriate to other areas of a child's life (Golson, 1995).

There have been many changes in western society, which have impacted schools. Joseph (1986) and Kaiser (1997) describe what they believe is the most important change, which is an umbrella to many societal changes: the movement from a *gemeinschaft* society to a *gesellschaft* society, the transition from a communally based social structure to one that is institutionally based. With this change from a communal to a more bureaucratic society, there has been a corresponding change of underlying values (Joseph, 1986). To replace the communal, one for all feeling in the communities of the past, there have been attempts to promote brotherhood within organizations partly through uniforms. Urbanization has also led to a need for visual landmarks, a need to know who people are for safety and informational reasons. This need has partially been fulfilled by uniforms and other types of clothing which are a significant and efficient means of communication

(Kaiser, 1997). Others, to perceive and make sense of this world, use these sartorial signs generated by groups and other organizations. Categories of clothing enable wearers to more easily carry out activities and supply perceptual categories for the rest of society. For example, men, women and children sometimes display the social status of their family, a policeman's uniform legitimizes his authority, a school uniform defines student status and the behaviors expected by the school, and youth gangs make heavy use of sartorial signs to make their status known. These signs can be valid or they can distort perception either unwittingly or deliberately. For example, the new student dressed in baggy clothing and Raiders' jacket may or may not be a member of the local gang. However, staff and other students will likely perceive him as such, at least initially. Whether he intends to or not, he will also likely attract those students who have gang affiliations, and repel those who are averse to or threatened by gang activity.

In summary, different types of clothing create varying degrees of awareness and effect on the wearer with regard to his/her interaction and accountability toward others. However, with uniforms the social component is felt more immediately than with other clothing. The public accepts the uniform as a badge of legitimacy, helping to enforce the uniform norms. Because the uniform promotes the objectives of the group, it clearly demonstrates the change in accountability from leisure to work or school. The uniform, more than any other sartorial sign, affects the wearers, "but also reaches far beyond them and affects colleagues, whose role interpretations are also at stake, and the public - the

invisible third party - for whom the wearers also serve as symbol bearers” (Joseph, 1986, p. 216).

### Attribution Theory and Appearance

“.... what I’ll miss most is something that might seem trivial to most people: the uniform. That sounds silly, I know. But it was always the uniform that made me feel special . . . off the floor I’ve always been Earvin. But in uniform, I was Magic”(Earvin “Magic” Johnson, 1991).

Heider (1958) used the term attribution theory to refer to individual desires to determine causality. He indicated that people have a basic intellectual need to find out why others act as they do. The process of attributions is not only internal in nature, but also involves external information that individuals perceive, evaluate and about which they make judgments. The clothing and appearances of people may provide clues to their role, as well as to personal traits and qualities. Thus, the clothing and appearance of a student can cause others to assume certain facts about a child’s values and abilities. The following studies demonstrate this theory.

We often hear that clothes make the man. “They give others clues to one’s social status, occupation, and destination” (Bickman, 1974). Studies done with college students revealed in the responses to appearance, that clothes lead others to assume certain facts about personal values and attitudes. Numerous studies have demonstrated that people believe that the well-dressed are more diligent, intelligent and hard-working than the poorly dressed, thus they respond to the well-clad more favorably (Bickman, 1974;

Solomon, 1987). In one study students were asked to return a dime from a phone booth. The dime was returned to the well-dressed individual on the street; but there was a different response to a poorly dressed individual. He did not get his dime back. Bickman says that it wasn't surprising that the high status individual was treated better, but it was unexpected that the perceived low-status person was treated so poorly and dishonestly.

Solomon (1987) reiterates Joseph's belief that uniforms affect not only the wearer but also the organization, because the presence of a uniform implies a coherent group structure with norms and goals. In the past, pregnant women in the military had to wear civilian clothes when their pregnancy became obvious. Dressed as civilians, these personnel seemed to lose some of their commitment to the organization and morale problems developed. Obviously, these women had other things on their minds, and morale can't all be attributed to clothing. However, when the military began to issue maternity uniforms, the problem did abate to such an extent that many other businesses and organizations that used uniforms, began to issue maternity uniforms (Solomon, 1987). While this situation is far removed from an elementary school, the sense of belonging and the commitment to the goals of the organization to which the uniform contributes, or at least more awareness that school authorities expect one to be so committed, is the important point which may transfer to the school.

Individuals are impacted by their own clothing choices as well. Ericksen and Sirgy (1989) did an interesting study with women because their role in the academic

environment and the workplace has changed so dramatically in the past century. It demonstrated that achievement-motivated women believe that clothing is of value for impressing others with one's worth, adding to self-confidence and prospects for job promotion. The results of this study provide support for the hypothesis that achievement-motivated women are more likely to wear professional costumes than non-achievement motivated women, and they are more likely to have a higher self-image. In another experiment demonstrating the impact of clothing, college students were dressed as prisoners or guards in a role-playing situation. Both types of clothing greatly reinforced the respective behaviors of assertiveness or dependency (Zimbardo's study, cited in Joseph, 1986).

Students also reflect an attitude and confidence level in the classroom with sartorial signs that are self-chosen. Their appearance is influenced by the media, parents, role models, gangs or some other affiliations, which impacts how they are perceived by their peers and teachers, that ultimately can influence their performance. Adolescents say that they want to wear clothing that shows their individuality, but much more likely they dress to reflect their membership in a group with which they wish to identify. Some of this clothing has come to symbolize lifestyles relating to drugs, violence and the disrespect of authority. Psychologists agree that clothing can and often does impact individual and group behavior, as well as provide clues to others about one's status and values. Thus, many elementary age children and most adolescents can give you a

perceived in depth description of a peer, whether correct or not, based on his/her appearance ("Great uniform debate," 1996).

Another perceptual study demonstrates again the significant impact that uniform clothing can have on the wearer, this time in the sports arena. Pictures of junior high school female athletes in and out of uniform were rated by female physical education students and by female teachers not associated with athletics in their over-all ability, professionalism and team spirit on a 7 point rating scale. The pictures of uniformed athletes were rated better in all areas than those dressed in casual clothes (Harris, Ramsey; Sims & Stevenson, 1974). Uniforms also affected individual and team performance in a West German study. Fifth grade school handball teams were randomly selected, one team was dressed in uniform tee shirts, while others wore a variety of their own personal clothing, differing widely in style and color. The results of the study indicated that the uniformed teams were significantly more aggressive and successful. It appears that the wearing of uniform clothing enhanced the feeling of cohesiveness in the group, which led to greater individual effort to fulfill the group norms (Rehm, Steinleitner & Lilli, 1987).

Moving this literature's implications from the athletic field to the classroom, the uniform may contribute to a sense of belonging for all children despite transiency or economic disparities. Kids love athletics in part because they belong to a group that works hard and the uniform reflects that membership. Some schools also encourage the

same kind of loyalty and students want to wear school sweatshirts and colors. Public schools need to work on creating an environment where students are proud of being on and contributing to the team. While not necessary, the uniform may help to establish that sense of belonging for all students.

Behling (1994) conducted some similar research with students and teachers. Controlling for variables such as ethnicity, facial expressions etc., students and teachers were asked to give their perceptions of photographs of children in uniform and non-uniform dress. She concluded that students and teachers perceived that uniformed students were better behaved and more academically successful. Students in old and raggy jeans were considered consistently less successful. High school students corroborate the results of this study in the Weekly Reader, a widely read children's paper. "Some students say uniforms force kids to judge each other because of who they are, rather than what they wear." Another student who did not wear a uniform commented, that in a non-uniform school, "It's easier to tell which kids are nerds and which aren't" ("The great uniform debate", 1996).

The Rosenthal Effect describes the power of teacher expectations and perceptions (Behn, 1994; Cooper & Good, 1983). Rosenthal tested children randomly assigned to classrooms. The teachers were told that 20% of each group had scored well on an intellectual test and were expected to make great academic gains. Eight months later the children were tested again. Students whom the teacher perceived to be bright did indeed

make higher academic gains, because the children rose to the expectations of the instructor (Rosenthal and Jacobsen's study cited in Behn, 1991). On the other hand, those children who were perceived as less capable were less successful. Behling's (1994) findings have lead her to believe that uniforms create a more positive perception of students regardless of their economic status or other physical traits, which results in more equitable treatment by teachers, administrators and other children. It could be that a halo effect is produced, where teachers have a more positive image of students, treat them differently and as a result student behavior and self esteem improves because of this attention (Posner, 1996).

Good and Brophy (1983) have defined teacher expectations as inferences that teachers make about the future academic achievement of students. "Once an expectation is held, an individual tends to act in ways that are consistent with the belief and eventually his/her actions may cause the expectation to become a reality (Cooper & Good, 1983, p.5)." In Chaikin, Sigler and Derlega's study (1971) as described by Cooper and Good (1983), teachers with high expectations for a student give that child more opportunities to interact, more eye contact, and more positive feedback and praise. The "Model for Expectation Communication and Behavior" describes the impact of teacher expectations that occurs at the beginning of the teacher's relationship with the child (Cooper and Good, 1983, p.17). Figure 1 represents a modification of this model. It

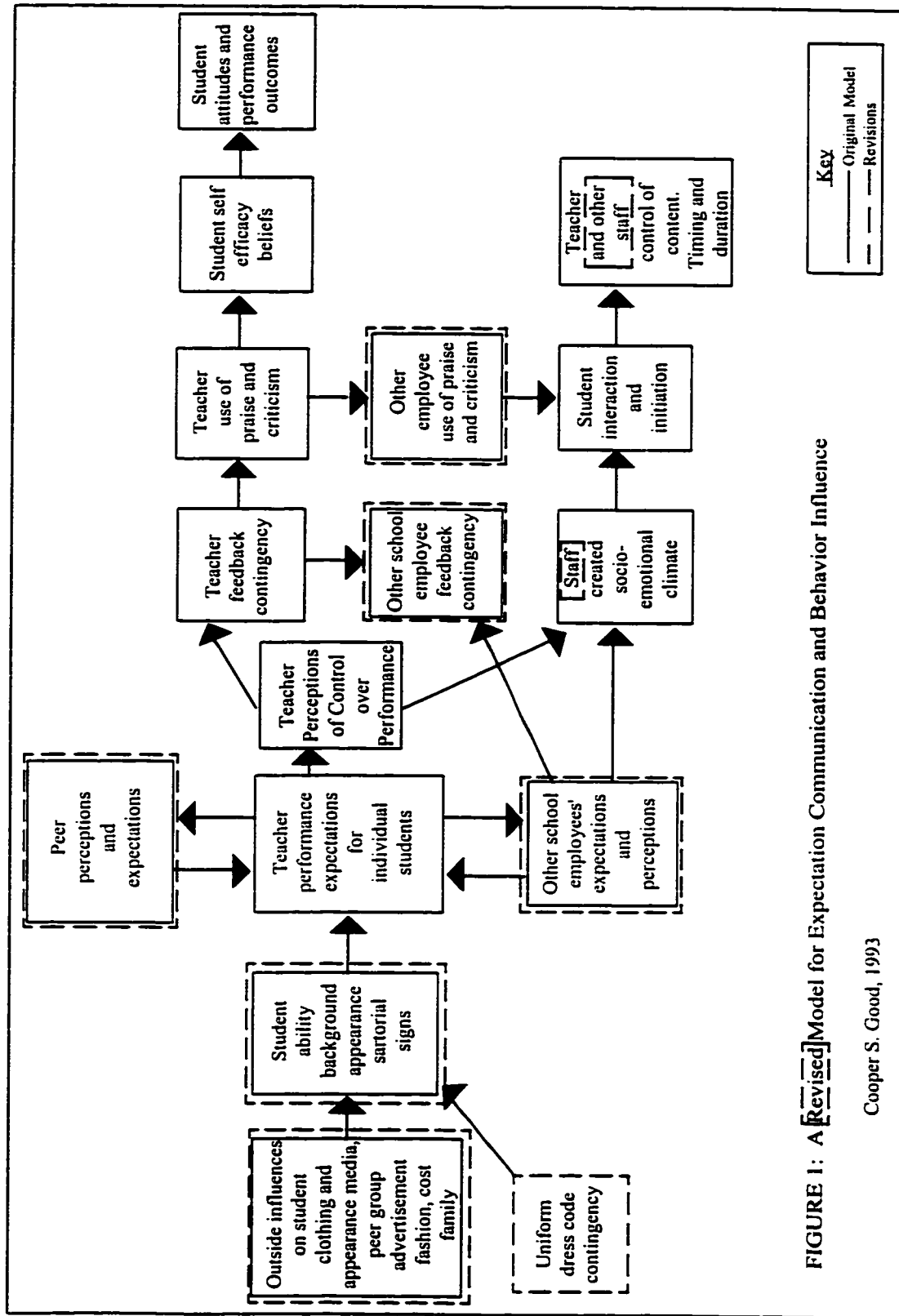


FIGURE 1: A Revised Model for Expectation Communication and Behavior Influence

Cooper S. Good, 1993

makes student appearance an obvious variable in the beginning and includes the other players who impact student sense of efficacy and learning in the school community. The original model begins with teacher expectations based upon what is learned about student ability and background. Teacher expectations then drive perceptions of his/her ability to influence the student's performance. These perceptions impact the way the teacher treats the child, which in turn impacts student efficacy, attitudes and performance. The revised model introduces student uniforms, which lessen the impact of media, advertisement, fashion, gang influences and student economic background on clothing. Therefore, the teacher's perceptions of a student's ability are less impacted by appearance. In addition, peers and other school employees will be less likely to make attributes about a student based on clothing, which could negatively impact their perceptions of the student's attitude or ability.

Part of this expectation is created, consciously or unconsciously, by attributes that exist because of family background and appearance. The psychological literature cited indicates that clothing can make a difference, especially in initial perceptions and it can also reinforce those perceptions. The school uniform intervention is introduced to ameliorate the outside impact of sartorial signs in the school setting and may contribute to a lessening of those initial attributions based on clothing and appearance made by teachers, other school employees and students, resulting in more equitable treatment of all children. In addition, new students with dissimilar backgrounds may be provided with an

immediate sense of belonging that would make it easier to lead them to believe that their individual effort is important for the success of the group in which they are working. Kohn (1993) and others, who do not support uniforms, believe that uniforms are too superficial a change and that irrational assumptions cannot be adjusted by a change in apparel. On the other hand, Behling (1994) believes that uniform clothing could be one way to provide at least a superficial change in school climate that could positively impact the school environment in order to pave the way for more significant changes and reforms. Setting high academic standards for all students, and providing the learning environment and quality instruction to meet the needs of a diverse population, requires focus and time. Uniforms may be one variable, in combination with others that can reduce discipline incidents, eliminate visible gang influences and improve school safety. If these distractions from the community are reduced in the classroom, there will be more time to focus on the academic mission of the school.

#### Legal Impact of a Uniform Policy

Education is one of the most important functions of state and local governments. In order to facilitate that responsibility, state laws authorize school boards to take reasonable steps to ensure a positive learning environment for students. With the general exception of segregation, the courts usually have deferred to a school board's expertise when it is trying to protect that environment. With regard to clothing, "It therefore seems probable that a school board is not overreaching its authority ... when it adopts a dress

code for the purpose of maintaining the board's interest in providing safe and secure classrooms to facilitate effective learning" ("Dress Codes", 1996. p. 2). The purpose of the code becomes the determining factor as to the constitutionality of the regulation. If it can be shown that the purpose of the dress code or clothing restriction is to protect the right to an education and to maintain an effective learning environment, and that it can reasonably be expected to do so, it is likely to be upheld (Lane & Richardson, 1992; LaPoint, Holloman & Alleyne, 1992; Paliokas, Futrell & Rist, 1996). Many school boards are implementing policies with dress restrictions, banning certain types of clothing, gang colors etc. Others have implemented a voluntary or mandatory uniform policy. If the policy is simply based on a gang problem, the board has to be able to prove that a gang problem does exist. On the other hand, a policy that stresses the importance of reducing distractions is more likely to succeed ("Dress Codes", 1996; LaPoint et al, 1992).

While opponents of school uniforms often assert, ". . .that school uniforms are clearly unconstitutional" (Callaghan, 1994, p. A 7), the U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled on such policies. However, to avoid constitutional quagmires and sometimes to comply with state law, many school districts, fearing the expense of civil liberties law suits, have implemented voluntary, instead of required policies (Stover, 1990). For example, both Long Beach Unified School District and Oakland School District have exemption provisions for parents. Uniforms are required for all students unless parents

go through a specific procedure (Cohn, 1994). Nonetheless, The American Civil Liberties Union, The Legal Aid Foundation, and small groups of parents have sued, contending that school districts discriminate against students who do not comply. The suits revolve primarily around two issues: first, the first amendment right of freedom of expression (clothing as speech) and second, discrimination against students who cannot afford uniforms. So far, the courts have upheld the school districts' uniform policies (Callaghan, 1994; "Dress Codes and," 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 1996).

Increasing numbers of states have passed laws addressing school uniforms. In Washington, state law allows for schools with special standards. This law permits school boards to establish schools which parents may choose for their children to attend in which "students are required to conform to dress and grooming codes, including requiring students to wear uniforms." "However, if a board requires uniforms under such authority, it shall accommodate students so that the uniform requirement is not an unfair barrier to school attendance and participation" (RCW 28. 320. 140 - See Appendix A). Another example is California's SB 1269 (See Appendix B), which also authorizes school boards to require uniforms. More specifically, it directs who will select the type of uniform. In addition, the bill requires a method be made available whereby parents may choose not to have their child comply. Uniform policies which operate within the guidelines of these laws and the first amendment guidelines presented in the President's uniform manual have a better chance of standing up to legal challenge (Weintraub, 1994).

### School District Uniform Data

This section will include a summary and analysis of information from four school districts that have implemented uniform policies and conducted more formal data collection on the results. The data consists of survey responses from parents, teachers and students, as well as some hard data reflecting discipline referrals, absenteeism, and academic growth by schools or districts before and after the uniform policies had been implemented. The results of some early research by Woods and Ogletree (1989) involving Chicago Public Schools will be reviewed, as well as the data from an early study done in 1991 in the District of Columbia (Stevenson & Chun, 1991). This information shows the consistency of the data in each study over time and across different populations, when it is compared to later studies.

The primary focus will be the Long Beach School District in California, which has just completed its third year with mandatory school uniforms, as well as one Puget Sound middle school, which will be referred to as P.S.M.S., that has had a policy for two years (Cohn, 1994; Mason Middle School Uniform Evaluation, 1996). Long Beach is highlighted because it was the first system in the country to require uniforms kindergarten through 8th grade district wide, and no district to this point in time, has as wide-spread implementation in both urban and suburban schools. The Puget Sound Middle School was selected because it had to conform to Washington State law and a consistent statistical data analysis was completed by the school with the help of the district

department of research and evaluation. The data will be compared across the two districts and the earlier studies. The conclusions will then be related to the results of the implementation in the case study, as well as to the theories presented in the literature, in order to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this paper. What drives the perceptions of parents, teachers and students about the impact of uniforms? Can the same conditions that contribute to the acceptance of uniforms in private and parochial schools be replicated in the public setting? What are the negative and positive impacts of uniforms?

*Early Studies:*

In 1989, the District of Columbia Public School Superintendent requested a study of dress code policies and practices within the D.C.P.S. (Stevenson & Chun, 1991). This inner city district has a population which is primarily African-American, with a low socio-demographic profile. At the time there were voluntary uniform policies in 46 schools. Compliance ranged from 100% in one school to 10% in another. The average compliance rate for 22 sample schools was 75% (Stevenson & Chun, 1991). In order to measure perceptions of the impact of these policies a survey was given to educators, parents and students. Of the 301 educators that responded from the uniform schools, there were multiple perceptions as to why uniforms were needed. Principals believed that behavior was poor on days when no uniforms were worn. They also believed uniforms

helped to cut down on fights. Other school staff also believed that uniforms did cut down on disputes and fights related to clothing.

On the other hand, the majority of the 268 parents (223 were parents of elementary children) who responded to the same survey believed that uniforms assisted their child in learning that clothes don't make the person and that uniforms did cut down on ridicule because of lack of designer clothes. The majority also believed that they saved money on clothing. Thirty percent believed that the uniform helped their child focus at school.

Because the policy was voluntary, it was assumed that there would be a positive correlation between the number of students who complied with the policy and attendance and achievement. A statistical analysis indicated that there was a non-significant low positive correlation between attendance and the percent of students wearing uniforms, as well as between the percent of students promoted and the percent wearing uniforms. A telephone conversation with an assistant principal from Mt. Royal Elementary School indicated that the great majority of children still wear uniforms and that staff and parents still have positive feelings about them. While she had 100% compliance at her school, she indicated that participation still varied greatly from school to school (R. Thompson, personal communication, March 5, 1997).

In 1990, Woods and Ogletree reviewed parent survey data in the Philadelphia School District, the first large urban district to establish a uniform policy. The parent

responses from one elementary school pilot site were similar to those from the D.C.P.S. study. Ninety-one percent of those surveyed at this elementary felt that uniforms enhanced the school's image. More than 80% believed that uniforms contributed to a lessening of peer pressure and financial savings. Like the District of Columbia children, 51% of the students at this school felt that uniforms did not impact their behavior. However, the majority of the teachers felt that the students were proud to wear their uniforms and that dress competition had been de-emphasized. Likewise, a small random sample of 30 African-American and Hispanic parents in uniform schools in the Chicago Public School system in 1993 produced similar perceptions. More than 80% believed that wearing uniforms promoted good conduct and provided some measure of safety against gangs. More than 60% believed that uniforms helped their child focus on learning and studying (Woods & Ogletree, 1990).

In summary, this data gathered from inner city school communities indicate that many parents approve of school uniforms, primarily to decrease clothing pressures, provide some measure of safety against gangs and for financial savings. In addition, the majority believed that uniforms promoted good conduct and helped their child focus on learning. Principals and teachers felt that uniforms contributed to better behavior and decreased fights related to clothing. The older the students, the more staff believed that to be true. The children on the other hand, while they agreed that there were clothing pressures, did not want to wear uniforms.

Deteriorating conditions in the inner city communities could contribute to parent and teacher support of uniforms as a strategy to improve order and discipline. In addition, Chicago and Philadelphia have parochial school systems where children wear uniforms, which are associated with control and discipline, that may have served as a model. Do public school teachers and parents of children in middle class areas without the extreme poverty and gang issues have similar perceptions about uniforms as those reflected in these studies?

*Recent Studies:*

The Long Beach Unified School District has 84,000 students of which 57,500 are in kindergarten through eighth grade. The minority population, made up primarily of African-American, Asian and Hispanic, is 81%. This highly diverse district has students who are very poor, as evidenced by the high number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch (60%), as well as children from very wealthy families. For example one elementary, located in an area of apartments with high transiency, has a population which is 50% Cambodian. Ninety-eight percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and 85% of the children are limited English speaking. On the other hand, a kindergarten through eighth grade magnet school on the other side of the district has only 30% of its students that qualify for free and reduced lunch. A kindergarten through twelfth grade program on tiny Catalina Island, far removed from the city, is another example of the diverse school environments within the district.

In 1994, the Long Beach Unified School Board moved to require school uniforms for all kindergarten through 8th grade students in every school in the district without exception. The reasons that were given by the school board were a combination of the gang related concerns of the Chicago, Philadelphia and District of Columbia parents and the school pride and focus issues of the parochial and private school population.

“We Board Members believe school uniforms at the elementary and middle school level will simplify proper dress for school business. We know that dress significantly influences behavior. In education we have seen its influence on dress-up days and color days. We have also seen in the schools that have adopted school uniforms a “coming together,” greater school pride, and better behavior in and out of the classroom. Moreover, with the complete elimination of gang attire, all of the students at those sites are safer, less intimidated or threatened (Long Beach Unified Board of Education, January 18, 1994).“

Long Beach has systematically collected attendance and discipline statistics district wide since before the uniform policy was implemented. Attendance has slightly increased and is currently at an all time high, kindergarten through grade eight. In addition, there have been significantly fewer reported incidents of elementary and middle school disruptions. (See Table II) Because there are so many other variables that may have contributed to these changes, it cannot be stated that there is a causal relationship between these changes and uniforms. However, uniforms were the only single change made district wide and the perception of teachers and parents is that uniforms have made a difference. For example, administrators see more togetherness, school pride and positive attitudes toward school. Staff have noticed a transfer of focus to academic

Table II. Long Beach Unified Attendance and School Crime Summary 1993-1996

## Elementary and Middle School Crime Summary (Student uniforms required K-8)

<b>SCHOOL CRIME REDUCED</b>	<b>1993-94 Before Uniforms</b>	<b>1994-95 Uniforms Required</b>	<b>1995-96 2<sup>nd</sup> Year w/Uniforms</b>
<b><i>K-8 Enrollment</i></b>	<b><i>57,497</i></b>	<b><i>58,376</i></b>	<b><i>59,822</i></b>
Assault/Battery	319	214	53*
Assault w/Deadly Weapon	6	3	16*
Fighting	1,135	554	653
Sex Offenses	57	15	5
Robbery/Extortion	34	12	13
Chemical Substances	71	29	24
Weapons or Look Alikes	145	78	28
Dangerous Devices	46	23	1
Vandalism (includes graffiti)	1,409	1,155	127**
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,222</b>	<b>2,083</b>	<b>920</b>

\* The statewide category of assault has been revised because of different interpretations of what constitutes assault. Verbal threats without physical contact were sometimes reported as assaults. There is also a new, expanded definition of assault with a deadly weapon this year. Reported now is any item that is actually used in an effort to inflict any bodily harm, i.e., a foot, a fist, a pencil or a comb.

\*\* Under the new California Safe Schools Assessment School Crime Report, only vandalism over \$100 is included. Some prior years' incidents were under \$100, so the actual reduction is less than this.

**Percent of Actual Student Attendance  
Long Beach Unified School District**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Elementary School</b>	<b>Middle School</b>	<b>High School</b>
1980-81	92.6	89.9	91.3
1981-82	93.2	91.1	90.7
1982-83	93.2	91.4	90.8
1983-84	93.7	92.2	93.1
1984-95	93.8	91.9	92.5
1985-86	94.1	91.8	92.1
1986-87	94.1	91.6	91.6
1987-88	93.4	90.9	91.0
1988-89	93.1	90.5	91.2
1989-90	93.5	91.1	91.7
1990-91	93.8	92.2	90.4
1991-92	93.7	92.6	91.0
1992-93	93.8	92.8	92.5
1993-94	93.8	93.3	92.4
1994-95	93.7	93.3	90.8
1995-96	94.5	94.3	91.5

achievement and an increased attentiveness in class (Cohn, 1994). In a parent survey, 81% believed that uniforms reminded their children that they were going to school to learn and they perceived the school environment to be safer. The majority of parents also indicated that the uniforms were economical and it was easier to get children ready for school in the morning.

Although uniforms are required in L.B.U.S.D., parents can get an exemption for their child, but less than 1% of the population has chosen to opt-out. Friel and Ripston (1996) indicate that those who choose to opt-out may do so for financial reasons. However, interviews with the principals from two elementary schools, W. Elementary, with an economically low demographic profile and the other, a Magnet School with more middle class demographics, indicate that there were more exemptions at the Magnet School than at W. Elementary (M. Marquez, personal communication, February 28, 1997; M. Daily, personal communication, March 3, 1997). Both principals expressed that uniforms had made a difference in the environment of their schools, especially with regard to student behavior. At W. Elementary, where the attendance rate is 98%, the changes were so dramatic that the school was nicknamed "The Walnut Avenue Miracle" (Personal communication, R. Van Der Laan, Public Relations Director for the Long Beach Unified School District, February 28, 1997). Because there are so many variables at work in these very different school communities, it is not clear that uniforms contributed to the improvement in behavior statistics. However, the perception

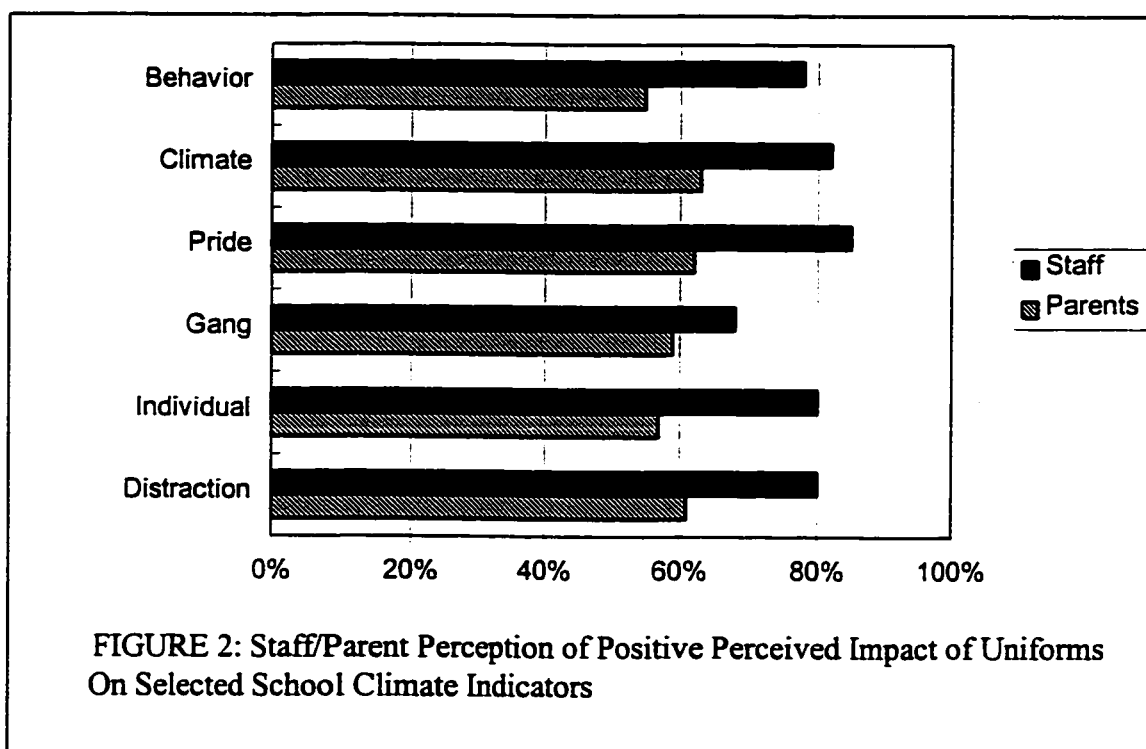
of these administrators of very different schools is that uniforms are contributing in some way to a more serious, orderly school environment.

#### Puget Sound Middle School

Puget Sound Middle School, located in an urban district, has an enrollment of 917 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. The minority population of 29.5 % is equally divided between African-American and Asian students with a small percentage of Native Americans. Thirty-six percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Initiated by parents, P.S.M.S implemented a required uniform policy in the Fall of 1995. Unlike Long Beach, no exemptions are allowed; students who do not wish to comply must go to another school, but very few made that choice.

At the end of the first uniform year, parents, students and teachers were surveyed on the perceived impact. Most staff members and parents expressed positive attitudes about the impact of uniforms. Staff believed in some areas that uniforms made a bigger difference than did parents (see FIGURE 2). As the children in other surveys have indicated, P.S.M.S. students in general expressed negative attitudes toward uniforms. Even though parents and teachers believed that uniforms had impacted the students' behavior (82%), only 7% of the children believed that to be true. Grade point averages and attendance rates were analyzed from Fall '94 without uniforms to Fall '95 with uniforms. While the building administrator saw small gains in attendance and achievement in the raw data, a statistical analysis done by the District Research and

Evaluation Department indicated that it could not be said that wearing uniforms contributed to better attendance or to higher student achievement. A similar comparison of 1994 to 1996 data indicated that the claim still couldn't be made that wearing school uniforms contributes to higher achievement. However, in comparing the Fall, '96 to Fall, '94 attendance rates, there was a significant improvement in attendance at P.S.M.S. after one and one half years of wearing uniforms and whatever else may have contributed to the change. (See FIGURE 3)



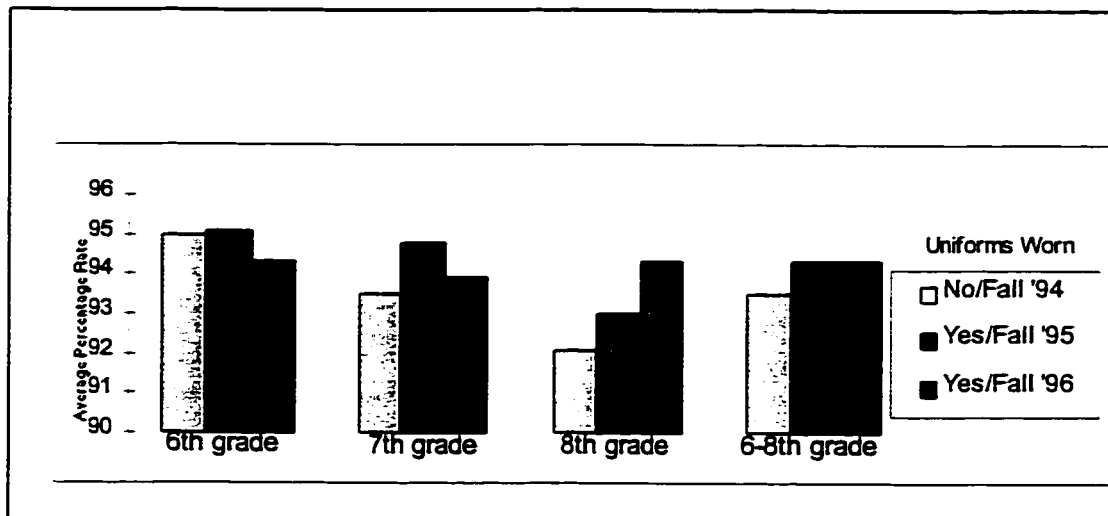


FIGURE 3. Puget Sound Middle School Attendance Comparisons

Four other middle schools and one elementary in Tacoma, adopted uniform policies in Fall '95 based on the reputation of P.S.M.S. A similar study conducted by the Planning, Research and Evaluation Department on data from these five schools indicates that there was no significant improvement in attendance or achievement after one semester of wearing uniforms (Tacoma Public Schools, 1997). However, despite the lack of clear evidence that uniforms make a difference, the P.S.M.S. principal and an evaluator from the Planning, Research and Evaluation Department indicate that parent and staff perceptions about the impact of uniforms are still positive ( G. McLaurin, personal communication, February 28, 1997; F. Manna, personal communication, May 6, 1997).

#### Analysis and Summary

Like any other policy, a school uniform policy will take a while to settle in smoothly before the effect is evident. Overall at this point in time, student achievement and attendance have not changed significantly because of school uniforms. Even with the

increase in the collection of hard data at Puget Sound Middle School, it is not clear that uniforms were the primary cause of improved attendance. Although Long Beach had very positive discipline statistics, it wasn't clear that uniforms were the primary cause of the results (Cohn, 1996). It could be that the trend of increased school violence had peaked and was declining anyway; or other security measures may have contributed to the change. However, the school uniform was the only consistent district wide change that had occurred in every school, and there is no reason to believe that there was any other significant variable that could have made this difference. In addition, uniforms were not implemented at the high school level. These schools did not show a significant decrease in discipline infractions or improvement in attendance, as did the elementary and middle school facilities, some of which were located in the very same neighborhoods (R. Van Der Laan, personal communication, April 14, 1997).

Despite the lack of definitive evidence, a high percentage of parents and staff in Washington, DC; Philadelphia, Chicago, Long Beach and Puget Sound still believe that the wearing of uniforms had a positive impact on their schools. The attributions made about the uniformed students by parents and teachers and the changes in their behaviors, may explain the positive perceptions and perceived environmental changes.

Behling's (1994) research shows students and teachers are impacted by dress. Experts in psychology generally agree that clothing and appearance do influence individual and group behavior. In Behling's study, teachers believed that children in

uniforms were better behaved and more academically successful. It could be that there is no actual change in a student's behavior, but a change in the way parents and teachers perceive the child and, therefore in the way they act towards that child. Although parents and children have different goals and desires driving their attitudes, this could account for the large discrepancy between adult and student responses at Puget Sound Middle School, as well as other youth surveys.

On the other hand, the halo effect produced by this changed perception of the adults could produce a self-fulfilling prophecy (Good & Brophy, 1971). Because teachers have a better perception of the uniformed child, disciplinary and grading standards are adjusted. Student behavior and effort could then indeed rise to the expectation. It could be that because Puget Sound Middle School has had a uniform policy for only one year, this may not be enough time for the perceptions of the adults to trigger the halo effect, which could then translate into some positive behavior and achievement data. Long Beach has had a district-wide policy for a longer period of time. The halo effect of positive teacher and peer perception could be a contributing factor to the improved discipline and attendance statistics in their last evaluation. If uniforms can contribute to a positive change in staff perceptions of students and the student perceptions of one another, these are elements that could contribute to a change in school climate.

Beside the aspects of a halo effect, uniforms may have other positive effects which the survey data above tends to confirm (Kaiser, 1996). One doesn't have to worry

about what one is going to wear, less is spent for clothes, the wearer is recognized and identified with the goals of the group, and socio-economic distinctions are transcended. A newspaper columnist recently bemoaned the fact that parents spend an average of \$396 on back-to-school clothing. His “relatively naive” twelve-year-old was able to tell him which brand name jeans were “in” and which were connected with people who do drugs or belonged to gangs. He concludes, “It all makes me wonder if this uniforms-in-schools business isn’t such a bad idea after all. My daughter would disagree.... But uniforms, I’m told at least makes it cheaper” (Rothgeb, 1997, p. A3). (FIGURE 4 shows a cost comparison by vendor of one uniform, a shirt, slacks or skirt without sales tax. The author researched the prices.)

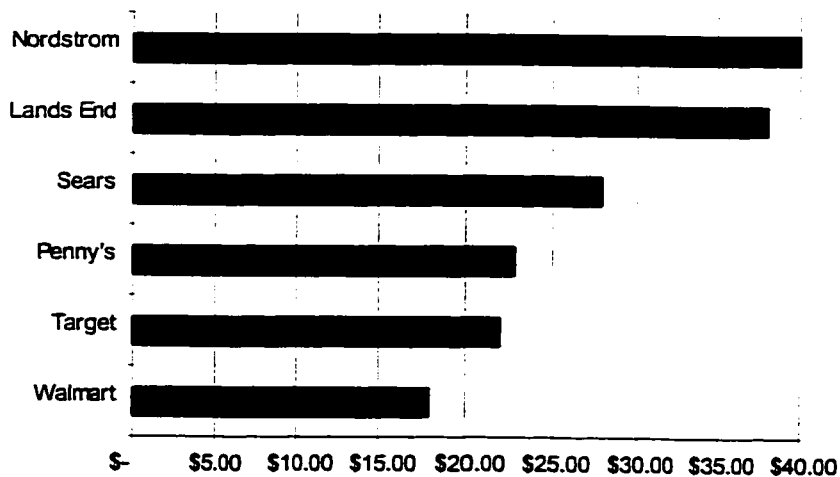


FIGURE 4: Uniform Cost Comparison by Vendor (polo shirt and slacks)

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Parents indicated in their responses that they believed the uniform has simplified the pressures that occur in the school setting, allowing their children to focus on learning. It also reminded the students that they were going to school for the purpose of learning. These perceptions, which are repeated over and over again in parent surveys, correlate to Joseph's (1986) and Kaiser's (1997) points. The uniform helps the student separate work from leisure time, and helps him/her to identify with the student status and behave accordingly.

In addition, as Zimbardo (1972) demonstrated, the uniform clothing could be reinforcing those behaviors. More importantly, the way the teachers, parents, and other adults perceived and treated the uniformed student can result in behavior which rises to the changed expectations.

Many variables impact student achievement: demographics, curriculum, instruction, parental involvement, school climate etc. Although this data indicates that school uniforms seemed to positively impact school climate, it is impossible to establish a direct correlation between the uniform and student achievement and behavior. However, the impact of positive perceptions on school climate, which may influence student behavior and ultimately student achievement, while not easy to document, is important. The positive environment that is created by these perceptions and expectations can provide a base for more substantial reform. While some staff and parents dismiss the impact of uniforms on perceptions as superficial, the majority of both believes that any

strategy that positively impacts parent, staff and community perception is worth considering.

## **Chapter III**

### **PUGET SOUND ELEMENTARY - A CASE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a profile of P.S.E., followed by a description of the school improvement process used at the school. The profile and improvement process help to reveal the conditions at P.S.E. that caused staff to consider school uniforms as one strategy to improve the school environment. A description of the decision-making, implementation and evaluation processes of the voluntary uniform policy between 1995 and 1997 is followed by a description of the evaluation plan for the required policy that will be in place for the '97-'98 and '98 -'99 school years. The steps taken were based on an analysis of the procedures used by the cited districts, as well as the recommendations of the President's Manual on School Uniforms. They will be organized in the chronological order of the process and include information about the most frequently mentioned concerns. The following key questions will be addressed. Who was involved in the decision making process? Should the policy be mandatory or voluntary? Who was positively or negatively impacted? In summary, this chapter is intended to describe what happened in one school where a principal and steering committee decided to consider school uniforms as a strategy to improve the school learning environment.

#### **School Profile**

Puget Sound Elementary opened in 1994 with 556 students, the seventh kindergarten - sixth grade elementary school in a rapidly growing, mid-sized, west Puget Sound School District. The innovatively designed building provided ample regular classroom space, as well as spaces for art and other specialty instruction. Six classrooms

were arranged together in four schools-within-a-school (24 classrooms total), providing a small school atmosphere, along with the economic efficiencies of a large school environment.

The new school population drew from 4 other elementary schools and included children from low income rentals and housing project areas as well as much more affluent waterfront single family homes and small farms. Thirty percent of the student body was eligible for free or reduced lunch. Limited-English speaking Mexican and Russian children arrived along with the children of long time resident families. A rapidly growing military base near-by brought children who came from all over the United States. It also introduced a still small but growing African American and Asian population to an area where Native American had previously been the only significant minority.

Because of the newness of the school and its relative diversity, the school's population (staff and student) seemed to have difficulty developing a culture of its own. The very competent senior staff, as well as students, continually referred to the way things were done in the school from which they came. In addition, the school within a school architectural concept initially tended to produce a feeling of isolation, especially among staff. Many teachers came from fairly homogeneous middle class schools and were unfamiliar with the special needs of the low income and more transient military populations. Discipline problems were many as procedures and rules that had worked in the past were unsuccessful in this new environment. The physical education teacher

actually transferred back to his previous school in October as he felt that, overall, the children at this school were much more difficult to teach. However, teachers were pleasantly surprised by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills scores (see Table III), as their expectations, expressed in staff room conversation and principal/teacher dialogue, were not high.

**Table III. Puget Sound Elementary Standardized Test Scores 1994-1995  
Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills - Grade 4**

	<b>State</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>P.S.E.</b>	<b>% of students in lower 25%</b>
Reading	50%	50%	58%	22%
Math	49%	45%	55%	24%
Language	47%	49%	60%	20%

P.S.E. participates in an annual self-study during which the Building Steering Committee surveys all stakeholders, parents, staff and students and analyzes discipline and academic data, in order to know where to put limited resources to have the biggest impact. In 1994, the common school success indicators were reviewed. Attendance and test scores, were acceptable, but lower than desired. Student responses to environmental indicators such as respect for others were not acceptable. The percent of students who believed that most children did not obey the rules, as well as the incidents of harassment and violent referrals were unacceptably high. Disorder and inappropriate

behavior in large group areas, such as hallways, assemblies, lunchroom and playground was a problem. During this process of continuous improvement, the Committee agreed on several building -wide strategies to work on these issues. They also came to believe that school uniforms might contribute to an overall better learning environment for the following reasons:

1. P.S.E. was a new school with a diverse population, it was hoped that uniforms would contribute to school identity and spirit.

2. Uniforms may eliminate the self-consciousness, social competition and cliques evident in the upper grades. In addition, it would eliminate the gang-like attire and clothing with disruptive messages which was becoming more prominent at the sixth grade level.

3. Uniforms may contribute to higher expectations for all children (Behling, 1994; Good& Brophy, 1971; Cooper & Good, 1983). In addition, new students and children with dissimilar backgrounds would be provided with an immediate sense of belonging.

4. The dramatic improvement in discipline statistics in Long Beach Unified School District was very convincing and strengthened the committee's resolve. Fewer discipline distractions translated into more potential teaching time.

5. The positive perceptions of staff and parents from Long Beach School District and Puget Sound Middle School regarding the impact of uniforms were considered and initial inquiries indicated that many P.S.E. parents had similar feelings about uniforms.

6. The P.S.M.S. Principal indicated that support from the community had increased since the implementation of uniforms, especially among the large number of retirees, because they perceived in the uniformed students a return to order and hard work in the school (G. McLaurin, personal communication, March 4, 1997). Because P.S.E.'s district has a large retired population (only 25% have children in school), and a history of levy failures, the perception created by a uniform policy may contribute to more community support.

#### Decision Making Process

The principal's primary goal at this point was to promote the establishment of a new school culture that valued academic excellence. At a pre-school planning meeting in September, 1995 she described an environment where every teacher and student believed that if they worked hard enough, they would succeed; an environment with the same supportive esprit de corps as a winning football team; an environment where students understood that they were coming to school to work together to prepare themselves for their future; and an environment where they behaved accordingly. These points were also reiterated to the Building Steering Committee, which consisted of teachers, parents, classified staff and the principal.

The principal had previously visited several uniform public schools in California and Massachusetts and had a sense that school uniforms might be able to impact some of the new school's climate issues in a positive way. She presented information about these schools to the Building Steering Committee. The members asked for more information about uniforms and more discussion ensued. As a result, among the several academic and behavioral strategies that were considered for the 1995 building improvement plan, it was decided to survey staff and then parents about the possibility of implementing a school uniform policy. While some staff were skeptical, they agreed to a parent survey.

There was considerable discussion as to whether the possible policy should be mandatory or voluntary. The principal presented the research that indicated that teacher perceptions can create inequities in schools with voluntary uniforms because there was some evidence that children who declined to wear a uniform were more frequently referred for disciplinary infractions (Posner, 1996). One could conclude from the literature on sartorial signs that to get the full benefit of the policy it should be required for all (Solomon, 1987; Posner, 1996; Bickman, 1984; Kaiser, 1997 & Joseph, 1986). However, the principal and superintendent believed that a mandatory policy that did not include an exemption provision would be very vulnerable to legal challenge (United States Department of Justice, 1996). If a required policy were chosen, two opt-out provisions could be considered. In Long Beach Unified School District parents may opt their child out by meeting with the principal and signing an exemption stating the

reasons. (Long Beach has 99% of the districts' kindergarten through 8th grade students comply with the policy (R. Van Der Laan, personnel communication, February 26, 1997). On the other hand, Puget Sound Middle School in Washington requires students who don't wish to comply to go to another school.

The steering committee saw problems in a voluntary policy, especially in the area of enforcement. One staff member summed it up at a staff meeting by stating that voluntary uniform was really an oxymoron. Still the committee decided to survey parents about a voluntary, rather than mandatory policy for legal reasons. In addition, it would give parents time to learn more about uniforms and get used to them in a public school setting. Overall, the committee believed that a voluntary policy would be less threatening and garner more support.

#### School Community Impact

*Central office staff and other elementary school principals* - In April, 1994 the principal shared the possibility of P.S.E. pursuing a uniform policy with her immediate supervisor, the assistant superintendent, as well as the superintendent. This was also shared with the 6 other elementary principals whose concern was the possibility of a flood of students being transferred into the schools by parents who disagreed with uniforms. They were told that uniform school administrators in the Puget Sound area had reported minimal transfers, and in most cases the uniform school gained students. In addition, a parent survey would take place first.

*Principal* - In most districts that have uniforms, parents were the impetus for the policy (Stevenson et al, 1991; Virginia State, 1992; Woods & Ogletree, 1990). In this case, the principal was the initial impetus and she was feeling the pressure to garner support. In order to be able to knowledgeably discuss the pros and cons with staff and parents, she had to become very familiar with the literature, as well as practices and reactions in current uniform schools. It was important to be able to justify and articulate the reasons why student uniforms may benefit P.S.E., which was not a gang riddled or poverty plagued, inner city school. She also developed a clear understanding of the state law that applied to uniforms by reviewing how it had been applied in other districts and how legal issues had been avoided.

In order to ascertain support and approval for the up-coming survey and the uniform proposal overall, she began to communicate intentions, timelines etc. to her immediate supervisor, the assistant superintendent. Because uniforms were so foreign to this and surrounding school districts, the assistant superintendent was somewhat concerned about the concept. He felt that the survey would dredge up unneeded controversy. However, the superintendent, who was in favor of choice programs in elementary schools, gave the concept and the survey his approval. He informed the school board, which was also favorable to the concept.

*Faculty* - Although staff informally agreed to support the concept in June, 1994, an additional staff meeting was held in February, 1995, as there were two new teachers on

board. In order to make sure that staff clearly understood the reasons behind the policy, the principal presented the same data that the steering committee had reviewed.

Discussion ensued and a staff survey was held to ascertain support. Of thirty staff, all but three supported the concept, three others were skeptical, but all agreed to support and not sabotage the policy if parents were in favor.

*Parents* - Parent interest was gauged through a simple survey in February which went home with the students to 100% of the school families. (See Appendix C) Forty-five percent of the surveys were returned with 70% in favor of uniforms, 24% opposed and 6% requesting more information. While the opinion of nonrespondents could be different, this result was positive enough to pursue the topic. The superintendent approved an informational meeting that was well publicized in March, but only 30 parents showed up. All were in favor of a voluntary uniform policy with the exception of two parents who were teachers in a neighboring district, who were adamantly opposed for a number of reasons. They communicated their disapproval at the meeting as well as to the superintendent. First, they believed that the district already had an adequate dress code policy. Second, choosing what to wear in the morning was a life skill from which students should not be deprived. Third, economic differences should not be hidden because children need to learn to cope with them. Fourth, freedom of expression was critical in a public school that prepared children to live in a democracy. Fifth, uniforms might be a need in the inner city where there were gangs, but they did not see that kind of

problem at P.S.E. Finally, they believed that their children would be discriminated against if they chose not to wear uniforms.

The parents who supported the policy offered countering viewpoints and the principal helped to facilitate the conversation. She knew that there were others not present at the meeting who disagreed with uniforms for similar reasons. When the meeting ended, the principal wondered whether the assistant superintendent had not been right. Would uniforms help to build a unified school culture, or would such a policy be divisive among parents?

Every other week, additional information about uniforms went home to parents in the school newsletter as part of a continuous exposure and educational effort. In May, the survey results were released and any parent who had not responded was given another opportunity to express their opinion. This increased the return to 60% with 70% still in favor of voluntary uniforms. As a result, the steering committee met and approved a voluntary uniform policy for the 1995-1996 and 1996-1997 school years. Another staff meeting was held, and with much discussion all teachers but four approved. The instructional support (Title I) teacher and a 6th grade teacher were very skeptical; a first grade teacher felt uniforms were not the answer to attendance, discipline problems or student achievement issues; and another felt that we would be stifling the creativity of the child. The principal and other staff acknowledged their concerns as legitimate, but tried to stress the positive possibilities of such a policy. The discussion was lively, but did not

seem to alienate staff, who for the most part, had known each other professionally for a minimum of five years. Those who did not support uniforms agreed, however, to support the program. All staff had some concern about whether they would have to wear uniforms.

*Students* - During March, April and May teachers talked about uniforms to their students. Like the children in other uniform districts, most students indicated that they did not want to wear a uniform. However, after a teacher, parent and student committee chose the uniform pieces and colors, the children began to get more interested. Many students volunteered to model at a uniform fashion show provided by a local vendor, which generated a lot of enthusiasm from children and parents. The press covered the fashion show and the children were delighted with their pictures in the paper (Ramsey, June, 1995). One parent, who has always been very supportive of school policies, came to the fashion show rehearsal. He was obviously not happy with the policy even though it was to be voluntary. He told the principal that seeing these public school children dressed in uniform just didn't sit right with him. (Interestingly enough, he was one of the top Pony League football coaches renowned for his strict discipline standards and high expectations in all areas, including proper uniform. In addition, he owned a gas station where his employees were required to wear a uniform when they worked.)

The principal was surprised that this particular parent was opposed to uniforms and wondered if she had misjudged the support of others. Whereas there was no

sampling error in the parent survey because 100% of the parent population was surveyed, there was a degree of possible response bias due to not knowing how those who did not fill out the survey would have answered the question. There could be more parents out there who were adamantly opposed to uniforms. However, the second call for survey responses tended to allay this concern.

Summary - This chapter described the process used by the P.S.E. staff to decide whether to implement a voluntary uniform policy. Because the impetus for the policy did not originate from the parents or staff, the principal had to spend much time working with both groups. The policy evolved through several stages:

- Research and dissemination of information by the principal
- Steering committee review of research and discussion
- Acquiring central office support
- Staff discussion, support and decision to survey parents
- Parent education through newsletters and meetings
- Parent survey and publicity about results
- Decision to implement a two year voluntary uniform policy (1995-1996 and 1996-1997)

The decision to go forward came from support from the large majority of staff and support from parents as indicated in the survey results. Most parents who disapproved were not extremely upset because the policy was voluntary. The staff already had a good

working relationship, which allowed room for professional and philosophical disagreement. The younger students were excited about the policy, but predictably, the 5th and 6th graders were not.

It was apparent, nonetheless, that the activities surrounding the decisions to implement uniforms introduced some additional tension among staff, students and parents. However, it also seemed to make all three groups focus on an improvement strategy, whether they completely agreed with the uniform policy or not, which was unique to this school. Since the school's opening in 1994, the staff and parents who came from three other schools had focused on strategies and routines which would make this new school similar to the one from which they came. But this new school was very different. In this very small way the separate identity of the school was beginning to develop.

#### Implementation Strategies and Impact - 1995 - 1996

This section will describe the steps taken to implement the policy in its first year. After the decision to implement the policy was made, a memo to the superintendent outlined how it could fit into the existing board policy. It outlined all the steps, which had or would take place, including the setting of the dress code parameters, the fashion show, and the dress code fair. In addition, it outlined the plan for evaluation. This evaluation plan consisted of collection and analysis of the following data:

1. The percent of children who participate in the uniform program collected by grade level.
2. Comparison of the numbers and types of discipline referrals from 1994-1995 to 1995-1996 to 1996-1997
3. Comparison of standardized, as well as norm-referenced test scores for 1994-1995 to 1995-1996 to 1996-1997
4. Comparison of the results of student, parent and staff surveys for 1994-1995 to 1995-1996 to 1996-1997

In June, a dress code update was sent home which described the uniform parameters and the vendors who would carry the clothing. (Appendix D) A uniform fair was arranged which four vendors attended. Seeing a potential market, the retail clothing industry has also had an impact on the growth of the school uniform policies (Forest, 1997; Hamilton, 1995; Lee, 1995). Major national chains like Mervyn's, J.C. Penny's, Target, Nordstrom, Sears Roebuck, L.L. Bean and others, who did not initially venture into the small private school uniform market, now have full time coordinators of these departments, who are very versed on the perceived benefits of school uniforms. They publish their own uniform catalogs and provide special services to public schools and parents.

For parents in need during the first year, local used clothing stores were contacted and donations were solicited through the press. One company donated seventy-five

dollars. Since a uniform closet, where parents could donate or exchange outgrown clothing was not yet in existence, the principal made the purchases for three families who asked for assistance by adding \$100.00 more to the donation pool. Beside the retail vendors, the PTSA had a forum to sell sweatshirts, and several parents sold handmade accessory items such as hair clips or backpacks. The fair was open from 11:00 to 8:00 to accommodate working parents and was well attended.

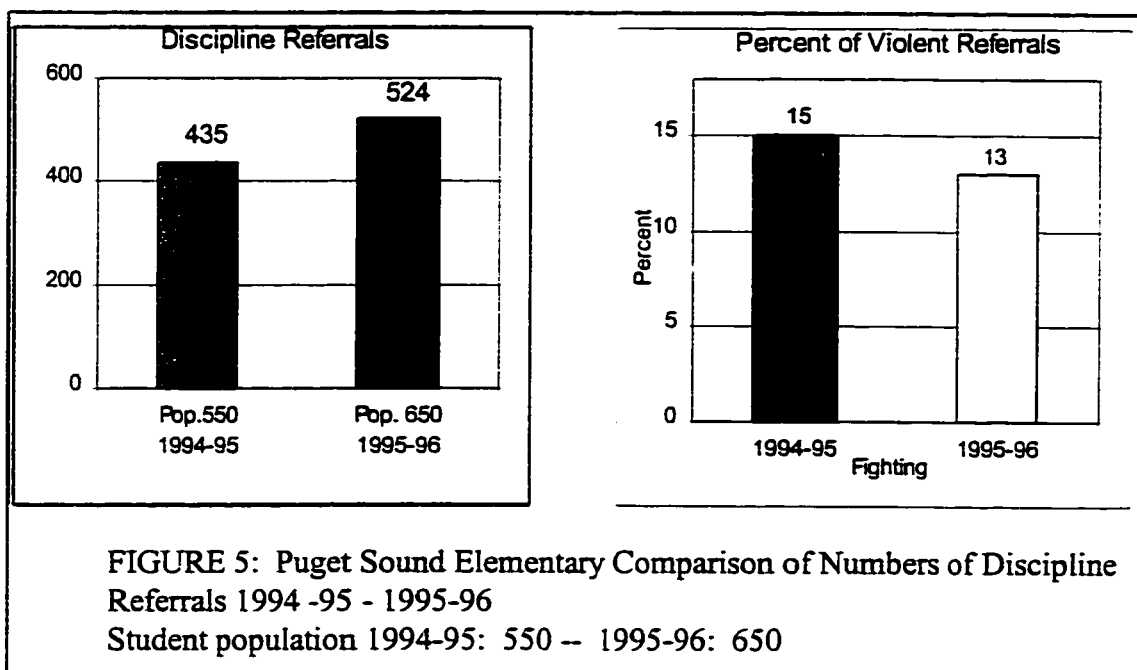
On the first day of school, 80-90% of the kindergarten-third grade children came to school in uniform, 65% of the fourth grade and 35% of the 5th and 6th grade. The local press recorded the sea of white and blue on the playground. Who wore the uniforms and who did not? The daughter of one teacher who agreed to support the policy did not have on a uniform. The children of parents who opposed the policy understandably were not in uniform, as well as children whose parents supported the policy but allowed their children to make their own decision. The children of parents supportive of the policy in regular classrooms and the majority of the younger children in the district-wide, self-contained gifted program housed at this school wore uniforms. The principal modeled the uniform daily, as well as did 6-10 staff on any given day, perhaps encouraged to do this because the principal did. Some regular parent volunteers also came to school in uniform. Bi-monthly newsletters continued to encourage parents to send their children to school in uniform. In addition, positive local press helped to motivate parents and children as well (Ramsey, September, 1995).

The numbers of children in uniform were tracked by grade level when they reported to the library each week. The principal also did counts. Staff members reinforced those who wore uniforms in a variety of informal ways, which worked with the younger students. But peer pressure took its toll, especially at the intermediate level. As the year progressed, the number of children who wore uniforms declined. There were some concerns that the children who wore their uniforms were being teased. Although, discipline referrals showed that most teasing and harassment among 5th and 6th grade students were caused by traits, appearance and sexuality that had nothing to do with uniforms, it seemed that we had added one more teasing factor.

There was also some parent concern about availability. In November, the uniform closet was opened, (managed mostly by the principal), to exchange outgrown pieces of clothing. One uniform vendor also came to a PTSA function in December. After Christmas, the numbers continued to decline. Based on the data collected in the library, 60% wore a uniform at some time during the week. By the spring, only 39% of the children wore the uniform regularly with the highest compliance level still in the first four grades.

An evaluation in May 1995 indicated that discipline referrals were about the same despite an 18% increase in population, and fights and violent referrals were down 2% (See FIGURE 5). Teachers who had large numbers of uniformed children in their classrooms said that the policy made a difference, especially at the beginning of the year

in unifying the group. Teachers also attributed positive changes in the extreme behavior of three specific children, in part, to the uniform. Those who were skeptical or opposed tended to continue to believe that the uniforms made no difference.



While intermediate students continued to express that they were still not in favor of uniforms, 85% of them reported in a survey that they liked school. Over 80% of the children also enjoyed learning new things at school and felt that they were challenged and academically successful. Another climate indicator revealed that 54% of the primary children and 46% of the intermediate children disagreed or were undecided that most children followed the school rules. And 61% of the intermediate students were undecided or disagreed that children treated each other with respect.

The adults perceived the children's behavior somewhat differently. 81% of teachers perceived that student behavior was generally positive. 90% of parents believe that their children liked school and were academically challenged. 70% perceived that their child was safe at school. It seems that the adult perception of student behavior was slightly better than that of the students themselves, although one parent commented, "Fewer uniforms, more mayhem."

Office referrals for misbehavior had decreased slightly and standardized test scores had improved significantly. Students tested in October of 1994 came to P.S.E. from three different local schools as well as from districts around the country. The tests were given to students the third week in a new school. In 1995, the majority of the 4th grade students taking the test were in their second year with the same teacher. They had stability of program, access to summer review packets, and adequate test preparation training. As a result, the number of students in the bottom quartile in all subject areas had decreased markedly (see Table IV).

A strong academic focus had been established, with resources focused on early intervention and continuity of program with students remaining with the same teacher for two years. The uniform was a further attempt to reflect a higher standard, where children came to school to work. But as in any school, there were many variables that contributed to program results and perceptions. With the decline in uniform participation in the

second half of the year, it was impossible to measure any impact in academics or behavior that could be attributed to uniforms.

Table IV. Comparison of Average Percentile Test Scores from 1994-95 to 1995-96

**Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills**

	1994-95	1995-96
<b>Reading</b>	58%	68%
<b>Language</b>	55%	74%
<b>Math</b>	60%	83%

**Percent of Children in Lower Quartile**

	1994-95	1995-96
<b>Reading</b>	22%	16%
<b>Language</b>	27%	15%
<b>Math</b>	24%	13%

It is more likely that the improved test scores were primarily the result of having the students in a consistent academic program for a second year and good test preparation practices, than that they resulted from the uniform policy per se. The decline in violent behavioral referrals is more likely connected to the implementation of a school-wide student problem solving curriculum, than to the wearing of school uniforms.

Despite the fewer numbers of children in uniform by spring, the parent survey (administered to 100% of the parent population in May, 1996, with a 60% return) was

still positive about uniforms. Sixty-eight percent of parents supported the voluntary policy. While 50% indicated that their child was not wearing the uniform, 62% favored a required policy and 50% believed it would be easier to implement at home if it were mandatory. There were nine pages of written comments with 30 comments requesting that uniforms be required, 6 to abolish the policy, and the rest argued for no change in the policy, to suggestions for additional colors, more reasonably priced school sweatshirts, and ways to promote participation (see FIGURE 6).

As a result of this input and with the approval of the Superintendent, the building steering committee and staff agreed to continue with the voluntary program for the 1996-1997 school year with the following modifications. To make it easier for parents to comply, it was decided to have more vendors available at the school uniform fair. In addition, a parent volunteered to maintain a more organized and accessible uniform closet. Navy “double-blue” brush denim jeans were also added to the uniform items for practicality. In addition 9 half days of the year, (teacher inservice days) were designated as “free dress” days.

#### Implementation Strategies and Impact - 1996-1997

The end of the year survey seemed to show a polarization in parents’ thinking about uniforms. A small but growing number were adamantly opposed and those who supported the policy wished it to be required. The enforcement issues and the peer

pressure that can occur with a voluntary policy were evident over the past year and may have contributed to these responses. Basically, a voluntary policy cannot be enforced, but

Questions regarding uniforms at Puget Sound Elementary:

1. My child is wearing the voluntary dress code/uniform.
2. As a result of the dress code/uniform, the cost of school clothes has been less.
3. I am in favor of a voluntary uniform policy
4. I would support a mandatory dress code policy.
5. If the dress code/uniform policy were to become mandatory, there would be less pressure at home to implement it.
6. The uniform colors are acceptable. (Navy, white, cranberry, forest green)

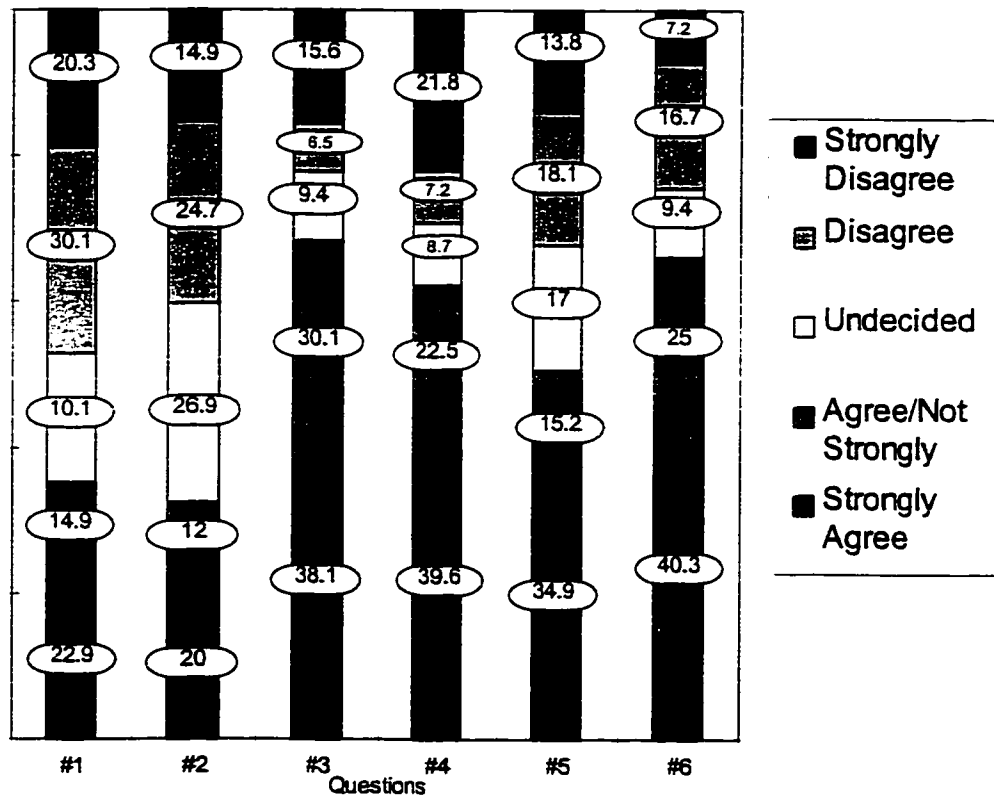


FIGURE 6: Puget Sound Elementary Parent Survey - Spring 1996  
Percentage of Respondents

only encouraged. However, parents who were opposed to uniforms also opposed reinforcing those students who wore uniforms. Parents who supported the policy also had a hard time making their child wear the uniform, when other children were not. This section will describe the events that occurred during the second year of implementation that caused further changes in thinking among parents and staff that resulted in the recommendation for a required uniform policy in 1997-1998.

In July, 1996, a letter was sent home to parents announcing the uniform fair and the new guidelines. It included an attachment, "A Parent's Perspective on Uniforms in Public Schools" which was very well received by some parents. (See Appendix E) The Uniform Fair was held in August, 1996 and as promised, more vendors were present, including the Navy Exchange Department Store from the nearby naval base. Despite the increase in vendors, fewer parents showed up than in 1995, which didn't bode well for the number of children who would come to school in uniform. However, a large aircraft carrier from Alameda, California, as well as several naval vessels from Long Beach, California, were to be transferred to the Puget Sound during the year. This brought an influx of families who had come from school districts that required uniforms. They were familiar with a uniform policy and many were delighted that they had clothing that fit P.S.E.'s code.

On the first day of school, 60% of the students came to school in uniform, less than the previous year. Some children that wore uniforms in 1995-96 did not in 1996-

1997. (One parent told the principal that it was too stressful to have a clean pressed uniform ready for each day of the week.) As new students enrolled, they often came to school in uniform. However, especially at the intermediate level, children soon stopped wearing the uniform when they saw some of their classmates in jeans and tee shirts.

Reinforcement strategies were tried, many suggested by parents. Special awards were given to children in uniform by the principal. These awards (given out for many other reasons as well), once initialed by parents, could go into a box making the students eligible for a drawing for lunch with the principal at a local restaurant, or a pizza lunch with the PTSA. The uniformed children loved the reinforcement, but those that did not wear uniforms felt slighted. Some parents praised the uniform reinforcement program, and others were angry because they believed that it discriminated against children who did not wear uniforms. Another reinforcement program, developed by a specialist, gave classes with the highest percentage of uniforms a special incentive. This program also worked to some degree, but again, some parents felt it was discriminatory and put undue pressure on children who didn't wear uniforms. Both programs were quietly dropped. Uniforms were supposed to take the emphasis off clothing and appearance, but it seemed to the principal and many staff members that it was a perpetual topic of conversation.

By January, 40% of the students were wearing uniforms on any given day and virtually no 5th and 6th grade children. Two teachers on the staff believed that the policy should be abolished for the following year. (One other school in the district had

abandoned their voluntary uniform policy after one year because of lack of participation.) They felt uniforms were not making a difference and fewer children were wearing them. One also believed, like Kohn (1993), that uniforms were a band-aid and that we were spending a great deal of time on the topic, when we should be addressing learning and teaching issues. The steering committee decided that the policy should either become required for the 1997-98 school year, or discontinued.

But the principal believed that before that decision was made, visitations should take place to schools where uniforms were required, so that teachers could talk to teachers and parents could talk to parents, who had actually experienced the impact of a required policy. In February, 1997, 5 teachers (4 who did not support uniforms), 2 classified staff, and 2 parents (1 who was adamantly opposed to uniforms) together visited 2 middle schools and 2 elementary schools located in three different Puget Sound districts. The purpose of the visitation was to get a better understanding of the perceived impact of uniforms, by observing a required uniform school in session and talking to staff, parents and students face to face. The principal called the Seattle, Tacoma and Everett School Districts to get the names of uniform schools. She had previously talked to a counselor and a secretary at two of the buildings. The P.S.E. secretary set up the visitations over a period of two days, asking that parents and teachers be available at some point to talk to the visiting team, which included the principal, teachers, parents, and para-professionals.

Each school visited was very welcoming. The visiting team had access to classrooms, parents, and the administrators. The principal remained very quiet and left the questioning up to the parents and staff. They were probing and asked hard questions. In every case, they got positive responses to their questions about how uniforms were impacting learning, discipline, cost of school clothing etc. In all cases, middle school age students said they hated uniforms, but most still liked their school. At the elementary schools, many of the younger students liked to wear their uniforms. After the second day, it was clear from conversation, that those opposed to uniforms on the team were now far less negative and in the case of two teachers, were now supportive. The greatest swing in opinion was that of the previously opposed parent, who became an adamant supporter.

Upon returning to school, the visitation team spent time reviewing the literature that had been collected about uniforms and discussing everything that had been gathered during the visitations. The team then brainstormed and listed as many negatives for a required policy as possible, followed by the positives. Because this list was critical in the decision to recommend a mandatory policy it is included here with the status of the individuals who contributed the point. In analyzing the areas of concerns or the positive aspects of uniforms, it was evident that some related directly to the literature that had been reviewed. The references after some points indicate these connections.

**Negatives for a required school uniform policy:**

- Extensive principal time required (teacher, counselor)

- Problem with high turnover and transfer students (teacher, counselor)
- No follow-up in junior high schools (teacher, parent)
- Loss of color in the school (teacher)
- Loss of freedom of expression with clothing (teacher) (LaPoint, Holloman & Alleyne, 1993)
- Lack of individuality in clothing (teacher) (Lukes, 1973 quoted in Kaiser)Kaiser, 1996)
- Hard to identify students on the playground (para-professional)
- Dirty white shirts (teacher, parent)
- Enforcement (teacher, parent, para-professional)
- Label the school philosophically as basic and structured (teacher)
- Cost (parent) (Friel and Ripston, 1996)

**Positives for the implementation of a school uniform policy:**

- Student sense of belonging (teacher, parent, counselor) (Joseph, 1986; Harris, 1974; Solomon, 1987)
- Increase in school spirit (teacher, para-professional)
- Adds to the feeling of community (teacher, parent) (Joseph, 1986, Bickman, 1974)
- Sets a positive tone (teacher, para-professional, counselor) (Joseph, 1986)
- Teachers/students have better perceptions of one another (teacher, counselor).  
(Behling, 1994; Laitsky and Smith, 1981; Portner, 1996; Soloman,1987)

- Students get to know one another for whom they are (teacher) (Bickman, 1974.)
- Withdrawn children tend to participate more (teacher).
- Anticipated improved attendance (teacher, counselor)
- Anticipated decrease in discipline referrals (teacher, para-professional, parent, counselor) (Cohn, 1994,1996)
- Hallway behavior improvement (teacher)
- Outsiders easily identified (teacher)
- Fewer distractions (teacher, parent, counselor)
- More focus on academics (teacher, parent)
- Improved grades (teacher)
- Economic leveling (counselor, parent) (Posner, 1996)
- Easier to get ready in the morning (parent)
- Students come dressed for work (teacher, parent) (Joseph, 1986; Kaiser, 1996)
- Lower cost for school clothes (parent) ( Rothgeb. 1997; Woods & Ogletree, 1990)
- Community support (Joseph, 1986)

Some of the negatives that were emphasized were similar to those in the literature that stress the restriction of freedom of expression. The first grade teacher who expressed this concern, as well as concern over the loss of color in the school, believed that a uniform policy could inadvertently label the school as very structured philosophically. She believed that this could drive all the artistic, creative children and their parents to

another school. (She was making her own attributions about a child's particular talents based on his/her appearance.) The visitation to a uniform school that stressed multiple intelligences helped to quell her concerns. Other negatives such as student identification and dirty white shirts were issues not included in the literature but were practical concerns that emerged with implementation in the visited schools.

As a result of this visitation and analysis, the steering committee recommended a required uniform policy for the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 school year. (The principal could not help but think how much easier it would have been to have conducted these visitations prior to the first implementation year. With more individuals having first hand knowledge of a uniform school, she would likely have had more support in conveying the concept to others.) Information was presented to the staff and all but one agreed with the recommendation. That individual, a well-respected master teacher, continued to stress that this was a band-aid approach to solving serious problems that were not being addressed. These problems included students not coming to school ready to learn because of poverty, family addiction, or broken homes. She believed uniforms could not correct these things; but spending time on programs that taught children to cope, to be tolerant, and to cooperate was the way to improve the learning environment. The counselor shared that such programs were being used and would continue to be. Uniforms, while not a panacea, may improve the learning environment so that more teaching and learning could take place.

It was decided to hold two informational meetings, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, for the purpose of providing as much information as possible for parents to make an informed response in the survey to be administered in May. The PTSA publicized the meetings with a large mural that contained pictures of the students from the visitation schools, which intrigued the P.S.E. students.

At the parent meetings, the principal presented all the P.S.E. information about the voluntary policy, as well as the information from the visited schools. Members of the committee were present to explain what they had seen and experienced at these schools. Although the turnout was still disappointing (35 - 40 at each meeting), a number of new parents attended who had not been at previous meetings. Most of those present were in favor of a required policy. The parents who were opposed at both meetings were teachers, one from a neighboring district and the others from a junior high within the district. Two students representing their peers presented their opinions as well. A 3rd grader presented an anti-uniform petition that students had signed (her parents were in favor of uniforms); and a 6th grade student also spoke against uniforms (her parents were opposed to uniforms).

The staff wished to make sure that as large a response rate as possible was achieved. Therefore, the survey was mailed to all families (rather than depending on student as courier) and administered to the parents of all newly registered students, including incoming kindergartners. Parents of exiting 6th graders were not surveyed.

(See Appendix F) The surveys were coded in order that follow-up telephone contacts could be made to those families who didn't return a written survey to cut down on response bias. PTSA members, parents and teachers made these calls. The PTSA president thought that most of those who had failed to return a survey would probably be negative. However, this was not the case. The telephone responses increased the return but did not change the percentages of the written results (see Table V).

Table V. Results of 1996-97 Parent Survey on Required Uniforms

<b>Return rate</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
<b>70%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>5%</b>

Number of Written Comments

<b>In favor</b>	<b>Opposed</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
<b>79</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>

Part of the positive telephone response may have been influenced by recent incidents at one junior high school. During the same week, several students had been caught with methamphetamines and another had shot his own hand with a gun in the school office. A well-publicized community meeting had been held with the police to work on solutions to the drugs and violence issues in the district.

While the reasons for uniforms at P.S.E. had little to do with drugs or extreme violence, parents were afraid that some of these same issues could appear at the elementary level. They saw uniforms as a symbol of getting some control back. In addition, an office support secretary at P.S.E. had lost her son to violence in Seattle and adamantly supported uniforms as a way to set a different tone. She sometimes used her position, which gave her access to parents and children, as a forum. Her passion and concern may also have influenced some parents. The principal asked her to take her concerns, which revolved mainly around youth violence, to the PTSA and other local civic organizations. She has since joined Mothers Against Violence and has another forum to express herself.

Parents included many more comments than they had in previous surveys because they were now more familiar with uniforms. Many saw differences in their child when they wore a uniform and when they did not. One parent newly arrived from Southern California said, "Even if parents here can't see it yet, my experience has shown that uniforms make a difference educationally and socially." The negative comments stressed a child's right to wear what he/she wants and the importance of diversity. One parent felt that the uniform was promoting an upper class atmosphere and a superior attitude to which he didn't wish his children to be exposed. Those who were undecided were concerned about the cost, and a Russian parent had some concern as he recalled his childhood experiences in the Ukraine. The comments were as varied as the P.S.E.

population and reflect the positive and negative aspects of uniforms as reflected in the literature. But overall, the survey reflected strong support for a required uniform policy.

The steering committee decided to recommend a required uniform policy. Much discussion ensued about whether to allow parents to exempt their children or to request their child be assigned to another school. The committee would have preferred a no exemption policy. However, the principal, in consultation with the superintendent, felt that in order to avoid legal issues, it was important to have some procedure for parents to opt their children out of the policy. The principal believed that, based on the experience of Long Beach and another Puget Sound elementary school, there would be very few families who chose that option. (Long Beach -1% exempted, Puget Sound Elementary II, 2% exempted)

There was a range of emotion and opinion at the staff meeting when the plan was presented. The instructional support teacher, who was previously skeptical, works with many children in need of remediation as well as discipline problems on a daily basis. He concluded that given all the information collected, we owed it to our children to give required uniforms a try. He believed that nobody would be hurt, and if the policy didn't make a difference after two years then it could be revised. The counselor said that she believed that students wearing uniforms would make it easier for them to buy into the anti-violence and social skills curriculum which she used. She saw a potential decrease in teasing because of clothing issues. A fourth grade teacher said that she felt the survey

results were “a mandate.” The first grade teacher who objected all along said she would reserve judgment.

Enforcement was also a staff concern. Teachers made it clear that if a child didn't have on a uniform, they wanted the principal to deal with the problem. While procedures had not yet been developed, they were assured that the office would handle uniform noncompliance.

The issue of staff uniforms was also brought up again. Teachers who visited the uniform schools told the staff that some wore a uniform and others did not. It was explained, however, that there was an attempt by many staff in these schools to dress more professionally. There was not, nor could there be because of union contracts, any mandate for staff to wear uniforms. The principal, however, would continue to encourage it by wearing the uniform herself everyday.

More than 70 people had volunteered by means of the written survey to be on a uniform committee to determine the uniform colors and clothing pieces. (This was more than twenty times the number that had volunteered in 1994. Either people were more familiar with the policy or a required policy made it more important to become involved.) In order to recognize this large number of volunteers, all of them were invited to come to the meeting. The thirty-five people who were able to be there brainstormed uniform clothing ideas, some very restrictive and others very open with a wide variety of choices. Ultimately, they came to consensus on the uniform pieces, which excluded the navy blue

jeans that had been added the year before. The criteria were relatively simple, but still provided some variety and choice.

Details about the new requirement were sent home with students in the newsletter and the next day several phone calls were received by the office. One parent of a 5th grader was interested in the procedure for exemption, which had not yet been finalized. She said her son was a good student, wanted to wear what he wanted, and did not need to be subjected to a uniform. Changing schools was not an option for him. The office staff had expected much more immediate reaction than was received.

The superintendent and the principal developed building procedures based on the state law. These procedures included financial assistance for low income parents, exemption procedures, and compliance measures. They were submitted to the district lawyer who recommended changing the word "mandatory" to "required." He also added a sentence that gave the policy more teeth. "The principal may in appropriate cases send a student home until such time as the student complies with the uniform policy." The superintendent is presently working with the board to amend board policy on student dress and appearance to include uniforms. Thus, any district school that chooses to implement a uniform policy will have state law, as well as board policy, to use as a guideline.

A complete copy of the uniform information including: history, policy, financial considerations, guidelines and compliance measures was mailed to each home in mid -

June. (See Appendix G) (A similar document was mailed again early in August before the uniform fair.) Reaction to the mailing was limited. Three additional parents requested an exemption and several others called to clarify the uniform colors etc.

On September 4th, 1997, 565 students arrived at P.S.E., 99% of whom were in uniform. Two students, a 1st and 5th grader, were exempted from the policy because their parents could not agree with it philosophically. Although the parents were encouraged to choose another school, they chose to stay. Six other students received exemptions because they were moving at the end of September. Forty-nine students from P.S.E. went to other schools because of day care or location of parents' employment, similar to numbers requesting transfers in the past. No family identified uniforms as a reason to attend another school. Thirty-two students, 7 from out of district and 25 from out of attendance area, remained on a waiting list to come to P.S.E. until the day before school started. Most of these children were allowed to enroll on the first day of school. Two were admitted a week later. Out of area students are admitted on a space available basis, and no exemptions from the uniform policy are granted to these families. Newly enrolled students have two weeks to comply with the policy.

The uniform closet is now well stocked with used uniform items, as well as new items that have been donated by vendors. While, the vendors have always tried to provide good service to parents, now that uniforms are required, support has increased. Two national vendors donated numerous uniform pieces to the school for use by low-

income students. In addition, some vendors proactively work with the Department of Social and Health Services to make sure that students that receive these services are able to have uniforms. This kind of support did not occur during the voluntary years.

### Evaluation Plan

Minimally, an internal evaluation process of the uniform policy is planned, which will be similar to the process used in Long Beach School District and Puget Sound Middle School. This evaluation plan will compare data collected on school success indicators over a period of time. The great majority of the baseline data was collected either before the implementation of any uniform policy, or before required uniforms. In addition, subject to limits on staff time and availability, the same data will be collected in a neighboring school that does not have a uniform policy.

When comparing the data between the two schools, the following threats to validity will be considered. While the schools have similar demographics, curriculum and discipline programs, not all relevant group differences can be identified and measured. For example, staff differences are not easy to measure. It will also be important to consider any program changes or unrelated events that could impact the data at either school. The planned data collection and analysis include:

#### *Quantitative data:*

- a. Comparison of the numbers and types of discipline referrals from school year '94-'95 (baseline data) to each of the next 4 school years.

- b. Comparison of standardized test scores from school year '94-'95 (baseline data) to each of the next four school years.
- c. Comparison of norm referenced test scores from school year '96-'97 (baseline data) to the next 2 school years
- d. Comparison of the results of student, staff and parent surveys for school year '95-'96 (baseline data) to the next 3 school years.
- e. Conduct structured interviews of a random sample of staff, parents, students and local community members about their perception of the impact of uniforms on student behavior and the learning environment. Compare the responses from '96-'97 (baseline data) to the next two school years.
- f. Comparison of student attendance from school year '94-'95 to the next 4 school years.

*Qualitative data*

- a. Classroom observational data will be compared from school year '96-'97 to data from the next 2 school years. Observations will focus on student behaviors in the classroom that may be impacted by uniforms. These include time on task, seriousness of purpose, focus, achievement of stated objectives, cooperation with peers and reduction of distractions. Teachers' interactions with students will also be observed. In large group areas such as the playground and lunchroom, the focus will be on appropriate behaviors that reflect a respect of the rights of others. The principal, teachers and para-

professionals, as well as at least two outside administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals will perform observations. Data will be recorded in multiple ways: writing, photographs, audiotape and videotape.

In summary, this chapter has described the conditions at P.S.E. that influenced staff to implement initially a voluntary, then a required school uniform policy as one strategy to improve the learning environment. The research, planning, implementation and evaluation strategies and those involved in these processes were discussed in the chronological order of the description of the events, that occurred between 1994 and 1997.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

In this case study, a building administrator attempted to bring the school uniform intervention, which she had observed in public, private and parochial schools, to a new suburban school. Because the intervention did not spring from the parents, she spent an inordinate amount of time making staff and parents aware of the possibilities. An influx of parents from other parts of the country who had exposure to uniforms helped to increase the number of volunteers willing to help. Without this new enrollment, the uniform program would not have received the support that it did at the end of the second year. An understanding of the composition school community is critical in assessing whether support for school uniforms can be developed. It is important for the principal and staff to be in favor, but if the community is widely split philosophically, a uniform policy cannot be implemented successfully.

After two years with a voluntary uniform policy, the survey responses and statistics generated were remarkably similar to those cited in Chapter II, although the population was demographically different from the cited districts. In the 1996-97 parent survey, the majority of parents still supported the policy, although most students were not regularly wearing uniforms. The following are examples of positive and negative parent comments on the impact of voluntary uniforms school on climate indicators: (See Appendix H for a complete summary of parent comments.)

1. Do school uniforms create a sense of school pride?

“My child feels wearing a uniform is easy because he doesn’t have to choose an outfit every day. He is proud to go to P.S.E. and he feels the uniform is one reason why. I have seen a real pride shine through in the children who wear their uniforms every day.”

“I feel if all students participated this would encourage my son to wear his uniform proudly.

“Uniforms take away their individual personalities.”

2. Do school uniforms improve the learning environment, contribute to improved student achievement and help to reduce distractions?

“This year I did not make my son wear a uniform to school. I believe this added to his inability to stay focused at school. This was the only year I did not force him to wear a uniform. I am supportive of a uniform policy.”

“I do not agree with the equation of uniforms with higher standards.”

3. Do school uniforms help to develop a sense of belonging, hide differences among income levels?

“Moved here in January. Child was shy in last school. At P.S.E. she has been social, happy, accepted, blossomed --- uniforms!”

“Mandatory uniforms make it easier for all students to deal with peer pressure.”

“I think diversity is an important lesson for children to learn – people are different.”

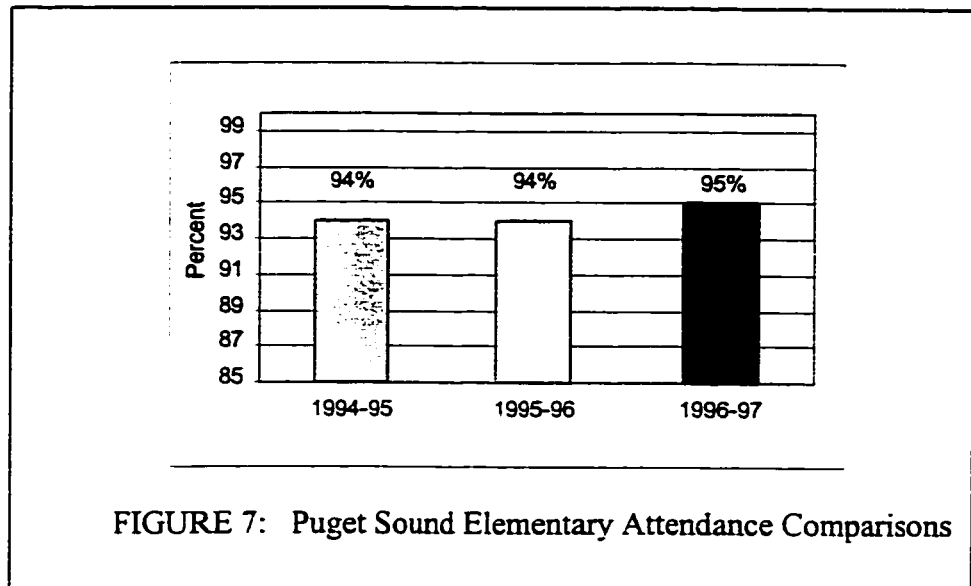
4. How do school uniforms impact parents financially?

“We love the uniform policy, especially the financial part.”

“We support the mandatory policy but it is financially difficult in our situation.

“Not affordable.”

There was no significant change in student attendance, which hovered between 94% and 95% between 1994 and 1996. In addition, behavior and academic statistics improved slightly each year and parent, teacher and student perceptions about school climate were good. But because a limited number of children wore uniforms and there were so many other variables contributing to these changes, no correlation can be drawn between these results and uniforms. It could be that similar gains could have been made without introducing the extra tension of a uniform policy (see FIGURE 7).



In addition, there was a significant gain in standardized test scores, but as has been stated, there were different variables other than uniforms that impacted them.

However, there is a perception in the school community at this time that the uniform adds to the professional climate of the school. If parents believe it to be so, they

may expect more of the school and have higher expectations for their children. Most staff also believes that uniforms set a tone in the school that reflects a higher standard. The majority of teachers supports the uniform policy and expects to see positive changes in the school environment as a result of required uniforms over time. The evaluation process, over the next two years, will reveal whether the expected changes become a reality.

Because parent involvement is critical in today's school, no school can afford to alienate parents or community members. Despite some controversy, the P.S.E. uniform experience, as it enters its third year, has not negatively impacted parent involvement. In addition, grandparents and other community members have expressed support. (This is especially important in this anti-tax, anti-school levy environment that currently exists in West Puget Sound.) For example: "I am thrilled that my grandchild is going to the school where they wear dress-up clothes." "The children look like real students as they wait at the bus stop" (G. Johnson, personal communication, August 6, 1997). Once again, the perception the community has of the school is important, for it is that perception that will initially generate support. It is the school's job to take advantage of the environment created by the positive perception to provide the best educational program possible for the children whom it serves, thereby making the perception a reality.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

#### Conclusions from the literature

The sociological and psychological literature (Joseph, 1986; Kaiser, 1997) reviewed in this report indicates that clothing has an impact on individual and group behavior. As previously discussed, Joseph (1986) says that uniforms impact the wearer with regard to interaction and accountability toward others. With regard to children today, this is officially evident in some youth groups like the Boy Scouts and athletic teams, and unofficially in youth gangs. The uniform helps the child identify with the norms and behaviors of the group, which are reinforced by those who observe him/her and identify him/her with said group. School may be able to take advantage of the uniform strategy to help an ever more diverse student population more easily identify with the group and the norms and expected behaviors of the classroom; thereby reducing distractions and making it easier for teachers to teach and students to learn.

The literature also indicates that individuals make attributions about others based on their appearance. These attributions contribute to one's expectations of an individual, which in turn impacts behavior toward that person (Behling, 1994). The Rosenthal Effect, as described in Behn (1994) and Cooper and Good (1983), demonstrated that once an expectation is held, an individual acts in ways that reinforce it. It is clear that a teacher's expectations, and how a teacher treats a student based on them, impacts student achievement (Good & Brophy, 1971). One can also conclude that the expectations of para-professionals, volunteers, and other students in the school setting can also reinforce positive or negative expectations. The school uniform may contribute to more positive

attributions of students by school personnel, resulting in higher expectations and more equitable treatment of all children. The perceptions of parents and staff in uniform schools, about the positive impact of uniforms, may be due to these attributions. Over time, parents and teachers may treat uniformed children differently because of these changed expectations and the children may behave differently as a result of this treatment. This “halo effect” could be partly responsible for the positive changes in the frequency of discipline infractions in Long Beach School District when a uniform policy was implemented. A positive school climate is based on perception. The literature affirms the link between appearance, perception, expectation and behavior. Therefore it is logical to consider a school uniform intervention in any school where the parents and staff think it makes sense and support such a policy.

Those districts that have implemented a uniform policy and evaluated the results over time, have consistently shown positive staff and parent perceptions about the impact. Long Beach Unified School District has also shown positive changes in attendance and discipline infractions over the past three years when raw data was compared. P.S.M.S. has shown a statistically significant improvement in attendance, though it is not clear that uniforms caused this. The fact that only 1% of Long Beach families have chosen to opt their children out of the uniform policy speaks to strong parent support.

Legally, the courts continue to support a school board’s right to implement a uniform policy. Providing an opt-out procedure, as well as a way for low-income

families to obtain uniforms has kept schools free from legal defeats so far. Those families who have chosen an exemption have done so for philosophical or financial reasons. When parents feel philosophically that their child's right to choose what he/she wants to wear to school is more important than the reasons for the uniform policy, the best solution would be to move to another school if possible. However, with the expansion of charter schools, as well as other public school choices, parents may have the opportunity to support a school which has a particular emphasis, such as uniforms.

While financial assistance is available in most districts for low-income families, other parents, who are not low-income, also feel financial stress. Some believe that a uniform policy means that they have to buy a second wardrobe for their child. The vendors, however, stress that a minimum number of uniform pieces should be purchased and "worn to death" (M. Irvine, personal communication, August 20, 1997). Parents of parochial school students report that they save money on overall clothing budgets. Many public school parents also say that they save money because of uniforms. Because uniforms replace spending on other clothing that would likely be more expensive, it is predicted that the longer that families are involved in a school uniform program, the more they will realize the potential savings.

In summary, school uniforms are a low cost to the government intervention that seems to have some potential to make a difference in the school environment based on how attributions and subsequent expectations of school employees, students, and other

members of the school community may be positively affected. Data on discipline and attendance over time in some uniform schools indicate a possible modest positive impact on the number of discipline referrals and attendance. Parent and staff perception as to the impact of uniforms has generally been positive. In addition, the courts have supported uniform policies as a school improvement strategy provided that an opt-out provision is in place and assistance is provided for low-income families.

### Tentative Conclusions from the Case Study

The uniform policy is being played out at P.S.E. because several conditions existed. First, the principal, who believed in the potential of school uniforms, brought the concept to a new school where she and the steering committee had spent a difficult first year trying to focus and unify the staff and student body, as well as establish an orderly, productive learning environment. It helped considerably that the P.S.E. staff was receptive to a unified building improvement effort. Second, increased population growth in the area had caused an increase in juvenile crime that was spilling over into the secondary schools. This was a growing concern of parents and community members, similar to parents in the inner city, although this was a suburban community. Third, the growing uniform trend nationally was well accepted in this relatively conservative community and was supported by a conservative local press. Parents were willing to accept a strategy which put some restrictions on student dress because there was an “implicit assumption” by many that the wearing of school uniforms would contribute to

an improved school climate (Pugh, 1990.) They also perceived that they could hold at bay the gang-related dress and violence that was becoming more prevalent in the local secondary schools.

It is important for parents to know that their children are in a safe school with appropriate peers. Parents use clothing and appearance to make judgments (consciously or unconsciously) about their child's friends and school (Joseph, 1986). The uniform defines the status of the student and those behaviors that should accompany that status, and causes many parents to perceive that learning is the business of the school. Parents, teachers and community members who observe students in uniform attribute certain characteristics to them (Behling, 1994). As a result, they may reinforce higher expectations. One classified staff member was surprised to learn that a fourth grader who wore her uniform daily was in many remedial classes. It seems that she attributed to the child the characteristics of a good student because of her appearance. Would she have a different expectation if the student were dressed poorly? If nothing else, staff have become more aware of how appearance affects attributions and attributions affect expectations, which in turn are known to impact student learning.

When making a decision to implement a uniform policy, the administrator should be clear about the rationale for a more restrictive dress code. Given the literature on the impact of clothing on teacher perceptions, it is suggested that a required versus a voluntary policy be considered. Then, working with staff, parents and students, the

uniform policy should become part of an overall plan to make the learning environment safer and more effective. It is clear that the involvement of parents is critical to the successful implementation and maintenance of any uniform program.

As in the other districts described here, there is as yet no hard data that uniforms are making any difference in student attendance, behavior or achievement. However, the perceptions of the majority of the parents about the impact of uniforms are positive. At P.S.E. it seems that these perceptions are being driven by the psychological impact of sartorial signs and by attribution theory.

The negative aspects of the uniform policy at P.S.E. can be organized around the groups who were impacted:

**Faculty** - Some staff objected to the amount of time used to discuss the policy at meetings. Those who did not agree with it felt somewhat alienated. One teacher told a staff member in another building that there was a lot of pressure for teachers to wear uniforms. Teachers also felt uncomfortable in reinforcing a voluntary uniform policy. Although they are much more proactive in identifying students out of uniform since the policy has become required, teachers still want the office to deal with uniform non-compliance issues.

**Principal** - The principal spent 5 - 6 hours a week, initially working with staff, parents, students, vendors and community. The policy would have been a lot easier to

implement if it had come initially with a strong parent mandate. She also initially suffered the loss of or weakened support from some parents and teachers.

Parents - Some parents were alienated who philosophically could not comply. It also divided groups of parents who disagreed. Part of the reason why uniforms are more readily accepted in private and parochial schools is because parents choose to send their children to a particular school, sometimes incurring significant financial cost; thus they buy into and support the philosophies and policies of the school. Since more school and program choices are being offered to parents in the public system and parents on site councils contribute to the making of policy, it is logical to assume that support for specific types of programs, like a uniform program, would be strong by those parents who made that choice.

However, where a private school can mandate such a policy and those that disagree leave, the public school has to continually work through a consensus process, the results of which in the end not everybody will agree with. Those who disagree may not leave, sometimes becoming a continuous source of disruption. More parent choice helps to replicate the conditions in a private school where uniforms are more readily accepted, but not completely. A public school is still public, with a population that is usually much more diverse in many ways than that found in a private or parochial school. In addition, the uniform closet and survey work required many volunteer hours that could have been

spent in another area of the school. Also, it was a financial hardship for some parents to buy uniforms initially as indicated in the survey.

**Students** - The child's right to dress as he/she wished was restricted. Teasing and peer pressure on those who wore uniforms occurred, especially at the intermediate level. There has been no teasing because of uniforms since the policy became required. In addition, there has only been one case of teasing because of appearance that involved a physical trait. Intermediate students still complain about wearing uniforms, but teachers and parents feel that there is less pressure on them as well as a calmer environment in the classroom.

**Financial** - Increased costs of approximately \$3000 were incurred for staff visitations, steering committee meetings, parent communication, paper, copying and postage. This is a small amount to plan and implement a new program. However, this does not include the time spent by the administrator or the value of the volunteer hours in the uniform closet.

**Central Office** - Legal advice had to be provided to the building. (While schools are always subject to litigation, following the guidelines in the state laws and providing some kind of exemption provision should keep the policy less vulnerable to legal challenge. However, it is suggested that the district be prepared if a challenge occurs.) In addition, it was necessary to revise board policy and personnel time was required to handle parent complaints and questions.

In summary, beside the more restrictive dress code for students, the negatives of this policy were similar to those that often accompany the implementation of any relatively new or controversial program: the use of time, the divisiveness and alienation of those who don't approve, the lack of hard data that indicates that the program is making a difference and adverse financial impact. In this case, the uniform policy takes very little teacher time and incurs limited costs and the early parent and staff perception is that the school environment is better.

Only time will tell whether uniforms will make a lasting impact at P.S.E. Even though less than 50% of the students wore uniforms last year, 71% of the parents who responded to the survey believe that they make a difference. The question is will the perception that the children are more focused, working harder and behaving better translate into higher achievement? If that does not occur will the interest in uniforms wane?

School uniforms were just one of many strategies and programs used at this facility to address the social and academic issues of a new school trying to establish its own culture in a rapidly growing and changing community. The uniform policy contributed somewhat to positive parent and community perception of the academic focus and climate of the school. Required uniforms with higher participation may make an even greater difference. However, without the strong academic and social skills

programs implemented by master teachers, the positive academic results reflecting student progress would not have occurred.

### Summary and Recommendations

The first part of this document indicated the incredible challenge that faces educators today. It then described a strategy being used in some schools to meet this challenge primarily by reducing distractions, helping students to identify with the norms of the school, and influencing them to take the task of learning seriously. In addition, this strategy suggests that uniforms positively influence the perceptions of students by adults, which may positively influence behaviors of both groups.

The results of this case study reflect what other uniform schools have reported, positive perceptions about what a uniform policy does for the school environment, but little hard data to support those perceptions. What it contributes is a synthesis of research about why such perceptions exist, as well as the importance of attribution theory to appearance. Cooper and Good's (1983) model is revised to make clothing and appearance a more important variable influencing teacher attributions of students and the subsequent formation of performance expectations. It is also expanded to include the other members of the school community who are influenced by the teacher and also make attributions, reinforcing those perceptions by their behavior toward the children. It is important that pressured school staff be trained about how attributions based on appearance, demographics, family make up of the home etc., can impact expectations.

The importance of teacher expectations and their impact on student behavior is well documented (Behn, 1991, Cooper & Good, 1983, Good & Brophy, 1971).

Although all school communities are different, the following points can be generalized to schools who wish to implement a uniform policy.

If a school decides to pursue a uniform policy, it is imperative that the principal have the support of the central office, be personally committed to the uniform concept, and have a good understanding of the literature on school uniforms, and how the such a policy could contribute to positive changes in the school environment in a particular case. The principal also needs to be able to communicate this effectively. In addition, it should be recognized that while a uniform policy does limit students' rights to wear what they wish to school, that limitation is offset by an improvement in the learning environment due to a reduction in distractions.

In addition, it is important that the uniform strategy be part of a comprehensive plan for continuous improvement that includes using available resources to focus on academic achievement for all children by providing:

1. A strong curriculum that meets the needs of all students
2. A looping model, where students spend two years with the same teacher providing more efficient use of time for academic instruction.
3. Effective instruction delivered by a staff that works together to maintain high academic and behavioral standards for all children

4. Staff development which provides opportunity for continued education and professional growth
5. A counseling program which coordinates community resources and social services to assist children and families in need
6. An efficient, well managed, secure facility with rules and procedures that provide the best environment for learning
7. Instructional support which coordinates parent and community involvement
8. A building decision making process which facilitates communication and incorporates input and decision making from those who are impacted by the results of the decision.

At least one year should be spent reviewing the literature with staff and parents, as well as providing continuous education through meetings and newsletters. In addition visitations to uniform school sites should take place if possible. This is the single, most powerful way to get parents and teachers to understand the possible impact of a uniform policy on a school, especially if they are unfamiliar with the concept. One can build on the successes of other uniform schools by adopting successful implementation strategies and procedures. By spending this time, a school that wishes to implement a uniform policy can avoid mistakes and not have to reinvent the wheel.

It is recommended that parents be surveyed in a way that will elicit the broadest response possible, with the goal of achieving a substantial approval rate for required

uniforms. The site council or leadership team should agree upon that percentage. It is not recommended that a voluntary policy be tried for the reasons described earlier, unless it is determined that the community needs more time to get used to the concept of uniforms. An evaluation plan should then be developed that provides for a collection and analysis of data over time on school environment indicators, designed to assess the impact of the policy.

Data collected to this point suggests that uniforms may contribute to a better learning environment in the areas of attendance, discipline and school safety, but not definitively. In addition, research on the psychological impact of clothing can help to better explain the positive perceptions that parents, teachers and the public have about uniformed students, and the attributions that students make about one another. But more research needs to be done on the significant difference of perception between the adults in the school community and the students.

Further research is also needed in the area of the psychological and sociological impact of uniforms on children and employees, specifically in the academic setting. Because the school environment is so complex, it is suggested that an ethnographic study be done over a significant period of time, in two schools of similar demographics, characteristics and environment, one with a uniform policy and one without. The data collected in this type of study can be used with the quantitative data that most schools collect to get a more holistic picture of the differences between the two schools. In depth

studies of this type and more time will help to determine whether school uniforms are a meaningful improvement strategy that can make a difference for some U.S. public schools.

Today's educators are charged with ensuring a safe, productive school environment in communities that are increasingly impacted by broken homes, drugs, and violence. In order to prepare an increasingly diverse student body for the twenty-first century, multiple strategies must be used. School uniforms are one strategy, which used in combination with others, may contribute to an improved learning environment in those school communities which believe that they can be useful.

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## Appendix A

### Washington Law - RCW 28A.320.140

Schools with special standards. (1) School district boards of directors may establish schools or programs which parents may choose for their children to attend in which students are required to conform to dress and grooming codes, including requiring that students wear uniforms.

If a board requires uniforms, it shall accommodate students so that the uniform requirement is not an unfair barrier to school attendance and participation.

## Appendix B

### California Law - SB1269

#### CHAPTER 325

An act to amend Section 35183 of the Education Code, relating to schools.

[Approved by Governor August 23, 1994. Filed with Secretary of State August 23, 1994]

#### LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1269, Wyman. Schools: Dress codes: uniforms.

Existing law authorizes the governing board of a school district to adopt reasonable dress code regulations that prohibit pupils from wearing "gang-related apparel" if the board determines that the regulations are necessary for the health and safety of the school environment. Under existing law, individual schools in a district that have approved a dress code regulation may adopt a reasonable dress code as part of its school safety plan.

This bill would authorize the governing board of a school district to adopt or rescind a reasonable dress code policy that requires pupils to wear a schoolwide uniform or prohibits pupils from wearing "gang-related apparel" if the governing board of the school district approves a plan that may be initiated by the principal, staff, and parents of an individual school within the district and the governing board determines that the policy is necessary for the health and safety of the school environment. If a schoolwide uniform is required the specific uniform would be selected by the principal, staff, and parents of the individual school.

The bill would require the school district to provide a method whereby parents may choose not to have their children comply with an adopted school uniform policy.

This bill would contain a declaration of legislative declarations and findings.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

SECTION 1. Section 35183 of the Education Code is amended to read:

35183. (a) The Legislature finds and declares each of the following:

- (1) The children of this state have the right to an effective public school education. Both students and staff of the primary, elementary, junior and senior high school campuses have the constitutional right to be safe and secure in their persons at school. However, children in many of our public schools are forced to focus on the threat of violence and the messages of violence contained in many aspects of our society, particularly reflected in gang regalia that disrupts the learning environment.
- (2) "Gang-related apparel" is hazardous to the health and safety of the school environment.
- (3) Instructing teachers and administrators on the subtleties of identifying constantly changing gang regalia and gang affiliation takes an increasing amount of time away from educating our children.

(4) Weapons, including firearms and knives, have become common place upon even our elementary school campuses. Students often conceal weapons by wearing clothing, such as jumpsuits and overcoats, and by carrying large bags.

(5) The adoption of a schoolwide uniform policy is a reasonable way to provide some protection for students. A required uniform may protect students from being associated with any particular gang. Moreover, by requiring schoolwide uniforms teachers and administrators may not need to occupy as much of their time learning the subtleties of gang regalia.

(6) To control the environment in public schools to facilitate and maintain an effective learning environment and to keep the focus of the classroom on learning and not personal safety, schools need the authorization to implement uniform clothing requirements for our public school children.

(7) Many educators believe that school dress significantly influences pupil behavior. This influence is evident on school dressup days and color days. Schools that have adopted school uniforms experience a “coming together feeling,: greater school pride, and better behavior in and out of the classroom.

(b) The governing board of any school district may adopt or rescind a reasonable dress code policy that requires pupils to wear a schoolwide uniform or prohibits pupils from wearing “gang-related apparel” if the governing board of the school district approves a plan that may be initiated by an individual school’s principal, staff, and parents and determines that the policy is necessary for the health and safety of the school environment. Individual schools may include the reasonable dress code policy as part of its school safety plan, pursuant to Section 34294.1.

(c) Adoption and enforcement of a reasonable dress code policy pursuant to subdivision (b) is not a violation if Section 48950. For purposes of this section, Section 48950 shall apply to elementary, high school, and unified school districts. If a schoolwide uniform is required, the specific uniform selected shall be determined by the principal, staff, and parents of the individual school.

(d) A dress code policy that requires pupils to wear a schoolwide uniform shall not be implemented with less than six months notice to parents and the availability of resources to assist economically disadvantaged pupils.

(e) The governing board shall provide a method whereby parents may choose not to have their children comply with an adopted school uniform policy.

(f) If a governing board chooses to adopt a policy pursuant to this section, the policy shall include a provision that no pupil shall be penalized academically or otherwise discriminated against nor denied attendance to school if the pupil’s parents chose not to have the pupil comply with the school uniform policy. The governing board shall continue to have responsibilities for the appropriate education of those pupils.

A policy adopted pursuant to this section shall not preclude pupils that participate in a nationally recognized youth organization from wearing organization uniforms on days that the organization has a scheduled meeting.

Appendix C

Uniform Survey 1995

Puget Sound Elementary School

Dear Parents,

As you may know, students in most countries around the world have traditionally worn uniforms to school. Recently, more and more parents of public elementary and middle school students in the United States have supported a volunteer uniform policy. Teachers and school administrators have noticed a marked improvement in the academic environment because teasing and peer pressure over name brand articles of clothing became non-existent. Concerns about "wanna be" dress and alcohol and drug message t-shirts were eliminated. One principal stated that the children came to school dressed for business, the business of learning. Parents were pleased because the "what to wear" problems every morning were gone and clothing costs were reduced significantly.

One example of a school uniform recently adopted in a San Jose, California middle school is a khaki pant, skirt, or walking short, white polo shirt, and a monogrammed forest green sweatshirt. Another Seattle public school adopted gray pants, skirt or shorts, white polo shirt or turtleneck and green monogrammed sweatshirts. About 80% of the students participated on a regular basis. Parents and students had input into the type and color of uniform chosen. The cost of one complete outfit is approximately \$50.00.

Please let us know your thoughts on this growing trend in the public schools, by filling out the response form and returning it to your child's teacher by February 15<sup>th</sup>.

Thanks so much of your input!

Carol Green, Principal



**Puget Sound Elementary School Uniform Survey**

Voluntary school uniforms

- Yes, I am in favor of voluntary school uniforms
- No, I am not in favor.
- I would like more information about school uniforms.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Uniform Guidelines 1995

#### Puget Sound Elementary School

Greetings from Puget Sound Elementary School! Inside this correspondence you will find information about:

- The reasons for a dress code policy.
- The prescribed dress code for Puget Sound Elementary School.
- The dress code fair in August.

#### Reasons for a dress code policy:

More and more parents of public elementary school students in the United States are supporting a voluntary dress code policy. Teachers and school administrators in schools where a dress code has been adopted have noticed a marked improvement in the academic environment because:

1. Teasing and peer pressure over clothing becomes non-existent.
2. Student attitude surveys indicated that students are less stressed and intimidated by other students.
3. A decrease in absenteeism and tardiness occurred.
4. An increase in academic achievement, grades and test scores occurred.
5. Time spent dealing with inappropriate dress related to gang colors, alcohol or drug messages ,etc. was almost eliminated.
6. A sense of pride and community grew easily.

Parents in those schools stated:

1. There was far less pressure for labels and designer clothes.
2. Arguments about what to wear to school rarely occurred.
3. School clothes budgets were significantly reduced.
4. The children seemed to behave better.

The adopted dress code policy for Puget Sound Elementary School:

The prescribed dress code will consist of a white collared shirt. (i.e., polo blouse, turtleneck), navy blue pants, (i.e., comfortable style, cotton, twill, cords), walking shorts for both boys and girls, and navy blue or white leggings, skirts, skorts or jumpers for girls. Navy blue sweaters will compliment the outfit. Also within the parameters of the dress code will be school sweatshirts in cranberry and forest green, with the dolphin logo.

We are encouraging the parents and students who decide to participate in the dress code to do so daily for at least a year. At the end of the first year we will evaluate our policy. Consistent participation will help us with the evaluation.

#### The dress code fair is August 22<sup>nd</sup>.

On August 22, from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., vendors from Penneys, Sears, Nordstroms and Target will come the school gym and set up their merchandise to sell to our families. They will bring all of the items that are listed in our dress code and they recommend purchasing two complete outfits. If you are unable to attend the dress code fair, you may wish to attend a similar event at Capital School, August 21, 11:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

## Appendix E

### A Parents' Perspective on Uniforms in Public Schools

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

If you could imagine the perfect school situation, where our children were evaluated by achievement and personal merit, would you endorse it? Of course, we most likely can't have this ideal, however, we can encourage and enforce certain elements within our current school environment to help encourage this standard.

The uniform is a simple yet ingenious way to bring more equality amongst our school populations. Not only do we rid kids of the social pressures applied by today's fashion trends, we also produce a "level playing field" for the many facets of our children's complicated social arena.

As parents pondering this "uniform dilemma", we must, as a collective group, ask ourselves not only what is best for us but what is and will be best for our children. Would we rather our kids be measured by intelligence, wit, sense of humor, and character, or on shallow and often misguided elements such as what they are wearing (or, as in many cases, what they can't afford to wear!).

Let's not forget the obvious advantages to us, the parents, lest we fail to admit our often selfish motivations. We would no longer have to endure debates (often escalating to brawls) over what shall be the next day's attire. We could avoid the tiresome and common argument, "But all the kids are wearing this!!" Never would we have to utter the now infamous "You're Not Wearing THAT, are you?" Plus, we could even insist on clothes that fit rather than outfits more fitting of Jumbo the Elephant (and insist on pants that button at the waistline rather than mid-thigh!). Kidding aside, this may have unpleasant aspects and seem a violation of "rights", however, it's easy if all the kids are wearing it (and all the parents enforcing it!).

With a Uniform Dress Code comes both mental and economic relief for all. Certainly we, as parents can see the joy in this! Given the out of control nature of our society providing one thing after another for us to strive for, it would be comforting to know the school clothing variable is solved!

Finally, we can only assume the obvious reason for a Uniform Dress Policy is right there in front of our collective noses and ready for us to grasp. If we have the opportunity to do away with the stress and pressures described above, wouldn't it seem obvious that the single most important reason for the whole education process would be enhanced greatly? Obviously learning would become greatly improved and most certainly would become the priority of our schools, it's children, teachers and parents. Learning is, after all, the goal for our children common to us all, is it not?

Sincerely,

Appendix E

**Uniform Survey, May, 1997**

**Puget Sound Elementary School**

I am in favor of a required uniform policy. YES NO

I would like to be on a uniform committee that would determine the uniform guidelines. YES NO

I would like to work with others in organizing the Uniform Closet. YES NO

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

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## Appendix G

### Required Uniform Guidelines 1997

## UNIFORMS ARE REQUIRED AT PUGET SOUND ELEMENTARY IN SEPTEMBER, 1997

### **Puget Sound Elementary Uniform Selection**

- Pants: navy blue or khaki twill pants, corduroy, navy blue leggings
- Shorts: navy blue or khaki twill, corduroy walking shorts
- Jumper: plaid jumper (Nordstrom green)  
navy jumper
- Skirt: navy skirt  
plaid skirt (Nordstrom green)  
navy skirt
- Shirts: white, navy or forest green, collared, short or long sleeved  
No t-shirts with the exception of reading t-shirts
- Outerwear: school sweatshirt/sweater  
navy, forest green, white sweater or sweatshirt  
burgundy school sweatshirt (available from the PTSA)

### **A minimum of 3 tops, 2 bottoms and 1 outerwear is recommended.**

- Clothing must be neat and clean.
- No torn clothing.
- No logos or pictures on clothing (other than school logo).
- No baggy clothing - no larger than one (1) size above the student's regular size.

### **UNIFORM FAIR**

**Tuesday, August 19, 1997 - 9:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M.**

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Where can the clothes be purchased?**

Puget Sound Elementary will hold its Uniform Sale Event Tuesday, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. in the multipurpose room. Businesses will have merchandise available to try on and purchase. You will also be able to place orders from other vendors. You may use cash, personal check, major credit cards or the credit card from participating stores.

You may also shop at the department stores. School sweatshirts can be ordered at the Uniform Sale Event and will be available through the school year.

### **What was the criteria for selecting vendors?**

Vendors were selected based on the quality of their clothing, competitive prices and customer service. Also, certain vendors are willing to aid our uniform assistance program by generously donating clothing based on the quantity purchased from them.

Some vendors offer very durable clothing, reinforced knees, Scotch-guarded fabrics, generous hem and seam allowances, twelve month availability on all items and easy care machine washable fabrics. Others offered products at a lower price and lesser quality. Sears Roebuck, J.C. Penney, Mervyns, Nordstrom, Navy Exchange, Target and the Lands End Catalog will all carry uniforms.

### **How many pieces of clothing will my child need?**

It is recommended that each student have at least 3 tops, 2 bottoms and one piece of outerwear (school sweatshirt or sweater). This may vary depending on how often you do laundry and the child's wear on the clothes.

### **Do the vendors offer an expanded range of sizes?**

Sizes range from 4 through junior and adult sizes.

**The Clothes Closet** will be available to exchange outgrown clothing. Hours will be announced in August.

### **Can I make my child's clothes?**

Absolutely, follow the uniform color guidelines.

## **Puget Sound Elementary School Required Uniform Policy**

### **I. BACKGROUND**

During the 1994 school year the Puget Sound Steering Committee researched school uniforms and found that they contributed to an improved learning environment, promoted good behavior, school unity and pride, and produced cost savings for participating families. A voluntary policy was instituted for the next two years. Information about the benefits of uniforms was shared with parents in the school newsletter and in parent meetings. A survey has indicated clear support for this type of program at our school. The Building Steering Committee has recommended to the administration a mandatory uniform policy for all students to take effect in the 1997-98 school year.

### **II. STATEMENT OF POLICY**

Pursuant to RCW 28A.320.140, Puget Sound Elementary shall implement, with the parameters set forth below, the required uniform policy beginning with the 1997-98 school year. (The term "school" herein shall mean Puget Sound Elementary School.)

### **III. COMMENCEMENT OF UNIFORM POLICY**

The mandatory uniform policy shall be effective beginning in September of the 1997-98 school year.

### **VI. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- A. With the adoption of a required uniform program, the Building Steering Committee and Uniform Committee shall:
1. Determine the form and type of financial assistance appropriate for the school community.
  2. Designate a specific staff member or school volunteer to assist those families in need of assistance.
- B. The parent(s) or guardian of a student who seeks financial assistance may follow these procedures.
1. Request a Uniform Assistance Form.
  2. Complete the application and submit it to the principal.
  3. All requests will remain confidential.

## **V. COMPLIANCE MEASURES**

- A. The Building Steering Committee and Uniform Committee shall develop incentives and positive reinforcement measures to encourage full compliance with the uniform policy. The school shall communicate with parents so the expectations, rationale and benefits are fully understood by the students and his/her family.**
- B. If a student who has not previously been granted an exemption comes to school out of uniform, the principal or designee will contact the student's parent(s) or guardian to determine what steps can be taken to help the students comply or make the parent(s) or guardian aware of the exemption process. The Principal may in appropriate cases send a student home until such time that the student complies with the uniform policy.**
- C. The school shall protect the students' rights of expression. Students may wear or display items conveying a particularized message or symbolic speech – for example a button that supports a political candidate – so long as such items do not or are not likely to materially and substantially interfere with school work or discipline or with the rights of others. The school will prohibit items that undermine the integrity of the uniform, notwithstanding their expressive nature, such as a sweatshirt that bears a political message, but also covers or replaces the type of shirt required by the mandatory uniform policy.**
- D. The school shall protect the students' religious expression rights. Students may display religious messages on items of clothing to the same extent that they are permitted to display other comparable messages. The school will allow the wearing of particular religious attire, such as yarmulkes and head scarves, when the attire is part of the student's religious practice.**
- E. No student shall be considered noncompliant with the policy in the following instances:**

  - 1. When noncompliance derives from financial hardship, on condition that the parent(s) or guardian has applied for financial assistance following the procedure outlined in Section IV.D. or followed the exemption process outlined in Section V. G.**
  - 2. When a student wears the uniform of a nationally recognized youth organization such as the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts on regular meeting days.**

3. When a student's parent or guardian has secured an exemption from the uniform policy by following the procedures set forth in Section V. G.
- G. If the parent(s) or guardian desires to exempt his or her child from the uniform policy, the parent(s) or guardian must observe the following procedure:
1. Request an Application for Exemption from the Student Uniform Requirement. The parent(s) or guardian may obtain an application from the school office.
  2. Complete the application in full and submit it to the principal.
  3. Meet with the principal and/or designee to discuss the uniform policy and the nature of the parent(s) or guardian's objectives to the policy. The purposes of this meeting include (1) ensuring that the parent(s) or guardian understands the reasons for, and goals of the uniform policy and (2) verifying the accuracy of the information on the application.
- H. Any parent or guardian who is aggrieved by the principal's decision on an application for exemption shall have the right to present a written or oral grievance to the Superintendent or designee.

## **V. ANNUAL EVALUATION**

- A. The Building Steering Committee will conduct an evaluation of the uniform program at the end of the 1999 school year. Thereafter, the evaluation of the uniform program may be included in the school's regular review process.
- B. The Building Steering Committee shall review the results of the evaluation and consider proposed modifications to the uniform policy as appropriate.
- C. The results of the evaluation shall be made available to the parent(s) or guardian of students.

## Puget Sound Elementary School

### Application for Exemption from the Student Uniform Requirement

Name of person submitting the application: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of student(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I am the parent(s) or legal guardian of the student(s) named above. I choose not to have my child/children named above dress in compliance with the student uniform policy adopted at my child's/children's school during the current school year. I hereby request an exemption from the student uniform requirement on behalf of the above named student(s) for the current school year at Puget Sound Elementary School, pursuant to Section V.G. of the Puget Sound Elementary School Required Uniform Policy. I understand that the exemption is for the current school year only.

The reason for my application for this exemption is as follows:

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I understand that the exemption may be effective after I have met with the school principal and/or designee, as set forth in Section G.3 of the Puget Sound Elementary School Mandatory Uniform Policy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Request

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal/Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Conference

## Appendix H

### Summary of P.S.E. Uniform Survey Comments

## **“Yes” Puget Sound Elementary Uniform Survey Comments May 1997**

- As a new kindergarten parent to Puget Sound Elementary, this year, I felt it important to respect school wishes for a uniform policy, even though I had reservations. I am over that now. I am pleased at the freedom of choice within a guideline which allows me to buy cut, comfortable clothes for my child. I believe in the promotion of belonging and school spirit and most of all an overall consciousness of neat dress. I want to support these efforts and feel that whatever reservations I had or have can be put aside for the good of the school my child will be attending for many years to come.
- We are very supportive of a required uniform policy. We appreciate the current uniform guidelines which have been easy and economical to meet. We see this step as a continuation of sound decisions by the educators at P.S.E. Thank you for creating and maintaining such a high level of education for our children.
- It's great to see a class in uniform. They are so business like and neat, as if ready to "get started" on the learning process.
- No comments at all, because we love the uniform policy very much! It helps a lot, especially the financial part.
- I am in favor of mandatory uniforms with strict guidelines.
- Please, please, please . . . make it required!
- We approve and encourage required uniforms for Puget Sound Elementary.
- My child feels wearing a uniform is easy because he doesn't have to choose an outfit every day. He is proud to go to Puget Sound Elementary and he feels the uniform is one reason why. It adds to the "professional" climate of the school. I have seen a real pride shine through in the children who wear their uniforms every day.
- Thinks the uniform policy is great, should be required.
- This year I did not make my son wear a uniform to school. I believe this added to his inability to stay focused at school. This was the only year I did not force him to wear a uniform. I am supportive of a uniform policy.
- My son likes to dress nicely and I feel the uniforms make him feel dressed up. I feel uniforms should be mandatory. I feel if all students participated this would encourage my son to wear his uniform proudly.
- I think the uniforms we use are great. I do think it would be better if it was required and used throughout the district.
- I have lived in Southern California and seen what schools are like with and without uniforms. I believe Puget Sound Elementary going mandatory is the right thing to do. I enjoyed the Uniform Fair

with several different retailers having uniforms to purchase on site. In the long run, even if parents can't see it yet, I believe the uniforms make a positive impact at school socially and educationally. Keep up the good work of providing positive information.

- I am hoping a mandatory policy is in effect by next school year!
- Compliance is too inconsistent with the voluntary policy. It says it is okay not to follow the rules when we don't feel like it. Commitments are very important lessons to learn.
- Mandatory uniforms make it easier for all students dealing with peer pressure.
- I agree that a uniform policy would be a benefit to our local schools. A variety of uniform combinations would be a benefit, kids are learning and should be free to express their individualism and self-expression.
- Would like to see Friday and ½ days as the time for optional uniform wear. Support a required uniform policy.
- I look back on my own 12 years in Catholic school education and favor this policy. What I had to wear was not nearly as important as what I had to learn. We had one week a year, "School Spirit Week" and were allowed to wear something outside of the prescribed guidelines.
- Perhaps a casual day on ½ days?
- A required uniform policy is cost effective and less stressful for home life.
- Like the required uniforms, suggest adding school color (dark green and burgundy) uniform colored shirts and khaki colored pants.
- Recommend and support mandatory uniforms for next year. Suggest starting this Fall 1997. I would like to see this policy carried into the Jr. And Sr. High Schools where there seems to be so much judgment put on a student by what clothes they wear.
- Grateful we have one less thing to argue about in the morning.
- Please allow students to wear navy blue jeans and corduroy overalls for girls. Support a required uniform.
- Favor a required policy. Would like more information about companies carrying selection of "husky" pants.
- I support mandatory uniform policy and would be willing to assist wherever possible.
- Moved here in January/child was shy in last school/at Puget Sound Elementary, social/happy/accepted blossomed – uniforms!
- Support the mandatory uniform policy – is financially difficult for our situation.

## “NO” Comments from Puget Sound Elementary Uniform Survey May 1997

- ◇ Not affordable
- ◇ Stare in lower grades and phased in
- ◇ Kids like to wear their own clothes
- ◇ Family split, but would support
- ◇ Kids should be able to wear what they want.
- ◇ Takes away their individual personalities
- ◇ Kids have a right to wear what they want.
- ◇ We shouldn't be punished because some parents don't have control of their kids.
- ◇ My son is strongly against this. He is a good student and shouldn't have this forced upon him.
- ◇ Prefer policy remain optional.
- ◇ Opposed to dress code.
- ◇ The whole district should have the same policy not just one elementary school.
- ◇ I do not agree with the equation of uniforms – higher learning standards.
- ◇ Choices and the freedom to choose is the reason that we are in public schools in America. Are you going to provide a nutritious lunch for everyone too? Enforce a stricter dress code for those parents who have no control and let their kids dress sloppy.
- ◇ I think diversity is an important lesson for children to learn. People are different. I also think that in some way this is promoting an upper class atmosphere for Puget Sound Elementary. - high social status and possibly a superior attitude which I don't want my kids bombarded with.

**“UNDECIDED” Puget Sound Elementary Uniform Survey Comments****May 1997**

- ◇ Uniform policy can't work unless more specific guidelines regarding type of shoes, jewelry, make-up, type and color of socks, jackets, sweaters.
- ◇ Voluntary program does not go far enough to accomplish the goals you have set for this type of policy. If changes are not included in new policies, will not consider uniforms.
- ◇ Concerns because he remembers his early childhood experiences in another country.
- ◇ Need more information about the uniform policy.
- ◇ Cannot afford the uniforms, therefore undecided.
- ◇ Still undecided.

## MARYLOUISE MURPHY

- EDUCATION:** B.A. Newton College of the Sacred Heart  
M.Ed. University of Washington  
Ed.D. University of Washington, 1997
- CREDENTIALS:** California Standard Teaching Certificate  
San Jose State University
- Washington Standard Teaching Certificate  
University of Washington
- Continuing Principal Certificate  
University of Washington
- PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:** North Kitsap School District
- |  |                |
|--|----------------|
| Principal, Vinland Elementary School     | 1994 - present |
| Principal, Breidablik Elementary School  | 1990 - 1994    |
| Principal, Suquamish Elementary School   | 1986 - 1990    |
| Principal, Sixth Grade Elementary School | 1985 - 1986    |
- Ten years of elementary and secondary teaching experience in Washington, California, Bermuda and Puerto Rico.
- AFFILIATIONS:** National Association of Elementary School Principals  
Delta Kappa Gamma  
Washington Association of Elementary School Principals  
International Reading Association  
Washington Organization of Reading Development  
Harvard University Principals' Center
- QUALIFICATIONS:** Demonstrated success in:
- building and district level leadership
  - curriculum and staff development
  - student welfare and achievement
  - fiscal management
  - new construction and remodeling coordination
  - new school opening, program planning and staffing
  - communication with staff, parents and community to improve the learning environment for all students.