

Argumentative Essay Prompt A3: SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Be sure to annotate before filling out your Planning Web.

ESSAY PROMPT: In a multi-paragraph, well-organized essay, take a stance on the following issue: **Should students be required to wear school uniforms?**

Remember to support your claim with relevant textual evidence and be sure to include a counter-argument to make your argument more effective.

Source - ProCon.Org

Background:

Traditionally favored by private and parochial institutions, school uniforms are being adopted by US public schools in increasing numbers. Almost one in five US public schools required students to wear uniforms during the 2011-2012 school year, up from one in eight in 2003-2004. Mandatory uniform policies in public schools are found more commonly in high-poverty areas. [23] [46]

Proponents say that school uniforms make schools safer for students, create a "level playing field" that reduces socioeconomic disparities, and encourage children to focus on their studies rather than their clothes.

Opponents say school uniforms infringe upon students' right to express their individuality, have no positive effect on behavior and academic achievement, and emphasize the socioeconomic disparities they are intended to disguise.

Some Interesting Facts:

- The first school district in the United States to require all K-8 students to wear uniforms was Long Beach, CA, in Jan. 1994.
- Americans spend around \$1 billion per year on school uniforms.
- Students at Eton, one of England's most prestigious schools, were required to wear black top hats and tails on and off campus until 1972.
- US schools with a minority student population of 50% or more are four times as likely to require uniforms than schools with a minority population of 20-49%, and 24 times more likely than schools with minority populations of 5%-19%.
- As of 2008, 22 US states specifically authorized schools to institute dress codes or uniform policies.

PRO (FOR UNIFORMS)	CON (AGAINST UNIFORMS)
<p>School uniforms may deter crime and increase student safety. In Long Beach, CA, after two years of a district-wide K-8 mandatory uniform policy, reports of assault and battery in the district's schools decreased by 34%, assault with a deadly weapon dropped by 50%, fighting incidents went down by 51%, offenses were cut by 74%, robbery dropped by 65%, possession of weapons (or weapon "look-alikes") decreased by 52%, possession of drugs went down by 69%, and vandalism was lowered by 18%. A 2012 peer-reviewed study found that one year after Sparks Middle School in Nevada instituted a uniform policy, school police data showed a 63% drop in police log reports, and decreases were also noted in gang activity, student fights, graffiti, property damage, and battery. A 2010 peer-reviewed study found that schools with uniform policies had 12% fewer firearm-related incidents and 15% fewer drug-related incidents than schools without uniforms. School uniforms also prevent students from concealing weapons under baggy clothing, make it easier to keep track of students on field trips, and make intruders on campus more visible.</p>	<p>School uniforms restrict students' freedom of expression. The First Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees that all individuals have the right to express themselves freely. The US Supreme Court stated in <i>Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District</i> (7-2, 1969) that "it can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." In the 1970 case <i>Richards v. Thurston</i> (3-0), which revolved around a boy refusing to have his hair cut shorter, the US First Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that "compelled conformity to conventional standards of appearance" does not "seem a justifiable part of the educational process." Clothing choices are "a crucial form of self-expression," according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada, which also stated that "allowing students to choose their clothing is an empowering message from the schools that a student is a maturing person who is entitled to the most basic self-determination."</p>

School uniforms keep students focused on their education, not their clothes.

A bulletin published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals stated that "When all students are wearing the same outfit, they are less concerned about how they look and how they fit in with their peers; thus, they can concentrate on their schoolwork." A 2010 University of Houston study found that elementary school girls' language test scores increased by about three percentile points after uniforms were introduced. Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, when she was a 2008 US presidential candidate, advocated school uniforms as a way to help students focus on learning: "Take that [clothing choices] off the table and put the focus on school, not on what you're wearing." Chris Hammons, Principal of Woodland Middle School in Coeur d'Alene, ID, stated that uniforms "provide for less distraction, less drama, and more of a focus on learning."

School uniforms promote conformity over individuality.

At a time when schools are encouraging an appreciation of diversity, enforcing standardized dress sends a contradictory message. Chicago junior high school student Kyler Sumter wrote in the Huffington Post: "They decide to teach us about people like Rosa Parks, Susan B. Anthony and Booker T. Washington... We learn about how these people expressed themselves and conquered and we can't even express ourselves in the hallways." Troy Shuman, a senior in Harford County, MD, said the introduction of a mandatory uniform policy to his school would be "teaching conformity and squelching individual thought. Just think of prisons and gangs. The ultimate socializer to crush rebellion is conformity in appearance. If a school system starts at clothes, where does it end?" Late satirist George Carlin asked, "Don't these schools do enough damage, making all these children think alike? Now they're gonna get them to look alike, too?"

School uniforms create a level playing field among students, reducing peer pressure and bullying.

When all students are dressed alike, competition between students over clothing choices and the teasing of those who are dressed in less expensive or less fashionable outfits can be eliminated. In a 2013 survey by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and uniform manufacturer Lands' End, 86% of school leaders said uniforms make "a significant, positive impact on peer pressure," and 64% said uniforms reduce bullying. Arminta Jacobson, Founder and Director of the Center for Parent Education at the University of North Texas, stated that uniforms put "all kids on the same playing field in terms of their appearance. I think it probably gives them a sense of belonging and a feeling of being socially accepted." Virginia B. Draa, Assistant Professor of Human Ecology at Youngstown State University, said uniforms can decrease peer pressure and blur class lines between students.

There is evidence that school uniforms may increase violent attacks and lower academic achievement, while there is little evidence that uniforms provide any benefits at all.

A 2007 peer-reviewed study found that "school uniforms increased the average number of assaults by about 14 [per year] in the most violent schools." David L. Brunsma, PhD, Professor of Sociology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), co-authored a study that analyzed a national sample of 10th graders and found "no effects of uniforms on absenteeism, behavioral problems (fights, suspensions, etc.), or substance use on campus" and "no effects" on "pro-school attitudes, academic preparedness, and peer attitudes toward school." Brunsma also found a "negative effect of uniforms on academic achievement," and later found that uniforms were equally ineffective on elementary students and eighth graders. A 2009 peer-reviewed study found "no significant effects of school uniforms on performance on second grade reading and mathematics examinations, as well as on 10th-grade reading, mathematics, science, and history examinations."

Wearing uniforms enhances school pride, unity, and community spirit.

A 2007 study from Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom found that uniforms "often directly contributed to a feeling of school pride." Christopher P. Clouet, Superintendent of the New London, CT school district, stated that "the wearing of uniforms contributes to school pride." A 2002 study of over 1,000 Texas middle school students found that students in uniform "reported significantly more positive perceptions of belonging in their school community than reported by students in the standard dress group." Arnold Goldstein, PhD, head of the Center for Research on Aggression at Syracuse University, stated that uniforms help troubled students feel they have the support of a community: "There is a sense of belonging." A 2007 peer-reviewed study found that after uniforms were introduced, "Teachers perceived an increase in the level of respect, caring, and trust... throughout the school" and said "students are made to feel 'important' and as if they are a part of a team by wearing a uniform."

The key findings used to tout the benefits of uniforms are questionable.

The oft-quoted improvements to school safety and student behavior in the Long Beach (CA) Unified School District from 1993-1995 may not have resulted from the introduction of school uniforms. The study in which the findings were published cautioned that "it is not clear that these results are entirely attributable to the uniform policy" and suggests that the introduction of new school security measures made at the same time may have been partly responsible. Other reform efforts implemented alongside the uniform policy included a \$1 million project to develop alternative teaching strategies.

School uniforms may improve attendance and discipline.

A 2010 study by researchers at the University of Houston found that the average absence rate for girls in middle and high school decreased by 7% after the introduction of uniforms. The study also found that "behavioral problems shift[ed] towards less severe infractions." A 2006 Youngstown State University study of secondary schools in Ohio's eight largest school districts found that school uniform policies improve rates of attendance, graduation, and suspension. During the first semester of a mandatory uniform program at John Adams Middle School in Albuquerque, NM, discipline referrals dropped from 1,565 during the first semester of the year prior to 405.

School uniforms emphasize the socioeconomic divisions they are supposed to eliminate.

Most public schools with uniform policies are in poor neighborhoods, emphasizing the class distinctions that uniforms were supposed to eliminate. In 2013, while 47% of high-poverty public schools required school uniforms, only 6% of low-poverty public schools required them, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Even school uniform proponent Angela Walmsley, Associate Dean for Graduate Education and Research in the College of Education and Public Service at Saint Louis University, concedes that "we're creating a culture where parents think that a public school where children wear uniforms is an unsafe place to send their child. In other words, school uniforms in public schools are becoming associated with schools facing violence problems."

School uniforms prevent the display of gang colors and insignia.

The US Department of Education's Manual on School Uniforms stated that uniform policies can "prevent gang members from wearing gang colors and insignia at school" in order to "encourage a safe environment." According to a 2013 US Department of Justice report, almost 50% of high school students say there are gang members at their schools. Educators in the Long Beach Unified School District have speculated that the sharp reduction in crime following the introduction of school uniforms was a result of gang conflicts being curbed. Osceola County, FL School Board member Jay Wheeler reported that the county's schools had a 46% drop in gang activity after their first full school year with a mandatory K-12 uniform policy (2008-2009).

School uniforms make getting ready for school easier, which can improve punctuality.

When uniforms are mandatory, parents and students do not spend time choosing appropriate outfits for the school day. According to a national 2013 survey, over 90% of US school leaders believe school uniform or formal dress code policies "eliminate wardrobe battles with kids," make it "easier to get kids ready in the morning," and create a "time saving in the morning." Tracey Marinelli, Superintendent of the Lyndhurst School District in New Jersey, credited the district's uniform policy for reducing the number of students running late. Lyndhurst student Mike Morreale agreed, stating that "it's so much easier to dress than having to search for clothes and find out that something doesn't match."

Uniforms may have a detrimental effect on students' self-image.

When students have to wear the same outfits, rather than being allowed to select clothes that suit their body types, they can suffer embarrassment at school. Child and teen development specialist Robyn Silverman told NBC News' Today that students, especially girls, tend to compare how each other looks in their uniforms: "As a body image expert, I hear from students all the time that they feel it allows for a lot of comparison... So if you have a body that's a plus-size body, a curvier body, a very tall body, a very short body, those girls often feel that they don't look their best." A 2003 study by researchers at Arizona State University found that "students from schools without uniforms reported higher self-perception scores than students from schools with uniform policies." Some students also find uniforms less comfortable than their regular clothes, which may not be conducive to learning.

Focusing on uniforms takes attention away from finding genuine solutions to problems in education.

Spending time and effort implementing uniform policies may detract from more effective efforts to reduce crime in schools and boost student performance. More substantive improvements to public education could be achieved with smaller class sizes, tightened security, increased parental involvement, improved facilities, and other measures.

School uniforms can save parents money.

Parents can reduce their financial burden when their children are limited to wearing one simple outfit every day. A national 2013 survey of 517 US school leaders found that 94% of those surveyed believe "one of the main benefits to parents is that school uniforms are more cost-effective than regular apparel," and 77% estimated the average annual cost of school uniforms per child to be \$150 or less. Uniform company French Toast states on their website that the average cost one of their complete school uniforms is \$45 and that most children will only require two sets. Without school uniform policies, parents may feel pressure to compete with other families by purchasing fashionable clothes for their children.

The push for school uniforms is driven by commercial interests rather than educational ones.

Americans spend around \$1 billion on school uniforms every year. Retailer J.C. Penney Co. says school uniforms are "a huge, important business for us." In 2003 alone, uniform company Lands' End spent \$3 million on marketing efforts directed at public schools and districts. Multiple studies used to promote the effectiveness of uniforms were partly funded by Lands' End, and at least one of those studies is "so wholly flawed as to render itself useless," according to David L. Brunsma, PhD. In Aug. 2013, Reuters reported that retailers were "sensing their opportunity... stepping up competition in the uniform aisles and online. Walmart has set up 'uniform shops' or temporary boutiques within some stores."