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SCHOOL UNIFORM SYNTHESIS QUESTION

Introduction: Public discourse surrounding educational reform has recently focused on the importance of uniform policies in public schools. School uniform policies have historically been restricted to the private sector and have only recently begun to be discussed as a viable policy option in public school districts.

Assignment: Read the following sources carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that school uniforms are beneficial for public school students.

Source A (Albietz)

Source B (King)

Source C (Brunsma)

Source D (Oppenheimer)

Source E (esortment.com)

Source F (ParentSmart)

SOURCE A: Albietz, Albert. Those disgusting School Uniforms. Oct. 1998. 21 August 2006. <<http://www.optionality.net/mag/oct98a.html>>

The “equity” argument goes like this: If children wear uniforms, they do not notice differences between children from rich and from poor families. This “equity” argument is often put forward by State Schools. The reason for this may be that it is a purely socialist argument and it may be rejected for this reason alone. In a democratic country, school should not indoctrinate children with a specific political ideology, especially not a government-funded school. Interestingly, private schools typically are even more fanatical about uniforms, but they are less inclined to use the “equity” argument.

Anyway, even as a socialist argument, it does not make much sense. School uniforms may make all students look alike. But why do the teachers not wear the same uniforms? Clearly, school does not like any confusion as to who is the teacher and who is the student. The master-slave relationship that is so obviously present at school is deliberately magnified by uniforms that emphasize this difference. The teacher is allowed to dress casually, while the student has to wear silly clothes intended to make the student look stupid.

Furthermore, there are often different uniforms for those in higher grades than for those in lower grades, just like in the military a superior officer wears a less silly hat. This creates class differences. Some will argue that this merely reflects existing differences. But the point is that if this were accurate, it constituted an argument against uniformity. Moreover, school itself creates class differences. Class is a trademark, if not an invention of school. Children are grouped together in classes according to age and often according to gender and to perceived academic performance. Because parents want their children to mix with children of their 'own class', they carefully select the neighborhood where they are going to live. Houses close to private schools are often substantially more expensive than similar houses close to state schools. On the street, children are identified by their uniform. 'Oh, you come from that poor school, you dummy!' is an example of what children say to each other when they look at each other's uniform. And even in the classroom, uniforms only accentuate differences in length, hair color and other physical characteristics. Children consequently judge each other by their physical appearances. One can argue whether it were better if children judged each other by their clothes instead.

SOURCE B: King, Keith A. "Should school uniforms be mandated in elementary schools?"
January 1998. 21 August 2006. <<http://danenet.wicip.org/ncs/forumuniformseval.htm>>

Some individuals feel that mandatory school uniforms may teach students a negative lesson about conformity. Some believe that students should base life choices on their own internal values, rather than on rules and regulations arbitrarily set for them, and that this is vitally important to their future health and discipline. Such an argument touches directly upon the rights of freedom of expression for all U.S. citizens. In turn, the ACLU has argued that mandatory uniforms violate students' free expression rights.

Although most younger children seem to be amenable to uniforms and even like them, many older students, especially adolescents, respond very negatively to school uniforms. One Long Beach seventh grader stated, "It's like we're all in jail." Adolescence is a period when youths attempt to find their own uniqueness and individuality in various ways. One way is through fashion. While many political cartoonists joke that today's youths already wear uniforms of baggy pants, T-shirts, and baseball caps worn backward, these uniforms are acquired by free choice, not enforced by authority figures.

Another argument against implementing school uniforms involves using student clothing as a barometer for possible personal problems, such as drug use, gang involvement, or sexual abuse. Students' school uniforms may cover up such problems that their clothing might otherwise reveal. In addition, some argue that a mandatory uniform policy tends to penalize everyone as opposed to addressing the children who cause the majority of problems.

SOURCE C : Brunsmas, David L., and Kerry A. Rockquemore. "The Effect of Student Uniforms on Attendance, Behavior Problems, Substance Use, and Academic Achievement." The Journal of Educational Research 13 Feb. 1998. The Parental Action Committee of Polk County, Florida. 5 Apr. 2000. <<http://www.members.tripod.com/rockqu/uniform.html>>.

Weighted Sector Comparisons on Means of Absenteeism, Behavior, Substance Use and Standardized Achievement Scores

	Uniform ^d	Non-Uniform
Total Sample (N=4578)		
Absent	2.90	3.01
Behavior	1.58	1.74
Drugs	2.68	2.71
F12xcomp	52.89**	50.58
Catholic Sample (N=327)		
Absent	2.89*	2.55
Behavior	1.49	1.41
Drugs	2.73	2.80
F12xcomp	53.51**	56.53
Private Sample (N=80)		
Absent	2.93	2.73
Behavior	1.33	1.28
Drugs	2.36	2.07
F12xcomp	56.60	56.01

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

SOURCE D: Oppenheimer, Lauren. "School Uniforms." 21 August 2006.
<<http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~lo226899/pros.htm>>

School uniforms are used in many schools to provide an atmosphere of uniformity, pride, loyalty, and equality among the student population. Wearing school uniforms also makes the atmosphere more of a businesslike atmosphere by giving a better approach to learning. The uniforms increase one's sense of school pride, it gives less distractions, saves a lot of money for parents, and reduces peer pressure.

In my opinion one of the biggest problems for teenagers today in schools is cliques. Teenagers today now group themselves by who wears what and so on and so on. School uniforms would force students to get to know someone for who they are and not for what they are. When there are a lot less cliques there is a lot less hatred which leads to a lot less violence.

I think parents would also benefit from uniforms because of all of the money that they would save. Children that wear school uniforms spend less than students who don't wear the uniforms. Those who do wear school uniforms spend an average of \$104 on clothing during the first three quarters and those who don't wear school uniforms spent an average of \$185. Although the difference isn't that great, overtime a lot of money could be saved.

During the State of the Union address in January of 1996 by Bill Clinton said school uniforms are beneficial to all schools and the safety for our children. The president said "If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets then our public schools should be able to require students to wear school uniforms." Since Clinton's State of the Union seven states have now made school uniforms a law. One of the states is California. Long Beach, California who started the law in 1994. Over 70,000 students from the grades kindergarten through eighth grade wore the uniforms. During the first year there was a 43% reduction in suspensions, fights within the school decreased by 54%, there was a 70% reduction of substance abuse, and 20% less cases of weapons.

No one really knows exactly why the Columbine incident happened, but I have a hunch that maybe if those kids grew up with school uniforms then maybe it would have never happened. I know that might be a stretch of a guess, but with all of the facts we know it could be possible. Obviously the killers went after jocks and well rounded students. The jocks and good students take part in cliques which school uniforms would abolish.

SOURCE E: "School Uniforms and Safety." 13 July 2006. 21 August 2006.
<http://wi.essortment.com/School_Uniforms_and_Safety>

Uniforms protect against students wearing gang colors or exploiting gang related symbols. This will protect all students from gang related violence including fighting, shootings and sometimes murder. It allows for students to get along better and not separate themselves because of social interactions outside of school. Uniforms will also protect students against harassment because of what they are wearing, gang related or not.

The standard blue bottoms and white tops also prevent against theft. More often in junior high and high school are clothes being stolen during P.E. class. Everything from shoes and socks to jeans, skirts, shirts and sweaters wind up missing in the locker room. With a standard set of uniforms that all students wear, stolen clothing and accessories should be eradicated.

With every student looking similar it gives the entire school community something in common. With something in common students will get along better and there should be fewer conflicts on campus and more focus in the classroom. Uniforms take a little something away from the social status that students create for themselves inside school grounds.

School uniforms provide a safe environment for students, teachers and administration. With all students wearing uniforms an invited guest on campus will stand out dramatically and easily be spotted by administration. This will prevent unauthorized people from being on campus which promotes mass amounts of safety for the students.

SOURCE F: "School Uniforms: Pros and Cons." 2005. 21 August 2006. <
<http://www.parentsart.com/ExtLink.asp?URL=http%3A%2F%2Ffamilyeducation%2Ecom%2Farticle%2F0%2C1120%2C5%2D4116%2C00%2Ehtml&PrevUrl=/SchPractices/DressCodes/Default.asp&cite=Ann+Svensen>>

Dr. Alan Hilfer, senior psychologist in the Children's and Adolescent Unit at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn says, "Uniforms do eliminate competition, pressure, and assaults perpetrated by older kids on younger kids for their sneakers and other possessions. They also allow some kids to focus better, especially in the lower grades." But Dr. Hilfer says there is a downside: "Clothes are a source of expression for children, and as kids get older, they become increasingly resentful of uniforms."

Anthony Poet, assistant principal at the Pueblo Del Sol Middle School in Arizona, recently instituted a uniform policy in his school. He's the first to agree that kids don't like uniforms. But he noticed that the same kids who said they hated the policy also said they're glad to have it. One student confirms, "Uniforms make the school safer, but I don't like them." Since his school began requiring uniforms, Poet has documented a remarkable drop in discipline problems. But until a long-term study is done, he says he can't be sure whether it's the uniforms or the act of instituting the policy that's made the difference. Dr. Hilfer explains: "Discipline problems may be decreasing in schools with uniforms because the schools (and the parents) have begun taking the issue of discipline more seriously."

According to Dr. Hilfer, strict dress codes are not for everybody. "Some schools thrive on permissiveness and individuality, while others have to be more restrictive to contain a restless student body." Before making the uniform decision, he suggests that schools carefully consider their unique populations; what kind of message they want to send; and whether or not they think their kids will go for it. Dr. Hilfer warns, "By instituting a uniform policy, schools are taking away kids' individuality -- schools need to decide if that sacrifice is worth making."