

Opinions Differ in San Miguel Over Student Uniforms: School Board Seeks Proposals

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San Miguel—The idea of a school-uniform mandate received mixed reviews here.

Some parents attending Tuesday night's school board meeting found the idea was very much in vogue, but others called it a complete fashion mistake. A large number of parents applauded the idea, which would require students from kindergarten through eighth grade to wear uniforms in San Miguel schools next year. According to the plan discussed, high schoolers would not have to wear uniforms.

Support for Uniforms

Hundreds of parents responded favorably in a survey recently taken by the district, stating the uniforms would (1) cut down on gang problems, (2) improve students' appearances and (3) help focus kids' attention on their studies instead of clothes.

"I feel that the uniforms would be great," said one of the parents surveyed. "That way all kids are valued the same. Lower-income families can't compete with fashion and style. I have seen kids looked down upon and are very hurt because they don't have the best. They are there for an education, not fashion statements."

"When I was a kid, everyone wore uniforms," one father said during the first public hearing on the matter. "I'm spending a fortune on stylish clothes, and I can't keep up with it."

Many voiced concern over the cost of uniforms. But several parents, who described their families as low-income, said they would do whatever they could to buy the uniforms because they felt it was important to their kids' success at school. "There is a problem at San Miguel Elementary where children make fun of others not in the latest fashion," said Maria Dunbar, who works at the school and has two children attending Jackson Middle School. "This would be a step to making sure that all children are equal."

Others argue that it's a good idea but should also be enforced in high schools.

Officials' biggest sales pitch for the policy is safety. They say uniforms could curb campus violence. Officials liken the idea to a program adopted in Long Beach. School administrators there say the dress code has resulted in a big drop in safety-related problems.

Objections to Uniforms

But many did not like the idea, saying it would be too expensive and could thwart freedom of expression.

Some parents and students argue that mandatory uniforms would interfere with students' freedom of choice. "Don't we as students have the right to dress the way we want?" Doris Wilson, a seventh-grader at Miguel Middle School, asked during the hearing. "I do believe in discipline and rules. But students have many different tastes at Miguel and all across the nation. Uniforms will only jump everyone together as one."

Wrote a parent whose child attends Irving Elementary: "I vote no for school uniforms. Irving is a school, not a restaurant, not a grocery store and not a prison. Put the children in uniforms and you take away their identity."

For David Givens, the father of two elementary students, the idea of mandated clothing was offensive. "I will not buy uniforms for my kids," he told the board. "We dress our two boys every day. My kids don't leave the house until they look proper. The district should spend your money on education. You should pay attention to overcrowding in the schools."

Trends Across the Nation

While other schools in the county and in districts nationwide have adopted conventional uniforms—black or navy blue trousers or skirts and white shirts or blouses—there has been little discussion of the precise look for San Miguel.

Board President Calls for Proposals

San Miguel school board president Richard Roberts said it would be up to each school to decide on its uniform and has asked that each school prepare a proposal for school uniforms.

"We need to find out what parents, students and teachers think would be the best plan for school uniforms," said Roberts. "Should the uniforms be black or navy blue trousers or skirts and white shirts or blouses? Or should they be simply dark pants or skirts and white tops? Should we have uniforms every day but Friday, when students would be allowed more freedom of choice? Should we require uniforms just for middle school students and not for K-5?"

"We need everyone to present their ideas to the district. But we need to have everyone's proposals within the next two weeks."

If adopted next month, the approved plan would begin next school year.