

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HARFORD COUNTY
INFORMATIONAL REPORT

ACTION ON EXAMINATION OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS: RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background Information:

In response to a request by the Harford County Board of Education that the Superintendent's staff assess public interest in the concept of requiring all Harford County Public Schools students to wear a school uniform, the Committee on School Uniforms was convened in September, 2007. The Committee, which includes representation from stakeholder groups including teachers, students, parents, community members, and the Board of Education, is co-chaired by Mrs. Patricia Skebeck, Executive Director of Elementary Education, and Mr. David Volrath, Executive Director of Secondary Education.

Early on in their work, the Committee decided to survey the major stakeholders. The Office of Accountability was engaged to provide technical support. The Committee met several times in the early fall to review research and practice related to the topic. It was established by consensus that a single-item scannable form be developed and distributed to all schools to be completed by parents and staff. In addition, students enrolled in grades 8 through 12 would also be asked to respond to the survey.

The survey form asked respondents to identify their role and their school and then to respond to the single item "Harford County Public Schools students should be required to wear a school uniform" by indicating "Agree" or "Disagree." The survey forms were distributed in mid-November, 2007, and returned for scanning and analysis in late November.

Discussion:

Of the approximately 60,000 forms sent to the schools, 28,600 were returned for scanning. In addition, the Committee invited public comment on the school system's website. More than 800 individuals submitted comments. Their comments were recorded and are available to Board members.

Analysis of the forms showed that stakeholders in all schools participated. They included more than 16,000 parents, 10,000 students, 1880 teachers, and 136 school administrators. Teachers and school administrators expressed the most favorable attitude towards uniforms, with more than three out of four indicating support. Parents' responses were divided, with 58.4% indicating agreement and 41.6% indicating disagreement. Students indicated they are opposed to school uniforms.

Parents of elementary students expressed the greatest support, with 63.7% indicating agreement with the concept. Just about half the parents of high school students and slightly more than half the parents of middle school students indicated support.

Whereas the intent of the Committee was to elicit a response from all parents, only about half the parents contacted actually returned a scannable form. Although the Committee was pleased with this return rate, which is far higher than expected for a written survey, they recognize that it cannot be concluded that the responses of this group are necessarily typical of the total population. Nonetheless, the Committee believes that the results as a whole support the notion of community interest and some support for the concept of school uniforms.

The Board of Education directed the Committee to begin research into the types and costs of various uniforms and that conduct regional meetings to share information, and provide opportunities for parents and community members to have input in the process and the procedures necessary to implement a uniform policy. The Committee is further directed to have School Principals host student meetings to share information about uniforms and to compile recommendations regarding the implementation process of uniform use.