

The following is an excerpt from the April 5, 2005 Tuesday Times...

At the March meeting of the CSA Board of Education, I brought forward a recommendation to develop a **specific student dress code/uniform policy for CSA, to be implemented during the 2005-06 school year**. After a good discussion, the CSA Board approved my recommendation to develop the policy. The CSA Staff Management Team is now working on the new policy that will include a description of the specific student dress code/uniform, a process for how and where parents can purchase the clothing and a financial support plan for families that may have difficulty purchasing the CSA clothing required by the policy. The policy promises to be *reasonable* -- in cost and degree of formality. If you wish to offer your input as to what you would like the uniform to look like, please email me at sstockwell@csaschool.org and I will forward your input to the Staff Management Team.

As CSA families, I want to share with you the rationale I provided to the CSA Board as to why such a policy would be positive for CSA – and most importantly, how that supports and strengthens the mission of our school.

The mission of CSA -- *to provide a safe place for children to grow and learn* – speaks to three levels of safety: physical, intellectual, social/emotional safety.

Let's talk about how each of these three levels of safety can be enhanced by the development of a specific student dress code/uniform policy. The information I cite in the following comments have been reported by administrators and teachers across the country who have observed and gathered data in schools that have implement a uniform policy.

#1: Physical Safety

Reports by administrators and teachers indicate that a more specific student dress code/uniform increased student focus on positive conduct and behavior in the classroom and in the school. How we dress often impacts how we conduct ourselves in certain group situations. A student dress code that *minimizes distractions* from the student's *central role* as a learner, promoted a school environment where students conducted themselves more fully as focused learners. It set a climate of expectation for learning as the student's primary responsibility. Not all students come to school understanding that learning is their primary purpose at school – a specific dress code mitigates other purposes that distract students from their attention to learning activities.

Since 9/11 and Columbine, all schools must be more concerned with **security** in the school. We must be alert to all potential intruders into the school, or on the school campus. A uniform student dress code is one additional – and powerful way to instantly bring attention to an unknown person on the school grounds. Students that are uniformly dressed are one more way to be proactive in recognizing a potentially dangerous situation and responding quickly with emergency procedures. The more proactive we can be, the safer our children will be in our schools. Recent events do not allow us, even in Livingston County, to reside in the notion that our schools are immune from such dangers. Our security measures must be forward thinking regarding the challenges facing us in school today *and tomorrow*.

#2: Intellectual Safety

All children have the right to an education that optimizes their intellectual growth. Our continuous progress/mastery learning model at CSA where children can learn at their own pace is one network of intellectual safety. Another important consideration for intellectual safety is creating a school climate that allows students to concentrate more on education. Clothing that is not conducive to the school environment distracts students from their academic work. Administrators and teachers in schools that have a specific dress code/uniform reported increased academic focus among the students,

reduced clothing distractions and less staff time required during instruction to enforce a more general, non-specific dress code. The overall climate reflects more seriousness about the work of learning in school.

#3 Social/Emotional Safety

The most striking reports in schools with a uniform policy were those from students, particularly those students from 8 years and above. Although these students may have complained about a uniform policy upon its implementation, most reported that it was a “relief” not to have the competitions that arises when students choose what clothes they wear to school. Reports from students indicted that the socio-economic barriers were leveled, resulting in less attention and competitiveness between students regarding “who’s wearing what”. Students are viewed more for “who they are on the inside” rather than for “what they wear on the outside”.

At CSA we are also concerned about children having to grow up too early – the time of “childhood” is becoming rapidly reduced by the influences in our society. Many CSA parents send their children to CSA to extend the time for their children to grow up and just be a “kid”, full of wonder and anticipation of the good things in life. Exposing children to adult clothing trends before it is necessary is not what most parents choose.

A specific student dress code/uniform policy can help extend that tie of childhood, allowing enough time for children to mature before facing some of the more subtle complexities of life.

At CSA we recognize that it is important for children to express themselves as individuals, and to allow for creativity in the learning environment. At CSA we encourage individual expression and creativity in the learning environment. At CSA we encourage individual expression and creativity in many ways. Students are given many options and choices in their learning projects that allow their own thinking processes to emerge. We will continue to nurture each child’s individuality through the expression of their learning; a specific dress code/uniform policy will not change that vital opportunity for students. In closing, I would like to talk about *pride* . . . pride in achievement , pride in strong character traits and pride in our school that represents excellence; excellence in learning, and excellence in becoming compassionate and caring human beings. CSA stands for quality in education and it is time for us to express that pride more visibly in our communities.