

2016

# The Impact of School Uniforms on School Climate

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*Walden University*

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Attillah Brookshire

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2016

Abstract

The Impact of School Uniforms on School Climate

by

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MA, Central Michigan, 2005

BS, Jacksonville State University, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2016

## Abstract

Approximately half of the public schools in the United States require uniforms or a formal dress policy and many are intended to reduce discipline problems and improve school climate. A suburban school district in Georgia recognized that there was an increase in discipline problems in their schools that affected the school climate. In an effort to promote school safety and improve climate, stakeholders at a district campus adopted a uniform policy. The purpose of this survey study was to examine the differences in perceived school climate between a district campus with a uniform policy and a similar campus with no uniform policy. The theoretical framework of this study was based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The American School Climate Survey-Teacher Version was sent electronically to all teachers from the 2 study sites. The final sample included 62 respondents, 32 from the school with uniforms and 30 from the school without uniforms. Mann-Whitney tests were used to test for differences in survey responses between the 2 groups. The climate of the school that required uniforms was rated significantly higher on 14 of the 25 survey items, including safety, reduced bullying, and improved student learning. There were no differences between group scores for the remaining survey items. Implications for positive social change include providing the findings to the local site as an initial step in investigating school climate and the possible impact of school uniforms. With increased information, the study district can make more informed decisions regarding the use of school uniforms, which might improve safety, reduce bullying, and improve student learning in the district.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my son, Zakiyah and the rest of the members of my family. Their patience and encouraging words are what encouraged me not to give up. This doctoral study is evidence that dreams can and do come true. I want my son and all the other youth to know the sky is the limit. Nothing is impossible if you put God first and let Him order your steps. Nothing can keep you from reaching your dreams, not your family, environment, nor childhood. Anything is possible if you first BELIEVE.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	96
List of Tables .....	iv
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Description of the Problem .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Nature of the Study .....	9
Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	10
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Definitions.....	13
Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations.....	15
Assumptions.....	15
Limitations .....	16
Scope and Delimitations .....	16
Significance of the Study .....	16
Summary.....	17
Section 2: Review of the Literature .....	18
Introduction.....	18
History and Theories.....	19
Black Smock and White Collar.....	19

Why School Uniforms .....	20
Violence .....	23
Behavioral Problems.....	25
Academic Achievement .....	26
Opponents of School Uniforms .....	27
Implications for Further Research .....	29
Summary.....	31
Sectin 3: Research Method .....	33
Introduction.....	33
Research Design and Approach .....	33
Setting and Sample .....	35
Instrumentation and Materials .....	36
Reliability.....	37
Data Collection .....	38
Research Question and Hypotheses .....	39
Data Analysis .....	39
Pre-Analysis and Data Screening.....	40
Measures for Ethical Protection.....	41
Role of the Researcher .....	42
Summary .....	43
Section 4: Results.....	44

The Study Results .....	44
<b>Analyzing the Questions</b> .....	47
Section 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	57
Introduction.....	57
Rationale for School Uniforms .....	58
Synthesis of the Literature .....	61
Conclusions and Implications.....	63
Recommendations for Future Research .....	65
Summary .....	66
References.....	69
Appendix A:.....	88
Walden University Approval Letter.....	88
Appendix B: Consent Form A .....	89
Appendix D: .....	93
Appendix E: Variable Names .....	96

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Frequency Counts for Selected Variables ( $N = 62$ ) .....	52
Table 2: Statistical Data for School Uniforms A-Uniform and School B- non-uniform...53	
Table 3: School Learning Environment.....	58
Table 4: Bullying .....	45

## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

In 2014, 49% of the United States public schools required uniforms or a formal dress code policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The trend of public schools requiring school uniforms began in the 1980s, and grew significantly in the 1990s. In the late 1980s, urban school districts began experimenting with school uniforms mainly due to gang violence associated with dress (Chen and Weikart, 2008) This type of violence, as well as the appropriateness of various popular fashion trends, is the primary reason for the adoption of school uniforms (Konheim-Kalkstein, 2006). McDaniel (2013) reported that in 1986, Baltimore Cherry Hill Elementary School became the first U.S. public school to adopt a uniform policy. This school implemented uniforms in an attempt to reduce clothing costs for parents and to help curb social pressures. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that about 22% of public elementary schools, 19% of middle school, and 10% of high schools require uniforms for students (McDaniel, 2013). President Clinton promoted the uniform initiative with this 1996 State of the Union Address. He declared:

If it meant that the school rooms will be more orderly and more disciplined and that our young people will learn to evaluate themselves by what they are on the inside, instead of what they're wearing on the outside, then our public school should be able to require their student to wear uniforms. (White, 2000, p. 33)

This statement prompted the development of *The Manual on School Uniforms* (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The manual was provided to all school districts in the United States. The manual contained user guides to implementing a school uniform policy. It was expected that, after the release of the manual, more than 25% of elementary, middle, and high schools would implement school uniforms (Issacson, 1998). In implementing school uniforms following the guides in the manual, it would also help to increase safety in schools.

Robers, Zhang, Truman, and Snyder (2012) reported on indicators for U.S. school crime and school safety. They reported that there were 22 school-associated violent deaths from July 2009 to June 2010. After the 1999 Columbine shootings, more school districts did begin to implement uniforms. Ronald D. Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center, said, “In the wake of school shootings, community and schools are much more willing to embrace uniforms as well as a number of other strategies to enhance school safety” (White, 2000, p. 5). With the growing acts of violence and crime in school, it became obvious that the government needed to put something in place to solve these problems.

Tragedies such as these and other school-related incidents seemed to send an urgent message to push the adoption of school uniforms. Konheim-Kalkstein (2006) reported that in 1998-1999, 11.5% of public elementary schools had uniform policies, which increased to 15.5% by the end of the next school year. In 1999, New York City adopted a policy that allowed schools to vote on whether to opt out of a new school

uniform policy. About 70% of the city's elementary schools adopted the school uniform policy. The Philadelphia School Board unanimously adopted a district-wide policy requiring uniforms. Later that year, 60% of Miami public schools and 80% of Chicago public schools required school uniforms. Thirty-seven state legislatures enacted legislation empowering local districts to determine their own uniform policies (Konheim-Kalkstein, 2006). With a growing need to find a way to address the behavior, violence, and academics in school, districts began to adopt dress code policies.

Long Beach Unified School District was the first large urban school district in the United States to require school uniforms for all students in elementary and middle schools. Afterwards, school violence, crime, and negativity decreased among students (King, 1998). For some school districts, the rationale for dress code policies were reducing risks to safety. Other schools banned expensive clothing in response to repeated incidents where students were being assaulted and robbed for their clothes (Workman & Studak, 2010). The moves districts began to make to decrease crime in schools started the shift towards the adoption of school uniforms.

Uniforms lessen social pressures, help to increase student self-esteem, and improve academic achievement (Brunsma, 2006). Advocates favor school uniforms because they serve as a social and economic equalizer, reduce competition over clothes and demands on parents to purchase expensive, trendy clothing and teach children that there is more to a person than the clothes he or she wears (Wade & Stafford, 2003). Uniforms helped students feel equal to others. It helped them to focus more on the

academics because everyone looked alike. This adoption of dress codes and uniforms in school made students see each other as a family and a team instead of focusing on who had money and who did not. Researchers who have studied school uniforms have focused mainly on urban middle school settings, although a few researchers have studied high school and elementary school settings (Draa, 2005). Since, 2000, they have examined gang violence, discipline, attendance and socioeconomic effects related to uniform policies.

Murray (1997 and Wade and Stafford 2003) investigated the relationship between school uniforms and school climate. In 2000, Murray used The National Association of Secondary School Administrator's Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments School Climate Survey (CASE) to research the relationship between school climate and school uniforms in urban middle schools. He discovered that students in schools with school uniforms had a significantly more positive perception of security and maintenance, teacher relationships, and parent and community-school relationships.

Wade and Stafford (2003) also studied the relationship between school climate and school uniforms. He replicated Murray's (1997) study using the same instrument. However, they found no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of students at schools with uniform policies and those of students without such policies. Other researchers have found positive correlations between school climate and student achievement (Benson, 2003; Jurewicz, 2004; Summer, 2006). Overall, the research from these studies are conflicting, however, further studies on this topic could provide more

clarity in just how much school uniforms affect school climate. My purpose in conducting this study was to research the impact of uniforms on school climate in elementary schools located in a suburban area.

According to Brennan (2005) uniforms impact the school climate positively. He worked in a school that was riddled with gang activity and academic deficiency until a uniform policy was adopted. He contended that the climate of the school improved due to the implementation of a school uniform policy. Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey (2009) said that a positive and sustained school climate increases student academic achievement, motivation to learn, discipline, and school attendance. In this study, I provide insight into the school climate of two elementary schools, one with an adopted uniform policy, and one without a uniform policy. I wanted to find out if the school with uniforms had a higher school climate than the school without uniforms. I hoped to add to the study of school uniforms and the affect they have on climate in elementary schools.

### **Description of the Problem**

The administrators, teachers, parents and other stakeholders of Metropolitan school district located outside of Atlanta recognized that student discipline was a major concern. They believed the adoption of a uniform dress code might improve school safety, decrease discipline problems, and improve the learning environment. In response to the increasing educational demands of the students in the county, many stakeholders viewed uniform adoption as a way to increase student achievement and promote school

safety (CCPS-Blue Ribbon on School Discipline, 2007). However, researchers have not conducted follow-up studies, reviews, or evaluations on the impact of uniform adoption.

Research on the topic of whether school uniforms have an impact on school climate is also lacking on a much wider spectrum. Perkins (2006) said a school's climate can be characterized by the learning environment created through the interaction of human relationships, physical setting, and psychological atmosphere. Thus, it makes sense that uniforms would have an effect on the overall school climate (Perkins, 2006).

The school's climate can also be described as the tone or atmosphere of a school; it includes certain characteristics, such as the physical structure of a school building and the interactions between students and teachers (Cohen et al, 2009). It is grounded in student and teacher experiences and has emotional, ethical, social, and academic dimensions (CSEE, 2008). A positive and sustained school climate increases student academic achievement, motivation to learn, discipline, and school attendance (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009).

Cohen et al. (2009) said that school climate refers to the level of safety a school provides, the kind of relationships that exist within, and the larger physical environment, in addition to the shared vision and participation in that vision by all. Franco (2010) said there are four encompassing constructs that make up the concept of school climate. The domains are as follows:

- Physical, where the environment is conducive to teaching and learning and is safe, and welcoming;

- Social, where the environment promotes interaction and communication among students, faculty, staff, and the community;
- Emotional, where the affective environment for students, faculty, staff, and community helps students to foster self-esteem and a sense of belonging; and
- Academic, where the environment endorses learning and self-fulfillment for students, faculty, and staff.

A positive school climate can affect student motivation to learn, increase teacher morale, help to set clear goals, help to create higher student expectations, and increase teacher commitment (CSEE, 2008). Currently, data that has been presented only show studies that were conducted in middle and high schools in urban areas and those results are conflicting. The research of Gentile & Imberman (2011) reported the impact of uniforms on student achievement, attendance and behavior from a large urban school district in the southwest United States. They found that uniforms generated improvements in attendance in middle and high schools. However, there was little evidence of uniforms having impacts on attendance or disciplinary infractions for elementary students. In my research, this gap in attendance and disciplinary infractions are addressed through school climate surveys.

Schools with uniform policies have already seen significant drops in violence and behavioral problems. Konheim-Kalkstein (2006) found that principals reported increased attendance, reduced suspensions, less frequent fighting, increased test scores, and improved school performance after students began wearing uniforms. Educators and

politicians across the country have considered school uniforms as a vehicle to achieve school safety, school discipline, and student achievement (Breitenbach, 2010).

Supporters of school uniforms contend that uniforms bring tangible benefits, including lower student victimization, reduced gang activity and fights, increased student learning, and positive attitudes toward school and that they contribute to fewer occurrences of behavior problems (Beresford, 2003). Educators are most convinced that academic advantages could be linked to obligatory school uniforms, and that they embrace social benefits (Wilken & Aardt, 2012). Opponents, however, argue that school uniforms infringe on their right of self-expression and do not address school's real problems (Kizis, 2000).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Since the adoption of school uniforms in the suburban school district located outside of the Metropolitan Atlanta area, there have been no studies conducted that examine the impact of uniforms on school climate. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact the presence of school uniforms had on the school climate of a suburban elementary school from the perspective of the administrators and teachers. A favorable school climate provides structure within which students, teachers, administrators, and parents function cooperatively and constructively. A positive school climate influences students' behavior positively and increases their desire to stay in school (Loukas & Murphy, 2007). Positive school climate affects the indicators of school

success such as standardized test scores, annual yearly progress measures, and report card information (McGuiness & Dickerson, 2007).

### **Nature of the Study**

In this study, I examined the impact of school uniforms on school climate in two suburban elementary schools, one with a uniform policy and the other without one. These schools were located outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. I surveyed teachers and administrators to gauge their perceptions about uniform policies and their possible effects on school climate. Quantitative researchers are concerned with the development and testing of hypotheses and the generation of models and theories that explain behavior (Hoy, 2009). In an effort to be unbiased and objective, they collect quantifiable data and analyze data using statistics (Creswell, 2008). I used the American School Climate (ASC) Survey Teacher Version 2006, which is comprised of 25 Likert-type questions (Perkins, 2006). The survey measures teachers' attitudes about school climate, the school, community, and themselves. I administered surveys to the teachers and administrators at both schools using their work e-mails. After administering the surveys, I analyzed my results to assess whether teachers and administrators at the school with uniforms had a significantly different outlook on school climate compared to teachers and administrators at the school without uniforms. The results of my study were very enlightening, and will provide useful information to districts contemplating school uniforms.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

I used the following research question for this study: How has the adoption of school uniforms impacted school climate? I also hypothesized the following:

H<sub>0</sub>1: The adoption of school uniforms has no effect on the school climate.

H<sub>a</sub>1: The adoption of school uniforms has an effect on school climate.

I provide a more detailed discussion of the research questions and hypotheses in Section 3.

### **Theoretical Framework**

School climate has the potential to either increase or decrease student achievement (Perkins, 2006) as well as students' and other stakeholders' perceptions of a school as a welcoming environment (Perkins 2006). An organization's environment influences its climate, which influences the behavior of the organizations members. Stringer (2002) believed that climate is an objective element within an organization which is measured through the members' perceptions. He said that climate is part of the organization and that it exists regardless of the perceptions through which it is made known. Since school climate is affected by its' environment, then school uniforms should affect the climate, because it affects the environment.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs model is helpful for understanding the climate of a business, organization, or school (Rafferty, 2008). Maslow examined motivation factors in organizations and the needs that must be satisfied in order for members of the organization to be productive. He identified five needs: physiological,

safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. He applied the theory to organizations, hypothesizing that it was the task of the leaders to achieve motivation of the employees by addressing the basic needs of the individuals and allowing them to reach self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Those five needs are what schools need to be productive. It is the responsibility of the administration and teachers working together and putting different plans in place that help the students to feel safe and comfortable, allowing them to work to their fullest potential at school.

The basic needs that Maslow (1943) identified also have to be fulfilled in students, teachers, and administrators of a school (Howard et al., 1987). Schoen and Teddie (2008) said students, teachers, and administrators who have their needs fulfilled help ensure students' success in schools. Teddie (2008) also said that psychological needs involve the physical school characteristics such as space, light, and heat. Safety needs are addressed by safety from physical harm. Social needs of friendship and acceptance are promoted with a positive relationship among all the administrators, faculty, and students. Esteem needs are acknowledged by achieving and recognizing individual success in school. Students who feel like they are in a safe environment, are accepted by their peers and teachers, and acknowledged for their hard work tend to have higher self-esteems and are motivated to work hard.

The climate of a school includes the holistic perception of all stakeholders in values and expectations. Proponents of the school climate theory maintain that a school's ecology, milieu, social system, and culture affect a school's ability to regulate student

behavior (Patton, 2011). Proponents suggest that student outcomes, including school disorder, will be lower when the social climate is more socially unified and has a shared sense of values and beliefs (Zaykowski & Gunter, 2011). School uniforms help add to a child's sense of belonging and family because everyone is dressed the same.

Critics contend that clothing such as low cut pants, see-through shirts, and clothing with sayings that are perceived to be disrespectful are inappropriate and distracting in a school setting (Patton, 2011). Following such criticisms, many school districts have adopted more stringent dress codes or required that students wear school uniforms (Lumsden & Miller, 2002). In President Bill Clinton's 1996 State of the Union Address, he challenged schools "to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship. If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms (pg 13)." Advocates use this quote as their primary argument for mandating uniforms in public schools (Boutelle, 2008).

Opponents believe dictating what students wear to school violates their constitutional right to freedom. School uniforms infringe on students' right of self-expression, do not address the school's real problems, and are just a superficial approach to the problems faced by American schools (Brunsmma, 2006). Although critics such as Kizis (2000) asserted that school leaders need to be aggressive in handling these problems, others seek a more nuanced approach regarding uniforms. They say that school leaders who implement uniform policies should specify how such policies help foster a

safe, orderly environment for student learning. They should also ensure that such policies allow students an alternative means of expressing their views (Lumsden and Miller, 2002). Opponents have made a stance and refuse to allow students to conform to one style of dress at school because they say it takes away their freedom of expression.

### **Definitions**

This section contains keywords and their meanings, which can found throughout this paper.

*Absenteeism*: The practice of regularly staying away from work or school without good reason (Brunsma, 2006 pg 25).

*American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*: National organization advocating individual rights by litigating, legislating, and educating the public on a broad array of issues affecting individuals (King, 1998).

*Adequate Yearly Progress*: a measurement defined by the U.S. federal No Child Left Behind Act that allows the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

*Advocates*: someone who speaks on the behalf of another person especially in a legal context (Brunsma, 2006).

*Blue Ribbon Commission*: an independent and exclusive commission of nonpartisan statesmen and experts formed to investigate some important governmental issue (Campbell, 2006).

*College and Career Performance Indicators (CCRPI)*: a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

*Disciplinary sanctions*: the detriment, loss of reward, or coercive intervention annexed to a violation of a law as a means of enforcing the law (Brunsma, 2006).

*Family of Consumer Sciences*- professionals that strive to improve the quality and Standards of individual and family life by providing educational programs, influencing public policy, and through communication (Campbell, 2006)

*Gangs*- a group of persons working to unlawful or antisocial ends; *especially*: a band of antisocial adolescents (Brunsma, 2006)

*Implement*-to put policies into practice, action, or to employ (Perkins, 2006).

*National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)*: leaders in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle level principals and other education leaders in their commitment for all children (Lumsden, 2002).

*Ostracism*: banishment; the state of being excluded from society (Perkins, 2006).

*Pedagogica*: the study of becoming a teacher; strategies of instruction or style of instruction (Perkins, 2006).

*School climate*: the learning environment created through the interaction of human relationships, physical setting and psychological atmosphere (Perkins, 2006).

*Socioeconomic*: the study of the relationship between economic activity and social life. (Brunsma, 2006).

*Stigma*: a mark of shame or discredit, (Merriam-Webster retrieved May, 2015).

*Suburban schools*: schools in the residential area on the outskirts of a city or large town, (Merriam-Webster retrieved July, 2015).

*Title I School*: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged; a school with a large number low, economically disadvantaged students, who qualify for free or reduced lunch, that has not passed the state test for two consecutive years, (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

*Uniforms*: Uniforms are considered to be a distinctive set of clothes worn to identify a person's occupation, affiliation, or status. In reference to the school setting, uniforms are a distinctive style or other feature that identifies someone as a member of a group (Brunsma, 2006).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

I made many assumptions in this study. The first assumption I made was the climate of schools could be affected by the presence of uniforms. I assumed the principals and teachers from both schools would all be interested in the study and would, therefore, complete the survey. I assumed the participants understood the directions of the survey and completed them honestly. I also assumed the survey questions measured the

climate of the schools accurately. I assumed that I would need to use an Independent t-test to analyze my data.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are weaknesses in the study that are beyond the control of the researcher (Creswell, 2008). A limitation of this study is that even though the study was done in a small metropolitan school, it could be seen as not comparable or generalizable to other schools.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to the bounds or scope of a study. I conducted my research at two of the smallest schools located in the school district. Because the schools are very small, they represent a very small part of the overall student population in their counties. Therefore, my results might not be generalizable to teachers and administrators working at schools with larger student bodies.

### **Significance of the Study**

Proponents of school uniform policies contend that students who wear uniforms have fewer distractions and are less inclined to bully classmates; they also say that uniform policies put an end to offensive displays such as gang symbols (Carpenter, 2012). Researchers have not examined the perceptions of administrators and teachers about school uniforms, especially on school climate. Gauging these stakeholders' perceptions about student uniforms might help school leaders and other observers assess the feasibility of uniform policies. Research currently resides in heavy populated urban

cities where gang violence is very prevalent. District officials may use information from this study to determine whether adopting school uniforms as a means of improving school climate is beneficial. Most importantly, this study will answer the question of whether the reasons for adopting school uniforms have been met and determine if a new plan is needed to get the desired outcome.

### **Summary**

In this section, I considered the adoption by many school leaders of student uniform dress codes as a way to improve school safety, decrease discipline problems, and improve the learning environment (Clayton County Public Schools, 2007). I discussed the need for further research on this problem, described the nature of my study, and provided an overview of the procedures used in the study, the guiding research questions, the limitations, significance, and the key points of this study. In Section 2, I consider recent studies conducted on the background of school uniforms, how they were first implemented, the reasons for implementing them, and the outcomes from different school districts. In Section 3, I provide details about the research method, design, and procedures that I used to conduct the study. In Section 4, I present my findings. Lastly, in Section 5, I summarize my study and consider its implications for social change.

## Section 2: Review of the Literature

### **Introduction**

In this review of the literature, I explore the impact of school uniforms on violence, behavior, and academics. I have divided this section by topic (history of school uniforms, use of uniform policies to curb school violence, research linking such policies to decreases in behavioral problems, and increases in academic achievement, and criticisms of school uniform policies). The review provides information about when the first school uniforms were implemented and the reasoning behind their implementation. It also provides information about some of the first school districts that implemented uniforms, the reasons that districts chose to implement uniform policies, the impact of school uniforms, and why opponents assert that uniforms violate students' freedom of expression. I conclude this section with an in-depth summary of the literature.

I searched journals, articles, and books by using educational databases such as EBSCOhost, ERIC, ProQuest, Academic Premier, and Walden dissertations. I also used the card catalog to find pertinent books related to my subject. I restricted my search to the period from 1996-May, 2015. My search was limited to this timeframe, because I was able to find older research that was pertinent to my study as well as current research to help support my study. I used the following keywords associated with the topic: *school, uniforms, academics, behavior, and violence*. The research I found was very valuable for my study, and as I continued to research, I began to see trends in the data which was also helpful in helping me reach saturation in my study.

## **History and Theories**

School uniforms have been mandated in private and parochial schools for centuries (White, 2000). In private schools, uniforms became a means of defining status. In public schools, uniforms provided an equalizing effect for the poor who otherwise came to school looking underprivileged (Firmin, Smith, & Perry, 2006). Uniforms are commonplace in the United Kingdom. According to Walmsley (2011), U.K. teachers appreciate the presence of uniforms and believe that students are more respectful, focused, and duty-minded when wearing them. Brunnsma (2006) estimated that as many as 27% of all public elementary schools in the United States of America had a uniform policy in place by 2000. Those schools tend to be in areas where families are disadvantaged (Brunnsma, 2006). These are families that are socioeconomically disadvantaged and have low incomes.

## **Black Smock and White Collar**

The origin of black smock and white collar lie in the university and charity school uniforms in England. In France and England, school uniforms have mostly been affected by the religious tradition. Most of these schools wore uniforms, because it was a part of their church school attire. Charity school uniforms of the sixteenth century were probably the first elementary school uniforms (Hesapcioglu & Giorgetti, 2009).

Even though private schools in the United States require their students to wear school uniforms, mandatory policies in public schools are relatively rare (Lumsden & Miller, 2002). In 1998, 11.5 % of public elementary schools had uniform policies, which

increased to 15.5% by the end of the next school year (Brunsma, 2006). Both urban and rural areas increased their adoption of school uniforms more than suburban areas. Schools with high levels of poverty and high proportions of minorities all have more uniform policies. (Brunsma, 2006). These areas tend to have higher levels of gang activity as well as lower income families, which make uniforms affordable and unattractive to gangs. As part of their efforts to promote safety, civility, and discipline, some schools have adopted student dress codes, ranging from the mandatory wearing of school uniforms to the banning of caps and hats (Zirkel, 2000). The need for school uniforms is very obvious and needed, especially in areas of high crime and gang violence. The adoption of school uniforms in these areas act as an equalizer to eliminate gang targets.

### **Why School Uniforms**

What is the theory behind school uniforms, and what are politicians saying about them? The theory behind adopting school uniforms is that uniforms can reduce violence in schools by diminishing gang influence and easing competition over clothing as a source of conflict (Brunsma, 2005). The most longstanding and widespread arguments used by proponents is that uniforms reduce the effects of social disparity. In 1994, at Winthrop Normal and Industrial College, South Carolina's populist governor, John Gary Evans announced that "All the distinction of wealth will be done away with. Every pupil was required to wear uniforms" (Bodine, 2003, pg 1). In President Clinton's 1996 State

of the Union Address, he challenged schools “to teach character education, to teach good values, and good citizenship. “If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms” (Boutelle, 2008, 34). After President Bush’s endorsement, the U.S. Department of Education sent a school uniform manual to every school district in the United States (White, 2000). Authors of this book entitled, *School Uniforms: Where They Are and Why They Work*, discussed the potential benefits of school uniforms including a decrease in violence and theft, a decrease in gang activity, less peer pressure, and better discipline.

There were many stakeholders who thought school uniforms were what schools needed. Brunsmma (2006), proponents of uniform policies in public schools often assert that uniforms help to reduce violence and behavioral problems, foster school unity, improve the school learning environment, reduce social pressures and level status differentials, increase self-esteem, save parents money, improve attendance, and improve academic achievement. In contrast, opponents assert that school uniforms are a negative investment. They felt uniforms stifled student’s ability to be creative and show their self-expression. They felt that students should have the right to dress as they pleased. Their stance about school uniforms infringing on the rights of others were heard by many and very powerful.

Although school uniforms are correlated with improved attendance rates for middle and high school students and lower teacher-attrition rates at the elementary school

level (Rice, 2011), they appear to have little effect on student behavior and achievement (Rice, 2011). In this case school uniforms helped to improve attendance because students came to school more, however; there was no effect on student behavior. Brunsmma (2008), however, reported that school uniforms have been found to be related to improvement in academic achievement and attendance. The problem in the debate over public school uniforms is there is little empirical data to support the claim that school uniform policies reduce gang activity, help students concentrate on school work, reduce peer pressure, instill discipline, reduce theft and violation related to designer clothing, save money that would otherwise be spent on expensive designer school clothing, or help identify visitors or intruders (Samuel, 2003). In the pages to follow, I explore the impact that school uniforms have on violence, behavior and academics, and why opponents feel they should not be implemented. In this literature review, I summarize proponents' views on why uniform policies should be implemented and opponents' arguments against the implementation of school uniform policies.

### **School Climate**

The implementation of school uniforms also affects school climate. School climate, which refers to the quality and character of school life is based on patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A positive school climate reduces dropouts and fosters youth development, academic achievement, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for

students to be responsible and productive members of society (Cohen. et. Al. 2009). The National School Climate Council (2014) reported that school climate includes:

- norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physical safe;
- members of the school community who are engaged and respected;
- students, families and educators that work together to develop, and contribute to a shared school vision;
- educators who model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits and satisfaction that can be gained from learning;
- members of the school community who contribute to the operations of the school and the care of its physical environment.

The growing attention to school climate reflects both the concern for improving schools and the need for preparing students to address the many challenges faced in today's society.

## **Violence**

The impact of school violence is multifaceted. When violence happens at school it can lead to victims feeling depressed and isolated. Researchers have indicated that some students who are victims of school violence skip school occasionally, because they do not feel safe (Johnson, Burke, and Gielen, 2011). Teachers have left schools because of the violence in the community that impacted the atmosphere of the school (Algozzine and McGee, 2011). Violent events in school are often reported in the news, bringing attention to the issue (Espelage and Holt, 2013).

King (2006) stated that violence among today's youth has been labeled by many health professionals as a potential threat to the health and academic success of children. He also stated that kids are being hurt and killed for wearing designer clothes. The fashion trend at schools, especially urban schools, is largely dominated by children wearing gang-related or gang-like clothing. The Columbine High School shooting in Colorado had a dress code where students were permitted to wear trench coats, excessive jewelry, make-up, and eccentric hair styles and clothing. This incident stimulated arguments that the lack of a dress code policy affected the level of safety at this school (Eppinger, 2009).

Violence has become a major problem in schools and over 90% of school districts in the United States have implemented policies and procedures to attempt to prevent school violence (Johnson, Burke, and Gielen, 2012). There is currently a nationwide trend toward the adoption of a more restrictive dress-code policies (Yeung, 2010). The style of clothing popular among children today arose from the clothing of inner-city gangs, who have worn baggy pants and oversized shirts that could hide weapons and drugs from law enforcement officials (King, 2006). Uniforms support reduction of gang violence in schools and contribute to other positive outcomes such as decreased behavioral problems, increased learning, enhanced school climate, improved self-esteem, better school spirit, and greater academic achievement (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2003).

Yeung (2010) reported that Long Beach Unified School District has become known for being the first large urban school district to require school uniforms for all students in both elementary and middle school with 58,500 students. This district experienced a decline in school violence, crime, and negativity. Since 1994, when the mandatory uniform policies were adopted in this school district, school crime decreased by 36%, sex offenses by 74%, physical fights between students by 51%, weapon offenses by 50%, assault and battery offenses by 34%, school suspensions by 32%, and vandalism by 18% (King, 1998). The outcome of enforcing school uniforms in the Long Beach Unified School District proved to be a success.

### **Behavioral Problems**

Konheim-Kalkstein (2006) stated that evidence proves school uniforms may actually improve a school's environment by reducing competition, improving student self-esteem, and improving academic achievement. School uniforms eliminate a source of distraction and differences among students, reducing conflicts, bullying, ostracism, and crime (Dress for Success, 2005).

King (1998) reported that school personnel believe that students and teachers tend to behave the way they are allowed to dress. Lumsden and Miller (2002) said that uniforms are beneficial because they minimize socioeconomic tensions between the "haves" and "have nots". Huss (2007) reported that "The kids wearing uniforms are less cocky toward adults. The kids wearing the uniforms are generally better behaved and have fewer attitudes". He also stated that school uniforms contributed to an

academically motivating climate in that the teachers perceived an increase in the level of respect, caring, and trust demonstrated throughout the school. The teachers at the school also perceived improvement in the relations between students and teachers. School uniforms promote school safety, foster school unity, eliminate label competition, ensure modest dress, and simplify dressing.

### **Academic Achievement**

The implementation of school uniforms help to increase student self-esteem and ultimately to improve academic achievement (Brunsma, 2006). When students are less distracted by dress and behavioral issues, they tend to focus more and do better in school. Students who go to school ready to learn are inclined to become successful leaders, and to contribute to positive social change.

Campbell (2006) reported that The Family of Consumer Sciences has a curriculum in place where the learning activities identify the relationship between dress and student behavior. The educators provide the faculty and students practical experiences that increase awareness of dress codes that promote psychological security for the safety of the entire school body. The Family of Consumer Sciences can play an influential role in providing clear expectations of appropriate dress in the classroom. Students in the program are knowledgeable of the reasons for school uniforms and understand that this policy will follow them outside of school into the workplace of their choice (Campbell, 2006).

## **Opponents of School Uniforms**

Opponents believe that dictating what students wear to school violates their constitutional right to freedom. They argue that school uniforms infringe on their right of self-expression and do not address school's real problems (Kizis, 2000). Students' First Amendment right to freedom of expression is one of the fundamental issues raised. Several legal challenges have asserted that students' freedom to select what to wear to school is a form of self-expression with which schools are not entitled to interfere (Lumsden and Miller, 2002).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) labeled mandatory school uniform policies as not constructive, since such a policy only serves as a "band aid" to a set of serious problems that require multifaceted, multidisciplinary actions (King, 1998). The ACLU has argued that mandatory school uniforms violate students' free expression rights. Other opponents argue that states cannot legally tell students what to wear. Uniforms are just a superficial approach to the problems faced by American schools; they need to be approached more aggressively (Kizis, 2000).

Opponents also say that adopting a uniform policy is like applying a fresh coat of paint to a building- it is visible but does not address the underlying problems (Lumsden and Miller, 2002). Some opponents think school uniform dress codes create resentment and conflicts with the administration, leading to an erosion of discipline. Mandatory school uniforms may teach students a negative lesson about conformity (King, 1998). According to opponents, uniforms stifle a student's need for self-expression and

preschoolers should have input into their wardrobe (Chen, 2008). The National Bureau of Economic Research also conducted a study, where the focus was on large urban school district and the trend for adopting school uniforms. In this study researchers found that there was no statistical difference between students in schools with and without uniforms in the district they studied (Rice, 2011).

Brunsmma and Rockquermore (1998) noted that students wearing uniforms did not appear to have significantly different academic preparedness, or pro-school attitudes than other students. Some opponents do not think uniforms prevent violence at all. Junior Scholastic (1999) reported that school uniforms do not address the real causes of violence in our society, such as poverty, abuse, and neglect. School uniforms cover the problem rather than correcting it. King (1998) reported that no one knows for certain if school uniforms are actually beneficial. The Long Beach Unified School district had positive results when it enforced school uniforms; however other steps were taken as well, to improve student behavior (Yeung, 2010). One drastic step taken was having more teachers patrolling hallways. Also the ACLU stated that there are no empirical studies that prove uniforms consistently produce positive changes in school behavior.

Viadero (2007) found that schools cite benefits of uniforms, but researchers are seeing a different picture in their evidence. The researchers' findings are that the uniforms do not affect anything in the school setting. One principal said that the violence is down at his school and that the students are more focused. In contrast to that, on the days that the students are allowed to dress down, they are very different. This evidence

suggests that the enforcement of uniforms at this school does work. Furthermore, it indicates that the students are better behaved when they are all dressed alike. Another researcher said that uniforms help with attendance, graduation, and suspension, but do not aid with the academics (Draa, 2005). Many methods used with uniforms are flawed (Brunsma 2006). These methods are said to be flawed, because different factors are not accounted for, such as design of uniform policies in different school studies, and racial and socioeconomic status. When developing a dress-code policy, the school should specify how the policy relates to its ability to educate students in a safe, orderly environment. To defend a mandatory uniform policy successfully against constitutional challenges, a district must ensure that its dress code is related to the school's pedagogical purpose.

### **Implications for Further Research**

The exploration of uniforms in public schools across the elementary and middle schools context and critical assessments provide several apertures for investigating the public schools uniform movement. Adams (2006) said there is no clear causal relationship between the implementation of school uniforms and increased positive student behavior and achievement. He also said the district political machinery is fueled by social, legal, cultural, racial, educational, and other social structures.

Methodologically, the empirical research on public school uniforms is flawed. First, researchers lack a conceptual agreement about what constitutes a "uniform". Second, sampling procedures are limited to small, non-random, cross-sectional and quasi-

experimental studies without suitable control groups. Third, data collection is often conducted following implementation of school uniform policies, making it difficult to isolate antecedents and producing results that are questionable. Brunnsma (2006) said that most current research has been in the form of dissertations skewed by candidates pursuing the less rigorous education doctorate without the prerequisite scrutiny of the peer-review process. He maintains that the body of existing research provides the ground work for more serious research. Continued research is vital in acquiring evidence about whether school uniforms do impact violence, behavior, and academics.

Previous research studies about school uniforms reside mainly in urban middle schools and not in elementary and high schools. These studies examined gang violence, discipline, attendance and socioeconomic effects.

In 2000, Murray used The National Association of Secondary School Administrator's Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments School Climate Survey (CASE) to research the relationship between school climate and school uniforms in urban middle schools. He discovered that students in schools with uniforms had a significantly more positive perception of security and maintenance, teacher relationships, parent and community-school relationships. Wade and Stafford (2003) replicated Murray's study using the same instrument but found there was no significant difference between the school climate in schools with and without uniforms in the areas of security and maintenance, teacher relationships, and parent/community-school relationships.

The solutions to making a uniform policy successful are common sense, the ability to compromise, and the desire of all parties involved to work through differences (Gilbert, 1999). A uniform or dress code policy cannot be put in to effect overnight. It takes time and patience and the ability for a school system to work together to come up with the most appropriate uniform policy. Schools with high levels of violence, extreme behavioral problems, and low academic achievement should consider implementing school uniforms after a thorough research investigation on districts that have been successful with enforcing school uniforms. One of the first school districts to start this policy was the Long Beach Unified School District K-8 in California in 1994 (Yeung, 2010). According to Schachter (2005) 23% of all elementary schools had adopted uniforms by the end of 2002 and a number of middle and high schools have followed suit. More and more school districts are finding it necessary to implement school uniforms as a means to gaining control in their schools and providing for a safe violent free school zone in which improved academic achievement can occur (Yeung, 2010).

### **Summary**

Do school uniforms really have an impact on violence, behavior, and academics? Research reveals there are pros and cons to enforcing school uniforms. The pros are very significant. School uniforms reduce behavioral problems at school, because they require students to wear the same clothing which levels the playing field. The presence of school uniforms also eliminate the distraction that dress can cause (Dress for Success, 2005). When students are less distracted by dress and behavioral issues, they tend to focus more

and do better in school. When Long Beach Unified School District enforced school uniforms, it saw a significant decline in school violence, crime, and negativity (King, 1998). Requiring students to wear uniforms puts a target on those not dressed as the other students are. It allows the administrators to recognize immediately who does not belong. Brunσμα (2006) said that school uniforms promote school unity, simplify dress, and eliminate label competition.

Although the pros are great, there are still opponents to school uniforms. Opponents argue that school uniforms are just bandages to cover a bigger issue. They feel that implementing school uniforms would infringe on students' right of self-expression (Kizis, 2000). Finally, school districts that decide to implement uniforms must know that when developing a dress-code policy, the school should specify how the policy relates to its ability to educate students in a safe environment and ensure that students are allowed alternative means of expressing their views (Lumsden and Miller, 2002).

## Section 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to determine the impact of school uniforms on school climate. In this section, I consider the context for the study, present my research question and hypotheses, describe my research method, participants, ethical protections, my role in the research process, my data collection and analysis procedures, and efforts to ensure the validity of my data.

### **Research Design and Approach**

In this study, I wanted to examine how school uniforms affected the school climate. I wanted to probe if the administrators' and teachers' perceptions of school climate would be higher at the school that implemented school uniforms. In order to achieve my goal, I decided to use a school climate survey that both schools would complete. The surveys for both schools were the same and did not ask any questions about uniforms. I thought having a school climate survey that did not have questions about school uniforms would make it more valid and fair to the school that did not have uniforms. I used the American School Climate Survey-Teacher Version 2006 (Perkins 2006) to measure the climate of the two schools participating in this study. The variables that define school climate in my study are the interaction of human relationships, physical setting, and the psychological atmosphere. These variables were assessed through the impact that uniform status, the dichotomous independent variable, had on the continuous dependent variable, school climate. The Mann-Whitney tests were used instead of the

more common *t* tests for independent means due to the ordinal level of the Likert scale ratings (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*; see Table 2) and because mean scores were compared. I viewed Mann-Whitney tests as an appropriate statistical test because I compared the difference between the two independent groups and the dependent variable, climate, was non-normally distributed. In addition, the independent variable, uniform status, was considered nominal.

According to Creswell (2008), survey designs allow researchers to describe trends and the attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample population. Other researchers have used a survey design to measure how students, teachers, or principals, perceive school climate (Zaykowski & Gunter, 2011). Because researchers presume that school climate influences the experiences and behaviors of the members of a school (Center for Social and Emotional Education, n.d.; Deal and Peterson, 2009; Hoy 2009), they find surveys or interviews to be attractive means of collecting data (Zaykowski & Gunter, 2011). Creswell (2008) stated that “additional strengths of a survey approach include the ability of a survey to measure the opinions of a sample group that can be generalized across the population from data collected in a relatively rapid manner p. 14.” Using these anonymous climate surveys made it easier for the participants to feel free and comfortable to share their opinions on school climate. I feel that it added validity to the research because no one was pressured to participate and their willingness to participate or not was all anonymous.

### **Setting and Sample**

I conducted my research at two different elementary schools located in the greater metropolitan Atlanta area. Each school was comprised of grades K-5. One school had implemented a school uniform policy while the other school did not have a uniform policy. Teachers and administrators were surveyed from both schools. The staff had some type of working relationship with the students at the schools that included either being a homeroom teacher, remediation, or specials teacher. Both male and female teachers and administrators were included in the survey, which comprised of about 10 men and 95 women.

School A, which has a policy mandating uniforms is a small school located in the southeast area of Metropolitan Atlanta. School A is a Title I school. Students in Title I schools are considered low income and socioeconomically disadvantaged. Its College and Career Readiness Performance Indicator (CCRPI) score for 2013-14 was greater than 60% (Clayton County Public Schools, 2007). This school has two administrators, 45 teachers, 25 building staff, and 560 students. Of the 560 students, 50% are African Americans, 45% are Hispanic, 3% are Caucasian, and 2% other. Over 80% of the school's students are on free or reduced lunch.

School B, which is also a Title I school, is located in the southeast Metropolitan area. This school's CCRPI score was also greater than 60%. The school has 43 teachers, two administrators, and 19 building staff. The school consists of 564 students in grades K-5. The demographics of the students at this school are 45% African American, 43%

Hispanic, 8% Caucasian, 1% Asian, and 3% other with the teacher-student ratio being 1:14.

In conducting my research I made sure the participants knew their rights and what to do if they decided to stop participating. Hatch (2002) said that researchers should be prepared to explain what they will be doing, when, and for how long. He goes on to state that participants need a systematic way to let the researcher know when they have questions about the research process or are uncomfortable in the research setting. Each participant will be guaranteed the right to ask questions and to opt out during any point in the study.

After the data were collected, I moved into the next step of analyzing the data. In order to address the research question, Mann-Whitney tests were used instead of the more commonly used *t* tests for independent means due to the ordinal level of the Likert scale ratings (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*; Table 2). G\*Power 3.1.7 was used to assess the required number of participants to find significance. Using a medium effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.50$ ), an alpha of .05, and a power of .80, I determined that 128 participants would be the ideal sample size. I sought out approximately 64 teachers from non-uniform schools and 64 teachers from uniform schools.

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

The American School Climate Survey Teacher Version-2006 (see Appendix D), which was developed by B. K. Perkins, is the survey instrument that was used to test the impact that school uniforms have on school climate. This instrument consists of 25 items

presented in a Likert scale format. Teachers and administrators who take the survey rate whether they strongly disagree or strongly agree to the questions about their school. Here are some examples from the survey.

1. This school is a safe place in which to work.
2. Students at this school fight a lot.
3. Students at this school trust the teachers.
4. I have been able to deter bullying among the students at my school.
5. I respect the students.

### **Reliability**

In this section I show the reliability of my study and the instrument I used to assess the research question. Reliability means that scores from an instrument are stable and consistent whereas the validity of an instrument means that individual scores make sense or are valid (Creswell, 2008). Prior to examining the school climate variable, Cronbach alpha was conducted for reliability. The Cronbach's alpha provided the mean correlation between each pair of items and the number of items in a scale (Brace, Kemp and Snelgar, 2006). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were evaluated using the guidelines suggested by George and Mallery (2010) where  $> .9$  = Excellent,  $> .8$  = Good,  $> .7$  = Acceptable,  $> .6$  = Questionable,  $> .5$  = Poor, and  $< .5$  = Unacceptable. The Cronbach alpha for the instrument used in this study was .793. Means and standard deviations were also presented to detail the subscale further. I was not able to find information about the validity of the instrument. However, the American School Climate survey is available in

five languages and was used in a national study of over 40,000 students, approximately 4,000 teachers, and approximately 300 administrators. The national results are available for comparison and benchmarking and districts can also arranged for an online administration (Perkins, 2006). I found this survey to be perfect for my study. The fact that it could be used to assess both schools climate without asking any questions about uniforms made the results even more valid.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process begins with the permission to gain access to a particular site. Initially permission needs to come from a review board in which a campus committee reviews research studies for their potential harmful impact on and risk to participants. Creswell (2008) said that it is helpful to examine a sample consent form that participants need to review and sign before entering a study. Some of the elements needed in the consent form are as follows: the right of participants to withdraw voluntarily, a central purpose, procedures for data collection, protecting confidentiality, risks, expected benefits, and signatures from both the participant and researcher.

After permission was granted by the Institutional Review Board, the participants were emailed the informed consent forms (Appendix B and C). The consent form explained the study and participant rights. The American School Climate Survey-Teacher Version 2006 was used to measure the climate of the two schools participating in this study. The surveys were administered through a Web-based delivery system and the participants were given a two week window in which to complete them. The climate

survey addressed school safety, bullying, student achievement, and teacher/student relationships. The two variables in the study included the continuous dependent variable which is the school climate and the dichotomous independent variable which is the uniform status. After the survey window closed, Mann-Whitney tests were used to determine if there was a significant difference in the climate of a school with uniforms compared to the climate of a school without uniforms. The data from the surveys provided information about the impact school uniforms may or may not have on a school's climate. The survey results will be kept confidential in a computer data base system. Names will not be required to complete the survey.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

How has the adoption of school uniforms impacted school climate?

H<sub>0</sub>1: The adoption of school uniforms has no effect on the school climate.

H<sub>a</sub>1: The adoption of school uniforms has an effect on school climate.

### **Data Analysis**

To address the research question and assess this quantitative study on the impact school uniforms, the independent variable, have on school climate, the dependent variable, The American School Climate Survey Teacher Version was administered in two suburban elementary schools. One school had a uniform policy, while the other school did not. After the data collection window closed, the data was entered into SPSS version 20.0 for Windows using the Mann-Whitney U test. This non parametric test was chosen

for the analysis, because the dependent variable, school climate, was measured on an ordinal scale, the independent variable, uniform status, consisted of two categorical groups, there was an independence of observations, and the variables were not normally distributed (Laerd Statistic, 2013). Descriptive statistics were then calculated to describe the sample demographics and the research variables used in the analysis. Means and standard deviations were calculated. The analysis showed that 14 of the 25 comparisons were significant at the  $p = .05$  level. In all 14 significant findings, the uniform school had more favorable responses. The four largest differences were for Item 8, “There are sufficient opportunities to learn new instructional methods” ( $p = .001$ ); Item 11, “Students at this school trust the teachers” ( $p = .001$ ); Item 12, “I have been able to deter bullying behavior among students” ( $p = .001$ ); and Item 16, “I would benefit from more professional development provided by the district” ( $p = .001$ ). This combination of findings provided support for this hypothesis (Table 2).

### **Pre-Analysis and Data Screening**

Data was screened for accuracy, missing data and outliers, or extreme cases. Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions were conducted to determine that responses are within the possible range of values and the data are not distorted by outliers. Standardized residual values were created for each subscale score and cases were examined for values that fell above 3.29 and values that fell below -3.29 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Cases with missing data were examined for nonrandom

patterns. I did not find any cases that fell above or below the values of 3.29 or -3.29.

Participants who did not complete major sections of the survey were excluded.

### **Measures for Ethical Protection**

Hatch (2002) said that means of assuring confidentiality must be described, including the storage and disposal of data through which identification of the participant is possible. Once I was granted permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, each participant in this study received a consent form (Appendix B) stating any risks or benefits to the study as well as information on how the data will be collected, participants right to see the data collected, their right to decide no longer to be a participant, and signatures from both the participant and researcher of the agreement to adhere to the provisions of the consent form. The findings were suppressed or falsified to meet an audience's needs (Creswell, 2008). The participants' information will be kept confidential and the data collected during the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for three years. The research will then be destroyed.

Hatch (2002) said that forms must be created in the language that is understandable to participants, and that means must be specified for explaining procedures to those who may not be able to read or understand consent documents. There were no potential risks that occurred in this study; however, participants might see the study as a benefit for them because their voice will be heard through the School Climate surveys.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have been employed as an educator in the county for the past 12 years. I have taught both third and fourth grades. Other positions I have held are Campus Kids Teacher, grade level chair, Curriculum Writer, and Common Core Standards trainer. My current position is that of an Instructional Site Facilitator. After gaining permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board, my first job was to meet with interested participants to discuss my research plans, when the research would begin and end, the purpose for conducting the research, and to elicit as many willing volunteers for this study as possible. Hatch (2002) said researchers should take the time to review or explain what the study will involve and what will be expected of participants before the study actually begins. My role in this study began with personal conversations with the principals at both schools to invite them to participate in my study. I explained the purpose of the study and the major contributions the results of the study could have toward positive social change. After the principals agreed to allow me to conduct research, they sent the consent letters with the survey links to their staff. They were given a two week window to complete the surveys.

Researcher bias was very limited in this study, because participants completed the surveys alone through a secured work e-mail address and I did not work at either school. This ensured the staff did not have to worry or be concerned about how their responses would affect me. Although there was no researcher-participant relationship in this study, it is important to note that Hatch (2002) said thinking through and describing the

anticipated relationships between researcher and participants is a vital part of designing a qualitative project. Once the desired relationship is identified, the researcher should make plans for building and maintaining that level of relationship. Knight (2007) stated that an authentic respect can be developed between a researcher and his or her teacher participants during their first conversations and that great difficulty may arise if participants feel disrespected.

### **Summary**

Section three outlined the methodology for this study. This quantitative study focused on the impact school uniforms have on school climate. Two suburban schools from the metropolitan Atlanta area were chosen to participate in this study. One school had a mandatory school uniform policy while the other school did not. After gaining permission from the IRB Board, both teachers and administrators completed an online survey about the climate of their school. After completion of the survey, the data was analyzed through SPSS version 20.0 for Windows and descriptive statistics were calculated. The results of the survey, which are presented in Section four, provide results about whether or not the presence of school uniforms have an impact on the school climate from the perceptions of the teachers and administrators. The results of the study can then be generalized to the population and provide empirical data that could assist future studies on school uniforms implemented in suburban elementary schools.

## Section 4: Results

In this section, I present my findings on school climate for the two study schools. School A is a Title I elementary school located in a suburban area outside of the metropolitan Atlanta area. This school has a mandated uniform policy. School B is also a Title I elementary school located outside of the metropolitan Atlanta area. This school does not have a mandated school uniform policy; its students do not wear uniforms. My purpose in conducting this study was to examine the possible impact of a school uniform policy on the school climate of a suburban elementary school from the perspective of the administrators and teachers. My research question and hypotheses are as follows:

RQ1: How has the adoption of school uniforms impacted school climate?

H<sub>0</sub>1: The adoption of school uniforms has no effect on the school climate.

H<sub>a</sub>1: The adoption of school uniforms has an effect on school climate.

Although 128 educators were sent surveys, only 62 decided to complete them. The change in my sample size caused my power analysis to decrease. The reason the other 66 educators chose not to participate could be due to other obligations such as family, work, and school. The results of the American School Climate Survey-Teacher Version 6 were analyzed in this section. Below, I highlight some of my key results.

### The Study Results

Table 1 displays the frequency counts for selected variables. The majority of the educators were women (93.5%). Most of the participants were either Caucasian, Non-

Hispanic (61.3%) or African American (21.0%). All of the participants in the study (100.0%) spoke English in their home.

Table 1

*Frequency Counts for Selected Variables (N = 62)*

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	4	6.5
	Female	58	93.5
Ethnicity	Black	13	21.0
	White, Non-Hispanic	38	61.3
	Other	11	17.7
English spoken at home	Yes	62	100.0

The descriptive statistics, which were discussed in this section are displayed in the Group Statistics Table 1 and 2. These tables detail the mean and standard deviations for questions that represent survey results for school A and school B.

Table 2

*Statistical Data for School A-uniform and School B-non-uniform*

	Group 2	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error Mean
Q6 Safe Place	1.0 2006a	34	4.6176	.77907	.13361
	2.0 2006b	32	4.5000	.80322	.14199
Q7 In-service Opportunities	1.0 2006a	34	4.3529	.81212	.13928
	2.0 2006b	32	3.9375	.88003	.14850
Q8 Instructional Methods	1.0 2006a	34	4.6176	.65202	.11182
	2.0 2006b	32	4.0938	.588802	.10395
Q9 Student Fights	1.0 2006a	34	1.6765	.8422	.14454
	2.0 2006b	32	1.9063	.85607	.15133
Q10 College Success	1.0 2006a	34	2.000	.85607	.22341
	2.0 2006b	32	2.2500	.87988	.15554
Q11 Trust Teachers	1.0 2006a	34	4.6471	.54397	.09329
	2.0 2006b	32	4.1250	.42121	.07446
Q12 Deterring Bullying	1.0 2006a	34	4.5000	.61546	.1055
	2.0 2006b	32	3.9688	.59484	.10515
Q13 Professional Judgement	1.0 2006a	34	4.5882	.55692	.09551
	2.0 2006b	32	4.2188	.49084	.08677
Q14 Respect Students	1.0 2006a	34	4.7059	.46250	.07932
	2.0 2006b	32	4.4688	.56707	.10025
Q15 Standardized Exams	1.0 2006a	34	4.2941	.75996	.13033
	2.0 2006b	32	3.9375	.84003	.14850
Q16 Professional Development	1.0 2006a	34	3.7353	.96323	.16519
	2.0 2006b	32	2.8438	1.22104	.21585
Q17 Motivated Students	1.0 2006a	34	2.3824	1.49777	.25687
	2.0 2006b	32	2.4688	1.16354	.20569
Q18 Carrying Weapons	1.0 2006a	34	1.4118	.85697	.14697
	2.0 2006b	32	1.7188	.88843	.15705
Q19 Long Life	1.0 2006a	34	4.5882	.49955	.08567
	2.0 2006b	32	4.2813	.92403	.16335

*(table continues)*

	Group 2	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Q20. Addressing Bullying	1.0 2006a	34	2.4412	1.15971	.19889
	2.0 2006b	32	2.7188	1.27594	.22556
Q21 Teachers Care	1.0 2006a	34	4.7647	.60597	.10392
	2.0 2006b	32	4.6250	.55358	.09786
Q22 Parental Support	1.0 2006a	34	4.1471	.95248	.15872
	2.0 2006b	32	3.5313	1.01550	.17952
Q23 Being Fair	1.0 2006a	34	1.6765	.76755	.13163
	2.0 2006b	32	1.7813	.79248	.14009
Q24 Racial Success	1.0 2006a	34	2.8235	1.33645	.22920
	2.0 2006b	32	2.5938	1.24069	.21933
Q25 Supportive Climate	1.0 2006a	34	4.6471	.54397	.09329
	2.0 2006b	32	4.4375	.50402	.08910
Q26 Productive Citizens	1.0 2006a	34	4.6765	.47486	.08144
	2.0 2006b	32	4.3750	.49187	.08695
Q27 Work Everyday	1.0 2006a	34	4.5882	.78306	.13429
	2.0 2006b	32	4.2188	.83219	.14711
Q28 Academic Struggle	1.0 2006a	34	2.2647	1.10943	.19027
	2.0 2006b	32	2.6250	1.09985	.19443
Q29 Parent Conferences	1.0 2006a	34	4.3824	.88813	.15231
	2.0 2006b	32	3.9688	1.09203	.19305
Q30. Racial Barriers	1.0 2006a	34	1.9706	.83431	.14308
	2.0 2006b	32	2.4375	1.13415	.20049

### Analyzing the Questions

The questions in this survey were rated on a 5 point metric scale, where (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The participants are represented by the letter ( $n$  = number of participants), ( $m$  = mean/rating out of 5 points),  $r_s$  (Spearman correlation) that shows the relationship between schools and their ratings, and ( $p$  = probability). The Cronbach alpha for the instrument used in this study was .793. In Tables 2-4, I present the results from each of the survey questions. In this study, School A represents the school with uniforms, and School B represents the non-uniform school. The results of the questions are described in more detail according to the constructs of school climate which encompasses school learning climate, bullying, and professional development ((Perkins,

2006)). The tables that follow provide an organized break down of each question according to the school climate category into which it falls.

The questions in Table 3 relate to the school learning climate part of the American School Climate Teacher Survey. Most of the questions in the American School Climate Survey pertained to school learning climate. While analyzing data, I found that six of the 16 questions found in this section supported the hypothesis that school uniforms do have an effect on the school climate which is more favorable towards school A. The school that implemented school uniforms had a higher school climate measure than the school without uniforms. Those items were 11, 15, 22, 26, 27, and 29. According to some of the responses, educators view parents as supportive and students as trusting of teachers. Teachers also view students as being capable of high achievement on standardized tests.

Responses to the other 10 questions were not significantly different for the two schools. However, respondents in School B gave higher ratings for questions 10, 17, 23, 28, and 30. These questions showed a higher school climate for the school without uniforms. These questions show that students are not motivated to learn, and teachers said the students will have trouble with core academic subjects regardless of the strength of instruction. In the school without uniforms, the students were not as motivated as the school with uniforms and would struggle more with academics.

The final six questions, 6, 14, 19, 21, 24, and 25 were more positive for School A. Teachers at this school feel the school is a safe place to work and they work to foster a

supportive climate for the students. Here the teachers enjoyed being at work and felt comfortable with the work environment.

These findings suggest that student learning is key to a positive school climate. Students who are provided with quality instruction from teachers who continue to seek professional development, have the ability to do well in school and score high on academic achievement tests. Because the focus is taken off school uniforms, the students are less distracted by what other students are wearing. This helps decrease behavior problems related to dress and puts the students' attention on learning.

Table 3

*Mann-Whitney Tests Comparing Teacher Perceptions Based on Uniform Policy (N = 62)*

Uniform Rating School Learning Climate	Policy	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r<sub>s</sub></i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
6. Safe Place	School A	33	4.61	0.79	.10	0.80	.43
	School B	29	4.59	0.50			
10. In-service Opportunities	School A	33	2.00	1.32	.22	1.69	.09
	School B	29	2.21	0.86			
11. Trust Teachers	School A	33	4.67	0.54	.50	3.92	*.001
	School B	29	4.14	0.44			
14. Respect Students	School A	33	4.73	0.45	.29	2.28	*.02
	School B	29	4.41	0.57			
15. Standardized Exams	School A	33	4.30	0.77	.27	2.11	*.04
	School B	29	3.93	0.84			
17. Motivated Students	School A	33	2.39	1.52	.11	0.84	.40
	School B	29	2.48	1.15			
19. Long Life	School A	33	4.61	0.50	.16	1.26	.21
	School B	29	4.28	0.96			

*(table continues)*

Uniform Rating School Learning Climate	Policy	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r<sub>s</sub></i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
21. Teachers Care	School A	33	4.79	0.60	.25	1.97	*.05
	School B	29	4.59	0.57			
22. Parental Support	School A	33	4.15	0.94	.40	3.15	*.002
	School B	29	3.45	1.02			
23. Being Fair	School A	33	1.67	0.78	.08	0.65	.52
	School B	29	1.79	0.82			
24. Racial Success	School A	33	2.85	1.45	.08	0.61	.54
	School B	29	2.66	1.26			
25. Supportive Climate	School A	33	4.70	0.47	.25	1.97	*.05
	School B	29	4.45	0.51			
26. Productive Citizens	School A	33	4.70	0.47	.35	2.75	*.006
	School B	29	4.34	0.48			
27. Work Everyday	School A	33	4.58	0.79	.30	2.36	*.02
	School B	29	4.17	0.85			

*(table continues)*

Uniform							
Rating	Policy	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r<sub>s</sub></i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
School Learning Climate							
28. Academic Struggle	School A	33	2.24	1.12	.20	1.59	.11
	School B	29	2.66	1.08			
29. Parent Conferences	School A	33	4.39	0.90	.27	2.14	*.03
	School B	29	3.90	1.11			
30. Racial Barriers	School A	33	1.94	0.83	.24	1.91	.06
	School B	29	2.48	1.15			

*Note.* Ratings were based on a 5-point metric: 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

In table four, the next construct of school climate, bullying is rated. In this section there were four questions. One of the questions in this section supported the hypothesis that uniforms do have an effect on school climate. Question 12 is favorable for school A, in which teachers have been able to deter bullying in their school. The remaining questions 9, 18, and 20 did not show any significant differences in the ratings for either school. However, the questions relating to students fighting a lot, bringing knives to school, and teachers addressing bullying in their class at least once a month was higher for school B. These findings suggest that school A, through the adoption of school uniforms, have been able to deter bullying and other violent incidences that could

negatively impact school climate. Since school A doesn't have bullying problems in their school, they are able to spend more time teaching which attributes to student learning and increased academic achievement.

Table 4

*Mann-Whitney Tests Comparing Teacher Perceptions Based on Uniform Policy (N = 62)*

Rating bullying	Uniform policy	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r<sub>s</sub></i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
9. Student Fights	Uniform	33	1.67	0.85	.23	1.76	0.08
	Non-Uniform	29	1.97	0.87			
12. Deterring Bullying	Uniform	33	4.55	0.56	.48	3.73	*.001
	Non-Uniform	29	3.97	0.63			
18. Carry Weapons	Uniform	33	1.39	0.86	.22	1.70	.09
	Non-Uniform	29	1.69	0.89			
20. Addressing Bullying	Uniform	33	2.45	1.18	.16	1.24	.22
	Non-Uniform	29	2.83	1.28			

*Note.* Ratings were based on a 5-point metric: 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

In table five, the last construct of school climate, professional development, is rated. In this section there were four questions. All four questions, 7, 8, 13, 16 support the hypothesis that school uniforms have an effect on school climate. The teachers at school A feel the administrators trust their professional judgment, there are sufficient opportunities to learn new instructional methods, and they pursue in-service opportunities

to improve themselves as teachers. These findings suggest that the continued professional development has a direct impact on school climate and teachers that increase their knowledge are then able to utilize what they have learned to increase academic achievement.

Table 5

*Mann-Whitney Tests Comparing Teacher Perceptions Based on Uniform Policy (N = 62)*

Rating	Uniform						
	Policy	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r<sub>s</sub></i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Professional Development							
7. In-service Opportunities	Uniform	33	4.36	0.82	.35	2.71	.007
	Non-Uniform	29	3.90	0.86			
8. Instructional Methods	Uniform	33	4.64	0.65	.51	3.96	*.001
	Non-Uniform	29	4.07	0.59			
13. Professional Judgement	Uniform	33	4.61	0.56	.38	2.96	*.003
	Non-Uniform	29	4.21	0.49			
16. Professional Development	Uniform	33	3.76	0.97	.42	3.27	*.001
	Non-Uniform	29	2.79	1.24			

*Note.* Ratings were based on a 5-point metric: 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

### Addressing the Research Question

The research question asked, “How has the adoption of school uniforms impacted school climate?” The related hypothesis predicted, “There will be a significant effect on the climate of a school due to the presence of school uniforms.” To answer this question, Mann-Whitney tests were used instead of the more common  $t$  tests for independent means due to the ordinal level of the Likert scale ratings (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*) Table 2. It was also more appropriate to use this non parametric test, because the dependent variable, school climate, was measured on an ordinal scale, the independent variable, uniform status, consisted of two categorical groups, there was an independence of observations, and the variables were not normally distributed. Inspection of the table found that 10 of the 25 comparisons were significant at the  $p = .05$  level. In all 14 significant findings, the uniform school had more favorable responses. Those findings were for numbers 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, and 29. Although there was no significant difference in the ratings of the remaining questions, 10 of them were higher for the uniform school and five of those questions were higher for the non-uniform school. The four largest differences were for Item 8, “There are sufficient opportunities to learn new instructional methods” ( $p = .001$ ); Item 11, “Students at this school trust the teachers” ( $p = .001$ ); Item 12, “I have been able to deter bullying behavior among students” ( $p = .001$ ); and Item 16, “I would benefit from more professional development provided by the district” ( $p = .001$ ). This combination of findings provided support for this hypothesis (Tables 3-5).

## Summary

In summary, 128 educators were emailed consent letters inviting them to participate along with links to the American School Climate Teacher Surveys. Of those 128 educators, only 62 completed the surveys. The data from the surveys were gathered to examine the impact the implementation of school uniforms have on the school climate of a suburban elementary school from the perspective of the administrators and teachers. Research hypothesis one, “There will be a significant effect on the climate of a school due to the presence of school uniforms,” was supported in (Tables 3-5). The findings in this study suggest that although bullying and professional development impact school climate, the school learning climate is very significant in determining the overall climate of a school. When teachers work hard, get professional development, they are then able to improve their pedagogy, which directly impacts how and what they teach the students. When students are being held to high expectations and the teachers believe their students can learn, that is when learning occurs and the climate and culture of the school is improved. Bullying and professional development are also important in defining a school’s climate. School A experienced a positive school climate after adopting uniforms, whereas they had fewer discipline problems and increased academic achievement. In the final chapter, these findings are compared to the literature, conclusions and implications are drawn, and a series of recommendations are suggested.

## Section 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative survey study was to determine the impact school uniforms have on a school's climate. A favorable school climate provides structure in which students, teachers, administrators, and parents function cooperatively and constructively (Cohen. Et. Al. 2009). According to Loukas and Murphy (2007), school climate influences students' behavior positively and increases their desire to stay in school. I administered the American School Climate Survey to educators at two schools, one with a uniform policy and one without one, located outside of metropolitan Atlanta, using participants' school email addresses. School A had a mandated school uniform policy while School B did not have a uniform policy.

As discussed in Section 4, survey results indicate that uniforms do impact a school's climate. The climate of School A was higher than that of School B, with 14 out of 25 questions being more favorable. The questions 8, 11, 12, and 16 proved to have the highest significant difference compared to the other questions. In these questions, the difference in climate was very different for both schools higher for School A..

In this final section, I discuss different perspectives on school uniform policies, offer my concluding thoughts, discuss the implications of my research, and offer recommendations for future research.

### **Rationale for School Uniforms**

The results of this study are consistent with those of Brunnsma and Rockquemore (2003) who asserted that uniforms support the reduction of gang violence in schools and contribute to other positive outcomes such as decreased behavioral problems, increased learning, enhanced school climate, improved self-esteem, better school spirit, and greater academic achievement. Teachers at School B (the non-uniform school) that I studied address bullying behavior in their classrooms at least once a month, and the students also fight more. Teachers at School A (the uniform school), reported they have been able to deter bullying behavior among their students, and their students do not fight.

Students who feel safe at school and free from bullying attend school more often. In 2008, Brunnsma reported that school uniforms were related to improvement in academic achievement and attendance. Students that know they won't be teased for what the type of clothes they wear or what they can't afford to buy will attend more. According to my research findings, there is a significant difference in how the teachers and administrators feel about their students' academic abilities. The staff in School A feel that students are capable of high achievement on standardized exams, while staff in School B gave a lower rating for this question. According to Dress for Success (2005), school uniforms eliminate a source of distraction and differences among students, reducing conflicts, bullying, ostracism, and crime. The implementation of school uniforms help to increase student self-esteem and improve academic achievement

(Brunsma, 2006). According to the findings of the study, students in School A are more motivated to learn, and the teachers care a little more about whether or not the students are successful. The teachers also work harder to foster a supportive climate for the students to work in.

The climate of a school also affects the teachers and administrators. Teachers have left schools because of the violence in the community and the impact it had on the atmosphere of the school (Algozzine and McGee, 2011). According to my findings, there is a significant difference in how the teachers feel about going to school. The teachers in School A look forward to going to work most days, which is more than teachers in School B. The findings of this study are consistent with research conducted by Konheim-Kalkstein (2006) who reported that evidence proves school uniforms may actually improve a school's environment by reducing competition, improving student self-esteem, and improving academic achievement. Ultimately, when students are less distracted by dress, they tend to focus and do better in school which is supported by the overall results of this study.

#### Critical Perspectives on School Uniforms

Although I found that school uniforms impact school climate, Junior Scholastic (1999) reported that school uniforms do not address the real causes of violence in our society, such as poverty, abuse, and neglect. School uniforms cover the problem without correcting it (Rice, 2011). King (1998) reported that no one knows for certain if school uniforms are actually beneficial. The Long Beach Unified School District had positive

results when it enforced school uniforms (Yeung, 2010). However, it should be noted that the school district also took other steps to improve student behavior (Yeung, 2010). Thus, the specific impact of uniforms is unclear. I found no significant difference in levels of student fighting for the two schools. Although, the rating for School B was slightly higher than School A, the significance was too small to indicate differences among the educator populations.

There are still studies that do support school uniforms. Viadero (2007) reported that schools do cite benefits of uniforms, even though the evidence is showing something different. Another researcher asserted that, although uniforms help with attendance, graduation, and suspension, they do not aid with academics (Draa, 2005). Many of the methods used by researchers to study uniform policies are flawed, according to Brunsmma (2006), who goes on to note that researchers often fail to account for differences in design of uniform policies and students' racial and socioeconomic status. There are just so many factors that could affect the outcome of school uniforms, but it is the responsibility of each school district to determine their uniform policy.

The findings for this study were enlightening and informative. The responses for School A were higher for 14 out of the 25 questions in my study. The other 11 questions did not show a significant difference between the perspectives of either school. The questions with the smallest difference were numbers 6 (this school is a safe place in which to work), number 17 (students at this school are not motivated to learn), number 23 (teachers are not fair to some students at this school), and question 24 (there are some

students that will be successful at this school because of their race). Although the number of questions were not as high as I thought they would be, school A still had a more positive school climate.

### **Synthesis of the Literature**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if school uniforms impact the school's climate. Researchers such as Brunnsma, Rockquemore, and Johnson et al. (2008) said that school uniforms do impact school climate. They reported that school uniforms helped to attribute to improvement in academic achievement and attendance. Johnson, Burke and Gielen (2001) indicated that students who are victims of school violence occasionally skip school because they do not feel safe (Johnson, Burke, and Gielen, 2011). In contrast to researchers who are advocates for school uniforms, there are others who disagree. Viadero (2007) reported that schools cite the benefits of uniforms, yet the evidence does not support their claims. The schools that say uniforms benefit students can not prove that other plans were not in place at the time to help with problems. They don't say if other initiatives were in place to also rectify the issues being faced by the school. Other opponents believe that dictating what students wear to school violates their constitutional right to freedom. They insist that school uniforms infringe on their right of self-expression and do not address school's real problems (Kizis, 2000). Still, although there are pros and cons to school uniforms, neither opponents nor proponents are willing to come to an agreement.

In this study, however, I found that uniforms do impact the climate of a school. The school climate for School A was greater than that of School B. Responses to 14 of the 25 survey questions were more positive for School A (uniform school). Researchers contend that a positive school climate can affect a student's motivation to learn, increase teacher morale, help to set clear goals, help to create higher student expectations, and increase teacher commitment (CSEE, 2008). According to the findings for School A students who wear uniforms are more capable of high achievement on standardized tests and are more motivated to learn. The teachers at this school respect the students and care whether the students succeed. Overall the students did better at the school with uniforms and the teachers enjoyed being at school.

The climate of a business, organization, or school is a concept that can be traced back to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs (Rafferty, 2008). An organization's environment influences its climate, and eventually influences the behavior of the organizations members. Stringer (2002) believed that climate is an objective element within an organization which could be measured through the member's perceptions.

Furthermore, a positive school climate is an important component of successful and effective schools. Educators have the power to make changes to the school environment that can help improve a child's chance for academic success (Smith, 2013).

This study contributes to the literature on school uniforms. In previous research studies about school uniform, Chen and Weikart, (2008) and Konhein-Kalkstein(2006), reported that studies mainly resided mainly in urban middle schools and not in

elementary and high schools. The school uniform studies conducted by Chen and Weikart, (2008) and Konhein-Kalkstein (2006) examined gang violence, discipline, attendance, and socioeconomic effects. Research in this study was conducted in two Title I schools located in a suburban area outside of Metropolitan Atlanta. This study will add to the current research on school uniforms and provides statistical data about how uniforms impact school climate.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The findings of this study support the intended purpose. The purpose of this quantitative, survey study was to determine if school uniforms impact school climate. According to the findings, school uniforms do impact a schools climate. There was a difference in the school climate of both schools. The climate for School A, the uniform school, was higher than School B, with 14 out of the 25 questions being more favorable.

Schools that do not have a uniform policy do experience lower school climate. Teachers are not as motivated to go to work. Students are not as motivated to learn. Teachers have to address bullying behavior more often and the students fight more. Students have more trouble with core academic subjects and the parents are not as supportive.

In contrast to School B, the climate of School A, the uniform school, was higher. The implications for social change are supported by findings in this study. Teachers feel their school is a safe place to work and look forward to going to work. They pursue opportunities to improve themselves as a teacher. There are sufficient opportunities for

them to learn new instructional methods. Teachers are able to deter bullying and hence there are fewer fights. The students trust the teachers and the teachers respect the students. The students are motivated to learn, and are capable of high achievement on standardized tests. The teachers work to foster a supportive climate for the students. They have met most of their student's parents and those parents are more supportive of the school and its activities.

Although the results of the study indicate that school uniforms positively impact a school's climate, there were limitations to the context of the study. This study was conducted in two small elementary schools located outside of the Metropolitan Atlanta areas. The schools were Title I schools and therefore receive extra funds to help support their students. The majority of the students come from lower socioeconomic households and many of them are considered at risk students. Even so, this study has shown that uniforms do impact a school's climate. Students and teachers do have positive attitudes about school. Teachers do have high expectations of their students, and students do perform better at school.

Methodologically, the empirical research on public school uniforms is still flawed. Researchers lack a conceptual agreement about what constitutes a "uniform". The sampling procedures are limited to small, non-random, cross-sectional and quasi-experimental studies without suitable control groups. Data collection is often conducted following implementation of school uniform policies, making it difficult to isolate antecedents and producing results that are questionable. Future correlational research is

vital in acquiring statistical data about whether school uniforms impact violence, behavior, and academics. Adams (2006) said there was no clear causal relationship between the implementation of school uniforms and increased positive student behavior and achievement. He believed that the district political machinery was fueled by social, legal, cultural, racial, educational, and other social structures.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Researchers interested in conducting future studies on school uniforms stand to learn a lot about how they impact the climate of a school. There are gaps in present research of school uniforms. Currently data on this topic has only been conducted after the implementation of school uniforms. Future researchers should look into ways to research the climate of schools before and after the implementation of uniforms. It is equally important to know what the climate was like before uniforms were mandated than after. This is important to have something to compare to. Future researchers could consider the following questions: How has school uniforms impacted the school's climate? What effect has the school uniforms had on the school climate? In this study, the students were not involved in the data collection. Future studies might include students in the study since they are directly impacted by school uniforms. Larger elementary schools in both the suburban and urban areas could be included in the study. A correlational study could be conducted on 2 higher achieving schools who wear uniforms, one located in a suburban area, and one located in an urban area. A question to consider would be; How is the schools climate different in a suburban elementary school

with uniforms, and an urban elementary school with uniforms? A mixed method study could also be conducted in which the researcher conducts interviews and focus groups to get a better understanding of the impact school uniforms have on a school's climate. A longitudinal data study could also be beneficial, where the researcher conducts a two year study on how the implementation of school uniforms has impacted a schools climate. The researchers could conduct surveys and focus groups, before and after uniforms were implemented. In conclusion a project study could be created in which researchers study schools that have experienced positive school climate as a result of school uniforms and create a manual to be used in other school districts. There is an unlimited number of ways that researchers can continue research on this topic and get students involved in the research project.

### **Summary**

The theory behind adopting school uniforms is that uniforms can reduce violence in schools by diminishing gang influence and easing competition over clothing as a source of conflict (Brunsma, 2005). The advantages of school uniforms include fewer distractions, less bullying, and putting an end to offensive displays such as gang symbols (Carpenter, 2012). Educators and politicians across the country have considered school uniforms as a vehicle to achieve school safety, school discipline, and student achievement (Breitenbach, 2010).

The purpose this quantitative survey study was to determine the impact school uniforms had on a schools climate. Existing research in the area of school uniforms

resided mainly in the urban middle school setting, although a few studies research high schools and elementary schools. To date the studies examined gang violence, discipline, attendance and socioeconomic effects. Literature already existing on school uniforms yielded some pros and cons. There were proponents who felt that uniforms were a positive addition to schools. Uniforms support reduction of gang violence in schools and contribute to other positive outcomes such as decreased behavioral problems, increased learning, enhanced school climate, improved self-esteem, better school spirit, and greater academic achievement (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2003). Opponents feel differently and suggest that school uniforms infringe upon students' rights and are a superficial approach to underlying problems. Viadero (2007) found that schools cited benefits of uniforms, but researchers were seeing a different picture.

Section 3 was the methodology and consisted of my plan to collect data. The study was conducted with two Title I schools located in a suburban area outside of metropolitan Atlanta. School A had a mandated school uniform policy, while School B did not. Both schools were invited to participate in the surveys through web based email. The findings revealed that there was a difference in the climate of the schools. School A had a higher climate than school B with 14 out of 25 questions being more favorable and proving that school uniforms do impact a schools climate. The implications of social change were evident in the results. The students at school A trusted the teachers more, were motivated to learn, and capable of scoring high on achievement tests. Teachers looked forward to work, and there were more opportunities for more professional

development. They were able to deter bullying, worked to foster a supportive climate for the students, and the parents were supportive of the school and its activities.

Future study points that need closer examination would be researching other factors that could affect and influence schools climate, such as teacher professional development, teacher attrition, parental involvement, as well as student perspectives on school climate. Researchers should also consider conducting different types of studies including longitudinal and mixed method studies. They should also consider comparing uniforms schools in suburban areas to schools located in urban areas.

According to the findings in this study, the impact school uniforms have on school climate is positive. The effects of the school uniforms show a clear contribution to positive social change. School uniforms are important, and they do matter. The school in this study was able to see the positive effect uniforms have on school climate from the perspectives of the stakeholders. This school was able to reap the benefits of a successful school uniform policy. A positive school climate reduces dropouts and fosters youth development, academic achievement, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for students to be responsible and productive members of society (Cohen. et. Al. 2009). In conclusion, if school uniforms are the solution to positive school climate brought about through improved academic achievement, decreased behavioral problems, safer schools, and a sense of belonging, then our educators have a job they are obligated to do. That job is implementing an effective school uniform policy so that all students can experience the positive results that School A experienced in this study.

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## Appendix A:

## Walden University Approval Letter

Dear Ms. Brookshire,

This email confirms receipt of the notification of approval for the community research partner and also serves as your notification that Walden University has approved BOTH your doctoral study proposal and your application to the Institutional Review Board. As such, you are approved by Walden University to conduct research. Approval Number: 11-24-14-0068463The

Please contact the Office of Student Research Administration at [doctoralstudy@waldenu.edu](mailto:doctoralstudy@waldenu.edu) if you have any questions.

Congratulations!

Libby Munson

Research Ethics Support Specialist, Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

Leilani Endicott

IRB Chair, Walden University

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:

<http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

## Appendix B: Consent Form A

You are invited to take part in a research study about the impact school uniforms have on the school climate. You are invited to participate, because you are an administrator or teacher at the school and can provide information about the school climate. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Atillah Brookshire, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. The researcher is also an Instructional Site Facilitator in a school system, but this study is separate from that role.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to determine if school uniforms impact the climate of a school. The implications for positive change include district focuses on cultivating a positive school climate, increasing administrator, teacher, and students relationships, and a focus on adopting school uniforms as a means to promote unity and harmony in all schools.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey through Survey Monkey consisting of:

- 24 questions that should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later or during the study. You may stop at any time. Declining to participate or discontinuing after you have started will not negatively impact the participants’ relationship with the researcher.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Your participation in the study and the answers you choose to mark will be anonymous to everyone including the researcher. This study could pose some risks of minor discomforts, such as stress, fatigue, or reluctance to complete the survey honestly. The benefits of the study are that you will provide informative feedback about the climate of the school from a stakeholder’s point of view which can then be used by Districts to determine if whether or not school uniforms impact the school climate.

**Compensation:**

There will be no gifts, reimbursement, or compensation of any kind for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. Since there is no identifying information in the survey and you will be given a link to access the survey directly, no one, including the researcher, will know who completed the survey. The researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept on an electronic file with a security code that only the researcher knows. The data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at . If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call . She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is. Walden University approval number for this study is and it expires on

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By clicking the link below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Link for electronic survey: [www.surveymonkey.com/s/YW8NHFN](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YW8NHFN)

## Appendix C: Consent Form B

You are invited to take part in a research study about the impact school uniforms have on the school climate. You are invited to participate, because you are an administrator or teacher at the school and can provide information about the school climate. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Attillah Brookshire, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. The researcher is also an Instructional Site Facilitator in a school system, but this study is separate from that role.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to determine if school uniforms impact the climate of a school. The implications for positive change include district focuses on cultivating a positive school climate, increasing administrator, teacher, and students relationships, and a focus on adopting school uniforms as a means to promote unity and harmony in all schools.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey through Survey Monkey consisting of:

- 24 questions that should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later or during the study. You may stop at any time. Declining to participate or discontinuing after you have started will not negatively impact the participants’ relationship with the researcher.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Your participation in the study and the answers you choose to mark will be anonymous to everyone including the researcher. This study could pose some risks of minor discomforts, such as stress, fatigue, or reluctance to complete the survey honestly. The benefits of the study are that you will provide informative feedback about the climate of the school from a stakeholder’s point of view which can then be used by Districts to determine if whether or not school uniforms impact the school climate.

**Compensation:**

There will be no gifts, reimbursement, or compensation of any kind for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. Since there is no identifying information in the survey and you will be given a link to access the survey directly, no one, including the researcher, will know who completed the survey. The researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept on an electronic file with a security code that only the researcher knows. The data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is. Walden University approval number for this study is and it expires on

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By clicking the link below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Link for electronic survey: [www.surveymonkey.com/s/YW9CFZF](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YW9CFZF)

## Appendix D:

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Version 2.5

**AMERICAN SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY TEACHER VERSION – 2006**

This survey is designed to get your opinions concerning some aspects of school climate and your attitudes concerning the school in which you work, its community and yourself. Your input is very important. Your responses are strictly anonymous and you will not be asked to identify yourself at anytime during the survey. Please respond honestly and completely. At the end of the survey, please feel free to add any additional comments that you find appropriate and were unable to address in the survey. Thank you, in advance, for taking the time to respond.

**DIRECTIONS:**

- Indicate your response with a check mark. ()
- Make your marks dark.
- Erase changes completely.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****1. GENDER**

Male  Female

**2. ETHNIC BACKGROUND**

Black  White, Non-Hispanic  Hispanic  Native American  Asian  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**3. TOTAL YEARS TEACHING 4. HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL ATTAINED**

\_\_\_\_\_  Diploma  Bachelor's  Master's  Doctorate

**5. HOME LANGUAGE**

English  Spanish  Portuguese  Cantonese  Mandarin  Thai  
 Arabic  Hindi  Korean  Japanese  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Following you will be asked a series of questions about your school. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement by filling in one of the five responses.

**1. This school is a safe place in which to work.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**2. I am currently pursuing in-service opportunities to improve myself as a teacher.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**3. There are sufficient opportunities to learn new instructional methods.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**4. Students at this school fight a lot.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**5. Most students at this school would not be successful at a community college or university.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**6. Students at this school trust the teachers.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**7. I have been able to deter bullying behavior among students.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**8. Administrators at this school trust my professional judgement.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

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**Version 2.5****9. I respect the students.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**10. Students at this school are capable of high achievement on standardized exams.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**11. I would benefit from more professional development provided by the district.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**12. Students at this school are not motivated to learn.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**13. Some children carry guns or knives in this school.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**14. Most students in the school will live beyond the age of 25 years.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**15. I address bullying behavior in my classroom or at the school at least once per month.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**16. Teachers at this school care whether or not the students are successful.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**17. Parents are supportive of the school and its activities.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**18. Teachers are not fair to some students at this school.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**19. There are students who will be successful in this school because of their race.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**20. Teachers at this school work to foster a supportive climate for the students.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**21. We are preparing students to become productive citizens.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**22. I look forward to coming to work most days.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**23. Students in this school will have difficulty with core academic subjects regardless of strength of instruction.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**24. I have met most of my students' parents or adult caretaker.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**25. Racial barriers to educational and economic opportunity no longer exist in the United States.**

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

**COMMENTS:**

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**Appendix E: Variable Names**

6. Safe Place = This school is a safe place in which to work.
7. In-service Opportunities = I am currently pursuing in-service opportunities to improve myself  
as a teacher.
8. Instructional Methods = There are sufficient opportunities to learn new instructional methods.
9. Student Fights = Students at this school fight a lot.
10. College Success = Most students at this school would not be successful at a  
community  
college or university.
11. Trust Teachers = Students at this school trust the teachers.
12. Deterring Bullying = I have been able to deter bullying behavior among students.
13. Professional Judgement = Administrators at this school trust my professional  
judgement.
14. Respect Students = I respect the students.
15. Standardized Exams = Students at this school are capable of high achievement on  
standardized exams.
16. Professional Development = I would benefit from more professional development  
provided  
by the district.
17. Motivated Students = Students at this school are not motivated to learn.
18. Carrying Weapons = Some children carry guns or knives in this school.
19. Long Life = Most students in the school will live beyond the age of 25 years.

20. Addressing Bullying = I address bullying behavior in my classroom or at the school at least once per month.
21. Teachers Care = Teachers at this school care whether or not the students are successful.
22. Parental Support = Parents are supportive of the school and its activities.
23. Being Fair = Teachers are not fair to some students at this school.
24. Racial Success = There are students who will be successful in this school because of their race.
25. Supportive Climate = Teachers at this school work to foster a supportive climate for the students.
26. Productive Citizens = We are preparing students to become productive citizens.
27. Work Everyday = I look forward to coming to work most days.
28. Academic Struggle = Students in this school will have difficulty with core academic subjects regardless of strength of instruction.
29. Parent Conferences = I have met most of my students' parents or adult caretaker.
30. Racial Barriers = Racial barriers to educational and economic opportunity no longer exist in the United States.