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Tips From Lands' End For A Successful School Uniform Program

WHY SCHOOL UNIFORM?

There are plenty of solid reasons why you should consider mandating a uniform for your school. While the idea may not sound exciting at first, many parents and even students appreciate the benefits of school uniforms. Uniforms reinforce student confidence and foster a positive, learning-driven environment. School uniforms also level the playing field for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, since more affluent students can no longer wear fashion-label apparel. "It's one less distraction from the goal of learning and teaching," says Matt Wersal, Manager of School Uniform at Lands' End, adding that parents also enjoy benefits from a mandated uniform. "The reduced costs in clothing purchases for school are an advantage for parents. It also reduces the time families need to get ready in the morning," he says. Perhaps the best reason to adopt a school uniform program is that the clothing helps build school spirit. "A uniform reinforces the school's brand and community identity," says Wersal. "It bonds students together as members of one 'team' and helps build pride in the school they represent."

GETTING STARTED

Once you decide to mandate a uniform at your school, you will need to agree on expectations. It is important to take your time and consult with staff, parents and students to find out what will work best for your school. Some points to consider include:

- **Will all students be required to wear uniforms?** Determine if all grades K-12—and pre-K students—will need uniforms. Consider exceptions or allowances for special circumstances.
- **What styles of clothing will be acceptable?** Consider clothing that matches your school's values and location.
- **What colors are required?** If you have multiple schools, you may find it beneficial to dress students in different colors. Or, you may want all students in one color.
- **Will the school's logo be required?** Adding your school logo enhances your ability to identify students and promotes your school brand in the community.

Before you set the rules for your uniform, reach out to other schools and study their uniform policies, and look to educational support organizations for guidance. The more information you can gather beforehand, the easier you will find rolling out your program.

SELECTING UNIFORM APPAREL

Your school's guiding principles, location and climate will influence your choice of clothing, from whether you require polos or dress shirts to skirt and short lengths. Some typical basic uniform pieces include:

- Short- or long-sleeve polos
- Dress shirts—perhaps with a tie in your school colors or plaid
- Sweaters
- Blazers, jackets and outerwear
- Dress pants or chinos
- Skirts and skorts



Also, don't forget PE apparel and staff wear. Some school uniform suppliers also offer adaptive clothing for students with additional needs, designed with easy-dressing features and sensory-friendly fabrics.

FINDING THE RIGHT SUPPLIER

When selecting your provider you should take into account whether they have experience and brand-name recognition among parents. Wersal suggests investigating whether the supplier shares similar values as your school. From a practical standpoint, find out which suppliers offer services that make it easier for your administrators and families to get what they need when they need it. Does the supplier always keep your uniform styles and colors in stock—and is there any inventory liability to your school? Do they offer a personal account manager for your school and a custom online store so parents can order at any time? Does the company make it easy for families to return and replace defective products? Perhaps the most crucial question is how the quality of a supplier's clothing and logo application compares to the competition. Remember, lower initial cost rarely implies good quality. Parents value "hand-me-down" quality and long-lasting, easy-care fabrics that may cost a little more up front. In the long term, higher quality apparel truly pays for itself. If uniform cost is an issue for some families, you might establish a "gently used" uniform closet, resale day or set up a fund to help them purchase the items their students need.

ROLLING OUT YOUR UNIFORM

Mandating a uniform is a big change for your school, and it's important to be prepared well ahead of the big day. In addition to working with a trusted supplier who can ensure every student has the required uniform, get your school ready by keeping everyone well informed. "Know your student leaders and get them on board," says Wersal. "You can make a uniform roll-out fun by hosting a fashion show featuring different outfits." However you choose to implement your school uniform program, remember to make the process engaging, inclusive and ultimately enjoyable for everyone involved, from administrators and parents to the students themselves. That way, your school will experience a smooth and successful transition to uniform.

Visit landsend.com/schooladmin for more information about school uniform programs