Group Name: Speaking Center Fam

Group Member Names: Bri, Nari, William, Lani, & Alec

School Uniforms

1. Introduction
2. Did you know that according to fashion reporter Marc Bain in the article *More US school kids than ever are wearing UNIFORMS this fall* published on the Quartz website, citing the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2016, almost 21.5% of all public schools have a uniform mandate in place with the numbers continuing to climb (Bain, 2018).
3. My name is Bri and I will be the moderator for this roundtable dialogue. My fellow panelists are Nari, William, Lani, and Alec. We have spent the last couple of weeks researching a variety of sources to become credible to discuss the topic of school uniforms.
4. This topic is important for several reasons.
	1. First, the debate about uniforms is not as simple as many people think. In the article, *Do uniforms make schools better?* published by GreatSchools.org in 2014, writer Marion Wilde says, it includes several larger issues, quote, “issues of school improvement, freedom of expression and the ‘culture wars’” unquote.
	2. Second, while this topic may not be the most pressing of our time, it is ongoing and relevant. On March 19th of this year, journalist Lydia Catling wrote in an article published in the Daily mail that there is currently debate going on in the British Parliament regarding uniform policies. As a matter of fact, according to a 2020 publication from the National Center of Educational Statistics titled “*Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019.”* Between the years of 1999 and 2016there has been an increase from 11.8% to 21.5% of schools that require students to wear uniforms.
	3. You may not be in K-12 anymore, but you might have younger siblings or plan to become parents in the future. It is also important for us to be aware of these issues because our education system impacts all of us.
5. During our roundtable, the members of our group will have a dialogue about whether or not public schools should implement school uniform policies. Within the United States, uniforms have been implemented within school settings since the early 19th and mid 20th century. Historically, uniforms were used mostly in private schools like catholic schools, but as public schools adopt them they are most often seen in lower income communities where people of color are the main student body. Inés Dussel explains that President Bill Clinton made the debate more well known when he endorsed uniforms while campaigning in 1996. The debate for uniform and dress code policies has continued and leads us to our dialogue today.
6. The format for our dialogue will be in 3 rounds. First, our panelists on each side will take turns presenting their perspectives on the issue. Nari and Lani will be arguing for school uniforms and William and Alec will argue against school uniforms. In round two, each panelist will be presented with a critical question about their position and have the opportunity to respond. In the third round, the panel will open the dialogue to the audience either through live questions and comments or via virtual discussion board.

Transition: Let’s start with Nari, who will offer points *for* uniforms.

1. Round One
2. Speaker 1: We should be implementing uniform policies in public schools.
	1. My first point is that school uniform policies lead to cost savings for families.
		1. If school uniforms were to be implemented, families on a strict budget wouldn’t have to worry about their kids experiencing the pressures of trying to purchase the latest, “trendy” clothing to keep up with the rest of the school population. Compared to the average cost of a typical school wardrobe, uniforms are a cheaper option.
		2. Also, with the variety of uniforms provided for the students, they can most likely stretch them out into the next school year and save additional money on new clothing. Rather than buying multiple outfits they will have the ability to buy 2-3 uniforms and wash them as needed.
	2. My second point is that requiring students to wear uniforms would reduce “wardrobe drama” and family conflict in the busy morning hours.
		1. For example, on March 11 I spoke to our Speaking Center Coordinator, Jenny Southard, who has a 15-year-old daughter. She says that for her daughter’s whole school life they have waged morning battles over outfit choices.
			1. She says, quote “Thank goodness I am no longer in charge of getting her clothing together. She yelled, “I don’t want to wear that one!” all the time.
			2. She went on to say that even though her daughter is older, she gets tired of hearing ”I have nothing to wear!” And obviously, girls are not the only ones to wage this war. Jenny says her nephew has cried, screamed, or flat out refused to budge over picking out clothes.
		2. This is not unusual as many others cite uniforms as the answer to reducing family arguments about school outfits.
			1. In an article titled, “National Survey of School Leaders Reveals 2013 School Uniform Trends: Lands’ End School Uniform and NAESP Partner to Report the Rise of School Uniforms,” Kaylen Tucker and Molly Hawkins report that a survey of principals and other school leaders conducted by Lands’ End School Uniform in partnership with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), found that respondents believe that parents benefit from having a school uniform policy. They cited benefits in several areas.
				1. 94% say it eliminates wardrobe battles with kids, 92% say it is easier to get kids ready in the morning, and 93% say it saves time in the morning.
		3. Based on hearing the perspective of a parent and the data I provided, I think that having a regular routine and no questions over what to wear would make for calmer mornings and less familial strife.

Transition: Thank you Nari for shedding some light on the positive aspects of uniforms. Now let’s hear from William for a different perspective.

1. Speaker 2: Public schools should *not* implement school uniforms.
2. Uniform policies are a superficial solution that keeps us from finding real solutions to the problems in schools and often emphasize the socio-economic divisions they are supposed to eliminate.
	1. Highlighting what students are wearing for seven hours out of the day over other public school issues such as academic performance and overall school success seems to be incorrectly prioritizing the matters.
		1. The socio-economic divisions are emphasized instead of eliminated because it is a struggle for some students to afford uniforms. For example, The cost of one uing. An example of uniform policies being a superficial solution that keeps us from finding real solutions to problems in school is the issue of the teacher to student ratio. Some students act out because they do not understand the curriculum and there is lack of one-on-one teaching, changing their dress code, might not fix this issue.
		2. In 1998, David Brunsma of the University of Alabama and Kerry Rockquemore from the University of Notre Dame, wrote in and article published in the journal of educational research titled, ‘Effects of Student Uniforms on Attendance, Behavior Problems, Substance Use, and Academic Achievement.’ They explained that the appeal of uniform policies is that they are easy to understand, are not costly to tax payers and require less effort or change from school faculty and parents (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998).
3. Now that I have talked to you about the socio-economic issues that uniforms spotlight, I will explain why school dress codes also emphasize conformity and hinder a students individuality and freedom of expression.
	1. According to an article on the American Civil Liberties (ACLU) website, titled, ‘All dressed up and nowhere to go: Students and their parents fight school uniform policies,’ “Many school districts claim stringent dress codes increase their emphasis on academics, disperse gang activity, and reduce pressures stemming from socioeconomic status. But they can also violate a student’s First Amendment right to freedom of expression and a parent’s Fourteenth Amendment right to raise their children as they choose” (Student dress codes, n.d.).
	2. In an article published by Today in 2013, titled,’Are school uniforms helping or hindering?,’ reporter, Lisa Flam, quotes child and teen development specialist Robyn Silverman as saying, “At a time where teens and preteens want to express themselves, clothes provide a vehicle, a benign vehicle, to allow them to express themselves and say, ‘I’m different,’ without having to approach more risky ways of saying the same thing” (Flam, 2013).

Transition: Thank you William, that really gives us a lot to think about. Now let’s here from Lani, representing the pro side.

1. Speaker 3: I believe that school uniforms should be implemented in K-12 public schools.
	1. My first point is that there is gender-based discrimination found in current dress codes.
		1. William made a good point when they cited the need to address social issues in our schools, but socio-economic issues are not the only issues that exist. The problem is that our current dress code systems are biased against females.
			1. Many dress codes include restrictions on leggings and tank tops which are more frequently worn by females.
			2. Meredith Harbach, a law professor at the University of Richmond, wrote in her 2016 article titled Sexualization, sex discrimination, and public school dress codes” published in the University of Richmond Law Review, said that dress codes focus on girls but not boys, or quote, “are at least selectively enforced such that they impact female students disproportionately” unquote and that female students say it is unjust. (Habach, 2016, p. 1043).
			3. Ask yourself if you have ever experienced, or witnessed a female you know, be a victim of an unjust dress code violation. I am willing to bet the number who say yes is too high!
		2. Now that I have proven that females are impacted by a problematic dress code system, I will prove that uniforms will solve this very real problem.
			1. From the same article written by Harbach (2016), she goes on to make a list of recommendations to policy makers and school Administrators.
			2. Citing a 2007 American Psychological Association report, she writes, quote "when sexualized clothing is part of a larger cultural context in which girls are sexually objectified, standardized uniforms may help to change those cultural messages and understandings of who girls are and what they are capable of, thereby reducing the incidence of sexual harassment” unquote (p. 1061).
		3. Having a uniform that requires a polo style shirt and slacks be worn by all students would eliminate the implicit bias inherent in current dress codes.
	2. My second point is that students can still express their individuality when uniform policies are in place.
		1. I definitely agree with **William** that individuality and expression are important for students’ development, but there are numerous ways for students to express themselves by adding personal style by other means, such as accessories and hairstyles.
		2. Additionally, it is not what is on the outside that counts. Clothing does not make the person. Personality and how students conduct themselves are major factors in expression and individuality.
			1. The editorial board for The Daily Herald provided a great analogy in their 2012 titled, ‘Uniforms benefit students.” They wrote, “Athletes all wear the same uniform, but we celebrate the individuals who make up the team. Their personalities and skills shine through their performance, hindered not at all by wearing the same jerseys. The same pertains to academic uniforms” (HeraldNet editorial board, 2012)
			2. Clothing is a superficial way to judge individuality and by making it the focus of how students can express themselves it devalues what matters most about a person.

Transition: Thank you Lani, those were very thought provoking counter points. Alec will now bring us back to the argument of not implementing uniforms.

1. Speaker 4: Public schools should not require uniforms.
	1. School uniforms often do not save families money and undermines the idea of a free *public* education.
		1. I understand the premise that Nari was working off of in their first point. In theory, uniforms should cost families less money, but that is not always the case because of specific requirements that are imposed.
			1. For example, some schools may require that uniforms be a particular brand that is often more expensive than a generic option.
			2. In an article published in the Guardian in 2019, titled ‘School’s back – but some parents can’t keep up with the cost of branded uniforms,’ award-winning journalist Donna Ferguson explains that charities and community organizations that assist low-income families with obtaining school uniforms are not able to keep up with the 90% rise in demand over a one year period. This is due to the fact that uniform schools are becoming more particular - they are increasingly becoming more specific and leaning towards branded clothing that is more expensive than regular uniforms.
		2. The purpose of public schools is to provide all children with the opportunity for an education, but if cost prohibitive requirements such as uniform policies are imposed, public education ceases to be free and may undermine that purpose.
			1. In discussing assumptions that school uniforms broaden access to schooling, education policy researchers Sabic-El-Rayess, Mansur, Batkhuyag, & Ot-gon-l-khag-va write in their 2020 article titled, ‘School uniform policy’s adverse impact on equity and access to schooling,’ published in Compare: A journal of comparative and international education, “Instead, they are more likely to exclude and incentivise the poor to drop out because of their inability to afford school uniforms” (p. 1137).
			2. Clearly, policies that lead to lower graduation rates for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, puts them at a disadvantage, counter to the purpose of our public education system.
	2. Proponents of uniforms say they reduce peer pressure and bullying because all students are all wearing the same thing, but that is rarely true.
		1. While this is a great premise it only works somewhat for ALL clothes from the same vendor because students compare themselves and judge each other based on other status symbols.
			1. For example, the shoes, belts, jewelry, watches, bags and backpacks that students have can indicate socio-economic status. Students are separated by the haves and have nots which can lead to bullying.
			2. It also creates competition for who has the latest and most stylish versions. This creates a hierarchy and can make students feel pressured to keep up by constantly buying expensive name brand items that their families may or may not be able to afford.
		2. It's not just how students accessorize themselves that can lead to bullying.
			1. Cheaper, generic uniforms from places like Walmart are easily distinguishable from more expensive name brand items which causes the same issues I have already mentioned.
			2. Additionally, less-affluent students may have second hand clothing that may be faded or ill-fitting which other students can pick up on right away and may cause these disadvantaged students to be teased or bullied.

Transition: Thank you Alec for those excellent points. Let’s do a quick recap of what has been presented so far.

1. Moderator:
	1. Nari and Lani argued for uniforms by detailing the cost and family harmony benefits for families, that uniforms are a solution to gender-based discrimination, and that uniform policies don’t eliminate students ability to express themselves. On the other side, William and Alec argued against uniforms. Their points were that uniforms are a superficial solution for real problems, that they promote conformity over individuality, that they don’t save families money, and that students don’t like uniforms because of their detrimental effects.
	2. Now we will transition into round two, where I will be asking each panelist a critical question to dive a little deeper into the issues.

Transition to next round/speaker: The first question in this round will be for Nari. Your points in round one, primarily focus on the benefits of uniforms to parents and in particular, your second point focused on reducing “wardrobe drama” for parents. How do students benefit?

1. Round Two
	1. Answer: Thank you for that question. Yes there are many benefits to parents when it comes to making getting dressed easier, but there are also benefits to students when it comes to what they wear. From my own experience, sometimes getting ready for school in the morning was a struggle just in trying to figure out what to wear. I wasn’t too worried about being trendy, but it was just a bother to think about if what I had matched or if something I wanted to wear was clean or, depending on how I was feeling that day, whether to go for comfort or style. I think it would have been easier to not have to think about it *and* it would have saved me from a few tardies. An article from a local New Jersey newspaper written by reporter, J.A. Gavin in 2011 explained it pretty well. -Quote- “Lyndhurst Educators said they have noticed a surprising change since the policy took effect: fewer late students. Marinelli attributed the punctual arrivals to students not worrying about what to wear. Mike Morreale, 16, tended to agree, saying that wearing a uniform simplifies things: ‘It's so much easier to dress than having to search for clothes and find out that something doesn't match,’ he said. ‘I'm okay with it.’” -Unquote-. Basically, uniforms are a win for the whole family.

Transition: Thank you Nari. This next question is for William. You made the point that uniforms stifle expression and individuality, but some argue that uniforms are a way to foster school pride, unity, and community spirit which can help students feel a sense of belonging. How would you respond to that statement?

* 1. Uniforms shouldn’t be the way we get students to feel a sense of belonging. Acceptance of who they are is what really makes people feel they belong. Acceptance of who they are begins with being able to express themselves. When students are all wearing the same uniform it makes it difficult to express their individuality and differences. Students tend to express themselves through the clothing that they wear, however uniforms takes that away from them. For example, I write my own music and am able to promote myself and my brand through the merch that I wear. It is a way that I like to express myself and my interests. If I had to wear a uniform it would limit my ability to express myself the way I would like to.

Transition: Thank you William. This next question is for Lani. You stated that you found research to suggest that uniforms could be part of the solution to gender based discrimination within current dress codes, but we also heard that students don’t like dress codes and they can actually be detrimental. Shouldn’t we be listening to students?

* 1. Answer: That is a great question and the law professor I cited earlier agrees with you! Harbach also recommends in her article that we -quote- “involve students themselves in the process” and “provide students with a voice in these deliberations” - end quote-. However, I think we need to think about whose voices are most often heard when students speak against uniforms. In a study in 2012, published in the *Journal of School Violence,* titled, “Uniforms in the middle school: Student opinions, discipline data, and school police data” the researchers, Sanchez, Yoxsimer, and Hill found that while the largest percentage of the 604 students they surveyed had responses that were against school uniforms, -quote- “females, 7th grade students, and Latino/a students tended to voice greater benefits than their counterparts” -end quote-. The opposing students tended to be males, 8th graders - who had not had uniforms previously - and white students. Since I have proven that the current dress code system disproportionately impacts females, and we have evidence that females see greater value in uniforms, we can conclude that we should see uniforms as a viable and more preferable option for school dress codes. And I did not even get into the positive implications for students with race and ethnicity concerns.

Transition: Thank you Lani. Our last question goes to Alec. You stated that corporate interests play a role in the uniform debate and gave a few examples, but what about schools that aren’t requiring a particular brand of uniforms? How are they involved with the corporate interest argument?

* 1. Answer: That is a great question. Even the cheaper options that are out there are from big corporations. Private schools have been the primary market for school uniforms in the past, but it is in their best interest to convince school systems to require uniforms to expand the market into public schools. Additionally, even if schools aren’t requiring brand name uniforms, there are other ways that they are supporting corporate interests. For example, many schools have school logos, mascots, or crests on the uniforms. I’ll give you an example of the problem that creates. April Wright, whose children attended a school that required uniforms when they were younger told me in a conversation on March 13th that her kids’ school uniforms had to have patches that had to be embroidered onto the clothing. The only options for getting the clothing with the patches was either purchasing the clothes through the school who often had a contract with a big company or buying the patch. Buying the patch so she could buy cheaper shirts sounds like a good option, but she still had to have the patch put on by a specific vendor which made it not much, if any, cheaper than buying through the school.

Transition to closing: Thank you all for your thoughtful and informed responses. We will now move to the concluding portion of our presentation.

1. Conclusion:
	1. Today we have heard many good points, both for and against school uniform policies in public schools. In round one we heard points from Nari and Lani for uniforms and from William and Alec against them. In round two, each of our panelists had the opportunity to respond to the critical questions posed to them.
	2. On behalf of me and my fellow group members, we would like to thank you for listening to our presentation.
	3. I would also like to thank my fellow group members for providing us with so many great points to think about. As I stated in the introduction the ongoing debate over school uniforms is more than meets the eye, so it is important that we continue to evaluate all the evidence to make informed decisions when it comes to school uniform policies in our education system.
	4. With that said, we would like to open our dialogue to the audience...

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