

*In our schools a good deal of freedom in the selection of clothing for students is the order of the day. That is, attire is, for the most part, left to the discretion of the student and his parents. And, more often than not, that works well. Sometimes, however, it doesn't. And when it doesn't, it doesn't take long either before someone offers what, on the surface at least, would seem to be the ultimate solution: "Why don't we just have school uniforms and be done with it all?" To some parents, that might be a welcome turn of events, since they have otherwise to cope with the all too common "But, why can't I wear this? Everybody's wearing it!" And the teacher, who likewise can be caught in the middle of things, could with uniforms be freed from the disagreeable necessity of talking to a student (or his mother) about clothing which, though not perhaps improper in itself, is nevertheless not quite appropriate in the school setting.*

*So . . . what to do — that is the question. Some schools, public and private, have opted for uniforms. Should our schools consider that? What are the "pros" and the "cons"? We arranged therefore to have the matter addressed in our "Viewpoints" rubric. Speaking out in favor of school uniforms is Mrs. Jo Dykstra. She's worked for a good number of years as secretary in Hope School (G.R.), so she's had plenty of opportunity to observe the subtle effects that clothing can have on student behavior. Besides, she's reared a few children of her own; so she probably knows, too, what it's like to have to try to help children deal with the pressures which can be involved, for *them*, in the matter of selection of clothing. The arguments on the other side are taken up by a teacher: Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers. She, too, has had ample opportunity to deal with the matter of school attire both at school and on the home front; so, no less than Mrs. Dykstra, she knows by experience whereof she speaks. She addresses the question primarily from a *girl's* perspective, because, especially from her experience as a mother, she understands that it's the girls who are most affected by decisions regarding what's permissible in the way of school attire.*

*So . . . with that for background, here they are:*

## Uniforms-Yes?

Jo Dykstra

"But, Mom, these jeans aren't frosted. Nobody wears plain jeans anymore!"

"I don't want to wear these jeans; they don't have the right label on them."

Mom assures her, "Don't worry, Darcie, we can sew the label from your old jeans on this pair."

Are scenes such as this characteristic of your home? Or, perhaps, do your children report situations such as this:

"Darcie, I love your new jeans; where did you get them?"

Darcie cringes and thinks to herself, "If I say Rogers I will be telling a lie, and if I say Meijers, Joni will probably make fun of me."

I have talked to a few mothers and am told scenes like this *do* occur. I think you already know that they do.

What pressures our children sometimes have to endure with regard to the clothes they wear! And what pressures are put on our moms so our children can be dressed like "everybody" else. (Really, is it *everybody* or just some who are perhaps the ones who follow the latest trends?) We know it is not accurate that *everybody* is wearing these trend-setter clothes, but some are, and those pressures are very really out there. After all, don't we adults also experience this pressure to one degree or another?

Certainly these pressures have an effect on our children's learning. You know the uncomfortable feeling if you don't "measure up" — it can be pretty hard to concentrate on the task

at hand. What can we do to help?

Well, how about our children wearing uniforms? I can already hear them screaming loudly! "Uniforms! Who wants to wear them?" And perhaps we parents don't really like the thought of this alternative either.

Let me tell you about some schools who were given the option of wearing uniforms (public schools), some who have already worn them, and some who have made a change to uniforms (Christian schools).

*Newsweek*, November 1987, reported on five public schools in the east who are wearing uniforms on a voluntary basis. I will quote in part from the report.

"The initial idea was to get rid of the social stigma attached to not having the right sneakers or jeans. Besides freeing children from that kind of peer pressure, school officials hope that wearing uniforms may lead to higher grades and better behavior. A principal in New York's Harlem claims that test scores have improved since donning uniforms three years ago. The uniforms just help the children feel better about themselves. Parents are already feeling one important difference: uniforms are a lot easier on limited family budgets than closets full of Reeboks and Guess? jeans."

In Washington the cost for a boy to be outfitted with three

pairs of slacks, three shirts, a tie and socks was \$104.00. A girl with two jumpers, three blouses, socks, and a sweater was \$107.00. Some parents reported they have better control of their children since the strife over clothes has been reduced. Since teenagers are more apt to balk over the switch, they began the program in the lower grades. Then as they move up in the grades they continue to wear uniforms.

I called two area Christian schools whose students wear uniforms. One school (Pilgrim Bible Academy in Cedar Springs) has worn them for their entire existence, which is 13 years. The junior high girls wear navy skirts (with a modest skirt length of course), red or navy sweaters or vests with white blouses; and the girls in the lower grades wear jumpers with tights. For gym classes the girls wear culottes. The boys wear navy pants with red or navy sweaters, and shirts and ties (which may be removed at recess). They report a positive attitude and a good learning environment without the competition in dress. They also report it is much less costly, needing a minimum of two outfits. They did not give any disadvantages and highly recommended uniforms as a mode of dress.

At Beth Haven, a Baptist School in Greenville, I spoke with a staff member who was also a

mother of two daughters who attended this school at the time the dress code was in effect. She was happy with uniforms. This school changed from regular dress to uniforms about eight years ago. Their uniforms are much the same as in the other Christian school. Her response to my questions was that wearing uniforms promotes a better attitude, reduces discipline problems, promotes better behavior, and improves the learning atmosphere. Obviously they have no problems with improper dress or with one student being better dressed than another. Also, it was reported to be more economical. She did not give any disadvantages. When the change was made, a few students and their parents were opposed. However, after it was in operation, there were no more complaints. When occasionally they were allowed to wear regular dress for one day, a change in behavior was evident (unbelievable though it may sound). The children also wore their uniforms when presenting programs. Uniforms were highly recommended! (Incidentally, the staff at this school wore the same uniforms, with the addition of blazers.)

I wonder if we parents, especially those who can provide the latest fashions for our children, realize the pressures put on those families who cannot keep up with the trends. What un-

happiness can be brought on the students who can't "measure up"! Remember, the trends are set by the world and are often not worthy to be copied. Modesty is not a consideration in their designs; in fact we all know that the opposite is true. Just page through the catalogs; some pictures almost make one blush.

When asked to write an article in favor of uniforms, I hesitated because I was not at all sure that I was in favor of them. However, since talking to Christian school personnel who have made the change successfully, I believe it could be an improvement. Especially now that we are more and more seeing the return of the short, narrow skirts and the sloppy and baggy unkempt look! I am very concerned that maybe we are on the way toward the problems of indecency we experienced with our children wearing extremely short skirts in the early 70's. I surely hope not!

In making a decision with regard to our children's dress, whether uniforms or otherwise,

modesty must have a high priority so that also in this area of their lives they also glorify God. We know that the dress, also of our younger daughters in the elementary grades, must be modest as well as neat. And who will teach them to dress modestly if it is not we parents? They will be building on what they are taught as they grow older. Our children must show in their dress, as well as in their behavior and attitude, that they belong to Christ. And we parents must do all in our power to promote these Christian attitudes and appearances. Perhaps uniforms would help to promote such attitudes.

Parents, I think the *Perspectives* staff would like to hear from you on this subject. Why don't you express *your* thoughts concerning uniforms? Or maybe you would like to discuss this at a Parent-Teacher Association meeting. I am sure there are parents out there who would like to give it a try. It sounds pretty good to me.

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## Uniforms-Nyet

Mary Beth Lubbers

"...they (Russian prisoners) would be ordered to leave their leather coats, their Romanov sheepskin coats, their woolen sweaters, their suits of fine wool,

their felt cloaks, their leather boots, their felt boots...and after passing through (a different door) they received black cotton breeches, field shirts, camp