

# School Uniforms: Awesome—or Awful?

MORE AND MORE SCHOOLS ARE TELLING STUDENTS  
WHAT TO WEAR. **BY LAUREN TARSHIS**

**I**t was bad enough that Sam Gebicki had to learn the ropes at a brand-new school. It was bad enough that she had to say goodbye to her old friends. But what really stressed her out?

“The uniform,” says Sam, 12. “When I first saw it, I couldn’t believe it.”

At her new school, Sam would have to wear a white shirt, a plaid jumper, black shoes, and a necktie. Yes, a necktie. She would wear this outfit every day, rain or shine. There would be no more jeans, no more T-shirts, no more leggings or Crocs.

“I wanted to cry,” she says.

But is wearing a school uniform really something to shed tears over? Many experts insist that uniforms improve learning,



make schools safer, and even help students feel happier. It’s no wonder that the number of schools requiring uniforms is growing.

Today more than 18 percent of students in the U.S. wear uniforms. In the past, it was mostly private schools that required them. But

more and more public schools are bringing on the jumpers and the blazers. In Cleveland, Boston, Chicago, and Miami, more than half of all public schools require uniforms. In New Orleans, kids at 95 percent of schools are decked out in them.

## Dress Without Stress

Many principals in high-crime areas say uniforms can transform a school by making students and teachers

safer. Troublemakers can’t hide dangerous objects under baggy clothes. Fights don’t break out over expensive jackets or fancy sneakers. Kids can’t show up to class wearing gang colors or symbols.

Even in quiet towns, uniforms are catching on. When all students

wear the same thing, kids don't have to stress about having the latest brands. Why beg your parents for a pair of \$150 Uggs if you can't wear them to school?

### Lost Opportunities?

Still, some experts believe uniforms have drawbacks. Schools often require families to buy the uniforms, which can be expensive. Some styles are unflattering to certain body types, which can add another challenge for kids already struggling with their self-image.

There's also the fact that clothing can help us all—teens especially—express who we are: a Jay-Z fan or a Steelers fanatic, one of the crowd or someone who dares to be different. Some schools do allow kids to spice up their uniform look with jewelry or hair accessories, but in general, options for creative expression are limited.

Last, kids who don't have to choose clothes for school lose an opportunity to practice for later in life. Wearing the appropriate clothes for a job interview or college visit can mean the difference between success and failure.

Nevertheless, education experts are virtually united in their support of school uniforms. And after four years of wearing a uniform, Sam Gebicki agrees with them.

"I do miss being able to express myself through my clothes and seeing what my friends were wearing every day," she says, "but it's nice to just get up and get dressed without worrying." ●

# What Do You Think?

**Are school uniforms a good idea?** Go back to the article to find arguments that support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



## YES

**BRING ON THE KHAKIS!**

1 It makes schools  
safer.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## NO

**I CAN'T GIVE UP MY JEANS!**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide what you think about this issue. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

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