



SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL SCHOOL

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SCHOOL BOARD TOWN HALL MEETING UNIFORM POLICY MAY 21, 2009

IN ATTENDANCE: School Board, Principal, Parish Council Liaison

38 Interested Parties (families & faculty—count based on those who signed in)

20 Speakers (based on cards given moderator)

The School Board listened carefully and attentively to those who presented. The presentations reflected various points of view with regard to the Uniform Policy approved by the School Board. Just prior to the meeting, the School Board and administration were given five binders containing

- An overview of the information collected by the Concerned Parent Group
- 95 surveys, categorized by grade levels (K – 8)
- A summary of hand written School Board Minutes, May 2008 to February 2009 and April 2009.

The concerns presented at the meeting can be categorized under four main headings, each addressed separately:

1. Process
2. Communication
3. Student Issues
4. Other

1. Process

- September committee not represented or considered
- Not democratic
- Board conducted a survey not a vote
 - Parents thought there would be a vote on uniform options
- Limited committee participation

In the April 17, 2008, School Board Minutes the following is stated: Randy Richard read Fr. John's e-mail concerning the school's dress code policy. Discussion followed and Todd Priewe and Janice Tischler volunteered to research uniforms and updating the dress code policy. The School Board was given a charge to review the dress code; the Board undertook its charge seriously and carefully, resulting in some major changes for the dress code for 2008/2009. By August 2008, based on the amount of negative feedback, it was evident that families would have preferred going to uniforms. In October, the minutes state the board would make a decision in January. The Board carefully considered all pertinent information presented to it in making its decision.

See in the text box on page 2, a summary of the salient points taken from the official published School Board Meeting Minutes relating to the Uniform Decision of the School Board.

May 15, 2008: Some discussion on the dress code policy took place with Fr. John present. Two of the board members had looked into dress codes from other schools and felt them to be similar to the policy at SKDS. Barb Haase stated that the dress code wording needs to be made clearer for students and parents. Changes will need to be made.

June 19, 2008: Father John requested that the new dress code be put on the website ...Father John then shared his opinions on the dress code and again brought up his reasons why he would like to see a new dress code and a more strict enforcement of it; also that if the new dress code fails then he would like to see a proposal for school uniforms by January so that the school would have time to implement a uniform policy. Father John very adamantly stated that he wants to see an improvement in the way students present themselves at school as well as at Mass.

After listening to Father John's comments regarding his views on the dress code, the new dress code was read, with a lengthy discussion following. After discussion, the new dress code was revised and the motion was made by Troy to approve the dress code as stated. Todd seconded the motion.

July 17, 2008: Bonnie.... commentedthat the council gave full support to the school's new dress code.

OLD BUSINESS: The school board members discussed the parents' reactions to the new dress code. The school board is in agreement that the dress code changes are for the positive. Randy questioned the athletic dress code. After discussion, a motion was made by Troy that the practice shorts be the same length as the uniform game shorts. Dan seconded this motion and it was approved.

August 21, 2008: Correspondence: Troy passed out Land's End catalogs. Discussed again issues brought up by parents regarding the pros and cons of the new dress code. The majority of parents are asking for uniforms and have questioned why SKDS didn't choose to go directly to uniforms. The time constraints for implementing uniforms were the main issue, but uniforms are still being considered for next school year.

September 11, 2008: Judy Johnsen shared a comment made by a school parent wondering if SKDS is going to uniforms and how soon that could happen. This led to a discussion that included Jackie Priewe, who shared her concerns that her daughter is quite stressed over the new dress code. Jackie would like to see a decision made on the uniforms. After discussion, the School Board decided to proceed with assembling a committee who would send out a parent survey and do some research as to the types of uniforms available, where to purchase them, and the cost.

October 16, 2009: Old Business: Regarding the dress code, Todd discussed the parent survey on the dress code and the data gathered from it. Several concerns surfaced: collarbone height, October to May time frame for shorts, the 2 inch rule for shorts and skirts, and camouflage. Given the concerns that have been expressed regarding the dress code and uniforms (pro and con), he suggested forming a uniform subcommittee that would put together sample uniforms that would include colors, styles, shoes and socks, and the cost of a uniform wardrobe. A written proposal on this will be presented to the School Board, with a **recommendation being made in January by the Board.**

The School Board acknowledges the fact that no reference of the October 12, 2008 ad-hoc uniform survey sub-committee meeting minutes was made within the October 2008 School Board meeting minutes. While there was no reference documented, the School Board did review and did take into consideration the ad-hoc committee's conclusions and recommendations.

November 20, 2009: Old Business: Uniform subcommittee will have a uniform selection available for **SCHOOL BOARD REVIEW IN JANUARY.** Barb Haase is pleased with how the students have stepped up to the dress code requirements this year.

December 18, 2009: Old Business: - Uniform subcommittee will have a uniform presentation available for **SCHOOL BOARD REVIEW IN JANUARY.**

January 15, 2009: Teachers as well are pleased and spending less time enforcing it. Judy Johnsen commented on how well the uniform subcommittee chose the uniform selections. The **UNIFORM SUBCOMMITTEE WILL HAVE A POSTER MADE UP WITH THE UNIFORM CHOICES FOR PARENTS TO LOOK AT THE FESTIVAL OF THE EDUCATIONAL ARTS.** The **SCHOOL BOARD WILL BE VOTING ON WHETHER TO GO WITH UNIFORMS OR NOT AT THE FEBRUARY MEETING.**

February 19, 2009: Dress Code Update: Todd shared that a lot of people did not see the poster at the Festival of Arts. He asked for parent input and reviewed previous surveys –conclusion being that families are divided. Long discussion on uniforms, with guest comments. Very well thought, very well presented. Following the lengthy discussion, the Board presented its vote in favor of uniforms. Accepted uniform choices and information on where to purchase will be made available to families before spring break.

The Board surveyed school families in September 2008. The survey established in question 7(see below) that 63.4% were not opposed to uniforms.

YOUR FAMILY WOULD SUPPORT A SCHOOL BOARD CONCLUSION TO ADOPT A SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY FOR THE 2009-10 SCHOOL YEAR. *Strongly Agree = 38 + Agree = 27 + Neutral = 18 = 83. 83 divided by 131 respondents = 63.4% responding as not being opposed to uniforms.*

As for committee participation, the Board formed a committee; several stepped forward; no one was turned away; the committee did its work; the board moved on from there.

2. Communication

- Nothing in newsletter
- Assessment of parents not accurately represented
- Poster wasn't seen

Each and every week, the Family Folder goes home with the oldest or only child of each family. In cases of multiple family arrangements, the folder goes home to both households. In the Family Folder are contained many items of importance to a member of the SKDS Family: newsletter, flyers, information from the Archdiocese and Parish, and communication from various school related committees. The School Board Minutes are part of the package. The information pertaining to the uniform policy was contained in the minutes. These minutes along with the newsletter and many other pieces of information are posted on our website.

As for assessing parents accurately, refer to question 7 above.

The poster wasn't seen. The poster was displayed in the cafeteria, the center of activity during the "Festival of Educational Arts", one of the most widely attended school events. We grant that many did not see the display, based on the statements heard and written; all we can say is, "We tried."

3. Student Issues

- Students are already signaled out; uniforms are an added pressure
- How will uniforms help?
- Clothes don't make the child nor change behavior
- Uniforms limit choice and expression
- Expect children to lead, yet force them to conform
- Uniforms are too specific, too limited

Throughout history, Christians have been singled out for their faith in Jesus Christ. Sometimes we are ridiculed and even despised for what we must say and do to be faithful to the Gospel. Uniforms are an outward sign of an inner difference—our faith. We call our students to a higher standard academically, behaviorally, socially, morally—in short—in all areas. We help them reach those standards. They meet those standards daily; our students have raised the bar by meeting those standards. They have proven repeatedly in academics, athletics, music, behavior, discipline, social concerns, and service to school, parish, and community that they are capable of meeting the expectations we have for them. Our students are already noticed. Ask teachers at Wayland and in BD High School. Why attempt to hide our pride in them? Why be afraid to raise the bar for everyone to emulate? We ought to be proud of who we are and what we stand for. We need to be expressing that at every opportunity.

Because of our social and moral concerns, as a parish school which is an integral part of St. Katharine Drexel Parish in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee part of the universal Catholic Church, uniforms level the playing field. It is not as easy to identify those who have and those who have not. The Catholic Church has always reached out to those in need, those who struggle, and those whom others shun — that still remains true today. One basic tenet of Catholic Social Teaching is to respect the dignity of each individual. With uniforms uniting the students, focus can be placed on inner dignity.

When we plan for an important event in our lives, we take care with our appearance. We "dress for the occasion". School is an important part of the lives of our children. They are preparing for the future. They are learning. They are doing something important. Dressing, in a manner that reflects the importance of growing, learning, and maturing, will make a difference as students continue to learn how to express their Christian values.

We are a team at St. Katharine Drexel. Any child who has ever been part of a team knows that the team supports a common goal. To demonstrate that solidarity, a member of the team proudly wears his/her uniform. Look at our students when they play volleyball, basketball, or track. Look at our SKDS Band; now there's an image to crow about and they are in uniform!

Daily our students have many opportunities to express their individuality on many fronts. We have students who participate in forensics, athletics, band, chorus, Builders Club, in addition to working on a variety of projects academically such as poetry, writing, art, class presentations, science demonstrations, history simulations, etc. We will still have spirit days and special dress up days to add variety and zest to the school year.

4. Other

- Other Christian schools in the area don't have uniforms and wouldn't consider them without a vote.
- Fear uniforms will cause families to leave.
- Uniforms won't save money.

St. Katharine Drexel School is part of St. Katharine Drexel Parish, and many school families are actively involved in many facets of parish life. The school benefits by being part of the parish directly due to parish subsidy. As a parent of children in SKDS, you benefit first hand because tuition is lower than that of other schools which are not part of a parish. The Parish has certain expectations of its children in the areas of behavior, appearance, and participation. The parish has a vested interest in our students. They are the future leaders of our Church. We want them to be the best possible leaders for a future that is still unknown. They need to be well grounded in their faith.

We answer to a higher authority. The School Board is a committee of the Parish Council. The Parish Council represents the Parish as a whole.

Consider what SKDS offers your children:

- ❖ Weekly Mass
- ❖ Daily prayer
- ❖ Special prayer events (Living Rosary, Living Stations, Shadow Way of the Cross, May Crowning, etc.)
- ❖ Daily Religious Education
- ❖ Class retreats
- ❖ Quality education
- ❖ Field Trips
- ❖ Athletics
- ❖ Band and Jazz Band
- ❖ Forensics and Builders Club
- ❖ Teachers and staff who love these children as if they were their very own
- ❖ Teachers and staff who spend countless hours more than they could ever be paid.

Would anyone really want to give all that up? We are more than a uniform. We, all of us, are a family, the SKDS family. SKDS is a holy place; we do holy work here. You and your children are part of that bigger picture. Utopia we are not, but we certainly are an entity in which one can place a great deal of pride.

We realize the economy leaves all of us gasping for breath on occasion. Your children still need to be clothed. You will be able to purchase uniform items from Land's End, Shopko, French Toast, Kohl's, Wal-Mart, Shopko, St. Vincent de Paul, Good Will—wherever you wish as long as those clothing items meet the uniform requirements. **BUT** if you truly believe you cannot remain at SKDS because of the uniform expense, please speak to Barbara Haase, Principal. She has funds at her disposal (from "Believers" in SKDS) to help those who are truly in need. As for the future, we are establishing "Cougar's Closet". You will be able to exchange clothing items your child has outgrown or donate clothing items for points.

Your School Board has listened, reflected, prayed and talked about the uniform matter. We ask that each individual consider thoughtfully that we are all part of a greater family. We need to pull together for the benefit of our children, our future. Our children are always watching us. That is part of their work as children. There is a reflection entitled, "When You Thought I Wasn't Looking". There are many lines in that reflection that can help us think about what is important. Consider these words:

***When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer; and I knew that there is a God
That I could talk to and I learned to trust in Him***

That's what we do at SKDS, we pray to and trust in God; and our children are watching us.

The St. Katharine Drexel School Board respectfully reiterates that the uniform policy for students in grades kindergarten through eight will start with the beginning of the 2009/2010 school year.

We look forward to sharing the year with you and your children.