



# 17 Surprising School Uniform Statistics, Facts & Data

By Chris Drew (PhD) / October 23, 2022



**This easy-to-read overview explores 17 of the best facts and statistics about school uniforms from recent studies and presents them in an easy-to-read format for teachers, students, parents, and journalists.**

There is plenty of research around about school uniforms. But distilling the fact from fiction in all that research is difficult. This is especially true for disputed questions, like “do school uniforms impact upon academic achievement?” (see

Point 7 in the list). Here, I've tried to give you the easiest possible introduction to the current *facts and statistics* we have about uniforms in schools.



*Please note this data is the distillation and analysis of academic and industry research. All original sources are cited and linked to in the reference list at the end of this piece.*

## **School Uniform Statistics From The Research Literature**

### **1. The First School Uniform Was Introduced In 1552**

The first recorded evidence of a school uniform for students dates back to a school in London in 1552<sup>[1]</sup>. It was a charity school called *Christ's Hospital* that educated orphans and poor children .

After this, the concept of a school uniform spread quickly throughout England. While this community school was the first to implement a uniform policy, it wasn't long before the uniform became associated with wealthier elite schools. These elite schools became known as "bluecoat schools" due to their quintessential blue blazer uniforms.

### **2. Uniforms Improve Listening In Class**

A study<sup>[2]</sup> written by Chris Bauman and Hana Krskova and published in the *International Journal of Educational Management* found that students in uniforms are better listeners. A detailed ANOVA test was conducted across a cohort of schools across 5 different geographical regions.



The study found that students in uniform are better listeners and teacher wait time is decreased. The authors conclude that “uniforms contribute to better discipline in everyday school operations.” They highlight that “good discipline allows students to work well and this ultimately leads to better academic performance.”

The authors’ implication here is that:

- Uniforms improve discipline.
- Discipline leads to better grades, therefore
- Uniforms may cause better grades.

### **3. 20% Of US Schools Have Uniform Policies (Up 8%)**

School uniforms are more popular than ever in the United States. The latest data from The National Center for Education Statistics finds 20 percent of schools in the United States require school uniforms (that was for the 2017-2018 school year)<sup>[3]</sup>.

This is up 8 percent since 2000, where the same statistical survey found just 12 percent of schools in the US required uniforms.

A common reason for the requirement to wear uniforms is that it helps identify students as belonging to the school (and helps identify intruders). But other schools without uniforms employ alternative safety methods for identifying students on school grounds, such as requiring students to carry school photo ID (9 percent of schools).



### **3. Primary Schools (23%) Require Uniforms More Than Middle (18%) And High Schools (10%) In The US**

The National Center for Education Statistics <sup>[3]</sup> also dissected uniform policies according to school type. They found that primary schools have the highest incidence of school uniform policies:

- Primary Schools with Uniform Policies: 23%.
- Middle Schools with Uniform Policies: 18%.
- High Schools with Uniform Policies: 10%.

However, while school uniform requirements are relaxed as students get older, strict dress codes become more common in middle and high school. It would appear that dress code policies are often necessary in the absence of school uniforms to ensure appropriate attire:

- Primary Schools with Strict Dress Codes: 43%.
- Middle Schools with Strict Dress Codes: 62%.
- High Schools with Strict Dress Codes: 56%.

### **5. Sports Uniforms Increase Participation In Physical Education Lessons**

in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, Nicole Nathan and a team of researchers<sup>[5]</sup> explore the relationship between school sports uniforms and participation in physical education lessons.

The study found that there was “significant reduction in sedentary activity”

among students who wore uniforms.



It is reasonable to assume that this is due to the fact students in uniform were wearing clothing that was more suited to physical activity than their everyday attire, facilitating greater participation.

## 6. A 1969 Supreme Court Ruling Gives Students The Right To Freedom Of Expression Through Their Dress

In 1969, the case *Tinker v. Des Moines* was brought before the Supreme Court of the United States. This case has implications today for the constitutionality of school uniforms.

The case looked at a situation where a school tried to ban the wearing of black arm bands. The arm bands were worn as a form of protest against the Vietnam War. The court sided with the students, arguing that students do not:

*“...shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”<sup>[4]</sup>*

The court was clear in their ruling that there *are* limits on what students can wear – including that schools can control dress codes in many constitutionally valid situations. Thus, while the Supreme Court still hasn’t made a clear on the constitutionality of school uniforms in [public schools](#), there is precedent for

future court cases challenging the constitutionality of uniforms based on restriction of freedom of expression.



## 7. It's Not Clear If Uniforms Impact Academic Performance

Several studies have tried to identify a correlation between academic performance and the wearing of uniforms, with varying results.

Seminal among these studies was Brunσμα and Rockquemore (1998) who argued that there was no evidence for the relationship between academic performance and wearing school uniforms.

This study was criticised by Bodine (2003) who claimed that Brunσμα and Rockquemore had misinterpreted their own data, and that uniforms in fact did have an impact on academic performance.

Later, Gentile and Imberman (2011) studied impacts on test scores and found small but statistically insignificant increases in test scores for students in uniform. Similarly, Velder (2011) found no evidence between school uniforms and improved graduation rates.

Thus, there appears to be no consensus among academic researchers about a correlation between mandatory school uniforms and improved academic performance.

However, *qualitative* studies that interview parents, teachers, and students tend to find that teachers in particular perceive that uniforms may lead to better test scores (Huss, 2007; Brobeck, 2018), sometimes as a result of better discipline

(Bauman & Hana Krskova, 2016), while students remain sceptical about whether their dress impacts their performance (Brobeck, 2018; Gregory, 2013).



## Table: Studies into Correlation between Uniforms and Academic Achievement

Studies that Support a Potential Correlation	Studies that are Sceptical or Disagree with a Potential Correlation
Bodine (2003)	Brunsma & Rockquemoore (1998)
Huss (2007)	Gregory (2013)
Brobeck (2018)	Gentile & Imbermann (2011)

*See Reference list for links to each study.*

Personally, I believe there is currently no clear empirical evidence for a correlation between school uniforms and test scores. In particular, the studies that *challenge* the correlation appear to me to have stronger empirical findings backing them up.

However, I'm open to future studies that may find better evidence for a correlation. The jury's still out.

### 8. A UK Study Found The Average Parent Pays £337 Per Year In Uniform Costs

In the UK, mandatory school uniforms are near universal across the four nations that make up the country (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland).



The UK-based *Children's Society*<sup>[6]</sup> surveyed about 1000 parents and found that parents spend about £337 a year for a school uniform for a secondary school child. They also spend about £315 per year for a primary school child.

**Table: Average Costs of School Uniforms in the UK**  
**(Adapted from *Children's Society*<sup>[6]</sup>)**

Item	Secondary School Student	Primary School Student
<b>Blazer</b>	£41	£28
<b>Jumper and Tie</b>	£35	£38
<b>Shirts</b>	£35	£35
<b>Trousers, Skirts and Dresses</b>	£38	£41
<b>Sports Clothing</b>	£40	£34
<b>Sports Shoes</b>	£45	£38
<b>Coats and Bags</b>	£52	£50
<b>School Shoes</b>	£47	£51





These high costs raise equity and access concerns in a society where public education is mandatory and ostensibly free. It appears overly costly uniforms could be a big [barrier to education](#).

## 9. 23% Of Parents Struggle With Uniform Costs

The *Children's Society* study in the UK also found that 23% of parents have sent their child to school in “ill-fitting, unclean or incorrect uniform” because of the high cost of buying a new uniform, cleaning it, or repairing it.

This challenges the idea that school uniform policies help ensure students are appropriately dressed. In fact, there can be instances where forcing a child to wear a uniform means they go to school in clothes that are ill-fitting or unclean.

## 10. Schools With Uniforms Have Better Behaved Students

The academic literature tends to show that school uniforms correlate with more discipline in schools. There is significantly more consensus that uniforms lead to improved behavior than there is that they lead to improved academic results.

For example, the study listed in Point 4 highlighted improved listening in class. But, the most convincing study I have found is that of Han<sup>[7]</sup> in the *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, which analyzes data from 421 urban schools in the United States.

The study finds that the following disciplinary issues are all less prevalent in schools with uniforms:

- Attacks



- Insubordination
- Firearms
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Hate Crime
- Gangs

However, there is still a stronger correlation between academic achievement and disciplinary issues than there is between uniform policies and disciplinary issues.

## **11. 72% Of Parents And 86% Of School Officials Believe Uniforms Minimize Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure may occur when students feel the need to dress 'cool', be up-to-date with fashion trends, or wear brand name clothing. School uniforms can eliminate each of these potential pressures on students.

The *National Association for Elementary School Principals* (NAESP) released a study <sup>[8]</sup> in which they surveyed 517 school officials from across the United States. This study, one of the most well-cited across the internet, presented some very clear statistical data on school uniforms.

One of the key findings was that school officials overwhelmingly believe school uniforms reduce peer pressure.

Trutex's UK-based survey asked parents this question and found that 72% of UK parents agree that uniforms decrease pressure on children to wear designer

looks.



## **12. Between 83% And 94% Of Teachers Believe Uniforms Improve A School's Image In The Community**

A study by Trutex<sup>[9]</sup> found that 94% of UK teachers (from a sample of 180) believed that school uniforms improved the school's image in the community. The US-based NAESP study<sup>[8]</sup> found that 83% of school officials believed that uniforms improved the school's image in the community.

If the school has a uniform, it may be *perceived* as being more upstanding, unified, and disciplined.

While the community's perception of the school does not directly impact standards or academic achievement within the school, it does have some very real implications for the school. For one thing, a school with a better image may attract more (and better quality) students. If it is a private school, it may then be able to charge higher fees.

## **13. 79% Of School Officials Believe Uniforms Improve School Safety**

One of the most widely cited reasons for school uniforms is that of school safety. If teachers can quickly identify who is and isn't a student based on uniforms, intruders to the school can be very quickly identified.

The NAESP study found that 79% of school officials agreed that uniforms improved safety.



Among schools that don't have uniforms, other measures to increase safety include badges and ID cards. In another study<sup>[3]</sup>, it was found that 12 percent of schools in cities required children to wear badges and 66 percent of city schools required teachers to wear badges.

It does seem somewhat hypocritical that, if safety and easy identification are the concern, children have to wear uniforms but teachers don't. It would seem most important that children as young as 5 need to know which adult to trust (the one in the uniform) and which ones pose a risk (the intruders out of uniform). I can't imagine a 5-year-old asking an adult intruder wandering around the school grounds for their ID card.

#### **14. Between 75% And 93% Of Parents Say Uniforms Make Life Easier**

The UK Trutex study<sup>[9]</sup> found that 75% of mothers in the UK think uniforms make their lives easier. The US NAESP<sup>[8]</sup> study found that 93% of parents believe school uniforms make getting ready in the morning easier.

In the NAESP study, they also looked at issues like wardrobe battles, which parents similarly said were significantly reduced (94%) by mandatory uniforms.

While this is overwhelming data from two separate studies, there is also some other evidence<sup>[6]</sup> that parents can find themselves in tough situations at times when all the school uniforms are dirty but wearing a clean non-uniform outfit is not an option.

#### **15. Blue Is The Most Common School Uniform Color**



From the quintessential 'bluecoat' uniform of elite English schools down to the humble blue polo shirt of the local state school, it seems blue remains a preferred color for school uniforms.

According to the NAESP study, school officials listed their color preferences like this:

- **Blue Polo** – 38%
- **White Polo** – 23%
- **Red Polo** – 15%

However, grey did not seem to be evident in that US-based study, and grey is a [very common](#) uniform color for schools in England.

## 16. 89% Of UK Teachers Believe School Uniforms Reduce Bullying

Reduction in incidences of bullying is another very commonly cited reason for the use of mandatory school uniforms. It gives every child a level playing field, minimizes chances of shaming based on inability to afford the best clothes, and reduces chances of shaming based on clothing preferences.

Teachers appear to agree most with this claim, followed by parents.

Interestingly, students tend to be less convinced, according to the UK-based Trutex<sup>[9]</sup> survey:

- **Teachers** – 89% believe uniforms reduce bullying.
- **Parents** – 61% believe uniforms reduce bullying.
- **Students** – 50% believe uniforms reduce bullying.

## 17. 7 In 10 UK Students Believe School Uniforms Help Them Fit In



Uniforms can help children fit in because they reduce pressure to dress 'cool'.

They also minimize visible poverty, allowing poorer and wealthier children to all look the same within the classroom.

Amongst UK students, younger children are more likely to say that uniforms are good for helping them to fit in. As children enter their teen years and want to further express themselves, children start disagreeing more with this statement:

- **6 and 7 year olds** – 75% think their uniform helps them fit in.
- **11 year olds** – 60% think their uniform helps them fit in.
- **14 year olds** – 57% think their uniform helps them fit in.

In the UK, the overwhelming number of children wear uniforms to school and it's part of the culture. So, this data is likely to significantly differ in a US-based survey.

[Related: 31 School Dress Code Examples](#)

## Conclusion

The above data is the distillation, review, and analysis of a range of school uniform statistics from academic and industry research. As I've outlined above, for several issues there isn't clear data or consensus on the facts. This is particularly true about the relationship between uniforms and academic achievement. In those situations, it's worth looking at the methodologies in each study.



Similarly, the majority of the above research was conducted in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom. These two jurisdictions are significantly different when it comes to school uniforms. Uniforms are overwhelmingly common and normalized in the UK, which will surely impact society's overall perceptions of them.

## Footnotes

[1] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-29047752>

[2] <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJEM-09-2015-0118/full/html>

[3] <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/a19>

[4] <https://www.aclu.org/other/tinker-v-des-moines-landmark-supreme-court-ruling-behalf-student-expression>

[5] <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-021-01084-0>

[6] <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/the-wrong-blazer-report-2020.pdf>

[7] <https://journals.sfu.ca/ijep/ijep/index.php/ijep/article/view/253>

[8] <https://www.naesp.org/resource/the-right-fit-principals-on-school-uniforms/>

[9] <https://www.trutexbtru2u.co.uk/research-shows-wearing-school-uniform-helps-reduce-bullying/>

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