

ABSTRACT

DULIN, CHARLES DEWITT. Impact of School Uniforms on Student Discipline and the Learning Climate: A Comparative Case Study of Two Middle Schools With School Uniform Dress Codes and Two Middle Schools Without School Uniform Dress Codes. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli.)

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of uniform dress codes on a school's climate for student behavior and learning in four middle schools in North Carolina. The research will compare the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators in schools with uniform dress codes against schools without uniform dress codes. This research project attempts to assist district level and school level administrators when contemplating the idea of implementing a school uniform dress code policy. The research looks at the factors of attendance, discipline, and school safety as indicators of effectiveness within the schools' climate.

This research project concentrates on four middle schools in North Carolina. Using qualitative methods, the researcher chose four middle schools for comparison; two middle schools that have a uniform dress code policy and two middle schools that utilize a standard dress code policy. The schools chosen for research are located in two neighboring counties in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina. The researcher reviewed and compared four years of data from each school site concerning attendance and out-of-school suspensions. In addition, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each school principal, four focus group interviews with a group of teachers at each school site, and four focus group interviews with a group of parents at each school site. Data was recorded and all interviews were transcribed then hand coded by the researcher.

Descriptive statistics from each school site revealed that middle schools with uniform dress codes do not have better average rates of attendance or better average rates of out-of-

school suspensions than do middle schools without uniform dress codes. Therefore, one cannot assert that the uniform middle schools represented here have better attendance rates or decreased out-of-school suspensions due to the presence of a uniform dress code. Qualitative data collected through individual and focus group interviews also cannot assert that uniform dress codes produce better climates of discipline or learning than do middle schools that do not have uniform dress codes.

It seems that for a school district to adopt a uniform dress code policy over a traditional dress code policy is to exchange one set of problems for another. In the non-uniform middle schools, school officials are dealing with inappropriate dress code issues such as sagging pants, low cut tops, and short skirts. These issues waste interactional time and cause discipline infractions. In the uniform middle schools, school officials are dealing with uniform violations such as items being the wrong color, labels on clothing, and clothing being the wrong style. These issues also waste instructional time and cause discipline infractions.

Findings suggest that uniform dress codes are not cost effective and have no significant effect on school safety, discipline, climate, and attendance. These findings are in contradiction to the results of previous research on school uniform dress codes. At this point, school officials must decide which set of dress code issues they wish to address. The objective of this research is to provide school board officials and district level administrators with clarity as they consider reasons to adopt new, adjust old, or retain their current policies on student dress at school.

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Impact of School Uniforms on Student Discipline and the Learning Climate:
A Comparative Case Study of Two Middle Schools With Uniform Dress
Codes and Two Middle Schools Without Uniform Dress Codes

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Supervision

Raleigh, North Carolina

2016

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BIOGRAPHY

Charles Dewitt Dulin was born in Charlotte, North Carolina as an only son to Charles and Bobbie Dulin. His heritage is deeply rooted in his faith in God and family. He comes from a long line of textile workers and railroaders. However, educating children became his passion after receiving his Bachelor of Science in Social Studies and Education from Wingate College in 1990. In 1992 he began his career in Education by teaching sixth grade Mathematics and Science at Monroe Avenue Elementary School in Richmond County, North Carolina. Charles continued to pursue higher education and completed a Master of Arts in School Counseling from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke in 1998 and a Master of School Administration from East Carolina University in 2001. After seven years in the classroom teaching sixth grade and seventh grade, he became a middle school counselor in 1999 at Carver Middle School in Scotland County, North Carolina. In 2005 he became a school administrator and enrolled in the doctoral program at North Carolina State University. Charles has been the principal of Pate-Gardner Elementary School and South Scotland Elementary in Scotland County, North Carolina. In 2015 he was recognized as the Principal of the Year for the Scotland County School System.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this degree would not have been possible without the support of many individuals. Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge the love and support of my family. To my parents, Charles and Bobbie Dulin, without your love, support, and constant encouragement, this milestone in my life would not have been accomplished. To my grandmothers, Margaret Cox and Rachel Dulin, without your love, support, and constant encouragement this project could not have been completed. To my grandfathers, Henry Cox (Hoodie) and Charlie Dulin, your memories will always live in me. You all have been my greatest source of support and encouragement throughout my life, education, and career. You taught to me the first lessons about attaining true knowledge through God's Word (Proverbs 1:7). To God be the glory!

Next, I wish to acknowledge the individuals who have provided direction, encouragement, and have been an example of scholarship during my time at North Carolina State University. To my program advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Lance Fusarelli, I offer my sincere thanks for believing in my research, counseling me through academic crossroads, and always having faith in my ability to finish. To Dr. Kevin Brady, I appreciate your knowledge, advice, and enthusiasm for my research topic. To Dr. Andy Overstreet, I say thank you for being part of this faculty and bringing your wisdom through experience to compliment our program of study. To Dr. Pam Van Dyk, thank you for your knowledge, insight, and teaching our program evaluation class which helped me to more clearly see the research process at work in the school setting.

Finally, to my colleagues and friends in the Scotland County School System thank you for your continuous encouragement, support, and interest in my research. Never underestimate the value and importance of human connections-relationships. Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, and who understands the power of relationships.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Uniform dress codes are not the newest researched-based reform measure to hit the world of education. In fact, school uniforms have been worn by students in private and parochial schools for decades. As a matter of fact, this researcher attended private schools from fourth grade through graduation and cannot remember a day without wearing a uniform to school. Through most of the Seventies until 1983, our school uniform consisted of navy blue pants, a red or white shirt, and a necktie with small American Flags printed over a navy blue background. However, the close of the 1980's saw uniform dress codes become part of the public school reform movement. Stanley (1996) cites that in 1989 rising clothing and gang related violence prompted the Baltimore, Maryland school district to become the first large city school system to implement a widespread uniform policy in 74% of its schools. Later, in 1994, the Long Beach, California Unified School District became the first in the nation to require uniform dress codes for all students in elementary through the eighth grade (White, 2000).

Supporters of school uniform dress codes see their arrival as a type of "cure all" for every ill that affects public schools from classroom violence to failing student achievement. However, those opposed to school uniform dress codes find them to be a violation of student rights, stifling to one's individuality, and a financial burden to poor families (Seamon, Schultink, & Slocum, 2007). Nevertheless, no matter how one personally feels about uniform dress codes in schools, the concept has captured national significance. Burk (2004) reports that while no state mandates the use of uniform dress codes, twenty-one states and the

District of Columbia give school districts the authority to design and utilize uniform dress code policies. School uniform dress codes entered the national political spotlight when in President Bill Clinton's 1996 State of the Union Address; he endorsed the idea of school uniforms by saying:

If it means that school rooms will be more orderly and more disciplined and that our young people will learn to evaluate themselves by what they are inside, instead of what they're wearing on the outside, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms.

(White, 2000, p. 37)

The Case for Uniforms

Initially, one may inquire, why are schools implementing uniform dress codes in such a sweeping manner? The most prevalent answer is violence in schools. Uniform dress codes in public schools were born out of a desire to improve student behavior and reduce violence. The safety of students and staff members should be the number one concern of any school administrator. Dinkes, Kemp, Baum, and Snyder (2009) state that any incidence of crime and violence in a school not only affects those involved, but causes a significant disruption to the educational process. School violence affects members of the school, innocent bystanders, and the community surrounding the school (Dinkes, et al., 2009).

Indicators of School Crime and Safety:2010 (Roberts, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder) is a publication produced by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the Institute of Education Science (IES), and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and publishes school violence statistics from the 2007-2009 school years. Sadly, the publication indicates that at

least one violent crime, theft, or other crime was reported by 85% of our nation's public schools during the 2007-2008 school year. This translates into about 2 million violent crimes committed in our public schools during only one school year. Significantly, the publication states that among children 5-18 years of age, there were reported 38 school-associated violent deaths. Among children 12-18 years old, there were 1.2 million victims of nonfatal crime at school including 619,000 thefts and 743,100 acts of violence such as simple assault. In an additional report on school violence, Neiman, DeVoe, and Chandler (2009) received completed surveys from a total of 2,560 public primary, middle, and high schools to calculate statistics from the 2007-2008 school year. The findings indicate that violent incidents were nearly twice as high among middle schools as in primary or high schools.

One of the first social issues associated with uniform dress codes has been the reduction of the presence of youth gangs in our public schools (Stanley, 1996). Roberts, et al. (2010) found that in the 2007, 23% of all students reported the presence of gangs in their schools. This reflects a slight increase from 21% in 2003. Interestingly, 38% of Black students and 36% of Hispanic students report a gang presence while only 16% of white students report such a presence in their schools. Gangs in the public schools are disruptive to education because they incite fear and increase violence among students (Roberts, et al., 20010). In addition, survey data collected by Neiman, et al. (2009) found that 13% of city schools reported at least one gang related crime in 2007-2008. However, their data also shows that the gang threat is not isolated to schools located in big cities. Gang crime was reported in 5% of schools located in suburban areas and 3% of schools located in rural areas (Neiman, et al., 2009). This data only serves to validate Michael Stabile's (1991) statement

that youth gangs are no longer a problem only in large metropolitan areas; suburban and rural areas are also under threat and the problem is spreading.

Murray (1997) states that school climate and student behavior are related to student achievement. This research study will not attempt to assert that uniform dress codes improve student achievement. There are too many factors associated with student achievement to isolate a single contribution that may or may not be significant such as the use of uniform dress codes. Nevertheless, school violence does constitute a significant disruption to the educational process. Roberts, et al. (2010) found that in the 2007-2008 school year, 34% of teachers agree or strongly agree that student disorder is a disruption to the teaching and learning process. Considering the above, schools across the nation are taking seriously the presence of student crime and violence. As a result, schools are implementing a variety of safety and security measures to keep students and staff safe from the rise of crime in our public schools. For example, nearly all schools now require visitors to sign in and out of the school building, 90% of schools now control access to the school building during school hours, 43% of schools now control access to school grounds, 8% of schools now require students to wear picture ID badges, 58% of schools require staff members to wear picture IDs, 55% of schools use one or more security cameras, and 6% of schools require drug tests for its student athletes (Roberts, et al, 2010). Finally, from the perspective of this research project, 18% of schools use uniform dress codes as a safety measure to reduce crime and violence. This is an increase of 6% from the 1999-2000 school year (Roberts, et al, 2010).

Background of the Study

This research study was born out of prior research into the politics of uniform dress codes. While looking into the politics of uniform dress codes, this researcher noticed a disconnect between national research into the effectiveness of uniform dress codes conducted by David Brunσμα (2004) and more localized research done by other researchers or school superintendents such as Carl Cohn (1996).

For example, Brunσμα (2004) basically concludes that school uniforms are ineffective with regard to students' perceptions of school safety and academic achievement. In more recent research done by Yeung in 2009, he concludes that there is scarce evidence that uniform dress codes improve academic achievement. On the other hand, Carl Cohn (1996), then superintendent of Long Beach Consolidated School District in California, reported that uniform dress codes reduced incidents of fighting by 51%, assault by 34%, and reduced incidents of vandalism and weapons possession after the first year of implementation.

Other researchers who study the effect of uniform dress codes in public education such as Bowsher (2001) and Murray (1997) state that uniforms may be considered a sound program in the struggle to improve schools and that student uniforms have been found to have positive effects on students' attitudes and behavior. However, Bowsher (2001) goes on to say that little evidence exists to claim that uniform dress codes improve student learning. Nevertheless, Tucker (1999) surveyed middle school teachers in schools with uniform dress codes and teachers in middle school without uniform dress codes and found that teachers in

the schools with uniform dress codes perceived the school's climate to be more positive and conducive for learning.

Angela Walmsley (2011) adds that the United States can learn several important ideas from schools in the United Kingdom (UK) when it comes to utilizing uniform dress codes in the public schools. The author is the current associate dean for graduate education and research in the College of Education at Saint Louis University. The author has taught in and her children attended public schools in the United Kingdom. First, the author finds that students in the UK, regardless of ability, show great respect for their school, teachers, and themselves. Walmsley (2011) attributed this attitude of respect, in part, to the presence of a uniform dress code in all the public schools in the United Kingdom. Second, targeting only high poverty areas for uniform dress codes gives parents, and the public, the wrong idea. The author believes this fact causes parents to associate uniform dress codes with schools that are unsafe for children. Finally, Walmsley (2011) states that if we want the greatest benefit of uniform dress codes to reach all children, then a uniform dress code should be the expectation in all public schools, not an exception in only a few public schools. The author states that it is her belief that uniform dress codes can strengthen the relationship of cooperation between parents, teachers, and students.

The research project at hand will not contend that uniform dress codes improve student achievement or improve learning in any form. Many factors exist that influence student achievement. It is not in the scope of this research to isolate the effectiveness of one element such as uniform dress codes as they may or may not relate to improved student achievement.

Instead, this research project will compare middle schools with uniform dress codes to middle schools without uniform dress codes and will focus on student attendance, student discipline, and the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators as they relate to the effectiveness of uniform dress codes on student behavior and on school climate. Susan Black (1998), in her article, “Forever Plaid: What Research Says and Doesn’t Say about School Uniforms,” concludes that more research needs to be done to find if the effects of uniforms are long-lasting or short term. Black further contends that research must be done that compares outcomes in schools with uniform dress codes to the outcomes in schools that do not have uniform dress codes. Echoing her call for further comparative research, Poliakos, Haywood, and Rist (1996) in their article, “Trying Uniforms on for Size,” says that more research concerning the effectiveness of uniform dress codes to improve student discipline is needed that compares schools in multiple districts and compares uniform schools with non-uniform schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in four middle schools in North Carolina. This study will compare two middle schools that have a uniform dress code policy with two additional middle schools that do not have a uniform dress code policy. The study will compare data from all four middle schools as it relates to student attendance, office discipline referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and the perceptions of parents, faculty members, and administrators as they express opinions about student behavior and the school’s climate for learning.

This research project will attempt to fill a gap in the knowledge base seen as lacking by researchers such as Black (1998) and Poliokas, et al. (1996). These researchers agree that more research is needed to compare uniform schools with non-uniform schools. Finally, this research seeks to increase the knowledge needed and utilized by school boards and district level administrators when the idea of uniform dress codes is brought up for discussion. As we will see in chapter two, the implementation of uniform dress codes is a difficult process laced with multiple challenges. As a safety and security measure, uniform dress code implementation is expensive and can become a complicated investment. Therefore, school boards and superintendents must be prepared through increased knowledge to make effective decisions.

Definition of Terms

Uniform Dress Code Policy: Term which refers to a Board of Education approved policy which requires students to dress in prescribed colors and types of garments in order to attend school. These type policies describe what articles of clothing may be worn to school. The uniform dress code policy utilized by schools represented in this research project require students to wear specified types and colors for all top and bottom garments.

Dress Code Policy: Term which refers to a Board of Education approved policy which describes articles of clothing that may not be worn to school by students. This type of policy does mandate certain types of clothing or specified colors not to be worn to school.

Uniform School: A middle school identified in this study that requires students to wear uniforms to school. These schools are under a Board of Education approved uniform dress code policy.

Non-uniform School: A middle school identified in this study that does not utilize a uniform dress code policy. This type schools utilizes a dress code policy.

Office Discipline Referrals: A written report of student misconduct. For purposes of this study, these referrals have been sent to a school administrator, administrative action has been taken, and this action has been entered into the NC WISE student information data system.

Short Term Out-of -School Suspensions: Term referring to administrative action that places a student out of school for a period of no longer than ten consecutive active school days. This action can result from an office discipline referral.

School Attendance: Physical presence at school for at least half of a school day. A student must be in school for at least half the instructional day (three and one half hours) to be counted as present for that school day.

School Climate for Discipline: This term refers to the school's code of student conduct and its effects on the school community. For the purposes of this study, this term refers to the faculty members', parents', and administrators' perceptions of student discipline and how it contributes to school safety.

School Climate for Learning: Term which refers a school's daily atmosphere in which learning takes place. A school's climate is complex and includes many variables that interact with each other on a daily basis (Wade & Stafford, 2003). For the purposes

of this study, we will be concerned with faculty members', parents', and administrators' perceptions of how the student code of conduct and school's dress code contributes to learning throughout the school.

Faculty / Certified Staff Member: Term which refers to any member of a school staff that is employed in a certified or professional licensed position within the school. For the purpose of this research, this will apply to individuals who work in a target school such as a classroom teacher, school counselor, school social worker, or school nurse.

Significance of the Study

Some research has shown that having uniform dress codes can reduce school violence, discipline issues, and improve school safety and climate (Black, 1998; Bowsher, 2001; Cohn, 1996; Elder, 1999; Murray, 1997; Wilson, 1999). For students, parents, teachers, and administrators, school safety lies at the core of the everyday routine of educating children. With this in mind, if research does support that uniform dress codes reduce violence and improve safety and school climate, then educators should take a closer look at increasing the implementation of uniform dress codes.

This study will contribute to the knowledge base of the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools in North Carolina and beyond. This study will help to answer Paliokas, et al. (1996) and Susan Black's (1998) invitation to compare the outcomes of schools with uniforms to schools without uniforms. Brunnsma (2004) used quantitative methods to find that uniforms are ineffective with regard to student achievement. This study will utilize descriptive statistics and qualitative methods to find if, through the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators, uniform dress codes are perceived to be effective in

improving student behavior and creating a school climate that is more conducive for learning. Should the research find no difference when uniform schools are compared to non-uniform schools, then the larger question becomes, why should we waste valuable resources, time, and political capital to implement uniform dress codes in the first place? Are school uniform dress code policies effective in any manner, or do uniform dress codes just make us feel better when we see children dressed alike?

Overview of Approach

Since coming into the national arena of educational reform movements, school uniform dress code policies have been scrutinized from nearly every angle. Research abounds on the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of uniform dress codes from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. However, little research exists that compares the outcomes of uniform schools with the outcomes of non-uniform schools. In addition, much of the literature about school uniforms results from large urban schools and districts. The following research study will compare middle schools with uniform dress codes to middle schools without uniform dress codes; in addition, this research will concentrate on four middle schools in rural North Carolina.

The project will compare multiple years of descriptive data from each target school. Attendance, office discipline referrals, and out-of-school suspension data will be compared and reviewed for each target school. Next, qualitative methods involving focus group interviews and in-depth individual interviews will be utilized to compare the perceptions of parents, faculty members, and administrators from each target school. Focus groups will be created from randomly selected groups of faculty members and randomly selected groups of

parents. Faculty member focus groups will be interviewed independently of parent groups and vice versa. The principal of each target school will participate in a face-to-face individual interview. As a result, the research project will yield data from four different groups of faculty members, four groups of parents, and four administrators. All focus groups and individual interviews will utilize semi-structured, open-ended questioning techniques to allow for the formation of common themes and ideas from each group. Administrators from each target school will participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. All interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and hand coded by the researcher.

Chapter Summary

Research on the effectiveness of uniform dress codes is plentiful in some respects and can be utilized to support or oppose their implementation. Quantitative research done on the national level by such scholars as Brunσμα (2004) and Yeung (2009) demonstrate that uniform dress codes have little to no effect on the academic achievement of students. Whereas, more localized research by Carl Cohn (1996), Paliokas, et al. (1996), and Susan Black (1998) support the idea that uniform dress codes can decrease discipline problems and may produce a school climate that is more conducive for learning.

Current research on school crime suggests that schools have increased the use of uniform dress codes as a security measure due to an increase in violence among students. For example, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2010* (Roberts, et al.) found that at least one violent crime, theft, or other crime was reported by 85% of our nation's public schools during the 2007-2008 school year. In total, the report found that about 2 million acts of crime were committed in our public school during the 2007-2008 school year. In an

additional report on school violence, Neiman, DeVoe, and Chandler (2009) indicate that violent incidents were nearly twice as high among middle schools as in primary or high schools. In addition, a rise in youth gangs in schools has contributed to increased adoption of uniform dress codes in several schools across the nation. Roberts, et al. (2010) found that in the 2007-2008 school year, 23% of all students reported the presence of gangs in their schools. Statistical data also shows that gangs are not just an inner city problem anymore. For example, gang crime was reported in 5% of schools located in suburban areas and 3% of schools located in rural areas (Neiman, et al., 2009).

In addition, we understand that student behavior is a factor that helps to create a school's climate and the school climate does impact student achievement. While this study does not attempt to credit uniform dress codes with increased student achievement, it does look at the relationship between uniform dress codes and a school's climate. As a result of this relationship, Murray (1997) concludes that uniform dress codes have been found to have a positive impact on a school's climate. Roberts, et al. (2010) finds that 18% of our nation's public schools utilize uniform dress codes as one measure to reduce school violence and improve the school climate.

Most research on the effectiveness of uniform dress codes comes from large urban school districts. However, research done about uniforms in rural school districts is scarce at best. In addition, research that compares outcomes in uniform schools with outcomes in non-uniform schools is also lacking. This lack of knowledge leads one to wonder how rural middle schools with uniform dress codes compare to rural middle school without uniform dress codes. If in making this comparison one finds no difference, then why do we still choose to

implement uniform dress codes? The purpose of this study will be to compare the perceptions of faculty members, parents, and administrators in middle schools with uniform dress codes to the same stakeholders' perceptions in middle schools without uniform dress codes. This study desires to find if indeed uniform dress codes have an impact on student behavior and the school's climate for learning. In the next chapter, the research on uniform dress codes is reviewed in depth.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

As schools and school systems find themselves under constant scrutiny to decrease discipline issues and increase student learning, school boards across the nation are looking for a means to “fix” the schools. In many cases, school boards look to uniform dress codes to affect this change. The choice to implement uniform dress codes affects the entire school community, and as such, is a decision that should only be made at the district level. In any case, as Susan Black (1998) asserts, uniform dress codes get a lot of credit for improving a school’s environment. However, one must also remember that in many cases, uniform dress codes are only one part of a multi-faceted school reform/improvement effort.

In collecting literature for this study, this researcher was interested to discover current studies that explored the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in more rural type school environments. However, this researcher has found no current research directly linked to uniform dress codes in the rural setting. This fact presents a gap in the research literature of the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in public schools. Most of the research to follow comes from studies done in larger urban type school districts.

Uniforms and School Discipline

In most cases school boards choose to implement uniform dress codes for three reasons: first, the reason most often cited is school safety and improved student discipline; second, uniform dress codes help to improve the school’s climate for learning; third, uniform dress codes are affordable and help level the field for students who “have” and those who “have not.” In his book, *Fix Schools First: Blueprint for Achieving Learning Standards*,

Bowsher (2001) lists student uniforms as a “low-cost, quick-fix, and sound program to achieving improvement in schools” (p. 63). He further goes on to state that while little evidence exists to support the opinion that uniform dress codes improve student learning, he contends that uniform dress codes contribute to an improved learning environment. Furthermore, he agrees that uniforms have been found to have a positive effect on student attitudes and behavior by eliminating bias and low expectations.

With regard to student discipline, an abundance of literature is available though much is anecdotal personal accounts or observations made by practitioners. However, as Paliokas, Haywood, and Rist (1996) state in their article, “Trying Uniforms on for Size,” the data surrounding the effectiveness of uniforms to improve student discipline has not been disaggregated to compare schools in multiple districts or uniform schools with non-uniform schools. Nevertheless, the literature that does exist is compelling and has attracted many districts across the nation to try uniform dress codes. For example, Deborah Elder (1999) published a qualitative study of two middle schools (John Adams and Truman) in Albuquerque, New Mexico that implemented uniform dress codes with the 1998-99 school year. In her study, she utilized interviews, focus groups, surveys, and reviewed data on student discipline. In her findings, Elder (1999) discovered that both schools saw a reduction in discipline issues. At John Adams Middle School discipline referrals in the first semester fell nearly 74% while at Truman Middle School, discipline referrals decreased by almost 25%. In addition, her survey data revealed that 75% of parents and 89% of staff at these schools supported uniforms and believed that they helped to decrease student violence, theft, and gang activity. However, Elder (1999) also points out that these results cannot be solely

attributed to uniform dress codes because at the same time these schools were also implementing changes in instruction and administration.

Increased gang activity in urban and rural schools has fostered much interest in uniform dress codes. Uniform dress codes make it easier to spot “who does not belong” and restrictions on certain colors debunk some aggressive gang activity. Holloman, LaPoint, Alleyne, Palmer, and Sanders (1996) write that by regulating dress through uniform dress codes, schools can reduce violence and theft by removing the temptation of expensive clothing. In addition, Holloman, et al. (1996) state that uniform dress codes prevent the outward expression of gang membership, and as a result, may reduce violence toward rival gang members. As stated above, in 1994 the Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach California became the first system in the nation to require uniform dress codes for all students through the 8th grade. In 1996, Carl Cohn, Superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District, wrote an article appearing in *The School Administrator* discussing the benefits of school uniforms for the Long Beach school system. In her article, Cohn (1996) claims that uniforms provide protection for students who must walk through gang-infested neighborhoods in order to get to school. Uniforms are neutral ground for kids whose clothing may otherwise make them a target for gang violence. Cohn (1996) also reports that uniforms have reduced incidences of fighting by 51%, assault by 34%, vandalism, and weapons possession also declined from the previous year without uniforms. In grades K-8, the Long Beach school system experienced a 36% drop in campus crime and 32% fewer suspensions within the first year of a mandatory uniform dress code policy (Cohn, 1996).

School boards also cite an improved climate for learning as an impetus for implementing uniform dress codes. In 1998 a survey was administered to 27 middle school teachers in four urban schools in St. Paul Minnesota. Two schools had uniform dress codes and the other schools did not have uniform dress codes. In the schools with uniform dress codes, teachers perceived the school's environment to be safer and more encouraging to positive peer relations which resulted in less cliques and teasing due to dress. Furthermore, this study also found that teachers took more time getting to know students instead of making quick judgments based on student appearance. Overall, teachers in the schools with uniform dress codes perceived the climate to be more positive and conducive for learning (Tucker, 1999). In Cohn's (1996) discussion of uniforms and the Long Beach school system, she states that uniforms help to foster a professional mindset for students. Uniform dress codes create a climate that is conducive to teaching and learning. Cohn (1996) also contends that students in uniforms tend to view schools as more of a workplace instead of a battleground, playground, or fashion stage.

Uniforms and the Economy

Finally, ease of affordability is a third reason why many school systems have found uniform dress codes effective for economically stressed communities. For the Long Beach community in California, Cohn (1996) cites that the average clothing cost for students in non-uniform schools is much higher than for students in uniform schools. For example, in 1996 typical uniforms cost \$70-90 per pupil for a full academic year (Cohn, 1996). In 1998 I taught at Hamlet Junior High School which had just implemented a uniform policy. In our community of Hamlet, North Carolina, a family could clothe a student for around \$100 a

year. This amount of money would purchase four shirts (\$10 each) and four pair of pants (\$15 each). Research done by McCarty in 1999 found that a typical family, whose child did not wear uniforms to school, spent an average of \$375 per child for school clothes.

However, those opposed to uniform dress codes say that uniforms cost families more because in addition to uniforms, parents still choose to buy fashionable clothes for children to wear outside of school (Norum, Weagley, & Norton, 1998). In this case, Stanley (1996) and Cohn (1996) found that in systems where uniform dress codes are mandated, programs are in place to give financial assistance to families who are unable to afford uniforms. Finally, in research done by Woods and Ogletree (1992), 30 parents (15 African American and 15 Hispanic American) of students in the Chicago, Illinois public schools were surveyed to discover attitudes toward uniforms dress codes as a financial savings. The results from this survey found that 80% of respondents believed that uniforms were less expensive and 84% also responded that uniform clothes were more economical to maintain than “street clothes”.

Uniforms and Their Effectiveness

As stated earlier, much of the literature on uniform dress codes is anecdotal and lacks a substantial base in empirical research. Poliokas and Rist (1996) write that parents and school officials often feel satisfaction when they see students wearing uniforms. However, the idea that uniform dress codes provide structure, decrease violence, improve the school climate, and increase academic achievement is decried by some researchers as only wishful thinking and not grounded in empirical research (Poliokas & Rist, 1996). For this section I have reviewed multiple pieces of empirical research that are concerned with the effectiveness of student uniforms.

By far the most comprehensive empirical research conducted on the effectiveness of student uniforms has been completed by David Brunnsma. He and other research partners have published several articles while the most comprehensive work on uniforms still remains Brunnsma's 2004 book, *The School Uniform Movement and What It Tells Us About American Education*. Brunnsma and Rockquemore (1998), in an article appearing in *The Journal of Educational Research*, used quantitative methods to test the relationship between uniform dress codes and the dependent variables of substance use, behavioral problems, attendance, and academic achievement. Brunnsma and Rockquemore used the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) to test these relationships. The NELS:88 is a national stratified random sample of schools and students that started in 1988 with students who were in the 8th grade. Since 1988 there have been three follow-up studies with the last one completed in 1994 when the original 8th graders were in their second year of college. For this particular article, data was used from the second follow-up study conducted in 1990 when these students were in the 10th grade. In order to provide a more rigorous test of the relationship value between uniforms and the above mentioned variables, Brunnsma and Rocquemore (1998) conducted *t* tests comparing the means of the dependent variables by use of uniforms in each sector. In addition, multiple weighted regression analysis was use to test the predicted effects uniforms might have on the dependent variables. The NELS uses a data set size of 7,930 observations in its analysis.

The first dependent variable tested by Brunnsma and Rocquemore (1998) was the effect of uniform dress codes on absenteeism. The results of their analysis did not support the idea that uniform dress codes decreased absenteeism among high school students. With

regard to student behavior, the data revealed no significant relationship between uniform dress codes and decreased discipline problems. This research also looked at the relationship between uniform dress codes and academic achievement. The study found that 10th graders who were required to wear uniforms had nearly a three point decrease in scores on standardized tests. The data did not show an increase in academic achievement for students who were required to wear school uniforms. However, this study did find that academic preparedness, pro-school attitudes, and peer norms had a positive relationship to school attendance, student behavior, and academic achievement. As a result, Brunnsma and Rocquemore (1998) posed the question of a possible relationship between uniform dress codes and academic preparedness, pro-school attitudes, and peer norms. Further analysis into this relationship found no support for such a relationship to be evident.

A final question posed by Brunnsma and Rocquemore (1998) asked if school uniforms decreased substance use among high school students. As with the past variables, their analysis showed no relationship between substance use and uniform dress codes. The researchers concluded that mandatory uniform policies are a change that is quick, highly visible, and wide sweeping for all stakeholders. They also warn that such a change is only superficial but it attracts a lot of public attention. Brunnsma and Rocquemore (1998) are not saying that uniforms are a bad idea for schools. On the contrary, the research shows that uniforms may not directly impact substance use, absenteeism, student discipline, or academics but may act as a change agent that provides an opportunity for additional reform programs to be used along with uniform dress codes.

Expanding on the research above, in 2004 Brunσμα published comprehensive findings on uniforms in his book, *The School Uniform Movement and What It Tells Us About American Education*. For his work, Brunσμα utilizes the NELS:88 for data from 8th and 10th grade students and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) from 1998-2000 for data on elementary students. Brunσμα states that school boards adopt uniform policies to decrease discipline problems, improve school climate, increase readiness for learning, decrease competition between students, and ultimately increase academic performance. In summation, he asserts eight conclusions with regard to his analysis of the effectiveness of uniform dress codes:

1. Uniforms have no significant effects on students' perceptions of safety or school climate.
2. Uniforms have no significant effects on perceptions of safety and school climate in elementary schools.
3. Uniforms have no significant effects on 10th grade academic achievement.
4. Uniforms have no significant effects on 8th grade academic achievement.
5. Uniforms have no significant effects on student achievement in elementary schools.
6. Uniforms have a negative effect on academic achievement in high schools.
7. Uniforms have no significant effect on academic preparedness or pro-school attitudes.
8. There appears to be no benefits for students or schools that switch from no uniforms to a uniform policy.

No matter the reason for adopting a uniform policy, Brunσμα bluntly states that other evidence and his own analysis find that uniform dress code policies are not effective. While

research done by Brunσμα and Rockquemore (1998) and Brunσμα (2004) seems very comprehensive, however, this research does not completely consider the impact of uniforms on students in middle school. Previous research by Elder (1999) found that uniform dress codes were effective with regard to reducing student discipline problems in middle schools. In addition, research done by Brunσμα and Rockquemore (1998) used data in which only 6.7% or 530 students in the sample were required to wear school uniforms. Of these students, 59.8% were students in Catholic schools, 24% were in private schools, and only .7% or 3.7 students of this sample were enrolled in public schools.

In more recent research on the effects of uniform policies on student achievement, Ryan Yeung (2009) offers another analysis using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) of 1998-1999 and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88 as described above). The ECLS-K is a nationally representative set of data collected from children who began their kindergarten year of school in 1998. Six waves of data from this cohort of children were collected with the final collection in the spring of 2004 when these children were in fifth grade. One of the strengths of the ECLS-K is that the subjects are accessed and data collected from multiple points of contact including parents, teachers, school administrators, and school office staff members. Analysis for this data set is based upon 8,867 observations with 2,332 (26.3%) of these subjects required to wear a school uniform (Yeung, 2009). Analysis for the NELS:88 data set is based upon a total of 7,930 observations with only 530 (6.7%) of these subjects required to wear a school uniform. Information describing the NELS:88 data analysis has been discussed above in previous paragraphs.

In the initial analysis, The NELS:88 results show that 10th and 8th grade students who wear school uniforms scored slightly higher than their non-uniform peers on reading and mathematics tests. However, the ECLS-K results show that elementary students that did not wear school uniforms out-scored their uniformed peers in all grades and subject matter except 1st grade reading. However, the author notes that none of the observed differences were significant. Nevertheless, Yeung (2009) concludes that there is little evidence to display that uniform dress codes improve student achievement. The results of this research found that students who wear uniform dress codes do not outperform non-uniform peers on 2nd grade reading or mathematics exams nor do they outperform 10th grade students on reading, mathematics, science, and history exams. To the contrary, in many of the areas tested, uniform dress codes actually resulted in negative results from grade to grade. Yeung (2009) simply concludes that uniform dress codes are not a panacea for all that ills American education. For the purposes of this research study, it should be noted that research conducted by Yeung (2009) did not consider uniform dress codes in the middle schools and the sample of public school students who were required to wear uniforms totaled only 1,122 observations out of a sample of 16,797 observations from both data sets.

Uniforms and School Climate

The latest statistics on school violence note that during 2007-2008 over 2 million acts of violence were committed on our public school campuses across the nation (Dinkes, et al., 2010). Hernandez and Seem (2004) state that school violence is a reflection of a school's climate and that it creates fear, emotional unrest, and is an obstacle to student achievement. School violence is not only restricted to the overt crimes that fill the evening news; school

violence is mostly covert actions such as teasing, name calling, vicious rumors, offensive touching, racial, or sexual harassment (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). One way in which to address school violence is to create a safe and positive school climate for all children.

Hernandez and Seem (2004) states that a safe school climate is created when the parameters of acceptable student behavior are defined through codes of conduct and school rules. Further, these rules must address such areas as acceptable student dress, treatment of others, and consequences for breaking such rules (Hernandez & Seem, 2004).

In order to determine the effects of uniform dress codes on school climate, Richard Murray (1997) conducted research among the middle schools of the Charleston, SC school district. This researcher states that school climate and student behavior are related to student achievement and that a positive school climate is a characteristic of an effective school. Murray (1997) utilized the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE) school climate survey. The survey was administered to 306 students at two middle schools in Charleston County. Each school supplied a random sample of 153 students to take part in the survey. The two subject schools were identical in racial composition, state categorization, and the numbers of students who receive free/reduced price lunch. However, the schools were opposite in that one utilized a uniform dress code policy and the other did not. In 9 out of 10 subscales, students who attended the school with a uniform dress code policy rated their school's climate as more positive than the students who attended the middle school which did not have a uniform dress code policy. Students from the school which had a uniform dress code rated their school's climate higher in the areas of student-teacher relationships, security and maintenance, student behavior values, student academic

orientation, guidance, student peer relationships, parent and community relationships, instructional management, and student activities.

As a result of his research, Murray (1997) concludes that students attending a school with a uniform dress code policy have a higher perception of their school's climate than do their peers at a school without a uniform dress code policy. Through this research, Murray (1997) views uniform dress codes as a way for administrators and school board officials to improve school climate and create an effective school for all children.

Perceptions of School Uniforms

Research on uniform dress code policies takes many different forms. Because uniform dress codes are such an obvious reform measure, many researchers choose to explore the opinions and perceptions of students, teachers, parents, and school administrators to find if uniform dress codes have had any positive or negative effects. These first two studies review the perceptions of principals regarding a mandatory uniform dress code policy. In the first study conducted by DeMitchell, Fossey, and Cobb (2000), the researchers distributed Likert-style surveys to 240 principals in elementary, middle, and high schools. Of these, 157 surveys were returned and evaluated. Fifty-one surveys were from elementary principals, 51 were from middle school principals, and 55 were from high school principals. Eighty-one schools were in rural settings, 53 schools were located in suburban settings, and 20 schools were located in urban settings (3 schools did not report their setting type). With regard to uniform dress codes, the study found that middle school principals were most likely to support uniform dress codes while high school principals were least likely to support uniform dress codes. From the perspective of school setting, urban principals were most

likely to support uniform dress codes while rural principals were least likely to support uniform dress codes. The article cites no known reasons for the above variations in support or lack of support for uniform dress codes. However, the authors do propose that this is an area in need of further research (DeMitchell, et al., 2000). It should be noted that the survey used in the above study contained a total of 7 questions with only one addressing support for uniform dress codes.

In other research considering the perceptions of principals on school uniforms, Richard Wilson (1999) surveyed school principals concerning perceived effects of uniforms on school violence. A final sample of 141 principals, from schools located in all four regions of the nation, were contacted and asked to participate in an 8-minute telephone survey. The survey items were adapted using questions from “Metlife’s American Teacher Survey, Violence in America’s Public Schools: The Family Perspective.” The first hypothesis of this study proposed that there was no significant difference in the principal’s perceived level of violence in schools with uniform dress codes than in schools without uniform dress codes. The results revealed that in schools with uniform dress codes, the principal reported lower levels of perceived violence than did principals in schools without uniform dress codes (Wilson, 1999).

Research conducted by Wade and Stafford (2003) explored the effects uniform dress codes had on the perceptions of gang presence, school climate, and student self-perceptions. This research study utilized 415 sixth through eighth grade students and 83 teachers from six middle schools in a large urban area of the southwest United States. Of the six middle schools, three had implemented a mandatory uniform dress code policy and three of the

schools did not have a uniform dress code policy. The schools participating in the study were consistent across ethnicity, geographic location, and socioeconomic status as identified by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. From the students who participated, 183 were from schools with a uniform dress code while 232 were from schools that did not have a uniform dress code. Eighty-three teachers participated who taught in fourth through seventh grades. Thirty teachers were from uniform schools and 45 teachers were from non-uniform schools. The research study utilized three surveys including the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC), the Comprehensive Assessments of School Environments, School Climate Survey (CASE), and the Gang Presence and Identity Questionnaire (GPIQ). These surveys were administered to intact classrooms across grades sixth through eighth. Teachers who participated received the surveys in their school mailbox with a letter of explanation and cover sheet asking their gender and grade level taught (Wade & Stafford, 2003).

After analysis of the data, the following results were summarized. In regard to student self-perception, students from schools without uniform dress codes reported higher scores than did students required to wear uniforms. Data collected from the school climate survey showed no significant differences between students and teachers with a uniform dress code policy compared to students and teachers from schools that did not have uniform dress code policy. However, when looking at perceptions of gang presence, a difference between students and teachers was identified. Students on either side of the uniform dress code policy perceive no difference in the perceptions of gang presence on their schools' campuses.

However, teachers from schools with uniform dress code policies did perceive significantly lower levels of gang presence at school (Wade & Stafford, 2003).

In addition to this research study, perceptions of the effectiveness of a school uniform dress code policy have been the focus of many dissertations. One such recent dissertation was published by Joseph A. Massare (2004) from Wilmington College in Delaware. Research done by Massare (2004) looked at the effects of a recent uniform dress code policy implemented on two elementary schools and one middle school in a New Jersey School District. One of the elementary schools houses grades first through third and the other houses grades fourth and fifth and has had a uniform dress code since the 2001-2002 school year. The middle school contains grades sixth through eighth and has had a uniform policy since the 2002-2003 school year. Massare's (2004) research takes place during the 2003-2004 school year. The research study had only two research questions: 1. "What impact on the rate of discipline referrals and student attendance does a mandatory school uniform policy have in grades one through eight?" and 2. "What perceptions exist among participating administrators, teachers, and parents of first through eighth-grade students concerning the effects of wearing school uniforms on classroom behavior and on the classroom climate?" Massare's (2004) design for this study consisted of three parts. First, the researcher utilized descriptive statistics to analyze pre-uniform and post-uniform statistics about discipline and attendance from all three subject schools. Second, the researcher used survey research employing a Likert-type scale method to determine parent and teacher perceptions of the impact of the uniform dress code policy. Third, focus group interviews were conducted independently with a group of teachers, a group of parents, and a group of

administrators in order to corroborate data gained from the descriptive statistics and surveys as a means of triangulation (Massare, 2004).

After a review of the descriptive statistics, initial analysis indicated that discipline referrals increased in both the elementary schools and the middle school. However, after a closer look at the data, the elementary schools and middle school saw a decrease in discipline referrals in the areas of disrespect to peers, fighting, assaults, and out of school suspensions. Massare (2004) is quick to state that he will not suggest any conclusion with regard to uniform dress codes and their effects on discipline given the short time of implementation. In addition, the statistics concerning attendance show no significant difference on these measures between pre-uniforms and post-uniforms (Massare, 2004).

The second research question for this study had to do with the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrations as to the effectiveness of school uniforms on student behavior and classroom climate. The researcher explains several emerging themes that result from the focus group interviews. It is noted that all focus groups agree that uniforms do not limit the rights of students' expression or student rights as protected by the U. S. Constitution. However, parents did view administrative enforcement as too restrictive to style options. With regard to student behavior, administrators and teachers agreed that uniforms looked good on students but did little to improve student behavior. On this issue, parents agreed but believed that uniform dress codes could create a climate that may have a positive impact on student behavior over a longer period of time. Student attendance was also addressed by each focus group. All groups agreed that uniform dress codes did not affect student attendance in a positive or negative manner. However, all three focus groups agreed that

uniform dress codes were a wise economic decision, allowed for easy dress routines in the morning, and eliminated competition between students based on style of clothing. Finally, all focus groups overwhelmingly agreed that uniform dress codes created an atmosphere of pride in self, their classmates, and their school (Massare. 2004).

In a more recent dissertation, Johnson (2010) researched the impact of uniform dress codes on school violence in North Carolina's high schools. The purpose of Johnson's (2010) study was to use a mixed methods approach while investigating the incidents of violence, occurrences of suspensions, and the perceptions of administrators in North Carolina high schools that had adopted uniform dress codes during the 2004-2005 through 2008-2009 school years. For the quantitative portion of the study, the author examined several annual reports produced by The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) concerning crime and violence in North Carolina's public schools. The author examined the Annual Report on Crime and Violence, the Annual Study on Suspensions and Expulsions, and the NC School Report Card Data Report. The qualitative portion of the research study focused on responses provided by assistant principals and principals from the thirty-eight North Carolina high schools that have a uniform dress code. The survey instrument used was developed by the author and contained eight, Likert-type questions in all. The survey was sent to 129 administrators, 83 surveys were returned for inclusion in the study. Results from the quantitative portion of Johnson's (2010) study revealed no change in the incidents of crime and violence or suspensions for the majority of the 38 North Carolina high schools under investigation. Johnson (2010) states that a few high schools saw a positive change in acts of violence and/or suspensions just after the adoption of a uniform dress code; however,

no sustainable change is this data was found in this study. Finally, results for the qualitative portion of this study indicate that administrators in North Carolina high schools with uniform dress codes feel that such policies have improved the overall safety of their campuses (Johnson, 2010). This result is consistent with other research concerning administrators' perceptions such as found by DeMitchell, Fossey, and Cobb (2000) and Wilson (1999).

Uniforms and the Courts

Most opposition to mandatory uniform dress code policies comes in the form of legal challenges through the court system or through mistakes made in the planning and implementation process. Legal challenges can be most complex and expensive for school districts. Even if the school system wins in the courts, it has lost large sums of money that would be best spent on the education of children. Paliokas, et al. (1996) state that mandatory uniform dress code policies are most problematic because they strictly limit what a student can wear to school instead of itemizing what students cannot wear to school as do dress codes. Uniform dress codes are more restrictive to a student's rights of expression than are typical dress codes (Poliokas, et al., 1996).

By far, the most common argument cited against school uniform dress codes is the First Amendment right to free expression. Fossey and DeMitchell (1997) in an *Education Week* article write that First Amendment rights were granted to school children in 1969 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Tinker v. Demoines Independent School District* (393U. S. 503, 89 S.Ct. 733). In this case, three teenagers wore black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam War and were suspended for their expression. The landmark case asserted that students "do not shed their constitutional rights at the school house door." However, this

case also found that a school may restrict a student's expression if it threatens to disrupt the educational environment (Fossey & DeMitchell, 1997).

In an article by Mitchell and Knechtle (2003) they state that school districts are legally safer to adopt a uniform dress code than a standard dress code. Standard dress codes are legally more problematic because they attempt to determine what is acceptable dress and appearance, thus causing more legal challenges based on the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the US Constitution. Mitchell and Knechtle (2003) find that courts generally support uniform dress codes if they are based on content-neutral regulations that satisfy the four-prong O'Brien Test. The four-prong O'Brien Test is a result of the U. S. Supreme Court case *United States v. O'Brien* (391 U. S. 367, 376) 1968. In this landmark case, the U.S. Supreme court developed this test to "determine if a content-neutral government invasion of the right to free expression violates the First Amendment" (p. 490). The court set out the following standards to justify a government regulation of expression:

- The regulation must be within the government's interest
- The regulation must further an important or substantial government interest
- The government interest is unrelated to the suppression of free expression
- The regulation's restriction on First Amendment rights is no greater than necessary to further the government's interest

School systems rest their main argument in support of uniform dress codes on the first prong of this test. School districts explain that uniform dress codes increase the public safety of schoolchildren; and therefore, the regulation represents a substantial interest of the

government. Second, there is government interest in reducing violence and gang activity on school campuses; therefore, uniform dress codes assist in protecting educational processes by making schools safer places to learn. Third, uniform dress codes are designed to eliminate various negative behaviors and are unrelated to limiting students' free expression. Finally, it can be argued that making schools safer and less violent outweighs any limits placed upon students' free expression (Mitchell & Knechtle, 2003).

To this point, no case to challenge uniform dress codes has been upheld at the national level. However, Dowling-Sendor (2001) writes about *Canady v. Bossier Parrish School Board* (204 F. 3d 437 5th Cir. 2001), a Louisiana uniform dress code case that made it to the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1999 when the Bossier Parish School Board implemented a mandatory school uniform dress code policy. A group of parents opposed to the policy argued that the policy violated student's rights of expression and religion and was not cost effective. In writing the court's opinion, Judge Robert M. Parker stated that while students did possess rights to free expression, the uniform policy did not violate those rights and was upheld by the court. In concluding this decision, the court created a four step test to determine the constitutionality of such uniform dress code policies. Under this test, uniform dress code policies pass constitutional muster if:

- First, the local school board must possess the right to make/pass such policies
- Second, the policy must promote a substantial interest of the board
- Third, the board has not adopted such a policy to censor student expression
- Fourth, the policy's restrictions on student expression are not greater than necessary to promote the board's interest (Dowling-Sendor, 2001).

Implementation of Uniform Policy

A sensitive phase of development for uniforms dress codes is the process of implementation. This process can mean the difference between a successful uniform policy and one that is under constant challenge. From the Long Beach school district, Superintendent Carl Cohn (1996) offers five suggestions for districts considering a uniform dress code policy. First, Cohn states that policy decisions that affect all parents and students can best be made by a school board that is stable. A dysfunctional school board can risk the success of any policy or reform movement. Second, it is suggested that a successful policy will result from a supportive community and consistent parental involvement. The Long Beach school district conducted a survey through the local media that showed 80% of parents and community members supported a school uniform dress code. Third, any system considering a school uniform dress code policy must plan in advance to provide resources to defend the policy from legal challenges. Fourth, a district must have strong site administrators for uniforms to be successful. A principal who is anything but enthusiastic will foster noncompliance in his/her school. Finally, Cohn (1996) suggests that a district must look toward community business partners and philanthropic relationships to help provide resources needed for the most economically stressed families to participate in the uniform dress code policy.

While taking the above research in mind, this researcher was required to complete an internship during the fall of 2009 for Mr. Rick Stout who is the Superintendent of Scotland County Schools. Mr. Stout came from a school district in North Carolina that utilized a uniform dress code policy and was interested in the opinions of parents in Scotland County

toward uniforms dress codes. Mr. Stout wanted to determine if parents would support a uniform dress code policy or did they wish to keep the current dress code policy. In order to answer this question for himself and the members of the school board, Mr. Stout asked this researcher to develop and conduct a survey (see Appendix A) of Scotland County's parents. The survey simply asked which dress code would they more likely support: a uniform dress code, a restrictive dress code, or the current dress code.

The survey process utilized two steps. First, parents were presented the dress code survey by their child's teacher during the Fall Parent/Teacher Conference Day on Thursday, October 15, 2009. Parents were asked by teachers to complete the survey and leave it with them to be returned to the school office. However, if a parent wished to take the survey home for completion, he/she was allowed to do so. The second step took place on Friday, October 16th when teachers were instructed to send the survey home with students whose parents were unable to attend the conference day. Finally, teachers were asked to collect incoming surveys until Tuesday, October 20th and then send all completed surveys to the school office on Wednesday, October 21st. Completed surveys were returned to the researcher through inter-office mail.

When collecting the surveys, the researcher continued to welcome completed surveys until November 24, 2009 hoping to increase the return rate and sample size to provide a better representation of the population. Out of 6,052 surveys sent out, only 1,304 were completed and returned for a final return rate of 22%. The survey results show that 62% of parents completing the survey wish to keep the current dress code which appears in Appendix A. However, 28% of parents surveyed supported a uniform dress code while only

8% of parents favored a more restrictive type of dress code (see Figure 1). However when respondents were able to make open comments, several parents made references to adjusting the current dress code to prohibit such trends as “sagging” and “oversized clothing”. Other comments made references to making the current dress code stricter with regard to shirts being tucked in and less revealing clothing for all students. For example, one parent responded, “No sagging, no shirt tails out, no midriffs, tank tops, halters or anything revealing.” Still, another parent comment echoes the concern for a stricter dress code in Scotland County says, “I do not have a problem with their casual dress code as long as the children aren’t showing their butts or wearing their shirts too tight with no offensive sayings or logos.” It is evident that for uniforms to be implemented in the schools of Scotland County, much public opinion will have to change for such a policy to be successful.

To assist school districts who are considering school uniforms, the Virginia State Board of Education and the U. S. Department of Education have published documents that outline successful uniform implementation procedures. In 1992 the Virginia State Board of Education was asked by the Virginia State Legislature to study and create model guidelines for the development and implementation of uniforms dress code policies. This document discerned four key elements needed for the successful development of a uniform dress code policy. First, the team states that parent and community organizations should be involved in planning and decision making processes from the beginning. Second, it is suggested that any uniform program should start in the elementary schools. Third, these guidelines propose that “all policies should stress the voluntary nature of parental and student participation” (p. 4). With regard to this element, the document does not make itself clear as to what it means by

“voluntary nature of parent and student participation.” This researcher does not know if this statement is concerning “participation” during planning and implementation or “participation” in the wearing of uniforms. Fourth, the final key element is the need for principal and faculty commitment and enthusiasm about the school uniform program (Virginia State Department of Education).

Likewise, in 1996 President Clinton ordered the U.S. Department of Education to publish and distribute to all public school districts across the nation a document titled *Manual on School Uniforms*. The purpose of this manual was to assist school districts with the successful implementation of school uniforms if desired. In a much more extensive manner than the Virginia document, this publication offers eight guidelines to assist parents, teachers, and school leaders with the implementation of a uniform dress code program. These guidelines are:

1. Get parents involved from the start.
2. Protect students’ religious rights.
3. Protect students’ rights of expression.
4. Decide if the policy will be mandatory or voluntary.
5. If the policy is to be mandatory, determine whether it will contain an “opt out” provision.
6. Students must not be required to wear a message. A logo such a school crest is not considered a message.
7. Provide a financial assistance program to help the neediest families participate in the uniform program.

8. Treat uniforms dress codes as a single part of an overall school safety improvement program (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

For any school system considering adoption of a uniform dress code policy, the above advice shares one key factor. Parental involvement is extremely important from early planning to implementation for a uniform program to be successful. Stakeholder buy-in is an important factor in reducing challenges and leveling the political battleground such policies face in courtrooms and boardrooms.

Chapter Summary

As the research above demonstrates, uniforms dress codes have proven effective in some respects, ineffective in others, and still complicated when considered by school boards. Researchers such as Elder (1999), Holloman, et al. (1996), Tucker (1999), and Murray (1997) have discovered uniform dress codes to be worth the struggle of implementation because they have been found to reduce discipline issues, reduce visible gang activity, and improve the school climate for learning. Other researchers have found uniform dress codes to be an economic advantage with uniform clothing costing less than traditional “school clothes” and as a result, decreasing competition between students based on clothing styles (Cohn, 1996; Massare, 2004). However, uniforms dress codes have not been proven as a means to improve academic achievement (Brunsma, 2004; Yeung, 2009).

Perceptions of uniform dress codes are as equally varied as is the research on their effectiveness. Many researchers have found school administrators and teachers hold the highest regard for uniform dress codes and credit them with decreasing misbehavior and improving school climate (DeMichell, et. al, 2000; Massare, 2004; Wilson, 1999). In

addition, Wade and Stafford (2003) found that teachers in schools with a uniform dress code perceived less gang presence while students did not perceive a decreased gang presence on the school campus. Perceptions can vary even within the same school.

School uniform dress code policies come with unique challenges. The largest challenge will come from parents or other groups who claim that uniforms violate a student's First Amendment rights to freedom of expression. To date, no school uniform case has been heard by the U. S. Supreme Court. However, in 1999 a school uniform case (*Canady v. Bossier Parrish School Board*, 204 F. 3d 437 5th Cir. 2001) was heard and the uniform policy was upheld by the U. S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. Thus far, the courts have been supportive of uniform dress code policies that are designed to support learning. A second complicated challenge to school uniforms is the process of implementation. To this end, it is important for policy makers to keep in mind that parental involvement and stakeholder buy-in are the most important factors to successful policy implementation (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Considering the large amount of research discussed above, this research study proposes to investigate the perceptions of parents, faculty members, and administrators from four rural middle schools in North Carolina. This project will compare middle schools with uniform dress codes to middle schools without uniform dress codes. The project's focus will concentrate on the perceptions of student behavior and the school's climate for learning. Descriptive statistics about discipline and attendance will be disaggregated from all schools. The following chapter will discuss the research methodology to be used in the study.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Overview

Since the late 1980's when uniforms dress codes were first introduced into the public schools on a large scale basis, researchers have been pounding away at the basic question of "what good are they"? National research done concerning their effectiveness to improve learning has been done by such researchers as David Brunsma (2004) and Ryan Yenug (2009). These researchers have concluded that no evidence exists to claim that uniform dress codes improve academic achievement. However, other researchers such as Elder (1999) and Paliokas, et al. (1996), which have focused their attention more on the local level, have found that uniform dress codes are successful in improving school discipline and making the school climate more conducive for learning.

Furthermore, researchers such as Black (1998) and Paliokas, et al. (1996) go on to add that further research is needed in the above areas and that such research should be designed to compare schools in multiple districts and compare uniform schools with non-uniform schools. In addition, much of the research done about the effectiveness of school uniforms has involved schools in larger urban areas. There is a lack of research that focuses on middle schools in rural areas. One of the objectives of this research will be to add to the knowledge base about the effectiveness of school uniform dress codes in rural middle schools.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used qualitative methods to analyze the perceptions of effectiveness of school uniform dress code policies. The project compared

middle schools with school uniform dress codes policies to middle schools without school uniform dress codes policies. The project utilized descriptive data to compare average attendance rates and average out-of-school suspensions from each school site for four years (2010-2011 to 2013-2014). Finally, interviews were conducted with parents, teachers/faculty members, and administrators to uncover their perceptions of uniform dress codes policies as they relate to improving student behavior and the school's climate for learning.

Research Design

The research focused on four rural middle schools in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina. This project is a comparative case study to compare middle schools with uniform dress codes policies to middle schools without uniform dress codes policies. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that in comparative case studies two or more case studies are done and then compared and contrasted. Cases are selected for comparison due to the absence or presence of some characteristic not found in the original cases. For our purposes here, the characteristic present or absent is the use of uniform dress codes in middle schools.

A total of four middle schools were selected for inclusion in the study. Two middle schools selected for inclusion uses a school board adopted school uniform dress code policy. The final two middle schools selected for inclusion utilized a traditional school dress code. Uniform and non-uniform schools were located in different school districts. Uniform schools chosen for inclusion were located within the same school district so that each school utilizes the same uniform dress code policy approved by their local board of education. Non-uniform schools were also located within the same school district so they also will comply with the same board approved dress code policy.

The research project was divided into two phases. In phase one, the project analyzed four years of descriptive data to explore if middle schools with uniform dress codes have better or worse rates of attendance and out-of-school suspensions than do middle school without uniform dress codes. This phase did not utilize in-depth quantitative methods, but rather basic descriptive techniques to define an average rate for each set of school data. This data is summarized and displayed in tables located in chapter five of this project.

In phase two, qualitative methods were used to explore the perspectives of teachers, parents, and administrators. Past the descriptive data for each school, the objective of this research was to create greater understanding of the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents as they relate to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of uniform dress codes. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) find that qualitative methods are appropriate in this case study because they are naturalistic in nature due to the fact that qualitative research is concerned with the lived experiences of its subjects. Qualitative research seeks to understand the perspectives of those who live the experience under investigation. Finally, at its central core, qualitative research is concerned with understanding “meaning” as it is related to how a subject experiences the concept(s) being explored (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). With this in mind, Hatch (2002) affirms that educational settings are especially conducive to qualitative methods when exploring perceptions and conditions within schools.

The design of phase two focused on perspectives and had two objectives. First, these groups were interviewed to understand their views about how uniform dress codes may or may not influence student behavior. The second objective of the interviews was to discover if these groups perceived that uniform dress codes created a difference in school climate that

is more conducive for learning. To meet the above objectives, a total of four semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the principal of each school site. These interviews are described in greater detail later in this chapter. The second stage of interviews consist of a total of eight focus group interviews conducted with groups of faculty members and groups of parents from each school site. Patton (2002) views focus group interviews as highly efficient and profitable because they are an easy means to increasing the number of one's sample size or data collection points. Hatch (2002) agrees and says that focus groups can be a valuable source of triangulation because data from a variety of sources can be very powerful. Focus groups may also offer participants a source of security that may lead to a more candid exchange of ideas than found in individual interviews. Group dynamics may allow subjects a greater willingness to expose ideas that may not fit with the researcher's expectations (Hatch, 2002). Patton (2002) says that focus group participants tend to provide a type of checks and balances as they weed out extreme or false information from each other. As asserted by Flick (2002), focus groups better correspond to the natural way in which opinions are created and exchanged within a social setting with multiple, diverse subjects engaging in the exchange of thoughts and ideas. These focus group interviews will be described in greater detail later in this chapter.

Case Study Research

The basic objective of this research was to determine if the presence of uniform dress codes has an effect on student discipline and the learning climate of select middle schools. In order to answer the research questions presented later in this chapter, this researcher has chosen to conduct this project as a comparison case study. Researchers such as Yin (1994)

define case study research in terms of its process. He continues to define this method as an empirical study that investigates a phenomenon within a real-life context. Yin (2003) says that case studies have long been a stable method of conducting research used to evaluate educational innovations and inform policy administration. Merriam (1988) defines case study research as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Merriam (1998) concludes that the most defining characteristic of case study research lies in defining the object under study, the case. The case then can be a class, a teacher, a principal, a program, or a specific policy occurring in a “bounded context” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Merriam (1998) states that phenomenon which qualifies to be considered case study research must occur within a bounded system which means that data to be collected must be limited in some manner. Data for this project is limited by the number of middle schools which use school uniforms. While the population of middle schools that utilize school uniform policies is unknown, it is a finite number. The sample size for this project included only two middle schools which utilize uniform dress codes. With the above definitions in mind, the “phenomenon or specific policy” under consideration here is the use of school uniforms in middle schools.

Merriam (1998) further delineates case study research by its intended purpose rather than it is to describe, interpret, or to evaluate. This research project may be considered evaluative in nature because such case studies involving making descriptions, explanations, and judgments about the phenomenon under investigation. Yin (2003) says that these type case studies can suggest clues about cause and effect relationships but with limited certainty; however, he recognizes the value of this type research in order to evaluate the outcomes of

specific interventions or programs. Merriam (1998) concludes that case study research is the best form of evaluation because the data produced is richly descriptive, grounded, holistic, and lifelike. While this research project did not seek to evaluate the use of uniform dress codes, it did attempt to understand if uniform dress codes have an impact on student discipline and the learning climate compared to schools without uniform dress codes. Merriam (1998) states that case study research is appropriate when the objective is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of a program or make a judgment about the program's impact on a social system.

This research project utilized a multi-case or comparative case study design which uses multiple research sites to compare uniform dress code schools with schools that do not use uniform dress codes. Merriam (1998) says that the more cases used in the study, the more valid an interpretation is likely to be. Including multiple cases is a method that strengthens the precision, generalizability, and the stability of the findings (Merriam, 1998). An additional strength of case study research includes the ability to study complex social systems which encompass multiple variables in real-life situations that produce rich descriptive accounts (Merriam, 1998). However, case study research is not without its limitations. Merriam (1998) warns that case study research can be limited by the integrity of the researcher because he/she may oversimplify or exaggerate a situation. In addition, the researcher is many times the only means of data collection, thus researcher bias is an ongoing concern (Merriam, 1998). As a safeguard, the use of multiple cases or research sites allows one to ask the same question of different sources of evidence allowing for triangulation. As

stated by Yin (2003), “if all sources point to the same answer, you have successfully triangulated your data” (p. 83).

Research Questions

As described above, phase one of the research project analyzed multiple years of descriptive data. This data was used to see if middle schools with uniform dress codes have better or worse rates of attendance, office discipline referrals, and out-of-school suspensions than do middle schools without uniform dress codes. Questions #1, #2, and #3 that follow were used to complete the first phase of research for the project.

1. What differences exist in student attendance in middle schools with uniform dress code policies and in those without such policies?
2. What differences exist in discipline referrals in middle schools with uniform dress code policies and in those without such policies?
3. What differences exist in out-of-school suspensions in middle schools with uniform dress code policies and in those without such policies?

In phase two of the project, qualitative methods were used to answer the final research questions. These questions seek to understand the perceptions of certain stakeholders. This phase of the research involved individual and focus group interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with the principal of each school included in the project. Focus group interviews were conducted with a group of teachers from each school site. In addition, focus group interviews were also conducted with a group of parents from each school site. The focus on perspectives had two objectives. First, these groups were interviewed to understand their views about how uniform dress codes influence student behavior. Second, these

interviews were used to explore perceptions about the school's climate and if it is more conducive to learning in middle schools with uniform dress codes as opposed to middle schools without uniform dress codes. Questions #4 and #5 were used to fulfill the second phase of the research.

4. What differences exist in the perceptions of administrators, faculty members, and parents about student behavior in middle schools with uniform dress code policies and in middle schools without such policies?
5. What differences exist in the perceptions of administrators, faculty members, and parents about the school's climate for learning in middle schools with uniform dress code policies and in middle schools without such policies?

Selection of Research Sites and Sample Criteria

For the purposes of this research project, homogeneous sampling was utilized in order to collect the desired data. This type sampling has been chosen because this project seeks to find out if there is some difference or no difference in middle schools that have uniform dress codes compared to middle schools that do not have uniform dress codes. Patton (2002) suggests that homogeneous samples are best for the purposes of describing a particular subgroup in greatest detail. In this case, the subgroup in question is middle schools with uniform dress codes. Patton (2002) further goes on to add that focus group interviews are inherently based on homogeneous samples.

For this project, four middle schools were selected as research sites. Two middle schools selected for inclusion in the study utilize a uniform dress code policy and the final two middle schools selected for inclusion utilize a traditional school dress code. Uniform

schools chosen for inclusion were located within the same school district so that each school utilizes the same uniform dress code policy approved by their local board of education. Non-uniform schools were also located within the same school district so they also will comply with the same board approved dress code policy. Uniform dress schools were located in different districts than non-uniform dress schools. The middle schools selected for inclusion were similar to each other in grade levels served, number of students, location in rural areas of North Carolina, and similar in the demographics of its student population.

From each selected school site a sample size of at least five participants were involved in either an individual or focus group interview. The principal of each school site was asked to participate in a semi-structured, face-to-face interview. Focus group interviews were conducted with two different groups from each school site. The first group consisted of teachers / faculty members who were randomly selected to participate in a focus group interview. The criteria for selection into this group included a willingness to participate in a focus group interview and being a certified faculty member currently working at the school site. Potential participants were either teachers from a grade level served by the school, teachers from the Exceptional Children's (EC) Department, or certified staff members representing the elective classes such as physical education, art, music, computers, band, the media specialist, counselor, school nurse, or school social worker.

The final interview groups consisted of parents who were randomly selected to participate in a focus group interview. The criteria for selection into this group include a willingness to participate in a focus group interview; group members were employed at the

school site, and group members were the parent or legal guardian of a student currently enrolled and attending the selected school site.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was generated from three different primary data sources. Those data sources include descriptive statistics from each school site, individual interview data from each school principal, and focus group interview data from groups of teachers and groups of parents from each selected school.

First, each selected middle school was asked to provide four years of attendance data, office referral data, and out-of-school suspension data. The resulting statistics was used to compare middle schools with uniform dress codes to middle schools without uniform dress codes. The data was only used as descriptive statistics to compare means and average rates for each school. This data has been displayed in various tables located in Chapter Five of this study.

Second, each school principal was asked to participate in a semi-structured face to face interview. The face to face interview is most advantageous and allows the researcher to probe for more in-depth answers to interview questions. Individual interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half. Interviews were conducted by the researcher on the school site and on a date and time agreeable to the principal. Interview questions were provided to the principal at least 24 hours prior to the interview. An interview guide was utilized to insure internal reliability (Appendix B).

Third, multiple focus groups was interviewed from each school site. The first focus group will be made up of teachers / faculty members who were randomly selected to

participate in the interview process. A second focus group from each school site was made up of parents randomly selected to participate in the interview process. Due to limited participants agreeing to be interviewed, one group of teachers and one group of parents were interviewed from each school site.

As a result, a total of twelve focus group interviews were conducted for the purposes of data collection for this study. Specific criteria for selection as members in the focus groups were described in greater detail in the selection and criteria section of this chapter. Interview questions were provided to group members at least 24 hours prior to the interview. An interview guide was utilized to insure internal reliability (Appendices C and D).

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed as quickly as possible after the completion of the interview. All data resulting from the interviews was hand coded by the researcher utilizing common codes which emerged during the data analysis phase of the study.

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of this research project, the final merit is determined by an expression of what does this mean for administrators and policy makers in the world of education. Hatch (2002) says that “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148). She goes on to explain that analysis is the organizing of data that allows a “researcher to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). Data from multiple sources offers greater potential for more accurate development of common patterns and themes. Since several sources of data exist, each source was considered individually and

then brought together as one body of data. According to Patton (2002), triangulation does not necessarily mean the use of multiple methods for producing data. Rather, he says that triangulation is the use of multiple data sources. The final analysis of this study involves a triangulation of data from descriptive statistics, individual interviews with four principals, focus group interviews with four groups of teachers, and focus group interviews with four groups of parents.

Patton (2002) states that “developing some form of manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis” (p. 463). To begin the process of analysis, individual interviews and focus group interviews will be transcribed to begin the process of better understanding the data collected. Hatch (2002) suggests that analysis of interview data begins as soon as the act of collection has begun. This will allow the researcher to shape the direction of future interviews based on what is actually being found or not being found in the interviews (Hatch, 2002).

For the purposes of this project, this researcher has chosen to use a three step, hand coding scheme explained by Patton (2002). In step one; the data is first read through for the purpose of developing a useful coding categories scheme. Step two involves a second reading of the data to begin the formal process of systematically dividing and separating the data into the coding categories developed in the first reading. The third step involves multiple readings of the data to insure that all data collected is completely consumed within the coding categories. Highlighter pens will be utilized to divide and identify categories (Patton, 2002). With such a broad explanation of the process of analysis, one may wonder, when will such analysis conclude? Hatch (2002) offers some advice on how one knows

when the process of analysis is complete. She states that analysis is complete when the data is able to tell a complete story; and most importantly, data analysis is complete when it has answered the research questions.

Validity and Reliability

Research validity refers to whether the researcher hears what he/she thinks he/she hears (Flick, 2002). Merriam (1998) says that validity is summarized by how accurately does the research findings match reality. Internal validity is viewed by Merriam (1998) as a definite strength of qualitative research because humans are the primary means of data collection and analysis. In this manner, interpretations of reality are viewed directly without the interjection of some type of collection instrument between us and our participants (Merriam, 1998). Internal validity may be validated by triangulation and peer examination. As discussed earlier, triangulation of interview data, due to the existence of multiple data sources (principals, teachers, and parents), will enhance both validity and reliability of this study (Hatch, 2002). As stated by Yin (2003), “if all sources point to the same answer, you have successfully triangulated your data” (p. 83). Finally, peer examination can be utilized by asking one’s peers to examine the findings as they emerge (Merriam, 1998).

Research reliability concerns the idea of replication. Reliability insures that the research study can be duplicated in other locations and times. Reliability in research is based upon the assumption of the existence of a single reality and if one studies it over and over it will yield the same results each time. As research involves human subjects, problems arise because human behavior is never static (Merriam, 1998). In dealing with interview data, Flick (2002) indicates that reliability can be increased through the use of an explicit interview

guide. This research study used interview guides for all individual and focus group interviews (Appendices B, C, & D). These interview guides provided foundational questions to be asked of each individual and group. The researcher conducted all interviews, thus helping to insure a uniformity of procedure for collecting interview data. All interviews were hand coded by the researcher using the same code headings for all interviews. This process will also help to protect procedural reliability and help to create an accurate audit trail (Flick, 2002). As with validity, triangulation is a useful means of strengthening reliability (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation for this research project was accomplished utilizing multiple interview populations, research sites, and multiple methods of data collection.

Finally, external validity is concerned with how well the results of a research project can be generalized to larger populations or other similar situations. Merriam (1998) finds that the issue of generalizability plagues qualitative researchers more so than researchers who use correlation or experimental research designs. In quantitative designs, generalizability is insured through conditions such as equivalency between the sample and population sizes, control of the sample size, and random sampling. Thus, the challenge becomes how to generalize from a single case or from qualitative research at all (Merriam, 1998). However, Merriam (1998) does suggest the following strategies to enhance the possibility of generalizing qualitative research results. First, through each type of interview, care was taken to provide rich, thick descriptions so that readers will be able to compare their personal situation in order to find similarities with the research data. Finally, generalizability is strengthened through the use of multiple interview populations and multiple research sites or

cases. In this way, the reader is able to apply the results to a greater range of other similar situations (Merriam, 1998).

Subjectivity Statement

To this research project I bring a unique perspective from a varied background. I am an only child raised by a working middle class mother and father who are still husband and wife and living in the same home. I was raised in a protestant Christian home and maintain a deep Christian faith to this day. I am a first generation college graduate on both my mother's and father's sides of our families. I have two master's degrees: one from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke in School Counseling and another from East Carolina University in School Administration. Currently, I am single and have no children of my own.

I have 24 years of experience in the field of education. I began my career in the classroom teaching mathematics and science for the first seven years. I started my teaching career with the Richmond County School System in 1992 teaching sixth grade at Monroe Avenue Elementary School. In 1997 I moved to Hamlet Junior High School to teach 7th grade math and science for the next two school years. In 1999, I became School Counselor and Testing Coordinator for Carver Middle School in the Scotland County School System. I maintained that position for four years until 2003 when I became Assistant Principal at Carver Middle School where I remained for seven years. In 2010 I asked my superintendent to allow me to gain new experiences in school administration; as a result, I was reassigned as an assistant principal in the elementary grades. I was assistant principal at Covington Street Elementary School and Washington Park Elementary School until June of 2012. On July 1, 2012 I became Principal of Pate-Gardner Elementary School until June of 2015 when the

Scotland County School Board chose to close the school due to the consolidation of Pate-Gardner Elementary School and Washington Park Elementary School into one school site. In June of 2015 I was named to my current position as Principal of South Scotland Elementary School.

My association with school uniforms started in fourth grade. Dissatisfied with the public schools, my mother and father enrolled me into a church supported Christian school in Greenville, South Carolina. This particular Christian school used the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum that included a recommended school uniform of navy blue bottom garments for all students and white or red top garments for all students. Male students had to wear a neck tie printed with small American Flags over a navy blue background. I continued in this type uniform into my junior year of high school when we moved back to North Carolina. I finished high school at a small church supported Christian school in Rockingham, NC. At this school, we did not have to wear a uniform except on Wednesdays when we were required to attend chapel service and wear a neck tie, dress shirt, and dress slacks.

My next experience with school uniforms came in 1997 when I was teaching mathematics and science at Hamlet Junior High School in Hamlet, NC. The parents of our school became dissatisfied with their children's current manner of dress and approached our Principal, Dr. Watkins, with the idea of exploring a uniform dress code policy for Hamlet Junior High School. During the 1997-1998 school year a uniform dress code committee was formed and included teachers, parents, and students. This committee was given the task of researching and exploring the idea of a uniform dress code. At the conclusion of that school

year, the dress code committee had designed a tentative uniform dress code and that summer gained school board approval for its implementation starting with the 1998-1999 school year. As a result, in 2004 the Richmond County Board of Education voted to implement a uniform dress code for all students in grades K-12. This policy is still in effect to this day.

I guess one could say that I have had a long time relationship with uniform dress codes in one manner or another. I like the idea of school children in uniforms and admit that I am a supporter of such policies. However, after doing some research into the politics of school uniforms and finding national research (Brunsma, 2004) that basically said uniform dress codes had no positive effects on children in schools; I became uncertain of an idea that I had supported and helped to implement. With this curiosity, I embarked upon this research project.

Limitations of the Study

The use of multiple data sources consisting of principals, teacher groups, and parent groups has allowed for a greater capacity to gather a richer collection of data on the topic. However, as with most qualitative studies, the most evident limitation is small sample size. This limitation causes generalizability of the results to become compromised. However, Hatch (2002) argues that qualitative researchers find no direct relationship between sample size and quality of a study. The sample size of only four middle schools hinders any results being generalized to the greater population of middle schools with or without a uniform dress code. A final total of interview participants results in only four principals, twelve certified staff members, and twelve parents being interviewed for this project. This fact greatly limits the generalizability of this study.

A further limitation is the fact that all selected school sites are within small rural school districts of North Carolina. This fact is purposeful, however, limiting in that the project's results may be considered unrelated to larger schools or larger urban school districts. However, this fact is also unique to this study because little research exists concerning the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in rural settings. Another limitation is the selection of data sources for the purposes of interviews. Several populations did not have input into the results of this study. Those populations included students, teacher assistants, and non-instructional school personnel such as custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, or office workers.

However, as noted earlier case study research carries its own limitations. Such research can be limited by the integrity of the researcher because he/she may oversimplify or exaggerate a situation. In addition, researcher bias is an ongoing concern because in many situations he/she is the only means of data collection. Finally, lack of rigor, training, and experience of the researcher may also create limitations for research (Merriam, 1998).

Chapter Summary

Through the use of multiple data sources and several qualitative strategies, it is the purpose of this study to understand more about how middle schools with uniform dress codes compares to middle schools without uniform dress codes. This study, unlike others of its kind, has focused on middle schools in rural North Carolina. This research project directly compared middle schools with uniform dress code policies to middle schools that do not have uniform dress code policies. The research has been presented as a comparison case study. Researchers such as Yin (2003) says that case studies have long been a stable method of

conducting research used to evaluate educational innovations and assist administrators with policy development. This project attempted to understand if uniform dress codes have an impact on student discipline and the learning climate compared to schools without uniform dress codes. Merriam (1998) states that case study research is appropriate when the purpose is to formulate judgments about a program's impact on social systems such as schools. The project has been presented as a multi-case comparison study. Including multiple cases in such research is a method that strengthens the precision, generalizability, and stability of its findings (Merriam, 1998).

Descriptive statistics concerning attendance and out-of-school suspensions from each school site were used to compare uniform dress schools with non-uniform dress schools. Individual interviews and focus group interviews were utilized to understand the perceptions of principals, teachers, and parents as they relate to uniform dress codes and how they may affect student behavior and the school's climate for learning. The resulting data generated through these interviews was hand coded by the researcher. The results of these interviews were triangulated to determine any emergent differences inherent in uniform schools as opposed to non-uniform schools. Common themes and patterns are highlighted in chapter four to provide the reader with a richer understanding of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of uniform dress codes. At the conclusion of the study, it is hoped that the resulting data will be used by local school boards and school administrators to make more informed and effective decisions regarding the implementation of uniform dress code policies. In chapter four, the findings of this study are reviewed in detail.

CHAPTER 4

Data collection and analysis

Introduction

Through data collection from individual and focus group interviews with principals, staff members, and parents in middle schools without a uniform dress codes policy and middle schools with a uniform dress code policy, several consistent themes and patterns emerged across groups as well as several contradictions that came to light. The following data was collected through individual and focus group interviews occurring over the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years.

Four middle schools were asked to participate in the current study; two middle schools without a uniform dress code policy and two middle schools with a uniform dress code policy. The two middle schools without a uniform dress code policy were located in the same school district or county. The two middle schools with a uniform dress code policy were also located in the same school district or county. The two school districts or counties are located beside each other in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina. This may be a limitation of this study because these schools may not accurately represent a wider distribution of middle schools across our state.

Upon the first visit to each school site the principals were asked to participate in an individual face-to-face interview with the researcher. Faculty members were asked to participate in a focus group interview through a letter (Appendix E) placed in each staff members' school mailbox. In addition, parents were asked to participate in a focus group interview through a letter (Appendix F) sent home with each student in each school. Upon

return of the letters from staff and parents each staff member or parent who agreed to participate was personally contacted by the researcher in order to arrange a date and time for the interview that was mutually agreeable to each party. Each interview was conducted using the prescribed interview guides (Appendices B, C, and D) and each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for use in writing this report.

For purposes of organization this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the findings from middle schools without a uniform dress code policy. The second section will discuss findings from middle schools with a uniform dress code policy. The final section will be a cross case analysis and comparison of middle schools without a uniform dress code policy compared to middle schools with a uniform dress code policy.

Non-Uniform Schools

The middle schools without a uniform dress code policy are located in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina in a “Miropolitan” statistical area with a population of 36,025 residents. The county residential population is made up of 46.5% Caucasian; 39.1% African American; 11.3% Native American; and 3.1% Hispanic and Multi-racial. The county covers 318.85 square miles and the median household income was \$30,472.00 in 2012 (Census, 2013a).

Non-Uniform A

During the 2013-2014 school year Non-Uniform School A had a total enrollment of 523 students. The student body is broken down as follows: 47% are African American, 31% are European American, 16% are Native American, 3% are Hispanic American, 2% are

Multi-Racial, and 1% is Asian American. In addition, 78% of the student population qualified for free or reduced meal prices.

Non-Uniform School B

During the 2013-2014 school year Non-Uniform School B had a total enrollment of 376 students. The student body is broken down as follows: 45% are African American, 34% are European American, 14% are Native American, 2% are Hispanic American, 4% are Multi-Racial, and 1% is Asian American. In addition, 75% of the student population qualified for free or reduced meal prices.

Non-Uniform Principals

Each principal at the non-uniform schools had at least 30 years of experience each in the field of education at the time of our interviews. In addition, both principals have over 10 years' experience as a building level administrator at the middle school level (Grades 6-8). Uniquely, one of the non-uniform principals has also been a principal of a middle school with a uniform dress code policy.

The principals were asked to describe the factors that each believed contribute to or distracted from the climate of discipline in their school. Emphatically, each principal expressed the major factor that distracted from a school's climate of discipline was simply the issue of consistency or inconsistency between teachers. One principal noted "if you have any part of your staff that is not doing it and they are not consistent with it, then it kind of destroys what you are trying to do." Another principal sees the issue of inconsistency rooted in a generational disconnect. For example, what one teacher calls a classroom disruption, another teacher may see as classroom engagement. The principal says it may be just related

to a change in times and the more veteran teachers “cannot relate in terms of culture change.” This principal said that, “A lot of times the seasoned veterans cannot relate to what I call the CD or new generation that is out here and it causes a disconnect.”

Second, the principals were asked to describe their belief about how the school’s dress code contributes or distracts from the school’s climate of discipline. Both principals agreed that the dress code sets the tone for school discipline. One principal stated that by setting clear expectations for student dress also transfers into clear expectations for student behavior. The other principal stated similarly that when a dress code was firmly and consistently enforced by teachers and the administration that it “contributes to a good climate of discipline in your school.” This principal also said that “when you make them toe the line on the dress code, then they know you are watching them.”

Both principals also commented on the issue of time as it relates to the enforcement of a dress code. Enforcement of a dress code can take time away from instruction if one is not careful. A principal said that it is not wise to have a lot of “do’s or do not’s” with regard to the dress code but instead make sure that the expectations for dress are clearly stated up front to students and parents. This principal did not want the staff playing the role of dress code police; however, the principal stated that when dress code violations became a distraction to instruction, then the staff knows to address the situation in a professional manner. With regard to the time issue, the other principal stated that a dress code can steal a lot of instructional time if you are not consistent and do not demonstrate to students that you are serious about the little things within your structure.

Finally, one principal addressed the issue of safety as it relates to a school dress code. The principal said that the dress code is a big part of school safety due to the changing times we live in today. For example, the principal said that when one first went into administration it would have never been odd for a student to wear a trench coat to school and in his/her classes. However, times have proven that such an article can pose a danger to the school community and is now addressed in the school dress code. This principal said that time has changed how student dress is considered in schools.

As indicated above, one of the non-uniform principals has also been a principal in a middle school with a uniform dress code. I asked the administrator to address the differences one noted between how the school dress code contributed to the school's climate of discipline in a uniform school and a non-uniform school. The principal stated that when he started as principal the school did not utilize a uniform dress code as it was an optional school based decision. However, as he began to observe how the female students pushed the letter of the current dress code, he decided that his school would opt-in to the county uniform dress code the following year. The principal stated that implementation was not easy and was time consuming but proved to be "one of the best moves I ever made." The principal concluded that a lot of issues he deals with today could be dealt with much easier with school uniforms. The principal of the other non-uniform school did not share this same opinion.

Third, the principals were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the school's climate of learning. Some of the same ideas and themes were expressed in their answers here as was in the second question. One principal said that in his opinion poverty was a distracting factor to the learning climate of the school. For example,

one student's inability to afford clean or appropriate clothing can cause a distraction in two ways. First, what the student may wear to school is inappropriate according to the dress code and the student must get a change of clothes from the office or from home; thus creating a situation that causes the student to lose valuable instructional time from class. Second, a student's lack of money to afford the popular fashions can cause a distraction, especially in middle school, where the student may be picked on or excluded from their social group.

The other principal responded that consistency or the lack of consistency is a great factor that distracts and contributes to a school's climate of learning. The principal further explained that a key to keeping a learning focus in school is to have consistent enforcement of the rules in every classroom and in the principal's office to support the teachers. It is important for the faculty, staff, and administrators to be on the same page with discipline. The principal says that children will do exactly what you allow them to do and if they see that you are not consistent with a dress code or uniform dress code; things can get out of hand and become a distraction to learning. In addition, this principal further stated that if a school has too many rules and regulations then one finds himself spending too much time enforcing rules and that becomes a distraction to learning.

Fourth, the principals were asked to describe their beliefs about how the school's dress code contributed to or distracted from the school's climate of learning. Both principals were together in this area saying once again that consistency is the greatest factor with regard to how the school's dress code affects the climate of learning. Both principals agreed that a school's dress code is one driving factor that sets the tone for learning across the building. With this in mind, both principals said that at this point consistency by teachers to enforce

the dress code and consistency by the administration to support teachers becomes really important to the learning environment. The principals concluded that whichever form of dress requirements were in place, a dress code or a uniform dress code, being consistent with enforcement was the greatest factor that contributed to the school's climate of learning.

Fifth, each principal was asked if they would make any changes to their current dress code; if so, what changes would you make and why or if you would not make changes, why would you not? Consistently, both principals said they would not make any changes to their school's current dress code. One principal said he would make no changes to the school's dress code because his current staff was consistent with how they enforced the rules and that allowed them to focus on educating children. In addition, the second principal would also not make any changes to the school's current dress code. This principal also went so far as to say that he prefers a dress code to a uniform dress code because it allows students to be different, have choices, and express their individuality and personality. This principal expanded on his belief about a uniform dress code saying that in his opinion a uniform dress code was more time consuming and would distract staff members from concentrating on educating children. The principal said that a uniform policy was two dimensional as far as its enforcement. The principal believed that that a uniform dress code would complicate the dress code process because now one must make sure that students are dressed in the proper colors, belt, socks, shoes, and etc. In short, with a uniform dress code students/parents must make sure that articles of clothing are not only appropriate for school but also meets the uniform dress code policy in that articles of clothing are of the correct color and style.

As noted above, one of these principals has a unique perspective as the principal of a non-uniform middle school and as a past principal of a uniform middle school. With this fact in mind, I asked this principal to elaborate on his preference of a dress code compared to a uniform dress code and why so? The principal would not really declare a preference but restated that if one has a good staff that consistently enforces the dress code then it makes little sense to have a uniform policy. However, if a staff is not consistent with enforcement then a uniform dress code makes it easier to enforce the rules. A uniform dress code policy makes it easier to determine if a particular article of clothing is appropriate for school. The principal continued by saying that uniforms saved parents money on school clothing and aggravation in the mornings getting kids dressed for school. In conclusion, the principal said that uniforms are not the answer for the dress code battle, they just make it easier; however, if the administrator is not willing to enforce the rules, uniforms are not any better than any other form of dress code.

Non-Uniform Teachers (Certified Staff Members)

As noted earlier, all certified staff members at each selected school received a letter (Appendix E) in his/her school mailbox asking them to take part in a focus group interview. After the letters were returned to the researcher, emails and phone calls were placed to all potential participants asking them to take part in a focus group interview. At non-uniform school A, 47 letters of invitation were sent out with only 3 letters being returned and only two certified staff members agreeing to take part in the focus group interview. The focus group interview took place after instructional hours, at the school site, and in the school's

conference room. The certified staff members representing non-uniform school A included one female 6th grade teacher and one male 7th grade teacher.

At non-uniform school B, 39 letters were sent out with only 6 letters being returned and five certified staff members agreeing to take part in the focus group interview. The interview took place after instructional hours, at the school site, and in the school's conference room. The certified staff members representing non-uniform school B included two female 7th grade teachers and three female 8th grade teachers. Each focus group interview was conducted using a prescribed interview guide (Appendix C) which was sent to each participant prior to the interview or delivered to the participant on the day of the interview. The information that follows is a summary of the common themes and ideas expressed by the interview participants.

During our interviews the staff members were asked to describe the factors they thought either distracted or contributed to the climate of learning at their respective schools. The staff members at one non-uniform dress school commented that things such as a teacher's use of ridicule and sarcasm were a distraction to the climate of discipline. In addition, they also said that the climate of discipline was compromised by lack of engaging instruction, social media, and classroom drama. One teacher included that clothing issues were a distraction to the climate of discipline at school. This teacher stated that it was discouraging when one would have to stop instruction to correct a clothing issue; such as, a shirt tail being out, pants sagging too low, a skirt too short, or exposed cleavage multiple times during the class period. Furthermore, the teacher stated that it was additionally discouraging because one would see the same student being corrected for the same dress

code infraction in the next class period or all throughout the day by multiple teachers while never seeing a student face a consequence from the administration. However, both teachers agreed that developing trust and a positive rapport with students helped to contribute to the school's climate of discipline.

Other staff members looked mostly at the factors that contributed to the school's climate of discipline. These teachers said that consistency with how staff members enforce the school's code of conduct, consistency among grade level team members, and consistency with how the administration supports and holds staff members accountable is a great contributor to the climate of discipline. In addition, these teachers discussed how important holding high expectations for students and the administration holding high expectations for the staff are to creating a positive climate of discipline in the school. One teacher said "it means something when the teacher is committed to high expectations themselves and models the desired behaviors." Finally, this group of teachers talked about the benefits of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) at their school. One teacher said that students understand that if they do not get their stamps by having poor behavior then they do not get privileges like going to the prom. The teachers at this school said that it is important that the students know the school's administration supports them in dealing with discipline and because of this students are less likely to get into trouble.

Next, staff members were asked to discuss how the school's dress code contributed or distracted from the school's climate of discipline. At one school a staff member talked about how current trends in clothing made it more difficult for children from economically disadvantaged homes to fit in with their peer group. Furthermore, clothing trends help to

separate the current generation from generations past and help to provide students with their own identity; currently, it is the “hip-hop” culture. This staff member also commented that a uniform dress code policy would help to compensate for economic issues (poverty). The teacher said that school uniform dress may help eliminate students being judged unfairly because they do not have the latest fashions. Another staff member commented that inconsistency with the administration supporting teachers when they enforce the current dress code rules was a distraction to discipline and a major waste of instructional time. The teacher stated that “the children don’t take it (the dress code) seriously; and to me, it sets a precedent that you can correct it and nothing is really going to happen.”

Staff members from the other non-uniform dress school agreed that having a school dress code definitely contributed to the school’s climate of discipline because it represented the school’s expectations for student dress. The teachers said that the dress code represented what they could do to enhance learning and discourage distractions resulting from inappropriate attire at school. However, it seems that keeping up with current trends in adolescent clothing can be a difficult task for any school staff. In fact, one teacher commented that over the summer the school’s improvement team would address one concern about a current clothing trend and then designers would come up with a new clothing distraction to replace it the very next fall. This teacher commented that “those darn designers keep finding ways to mess up our dress code.” These teachers noted also that when the dress code was not enforced consistently among all teachers, distractions to the climate of discipline could occur. Specifically, the conversation pointed to a belief that support staff, staff members that did not teach in a core academic area, were a little more relaxed with

dress code enforcement due to the fact that these staff members may have developed different types of relationships with students such as a school counselor.

Generally, this group of staff members felt that the school had a good dress code and did a fair job with enforcement; however, concerns still surrounded two specific areas addressed in the dress code (Appendix H). First, as the dress code addresses the length of skirts that can be worn to school it states that the length of the skirt must meet or exceed the length of the longest finger when one's arm is extended down the leg. (This rule appears in the dress codes of each of the non-uniform middle schools included in this research project (Appendices G & H).) The resulting concern of this rule is that according to this group of teachers not all middle school girls are created equal and some have shorter or longer arms that cause skirts to be shorter on some girls and not on others. This is an attempt to quantify all middle school girls under a generic rule that causes distractions because all girls are not made with the same length arms, legs, or torso. Unfortunately, most schools face similar issues rather having a uniform dress code or not having a uniform dress code.

Secondly, there is also a statement in the dress code that says, "Students will not be allowed to attend school wearing clothing or accessories that may cause any disruption in the expected daily operations of the school or classroom" (Appendix H). The concern raised here by these teachers is that what one may observe as a distraction in the classroom, the administration may not agree with in the office; therefore, inconsistency arises resulting in teachers perceiving the administration as unsupportive of the learning environment. Such statements in a dress code make it somewhat subjective and left to the interpretation of an administrator.

Each group of staff members was asked to describe that factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the school's climate of learning. Staff members from one non-uniform dress school said that making the learning environment comfortable and safe so students can laugh at each other's mistakes instead of ridiculing each other helps to support a healthy learning climate. On the other side of the discussion, these same staff members highlight more distractions than contributions. For example, these staff members see an excess of non-academic interruptions to the instructional day. These interruptions include forwarding outside phone calls into the classroom, students leaving early for sports or other reasons, and other interruptions due to assemblies or other school day events.

Another teacher in this interview cited that bullying issues have become a distraction to the learning environment. The teacher says that instructional time is taken up when the teacher must address acts of bullying in the classroom. The teacher says these acts are committed for various reasons but one common issue stems from clothing. Students either are not wearing the current fashions or the student's clothing is dirty or smells. In addition to bullying behaviors, the teacher also stated that clothing contributes to acts of theft within the school. The fact is high priced articles of clothing are a prize to steal and this leads to fights and other school disruptions. The staff members cited that articles such as high priced tennis shoes, jackets, and pocketbooks were highly prized items that were commonly stolen while at school. One teacher commented that these issues were serious but also distractions to learning because it took time away from instruction to deal with each event. In fact, this teacher stated that "enforcing fashion is not a common core standard."

Likewise, staff members from the other non-uniform dress middle school cited outside distractions such as forwarding phone calls to the classroom during instruction, school day events during instruction, and calling students from class for sports or other reasons were their largest distraction to the school's climate of learning. In addition, these teachers agreed that dress code items also distracted from instructional time at their school. They said that when a dress code violation occurred in class they had to send the student to the office to either get an appropriate item of clothing from the guidance counselor or to call home to get a change of clothes. In either case, the student is out of class and missing valuable instructional time. However, not addressing dress code violations could result in greater distractions and loss of instruction. Consistency or the lack of consistency seems to be a constant when discussing things that take time away from instruction.

The final question of the interview asked staff members to discuss what changes they would make to their current dress code and why or discuss why they would not want to make any changes to their school's current dress code. In both non-uniform dress middle schools the staff members who participated in these interviews stated that they would implement a uniform dress code policy in their school. One teacher said, "I would love to see them have uniforms." Staff members at both schools said that a uniform dress code policy would level the playing field between the children of low economic means and children from homes of average to high economic means. By leveling the playing field with a uniform dress code policy these staff members believe that such a policy could help to reduce issues of bullying and children feeling low self-esteem due to not having on the latest fashions. One teacher said that a uniform dress code policy "allows some students who are the 'have-nots' to feel

for one time that they are equal and kind of on an equitable field with some of the other kids.”

These staff also advocated for a uniform dress code policy because such a policy would make it easier to judge if a student was in compliance with the expectations. One teacher said that uniforms make dress code decisions “a lot easier than some of the judgment calls that we have to make with every single individual outfit now.” Another teacher said that “with uniforms all of that would go away and we would be able to focus on instruction.” Some staff members cited examples from relatives and personal experiences where a uniform dress code policy made things easier for parents because there were no arguments about what the child could or could not wear to school each day. School clothes could be laid out the night before and save time preparing the next morning.

However, these same teachers did expect that, even if their school had a uniform dress code policy, the students would find ways to push the rules or get around rules as they do with the current dress code policy.

Non-Uniform Parents

In order to solicit parent participation in this research project a letter (Appendix F) was sent home with each child asking his/her parent(s) to take part in a focus group interview. At non-uniform middle school A, 523 parent letters were sent home with only five letters being returned indicating a willingness to participate in a focus group interview. After communicating with all willing parents through either personal phone calls or emails, only 3 parents took part in the group interview. Parents representing non-uniform middle

school A included the parent of a male in 6th grade, the parent of a male in 7th grade, and the parent of a female in 8th grade.

At non-uniform middle school B, 376 parent letters were sent home with only 9 letters being returned indicating a willingness to participate in a focus group interview. After communicating with all willing parents through either personal phone calls or emails, only 2 parents took part in the group interview. Both parents representing non-uniform middle school B had female students in 7th grade. Parents at both schools who did not participate were either unreachable through the contact information they provided or declined to participate when contacted. Every effort was made to include everyone who wished to participate including offering multiple interview dates, times, and locations.

Each focus group interview took place just prior to student dismissal, at the school site, and in the school's conference room. The date, place, and time of each interview were agreed upon by each parent and the researcher. Each focus group interview was conducted using a prescribed interview guide (Appendix D) which was sent to each participant prior to the interview or delivered to the participant on the day of the interview. The information that follows is a summarization of the common themes and ideas expressed by the interview participants.

The parents were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the climate of discipline at their child's school. At one school the conversation centered on student dress and how it impacts discipline and learning. One parent said "I think a big thing that distracts from the climate in the school is students and their emphases on what others think about them—peer pressure." The parents agreed that

their children spend too much time worrying about what they will wear to school than about their grades or studies. A parent said that “they may spend an hour or two deciding on what shoes match these pants that I am wearing as opposed to getting into the books and just studying.”

The parents also discussed how the clothing and peer pressure issue affected their children. Parents said that when students began to discuss who had on the latest fashions it would sometimes lead to something hurtful being said to a child whose family could not afford the most expensive shoes or latest fashions. Parents commented that hurtful comments could throw a child “off” all day and cause their mind to concentrate on the negative comment and not Math or Reading. A parent said “there is a lack of tolerance and compassion for others and that is a huge part in discipline.”

Parents from the other non-uniform middle school believe that many issues distract from discipline at their child’s school. This group of parents said that a lack of follow-through at home and a lack of parental support for school administration was a distraction to school discipline. This group also discussed how discipline started at home and how many children come to school without being taught how to behave or how to have respect for their peers, their teachers, or themselves. These parents also commented on how classroom structure and teachers keeping students busy or engaged in meaningful lessons contributed to discipline. However, they also discussed how inconsistency with expectations from teacher to teacher distracted from the school’s climate of discipline. One parent said “if the expectations were spelled out better and consistently across the board I think you would have better discipline, less write ups and office referrals.”

Moving forward, parents were asked to describe their beliefs about how the school's dress code contributed to or distracted from the school's climate of discipline. Most of the conversations in both parent groups surrounded the idea that clothing in general was a great distraction that resulted in discipline issues at school. One parent commented that the idea of appropriate attire was a great distraction because some students wanted to wear pajamas, low-cut tops, or short skirts to school. These items present a distraction to school because they can disrupt learning. In addition, parents also commented that these issues were not dealt with in a consistent manner because students recognize if they have been called to the office for inappropriate clothing and the student next to them is wearing the same thing and nothing is said to them.

Parents from both non-uniform dress middle schools discussed how their children have become more concerned with what they wear to school than what they learn in school. One parent told that she had noticed a big difference in her son from elementary school where he may wear the same the same t-shirt each Monday and it did not matter to him or his friends. However, now that he is in middle school, it seems like "his self-esteem is directly linked to his clothing because I notice he will wear certain things just to get a compliment from his friends and if he does not get that compliment it hurts his feelings and he does not want to wear that item again."

Another parent said that there is too much of an emphasis on labels and whether the child has on the latest and best clothing. This mother said that her son would wear the same five outfits to school each week and the same Green Bay Packers zip-up sweat shirt and other students would comment to him that his parents must be poor because he wore the same

clothes to school every day. The mother said that her son did not dwell on comments like that but she felt like they hurt his feelings somewhat because he would come home and tell her that someone said something about his clothes. Parents in both groups agreed that children get picked on at school if they do not have on the latest and best clothes and that this “picking” can cause their children to have low self-esteem, lash out at their peers, and/or feel ostracized from their social group.

Next, parents were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the climate of learning at their school. One group of parents commented exclusively on how the attitude of the students affected the climate of learning. Parents emphasized that the morals and values that a child is taught at home have a direct impact on how they interact with teachers and peers. One parent said that they teach their child that just as they leave the home each day and go to a 9-5 job; school is the child’s job and they are to take school just as serious as they would any job. Another parent made the comparison that how a student was dressed at school was a good indication of how serious they took their studies at school. The parent said “it is almost like their attitude matches the way their clothing is fitting on them; it’s like if a girl wears a short skirt to school then that is what she is most concerned about and it is not about learning, it’s about how she is dressed.” Parents from this non-uniform dress middle school agreed that students who take school seriously will dress appropriately and come to school to learn.

Parents from the other non-uniform dress middle school believed that too many assignments and too short of a period of time to complete them were the largest distraction to the school’s learning environment. Parents noted that teachers have so many objectives to

teach that the quality of teaching was compromised so that the emphasis is not on learning the material but the emphasis is on completing a task. In addition, these parents also noted that disruptive behaviors and other classroom issues took time away from instruction and distracted from the learning environment of the school.

Parents were asked to describe their beliefs about how the school's dress code contributed to or distracted from the school's climate of learning. Both groups of parents were very similar in their thoughts to this question. One parent commented that the school's dress code set the climate of the school as students walked through the door on the first day. This same parent noted that children needed high expectations for academics and how they dress for school. "High expectations should be across the board with anything that you have in your school." It was also noted by one parent that when teachers have to tell the same student to pull up their pants or tuck in their shirts all day, that becomes distracting to what the teacher is trying to do in the classroom. A parent from the other non-uniform dress middle school discussed how distractions to learning occur when students choose to dress inappropriately by wearing revealing tops, short skirts, or exposed underwear. Other parents commented that it is distracting when an adult dresses provocatively to gain attention by wearing revealing tops or short skirts in a professional setting. Imagine how distracting this can become in a middle school when this is the age group that experiences the onset of puberty?

Finally, parents were asked if they would make any changes to their school's current dress code; if so, what changes would you make and why would you make them? If not, why would you not make any changes to the current dress code? Without exception, parents from

both non-uniform dress middle schools said that they would like to see their schools adopt a school uniform dress code policy. The parents believed that a school's dress code just could not keep up with the changing fashions. As one parent observed "the dress code may have everything covered this year but then the next best thing comes out and now you have to address that because it's inappropriate."

A few of the parents did express a slight reservation because they felt that their children would not want to wear a school uniform because they wanted to express their individuality through clothing. One parent said that "five years ago I would have said that (uniforms) would take away from their individuality but other things make a person unique when you are not focused on clothes." The parents agreed that a uniform dress code policy would take the attention away from clothing and refocus students' attention on education. The parents felt that this would help to eliminate the events of picking or bullying because children from disadvantaged homes would look the same as the children from more affluent homes. One parent said that "I just think it would make such a big difference for everybody to be on the same page." Parents shared great concern that their children were linking their self-esteem to the clothes that they wear to school. Sadly, one parent noted that her daughter came home one day and told her that "they pick on you if you are not dressed the way that they are, you know that hurts and makes you want to kill yourself." This parent said that the next day she spoke to her daughter's school counselor and said that this issue is serious and needs to be addressed.

Uniform Schools

The middle schools with a uniform dress code policy are located in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina in a Metropolitan statistical area with a population of 46,405 residents. The county residential population is made up of 62.7% Caucasian; 31% African American; 3.1% Native American; and 3.2% Hispanic and Multi-racial. The county covers 473.82 square miles and the median household income was \$31,726.00 in 2008-2012 (Census, 2013b).

Uniform School A

During the 2013-2014 school year Uniform School A had a total enrollment of 675 students. The student body is broken down as follows: 33% are African American, 53% are European American, 2% are Native American, 7% are Hispanic American, 4% are Multi-Racial, and 1% is Asian American. In addition, 51.41% of the student population qualified for free or reduced meal prices.

Uniform School B

During the 2013-2014 school year Uniform School B had a total enrollment of 548 students. The student body is broken down as follows: 36% are African American, 44% are European American, 6% are Native American, 9% are Hispanic American, 5% are Multi-Racial, and 0% is Asian American. In addition, 56.12 % of the student population qualified for free or reduced meal prices. The above statistical data was provided by each school's data (Power School) manager.

This school district implemented its school uniform dress coded policy in three stages. In the first stage, a single middle school adopted a school uniform dress code policy

to begin in the 1998-1999 school year. In the second stage, two other middle schools adopted a school uniform dress code policy to start with the 2001-2002 school year. Finally, the entire school district (K-12) adopted a school uniform dress code policy which began with the 2004-2005 school year. The district's current uniform dress code policy may be found in the appendices of this document (Appendix I).

Uniform Principals

At the time of these interviews, each uniform dress principal had over twenty years' experience as an educator. One of the uniform dress principals has been a building level administrator for over ten years and the other uniform dress principal has over five years' experience as a principal. Both uniform dress principals have the unique perspective of working in this district prior to and after the implementation of a required uniform dress code in 2004.

First, the principals were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the school's climate of discipline. The principals were brief in their answers and said that a lack of focus, inattention to details, down time, and student drama were all distractors to the school's climate of discipline. In addition, one principal added that the student's lack of respect for rules was also a distractor to school discipline. The principal said that "they simply don't believe that the rules apply to them so unless you instill it in them every day you will lose that climate." The other uniform dress principal spoke of how the school's climate of discipline was in disrepair and was a major issue when he assumed the principalship of the school. However, through a lot of work by the staff and administration the climate began to change with teachers having a voice and ownership of the

kind of climate they wanted to create in their school. The principal commented that consistency in school discipline is a combination of monitoring students and not being shy about following procedures when it came to addressing discipline violations.

Next, the principals were asked to describe their beliefs about how the dress code contributes to or distracts from the school's climate of discipline. Both principals approved of their districts' uniform dress code policy and said they liked it better than a dress code. One principal noted that before the uniform dress code policy was adopted there were a lot of discipline issues with sagging pants, low cut tops on girls, and boys not wearing belts. This principal went on to say that valuable instructional time was lost due to so many discipline issues involving the dress code. Finally, this principal stated that with the adoption of the uniform dress code the climate of discipline improved due to less instructional time being lost dealing with issues of clothing.

The principals were also asked to describe the factors that they believed contributed to or distracted from the climate of learning at their schools. One of the principals noted that increased academic apathy, a lack of parental support, and a lack of quality instruction were all distractions to the climate of learning. In addition, this principal also noted that sometimes the district could lose sight of what was important and turn the focus to such things as a new program or the structure of the professional learning community instead of how actual learning is taking place in the classroom.

To this question, the other uniform school principal saw that the learning climate was more affected by parental support and having high expectations for all students. This principal said that putting in uniforms and making kids look the same was not the greatest

thing that the school did; it was rather the raising of expectations for students that had the largest impact upon the learning environment. This principal said that “once they realized that we expected something different from them, they lived up to it.” The principal explained that the uniforms help to disguise the fact that we are in a low socio-economic area and that economics are a factor for many families. However, once the students were convinced that no matter what their economic state, whether they were from a single parent home or living with a grandparent, students began to believe that they were capable of high levels of achievement. The same level of expectations ties back to the dress code. When you communicate a high level of expectations, kids will live up to them much of the time. In addition to high expectations at school, this principal discussed how parent expectations can impact the learning climate. Parents have to begin seeing school and education as vitally important to their child’s success in life. The principal explained “that we have plateaued with what we can do with expectations at school; we have to get mom and dad to buy into what we are doing as well.” Many parents do not have the skills needed to support their children, so the school needs to find ways to help parents gain these skills to support their child’s education.

The uniform dress principals were then asked to describe their beliefs about how the school’s dress code contributes to or distracts from the school’s climate of learning. Both principals agree that the uniform dress code contributes to the climate of learning at each school. They believe that the uniform dress code helps students to concentrate on learning and not on what they are wearing. In addition, the principals also believe that the uniform dress code helps teachers spend more time on instruction and less time dealing with clothing

issues. The uniform contributes to learning because it helps kids focus on developing an identity based on other things of substance and not upon their clothing. In middle school one is also dealing with the onset of puberty and when students did not have a uniform they came to school with body parts improperly covered and that became a difficult distraction to learning.

They also believe that the uniform dress code contributes to school safety because it helps the students have a sense of togetherness and belonging. The uniform dress code has also helped to nearly eliminate kids being picked on because they are not wearing the latest fashions. One principal said that the uniform “is a grand equalizer.” One principal discussed how the uniform dress code could become a distraction to learning when teachers choose to focus more on being “the clothing police” and less on the importance of instruction. The principal said that if a teacher chooses to focus on the uniform too much then that is all they do all day. There is a fine line between enforcement and badgering students. This principal also stated “if you decide not to monitor it (uniforms), it is the worst policy you can have.”

Next, the uniform dress school principals were asked if they would or would not make any changes to their current dress code; and if so, what would those changes be? Both principals agreed that they would like to see the dress code become a true uniform by making all articles of clothing standardized. All shirts, pants, skirts, jacket, coats, and shoes would come from the same vendor, be the same shade of color, and made from the same standardized materials. The principals discussed how at this time uniform clothes could be purchased from any vendor such as Belks, J.C. Penny, Wal-Mart, or any other store that carries clothing. As a result, the styling and shades of colors vary greatly and this becomes a

policing issue for teachers and the administration. In addition, more affluent families can afford to go to the bigger department stores to purchase more current fashions such as North Face, American Eagle or Tommy Hilfiger. Under the current uniform dress code policy (Appendix I), students may not wear clothing with visible labels; however, if they do, they have to put masking tape over the label while at school. Tape on the jacket acts like a label letting everyone know it is a name brand jacket. This issue causes the administration and teachers to police some of the same type issues that non-uniform schools deal with on a daily basis. However, the principal says that they deal with things like this far less frequently under the uniform dress code policy. The principal added that if you limited clothing to one vendor that would make all other vendors furious and parents angry because they could not go out and buy the latest fashions for their children. One principal concluded that, “A (standardized) uniform is what I would love to see them go to and that way everybody would be the same all the time.”

As noted in the literature review section of this project most of the research concerning the effects or perceptions of school uniform dress code policies has come from larger, more urban school districts. The fact remains that little research has been conducted into the effects or perceptions of school uniform dress code policies in smaller, rural school districts. In order to gain insight into why this school district chose to implement a school uniform dress code policy, the uniform dress school principals were asked to discuss the reasoning behind this policy.

Each principal noted that the motivation to implement a school uniform dress code policy was caused by several factors. First, there was an outcry from teachers and

administrators to address the issue of modesty. Teachers and administrators were dealing with daily issues of sagging pants on boys and low-cut tops on girls. These issues caused a loss of instructional time in every school and increased discipline issues because when teachers would address the student, many times it led to disrespect and non-compliance. Second was an issue of stealing other kid's clothes. If a child saw some article of clothing that they wanted that they could not afford, they just took it. Now, with the uniform dress code policy, they all have pretty much the same clothes to wear so issues of stealing clothes have vanished. Third is the issue of discipline and school safety. Part of the thinking with a school uniform was that children who are "dressed up" would tend to behave better in school. In addition, with school uniform dress it is much easier to pick out who does not belong on your campus and who is out of place. Finally, the idea of saving parents money on school clothes was also a factor when the district considered adopting school uniforms. For example, a principal stated that when uniforms first started district-wide in 2004, a local clothing vendor could sell any size uniform shirts for \$6.00 and uniform pants for \$15.00. This was a great difference compared to a Tommy Hilfiger shirt that could cost a parent \$75.00 or more for only one shirt. The idea was that parents could afford to dress their children for far less money in uniforms than going out and buying name brand clothing.

Uniform Teachers (Certified Staff Members)

As noted earlier, all certified staff members at each selected school received a letter (Appendix E) in his/her school mailbox asking them to take part in a focus group interview. After the letters were returned to the researcher, emails and phone calls were placed to all potential participants asking them to take part in a focus group interview. At uniform school

A, 54 letters of invitation were sent out with only 2 letters being returned and only two certified staff members agreeing to take part in the focus group interview. The focus group interview took place after instructional hours, at the school site, and in the school's conference room. The certified staff members representing uniform school A included two female teachers who teach 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. At uniform school B, 42 letters were sent out with only 3 letters being returned and three certified staff members agreeing to take part in the focus group interview. The interview took place after instructional hours, at the school site, and in the school's conference room. The certified staff members representing uniform school B included one female 6th grade teacher, one female 8th grade teacher, and one male teacher who teaches 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. Each focus group interview was conducted using a prescribed interview guide (Appendix C) which was sent to each participant prior to the interview or delivered to the participant on the day of the interview. The information that follows is a summarization of the common themes and ideas expressed by the interview participants.

Teachers from both uniform dress middle schools were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the climate of discipline at their respective schools. At both uniform schools, the concept of consistency was discussed as a contributing factor to discipline at each school. Staff members commented that consistency was important with regard to how teachers dealt with behaviors in the classroom; and more importantly, consistency with how the administration dealt with behaviors that were sent to the office. It is important that the administration holds students accountable for their behaviors in a positive manner by asking students to own their mistakes, take the

consequences, and make an effort to make a better decision next time. One teacher also mentioned that at their school the administration made a conscious effort to provide positive rewards to encourage more consistent behavior in school. With regard to consistency, teachers commented that having consistent quality instruction in each classroom so that students were busy from bell to bell and did not have down time to get into trouble was also an important factor in the climate of discipline.

In addition to consistency, staff members at one uniform dress school discussed the idea of creating positive relationships with students to encourage good behavior. The staff members explained that when students feel like that have a sense of belonging in the school, they come to school happy and feel like they have a place where they fit into the environment. Further, when an adult in that environment takes the time to develop a positive, nurturing relationship with a child, that child is less likely to break the rules because they do not want to disappoint that adult. One teacher said “they tend to think about whether or not they should do something that may disappoint someone or let someone down.”

Next, the staff members were asked to describe their beliefs about how the school’s dress code distracts from or contributes to the school’s climate of discipline. At both schools, staff members believe that the uniform dress code helps to reduce the number of students being picked on because of their home situation or background. Staff members said that the uniform helps to put all students on an even playing field because they all look basically alike. Some students may have newer clothes or the latest designs but everyone still looks alike because of the uniform dress code. However, staff members at both schools also believe that the uniform dress code policy causes time to be lost from instruction due to

taking time to police the uniforms and having to send students to the office that may be out of compliance with the uniform policy. One staff member said that “it (the uniform dress code policy) cuts down on maybe some bullying or harassment, that kind of thing, but then at the same time sometimes they are taken from your classroom as punishment for what they have on, maybe a label or that kind of thing.” Another staff member stated “they may be in ISS (in school suspension) all day because they do not have anyone to bring them clothes or we don’t have clothes in the closet for them so it does take away from class time.”

Nevertheless, staff members would rather have a uniform dress code policy because of how they see parents dress to come to school and how they see students dress on non-uniform dress days at school. One staff member noted that they disliked days like “picture day” because students did not have to wear their uniforms and that meant more discipline problems and more distractions. Another staff member discussed that she sees parents come to the front office without undergarments or dressed in pajamas and she is concerned that if students had a choice each day they may come to school dressed the same way. A staff member commented that on picture days students do not have to wear the school uniform and that on those days they have more clothing issues than with the uniform dress code policy. One staff member said that “everything seems to be too short, too tight, or too far off the body.” In response, another staff member said “never mind, I guess we will keep the uniforms.”

However, another criticism brought to light is the fact that some of the staff members interviewed did not consider the dress code to be a “true uniform” dress code policy. One particular staff member believes that the current policy is too lenient and only requires

students to be “color coded” in the required school colors. The staff member feels as the previous principals, who were interviewed, do that items of the uniform should be standardized. All students should have the same style and color of each uniform item made by a single manufacturer as a way to truly puts students on the same standard.

The third question in our interview asked staff members to describe the factors they believed distracted or contributed to the school’s climate of learning. During our interview, several common themes and ideas surfaced among staff members from each school. The teachers felt that one issue that distracted from the climate of learning was students who were not at school to learn, but rather, students who were at school only to disrupt and distract others from learning. The teachers included that time taken in class to constantly correct these behaviors became a waste of instructional time and valuable learning. In addition, outside distractions such as phone calls from the office, announcements, and visitors coming in and leaving out of the classroom cause students and the teacher to lose their concentration on instruction.

However, the most prevalent distraction discussed was the home environment of the child. Staff members from both schools discussed the fact that a major factor affecting a school’s climate of learning was the environment in which a student is raised. The result of environment can be a distracting or contributing factor to learning. Staff members discussed how a positive home environment in which a child is taught to value education can result in good attendance, high grades, and positive behavior habits. Nevertheless, a negative home environment can result in poor attendance, low grades, and less than exemplary behavior.

Staff members also discussed factors they felt contributed to a positive learning climate in the school. As our target schools are middle schools, one factor teachers believed helped to create a positive learning environment was athletics. One teacher stated that “when students are engaged in sports, they know that there is a high expectation for good grades and positive behavior at school or they will not be eligible to participate.” Another staff member mentioned that at her school, the administration created multiple opportunities to reward students for good grades and behavior and she felt that this fact contributed to a positive learning environment. In this conversation one overwhelming contributing factor was the idea of relationships that staff members created with their students. One teacher said “the teacher sets the tone in the classroom for the whole day.” A good teacher creates a classroom environment that is positive, fosters learning, and makes learning fun and engaging for all students. One teacher summed up this fact by saying that “a good teacher makes learning personal for his/her students and it causes the student to recognize that this teacher is going out of her way to learn about me and center this learning around me and my needs.”

Question four asked the staff members to describe their beliefs about how their schools’ dress code contributed to or distracted from the climate of learning at their schools. Staff members from both middle schools remained consistent with their replies to this question. They believe that their respective uniform dress code is a factor that contributes to the learning at their schools. One staff member did state that the only time she felt that the uniform dress code was a distraction was in the event that you have a student who was not in compliance with the uniform dress code. In this case, the distraction occurs when you have to take instructional time to correct the issue. For example, one staff member recalled a

situation when a particular student wanted to wear an Aeropostale jacket inside out so as not to show the label which is a violation of the uniform dress code. As a result, the situation created an argument because the student felt that because the uniform dress code did not specifically address wearing a jacket inside out. The staff member said that this is typical behavior of middle school students and if it were not a uniform issue it would have been something else to cause the distraction. In addition, staff members recall that new shoes cause a distraction because the uniform dress code does not address shoes and students use their shoes as a means to set themselves apart from everyone else so when someone wears new shoes to school it causes some distractions. As a result, the staff member wishes that the school board would consider making shoes part of the uniform dress code.

Otherwise, staff members from both schools believe that the uniform dress code contributes to the climate of learning because it puts all students on a level field in regard to who is wearing what brand or type of clothes to school. In this case, staff members believe that the uniform dress code helps to reduce the incidents of students being picked on or bullied because of clothing. They say that because everyone is dressed the same students spend less time worried about what others are thinking about their clothing. A staff member stated that “students want to look like the things they see on TV and they can clearly tell, even if it is the same color, even if it is the same type of clothing, they can clearly tell whether I’ve got mine from Wal-Mart or you got yours from another store.” The staff member continued to say that this sort of thing is not as noticeable after the school system adopted the uniform dress code as it was prior to the uniform dress code adoption. Another staff member said “I just think that the uniform takes all that away when students have no leg

to stand on when picking on somebody's clothing that has on pretty much the exact same thing as the one doing the picking.”

One staff member said that she thought the uniform dress code “helped the kids as far as their self-confidence and self-esteem because they were not as worried about what others were thinking about them and how they were dressed.” In fact, as one staff member stated, “they can be more focused on what is actually going on in the classroom than what everyone else has on around them or what they wish they had.” The staff member continued to say “I think in that sense it gives them more time to focus at home towards schoolwork or in the classroom more sense of mind, peace of mind that they have and look like the kids next to them instead of not having or wearing name brand clothing.”

Finally, staff members at each school were asked if they would make any changes to the district's uniform dress code, and if so, what would those changes be and why? In addition, if they would not make any changes to the district's uniform dress code, why not? Responses to this question varied greatly between the two schools that took part in this research. At one of the uniform dress middle schools, the staff members who were interviewed agreed together that they would prefer to make the uniform dress code more uniform where all students would have to buy their school uniforms from a single vendor making all articles of clothing alike in shade of color, style, and material. One staff member said “I think the way it is now, it's just a color code, I don't even think that it is a uniform policy.” She continued to say that “the whole meaning of having a uniform policy is so that everybody pretty much looks the same but I don't think that is what we have now”. Because students are able to purchase their uniforms from any vendor this causes very visible

differences in styles and colors of clothing. The staff member recalls that when the uniform policy was approved in 2004, uniform clothing was not permitted to have visible labels; however, this rule is not always followed and it causes a breakdown in consistency. She says that the policy we have now is “getting a little further and further away from what we originally set out to do.”

The policy, as it is now written, has so many rules that if teachers policed every detail it would take away too much instructional time and cause too many kids to be out of class and in the office. The staff member explained that if she were to make any changes in the uniform dress code policy it would be to make it a strict uniform policy consistent across the board because, in her opinion, there is a lack of consistency between schools and even teachers within the same school. Parents who have children in different schools complain that one school is strict about parts of the uniform dress code while other schools are not as strict. This sends an inconsistent message to students and parents. She went on to say that she does not think that teachers or staff members are purposefully trying to be inconsistent, it is just that they do not want the hassle that comes with trying to enforce every little rule; they just let the little stuff go. In summary, the staff members at this school agree that they like the uniform dress code policy; they simply wish it were more consistent and more of a true uniform policy.

In comparison, staff members at the other uniform dress middle school did not see an issue with labels on clothing or wish for the uniform dress code policy to be made stricter. The staff members commented that they would like to see shoes become part of the policy and for students not to be permitted to wear flip-flops to school. In addition, the current

policy requires students to wear a belt if the pants have belt loops; however, these staff members said that if the pants can stay up by themselves then they did not see the necessity of wearing a belt. In summary, staff members at this school agree that the uniform dress code is positive and they need to be more consistent with its enforcement. Staff members said that without the uniform dress code policy they would be very concerned with what clothing students would wear to school. They recall that on days when students do not have to wear their uniforms they have far more incidences of inappropriate clothing which results in more students missing instruction because they are in the office.

Uniform Parents

In order to solicit parent participation in this research project a letter (Appendix F) was sent home with each child asking his/her parent(s) to take part in a focus group interview. At uniform middle school A, 675 parent letters were sent home with only 22 letters being returned indicating a willingness to participate in a focus group interview. After communicating with all willing parents through either personal phone calls or emails, only 5 parents took part in the group interview. Parents representing uniform middle school A included the parents of two females in 6th grade, the parent of a male in 6th grade, the parent of a male in 8th grade, and the parent of two males, one in 7th grade and one in 8th grade.

At uniform middle school B, 548 parent letters were sent home with only 8 letters being returned indicating a willingness to participate in a focus group interview. After communicating with all willing parents through either personal phone calls or emails, only 2 parents took part in the group interview. Parents representing uniform middle school B included the parent of two females, one in 6th grade and one in 7th grade, and the parent of

one male in 6th grade. Parents at both schools who did not participate were either unreachable through the contact information they provided or declined to participate when contacted. Every effort was made to include everyone who wished to participate including offering multiple interview dates, times, and locations. Each focus group interview took place just prior to or directly after student dismissal, at the school site, and in the school's conference rooms. The date, place, and time of each interview were agreed upon by each parent and the researcher. Each focus group interview was conducted using a prescribed interview guide (Appendix D) which was sent to each participant prior to the interview or delivered to the participant on the day of the interview. The information that follows is a summarization of the common themes and ideas expressed by the interview participants.

First, the parents were asked to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the climate of discipline at their schools. Parents at both schools believe that peers are a distraction for students and help to create discipline issues for teachers. One parent commented that one child can cause a majority of a class to become off task and lose valuable time that could better be spent on instruction. Another parent said that a teacher's lack of experience or inability to deal with middle school age students can also be a distraction to the climate of discipline. This parent stated that he believed "there is a lack of structure and discipline from the teachers" and that this fact shows up in testing and the student's grades. Another parent commented that they believed one of the biggest factors to creating a climate of discipline was the idea of expectations and holding students accountable for their actions. The parent said that "accountability has to go from parents to school, to the upper administration and everybody has to be on the same page." In addition to

accountability, the parents commented on the idea of consistency. One parent said that consistency between teachers in the same school was a concern. The parent continued that all teachers do not discipline in the same manner; one teacher may be stricter while another may be more “laid back” when it comes to classroom discipline.

Uniquely, parents at one of the uniform dress middle schools believed that the uniform dress code was itself a distraction to the school’s climate of discipline. The parent stated that time spent in the mornings checking students’ uniforms was a distraction in their opinion. The parent continued by saying that when a child was out of compliance with the school’s uniform dress code they were sent to the office to call home or sent to ISS to wait on their parent to bring them whatever was needed to correct the issue. This parent believes that this was a distraction to learning and the climate of discipline. The parent said “I can’t always be at home when my child leaves for school at 8:00 because I have to be at work at 7:00; I don’t feel like they should be punished because they did not grab the right belt when they were running out to school to get an education.” Another parent added that the dress code even addressed the number of pockets that could be on a pair of pants. She said “if they have to wear uniforms, just let it be the colors; we would prefer that they not wear uniforms because that is more money because you have to buy school clothes, then buy more clothes for outside of school.” She added that she bought more uniform clothes because her children wore them out much faster because they have to wear them every day.

The second question of our interview asked parents to describe their beliefs about how the school’s dress code contributes to or distracts from the climate of discipline at their school. Through the comments and conversation resulting from this question, it is evident

that these parents have valid concerns about the uniform dress code used in this district.

Parents from both schools discussed how each school day starts with teachers taking time to check students' uniforms. Parents said that this was a distraction and many times resulted in students being sent to the office and losing valuable time in class. Parents said that in their opinion too much time is spent on making sure students had on the right color belt, right color socks, and no visible logos. One parent stated that "you have all these principals and teachers out here worrying about what color belt somebody has on; I want to know if you know that child knows his multiplication

tables." Parents also addressed how they believed that the uniform dress code distracted from the climate of discipline because it was supposed to eliminate children being picked on because of their clothes. If a family cannot afford to purchase school uniforms the district has a recycled uniform program where families may apply for assistance; if approved, families are given gently used uniforms to wear during the school year. Parents commented that the students can tell who has on used uniforms and who has on new uniforms. A parent stated that "my child got picked on so bad because we did not have the money to go buy brand new uniforms so they had to wear second hand uniforms and she came home crying because of her uniforms." The parent added that the children can even tell if a uniform garment comes from American Eagle or Aeropostle because of the different stitching and design of the garment. She concluded that the uniform dress code did not eliminate bullying like they told parents it would nor does it cost less for students to wear uniforms. One parent agreed with the parent above and stated "I have heard people say you

don't spend as much on clothing, that's incorrect; you have to spend twice as much because you have to buy uniforms then buy clothes for going out with friends and church."

The idea of consistency came up again in our discussion, and like the staff members in the previous section, parents said that for the uniform dress code to be consistent and treated consistently by teachers and administrators the district should consider a dress code such as found in many prep and Catholic schools. In this discussion, a parent stated that "if you are going to have a dress code, have one from your toes to the top of your head."

Another parent said that the district should "send home a magazine with all the kids in the school and say the males can wear these shoes, and females can wear these shoes. The girls can wear this skirt and the boys can wear these pants and shirts and everyone has to order them out of the same catalog and you send your children to school every day with the same uniform on." The parents concluded that in this way the district can be consistent from classroom to classroom, from school to school, and from the elementary grades to the high school.

The third question asked parents to describe the factors they believed contributed to or distracted from the climate of learning at their schools. Much of the resulting summary that follows sounds very redundant to previous responses provided; however, the researcher believes it to be a result of the frustrations of parents as evident in these interviews. As a result of our conversations, several consistencies were found in the parents from both schools. Parents from both uniform dress middle schools believed that the uniform dress code itself was a distraction to the schools' climate of learning. The parents believed that it is a distraction for students to be constantly concerned if they have on the wrong belt or color

socks. In addition, the parents believed that too much instructional time is wasted with daily uniform checks. One parent stated “I feel like if they have to wear uniforms a belt being off color or a sock should not make a difference. I feel like it distracts them too much and have them worried about the wrong thing; they are too worried about how they look for their teachers, peers, and the principal versus what they are here for is to get an education.” Along the same line of thinking, a parent from the other uniform dress middle school said that the uniform dress code creates inconsistencies. The parent continued that if a child is struggling in his/her academics and then you add to that a uniform dress code, it only compounds the problem. Now the student is frustrated academically because he/she does not understand the academics and socially because he/she is worried about getting picked on because of a faded uniform or having on the wrong color of belt or socks.

Furthermore, parents at both uniform dress middle schools addressed the issue of their children being bullied at school due to the clothes they wear. Parents commented that the uniform dress code policy was supposed to stop kids from being picked on because they were not wearing the latest name brands or styles of clothing. Parents concluded that the uniform policy has not fixed the problem and has only added another non-instructional duty to teachers as they have to police the uniform daily. One parent said “you know we spend so much time trying to fix what they said was broken thirty years ago when I was in school, well I’m sorry, I don’t see that now. To me, we haven’t fixed anything, to me, we are absolutely going backwards.” This same parent concluded that “we can’t expect schools to fix society, families, or the community and I think that is part of the problem; we have so

many expectations of the education system that there is no way that they can achieve any of these goals.”

The next question in our interview asked parents to describe their beliefs about how the school’s dress code contributed to or distracted from the school’s climate of learning. Responses from parents of both uniform dress middle schools were very consistent. A parent from one uniform dress middle school said, “In my opinion, I don’t think the uniform helps at all.” Another parent said “I don’t have any positives to add about the way the uniform dress code is now. I don’t have anything positive to add to where it’s helping to educate our children.” Another parent added, “It was supposed to stop the chaos but it has created more chaos because, like he said earlier, the teachers are turning into uniform police.” A parent from the other uniform dress middle school said “I just don’t think taking twenty minutes out of the day to check uniforms is needed when you are always harping on test scores; let’s not worry so much about uniforms and spend more time on test scores and the curriculum.” A parent added that she thought the schools worried more about the uniforms than children coming to school hungry.

The final question of our interview asked parents if they would make any changes to the school’s dress code. If so, what changes would they make and why would they make the changes? If not, why would they not make any changes to the school’s dress code? The parents interviewed at both uniform dress middle schools said that they would definitely make changes to the current uniform dress code policy used in their district. The parents who were interviewed did not see that the uniform dress code policy had made any positive changes in the education of their children. For example, one parent said, “Tell me what good

is it doing, I am asking, tell me what good it is having uniforms?” Another parent said that “the uniforms are just not, in my opinion, are not accomplishing anything.”

However, the parents from each school had very differing views on how they would change the uniform dress code policy. Parents at one of the uniform dress middle schools said they would keep a modified form of the uniform dress code. These parents said that they would like to keep the colors with students wearing shirts in the school colors along with khaki, navy blue, or black pants or skirts. However, these parents said that the dress code should not address colors of belts, socks, or labels on clothing. The parents said that they would like to keep the color system because it helped to identify who was a student and belonged on campus and who was not a student and did not belong on campus for reasons of safety. A parent said “other than keeping the colors, I would love for them to get rid of the uniforms completely.”

Meanwhile, parents at the other uniform dress middle school wanted to change the uniform dress code policy to an “appropriate dress code.” These parents described an “appropriate dress code” as one that did not allow low cut tops, short that were too short, shagging pants, or offensive language or print on the articles of clothing. The parents also added that if students broke the dress code then they should be punished. These parents added that such a dress code would allow students to express themselves through their clothing and allow parents who had financial hardships to purchase school clothes at places such as Goodwill or second hand stores.

Cross Case Analysis

The final section of this chapter is a cross case analysis of middle schools without a uniform dress code policy compared to middle schools with a uniform dress code policy in order to see and understand any similarities or differences between the populations that were interviewed. At the core of this research is the underlying question of how do middle schools that do not have a uniform dress code policy compare to middle schools that have a uniform dress code policy. In the past sections we examined the principals, certified staff members, and parents at each type middle school to understand their perceptions as they relate to the factors that contribute to or distract from the school's climate of discipline and the school's climate of learning. In addition, we have also examined these populations to understand their perceptions about how the school's dress code impacts the climates of discipline and learning at each school. The following sections will examine the likenesses and differences found in the principals, staff members, and parents from each type of middle school.

Principals

During the interviews several common themes and ideas came to surface with both non-uniform dress and uniform dress school principals. In our conversations, each principal expressed support for their particular district's choice of dress codes. The uniform dress principals preferred a uniform dress code and the non-uniform dress principals preferred not to have a uniform dress code policy even though one of the non-uniform dress principals was a former principal of a middle school with a uniform dress code policy. However, this non-uniform dress principal did admit that having a uniform dress code policy made the task of monitoring student dress much easier. Even with these differences of opinion, several

common themes became evident. The most prevalent idea that was evident in every question from both types of principals was the concept of consistency. Consistency was referred to by all principals when it came to our discussions about the school's climate of discipline and learning as it relates to the school's dress code policy. The principals discussed how a school's climate of discipline and learning is dependent upon consistency in how the school enforces its rules and if all rules are consistently maintained from classroom to classroom and handled in a consistent manner in the principal's or assistant principal's office. One principal noted that a school's climate of discipline is maintained through consistent monitoring of students and consistency in how discipline issues are dealt with in the front office. Another principal noted that the climate of discipline and climate of learning are linked together and for learning to occur the climate of discipline must be strong.

In addition, the principals also discussed how consistency was an important factor in the effectiveness of the school's dress code policy. One principal noted that clear expectations of dress translated into clear expectations of behavior. The principals on both sides agreed that a school's dress code set the tone for learning and that consistency was its most important factor. All of the principals agreed that being consistent with whichever dress code policy a district chooses to utilize is the most important component that makes a policy successful. One of the non-uniform principals noted that as long as the staff was consistent, he preferred a dress code to a uniform dress code policy because it allowed students to show their individuality. However, another principal stated that if the staff and administration are inconsistent with the rules, then a dress code or uniform dress code were both useless to supporting a school's climate of discipline or learning.

Another common theme that evolved in conversations with the principals was the idea of how dress codes could impact instructional time. The non-uniform dress principals believed that having a uniform dress code policy could become a waste of instructional time. One principal warned that if a dress code has too many rules then teachers become consumed with enforcement of the uniform dress code resulting in the loss of instructional time. Another non-uniform dress principal stated that he did not want teachers becoming clothing police and wasting time on non-instructional duties. On the other hand, the uniform dress principals believe that when their district did not use a uniform dress code policy their teachers lost instructional time because of having to deal with so many clothing issues like sagging pants on boys, low cut tops on girls, or inappropriate clothing in general. In fact, these principals believe that the uniform dress code contributes to learning because now teachers can concentrate on education and spend less time monitoring student dress. However, parents from the uniform dress middle schools disagreed and felt that the uniform dress code causes a loss of instructional time because of time being wasted with morning uniform checks and students being sent out of class because of having on the wrong kind or color of clothing.

Principals' from each school discussed how their chosen dress code policy addressed the issues of poverty and school safety. Non-uniform dress principals saw poverty as a disruption to the climates of discipline and learning. One principal indicated that poverty was a factor in the climate of discipline because children from families who could not afford the latest fashions became targets for bullies resulting in them being picked upon. In addition, as a disruption to learning, students who wear inappropriate items to school may be

sent to the office to wait on a change of clothing thus losing time in class. The principal noted that for students from impoverished homes, their ability to wear appropriate clothing to school is limited by their families' ability to purchase such clothing items.

On the other hand, principals from schools with a uniform dress code policy believe that school uniform dress helped to disguise the fact that some children were from impoverished homes and could not afford the latest clothing fashions. In addition, the uniform dress principals also believed that the uniform dress code policy saves families money because uniform clothing is much less expensive than name brand clothing. Interviews with parents from the uniform dress schools show a difference of opinion. In fact, the parents commented that it was more expensive for them because, not only did they have to purchase uniform clothes, they also had to purchase clothes for activities outside of school.

In regards to school safety, all principals agreed that requiring a dress code or uniform dress code helped to improve school safety. Non-uniform principals said that a dress code excluded unsafe items such as trench coats or baggie clothing that could be used to hide unwanted items at school such as weapons or drugs. The uniform dress principals commented that their uniform dress code helped to improve school safety because it was easier to tell who did not belong on campus and that the uniform gave students a sense of belonging and togetherness. They also said that the school uniform dress helped to decrease the number of children being picked on because of clothing.

As the interviews concluded, each principal was asked if there were any changes they would like to see made to the school's dress code. The uniform dress school principals said that they would like to see the uniform dress code policy become more "standardized" with

all families purchasing their uniform items from a single vendor to insure uniformity in design and color. Interestingly, this was also an opinion shared by the uniform dress school staff members and parents.

Teachers (Certified Staff Members)

As with the principals, several common themes and ideas were addressed by the certified staff members that were interviewed. Many of the same ideas shared by the principals were also expressed by the certified staff members. Staff members from both types of middle schools agreed that the school's dress code set the climate for the school because it represents the school's expectations for behavior and learning. Across all schools the importance of consistency and concern for lack of consistency was a major theme. Staff members from all schools commented that clothing issues are a definite distraction to discipline and learning in a school; however, these type issues are further compounded when teachers are inconsistent from one classroom to another and when the administration is inconsistent with consequences. Non-uniform dress staff members remarked that a dress code is hard to enforce consistently because some rules are subjective. Not all middle school children are created equal so clothing fits them differently; for example, middle school girls and miniskirts. In addition, consistency is also compromised when some articles of clothing cause a distraction in the classroom and teachers and administrators cannot agree on what constitutes a distraction.

In addition, staff members from both non-uniform dress and uniform dress middle schools discussed how instructional time can be affected by the school's dress code. Staff members from non-uniform dress middle schools discussed how clothing issues can cause a

loss of instructional time due to discipline issues of non-compliance. Staff members said that these violations waste instructional time because students are either in the office waiting on a change of clothes or they are out of school due to more serious discipline issues such as theft of another student's clothing items. Non-uniform dress staff members stated that they would prefer a uniform dress code because it would be easier to enforce consistently and save instructional time. However, staff members from the middle schools that have uniform dress code policies said that the uniform dress code policy also contributes to lost instructional time due to constant policing of the uniform and students being out of class due to uniform infractions. Nevertheless, staff members at the uniform dress middle schools still prefer the uniform dress code policy because on days when students do not have to wear uniforms to school the staff members see more discipline issues and inappropriate clothing at school.

Another common theme found in discussions at middle schools with a uniform dress code and middle schools without a uniform dress code was the idea of how poverty affects the climates of discipline and learning in each school. Staff members from the schools without a uniform dress code policy discussed how poverty affects children and their interactions within their peer group. Children from homes of poverty find it more difficult to be accepted by their peers because they may not be able to afford the newest or latest fashions to wear to school. The teachers said that this fact leads to them being picked upon or bullied by others resulting in the child having lower self-esteem which can manifest itself in academic or discipline issues. Staff members at the non-uniform dress schools went on to say that a uniform dress code may eliminate or lessen this effect because, in their opinion, a school uniform places all students on a level playing field because all students are dressed

basically alike. Teachers from schools with a uniform dress code policy agreed and said in our interviews that the uniform dress code puts children on equal terms as far as clothing is concerned. They went on to say that they believed the uniform dress code helped to reduce bullying due to clothing and helped to improve self-esteem and confidence in students at their schools. They also believed that having a uniform dress code helped their students to focus more on academics and less on issues of clothing.

Apart from issues of clothing, staff members at each type of middle school discussed the importance of developing positive relationships with students in school. Teachers at the non-uniform schools expressed how the climates of learning and discipline are supported when staff members develop trust and a positive rapport with students. Staff members from the uniform schools said that developing positive relationships with students helps to support positive discipline and creates a sense of belonging where all children “fit in” within the school community. Furthermore, the teachers from the schools with uniform dress codes said that positive relationships help to create a classroom environment that supports learning for all children.

Finally, each group of staff members were asked if they would make any changes to their schools’ dress codes and what would those changes be and why. As stated above, staff members from the non-uniform dress middle schools said that they would support having a uniform dress code because it would make dealing with clothing issues easier and save instructional time normally lost with a dress code. They also believe that a uniform dress code policy would reduce picking and bullying issues because all students would be on a level field and less concerned with how they and others around them were dressed. On the

other hand, staff members from the schools with a uniform dress code agreed with their principals and would like to see their uniform dress code become more “standardized” where all students were required to purchase their uniforms from the same vendor ensuring that styles and colors would match from student to student. The teachers from the uniform schools felt that the current uniform dress code policy has become so lenient that it is nothing more than a “color code” system. These teachers believe that the current uniform dress code has too many rules which cost valuable instructional time to enforce and leaves greater room for inconsistency from classroom to classroom and from school to school.

Parents

As with the interviews with principals and staff members, several common themes emerged in the interviews with parents from middle schools without a uniform dress code policy and those with a uniform dress code policy. For example, parents from both types of middle schools discussed how they believed issues of clothing were a distraction to discipline and learning in their schools. All parents agreed that a school’s dress code set the tone for learning and discipline and how a student is dressed for school is a good indication of how serious they take their education. Students who take their education seriously will most likely dress appropriately for school. However, parents from the middle schools without a uniform dress code saw issues of student dress as a distraction because students wanted to wear inappropriate items to school such as pajamas, low cut tops, sagging pants, and short skirts to get the attention of others and cause discipline problems. These parents believed that their children’s self-esteem was directly linked to what clothing they wore to school and that clothing had too much power over what they believed about themselves. These parents

also discussed how peer pressures cause children to think more about their clothes and less about their education. Parents said that when a peer says something hurtful it causes a child to fixate on that comment and not be concerned about the real reason they are in school.

In a slightly different way, parents from middle schools with a uniform dress code see their uniform policy also as a distraction to the education of their children. These parents said that the uniform dress code policy is a distraction because it wastes too much instructional time. Parents said that their children tell them that each day starts with teachers taking time out of class to check uniforms. In addition, if a child is in violation of the dress code they are sent out of class to the office or to in-school-suspension to wait on their parents to bring them a change of clothes or the proper color item. Parents believe that this fact causes their children to miss valuable instructional time. Parents believe that their uniform policy has too many rules and has caused teachers to be more concerned about the dress code and less concerned about educating their children.

Parents from both types of middle school also discussed how issues of dress often result in children being picked upon or bullied by their peers. The parents from middle schools without a uniform dress code policy said that when families cannot afford the newest or latest fashions this causes children not be accepted or be ridiculed by members of their peer group. In like manner, parents from the middle schools with a uniform dress code policy said that the uniform dress code did not eliminate picking or bullying because of clothing. In the school district with a uniform dress code policy, families who cannot afford to purchase new uniforms may apply for assistance. If the application for assistance is approved, these families are provided with gently used uniforms to use for the school year.

Parents said that children are able to recognize who is wearing a used or faded uniform and that this results in incidents of picking, bullying, and non-acceptance in the peer group. Parents from the uniform dress middle schools believe that the uniform dress code only compounds the problem for their children. If a child is sent out of class for a uniform infraction this may create an academic problem; when a child has to wear used or faded uniforms this may result is a social problem of non-acceptance for the child.

While parents in the middle schools that do not have a uniform dress code policy did not mention the issue of cost for purchasing school clothes, those parents from the middle schools with a uniform dress code discussed how uniforms are not very cost effective for their families. Parents said that when the uniform dress code policy was being discussed prior to school board approval, school officials claimed that uniforms would save families money because the uniform items would cost so much less than popular clothing items. In our interview, these parents said that this claim was false; and in fact, they spend more money on clothing for their children. Parents said that not only do they have to purchase uniform clothes but they must still purchase the popular clothing items for going out with family and friends and going to church. Parents from the uniform dress middle schools concluded that they have nothing positive to say about the uniform dress code policy and that it has not made any positive changes in the education of their children.

Finally, as with the other groups, the parents were asked if they would make any changes to their current dress code, what would those changes be and why would they make the changes. First, parents from the middle schools without a uniform dress code policy stated that they would like to see their district adopt a uniform dress code policy. The parents

said that the school's current dress code policy cannot keep up with the quickly changing clothing fashions of today. Items that are inappropriate and covered in this year's policy will be replaced by different items next year that are not covered in the current policy. In addition, these parents wished to adopt a uniform dress code policy because it would allow their children to focus less of their attention on clothing and more on getting an education. Finally, these parents believed that a uniform dress code would help to eliminate children being picked upon because they may not own the newest or latest clothing fashions. It should be noted here that parents from middle schools that already have a uniform dress code policy disagree and have stated that the uniform dress code policy in their district does not eliminate children being picked on because of clothing, and the dress code takes time away from instruction because of the time teachers spend policing the policy.

The parents from middle schools with a uniform dress code policy have several differing opinions about how they would change their dress code. Some parents who were interviewed said that if they had to keep a uniform dress code policy that it should be one like in the private prep schools or Catholic schools. All students would have to buy their uniforms from an approved vendor so that all clothing items were the same in shade of color and style. As with the principals and staff members, the parents wished to see a more "standardized" uniform dress code policy. Other parents who were interviewed would like to just keep the color code system. Children would wear the required color of shirts and bottom garments for their school but without concern for the color of belts, socks, or the presence of logos on the garments. Finally, others in the interview wished to do away with the uniform dress code policy all together and adopt an "appropriate dress code." This dress code would

restrict low cut tops, sagging pants, short skirts, and offensive language on clothing. Parents said that if students were not in compliance with this policy then the student should be punished. Without having to purchase uniform items, parents said that this would allow school clothes to be purchased at the Goodwill or second hand stores. It seems here that punishing a student for breaking the rules of an “appropriate dress code” would be the same cost to education as it is to punish a student for breaking a uniform dress code. It also seems that purchasing clothes from a Goodwill or second hand store would have the same effect as students wearing used uniforms from the district’s assistance program.

Chapter Summary

To adopt a uniform dress code policy or not to adopt a uniform dress code policy seems to be the question facing practitioners in the ever complicated world of educational policy. From data collected in the interviews above it seems evident that the major reason for a district to adopt a uniform dress code policy is to restore the climate of discipline and learning in their schools. For the district that uses a uniform dress code policy, it adopted such a policy to deal with a lack of modesty as evident by short skirts and revealing tops on girls and sagging pants on boys. The principals from the uniform dress middle schools said that the above issues wasted instructional time and resulted in numerous discipline issues of disrespect, non-compliance, and theft. In addition, the uniform dress code policy was also promoted as a policy that would save families money. It appears that the district without a current uniform dress code policy is dealing with much the same issues today as stated above. With the exception of principals, staff members and parents from the non-uniform schools would approve of adopting a uniform dress code policy in their district. They believe

that a uniform dress code policy would save instructional time and make it easier to monitor issues of clothing in their schools.

Ironically, parents in the school district that uses a uniform dress code policy would not agree and find the uniform dress code a waste of instructional time. It does not eliminate or lessen the effects of picking or bullying because of clothing, and it is more expensive to have a uniform dress code policy because one still has to purchase “popular” clothes for events outside of school. In addition, principals, staff members, and parents believe that the current uniform policy has too many rules and has become too lenient. As a result, they believe that for the uniform policy to be more effective, the uniform should be “standardized” where all uniform items would have to be purchased from a single vendor to ensure likeness in color and styling. However, many parents who were interviewed had nothing positive to contribute about the uniform dress code policy and would just as soon see it abandoned altogether.

In summary, the concept of consistency was laced into every interview in some capacity. Principals, staff members, and parents commented on the importance of consistency in order to have a strong climate of discipline and learning. One principal stated that if the staff and administration are inconsistent with the rules, then a dress code or uniform dress code were both useless in supporting a school’s climate of discipline or learning. It seems that whichever form of dress code a district chooses to use, it must be enforced consistently from the office to the classroom, classroom to classroom, and school to school, in order to be effective.

CHAPTER 5

Introduction

When does a school district decide the current dress code is not effective at sustaining the school's climate of discipline and climate of learning and begins to search for alternatives? For the district with a uniform dress code policy in this study, the decision revolved around several issues. First, administrators and staff members were outraged at the lack of modesty shown in their students' choice of dress. For example, they were dealing with excessive incidents of sagging pants on boys and low-cut tops and short skirts on girls. Second, staff members felt that a great deal of instructional time was lost to clothing issues that resulted in disciplinary infractions such as non-compliance, disrespect, bullying, and theft of clothing items. There is always great concern for students' safety on campus. The idea was that children who came to school dressed in a school uniform tended to behave better than those not in a school uniform. In addition, with the school uniform dress code policy, it should be easier to pick out a person who does not belong on the school campus. Finally, adopting a school uniform dress code policy has the potential of saving parents money on purchasing school clothes. The uniform dress school principals stated that in 2004, when the district adopted its uniform dress code policy, school uniform dress items could be purchased for much less than name brand clothing items.

The scope of this research does not seek to determine if the above district has been successful or unsuccessful with its uniform dress code policy. This study simply asks, if compared to middle schools without a uniform dress code policy, do middle schools with a uniform dress code policy have better attendance rates, fewer office discipline referrals,

fewer out-of-school suspensions, and do the principals, certified staff members, and parents perceive a difference, if any, in their schools' climate of discipline and climate of learning?

For the most part, school uniform dress code policy research has been confined to large urban school districts. This project seeks to expand the body of information on the topic of school uniform dress code policies in smaller rural school districts in the state of North Carolina. It is the hope of this researcher to provide district level administrators and school board officials with insightful information that may assist them when contemplating moving toward or away from a school uniform dress code policy.

Research Questions

As stated in chapter three, this research project sought to answer five research questions. First, what difference exists in student attendance in middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to those without uniform dress code policies? The attendance data for the middle schools selected for this research are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Average Daily Attendance

School Year	Uniform School A	Uniform School B	Non-Uniform School A	Non-Uniform School B
2013-2014	94.38%	94.01%	99.81%	100.00%
2012-2013	94.50%	94.01%	94.94%	95.45%
2011-2012	94.60%	94.02%	95.43%	95.65%
2010-2011	94.09%	92.88%	94.84%	94.96%
Average Attendance	94.39%	93.73%	96.26%	96.52%

The attendance data above was provided by each district's Power School Data Manager. The yearly average attendance was calculated by dividing the school's average daily attendance (ADA) by the school's average daily membership (ADM). While the difference in

attendance averages between the uniform dress middle schools and the non-uniform dress middle schools are not very apparent, the non-uniform dress middle schools have a slightly higher attendance average for the four school years represented. From the data above, the uniform dress middle schools represented do not have better average attendance than the non-uniform dress middle schools represented. In addition, while attendance at each school was not directly discussed during the focus group or individual interviews, no principal, certified staff member, or parent discussed how the uniform dress code policy or lack of a uniform dress code policy impacted school attendance.

The second research question asked what differences exist in the discipline referrals in middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to middle schools without uniform dress code policies? Unfortunately, this research question was not able to be answered because school districts do not all record or retain data on office discipline referrals in the same manner. The state of North Carolina does require school districts to monitor out-of-school suspension (OSS) data in the same manner but does not have a similar requirement of office discipline referrals that do not result in out-of-school suspension. For example, some schools only record those discipline offences that result in OSS and other districts require schools to keep a record of all discipline referrals sent to the office.

The third research question asked what differences exist in out-of-school suspensions (OSS) in middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to those middle schools without uniform dress code policies? Out-of-school suspension data for the schools selected for this research are summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Out-of-School Suspensions

School Year	Uniform School A (675)	Uniform School B (548)	Non-Uniform School A (523)	Non-Uniform School B (376)
2013-2014	225	88	97	243
2012-2013	219	163	114	174
2011-2012	362	127	145	160
2010-2011	355	122	148	74
Average out-of-school suspensions	290.25	125	126	162.75

The out-of-school suspension data above was provided by each district's Power School Data Manager. While the data does show that one school (Uniform School A) has a higher four year out-of-school suspension average than the other schools selected for this research, the data does not show that uniform dress schools have a lower suspension average than non-uniform dress schools. Non-uniform school B does have a higher suspension average than non-uniform school A; however, uniform school B and non-uniform school A have suspension averages that are very similar with a difference of only one suspension separating the two schools. The differences noted above may be the result of a change in administration or a change in the school's philosophy of how discipline impacts learning. From this data, we cannot conclude that in these communities school uniform dress code policies produce fewer out-of-school suspensions than in schools without uniform dress code policies. The data shown above does not support the notion that middle schools with uniform dress code policies have an apparent difference in out-of-school suspensions than middle schools that do not have uniform dress code policies.

The final two research questions were answered through face-to-face focus group and individual interviews conducted with the schools' principals, certified staff members, and

parents from each school site. The results of these interviews are summarized in full detail in chapter four of this study. The fourth research question asked what differences exist in the perceptions of administrators, staff members, and parents about student behavior or the school's climate of discipline in middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to middle schools without uniform dress code policies? Similarly, question five asked what differences exist in the perceptions of administrators, staff members, and parents about the school's climate of learning in middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to middle schools without uniform dress code policies? Throughout each interview it became very evident that the schools' climate of discipline and climate of learning were so strongly linked together that interview participants found it difficult to separate the two. In fact, there answers began to overlap as we transitioned from discussing the school's climate of discipline to discussing the school's climate of learning.

Interview participants believed that the school's dress code, whether it is a uniform dress code or a traditional dress code, sets the tone for the school's climate of discipline and climate of learning. In the middle schools without uniform dress code policies administrators, staff members, and parents discussed how their schools are dealing with disruptive behaviors caused by dress code infractions that distract from the school's climate of discipline and learning. On a daily basis they are dealing with the same type of issues that plagued the middle schools in the uniform dress school district prior to adopting a uniform dress code policy. Other than the principals, staff members and parents suggested that they would be in favor of adopting a uniform dress code policy. They believe that a uniform dress code policy would help to eliminate students being picked on due to clothing, reduce

discipline infractions such as theft of clothing items, and increase instructional time lost when students are in violation of the dress code.

Administrators and staff members from the middle schools that utilize a uniform dress code policy agree with the above and discussed how they believed that their uniform dress code policy improved the schools' climates of discipline and learning. Administrators and staff members discussed how they believe that the uniform dress code policy has lessened bullying due to clothing and helped to disguise students who are from economically disadvantaged homes. In addition, administrators and staff members believe that the uniform dress code policy has increased instructional time by making infractions of improper dress at school easier to address and correct.

Unfortunately, parents who were interviewed from the uniform middle schools do not agree with the above results. Parents from the uniform dress middle schools say that the uniform dress code policy has not eliminated or lessened bullying in their schools due to students being picked on because of how they dress. Parents also said that the uniform dress code policy has caused teachers to become more focused on the uniform causing wasted instructional time with daily uniform checks and sending students out of class because of uniform infractions. As a powerful statement, one of the uniform dress parents concluded "the uniforms are just not, in my opinion, not accomplishing anything."

In summary, it seems that the uniform dress school district adopted the uniform dress code policy to address the same problems now facing the non-uniform dress school district. However, the adoption of the uniform dress code policy has not eliminated or, in some cases, lessened these issues that distract from the schools' climates of discipline and learning. It

appears that the uniform dress code policy has only exchanged one set of problems for another. From the research presented in this study, we cannot conclude that school uniform dress code policies produce better climates of discipline or learning than in schools without uniform dress code policies in these communities. The qualitative data presented in chapter four does not fully support the notion that middle schools with uniform dress code policies have better climates of discipline or learning than middle schools that do not have uniform dress code policies in the communities selected for this study.

Literature Reflections and Connections

Did the middle schools included in this study reveal any connections to those schools noted in previous research about school uniform dress code policies? Summary data representing attendance and out-of-school suspensions as well as qualitative data from interviews conducted with principals, certified staff members, and parents show close alignment with much of the research presented in this study. The most concrete connections were found in the areas of school safety, discipline, school climate, attendance, and cost of uniforms to families.

Within this school district, the largest proponents of school uniform dress code policies were the principals and teachers in middle schools with uniform dress code policies. Likewise, DeMichell, et al., (2000), Massare (2004), Wilson (1999) cited that administrators and teachers have the highest regard for uniform dress code policies and credit them for decreasing discipline issues and improving school climate. Principals and certified staff members who were interviewed for this research agreed that the uniform dress code policy in their district has reduced incidents of bullying and teasing due to student dress. Likewise,

Johnson (2010) and Wilson (1999) also contend that administrators in schools with uniform dress code policies report lower levels of perceived school violence than do principals who are in schools without uniform dress code policies. Further, research done by Tucker (1999) and Cohn (1996) found that teachers in middle schools with uniform dress code policies perceived the school's environment to be safer which produced less teasing and a more positive school environment conducive for learning. Cohn (1996) stated in her research that uniform dress code policies were responsible for reducing out-of-school suspensions by 32%. However, in contrast to these studies, the results of this study suggest that in these communities there is no apparent difference in out-of-school suspensions for middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to middle schools without uniform dress code policies.

Additionally, administrators and certified staff members in this community did agree that the uniform dress code policy reduced incidents of theft of clothing items because with a uniform everyone pretty much wore the same things to school each day. In research presented by Holloman, et al. (1996) school uniform dress codes were credited with reducing violence and theft in schools by removing the temptation created by expensive clothing items. In addition, Elder (1999) cited that 89% of staff in schools with uniform dress code policies believed that the uniform helped to decrease student violence and theft; however, the researcher would not go as far to say these results were solely attributed to the uniform dress code policy itself.

In middle schools with uniform dress code policies in this particular district, principals and certified staff members concluded that the uniform dress code created a

positive school climate where students felt a sense of belonging and attitude that all students fit into the school community. Bowsher (2001) agrees and found that school uniform dress code policies have a positive effect on student attitude by eliminating bias and low expectations. Massare (2004) concluded that school uniform dress code policies helped to create for students an atmosphere of pride in them and in their school.

Results presented above from this research project suggest that there is no apparent difference found in average attendance for middle schools with uniform dress code policies compared to middle schools without uniform dress code policies. This finding is consistent with research by Massare (2004) who found that school uniform dress code policies did not affect student attendance in a positive or negative manner. Additionally, Brunsmma and Rocquemore (1998) found that no significant relationship exists between school uniform dress code policies and student behavior or absenteeism. These researchers conclude further that uniform dress code policies appear to have no benefits for students or schools who adopt them. Parents who were interviewed for this research would agree and see no positive benefits that uniforms have on the education of their children.

Research presented in this study found that while principals and staff members in this community perceived school uniform dress code policies to be an economic advantage to families because of the typically reduced cost of uniform clothing items as opposed to the high cost of popular clothing items. In addition, administrators, staff members, and parents believe that the uniform dress code policy helps to reduce arguing with children about what to wear to school and makes the morning routine easier. However, parents of students in uniform dress middle schools find uniform dress code policies to be more expensive because

parents still have to purchase popular clothing items for activities outside of the school setting. Past research by Massare (2004) cites that adopting a uniform dress code policy is a wise economic decision because uniforms make the morning dress routine easier and eliminates competition based upon clothing. Norum, et al., (1998) side with parents on the issue of economics and found that uniform dress code policies cost parents more because of the reason stated above. The findings of this small scale study appear to support those of Norum and refute a popular misconception that adopting school uniforms dress codes is less expensive for families. This finding may appear to be particularly significant given that many schools considering adopting school uniforms serve higher populations of low SES students and students living in poverty.

Implications for Research

School uniforms are not new to education; however, school uniform dress code policies are fairly new to public schools. Uniform dress code policies burst into public schools about 22 years ago when in 1994 the Long Beach California Unified School District became the first district in the nation to require all students in elementary through the eighth grade to wear uniforms to public schools (White, 2000). In their brief history, school uniform dress code policies enjoyed a variety of research being conducted through the 1990's and early 2000's; however, the research pool has become a small puddle in the last ten years. A first implication in this area is to conduct more empirical research. The research that exists becomes very limited after 2010. In addition, the research that exists has not been exclusively conducted in the public school arena. As an example, previous research conducted on the effects of uniform dress code policies only utilized a portion of their test

subjects from public schools and a majority were from private or Catholic schools (Brunsma & Rockqu Shore, 1998; Elder, 1999; Yeung, 2009). For this reason, more research should be conducted on the effectiveness of school uniform dress code policies in the public schools.

Another glaring disconnect in the literature is the lack of research into the effectiveness of uniform dress code policies in rural school districts. Most research into the effectiveness of uniform dress code policies has been conducted in large urban school districts leaving a wide gap in this body of knowledge. Within our own state of North Carolina many larger school districts have adopted uniform dress code policies; however, a growing number of more rural districts are adopting these policies as well. It would be interesting to see if there exists a difference in the effectiveness of uniform dress code policies with regard to urban districts versus rural districts.

Several glaring implications are a result of the current research project. This study is miniscule when one considers the widespread usage of uniform dress code policies in our state and the nation. The current research utilized only four school sites and a total of only around 30 interview participants. The small number of certified staff members (12) and small number parents (12) that were interviewed limits the generalizability of this study. The current research model could increase its generalizability with increasing the number of school sites and interview participants.

Another avenue that deserves future investigation would be to utilize similar methods and include interviews with students at each school site. Interviews with students would help one to understand the students' perspectives as they relate to the use of school uniform dress codes. While the scope of this research concentrated on middle schools, future research

could utilize similar methods to examine the effects of uniform dress code policies on elementary and high school climates of discipline and learning. The literature reviewed in this study did not always differentiate if studies were conducted with elementary, middle, or high school populations.

Throughout the interview data compiled from the uniform middle schools, the idea of a “standardized” uniform was discussed by administrators, staff members, and parents. To these populations, a “standardized” uniform means having all families purchase their uniform items from a single vendor ensuring likeness in all uniform items in coloring and styling. In contrast, the current uniform dress code policy in this district (Appendix I) allows parents to purchase uniform items from unlimited vendors as long as the color of the items is permitted at their particular school. Therefore, administrators, staff members, and parents call this type of policy a “color code” system. With this in mind, it would be interesting to conduct research into the effectiveness of “standardized” type uniform dress code policies compared to “color code” types of uniform dress code policies.

With the number of school districts that now require uniform dress code policies it is imperative that research into this reform measure continue to keep pace with the changing landscape of educational policy. Districts which have already adopted uniform dress code policies should continue to examine empirical research studies and conduct internal evaluations so they will not blindly continue to support a policy that may yield no positive effects. For districts contemplating the idea of adopting a uniform dress code policy, it is important to examine current research in order to ensure the effectiveness of whichever dress code policy one chooses to adopt.

Implications for Practitioners

The purpose of this research was to help provide guidance to school board officials or district level officials who are contemplating adopting a school uniform dress code policy. At a time when school systems in North Carolina are inundated with high stakes testing, every district is looking for an advantage. Many look to new academic intervention programs, new teaching structures, finding ways to improve attendance, or programs to help decrease discipline infractions that steal away from valuable instructional time. In many cases, school uniform dress code policies are only one factor included in an overall district reform program. For these reasons, it is imperative that research offer rich information from all aspects of an issue and not present a singular perspective. It has been the objective of this research to present relevant information about school uniform dress code policies from the perspectives of administrators, certified staff members, and parents. In doing so, two impactful insights have come to light out of the research presented in this study.

First, the idea of consistency was discussed by all interview participants from each school site. From the perspective of interview participants, consistency from classroom to classroom, from school to school, and from the classroom to the principal's office is a key factor in the success of any policy in the school setting. One of the non-uniform principals summarized the idea of consistency and school dress codes by saying that without consistency which every dress code policy a district chooses becomes worthless and ineffective. With consistency, any form of school dress code policy can be equally effective for improving or sustaining the school's climates of discipline and learning.

Second, without exception administrators, certified staff members, and parents from the uniform middle schools discussed the need to make their current uniform dress code policy more “standardized.” As the uniform dress code policy for this district is now written, parents may purchase uniform items from any vendor offering the required color without labels on the garment. Parents stated that this fact caused a concern for economically disadvantaged families because students are able to distinguish between articles purchased from name brand manufacturers compared to items purchased from Wal-Mart or Dollar General. As a result, parents claim that kids are still teased and bullied by others because they cannot afford name brand clothing. With this fact in mind, practitioners who are considering adopting a uniform dress code policy should explore the idea of utilizing only one vendor from which all uniform items must be purchased. In doing so, uniform items are ensured to have likeness in shade of color and styling; therefore, creating a true level playing field for all children. When this can be accomplished, the uniform dress code policy may have a better opportunity to improve or sustain a school’s climates of discipline and learning.

Conclusions

Based upon the perceptions of principals, certified staff members, and parents who were interviewed through this research project, several supportive and non-supportive ideas emerged about uniform dress code policies as they compare to traditional dress codes. Staff members and parents from middle schools without uniform dress code policies would prefer to adopt a uniform dress code policy in their middle schools. However, non-uniform principals would prefer to continue with the current dress code policy because they believe

that a uniform dress code policy would suppress students' individuality and cause staff members to waste instructional time enforcing the rules of a uniform dress code policy.

From the uniform middle schools, principals and staff members were the most supportive of the current uniform dress code policy. Principals and staff members believe that the uniform dress code policy makes managing issues of student dress easier to manage resulting in increased instructional time due to less dress code infractions and competition between students. However, the parents who were interviewed stated that the uniform dress code policy does not decrease teasing or bullying and does not save families money on clothing as they were originally promised. The only common conclusion emerging from the uniform middle schools was the idea of a "standardized" uniform policy. Under such a policy all uniform dress code items would be purchased from a single vendor ensuring likeness in color and styling.

Due to the small sample size of school sites selected and persons interviewed, the data presented here may not be generalized to middle schools across the state or nation. However, from the data presented in this study one cannot assert that the uniform dress middle schools representing this community have better attendance rates, decreased out-of-school suspensions, or better climates of discipline or learning than do middle schools that do not have uniform dress code policies. It seems that for a school district to adopt a uniform dress code policy over a traditional dress code policy is to exchange one set of problems for another. In the non-uniform dress middle schools in this community, school officials are dealing with inappropriate dress code issues such as sagging pants, low cut tops, and short skirts. These issues waste instructional time and cause discipline infractions. In the uniform

dress middle schools in this community, school officials are dealing with uniform violations such as items being the wrong color, labels on clothing, and clothing being the wrong style. These issues also waste instructional time and cause discipline infractions. At this point, school officials must decide which set of dress code issues they wish to address.

One common theme did emerge from both sides of the uniform discussion. The idea of consistency was discussed and supported by principals, staff members, and parents from each school site. Whichever dress code policy a district chooses to adopt must be implemented and enforced in a consistent manner from classroom to classroom, from school to school, and from the classroom to the principal's office in order to be successful. In fact, one of the non-uniform principals concluded by saying "if the administrator is not willing to enforce the rules, uniforms are not any better than any other form of dress code."

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Scotland County Schools Parent Survey School Dress Code

In an effort to learn more about the opinions of our parents, the Scotland County School System asks that each parent take a few moments to provide us with your opinions about our students' and our faculty/staff's dress codes. Thank you for your time and sharing with us your opinion.

1. Which dress code option below would you more likely support? Please check your choice and provide any comments on the back.

☐

Current Dress Code Policy

This is our current dress code policy as it is written and currently published on page #11 of the 2009-2010 Scotland County Schools Information Bulletin.

☐

A Restrictive Dress Code Policy

Characteristics of this type policy may include, for example:

- ❖ All top garments must have a collar such as button down oxford style shirts or polo style shirts.
- ❖ All top garments must have sleeves.
- ❖ Crewneck, hoodless sweat shirts may be worn to school.
- ❖ Shirts must be worn tucked in so that belt loops are visible at all times.
- ❖ Bottom garments made of spandex, nylon, denim, or sweat pants are not permitted.
- ❖ Shorts, skirts, or skorts must be at least figure tip length.
- ❖ Belts must be worn if the bottom garment is manufactured with belt loops.
- ❖ Pants must be worn above the hips at all times.
- ❖ Garments that do not fit properly such as oversized or undersized skin tight items are not permitted.
- ❖ Some type of footwear must be worn at all times.
- ❖ Shoes must match.
- ❖ Shoes must have an enclosed back or heel strap.
- ❖ Bedroom shoes, flip-flops, or shoes with spiked heels are not permitted.
- ❖ Socks may not be worn over pant legs.
- ❖ Heavy weight jackets or overcoats may be worn to school then placed in the student's locker.
- ❖ Light weight, hoodless jackets may be worn inside the classroom.
- ❖ Hats, sunglasses, do-rags, or bandanas may not be worn inside the school building.

☐

A Uniform Dress Code Policy

Characteristics of this type policy may include, for example:

❖ This type dress code would include all the characteristics of a “restrictive dress code” noted above with the following additions:

- ❖ All top garments must have a collar and be of a solid **school** color.
- ❖ Solid color, crewneck, hoodless sweat shirts may be worn to school. Color must match one of the school colors.
- ❖ All bottom garments must be **khaki or navy blue** in color. No other colors may be visible.
- ❖ All garments must be free of labels and graphics of any kind.
- ❖ T-shirts may only be worn as undergarments and must match the school colors.
- ❖ Shoe laces must match and be white, black, or match the color of the shoes.
- ❖ Socks must match and be white, black, or one solid school color.
- ❖ Belts must be black, brown, or khaki and have no labels, graphics, or other decorations. Belt buckles may not have labels or graphics.
- ❖ Light weight jackets must match the school colors and have no hoods, labels, or graphics.

Comments: _____

2. Do you believe school faculty and staff should have a dress code?

Please circle: YES or NO.

If you answered “yes” please comment on what you think that dress code should be. If you answered “No” you may also comment below.

Comments: _____

Statement of Disclosure

This is to inform you that the dress code survey was created and is being conducted by Mr. Charles Dulin as part of his requirements to complete a doctoral program at NC State University. Mr. Dulin is employed with Scotland County Schools as the Assistant Principal at Carver Middle School. This survey is simply a tool for gathering public opinion about our school dress code. Its only purpose is to gain and gather information. For your reference, the current Scotland County Schools' dress code policy appears below.

DRESS CODE FOR GRADES 6-12

The purpose of a dress code is to communicate the school's clear expectation that the focus of school is to promote learning. In order for students to learn in a safe and orderly school environment with minimal disruptions, they shall attend school in clothing that is neat, clean, safe, and which covers them appropriately.

Students will not be allowed to attend school wearing clothing or accessories which interfere with the maintenance of good order and discipline, or which otherwise disrupt learning.

In accordance with this dress code/policy:

- a. Midriffs shall be covered;
 - b. Shoulders shall be covered, though sleeveless apparel is acceptable;
 - c. Undergarments shall not be visible;
 - d. Shorts, dresses, and skirts shall be at least fingertip length;
 - e. Pants shall be worn at the waist;
 - f. Belts, if worn, shall be buckled;
 - g. Sunglasses, goggles, and head covers may only be worn outdoors; and
- Clothing and accessories, as well as messages on clothing or accessories, shall not be lewd, vulgar, provocative, obscene, degrade individuals or groups, or promote violence, alcohol, tobacco, or illegal substances.

The foregoing is intended as examples only and in no way limit the scope of this dress code policy.

For purposes of the Code for Student Conduct, violations of this dress code/policy shall be treated as violations of Rule 12, "School Violations."

LEGAL REFERENCES: G.S. 115C-391(d1), 14-269.2; Gun Free Schools Act of 1994

Adopted: April 14, 2008

Revised: November 17, 2008

Appendix B

Individual Interview Guide for Principals

Before starting the interview say:

Before we get started I want you to first understand how much I appreciate you spending some of your valuable time with me in order to help with this research project. You need to also know that this interview will be audio recorded so I can refer back to our discussion when I write my report. Finally, please say exactly what you think. Do not worry about what I think. We are here to express honest opinions.

Questions:

1. Describe the factors that you believe contribute to or distract from the climate of discipline in your school?
2. Describe your belief about how the school's dress code contributes or distracts from the school's climate of discipline?
3. Describe the factors that you believe contribute to or distract from the climate of learning in your school?
4. Describe your belief about how the school's dress code contributes or distracts from the school's climate of learning?
5. Would you make any changes to your school's dress code? If so, what changes would you make and why would you make them? If not, why would you not make changes to the school's dress code?

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Guide for Teachers

Before starting the interview say:

Before we get started I want you to first understand how much I appreciate you spending some of your valuable time with me in order to help with this research project. Before we begin our discussion it will be helpful for us to introduce ourselves and tell a little about how we are connected to this school.

You need to also know that this interview will be audio recorded so I can refer back to our discussion when I write my report. If you are uncomfortable about being recorded, please say so and you may feel free leave the group without question. When you speak, please speak clearly and loudly enough to insure a good recording. I ask that we speak one at a time. I will play traffic cop and try to assure that everyone has a turn to express his/her ideas completely. Finally, please say exactly what you think. Do not worry about what I or your neighbor thinks. We are here to express honest opinions and have fun while we do it. Let us begin by introducing ourselves.

Questions:

1. Describe the factors that you believe contribute to or distract from the climate of discipline in your school?
2. Describe your belief about how the school's dress code contributes or distracts from the school's climate of discipline?
3. Describe the factors that you believe contribute to or distract from the climate of learning in your school?
4. Describe your belief about how the school's dress code contributes or distracts from the school's climate of learning?
5. Would you make any changes to your school's dress code? If so, what changes would you make and why would you make them? If not, why would you not make changes to the school's dress code

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Guide for Parents

Before starting the interview say:

Before we get started I want you to first understand how much I appreciate you spending some of your valuable time with me in order to help with this research project. Before we begin our discussion it will be helpful for us to introduce ourselves and tell a little about how we are connected to this school.

You need to also know that this interview will be audio recorded so I can refer back to our discussion when I write my report. If you are uncomfortable about being recorded, please say so and you may feel free leave the group without question. When you speak, please speak clearly and loudly enough to insure a good recording. I ask that we speak one at a time. I will play traffic cop and try to assure that everyone has a turn to express his/her ideas completely. Finally, please say exactly what you think. Do not worry about what I or your neighbor thinks. We are here to express honest opinions and have fun while we do it. Let us begin by introducing ourselves.

Questions:

1. Describe the factors that you believe contribute to or distract from the climate of discipline in your school?
2. Describe your belief about how the school's dress code contributes or distracts from the school's climate of discipline?
3. Describe the factors that you believe contribute to or distract from the climate of learning in your school?
4. Describe your belief about how the school's dress code contributes or distracts from the school's climate of learning?
5. Would you make any changes to your school's dress code? If so, what changes would you make and why would you make them? If not, why would you not make changes to the school's dress code?

Appendix E
Recruitment Letter for School Faculty Members

Dear Faculty Member:

You are receiving this letter because I would like to ask you to participate in a research study being conducted in your school. My name is Chuck Dulin and I am a doctoral student at NC State University. I am conducting this research study in order to complete my degree at NC State. The purpose of this research study is to provide guidance to school administrators and board of education officials as they wrestle with the idea of implementing a uniform dress code for students. This study will evaluate the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools as they relate to the schools' climate for student discipline and learning. This study will compare two middle schools with a uniform dress code to two additional middle schools without a uniform dress code.

Participation in this research study is purely voluntary. Should you wish to participate, you will be asked to take part in a group interview with 5 to 6 other participants. The interview will take up to 90 minutes to complete, it will be conducted on your school campus, and at a time most convenient for all participants. The interview will, however, take place at a time when students are not on campus.

The maximum number of participants in the interview will be 7 faculty members from the various grades and subject areas around your school. All faculty members who agree to participate may not be selected to take part in the interview. Once all letters have been returned to the office, seven group members will be randomly selected from the pool of potential participants. I wish to thank you in advance for your consideration. I know that your time is valuable and I do not take lightly your sacrifice to help in my research.

If you would like to participate, please sign the bottom portion of this letter and give it to your school secretary in the school's main office. If you are selected as a participant, I will contact you with further detailed information regarding the interview.

Sincerely,

Chuck Dulin
Doctoral Student
NC State University

This consent information is valid September 6, 2013 through September 6, 2014

Yes, I wish to be considered as a potential participant in this research study. I do understand that if, for any reason, I do not wish to continue as a participant, I may withdraw myself without question or penalty.

Please return this letter to your school secretary on or before

_____.

Signature

Appendix F
Recruitment Letter for Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

You are receiving this letter because I would like to ask you to participate in a research study being conducted in your child's school. My name is Chuck Dulin and I am a doctoral student at NC State University. I am conducting this research study in order to complete my degree at NC State. The purpose of this research study is to provide guidance to school administrators and board of education officials as they wrestle with the idea of implementing a uniform dress code for students. This study will evaluate the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools as they relate to the schools' climate for student discipline and learning. This study will compare two middle schools with a uniform dress code to two additional middle schools without a uniform dress code.

Participation in this research study is purely voluntary. Should you wish to participate, you will be asked to take part in a group interview with 5 to 6 other participants. The interview will take up to 90 minutes to complete, it will be conducted on your school campus, and at a time most convenient for all participants.

The maximum number of participants in the interview will be 7 parents from your school. All parents who agree to participate may not be selected to take part in the interview. Once all letters have been returned, group members will be randomly selected from the pool of potential participants. I wish to thank you in advance for your consideration. I know that your time is valuable and I do not take lightly your sacrifice to help in my research.

If you would like to participate, please sign the bottom portion of this letter, provide contact information where I may reach you, and then return this letter to your child's school. If you are selected as a participant, I will contact you with further detailed information regarding the interview date and time.

Sincerely,

Chuck Dulin
Doctoral Student
NC State University

This consent information is valid September 6, 2013 through September 6, 2014

Yes, I wish to be considered as a potential participant in this research study. I do understand that if, for any reason, I do not wish to continue as a participant, I may withdraw myself without question or penalty.

Please return this letter to your school on or before _____.

Signature

Contact Information (phone number or email)_____

Appendix G

Non-Uniform Middle School A Dress Code

Dress Code

It is the responsibility of the school to foster good habits of dress and grooming, just as it is to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning. While a pupil's dress is primarily the responsibility of the student and parents, attire or appearance which is provocative or inappropriate and which distracts or disrupts the attention of students from the instructional program cannot be allowed. The school administration, with the approval of the superintendent, will determine that which is detrimental to the instructional program or to the educational process. Further, both pupil dress and grooming must be in accordance with the health and safety standards, and appropriate footwear must be worn at school. In the interest of pride in one's self, one's community, and one's school, ABC Middle School students are encouraged and expected to dress in a manner guided by safety, cleanliness, and decency.

Inappropriate Attire at School Includes:

1. Hats, bandanas, and scarves inside buildings
2. Sunglasses
3. Mini-skirts/short shorts-a good measure is to extend hand to leg, student should not touch skin. (Rule still applies when leggings are worn)
4. Tank Tops
5. Undershirts as outer shirts
6. Swimsuits
7. Clothing which does not join at the waist

8. Wide-legged shorts
9. Baggy/sagging pants
10. Shirts must be tucked in
11. Males wearing beads

Students will receive dress code violation sheet. In school suspension will result for the following.

3 Violations – 2 hours in ISS

6 Violations – 1 day in ISS

9 Violations – 2 days in ISS

12 Violations – 3 days in ISS

Appendix H

Non-Uniform Middle School B Dress Code

ABC School's Board of Education believes that dress and personal appearance of students greatly affects their academic performance. Therefore, at ABC Middle School, students are encouraged and expected to dress in a manner that promotes safety, cleanliness, and academic success.

Students will not be allowed to attend school wearing clothing or accessories that may cause any disruption in the expected daily operations of the school or classroom.

In accordance with ABC Middle School's dress code:

- A. All skirts and shorts must meet the fingertip rule requirements in front and back; (must meet or exceed the length of your longest finger when the arm is extended down the leg)
- B. Shoulders shall be covered, (three-finger rule) tank tops and halter tops are not permitted, though sleeveless apparel is acceptable;
- C. Undergarments (bra straps, boxers, etc.) shall not be visible;
- D. Sleepwear (pajamas, bedroom shoes, etc.) shall not be worn;
- E. Midriffs must be covered
- F. Bandage skirts and other tight, spandex skirts/dresses that move above the fingertip mark of measurement when walking, bending or sitting are not allowed;
- G. Pants, shorts, and skirts must be worn at the waist, NO SAGGING;
- H. Male shirt tails that extend below the back pockets of pants must be tucked in at all times;
- I. Hats, to include bandanas, sunglass, or swimwear are not allowed;
- J. Leggings may not be worn as pants. If worn, leggings must have an outer garment that meets the dress code (fingertip length);
- K. Jeans with holes that are above the fingertip measurement must be worn with leggings to cover any exposed skin;
- L. Clothing and accessories, as well as messages on clothing and accessories, must not be lewd, vulgar, provocative, obscene, degrade individuals or groups, nor promote violence, alcohol, tobacco, or illegal substances. Students may wear heavy jackets to school if they choose; however, heavy coats and jackets and/or oversized jackets (hoodies) create safety concerns. Heavy and/or oversized jackets must be placed in student lockers while at school. Light or fleece jackets will be acceptable to wear while in class.

The foregoing is intended as examples only and in no way limits the scope of the dress code policy.

If a student's attire is deemed inappropriate, the student will:

1. Report to guidance for an alternate outfit and return to class;

2. Contact a parent who will bring appropriate clothing for the student.

Students who refuse to adhere to the student dress code and safety expectations at ABC Middle School will be subjected to additional disciplinary actions.

Appendix I

Uniform School District School Uniform Dress Code Policy

SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY Policy Code: 4317 Page 1 of 4 In order to provide an educational environment that is safe, conducive to learning, promotes school pride and student self-esteem the ABC County Board of Education has adopted the concept of school uniforms. All ABC County students will be in uniform beginning on the first day of school 2004-2005.

Students who object to the school uniform policy, based upon sincerely held religious beliefs, may be exempt from the school uniform policy. See Policy 3510: Religious Based Exemptions from School Programs for information on requesting a religious exemption.

Adopted: January 10, 2002 Revised: March 26, 2002, May 7, 2002, February 4, 2003, March 4, 2003, May 1, 2003, August 7, 2003, April 6, 2004, April 5, 2005, April 4, 2006, May 12, 2009, June 7, 2011, August 2, 2011 Regulation Code: 4317 R-1 Page 2 of 4

VENDORS: ABC County Schools, in cooperation with the ABC County Chamber of Commerce, will make available to parents, guardians and students a list of vendors where school uniform items may be purchased

UNIFORM DESCRIPTION SHIRTS: 1. Golf/Polo Style with a collar 2. Must have buttons only. 3. Must be a solid school color (see individual schools for color selection) All schools will have two base colors, black and white. 4. May be long or short sleeve (sleeveless shirts are not permitted) 5. Shirts must be free of labels and graphics of any kind. 6. Shirts must be tucked in at all times with the exception of approved sweatshirts. 7. Solid, school colored sweatshirts. 8. Students Pre K-12 may wear school pride wear (no t-shirts). 9. T-Shirts can only be worn as under clothing if it matches the school colors. T-Shirts are not allowed to be worn as the primary shirt. Writing or graphics must not show through the top garment.

PANTS, SHORTS, SKIRTS, JUMPERS, DRESSES, SKORTS, OVERALLS: 1. All bottom garments must be Khaki, Black or Navy in color. No other colors may be visible. (Ex. Pockets, buttons, and zippers) 2. Bottom garments must be free of graphics of any kind. 3. Garments cannot have frays and must be hemmed and not dragging the floor. 4. Pants must be worn above the hips at all times. 5. Garments that do not fit properly will not be tolerated including oversized, undersized and skin tight garments. 6. Pants must have zippers, buttons or snaps with the exception of Pre - K-3 students. 7. Cargo pockets are not allowed on any garment. 8. Pants are limited to no more than two front and two rear pockets. Watch pockets are not considered a pocket. 9. Form fitting spandex material, nylon, denim, corduroy, and sweat pants are prohibited. 10. Skirts are limited to no more than four pockets. 11. Garments may not have more than two slits and the slits cannot exceed four inches above the knee. 12. Shorts cannot be shorter than four inches above the knee and may be worn at the discretion of the parent and student. Pre - K-3 student's shorts should be worn at a reasonable length. Regulation Code: 4317 R-1 Page 3 of 4 13. Skirts/Skorts/Jumpers/Dresses cannot be shorter than four inches above the knee. 14. Capri pants are allowed but cannot be hip huggers, cannot be skin tight and the manufactured slit at the bottom of the Capri Pant cannot be above the knee. 15. Pants may not have a slit that exceeds four inches from the bottom of the

pant leg. 16. Pants may not be rolled up in a cuff to simulate Capri pants or shorts. 17. One piece jump suits are not allowed.

BELTS: 1. Students in grades 4 through 12 must wear belts if the garment was manufactured with belt loops. 2. Pre - K-3 students are not required to wear a belt 3. Belts or waist bands must be visible with shirts tucked in except when approved sweatshirts are worn. 4. Belts must be black, brown, khaki, or school colored. 5. Graphics, metal decorations (spikes and studs), or labels are unacceptable on all belts and belt buckles. 6. Belts must be an appropriate length and not hang below the straddle. **SHOES:** 1. Some type of footwear must be worn at all times. 2. Shoes with laces must be laced and tied at all times. 3. Shoe laces must be white, black, or match the color of the shoes. 4. Shoe laces must match and any straps must be secured. 5. Shoes must match and be the appropriate size. 6. Bed room shoes are prohibited. 7. Girls may wear pants tucked into boots; however, boots must be below the knee. 8. Shoes with spiked heels are prohibited.

OVERCOATS: 1. Overcoats may be worn to school and placed in the student's locker for the entire day.

LIGHT WEIGHT JACKETS: 1. The jacket must be in school colors and be one solid color. 2. The jacket cannot have any labels, artwork, or graphics with the exception of school pride wear and may be worn during the day during cold weather.

HATS/SUNGLASSES: 1. Hats, sunglasses, do-rags, sweat bands and head bands or other items that may be seen as a disruption to the school setting are prohibited in school from 8:00 until 3:00. Regulation Code: 4317 R-1 Page 4 of 4 2. Students whose religious tenets require the wearing of yarmulkes, headscarves, etc. will not be prohibited from wearing those items.

SOCKS: 1. Both socks must match. 2. Socks must be worn in a manner that does not undermine the integrity of the uniform. 3. Socks must be white, black, or of one solid school color. 4. Socks may not be worn over pant legs.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE: 1. Combs and other hair grooming items cannot be visible in the hair. 2. All necklaces/medallions must be worn under clothing. 3. Piercing cannot present a health hazard or cause a disruption to the school environment.

MISCELLANEOUS: 1. School Pride Apparel may be worn as a part of the approved uniform. 2. Uniforms may not be used as a fund raising activity. 3. Principals have the discretion to designate "picture days" and other days deemed appropriate to enhance or supplement learning as non-uniform days. 4. Secondary students who fail to wear the approved uniform on a given day will be placed in ISS /Time-Out/Saturday School until parents provide the uniform. 5. Repeat offenders will be dealt with at the discretion of the principal. 6. Parents who need financial assistance may submit their request on the appropriate form to the principal and the School Uniform Committee. A decision will be made and provided to the parent in writing. 7. School uniform information, the dress code policy and vendor list will be provided for parents when the new school year begins, when a student enrolls or when revisions are made to the uniform policy. 8. Any item that is worn to school must not undermine the integrity of the Uniform Policy, serve as a disruption to the educational process or present a health hazard to an individual or their peers. Revised: May 6, 2003 Revised: September 2, 2003 Revised: June 1, 2010 Revised: June 7, 2011 Revised: August 2, 2011 Revised: January 12, 2015

Appendix J

North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Impact of School Uniforms on Student Discipline and the Learning Climate: A Comparative Case Study of Two Middle Schools With Uniform Dress Codes and Two Middle Schools Without Uniform Dress Codes

Principal Investigator: Charles D. Dulin

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to provide guidance to school administrators and board of education officials as they wrestle with the idea of implementing a uniform dress code for students. This study will evaluate the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools as they relate to the schools' climate for student discipline and learning. This study will compare two middle schools with a uniform dress code to two additional middle schools without a uniform dress code.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in either an individual or group face to face interview with the principal investigator traveling to your school site. School principals who agree to participate in this study will be interviewed individually while teachers and parents who agree to participate will be interviewed as a group of no more than seven participants. Each type of interview will take up to 90 minutes to complete. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts will be created and analyzed for themes and patterns that characterize the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of uniform dress codes. After review of the transcripts when patterns and themes have been discovered, interview participants may be invited back to the school site for a "Reality Check" meeting. This meeting is for the purpose of allowing interview participants the opportunity to review patterns and themes identified by the researcher as accurate and consistent with the information discussed in the initial interview. In short, to answer the question "did the researcher get it right?" Your information will be valuable in assessing factors relating to the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools. All participants will receive a copy of the interview questions prior to the start of the interview.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks involved with this study. Finding time to be interviewed may be difficult. Hopefully, these interviews can be done after the instructional day creating less stress and a greater opportunity to focus on the interview without interruptions. In order to be accommodating, interviews involving parents may be conducted while students are at school.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to the participants except the intrinsic knowledge that they have provided data to be used in looking at the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools. Ultimately, the decisions of

school boards and education officials, as they relate to the implementation of uniform dress codes, could be impacted by the information gained through this research study.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. The interview recordings will be maintained on a flash drive storage device until destroyed one year after the conclusion of the study. The resulting transcripts will be destroyed one calendar year after the conclusion of the study. The audio files and transcripts will be stored in a locked safe of the principal researcher. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you or your school site to the study. Schools nor administrators, faculty members, or parents will be identified by name. Direct quotes from participants may be used in the reports about the research. However, quotes by principals, parents, or teachers will be stated as "A principal (parent or teacher) stated..."

Compensation

You will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this research study.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Charles D. Dulin, at 205 Stacy Ave. Hamlet, NC 28345, or by calling 910-997-1408.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent to Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

Appendix K
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
SUBMISSION FOR NEW STUDIES

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Date Submitted: <u>07/28/2013</u>
1a. Revised Date: <u>07/27/2012</u>
2. Title of Project: <u>Impact of school uniforms on student discipline and the learning climate: A comparative case study of two middle schools with uniform dress codes and two middle schools without uniform dress codes</u>
3. Principal Investigator: <u>Charles D. Dulin</u>
4. Department: <u>Leadership, Policy, and Adult and Higher Education</u>
5. Campus Box Number: <u>N/A</u>
6. Email: <u>cdulin@scotland.k12.nc.us</u>
7. Phone Number: <u>910-997-1408</u>
8. Fax Number: <u>910-277-4315</u>
9. Faculty Sponsor Name and Email Address if Student Submission: _____
10. Source of Funding? (required information): _____
11. Is this research receiving federal funding?: _____
12. If Externally funded, include sponsor name and university account number: _____
13. RANK: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty X Student: <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate; <input type="checkbox"/> Masters; or X PhD <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator:

Charles D. Dulin _____* 07/26/2013
(typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

*As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the **principal investigator of record**.*

Faculty Sponsor:

Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli _____* 07/26/2013
(typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

***Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature. For student submissions this means that the faculty sponsor has reviewed the proposal prior to it being submitted and is copied on the submission.**

Please complete this application and email as an attachment to: debra_paxton@ncsu.edu or send by mail to: Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (Administrative Services III). **Please include consent forms and other study documents with your application and submit as one document.**

For SPARCS office use only

Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)

☐ Exempt ☐ Approved ☐ Approved pending modifications ☐ Table

Expedited Review Category: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8a ☐ 8b ☐ 8c ☐ 9

Reviewer Name

Signature

Date

**North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of this study is to provide guidance to school administrators and board of education officials as they wrestle with the idea of implementing a uniform dress code for students. This study will evaluate the effectiveness of uniform dress codes in middle schools as they relate to the schools' climate for student discipline and learning. This study will compare two middle schools with a uniform dress code to two additional middle schools without a uniform dress code. The proposed research is important because ultimately the decisions of school boards and education officials, as they relate to the implementation of uniform dress codes, could be impacted by the information gained through this research study.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

Dissertation

B. SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?
Estimates or ranges are acceptable. Please be aware that if you recruit over 10% more participants than originally requested, you will need to submit a request to modify your recruitment numbers.

Approximately, 88 participants will be involved in this research study. Participants will come from four public middle schools in North Carolina that serve grades 6-8. Two middle schools will utilize a uniform dress code and two middle schools will not utilize a uniform dress code.

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

This research study will utilize three types of participants: school principals, school faculty members, and parents. School principals will be recruited through a face-to-face meeting with the principal researcher. Faculty members and parents will be recruited through a letter sent to all faculty members and parents. Two forms of the letter will be created, one for faculty members, and one for parents. Letters for faculty members will be placed in their school mail box and letters for parents will be sent home with each student. Both forms are attached to this application

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

Participants for this study must come from the four selected school sites and will be divided into three categories; principals, faculty members, and parents. The principal of each school site will be asked to participate in this study. For faculty members to be included as a participant, the only requirement is that they are employed as a certified faculty member of the selected school site. For parents to be included as a participant, the only requirement is that they currently have a student enrolled in the selected school site.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

Charter schools, alternative schools, private schools, and those schools operating with special populations of students having specific disabilities are excluded as potential school sites. These type schools may operate under different guidelines with regard to student dress codes. Schools selected for participation will be considered as North Carolina public middle schools serving students in grades 6-8. These schools shall be similar in number of students, ethnic diversity, and economic diversity.

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

The principal researcher will have no relationship to any subject used in the study. The principal researcher will not be directly employed in any of the selected school sites.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study:

- ☐ minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature
- ☐ fetuses
- ☐ pregnant women
- ☐ persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
- ☐ persons with physical disabilities
- ☐ economically or educationally disadvantaged
- ☐ prisoners
- ☐ elderly
- ☐ students from a class taught by principal investigator
- ☐ other vulnerable population.

7. If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

None of the above populations will be purposefully utilized for this study. No minors will be used in this study.

C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects. In order for the IRB to completely understand the experience of the subjects in your project, please provide a detailed outline of everything subjects will experience as a result of participating in your project. Please be specific and include information on all aspects of the research, through subject recruitment and ending when the subject's role in the project is complete. All descriptions should include the informed consent process, interactions between the subjects and the researcher, and any tasks, tests, etc. that involve subjects. If the project involves more than one group of subjects (e.g. teachers and students, employees and supervisors), please make sure to provide descriptions for each subject group.

Two school districts will be invited to participate in this research study through a face to face meeting with each superintendent or their designee. One district will utilize a uniform dress code and the other district will not use a uniform dress code. Two middle schools from each district will be asked to participate in the research

study through a face to face meeting with each principal.

Once permission to conduct the research has been secured, a letter asking for participants will be placed in the school mail box of all certified faculty members. A similar letter will be sent home to all parents asking for their participation in the research study. After letters have been returned by faculty members and parents who agree to volunteer, participants will be randomly selected to participate in focus group style interviews (5-7 members per each group). Certified faculty members will be interviewed separately from parents and vice versa. One group of certified faculty members will be interviewed from each school and a maximum of two groups of parents will be interviewed from each school. Principals will be asked during our initial meeting to participate in an individual interview. No participant will be identified by name nor will their school site be identified.

Interviews with principals and certified faculty members will be conducted while students are not at school and at times most convenient for the participants. All interviews with parent groups will take place at a time most convenient for parents. All interviews will take place at the participant's school site to eliminate excess travel by participants. Each interview, individual or focus group, will take up to one and a half hours to complete. All participants will receive a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview.

Finally, some participants will be asked to return to the school site in order to conduct a "reality check" meeting. The purpose of this meeting will be to review the interview data to conclude if it accurately reflects the themes and patterns of information found in the interviews. Thank you notes will be sent to all participants at the conclusion of this process.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

Each subject will be asked to give a maximum of up to two hours for participation in this study. All interviews will take place at the selected school site so no special travel will be required for the subjects.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS

1. State the potential risks (psychological, social, physical, financial, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

None noted

2. Will there be a request for information that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

No.

- a. If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

N/A

3. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

No.

4. How will data be recorded and stored?

All interviews will be audio recorded for this study. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim and destroyed one calendar year after the study has been concluded. All resulting transcripts will be shredded one calendar year after the conclusion of the study. During the course of the study, all audio files and transcripts will be locked in the personal safe of the principal researcher.

a. How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials?

Individuals volunteering to participate in the study must submit his or her name on the letter they return to agree to participate. These letters will be shredded at the conclusion of the study. Participants may give their name during the course of the interviews; however, all audio recordings will be destroyed one calendar year after the conclusion of the study.

b. How will reports be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

Describing individual responses may be necessary in order to analyzing the qualitative data resulting from the individual and group interviews. Participants will not be identified when responses are described. No participant will be identified by name nor will their school site be identified – they will only be distinguished by whether they come from a school with a uniform policy or not. Pseudonyms will be used for principals. Teachers and parents will be identified with the generic “A parent (or teacher) stated ...”

5. If audio or video recordings are collected, will you retain or destroy the recordings? How will recordings be stored during the project and after, as per your destruction/retention plans?

Digital audio recording will be used during individual and group interviews. These recordings, as well as, the resulting transcripts will be destroyed one calendar year after the conclusion of the study. All audio files and resulting transcripts will be stored on a flash drive storage device that will be locked in the personal safe of the principal researcher.

6. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

No.

E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This does not include any form of compensation for participation.

1. What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

Knowledge may be gained which will assist in determining if the school's dress code is effective or ineffective at impacting the school's climate of discipline and learning. Participants will create a forum within the group interviews that will allow for the exchange of ideas and perceptions about their schools' dress codes. Participants will have the opportunity to voice both challenges and successes in regards to the dress code used in their schools. From the study, information will be gained to help school boards and district level administrators make more informed decisions about student dress codes.

F. COMPENSATION

Please keep in mind that the logistics of providing compensation to your subjects (e.g., if your business office requires names of subjects who received compensation) may compromise anonymity or complicate confidentiality protections. If, while arranging for subject compensation, you must make changes to the anonymity or confidentiality provisions for your research, you must contact the IRB office prior to implementing those changes.

1. Describe compensation

No form of compensation will be provided for participating in this research study.

2. Explain compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.

N/A

3. If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.

N/A

G. COLLABORATORS1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on **Cover Page**) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number.

N/A

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.

An outside reader will have access to the transcriptions of the interviews in order to have another view in seeking patterns and ideas from the data. I will ask a colleague to review the data after coding is complete in order to check the accuracy of the patterns and themes discovered during each interview. Interview participants will have access to the transcripts of their interviews in order to provide a “reality check” of the coding scheme.

H. CONFLICT OF INTEREST1. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project?
No2. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? N/A**I. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.

2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.

3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

J. HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING

*Please consider taking the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative](#) (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.

Figure 1. Scotland County Schools Dress Code Survey Results

Out of 6,052 surveys, 1,304 were completed for a return rate of 22%

Student Dress Code:

Option A-Current Dress Code—62% or 812 respondents

Option B-Restrictive Dress Code—8% or 104 respondents

Option C-Uniform Dress Code—28% or 370 respondents

*18 respondents made no selection

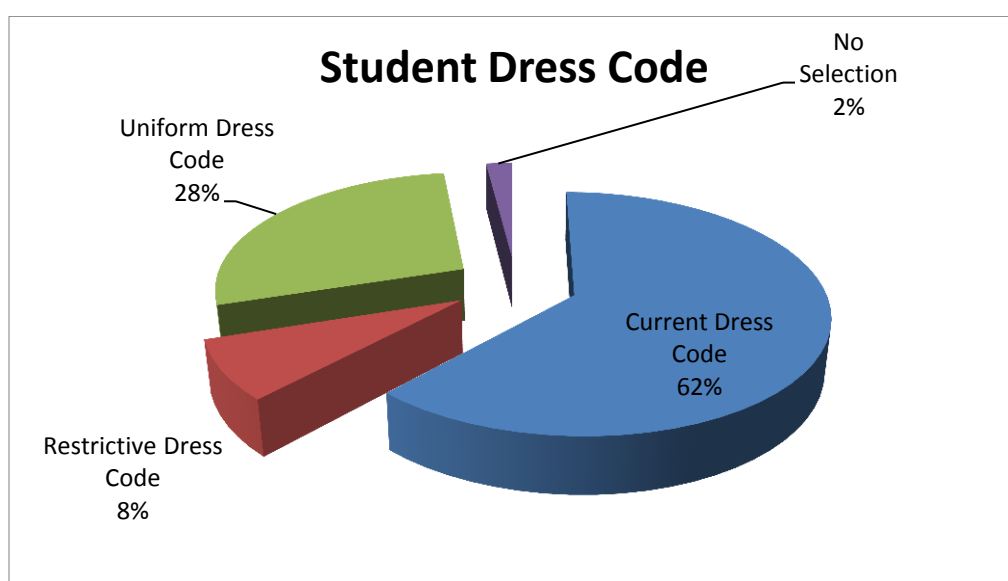


Figure 1. Survey data results from the Scotland County dress code survey. Overwhelmingly, 62% of parents who completed the survey wish to retain the current dress code used by the school system.