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The Washington Post

November 08, 1995, Wednesday, Final Edition

SECTION: A SECTION; Pg. A03

LENGTH: 1388 words

HEADLINE: Sizing Up a Uniform Answer To Address Problems at School; Despite Challenges, Clothing Policy Proves Popular as Behavior Improves

BYLINE: Kathryn Wexler, Special to The Washington Post

DATELINE: LONG BEACH, Calif.

BODY:

For Lauren Duran, 11, going to school every day dressed like everyone else -- in a dull white shirt and black pants -- interferes with her right to the pursuit of happiness.

"You don't get the pleasure of wearing whatever you like," she complained during an interview in her principal's office.

Carlos Gonzalez, 12 years old and in the seventh grade, sees it more dramatically. "I feel like I'm in prison," he declared.

So goes the prepubescent grumbling at Rogers Middle School, one of 70 elementary and middle schools in Long Beach, which last year became the first public school district in the country to require that color-coded uniforms be worn in its classrooms.

Too bad, respond school administrators, faculty and parents. In a world where status is often measured by a child's sneaker brand or jacket color, the adults contend that uniforms are a possible answer to long-standing school ailments like gang involvement, truancy and even racial polarization. And unless the courts knock down the policy, they say, uniforms are here to stay.

Legal experts say school districts like this one must tread lightly when implementing uniform policies, which are being tried and tested at individual schools in a number of states. "When you talk about clothing, you talk about suits," said Gary Marx, senior associate director of the American Association of School Administrators in Arlington, Va.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1969 that clothing (in this case, a black armband protesting the Vietnam War) is a mode of self-expression and as such, protected under the First Amendment. Consequently, say experts, public schools must offer parents the right to decline to have their children wear uniforms. Students who do not wear them cannot be punished.

Although Long Beach has given parents the right to "opt out" of the uniform policy, fewer than 400 have done so. The American Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Foundation of Long Beach have jointly filed suit in Los Angeles County Superior Court on behalf of 25 families, alleging that the uniform policy imposes monetary hardship on poor families. They also contend the district has

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provided inadequate information on the option to decline participation and is harassing children who opt out.

"I just don't see how this is benefiting the kids at all," said Beth Haire, a plaintiff in the suit whose daughter is a fourth-grader. "Freedom of expression would help them in life."

But most parents believe the benefits of the uniforms far outweigh the detractions. More than 99 percent of the Long Beach student body donned the color-specific clothes last year, and the number is even greater this school year, said the district's spokesman, Dick Van Der Laan.

"I think it's wonderful," said Charlene Ebright, mother of a seventh-grader. "Their behavior is more business-like. They recognize their job in the family is to be educated, and they come ready to do that."

A comparison of the 1993-94 school year, before most Long Beach schools required the uniforms, to last year reveals assault and battery cases in district schools are down by 34 percent. Fighting dropped 51 percent. Drug cases fell by 69 percent and sex offenses are down 74 percent. And at some schools, attendance, teacher respect and even grades are up significantly.

"I really thought we were wasting our time on it," said Shawn Ashley, the principal of Franklin Middle School in Long Beach. But "you could start seeing the signs visually in behavior within the first month. We thought it was the halo effect but it just kept going, month after month."

A number of districts across the country allow schools to decide on an individual basis whether to use uniforms, and many have chosen to do so, such as those in Dade County, Fla., and Seattle. District of Columbia school officials say students in 32 public schools wear uniforms.

The D.C. school board voted in 1991 to require every public school in the District to establish a dress code that requires students to wear appropriate clothing. The board's policy allows each school community to decide whether to adopt uniforms, but schools are not allowed to punish students who don't wear them.

Vincent Arraya, a spokesman for D.C. schools, said the uniform policy has had a positive effect at some schools. "At Roper [Middle School], the grades went up and the student demeanor has changed for the positive," Arraya said. "Kids are more concentrated on academics. It's a turn-around. The uniforms give students a sense of responsibility. It says clothing is not that important. The peer pressure of getting clothing that is expensive or of a particular brand disappears."

But school officials are hesitant to require entire districts to implement dress codes. In Oakland, school officials looked closely at the Long Beach experiment and decided this school year to put all their pupils in uniforms too. They were also sued by the ACLU, which raised the same issues as in the Long Beach suit. The case is pending.

Long Beach Unified has many of the problems and challenges faced by other large, urban school districts. About 34 percent of the 58,800 elementary and middle school students qualify for federal aid, and 60 percent receive free or

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reduced lunches. The district is 35 percent Hispanic, 21 percent white, 20 percent black and 16 percent Asian.

The impetus for the uniforms, school administrators say, was parents' concerns of gang involvement and the fear that students, by inadvertently wearing gang-specific colors and subtle gang insignia like handkerchiefs, could be mistaken by some gangs as belonging to rival groups.

"They'd be attacked and beaten within an inch of their lives," said Donald Erickson, a professor emeritus at the University of California at Los Angeles Graduate School of Education, who has spent hundreds of hours observing Long Beach schoolchildren for an ongoing study on the effects of the uniforms.

A plaque outside Rogers Middle School, which is considered one of the less troubled schools in the district, is telling. It warns: "NOTICE: Persons on these premises are subject to search for weapons by metal detectors. Possessions of weapons on school grounds is a crime."

While students often bemoan the regimented dress, they also acknowledge that the uniforms have made school safer.

"I like them because it's harder for other people to get in. There are not as many fights and weapons" as before, said Kyle Brannon, 11, who attends Rogers Middle School. "I used to have a fear of coming here, of being beaten up. I'm not scared of anything anymore."

Still, those monitoring the apparent changes in students' behavior are leery of attributing the district's triumphs solely to the uniforms.

"We don't see it as a panacea," said Long Beach Superintendent Carl Cohn. "I'm delighted with the results," he said, "but I'm cautious claiming that it's all about uniforms."

But UCLA professor Erickson is more convinced. "Is it a one-year blip? I'd be more skeptical than I am if I hadn't spent so much time in Long Beach classrooms."

According to teachers and school administrators, the color code has reduced tension between different ethnic groups, which used to dress according to their clique. Now, at least visually, the pupils all belong to the same group: the school.

Ashley, former principal of Washington Middle School in Long Beach, said that before the uniforms, relations between the Hispanic and Cambodian children were tense.

"At Washington [the uniforms] were very good for racial problems. More students were wearing backpacks and acting like students. Racial tension decreased [and] referrals to the office decreased," he said.

Furthermore, after one year of the uniforms, said Ashley, "We had one-third of students on honor roll where traditionally we'd had 15 percent."

Darlene Haberman, a veteran first grade teacher at Whittier Elementary, the first school in the district to implement uniforms five years ago, can't say

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enough about the benefits.

"We don't see the fights on the playground like we used to," she said. "They come dressed neatly, clean. They feel good about themselves. I see a whole difference in the community spirit."

Staff writer DeNeen L. Brown in Washington contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: Map, dave cook; Photo, lawrence k. ho/los angeles times, Students in uniforms play in schoolyard at Long Beach, Calif., middle school. Despite some students' feelings that the outfits quash personal expression, officials and parents say the uniforms will remain a part of schools' regimen. Although Long Beach schools have given parents the right to "opt out" of the school uniform policy for their children, fewer than 400 have done so.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: November 08, 1995



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 White House Press Release

 On School Uniform Program

School Uniforms

The White House

 Office of the Press Secretary
 (Long Beach, California)

For Immediate Release

February 24, 1996

 Remarks By The President
 On School Uniform Program

 Jackie Robinson Academy
 Long Beach, California

11:03 A.M. Pst:

The President: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Melissa Machit. Didn't she do a good job? Give her another hand. (Applause.) Mayor O'Neil; Superintendent Cohn; Chief Ellis; our host principal, Alexis Ruiz-Alessi, the principal of Jackie Robinson Academy, where we are now. (Applause.) To the president of the Board of Education Bobbie Smith -- (applause) -- to the Jrotc groups from Wilson and Poly, thank you very much for being here. (Applause.) And to the Poly High School Band, thank you very much for playing so well. (Applause.)

Just before I came out here I had a little roundtable discussion about the school uniform policy with Melissa and another fine student names Maurice Troutman, and a number of -- (applause). I thought he was going to run for office someday. (Laughter.) He's already seeded the crowd. (Laughter.) And a number of teachers and parents and the chief and your Board president. I would like for all the people who were in our roundtable to stand and be recognized. They did such a good job of educating me about what was done. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

I'm glad to be back in Long Beach. It seems like only yesterday when I was here last. (Laughter.) I do have my pen on today, it's sort of my uniform. And I'm honored to be here. I came here today to applaud and support the efforts of this remarkable community.

Yesterday the Mayor and community leaders briefed me on the remarkable plan that this community has to revive itself and deal with the impact of the defense downsizing of the last several years. Today I'm here to support what over the long run may have an even

more profound impact on the future of this community and our country. This remarkable progress you have shown in your schools as a result of the school uniform policy -- making them safer, more disciplined and orderly, freeing teachers to focus on teaching and students to focus on their job of learning. You are returning their schools to their original purpose, and proving that public institutions can excel when they have high standards, high expectations for all children and a high purpose with a strategy at the grass-roots level supported by everybody in the community for carrying it out.

I have to tell you on a very personal note, as I told the panel, this has made my life at home even a little more difficult because for 10 years -- 10 years-- several times a year, before Long Beach finally took this ground-breaking step, the only person who ever talked to me about school uniforms was the First Lady. (Laughter.) And six or seven times a year we'd go to Chelsea's school and we'd go to this or that event at school, or we'd visit other public schools and she'd come home and say, you know, if we had a uniform policy it would make things better in these schools. I heard it over and over and over again. And thanks to you, I have to listen to, I told you so. (Laughter and applause.)

Being able to endure, "I told you so," is one of the essential requirements of a successful marriage -- (laughter) --and I must say I can't think of a time when I have enjoyed hearing it more. I applaud all of you.

I want to take a few moments today to talk about how what you have done here fits into the larger pattern of what I hope is going on in America and what I am trying to do and what we are trying to do to help you to spread this message throughout the United States.

When I became President I was convinced that our country had to go into the next century making significant changes if we wanted to ensure that the American Dream was available to everyone willing to work for it, without regard to their race or income or background. If we wanted to bring the American people together instead of seeing them continue to drift apart, and if we wanted to see our country remain the leading force in the world for peace and freedom and prosperity, we have worked very hard over the last three years on all those three objectives, and we see that while progress has been made which is very substantial, serious challenges remain -- challenges that can only be met if we do a better job of working together.

If you were to ask me what the single most significant lesson I have learned as your President in the last three years is, I would without hesitation answer, it is that when Americans work together we never lose, and when we are divided we defeat ourselves. (Applause.)

Today California newspapers reported 285,000 new jobs in this state in 1995 alone. We are moving this economy --almost 8 million new jobs, a 15-year high in homeownership, three years of record highs in new businesses formed. Businesses owned by women alone in the last three years have created more new jobs than the Fortune 500 have laid off. (Applause.) The combined rates of unemployment, inflation and home mortgage interest rates are the lowest they've been in 27 years. We are moving forward.

But we know -- we know -- that a lot of Americans have not participated in this economic recovery. They haven't gotten a raise, or they live in the inner city or isolated rural areas where there aren't any new jobs, or they work for one of these big companies where sometimes when they're my age and ready to send their own children to college they've been downsized. So we have more challenges to meet until we can say to every American you're going to live in a more rapidly changing economy, but you will still be all

right if you're willing to work for it.

If you look at our most fundamental institutions, many of the social problems we've had, the objective indicators clearly point out the fact that on balance our schools are doing a better job. You should know that the welfare rolls are down in this country, the poverty rolls are down in this country. Every state in the country has reported a decline in violent crime. This is all encouraging. That's the good news.

Everybody knows this country is still too violent, it's still too dangerous for children, there are still too many problems out there, there are still too many people trapped in a culture of dependence when they ought to be out working and being successful in supporting their families and contributing to their communities and country. So we have a lot to do.

Now, a lot of the things we have to do involve modernizing our systems. For example, we have reduced the size of your national government, we have gotten rid of thousands of pages of regulation, we've made it far less bureaucratic. It's the smallest government you've had in 30 years. But you don't want it to be weak; it's still strong enough to be there when you need it if there is an earthquake or a fire or a flood. It's still strong enough to be there to help companies change when they have to go from defense to civilian construction. And these are the kinds of things that we need to focus on. I want to give you a government that is less bureaucratic and smaller, but still able to help every person, every family, every neighborhood, every community make the most of their own lives. (Applause.)

And so all the institutions have to change, we have to modernize. In just a couple of weeks the Vice President and I will be out here to celebrate Net Day in California, the biggest next step in our campaign to make sure that by the year 2000 every single classroom and every single library in this country will be hooked up to the Internet -- 20 percent of California's schools will be hooked up this year. (Applause.)

But it's not all modern. Some of what we have to do is to get back to basic values and basic institutions. I see at least two members of the Congress out here, Congressman Horn and Congressman Martinez -- there may be others here. We know that there are things in Washington we cannot do that you have to do. We have to find ways to reassert the vitality of the basic institutions of this country, of the family, of the schools; of the neighborhood and the community.

In the schools, I have always had a very simple formula. I believe I have spent more time in classrooms, more time listening to teachers and parents and students than any person who had the privilege to hold this office. And I believe that all children can learn. I think that we have to have high expectations. (Applause.)

I believe in high national standards. I believe in high technology, nationally spread. But I believe in grass-roots reform, giving kids a good head start, giving every person access to college and giving adults a lifetime chance to always, always get education when they need it for economic reasons. (Applause.) But let's not kid ourselves. None of this is going to work unless our schools work and unless our children feel safe and secure; unless the environments of education are disciplined and drug free.

We saw the tragic consequences of the time in which we live again just a few days ago with the terrible, painful agonizing senseless shooting of that fifth-grade teacher in front of his students in Los Angeles. We are praying -- I'm sure all of you will pray along with our family that Alfredo Perez will pull through, and that his wife, who is also a school teacher, will have the courage,

the bravery to carry on, and that those students in that school who underwent that horrible experience will somehow find the courage to believe in their adults who are responsible for their lives, so that they can go and grow and learn again.

We know that most of our schools are safe, but we know that our country is not as safe as it ought to be. We know that every parent who walks a child to the bus stop and waves goodbye in the morning should never worry whether the child will come home safely. Every parent has a right to expect that their children will be safe in school. Every parent has a right to believe that the children are spending their time learning and teachers are able to spend the day teaching. (Applause.)

When we identify national problems that have to be solved by local communities using basic values, what I believe we should do at the national level is to help to define what we ought to do and let you decide how to do it. That's what we're here to celebrate today. (Applause.) We've tried to help promote school safety with the Gun-Free Schools Act. We are educating our children through you with the funds we provide about the dangers of drugs with the help of the Safe And Drug-Free Schools Act. We are tackling student drug use through our random drug testing programs that we have advocated for local school districts. We are getting tough on criminals when they are seriously violent by permitting the prosecution of hardened young criminals as adults. We are promoting greater parental involvement through our family partnership for learning at the Department of Education. We are supporting you and teaching our children the values of hard work, discipline, mutual respect through the introduction of character education programs all across America, again, at the initiative of local school districts, not from Washington. But when you want to do it we're there for you and we think you should do it. (Applause.)

And we have worked very hard in this country where so many people come from such diverse backgrounds and so many different faiths which they want to express in different ways, to say that the First Amendment's freedom of religion is the freedom from oppression, but it doesn't make schools religion-free zones. There is a way people can pursue their values and their faith consistent with the First Amendment. We have tried to do all these things. (Applause.)

But I have to say, in the end it matters whether all of you are working together and whether your counterparts in every school district in America are working together. That's why I took some pains in the State of the Union address to urge that other school districts in our nation consider following the example of Long Beach on school uniforms. (Applause.)

One of the great hazards of our culture, with all of its wonderful opportunities, is that we can sometimes, as a friend of mine used to say, without meaning to teach our children to minor in the majors and major in the minors. It's important to be able to make a good living and it's important to be able to buy things that you'd like to have, but that's not the most important thing in life, and it's tragic when young people without a balanced upbringing, without grounded values, without a secure education, wind up believing that it's all right to kill somebody for a pair of sneakers or jewelry or a designer jacket.

In Detroit, a 15-year-old boy was shot recently for his \$86 basketball shoes. In Fort Lauderdale, a 15-year-old student was robbed of his jewelry. Just this past December, near where I live now, in Oxon Hill, Maryland, a 17-year-old honor student was killed at a bus stop, just standing there -- caught in a cross-fire during the robbery of another student's designer jacket.

As parents, every one of us has been wrenched by these stories. We cannot stand idly by while our children are having their

childhoods robbed from them and from us by people who place more value on the material things than even human life, not to mention human learning.

The Long Beach Unified School District and the parents here have not stood idly by. I want to again say, the entire United States of America is in your debt because you took the first step to show that elementary and middle school students could wear uniforms to class, reduce violence, reduce truancy, reduce disorder, and increase learning -- and, as was said more ably than me by my remarkable introducer, give a sense of unity and purpose and teamwork to the students and the schools that are in this school district. We are all in your debt in the United States. (Applause.)

After the first year of this program, fights between students and other students who bring guns to school were cut in half. Overall crime in the schools was cut by more than a third -- in one year. In addition to safety, learning improved, schoolwork became more important for students than showing off what they were wearing or resenting what someone else was wearing. And maybe most important of all over the long run, I think these uniforms do not stamp out individuality among our young people. Instead, they slowly teach our young people one of life's most important lessons -- that what really counts is what you are and what you can become on the inside, not what you are wearing on the outside. (Applause.)

And at least on that score, I think you can make a serious argument that this school uniform benefits the children of affluent families as much as it benefits the children of poor families, because that is a lesson all our children need to learn. (Applause.)

But in the end, we should remember it should be safety first. I was so moved in this panel listening to Melissa talk about unity, and then listening to young Maurice say, I can walk down the street now and because I have my uniform on those gangs know that I'm not a problem, I'm just a student; I don't have to look over my shoulder all the time.

It is wrong for a young person to look over his or her shoulder walking down the street of the United States of America. That is wrong. (Applause.) And you have helped to stop it. (Applause.)

And let me say finally about you, you did it, reflecting the lesson I said that was the most important I have learned: you did this together. This was not imposed on you. The parents decided to do it, working with the teachers, working with the school board, working with the police department, working with others. You worked this out together.

And I've learned about the differences from school to school. I've learned about the differences in permissible uniforms. I've learned all about this. It has really pleased me to understand just how much of a grass-roots endeavor this is. And that also is important.

I do want to say, though, that in all the years that I have spent in public schools, the thing that has frustrated me most is that nearly every problem in America has been solved by somebody somewhere in some school. But ideas don't travel very well. The most heartening thing to me, although I know it's been a headache for your superintendent, is that you've been deluged with phone calls. That's good. That means people say, I'm not too proud to learn from them.

You know, the founding fathers of this country set up state governments as the laboratories of democracy with the express intent that they would not be too proud to learn from one another.

When I was a governor, whenever we were the first state to do something, I was always proud of that; but I used to tell our people, I'm even more proud when we're the second state to do something because that meant that we weren't too arrogant, hard-headed, and deaf to learn from what somebody else was doing right. (Applause.)

So we want to support what you have done here. And so we have taken on the job of finding out what works and how. And I want you to know that just before I came here today I signed a directive instructing the Secretary of Education to distribute this new manual on school uniforms to every one of the nation's 16,000 school districts so they will know how to do what you did. (Applause.)

The Department of Education worked with the Department of Justice and the Attorney General to develop this. It's a road map for the establishment of a policy for school uniforms for schools that want to use the tool. It provides a central source of information about successful programs, yours and those that have followed that are making a difference all across America.

Let me be clear, this is not a national government mandate. This is not Washington telling any school or school district what to do. The decision about whether to adopt a uniform policy as a tool in an overall program to promote safety and improve learning is a local decision to be made entirely by parents, teachers, and local school officials. But at least now nobody will say, we didn't know about this, we couldn't imagine how to do it, and we're not sure it will work. If they read this, they will know it will work and they'll know about it and they'll understand how to do it. (Applause.)

In the meanwhile, let me leave you with these two thoughts: Please don't grow weary in pursuing this goal. We can never rest until violence against our children is the exception, not the rule; until we are horrified -- until we are genuinely surprised when we hear about something bad happening to a child. We can never rest until we have more of our children wearing the colors of school uniforms than the colors of gangs. We cannot rest until that is true. (Applause.)

And please, each and every one of you in your own way, be willing to reach out to your friends and neighbors, and anyone with whom you come in contact across this great state and across our beloved country, to tell people the story of how this works. People are desperately looking for ways to restore integrity and meaning and purpose and direction and success to our schools all across America. You have shown that it can be done. Share your knowledge, share your passion, share your conviction. And remember what I said: Whenever we are defeated, we defeat ourselves; if we are divided, we can't win, but when we're together, America never loses.

Thank you, and God bless you. (Applause.)

End

11:28 A.M. Pst





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

March 1996

Dear Superintendent:

We have received many inquiries about school uniforms since President Clinton's State of the Union address. In his address, the President said that "if it means that teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms." Many parents, community leaders, and school officials have expressed interest in uniform policies as an effective way to work toward a safe and disciplined learning environment in their schools.

Last month, President Clinton asked me to develop and distribute a road map on how school districts interested in developing uniform policies can make uniforms part of their comprehensive safe school program. Enclosed you will find one copy of our "Manual on School Uniforms," a document we developed in consultation with the U.S. Department of Justice after talking to parents, community leaders, and school officials in communities throughout the country.

It is a local decision whether or not to adopt a school uniform policy. In the manual you will see examples of local school districts where school officials, parents, and teachers worked together to incorporate school uniforms into their overall school safety plans. This manual is designed not only for school officials and teachers, but for parents and community leaders as well, since their involvement is a cornerstone of a successful school uniform policy.

A safe and disciplined learning environment is essential to high academic achievement by all students. We hope you will find the manual helpful as you decide which strategies work best for your school and community.

Yours sincerely,

Richard W. Riley

Enclosure

Manual on School Uniforms



The full text of this document is available through the
U.S. Department of Education World Wide Web site at
<http://www.ed.gov/>

For additional copies, please call 1-800-624-6100.



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At summer's end, school uniforms put focus on learning

By Lorraine Dusky

I wore uniforms from the first through 12th grades at two Catholic schools in Dearborn, Mich.

Of course, by the time we were 12 or 13, we were making fun of the uniforms, as in, "Ugh, those pleated navy blue skirts are so gross." In high school, we wore straight skirts, paired with white blouses and navy cardigans. The boys likewise wore dark slacks, white shirts and ties.

The kids with whom I went to school were from quite different rungs on the socioeconomic ladder. They were the children of plumbers, carpenters and teachers (my group) and the children of Ford Motor Co. executives and small businessmen (the group of many of my friends).

Some of them had swimming pools in their back yards and cashmere sweaters to wear to parties on Saturday night. But at school, wearing uniforms was a great leveler. During the school day at least, the uniforms made us equals. It's likely that most teachers didn't know which of us came from poor households and which didn't; we were all given the advantage of high expectations.

So the news that the New York City Board of Education has become part of a growing trend by mandating that students in city elementary schools wear uniforms should be greeted with cheers from parents. But, instead, it has set off a debate, with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) threatening to sue. One reason: Poor parents can't afford the uniforms. Norman Siegel, the ACLU's

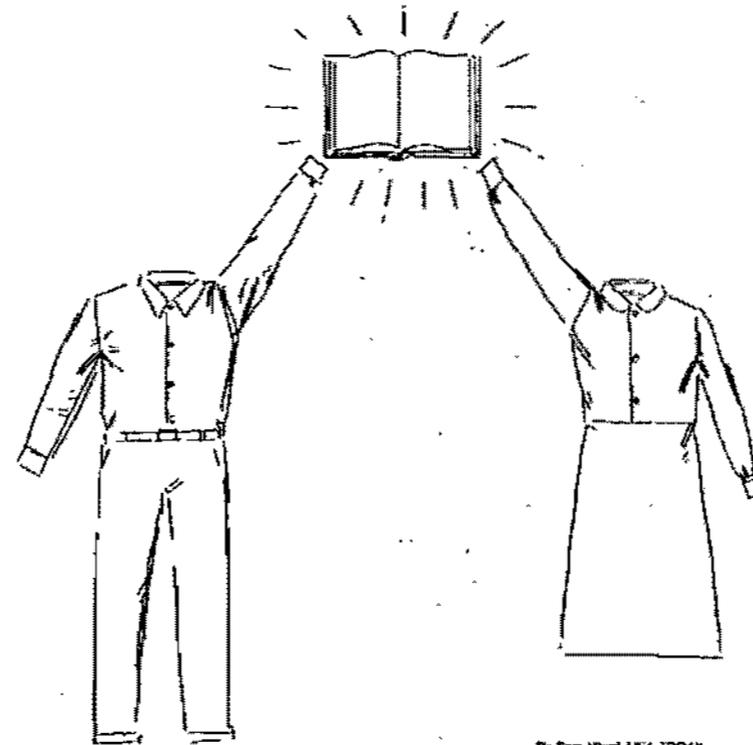
New York director, argues parents ought to be able to send their kids to school wearing anything they wish.

Is this guy for real? Has Siegel tried to send a teen-ager to school in what he, Siegel, wishes? If so, his child must be from some planet other than Earth. Last time I checked, it was peer pressure that dictated what kids wear to school, not parents.

What does that mean? Unequivocally, jeans. The grunge/baggy look has subsided in my part of the country, and kids generally are more presentable than they were a few years ago; but none of the kids look as if they have much in mind other than fooling around or just hanging out. Only the most preppy dress in what might be suitable, say, wool slacks or clean khakis and shirts and sweaters, or anything vaguely resembling age-appropriate clothing for "casual Fridays" at many companies.

But school is everyone's first job. We go to school to learn, not to play. School should not be just gym and gender studies, but readin', writin' and 'rithmetic. Putting students in attire which sends that message is a giant step forward in making classrooms more hospitable to those who want to learn.

It also works. School districts around the country which have uniform policies report that behavior changes along with the clothes. Long Beach, Calif., which in 1994 became the first large public school district to mandate uniforms, has found that in those grades requiring uniforms, K-8, attendance reached an all-time high last year in the nearly two decades



By Sam Ward, USA TODAY

records have been kept. Not counting excused absences for illness, attendance was more than 99%.

The drop in crime was just as dramatic: 76%. That includes fighting, sex offenses (down 93%), robbery/extortion, drugs and weapons or other dangerous devices. (What is not down, regrettably, are assaults with deadly weapons. It will take more than uniforms to get the guns out of

our children's hands.)

Improved academic achievement is harder to gauge because school districts have been making other changes along with the uniform policy; but with better behavior and attendance, a student is on her or his way. By passing the uniform code, New York joins six other large districts that have implemented a uniform policy: Birmingham, Ala.; Chi-

cago; Dayton, Ohio; Oakland, Calif.; and San Antonio, as well as Long Beach. Others seem likely to follow.

Uniforms can't cure all the problems of today's public schools — crumbling buildings, not enough textbooks, too-large classes, knives and guns — but insisting that students dress appropriately for their jobs as students is a beginning. It sends them a message, however subtle, that school is different from vacation.

School is for learning. Uniforms increase that likelihood. They also discourage gang activity, eliminate social bias and reduce peer pressure to have expensive clothing, while building a sense of community and school pride. Given all that, parents ought to be scrambling to get uniforms in their children's schools. There is no evidence that uniforms reduce individuality in reasoning.

Despite any initial cost (estimated at about \$100 annually), uniforms are less expensive than individual dressing in the long run because they stay the same day in and day out. School districts and local businessmen usually offer help to those families who need it; in some districts, children donate their old uniforms to be passed on. Peer pressure among teen-agers to sport cool, new clothing is diminished because teen-agers don't have to show up in something different every morning. And as the parent of any teen-age girl will tell you, that minimizes morning madness.

Interestingly, those in the economic group that might have enough disposable income to buy some cool clothing for their children (\$30,000 to

\$39,000), but not enough to supply the demand, are the people most in favor of uniforms, 38%, according to a poll reported in USA TODAY. Another poll, done by New York City's Daily News, found that 87% of African-Americans and 74% of Hispanics — groups more likely to have a lower economic status than whites — favor uniforms more than whites, who are evenly divided on the subject.

What these numbers suggest is poorer parents understand their children will be more "equal" if everybody dresses the same, just as I didn't have to feel deprived because I didn't have a closet full of the "right" clothing as one of my best friends did.

The New York City Board of Education didn't go far enough. It's not just first through sixth grades where students need uniforms; rather they are needed most during the more traumatic, troubled years of junior high and high school. The board ought to reconsider and make it mandatory up until graduation from high school. Long Beach, by the way, has started a uniform policy in the ninth grade at one of its magnet schools this year.

And while I'm offering suggestions, school districts surely should let the girls choose between skirts and pants. For one, pants are warmer. And two, if the first lady can appear on television in a stylish pantsuit, certainly pants are appropriate for girls when they choose.

Lorraine Dusky, a free-lance writer in New York, is a member of USA TODAY's board of contributors.

Handwritten note:
School uniforms
Dusky

Atlanta's right to mix public, private homes

By DeWayne Wickham

ATLANTA — "Slow down, I want him to see this," Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell said to his driver, as the vehicle we were riding in rounded a barren stretch of roadway on the city's southeast side.

He wanted to impress me — and he did.

Just ahead was the undulating form of a well-manicured golf course, the kind of vista that dots the landscape in many tourist destinations. But this was Atlanta, not Orlando. The golf course the mayor was showing off is the anchor of this nation's boldest attempt to recast public housing from places that warehouse the poor to ones that offer residents a real chance to turn their lives around.

Once a decaying, crime-ridden housing project called "Little Vietnam," East Lake Meadows is being transformed into an urban oasis of upscale, suburban-style townhouses where poor and middle-class people live side-by-side. When completed, 540 units will be built in the gated community that wraps around the public golf course. Roughly half will go to families that qualify for public housing. The rest will be leased at market rates.

The idea, Campbell said, is to give poor people neighbors who are good role models for success — while also offering middle-class families quality housing within Atlanta.

Attracting middle-class neighbors

Making it work is a delicate balancing act. Critics worry that middle-class families with a lot of options will not choose to live alongside large numbers of families from public housing. But the combination of a high-quality housing complex and stringent entrance requirements has muted that fear.

All residents must undergo credit and criminal background checks. Those who funk aren't allowed into the new development. To make the complex more attractive to those who can afford to live elsewhere, the city has promised increased police patrols and private security for East Lake, plus a new elementary school and a state-of-the-art YMCA.

City housing officials have done much the same in Centennial Place, a mixed-income development on the north edge of downtown Atlanta, near Georgia Tech University. The once-dilapidated complex will have 900 units when construction is finished, 360 of which are set aside for the poor.

Other cities should follow Atlanta

While many cities are using federal housing aid to renovate old public housing communities or to build new ones, Atlanta is getting out of the business of constructing housing for the poor. Cities that build housing for the poor create poor neighborhoods, which quickly become poverty ghettos.

Atlanta is moving away from that trap. More cities should follow its lead.

For most people, public housing should be a temporary lodging, not a lifetime dwelling. It's a necessary part of the social safety net that government provides. But if poor people are allowed to languish in housing developments overrun with blight and crime — and devoid of positive role models — they have little chance of escaping poverty's grip.

Atlanta's innovative approach marks a miraculous turnaround. For most of this decade, the city's housing authority was on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's "most troubled" list. At one point, there was talk that the federal government might take over its public housing.

Since taking office in 1994, Campbell has turned things around.

Of course, a fair share of the credit must go to the housing authority's executive director, its commissioners and developer Tom Cousins. But the lion's share belongs to Campbell.

A Democrat, Campbell plumed his closeness to Bill Clinton and Al Gore for all the help he could get for his city's public housing. On his watch, Atlanta has received more than \$500 million in federal aid for its seven housing complexes.

And in the process, he has set a standard the rest of the nation would be well advised to follow.

DeWayne Wickham writes weekly for USA TODAY.

USA TODAY • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1998

Uniforms changing culture of the nation's classrooms

By John Ritter
USA TODAY *A1*

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Four years ago, the public schools here drew attention as the first in the nation to require students to wear uniforms. The drumbeat for uniforms has rolled louder ever since.

In his 1996 State of the Union speech, President Clinton urged uniforms as a way to keep teenagers "from killing each other over designer jackets." The Education Department published an Internet manual on how to adopt a uniform policy. Some of the nation's largest districts — New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Miami-Dade County, Cleveland — moved to put students in uniforms. And this month, at a national summit on school violence, the U.S. Conference of Mayors endorsed uniforms even for high school students.

But absent in the rush to uniforms has been proof they actually promote better behavior. Now, from this melting-pot port city of 385,000, comes hard data suggesting they do. Long Beach schools report a 91% drop in assaults, thefts, vandalism and weapon and drug violations since 1991. Youth crime off school grounds is also down, as much as 36%, though police attribute that to a host of measures including uniforms.

"Uniforms take away the No. 1 reason kids treat each other differently: how they look," says Sgt. Joe Bettle, a Long Beach juvenile officer.

Few school districts have statistics comparing crime before and after uniforms, because most have switched in just the last year or two.

The little available data are encouraging but inconclusive. In Birmingham, Ala., drug and weapon incidents dropped 30% in two years after the school board required uniforms. In

Houston schools, violent crime is down 38% in the last two years. But a study of Miami-Dade County schools found that fights nearly doubled at middle schools that went to uniforms, while uniforms seemed to have stopped an alarming rise in elementary school incidents.

Nationally, no research correlates lower crime rates with uniforms. Most evidence is anecdotal. A survey by the Educational Testing Service found that most principals believe uniforms improve school discipline. Officials in

COVER STORY

schools that have uniforms say they bolster security because outsiders are easy to spot on school grounds. When students are in uniform, fights over clothing stop. Gang influence wanes because no one wears gang colors or gang attire. Students feel safer walking to school.

Socio-economic lines blur. "Uniforms reduce the differences between the haves and have-nots," says Linda Moore, principal at Will Rogers Middle School in Long Beach.

And some educators even think uniforms contribute to higher academic achievement because students aren't distracted by clothes — theirs or classmates' — and they treat school as their job. "Kids know they're here for business. This is their business attire just like if they were at IBM," Moore says.

'A Band-Aid solution?'

But critics say schools need more than uniforms. "It's a Band-Aid solution to problems — crumbling school buildings, 10-year-old textbooks — that defy easy solutions," says Loren Siegel, public education director of the American Civil Liberties Union in New York.

In many places, uniforms are just one piece of broader reforms. "By themselves uniforms won't make a major difference," says Cozette Buckney, chief education officer of Chicago schools. "They're just window dressing."

She says Chicago schools are producing better test scores because of higher academic standards, a ban on social promotion and required summer school for low achievers. In 1996, the school board ordered every school to consider uniforms, and more than 86% have adopted them.

The district has no comparative data. Buckney says, "but we're certainly seeing a drop in disciplinary reports."

The ACLU says uniforms inhibit students' expression and has sued schools over policies it deems too rigid. Courts usually have upheld uniform policies. "We're not against uniforms, we're just against them being forced down parents' throats," says Andy Brumme, an ACLU lawyer who's fighting a mandatory policy in Lancaster County, S.C.

Other critics say uniforms squelch a key social rite of passage. "Clothes are a way children find out who they are, what they are and who the others are," says Ruth Rubinstein, a sociology professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. "Clothes are their orientation to social life, and we're taking that away from them."

Most districts that call policies mandatory allow exceptions if parents insist. But most families go along — once uniforms are de rigueur, the pressure is to conform. In Long Beach, less than 1% of students in kindergarten through eighth grade don't wear uniforms.

In many cities, uniforms caught on after one or two schools tried them. Poor, inner-city Whittier Elementary here adopted uniforms in 1991, other Long Beach schools began switching over, and in 1994 the school board made them mandatory except in high school. Now, ninth and 10th graders at Wilson Classical High are the first in the upper grades to be in uniform. Eventually, all four grades will be in uniform.

Chemiya Carter, a Wilson freshman, likes uniforms and says fashion pressure can be intense outside of school. "If you aren't wearing Nautica, Tommy Hilfinger or Ralph Lauren it's like you are less of a person," Carter, 14, says.

Each Long Beach school picks its own uniforms and colors — pants, shorts and skirts one color, shirts another, but both solids. No labels, brands or insignia are permitted except the school's, even on shoes. The cost of outfitting a student varies, depending on whether the family shops at a discount

store or a high-end department store.

Freshmen wearing Wilson's khaki pants and white shirts said they hated the teasing from juniors and seniors but agreed uniforms made life easier. They get by with four or five shirts and two or three pairs of pants, far fewer than if they weren't in uniform.

"I'd have a lot of pants and shorts, and a lot of brand-name shirts and like two pairs of shoes to go with each outfit," says Hoyi Ly, 14.

George Berganza, 14, says: "With uniforms, you don't have to think about competition. You don't have to think about labels or if you're wearing something too often."

Parents most supportive

Once uniforms are ingrained, the biggest fans usually are parents. They spend less on clothes. Their kids are less stressed over fashion. They get out of the house faster in the morning.

"If you watch, on warm days, these high school kids are close to coming out in bathing suits," says Charlene Ebright, whose daughter Noelle is a 10th grader. "Really, some of the styles now . . ."

If civil libertarians believe forcing uniforms on kids chokes expression, many parents would say expression in clothes is beside the point. They'd rather see expression in math and English.

Speaking for moms everywhere, Cyndi Seibert says: "As the mother of a boy with teen-age hormones, the uniform makes the young lady sitting next to him in biology lab less of a distraction, and the teacher a little easier to focus on, because she's got on a collared shirt with sleeves instead of a spaghetti strap with her bra hanging out."

Parents, in fact, are driving the uniform movement in many places. They're often initially reluctant if the impetus comes from school boards or principals. But they're quickly won over, and districts that have polled parents have found overwhelming support.

Webster Elementary draws kids from a low-income, working-class industrial pocket of Dayton, and parents initially resented the school promoting uniforms, principal Sandra Kidd says.

"They already had so many other directives in their lives from institutions they depend on for livelihood or public assistance," Kidd says. "But they're very supportive now. They like not hassling with their kids over clothes."

Dayton gave schools the uniform option a few years ago, and children in 27 of 50 schools now wear them. Nearly 100 of Miami-Dade's 268 schools were already in uniform when the school board said any campus could switch if more than half the parents approved. Within two years, 112 more schools chose uniforms.

Last March, when the New York City school board ordered all 670 elementary schools in uniform by fall 1999, more than 75,000 students were already wearing them. Even in San Francisco, which has no uniform policy, students in 34 schools (of 115) wear them.

In 1995, the Los Angeles school board set a goal of getting all 600 schools in uniform. So far, 410 are on board.

Oakland has a mandatory uniform policy, but so many parents "opt out," says spokeswoman Sue Piper, that some schools have half their students in street clothes. That may be the result of an 1996 lawsuit. The ACLU challenged Oakland's uniform policy and won a settlement under which the district agreed to more cash aid to needy parents for uniforms and to tell parents clearly they had a right to opt out.

Many schools raise money to buy uniforms for low-income parents. For the first time this year, San Antonio required uniforms for all 60,000 students from kindergarten through high school. When all the bills are in, the district will have handed parents \$350,000 to \$400,000 in uniform vouchers, says spokesman Robert Zamora.

Lloyd Choice, principal at Houston's Jack Yates High School, says he'd always been skeptical about uniforms. Then his own students started lobbying for them. "That really shocked me," Choice says. "Pretty soon the parents caught on. On opening day this fall, I tell you, it just brought tears to your eyes. Out of 1,800 kids, we had 12 report not in uniform."

Choice says that after 35 years in the public schools, "I didn't believe it would affect behavior, but it does. My children are behaving so much better. I had to experience it to believe it."

Crime - School uniforms

ELECTION '98

Negative ads in N.Y. hurt candidates' ratings

The negative ads being run by New York's two Senate candidates are working, dragging down each other's favorability ratings while the race remains a dead heat. A Quinnipiac College Polling Institute poll of likely voters shows 22% have a favorable view of Democrat Charles Schumer, down from 30% last month. His unfavorability rating jumps to 19% from 11%. Incumbent Republican Al D'Amato's favorability rating is 30%, down from 37%, and his unfavorability mark rises to 39% from 32%. "You get in a mud fight, you get splashed," said pollster Maurice Carroll. "Clearly this shows negative ads work, which is why they do them," said Rachel Leon of New York's Common Cause. The race, meanwhile, remains a statistical tie. Schumer has 45% support; D'Amato has 45% with a margin of error of +/- 4 percentage points.



Ryan: Leads Illinois governor's race

OTHER POLLS: There's little movement in three governor's races, according to Mason-Dixon polls of likely voters.

► In Illinois, Republican George Ryan leads Democrat Glenn Poshard, 51% to 36%.

► In Connecticut, Republican John Rowland leads Democrat Barbara Kennedy 60% to 28%.

► In Alabama, Democrat Don Siegelman may have a slight edge over incumbent Republican Fob James, 48% to 43%, but it's within

the margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points.

POLLING DATA DIFFERS: Two recent polls in the Vermont lieutenant governor's race show how findings may vary based on polling techniques. A Mason-Dixon media poll found Democrat Doug Racine with 44% and Republican Barbara Snelling with 43%, a statistical dead heat. An Action Research media poll last week found a 19-point spread. Two differences were the sample size and makeup: Mason-Dixon polled 626 likely voters; Action Research polled 400 eligible voters.

HANDOUTS: When Rep. Martin Frost mingles with his colleagues on the House floor these days, he's likely to press into their hands a small yellow card listing a dozen Democratic House candidates whose campaigns need money. Members with campaign cash to spare are asked to donate directly to the needy, about half of whom are nonincumbents. Frost, of Texas, is chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. House Republicans have pulled in more than \$9 million from their members; Democrats about \$2.5 million. Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who heads the National Republican Senatorial Committee, made a similar pitch to GOP senators.

— Jim Drinkard

BILLS PASSED: Incumbents, eager to get home and campaign, rushed approval of several more noncontroversial bills. Among them are bills that would:

► Require the State Department to list each year diplomats accused of crimes and asserting immunity.

► Make it a federal crime to assume someone's identity to commit financial fraud.

► Make national park concessions more competitive by eliminating a preference for existing franchisees.

ONLINE FUND-RAISING: The 1998 election cycle has a new fund-raising mechanism — the Internet.

More and more candidates are using their Web sites not only to explain their backgrounds and positions, but also to seek contributions online.

Indiana Senate candidate Evan Bayh's site allows people to donate by typing in the amount and their credit card number. He's collected only \$250 so far, but it could become a major income source as more people become comfortable with privacy and security aspects of the new medium.

"It's going to open up a whole new audience for fund-raising," says Mike Connell, whose Cleveland-based company helped online efforts of GOP gubernatorial candidates Jeb Bush in Florida and Robert Taft in Ohio. "It's going to open up your young, credit-card-using demographic," Connell said.

Written by Paul Leavitt with staff and wire reports



Bayh: Seeks donations on Web site

Equality? Tyranny? Plaid? Navy? Uniforms and New York Schools

A1

By JACQUES STEINBERG

Continued From Page A1

In perhaps the most diverse and expressive city in the nation, the talk in public elementary-school classrooms yesterday often centered on what it would be like if everyone were compelled to dress the same.

That is what the president of the Board of Education, William C. Thompson Jr., proposed on Monday, following the lead of hundreds of schools across the country. And his plan to require uniforms in the elementary grades in New York, beginning in the fall of 1999, quickly gained political momentum yesterday, as other board members seized on the idea as a way to control student behavior, eradicate the visible differences between rich and poor children and foster school pride.

But inside the classrooms yesterday, there was little agreement about the merits of mandatory school uniforms — even from one desk to the next.

In Fritzy Sannon's sixth-grade class at Public School 200 in Harlem yesterday morning, Lawrence Harper wore the uniform that his school has encouraged since 1994 — clip-on navy blue tie, crisp white shirt, pressed navy slacks and black shoes.

"They should have a dress code," said Lawrence, 11, whose outfit was reflected, as if in a mirror, on all but 5 of his two dozen classmates, including the girls, who substituted skirts for slacks. "Otherwise people can just come to school in the baggiest baggy pants or the shortest short shorts. It wouldn't look right."

But leaning on his chair just a few feet away, Joseph Carter made his dissent plain by the outfit he wore: stone-washed brown denim jeans and a brown-and-white flannel shirt, defiantly open at the neck.

"We should be able to choose what we want to wear," said Joseph, 11. "When you are in school, it's a fashion statement. It's your individuality."

Those statements were echoed around the city yesterday, as parents, teachers, administrators, students and civil libertarians pondered

Continued on Page A31

and debated a policy that would profoundly alter the dressing and shopping patterns of hundreds of thousands of young city children.

Mr. Thompson's plan, which he is to present to the board for a vote next month, moved a step closer to reality yesterday with the endorsement of two of his colleagues — Carol A. Gresser, the board member from Queens, and Jerry Cammarata, the Staten Island representative. Mr. Thompson needs one additional vote on the seven-member board, and there were indications that he was nearing a majority.

Though Sandra E. Lerner, the Bronx board member, did not return a call seeking comment yesterday, the Bronx borough president, Fernando Ferrer, who appointed her, expressed his support for the plan. "At the end of the day," he said, "this is not a terrible idea, considering that kids get killed over sneakers."

Colleen Roche, a spokeswoman for Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, who appoints two board members, did not return repeated phone calls seeking his position on the policy yesterday, nor did his appointees, Irene H. Impellizzeri and Ninfa Segarra.

Numerous other questions about the plan went unanswered as well, including what if any financial impact it would have on parents; whether it would pass legal muster and whether, in limiting the program to elementary schools, Mr. Thompson had left out those students who might benefit from it the most: high-schoolers who have sometimes resorted to violence or theft to secure pricey items like Nike high-top sneakers, Timberland boots and oversized Tommy Hilfiger shirts.

While Mr. Thompson did not rule out applying the policy to older students in the future, he said he was beginning with younger pupils because he suspected that they would be less likely to offer resistance.

The conversations in New York yesterday reflected those in many other places. School systems in six cities — Birmingham, Ala.; Chicago; Dayton, Ohio; Oakland, Calif.; San Antonio, Tex., and Long Beach, Calif., — have instituted mandatory uniform policies in the elementary grades in recent years, according to the Council of Great City Schools, an organization of urban districts. And 35 others, including Miami and Cleveland, have voluntary policies.

While there has been no definitive research linking uniforms to improved achievement, evidence in

Long Beach over the last four years has suggested that requiring uniforms through eighth grade contributed to a drop in school crime and a rise in attendance, according to the Council of Great City Schools.

Though there have been few legal challenges to such policies, Norman Siegel, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said he would be eager to consider such a case. "A student's choice of dress is an expressive activity," he said, "and consequently, it's protected by the First Amendment."

That was the prevailing attitude yesterday at the Neighborhood School, an alternative elementary school in the East Village, where pupils address teachers by their first names and have a say in what topics their teachers discuss within a subject area.

The school's director, Judith Foster, said she expected parents at the school to consider a vote to opt out of the policy — a mechanism contained in Mr. Thompson's plan. "One of the hallmarks of this school is to give students choice," Ms. Foster said. "That includes being able to make a choice about what to wear."

But uptown at P.S. 200 on West 150th Street, administrators, parents and even some students gave uniforms a far more ringing endorsement.

Like dozens of other schools around the city that already have uniform policies, P.S. 200 does not require their use. But nearly 3 in 4 students choose to wear the blue uniform each day, in part because it is their ticket to after-school and Saturday morning activities.

The principal, Annette Knox, says she believes that the policy helped the school pull itself off the state's list of failing schools last year.

And Martha Serrano, the mother of a 7-year-old second-grader, said full-time uniforms would save her family several hundred dollars a year.

"Most of the clothes kids ask for are name brand — Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger," she said. "And name-brand clothes are more expensive."

Crime -
School
Uniforms

A 2d Oval Office Gatekeeper Is to Testify in Lewinsky Case

By MICHAEL JANOFFSKY

WASHINGTON, Feb. 10 — A second woman who has long been a close aide to President Clinton has been subpoenaed to testify before the Federal grand jury investigating the relationship between her boss and a former White House intern, Monica S. Lewinsky.

The woman, Nancy V. Hernreich, 51, one of Mr. Clinton's most trusted and longest-serving aides, was his appointments secretary when he was Governor of Arkansas and now serves in a dual role as deputy assistant to the President and director of Oval Office operations. She sits beside Mr. Clinton's secretary, Betty Currie, in a small office adjoining the Oval Office and plays a major role in developing the President's daily schedule and helping him stick to it.

One of her White House colleagues described her today as a "no-nonsense manager who makes the trains run on time."

As the last line of defense into the Oval Office, Ms. Hernreich often mediates between forces competing for the President's time.

She and Mrs. Currie, who testified before the grand jury two weeks ago, are often described as "gatekeepers" for Mr. Clinton. But Mrs. Currie performs more traditional secretarial duties, while Ms. Hernreich, who recommended Mrs. Currie for the job, functions more as an administrator.

The New York Times reported last week that Mrs. Currie had told investigators that the President and Ms. Lewinsky were sometimes alone together in the Oval Office. Mrs. Currie also said, according to lawyers familiar with her account, that she had retrieved a box of gifts to Ms. Lewinsky from Mr. Clinton, including a dress, a hat pin and a brooch.

The date of Ms. Hernreich's appearance has not been set, but it will not be her first at a legal proceeding while working for Mr. Clinton. In a



David Scull for The New York Times

Nancy V. Hernreich testifying before the Senate in 1996.

Federal trial 18 months ago in Little Rock, Ark., prosecutors called her to testify against two bankers accused of concealing cash from Mr. Clinton's 1990 campaign for governor and laundering the money.

Kenneth Starr and His Watergate Star

By WILLIAM GLABERSON

WASHINGTON, Feb. 10 — If there have not been enough reminders of Watergate lately, Kenneth W. Starr, the independent counsel, brought another one with him to court this morning.

Mr. Starr's companion at the courthouse was Samuel Dash, a hero to pursuers of a different President, Richard M. Nixon. If Mr. Dash's presence alongside the embattled independent counsel was intended as an act of political symbolism, it was at least as blunt as any father-daughter picture from the White House.

Mr. Dash, a Democrat who is now 72, was the chief counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee a quarter-century ago and, because of television coverage of those hearings, something of a Government integrity celebrity. Critics of Mr. Starr have suggested that he associates himself with Mr. Dash to cloak himself in the credibility of the Watergate inquiry.

Today, Mr. Dash looked older and balder than the last time he was on the national stage. But he still looked

Samuel Dash is advising the independent counsel on ethics.

enough, like the man in heavily framed glasses who used to whisper in the ear of the legendary chairman of the Watergate Committee, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., to make a visual point for Mr. Starr.

For students of Whitewater, Mr. Dash's appearance was not surprising. Since 1994, Mr. Dash has been a part-time ethics adviser to Mr. Starr, rendering opinions on the many assaults on Mr. Starr's fairness.

Since he has always seemed to clear Mr. Starr of accusations against him, Mr. Dash has sometimes been ridiculed by Mr. Clinton's supporters. James Carville, one of those taking part in the White

House's attack, has accused Mr. Dash of bringing a Mad magazine standard of ethics to Mr. Starr's investigation. Mr. Carville once said that Mr. Dash was the "Alfred E. Neuman of ethics counselors. He doesn't worry about anything."

Mr. Dash, a onetime Philadelphia district attorney who has been a law professor at Georgetown University Law Center for more than 30 years, has sometimes appeared uncomfortable as an ally of Mr. Starr.

But, particularly when Mr. Starr has been under attack, Mr. Dash has defended him. In an interview two weeks ago he dismissed critics who said Mr. Starr was being too aggressive in pursuing the accusations involving Monica S. Lewinsky. "He's very rule-of-law oriented," Mr. Dash said of Mr. Starr. For Washington lawyers, that was tantamount to: he's a guy who can be trusted.

It was not just what was said, though. It was who was saying it and about whom: the famous former Watergate counsel about the besieged Whitewater independent counsel.

The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1998

School
Uniforms

Clinton's uniform support

Endorsement wears well with many but not all

By Dennis Kelly
and Karen Thomas
USA TODAY

President Clinton caught more than a few folks by surprise Tuesday night with a plug for school uniforms.

His concern: student safety. "If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets," Clinton said in the State of the Union talk, "then our public schools should be able to require students to wear school uniforms."

Public schools are doing just that in growing numbers as they try to cut clothing competition and fights, save parents bucks and create an atmosphere more attuned to learning than labels.

But are the nation's kids ready to surrender designer-toys, the grunge look and baggy jeans for khakis, white shirts and pleated skirts?

The idea stinks, says Jennifer Tyus, 16, of Decatur, Ill. "Cruelty doesn't have anything to do with clothes. We can all wear the same clothes. It doesn't change the person."

Chanelle Matthews, 13, of Columbia, Md., suggests wearing uniforms part of the week. "Maybe it would change their attitude," she says. "Maybe some kids wouldn't wear things that are inappropriate, like T-shirts with cuss words."

That's dress code, not uniforms, and Sandy Marks, 15, of Tampa, sees no harm in stricter codes.

Early returns for schools with uniforms look positive.



Uniform start: Lincoln Elementary School students in Long Beach, Calif., wear uniforms as part of a school district-wide requirement started in 1994.

Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District started requiring uniforms for 70,000 stu-

dents in kindergarten to 8th grade in fall 1994. Spokesman Dick Van Der Laan says the

first year alone saw 32% fewer suspensions and 51% fewer fights.

"We have no other way to explain the pretty dramatic improvement" other than the uniforms, Van Der Laan says. (Parents still have the right to opt out of the requirement, but only 500 have so far.)

The Oakland (Calif.) schools put a similar requirement in place last fall. And leaders in Dade County, Fla., and Charleston, S.C., also allowed their schools to decide individually if uniforms were right for them.

Still, not everyone favors a uniform approach. Carole Kennedy, president-elect, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, says uniforms aren't as crucial to good behavior as factors such as "poverty and how it impacts learning and involvement of parents in school."

Most parents are hopeful: Jean Martin, a parent in Concord, Calif., thinks the Oakland programs are "great" and seem to be working in "real violent areas." But where daughter Melissa, 14, attends school, "it wouldn't make a difference."

But Richard Lavertu, an Auburn, Maine, parent, feels "kids bring their own personality to school. I don't know how a uniform will change that."

Chris Pipho, Education Commission of the States in Denver, says when schools do require uniforms, it can be "a visible (sign) that schools have changed, and they're trying to do something about the safety of students."

Increasing the cycle of bitterness

If you want to know why black Americans tend to show a lot less faith in the criminal justice system than white Americans do, especially now that O.J. Simpson is back in the news, just check out the case of Michael Watson.

Perhaps you ran across his story on ESPN or in the Sporting News. Mr. Watson is a graduate student now, but he used to be a star player for Mount St. Mary's College, in Emmitsburg, Md., helping to lead the small school to the Northeast Conference championship last year.

Mr. Watson is black. This was not a big issue for him until recently. That changed on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, when he sat in the state courthouse in Frederick, Md., outside Washington, waiting for justice.

On trial were three white men charged with assaulting Mr. Watson and committing a "hate crime" against him in a convenience store in rural Thurmont, Md.

Mr. Watson stopped at the store late one night in October, 1994, with his girlfriend. According to Mr. Watson, one of the men picked a fight, shouting, "You don't belong here. This is Klan country." Mr. Watson says the man used the N-word.

Klan country? As it turned out, Mr. Watson had dropped into the vicinity of the town where the state's Klan leader lived. Hours before the incident in Thurmont, a busload of robed Klansmen marched to the state house in Annapolis. Surrounded and, it is worth noting, vastly outnumbered by anti-Klan protesters, the Klansmen shouted "White power!" One carried a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr. in a bull's-eye with the words "Our Dream Came True."

The three defendants declined to testify, but through their attorneys they denied they started the fight. A black lawyer hired by one of the defendants claimed in court that Mr. Watson had provoked the fight.

How? Apparently because Mr. Watson did not turn and leave when

the white man badgered him. Never mind Mr. Watson's right to shop without being hassled.

But the prosecutors were confident. Mr. Watson had an impressive piece of evidence on his side. The assault was captured on the store's security camera. The videotape had no sound, but, as viewers of ESPN, the cable sports channel that later picked up the story, would see, it shows quite clearly the white man shouting at Mr. Watson. Then the two other white men join their friend to hurl Mr. Watson to the counter and punch him while Mr. Watson holds up his hands to cover his face.

But, despite that evidence, the all-white jury decided after two hours of deliberation to find the three not guilty on all charges.

When I talked to Mr. Watson later, he said he was still stunned by the verdict. After the verdict was read, he said, he sat silently in the courtroom for several minutes unable to believe his ears, while the freed defendants celebrated.

The O.J. Simpson verdict, handed down less than two months earlier, upset a lot of people. Many thought a mostly black jury had let a black man go free because of his

race. Many critics of the Simpson verdict compared it, rightly or wrongly, to the way all-white juries in the South freed whites who had lynched blacks. The Watson case reminds us that affronts to justice by all-white juries are not a thing of the past.

Injuries from the incident benched Mr. Watson for several weeks of therapy during his last playing season. More than a year after being thrown against the convenience store counter, he still has stiffness and pain in his back and sees a chiropractor, he said.

But a bigger injury may have been suffered by his confidence in "the system." All along, Mr. Watson recalled, he had played by the rules. He "grew up in the worst part of Philadelphia," he says. Yet, he bore no animosity to whites. He treated everyone fairly regardless of race and that's how most treated him, he said. His best friend in high school was white. A high school girlfriend of whom he still thinks fondly was white.

His attitude has changed now, he says. He tries not to be bitter about it, but still he is wary and skeptical. "I was a little naive. Now I am awakened because it has touched home."

U.S. Justice Department investigators recently announced they are looking into Mr. Watson's case to see if his alleged attackers might be tried under federal civil rights charges, like the police officers who beat Rodney King. A decision is expected in a few months. Comparisons between the two cases are appropriate. Videotape figured in each. Yet jurors chose to disbelieve the unpleasant truth the tape revealed and chose another version that they found a little more comfortable.

Yet, Michael Watson has taken the time to let the world know he does not hold bitterness in his heart toward all white people.

When three residents said in a letter to the community newspaper that "the blind ignorance of a few shame us all," Mr. Watson replied in a letter of his own: "I extend my hand to them and others of goodwill in the community to build a unified front against racial intolerance."

With that, he showed how nobly a spirit beaten down can rise again.

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The Washington Times

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 1996

School uniforms

WILLIAM BUCKLEY JR.

School uniforms?

One commentator dealt bravely with the seven general categories of national problems addressed by President Clinton and finished his appraisal with the sentence, "Why on earth does the leader of the free world have to concern himself with school uniforms?"

Well now, there are those who found that the most novel and potentially the most resonant sentence in the president's address. Flash ahead 10 years, close your eyes and answer the question: "What was the highlight of President Clinton's State of the Union speech in 1996?" Right, the answer will be: Oh, that's the speech in which he came out for school uniforms.

To say that was the "highlight" of the speech is of course to take liberties, consigning all else he said to generic political thought. The president declared in favor of health care, law and order, unity, growth and husbandry. So does every can-

didate running for president. It was the school-uniform bit that caught the attention of the unwary, who asked first: What does Mr. Clinton know about school uniforms? And second: How is it that he intuits their importance?

Not long ago a public school teacher in New York City wrote a letter bristling with authenticity to The Wall Street Journal, relating that the foremost problem in the city's schools was discipline. In the absence of it, she complained, practically nothing else is possible.

What has been called the "hijacker's leverage" is operative here. Just as one terrorist can dictate the movements of a jet carrying 500 passengers, so one unruly student can, for as long as he is able to keep it up, affect the climate of a schoolroom.

In the late 1960s, one senior at Harvard appeared at the office of

the president hours before the commencement ceremony demanding that he be scheduled as a speaker. If not, he informed the stunned president, the ceremony would not proceed. A half-dozen noisy protesters, even in an assembly of 2,000, can make solemn processions impossible; as also studious classrooms.

The head of Cardinal Hayes High School in New York made a point of it some years ago. That school, formally a parochial school although many of its students are of other faiths, 85 percent of them minorities, has arresting academic attainments: 85 percent of its graduates go on to college, compared with less than 15 percent in comparable public schools made up of identically endowed students.

It is very important, the principal told his visitor, to insist on a

school uniform.

Why, one naturally wondered? Because, he said, the symbol

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irradiates several things. The first is that the student is a member of a

regulated community. When you are in uniform, your dress bespeaks hierarchy. The symbol is very important. At Cardinal Hayes, the students are simply not expected to be late in arriving at school, and punctuality is accepted as a part of the system — related, in a way, to the requirement that the students wear their simple gray jackets and pants, a shirt and a tie. On the question of disorder in the classroom, it is as simple as that there is no disorder in the classrooms.

Defenders of the antinomian behavior of so many public-school students confide to you that the reason for the success of the parochial schools is that they simply expel anyone who is in any way nonconformist. But such defenders of chaos run into statistics: 2 percent of the students at Cardinal Hayes are expelled.

The maintenance of order, the minor conformity that issues from the wearing of identical uniforms, is always a latent problem because the schools deal with boys and girls

who are going through their unruly period in life. The sociologist who some time ago remarked that a single broken and unrepaired window is an invitation to corollary shambles gave us all an epiphany. Of course it is true, we realize!

Student unruliness is met in different seasons in different ways. At Etan in the 1830s, the students outnumbered faculty by about 100-to-1, and the notorious Doctor Keate attempted to solve his problem by flogging a dozen students every day.

We shrink from discipline enforced by such measures, but ought to welcome civilized substitutes. The school uniform is the beginning of wisdom in this field, and we say hurrah to the president for coming upon that insight.

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