

Title: Information on school uniforms

Date: September 2016

Request: Could you provide research on the relationship between the use of school uniforms and school culture, academic achievement, or other outcomes?

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with references on the relationship between the use of school uniforms and student and school outcomes. Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Brunsma, D. L. (2005). *Uniforms in public schools: A decade of research and debate*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Book description: Contrary to some of the nation's most prominent newspapers, politicians and educational administrators, and the evening news, there is absolutely nothing simplistic and straightforward about the current movement to uniform public school students in the United States. The debate over whether to require uniforms is highly controversial, undeniably complex, and, from the analyses and arguments presented in this book, unquestionably rooted in multifaceted social, political, legal, cultural, racial material, and educational structures. Much of the empirical research on school uniform policies' effectiveness has remained in dissertation and/or policy brief formats. This book provides an antidote to the ungrounded, anecdotal components that define the contemporary conversation regarding policies of standardized dress in American K-12 districts and schools. The contributors draw upon years of educational teaching and administrative experience, as well as research directed at objectively and empirically understanding the issue of school uniform policies [in] elementary and middle schools. *Uniforms in Public Schools* is of the utmost importance for those who wish to be informed and insightful participants in the contemporary debate on school uniform policies.

Gentile, E. & Imberman, S. A. (2011). *Dressed for success? The effect of school uniforms on student achievement and behavior* (NBER Working Paper No. 17337). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved on September 15, 2016, from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17337.pdf>

Abstract: Uniform use in public schools is rising, but we know little about how they affect students. Using a unique dataset from a large urban school district in the southwest United States, we assess how uniforms affect behavior, achievement and other outcomes. Each school in the district determines adoption independently, providing variation over schools and time. By including student and school fixed-effects we find evidence that uniform adoption improves attendance in secondary grades, while in elementary schools they generate large increases in teacher retention.

Seinghee, H. (2010). A mandatory uniform policy in urban schools: Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2003-04. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, 5(1-12), 1-13. Retrieved on September 15, 2016, from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=bc737e67-c038-4093-951c-d4d676ce36ee%40sessionmgr107&vid=22&hid=116>

Abstract: The main purpose of the study is to examine the relations between a mandatory school uniform policy and student problem behavior. The study is based on the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) 2003-04 data. Analyzing data from 421 urban schools, the study found that schools adopting a mandatory uniform policy are negatively associated with rates of student problem behaviors except at the high school level. As with other school safety initiatives, parental involvement at the elementary school level, and teacher training and community efforts at the high school level were revealed as negative predictors of student problem behavior.

Walker, K. (2007). *School uniforms* (Research Brief). Education Partnerships, Inc. Retrieved on September 15, 2016, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538456.pdf>

Abstract: Does clothing make the person or does the person make the clothing? How does what attire a student wears to school affect their academic achievement? In 1996, President Clinton cited examples of school violence and discipline issues that might have been avoided had the students been wearing uniforms ("School uniforms: Prevention or suppression?"). In his 1998 State of the Union address, he mentioned the positive impact uniforms had made in the Long Beach Unified School District, which has a highly diverse ethnic and socioeconomic population that is also the third largest district in California. When students have continuous negative experiences in school, dropping out and delinquency tend to be the common responses. The role of schools is to provide a positive, safe and secure learning environment where students feel protected enough to explore and develop their intellectual and social competencies. Hard evidence that proves the wearing of uniforms provides a direct link to better academic achievement is not conclusive, however, there is evidence that supports there are fewer discipline problems/referrals and violence as well as higher attendance rates since the implementation of a uniform policy. What appears to have been overlooked in the data analysis is the effect of other programs that are often being implemented at the same time as the uniform policy and may also have a direct impact on the discipline and attendance issues. There are many arguments for and

against school uniform policies. The pros and cons of school uniform are listed in this paper.

Yeung, R. (2009). Are school uniforms a good fit? Results from the ECLS-K and the NELS. *Educational Policy*, 23(6), 847–874. Retrieved on September 15, 2016, from <http://epx.sagepub.com/content/23/6/847.full.pdf+html>

Abstract: One of the most common proposals put forth for reform of the American system of education is to require school uniforms. Proponents argue that uniforms can make schools safer and also improve school attendance and increase student achievement. Opponents contend that uniforms have not been proven to work and may be an infringement on the freedom of speech of young people. Within an econometric framework, this study examines the effect of school uniforms on student achievement. It tackles methodological challenges through the use of a value-added functional form and the use of multiple data sets. The results do not suggest any significant association between school uniform policies and achievement. Although the results do not definitely support or reject either side of the uniform argument, they do strongly intimate that uniforms are not the solution to all of American education's ills.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“School uniforms” AND research

Search of Databases on May 16, 2016

EBSCO Host, ERIC, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the West Region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.
