School Uniforms Essay, Research Paper

Angus Young of the rock band AC/DC is what comes to mind when picturing a school uniform. His uniform or costume if you will, is that of an English schoolboy dressed in a suit type uniform but shorts instead of slacks and a funky hat. A group of small boys and girls all warring the same colored uniforms assembled in front of the catholic school down the street is another picture that comes to my mind when thinking about school uniforms.

This is what most people used to think about school uniforms. They have been attached to students of European and private schools. Such pictures of students dressing in school uniforms have led to stereotyping and a negative attitude towards schools enforcing a uniform policy. Displayed as robots without the ability to express them selves in a society that says you must express yourself and be an individual at all cost. The problem is that the cost to express yourself and be an individual is high in some cases, in Detroit, a 15-year-old boy was killed for his $86 basketball shoes (Tweeters 1997). I believe that cost is to high, it would be better to be laughed at and teased about warring a nerdy uniform, than to be shot by some gang member that did not like the color of the pants I?m warring. School uniforms have been the cause of many jokes and harassment to those who wore them. In the past public schools considered uniforms old and out dated trends, though recently many public schools are starting to implement and enforce a uniform policy.

The implementation of a school uniform policy is important if we are still striving to improve our students. The arguments against them are fading while the positive reasons are promoting school uniforms and gaining ground. Some of the possible benefits are safety, cost, uniformity and competition in academics instead of fashions. The main argument against them is the need for students to express their individual selves, this argument is losing ground compared to the benefits of the uniform policy.

Today many public schools are mandating and enforcing school uniforms for their students. San Antonio School district requires all 60,000 of its students to wear uniforms; over 60% of Fort Worth?s elementary schools require their students to ware uniforms (Radcliffe 1999). In 1995, the Texas legislature gave public school districts the authority to require uniforms under Texas State Law 11.162 of the Texas Education Code. (Appendix A). The law however is a voluntary law; schools are not required to have a uniform policy. A Dallas attorney Domingo Garcia has filed a proposed legislation that would make it mandatory to wear uniforms in Grades k-12 in Texas (Ramos 1997).

The first fundamental issue that school board officials and law makers should look at before they make new policies and laws concerning school uniforms is, will these new laws and policies have a positive impact on students overall performance. This would not be limited to academic performances only but should also include other socially learned behavior that will inhance the students ability to conform to the social norms needed to be successful in today?s society. People for uniforms say that the academic performance has been and will increase by having the students ware them (Caruso 1996). A lessened degree of attention and concern with fashion will enable a better condition for serious study, as well as lesson the cultural and economic challenges of students and parents. (Cohn 1996, Paliokos 1996)

Nathan Minster, a seventh grader at Country Day of Arlington said, ? Uniforms provide a better educational atmosphere, and symbolize school spirit. If all students dress alike, their attention will not focus on Johnny?s new Tommy Hilfiger outfit.? (Teeters 1996). Any situation that does not promote the improvement of students in school should be looked at and studied to find ways to change the situation. There are no positive aspects to worrying about not having the money to buy the coolest and newest fashions. Would it not be better to strive and worry about who can get the best grade or do the best science project.

Is the reduction of crime going to help improve our students? We must agree that there is no part of our student?s lives that can be improved by the atmosphere of crime. We need to ask the question, What ought to be? When it comes to school and crime. How to deal with crime is one of the ethical questions all school administrators and lawmakers must address and act on accordingly. The statistics say that schools having a school uniform policy have seen a decrease in crime. Long Beach Unified School District was the first large urban school district in the United States to require school uniforms. They have seen substantial decreases in crime in the past five years since they have required uniforms. One incredible reduction was that sex offenses have decreased 93%. (Appendix B).

The cost of implementing a uniform policy must also be looked at closely. The fact that all students have different degrees of economic status requires us to address this matter. If a student can not afford uniforms would they not be able to go to school. Would it be better to have them spend all their money on uniforms so they could go to school, but because of that they don?t have the money to participate in after school sports or social events. Maybe they would spend the money on uniforms instead of nutritious food, which could effect their health. The current Texas law does provide ways of providing uniforms for students who can not afford to buy them. (Appendix A). The Long Beach Unified School District has privately funded over $160,000 for assistance to disadvantaged students. By doing this they have not put any financial burden on the taxpayers. The cost can be high, as it has been for the San Antonio School district, which has spent about $500,000 to outfit 90% of their students (Radcliffe 1999). Unlike Long Beach School District, San Antonio?s uniform policy has cost the tax payers a lot of money. They ought to look at ways of reducing the cost to taxpayers, possible private funding from companies that participate in philanthropic programs.

What are the ethical concerns for schools considering school uniforms? The nation has implemented school uniforms in about 25 percent of the public elementary, middle, and junior high schools according to the (California School News March 31,1997). The general improvements of the students who attend schools that requiring them to ware uniforms has shown an improvement. I can conclude from the improvements that we ought to have 100 percent of public schools starting uniform policies. I don?t believe that waiting for years of research and study on this issue will change the outcome. Students are moving through school fast and to wait for years to go by before making this a policy can only lesson the improvement chances of the students who are currently in school. The motivation of this issue is not to infringe on student?s rights or burden parents with extra cost, but to simply improve the students.

Do students have rights as part of the American populous? If so, What are there rights? Do they even have the right to choose to go or not to go to school, or is this, the rights of the parents and society? Our society is now more than ever concerned with our rights and feelings. Is a first grader’s mind able to use these rights for there best interest or is it up to the adult population? Parents are the ones who should teach and mentor the students in the spirit of the rights and how to use them for the good judgment and common sense. The Bible says, ?For I, too, was once a son, tenderly loved by my mother as an only child, and the companion of my father. He told me never to forget his words. ?If you follow them,? he said, ?you will have a long and happy life. Learn to be wise, ? he said, ? and develop good judgment and common sense! I cannot overemphasize this point.? (Proverbs 3: 3-5). Is it more important for us to make a place where the student can improve in the general sense compared to the First amendment claims that the students don?t have the right of free expression?

?Any dress restriction that infringes on a student?s First Amendment right must be justified by a showing that the student?s attire materially disrupts school operation, infringes on the rights of others at the school, or otherwise interferes with any basic educational mission of he school? (Grantham 1994).

The legal aspect of requiring students to ware uniforms is a small matter if the majority of the parents back the policy. However, some will fight with every penny they have so that their kids will not have to ware the uniforms. The biggest legal issue is the First Amendments, right to free expression and the Fourteenth Amendment. They use this to say that the school has violated the student?s liberty to control his or her personal appearance ( Paliokos 1996).

Stakeholers are involved in every part of this issue. Every person is a stakeholder. It will affect, children, adults, and elderly in one way or another, some more than others will. The children will be effected because they will have to ware the uniforms. Primary social stakeholders would be the students, parents, school employees and administrators, taxpayers, people opposed to and people for school uniforms. I don?t have children but I am a stakeholder because if the uniform policy is voted on and passed the chances are my local school tax will increase to help pay for the new uniforms. Paying for the uniforms might not seem fair to someone in my position but if I look at the long term benefits of having our public schools improve the students I believe that the chances of a better society in my golden years is more likely to happen compared with the alternative of not improving the students.

The improvement of student?s basic education holds very high stakes for all stakeholders. If a student receives a better education he/she will have a better chance and be better equipped to be part of our adult society in which they will have to abide by our standard. The responsibility of the schools and lawmakers is to improve students. They are also responsible to do this within a budget. This does mean there will be some compromises and restrictions to what and how they accomplish this task of improving the students. They must also stay within the legal aspects of our laws, which has been brought about by society from the past. If the laws are no longer valid they need to be changed for the current situations faced today by schools trying to improve students.

Lets look at the stakeholders and what stakes they face. See stakeholder map Appendix C. Students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and the general society are the stakeholders we will look at although there are many more secondary stakeholders involved with this issue. What challenges, threats or opportunities do these stakeholders pose. What economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities do they have?

We will start by looking at the students. The challenge they have has been a negative and stressful one, What to ware today?, is a question that will no longer have to be asked each morning before school. The desire to have the coolest and newest fashions is no longer a challenge for the students who attend schools with uniform policies. The challenge to not be teased or laughed at is no longer there. Jacqueline Rios, a student at Glencrest Middle School said, ?The good thing about uniforms is that everybody wears the same color. And having uniforms is a lot better, because people cannot talk about and laugh at your clothes.? (Teeter 1997). We do however have the threat that some of the opposing students will not comply which could cause disaplin problems or even cause them to drop out of school. The opportunities for the students are all positive ones. Simply put they will have more opportunities to better themselves with academic issues because the priority of fashion standards is gone as Assistant Director of elementary school operations, Frankie Batts, said ? Instead of worrying about their clothes or what everyone else is wearing, kids focus on math and reading,? (Richardson 1995).

Parents will also enjoy the decreasing challenge of keeping their kids in the newest fashions. The money issue will improve for them, ? Three outfits can run about $130,? said Jan Underwood, owner of the U.T.W. Uniforms store in Fort Worth (Teeters 1997). Parents have had to struggle with deciding if what there kids are warring is proper. You might even ask, is it ethical to let my dautauter go to school in an almost see-through and skintight outfit? The students being at a school with a uniform policy would now solve this problem.

A possible threat from the parents would be from those who feel and believe that kids should be able to do and ware what they want and to force them to ware a uniform is a violation of their kids rights as well as the law. They do however seem to be the minority, most parents seem to support uniforms. The Longview Independent School district says they would support the decision for school uniforms if 75 to 80 percent of the parents were for it (Bell 2000).

Teachers will have the challenge of enforcing the new uniform polices but it will be much easier then enforcing the current dress code. At most, schools the guidelines of a dress code can be subjective in determining if they meet the requirements. Lets say, if the school dress policy said that girls must ware skirts that go down to there knees and a student is seen warring one that does meet that requirement but it is see-through and she is not wearing underpants. This could cause a problem because the requirement is subjective. If the uniform policy was in effect this would not be because the see-through skirt would either be part of the uniform and accepted or not, it would now be an objective decision for the teacher to make, either it is a violation or not. One of the great opportunities that it would give the teachers is by having all the students? dress alike they would be able to identify students who belong to the school and trespassers who don?t. This is a great safety issue in today?s times where it is important to regulate who comes on campuses. How about on a school field trip would it not be easier to identify your students in a crowd if you did not have to remember what everyone was warring. Say they were kidnapped would it not be easier to describe them to the police.

School administrators have all the issues to deal with. They are the ones who are challenged to improve the students. They have the challenge to implement school policies like uniforms in an effort to improve students. Their decisions go from the smallest detail, what colors, what style, what material, all or which can have either positive or negative effects on other stakeholders. They must accomplish this and be able to stay within the legal, economic and ethical parameters that currently guide their decisions. What a privilege they have with this opportunity to improve students who will in turn improve society and possibly the entire world. Though this is a great opportunity, it is also a great responsibility to have.

General society has a stake that is both short term and long term. On the short term, they will have to support the decisions of the uniform policies that are imposed upon the students and parents. Some of the long-term stakes would be requiring paying for some of the uniforms for students who can not afford them. For the few who oppose the uniforms they will not have to compromise their believes so that their kids can get an education. The Texas 1995 law allows some exceptions to the rules with a written request that states a bona fide religious or philosophical objection to the requirement. (Appendix A)

Some recommendations that should be looked at by schools before starting a uniform policy could help reduce the problems that occur from putting new policies into effect. They need to be able to justify the actions by demonstrating the link between a kind of dress and disruptive behavior or between a dress and improvements of the students. They should consult with the schools legal advisors to possible legal problems. Determine ways of enforcing the policy as well as what punishment would occur. Finding out what the parents and students think and involving them before the final starting date. They might try to find out what the student?s favorite color or type of material they want to use. They might even look at having some variety maybe two different colors. This way the students will feel included in the decisions and might not fight the policy, making the discipline problem smaller because they would be less likely to rebel. A financial study should be conducted prior to the policy to determine how much burden is going to be imposed on the school itself, how many students would require financial assistance with the cost of the uniforms. By keeping the primary stakeholders involved with the decisions prior to making the policy, schools have a better chance of success from the uniform policy.

Appendix A

Sec. 11.162. School Uniforms.

a) The board of trustees of an independent school district may adopt rules that require students at a school in the district to wear school uniforms if the board determines that the requirement would improve the learning environment at the school.

(b) The rules the board of trustees adopts must designate a source of funding that shall be used in providing uniforms for students at the school who are educationally disadvantaged.

(c) A parent or guardian of a student assigned to attend a school at which students are required to wear school uniforms may choose for the student to be exempted from the requirement or to transfer to a school at which students are not required to wear uniforms and at which space is available if the parent or guardian provides a written statement that, as determined by the board of trustees, states a bona fide religious or philosophical objection to the requirement.

(d) Students at a school at which uniforms are required shall wear the uniforms beginning on the 90th day after the date on which the board of trustees adopts the rules that require the uniforms.

Added by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 260, Sec. 1, eff. May 30, 1995.

Appendix B

GRADES K-8 SCHOOL CRIME REPORT SUMMARY

Since the inception of required school uniforms in all Long Beach Unified School District elementary and middle schools, in September 1994, school crime here has dropped 86% percent.

SCHOOL CRIME REDUCED1993-94

Before Uniforms1994-95

Uniforms Required1995-96

2nd Year with Uniforms1996-97

3rd Year with Uniforms1997-98

4th Year with Uniforms1998-99

5th Year With UniformsChange

K-8 Enrollment57,49758,37659,82262,03963,60265,451+14%

Assault/Battery\*31921453474682

Assault w/Deadly Weapon\*631611824

Sex Offenses57155424-93%

Robbery/Extortion341213535-85%

Chemical Substances712924202737-48%

Weapons or Look A like1457828241236-75%

Vandalism\*\*1,4091,1551279398106

Dangerous Devices46231202-96%

TOTAL20871529267206196296-86%

\*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. 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.

Appendix C

Resources

Bell, Becky. ?LISD group focuses on school uniforms? Longview News Journal 22 March 2000; Local

?California Leads nation in Public School Uniform Use.? California School News 31 March 1997: 4

Caruso, Peter. ?Individuality vs. Conformity: The Issue Behind School Uniforms.? NASSP Bulletin 8,581 September 1996: 83-88.

Chon, Carl A. ?Mandatory School Uniforms.? The School Administrator 53, 2 February 1996: 22-25

Grantham, Kimberly. ?Restricting Student Dress in Public Schools.? School Law Bulletin 25, Winter 1994: 1-10

Long Beach Crime Report Summary. http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/

Paliokas, Kathleen L. ?Trying Uniforms On for Size.? The American School Board Journal 183, 5 May 1996: 32-35

Proverbs. The Bible. The Living Bible. 3; 3-5

Radcliffe, Jennifer. ?Irving joins movement supporting required attire.? Star Telegram 25 March 1999

http://netarrant.net/news/doc/1047/1:NEA/1:NEA032599.html

Ramos, Cindy. ?Capitol moves? San Antonio Express-News 1 April 1997 Metro- Education Express: 4B

Richardson, Ginger. ?Student uniforms in vogue at schools in Fort Worth Officials report success of voluntary clothing programs.? Fort Worth Star Telegram, 16 August 1995; Metro

Teeters, Amy. ?Growing up in uniform style.? Fort Worth Star-Telegram 18 February 1997: Class Acts: 9

Texas State Law 11.162 of the Texas Education Code. http://www.tea.state.tx.us