The Influence of Conflict Resolution Programs on Student Conduct Violations in Middle Schools with a School Uniform Policy

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THE INFLUENCE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMS ON STUDENT
CONDUCT VIOLATIONS IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH A
SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY

by

Edward C. Breitenbach

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Advisor: Walter Burt, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 2010
THE INFLUENCE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMS ON STUDENT CONDUCT VIOLATIONS IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH A SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY

Edward C. Breitenbach, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2010

School safety is a very important issue for school staff, parents, and students. When school safety is lacking, students suffer in emotional, academic, and social areas. One recent intervention middle schools are examining is the student uniform policy. In some cases, school uniforms have been shown to have a profound effect on school safety, attendance levels, and student achievement. Other studies, however, have found conflicting results in terms of the real effects of a school uniform policy. Many of the research studies that attempt to investigate school uniform policies suggest that there are other variables involved besides the school uniform policy.

This research study examined the influence of a conflict resolution component and its impact on student conduct in public middle schools that had a school uniform policy as compared to public middle schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution component. Findings in this study suggested there was no statistically significant difference between the two populations.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During my life there have been several wonderful people who have given of themselves to make me a better person. First, there were my parents, Marvin and Sandra Breitenbach. In high school, Mr. James Medley, in Honors English, used encouraging words to boost my self-confidence. In college, Dr. Orpha Galloway, and her husband Len, were excellent role models who also provided a lot of support and encouragement. My Aunt, Joanne Fraser, who passed away in 2005, was another friendly source of help and guidance. I remember telling her of my plans to pursue the doctoral program, and she was absolutely convinced that I would complete the program and use the degree in marvelous ways to benefit others.

My dissertation committee has been a source of great help and encouragement during this process. Dr. Marianne Di Pierro was always willing to listen, and she provided many good suggestions. Dr. Dennis McCrumb used his wealth of experience to offer several helpful insights. My advisor, Dr. Walter Burt, faithfully moved me through the challenging process with patience and good will. His expertise and good advice helped to produce an outstanding doctoral dissertation.

My Lord and Savior Jesus, the Messiah, who gives my life meaning and purpose, has been a faithful source of support and direction. His words from the Gospel of Matthew are as beneficial today as they were 2000 years ago: “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).
I want to thank my two wonderful sons, John W. Breitenbach, and Mark E. Breitenbach, of whom I am very proud. They both found ways to stay busy, and still have fun, while their dad was spending long hours working on the dissertation. Finally, I want to thank my beautiful wife Karen, who helped me keep a positive focus. She spent many hours keeping the boys amused, so I could have the time and energy to complete this project. I could not have done it without her.

Edward C. Breitenbach
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

School uniforms have historically been associated with private schools in the United States (Peters, 1996; Sher, 1995). Japan, Peru, and Korea are all countries with a long tradition of having school uniforms in public schools (Peters, 1996). Why have public schools in the United States started to look at having school uniform policies? In his 1996 State of the Union Address, President Clinton praised the courageous action by the Long Beach Unified School District in California for being the first public school district in the nation to adopt a mandatory school uniform policy (Black, 1998). The President also referred to encouraging results from other districts with uniform policies where levels of drug use, fighting, and sex offenses all declined (Black, 1998). President Clinton was so enthusiastic about the potential advantages of school uniforms that he directed the Secretary of Education to prepare and publish the Manual for School Uniforms (1996) and distribute this manual to the nation’s 16,000 public school districts (Gullatt, 1999).

The existing research on school uniform policies is both comprehensive and clouded. One area of agreement that most of the research studies share is the favorable impression that teachers, parents, and administrators have toward school uniform policies. Some of these favorable impressions are based on actual, positive classroom experiences, and other perceptions are nothing more than strongly held personal beliefs concerning the usefulness of school uniforms (Kim, 1998; Hughes, 1996; VanMater, 2003; Elder, 1999, and Murphy, 1997). Student perceptions, however, concerning the value of school uniform policies are generally found to be mixed or unfavorable (Kim, 1998; Hughes,
Several researchers agreed that school uniform policies are valuable because they save parents money over time. Generally, parents can expect to spend about $100 for three complete school uniforms, which is about the cost of one pair of designer jeans (Caruso, 1996; King, Walker, and Minor, 2002, & Daugherty, 2002).

Conflicting research studies have been found in the area of student conduct violations. The majority of studies show that student uniform policies reduce student behavior violations over time (Bollinger, 2002; Hughes, 1996; Samuels, 2003; Elder, 1999; Sommers, 2001; Cohn, 1996; Brennan, 2005; Pickles, 2000; Hoffler-Riddick, 1996; Peters, 1996, and Stanley, 1996). Other studies, however, show an increase in student discipline violations or no change after the introduction of a new uniform policy (Washington, 2003; McCarty, 1999; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998, and Murray, 1996). The research generally agrees that school suspensions usually go down after the introduction of a school uniform policy (Cohn, 1996; King, Walker & Minor, 2002; Stanley, 1996; Jones, 1997, and Williams, 2003).

Although school uniform policies appear to decrease school discipline violations, there are generally many other variables to consider. One of these important variables is the presence of conflict resolution programs. Schools with conflict resolution programs generally have lower levels of school violence and anti-social behavior (Snyder, 2007). Research shows that students who are given training in conflict resolution are able to resolve conflicts themselves, and these students usually have higher levels of academic achievement (Snyder, 2007).
Although there is a wealth of research on the effects of school uniform policies, very few, if any, studies have been done on the relationship between conflict resolution programs and school uniform policies (McCarty, 1999; Reynolds, 2005; Stevenson, 1999; Elder, 1999; Samuels, 2003). By looking closely at this relationship, the researcher investigated whether conflict resolution programs increase the effectiveness of school uniform policies in limiting student discipline violations. Ultimately, this research will better define how to implement a school uniform policy that is most effective in decreasing unwarranted student conduct. This information will be of interest to school administrators, school boards, political leaders, teachers, and parents who believe it is important to address disciplinary problems in middle schools.

Statement of the Problem

This research study investigated the problem posed by conflicting research studies on the effectiveness of school uniform polices in promoting middle school safety. Previous studies suggest that there are other variables that may have an effect on improving student discipline rates and making schools safer places for students (Lumsden, 2002; Evans, 1996). This study investigated the effect conflict resolution has on improving student conduct in public middle schools with a student uniform policy.

According to Carey & Bourbon (2006), “Educators spend a lot of time trying to encourage or motivate students to behave in particular ways” (p. 5). School uniform policies have been proposed as a solution to minimize student behavior problems. However, research studies on the topic of school uniform policies have produced a variety of results and findings. In some areas the results generally are in agreement (Kim,
1998; Hughes, 1996; Caruso, 1996; Daugherty, 2002), but with other areas the results are mixed and inconclusive (Lumsden, 2002; Evans, 1996; Wilkins, 1999; McCarty, 1999). These results confuse the debate on the effectiveness of school uniform policies and highlight the need for new, well-designed research studies on this topic.

Several researchers have suggested that when studying the effectiveness of school uniform policies, there are environmental changes that need to be examined (Hughes, 1996; Stevenson, 1999; Samuels, 2003). One interesting program used to limit discipline violations in middle schools is conflict resolution programs. These programs generally involve peer mediators working with fellow students to talk out a problem and arrive at an acceptable solution. Two noted school uniform researchers (Elder, 1999; McCarty, 1999) have suggested a possible connection between conflict resolution programs and the decreased numbers of student conduct violations in schools with student uniform policies. These researchers both listed conflict resolution programs as a possible confounding variable that may be having an effect in their particular studies. This possible connection, however, has not been sufficiently researched.

Bart Reynolds’s dissertation from 2005 examined 19 quantitative dissertations on the topic of school uniforms in order to ascertain if there was enough evidence to determine if student uniforms made a difference in student academic progress and if uniforms affected student social behavior. Reynolds studied the design and statistical methods of each of the 19 dissertations. Reynolds found nine good studies and four fair studies in terms of the quality of their designs. Only one study with superior design indicated improvement in students’ academic achievement and social behavior. One other study showed improvement in academics only. Two other studies showed improvement
in student behavior. None of the 19 studies could be generalized outside of their original samples. Concerning the effectiveness of school uniform policies, Reynolds states, “There is insufficient empirical research to support a cause-effect relationship between the school uniform policy and increased student behavior and academic achievement” (Reynolds, 2005, p. 189).

Reynolds concludes there is a need for additional research on the topic of school uniforms. He believes too many studies on the topic of school uniform policies have been conducted by students pursuing the less rigorous Ed. D degree, as opposed to the Ph. D degree (Reynolds, 2005). Another problem, according to Reynolds, is that many of the dissertations on school uniforms are written by employees of the school district that is under investigation. This dilemma usually leads to problems of the study’s reliability and validity (Reynolds, 2005). A final problem with these quantitative studies is they happened after the uniform policy has been implemented. What is needed is for studies to gather data before and after the uniform policy has been implemented. Reynolds concludes his study by stating, “Many factors account for change other than the uniform policy alone” (Reynolds, 2005, p. 188).

This study examined the impact of conflict resolution programs on school conduct violations in selected Michigan public middle schools with a school uniform policy. As previously indicated, the current body of research concerning school uniform polices is incomplete and often contradictory (Woods & Obletree, 1992; Hughes, 1996; Brunsma, 2001; Hoffler-Riddick, 2002; Shimizu, 2000). Additional research needs to be conducted to investigate the impact of other variables, specifically conflict resolution, which exert an effect on school discipline violations (DaCosta, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Stockton,
Gullatt, Parke, 2002). No study to date has examined the impact of a conflict resolution program on lowering the number of student discipline violations in middle schools with a student uniform policy.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which a conflict resolution program has an influence on student conduct in schools with a school uniform policy. This study sought to answer the following question: Do selected Michigan public middle schools with a student uniform policy and a conflict resolution program have lower levels of student conduct violations than similar schools with a school uniform policy, and no conflict resolution program? The study examined whether there are statistically significant differences in the number of conduct violations of students who attended public middle schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution component, as compared to the number of conduct violations of students who attended middle schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution component according to the following schema: disobedience violations (bullying, discipline referrals, and expulsions), attendance violations (truancy, attendance rates), and legal violations (physical assaults, illegal possession, vandalism, weapons on school property, larceny/theft, and illegal drug use).
Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent is there a significant difference in disobedient behaviors of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, as compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

2. To what extent is there a significant difference in attendance violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, as compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

3. To what extent is there a significant difference in legal violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, as compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

Variables of Study

In this study, the dependent variable was student conduct violations (disobedience, attendance, and legal infractions) and the independent variable was the adoption of a conflict resolution program.

Methodology

A quasi-experimental research design was used in this study. This design is similar to an experimental design, but participants are not randomly assigned to experimental or
control groups (Mertler & Charles, 2005). The study could also be described as an *ex post facto* study. *Ex post facto* studies involve studying a condition or phenomenon after it came into existence (Mertler & Charles, 2005). This type of research is common in the social sciences where the experimental variable is not manipulated by the researcher (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

This research study explored how a conflict resolution program impacts student conduct violations in schools with a mandatory school uniform policy. The experimental group consisted of six inner-city public middle schools with a conflict resolution program and a school uniform policy. The control group consisted of fourteen inner-city public middle schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program. Data on student conduct violations were gathered for the time period of 2005 – 2009.

**Significance of Study**

Most of the current research on school uniform policies has centered on the school uniform policy itself. Many of these research studies investigated the effects of a student uniform policy on academic achievement, student discipline violations, and attendance. Generally, these studies used a *before* and *after* approach to investigate the effects of the student uniform policy on these variables (Hughes, 1996; McCarty, 1999; Murray, 1997; Washington-Labat, 2003). The problem with this approach is that it fails to take into account other intervening variables or programs and processes that may affect the success or failure of the school uniform policy (Pate, 1998; Brunsma, 2001; Shimizu, 2000; Gonzales, 2000). What this study attempted to do that previous studies have failed to do is focus on the relationship between student uniform policies and a previously
unexplored variable: conflict resolution programs. Previous research studies have not investigated this relationship and its effect on student conduct (McCarty, 1999; Elder, 1999; Samuels, 2003). The results of this study provide new information on improving student conduct that will be useful for school administrators, teachers, parents, school board members, government officials, and college professors. In addition to this, this study provides valuable information to school leaders who are considering incorporating a school uniform policy or a conflict resolution program in their schools.

**Delimitations**

According to Creswell (2003), delimitations are used in research studies to clarify and narrow the scope. For the purpose of this study, only students in grades six, seven, and eight were used. Furthermore, only school data and school policies were used to investigate the research topics. Only student conduct data from inner-city Michigan public middle schools were considered in this study.

**Limitations**

This study was limited to aggregate student conduct records of students from selected inner-city school districts in Michigan. Due to the fact that this study was descriptive in nature, no causal inferences should be made beyond these populations of students and schools. The study was limited to public middle schools and no inferences and generalizations should be made about student conduct in private schools or at the elementary or high school levels. No data were obtained on what type of conflict resolution program was used in the middle schools or how the conflict resolution
programs were implemented in each school. The study was limited to student conduct violations and did not involve student academic achievement. And finally, this study is dependent upon CEPI’s data base and that any and all information reported is accurate and a factual representation of student conduct.

Definition of Terms

School Uniforms: The official or distinctive clothes worn by students of a particular school that conform to a predetermined standard for that particular school (Cohn & Siegel, 1996).

Conflict Resolution Program: An organized program that helps students resolve disagreements in a healthy and peaceful manner. These programs foster good citizenship and can empower students to resolve their own conflicts in a positive way. Examples include peer mediation, teaching students non-violent methods for working out disagreements, appropriate follow-up for students involved in violent behavior, and teaching students about conflict and how to handle everyday situations involving conflict (American Association of School Administrators, 1995; Persico, 1996; Johnson and Nafziger-Johnson, 1998).

Disobedience Violations: Student conduct violations that fall into four categories: bullying, discipline referrals, vandalism, and expulsions.

Attendance Violations: Student conduct violations consisting of truancy and the overall attendance rate for each school.
Legal Violations: Student conduct violations that fall into five categories: weapons on school property, physical assaults, larceny / theft, illegal possession, and illegal drug use.

Significant Difference: The presence of a reliable statistical result using the 0.05 alpha level.

Components of the Literature Review

In the ensuing chapter, the Review of the Literature, this study examined the relevant literature that focused on student uniform policies, conflict resolution programs, and policy implementation. The literature review highlighted important findings that relate to the main issues that are dealt with in this study. Therefore, the literature review will be divided into the following topical areas:

I. Critically Established Reasons to Adopt a Student Uniform Policy

II. Problems with School Uniform Policies

III. How Clothing Affects Behavior

IV. Effects of Student Uniform Policies on Academic Achievement and Conduct

V. Conflict Resolution Programs

VI. Policy Implementation

VII. Student Uniform Policies and Efficacy of Conflict Resolution Programs
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The literature review will serve as a foundation for the research study. In researching the relationship between school uniform policies and conflict resolution programs, several major areas of research emerged. Each of these main areas of research will be explored in this literature review. The first section, Critically Established Reasons to Adopt a School Uniform Policy, examines the current research on why schools choose to adopt a school uniform policy. This information is important because it provides background on the school uniform debate, and it highlights the reported advantages of a school uniform policy. The next section, Problems with School Uniform Policies, begins to set up the overall problem related to the research topic: the research on the effectiveness of school uniform policies is inconclusive and often contradictory, and what is needed is an investigation of the other variables (conflict resolution programs for this study) that are often present when school uniform policies are adopted.

The third section that is explored in the literature review is How Clothing Affects Behavior. This research is important because it reveals the impact of clothing and how it can possibly affect student behavior, which is a key area in this study. The next section is entitled, Effects of School Uniform Policies on Student Achievement and Student Conduct. This section examines the existing research studies that focus on the relationship between school uniform policies and student achievement and conduct.
Generally, this research is inconclusive in terms of how school uniform polices can affect either variable in a significant manner. The section sets up the problems that the research study attempts to address: how do other variables impact the effectiveness of a school uniform policy? According to the research studies on school uniform polices, one other variable, conflict resolution programs, has been suggested as having an impact on limiting student behavior problems. This variable of conflict resolution programs, however, has not been sufficiently studied.

The fifth section in the literature review is entitled, Conflict Resolution Programs. This section begins to define what conflict resolution programs are and how they have been shown to alleviate student behavior problems. In this study, the researcher will be examining a group of middle schools who all have a school uniform policy. Furthermore, the researcher will be investigating if these middle schools with a conflict resolution program have lower levels of student conduct violations than schools that don’t have this program.

The next section of the literature review is entitled, Policy Implementation. This section is important to the study because it examines the current research on the issue of policy implementation. Both student uniform policies and conflict resolution programs are policies that have to be implemented at some point. This section explores the important issues involved in successful policy implementation; this is a critical issue for school leaders that will increase the effectiveness of polices that have been shown to limit the number of student behavior violations.

The final section in the literature review examines the current research on the relationship between school uniform policies and conflict resolution programs. The
absence of any research studies investigating this relationship points to the need for this study. Ultimately, this research study will contribute new research that will investigate how conflict resolution programs affect student conduct violations in middle schools with a school uniform policy.

Introduction

School uniform policies have existed for more than one hundred years. In the early days, school uniforms were used to limit the negative effects of social and economic differences (Bodine, 2003a). In 1894, the Winthrop Normal and Industrial College opened in South Carolina. The new college had a mandatory uniform policy that was designed, according to the Governor of South Carolina, to eliminate the distinctions of wealth (Bodine, 2003a). Thirty years later, this idea of equality was still prevalent. In 1932, a high school principal in Muncie, Indiana proposed a school uniform policy to eliminate “class distinctions in high school and place the poor on an equal footing with the rich” (Lynd & Lynd, 1937, p. 445-446). The principal was trying to address the problem of students dropping out of school due to a lack of desirable clothes, which had become a status marker at the school (Bodine, 2003a).

After 1980, the need for a school uniform changed from promoting social equality to limiting school violence (Bodine, 2003a; Cohn, 1996; Pate, 1998; Gullatt, 1999, and Kim and Delong, 2002). Since the 1980s, the use of school uniforms in the nation’s public schools has steadily increased. Today, roughly 25% of US elementary and middle school students arrive at school each day in a uniform (Bodine, 2003a).
In the early 1990s, student dress shifted toward a style that favored baggy shirts, sagging pants, and oversized coats. Unfortunately, these large-fitting clothing items were being used to conceal weapons in some schools (Herman, 1998). This recent escalation in school violence, mainly related to student dress, has made school uniform policies attractive to many concerned parents and was the main reason President Clinton decided to draw attention to school uniform policies in his 1996 State of the Union Address. School uniform policies have been adopted in a haphazard fashion with little regard to sound research practices and an analysis of other variables that may be effective in promoting school safety.

Critically Established Reasons to Adopt a School Uniform Policy

_Prevent School Violence and Gang Activity_

The main reason there was such a rush to adopt school uniform policies was that they were thought to supposedly make schools safer. Advocates cite several reasons why school uniforms are important to schools. First, they contend that uniforms limit gang violence by eliminating certain colors, clothing symbols, and other gang-related clothing (Black, 1998; Bodine, 2003a). Innocent students also often get involved in gang-related violence when they inadvertently wear gang colors or symbols (Black, 1998; Gullatt, 1999; Holloman, 1995). Although preventing gang activity and gang-related violence is usually the top reason cited by supporters of a mandatory school uniform policy, one researcher, Ann Bodine (2003b), found wide support for school uniforms in a community (Milpitas, California) with no significant history of gang-related problems. One reason for this focus on gang activity involves how laws are made and later upheld by courts.
For the Long Beach, California school district, which was the first large school district to adopt a mandatory school uniform policy, school leaders recognized the potential for legal challenges (freedom of speech and expression) to a proposed uniform policy early in the process. “The district immediately ‘directed our lobbyist to seek legislative support for this initiative so that our efforts to make our schools safer will have the full backing of state law’” (Long Beach Unified School District, 1994; Bodine, 2003b, p. 49). Bodine (2003b) discovered in her research that sometimes schools use the gang activity justification to gain legal protection for a school uniform policy, when, in fact, the real reasons for the school uniform policy involve social, economic, educational, or family-related issues (p. 49). Another reason some schools adopt the gang activity rationale in support of a school uniform policy is to attract funding. Bodine (2003b) found that “the idea of children as threat and threatened can compel governmental response when other needs of schools and children do not” (p. 49). Bodine (2003b) notes that the wide-spread absence of mandatory school uniform policies in high schools contradicts the gang activity rationale since gang activity is mostly prevalent in high schools, as opposed to middle and elementary schools.

In recent years, overall school violence (in all types of schools) has gone down (Glassner, 1999). However, one type of school violence has increased dramatically: school shootings (Bodine, 2003b). Bodine found that although gang violence was not mentioned by survey participants in Milpitas, California as a danger, ‘Columbine type violence’ often was (2003b). “Some parents, teachers, and older students argued that clothing is related to and intensifies social isolation and ostracism at school, and that common dress can help protect against violence resulting from the experience of
ostracism” (Bodine, 2003b, p. 51). Other researchers have noted a possible relationship between social isolation and school violence (Snyder, 2007; Montovani, 1999).

Identify Non-Students

A second reason cited by advocates of school uniforms is to help school officials quickly identify and deal with strangers in the school building. In many large urban schools, trespassers are a problem and are hard to spot when they are mixed in with the other students. These troublemakers often cause problems and then try to blend in with the other students to avoid being discovered (King, 1996).

Supposedly, school uniforms would make it easy to identify trespassers, and the uniform policy would likely make trespassers think twice before trying to enter the school (King, 1996). Cohn (1996) believes, “Our schools are safer because it’s easy to see who doesn’t belong in the school environment” (p. 38).

Save Parents Money

School uniform advocates believe that uniforms save parents money over time (Cohn, 1996; King, 1996). Generally, a parent can buy three complete student uniforms for the price of one pair of designer jeans (Cohn, 1996; King, Minor, Walker, 2002). For a set of three school uniforms, parents can expect to spend $70 - $90 (Cohn, 1996). Reportedly, school uniforms last longer than regular school clothes and can be carried over to the next school year (provided they still fit) as opposed to purchasing a new set of clothes at the start of each school year based on changing fashion trends and peer pressure (Caruso, 1996; King, Walker & Minor, 2002).
Schools interested in saving parents money can buy school uniforms in bulk and provide the uniforms at cost to parents (Caruso, 1996). Funds can also be gathered from community groups to help low-income families pay for school uniforms.

Parents, as well as students, often feel enormous pressure to buy their children the ‘right’ clothes. This costly behavior increases the financial burden on many families and usually makes the family spend more than they planned on school clothes. Bodine (2003b) found that “most [parents] were committed to assuring that their own children would never have less than other children, leading inevitably to ever rising stakes in clothing competition” (p. 54).

Reduce the Negative Effects of Advertising on Children

A school uniform policy has the potential to insulate students from the harmful effects of advertising that children are exposed to on an hourly basis. Since the 1960’s, children have become a prime target for advertising. Before that time, advertising to children was restricted to toys and breakfast cereals (Bodine, 2003b). Around this time, labels like ‘clothing anxiety’ and ‘clothing deprivation’ were coined by researchers studying the effects of clothing on the self-esteem of students (Brewton, 1971). In the 1970’s, the US Federal Trade Commission began trying to regulate the questionable practice of marketing to children (McNeal, 1992). Bodine (2003b) states:

The period in which childhood was considered a protected space by commercial interests has clearly ended. Representations and images of normative childhood are now presented to children through the intertwined entertainment media of television, film, music, the Internet, toys and the press, and through advertising (p. 59).
Today, marketing to children has advanced to the level of behavioral science: “Commercial interests now use skilled, advanced degreed social and behavioral scientists, along with highly sophisticated techniques, in researching and communicating to children” (Bodine, 2003b, p. 59). Commercials of many types are now a normal part of the school environment and appear in school magazines, posters on school walls, and TV commercials in special classroom programs (Bodine, 2003b). Unfortunately, children, because they are children, are easily influenced by these slick marketing techniques. According to Bodine (2003b), the school uniform movement is partially motivated to combat the intensive marketing to impressionable children. Bodine (2003b) sees this struggle between “those who take care of children (parents and teachers) and those whose interest is in the child as a consumer” (p. 60). These parents and teachers see uniforms as protecting children from mass-marketing and the pressures associated with competitive dressing. Parents and teachers have strong desires to let kids be themselves (let them be kids) and hopefully avoid the loss of innocence, the rush to grow up faster, social strife, and the exclusion that results from the lack of competitive dressing (Bodine, 2003b).

Lower Family Stress

According to school uniform supporters, family stress can be lowered with a school uniform policy. The school uniform policy eliminates early morning arguments that often erupt between parents and children over what is appropriate and not appropriate to wear to school. Bodine (2003b) writes, “The majority of research participants discussed the contribution of uniforms to the peacefulness of their family’s functioning, especially in getting ready for school” (p. 56). One parent states:
My daughter wanted to dress like she was going on MTV, instead of going to school. I wouldn’t let her, and we fought about it all the time. It was awful. Uniforms haven’t turned her into a choir girl, but she doesn’t talk and fuss about clothes the way she used to, and we’re better friends (Bodine, 2003b, p. 57).

*Promote Social Equality and Minimize Teasing*

School uniform policies can promote social equality, or leveling the playing field, according to supporters (Cohn, 1996; Evans, 1996). Student uniforms make students equal in terms of the cost of their clothing. Students from affluent homes should be unrecognizable from lower income students. Supporters believe this equalization will minimize the teasing some students experience over having to wear outdated clothing for economic reasons. Students should be judged on what they learn and not on how expensive their clothing is (Cohn, 1996). Dennis Evans, who has been a high school principal in California for twenty-one years, disagrees. Evans maintains that students, unlike adults, do not really care about social distinctions. He wonders if uniform supporters plan to not allow students to carry money, wear jewelry, or drive expensive cars to school, which are other symbols of social status noticed by students (Evans, 1996). However, Bodine’s research on the effects of a mandatory uniform policy at the Milpitas School District in California revealed that clothing has a powerful effect on student self-esteem, attitude, and motivation. Interviews were conducted with parents and students in the Milpitas School District, which adopted school uniform polices from 1994 – 1999. Bodine found that students and parents both credited the school uniform policy with reducing distractions between rich and poor students and reducing the amount of teasing that occurred at school—mainly related to clothing worn by students (Bodine,
Bodine states, “A few economically struggling families reported clothing-inspired taunts and ridicule from pre-uniform days: ‘His mom buys his clothes from welfare.’ ‘You wore that last week. Why do you always wear the same clothes?’ More commonly reported was a pervasive ignoring or failure to include students who did not have a large wardrobe of the ‘right’ kind of clothes, usually a prerequisite for popularity” (Bodine, 2003b, p. 53).

A preoccupation with having the right clothes can also cause students to intentionally avoid attending school. “The problem is so extensive that parents and educators have observed that some youth would rather skip school than be without the most fashionable attire” (Holloman, 1995). School uniforms can also benefit affluent students. These students can experience low motivation because their view of themselves is artificially inflated due to their ‘superior’ position in school society. This position is often gained through no effort on their part and is often caused by their popularity, which is directly related to having vast quantities of the ‘right’ clothes (Bodine, 2003b). One parent who was interviewed by Bodine agreed with this assessment:

My kids know we’ve got some money. They think that means they’re entitled to whatever they want. . . . They were asking for new clothes all the time. ‘It’s only $40.’ ‘It’s only $50.’ [They began] to think of clothes as disposable. That’s a lousy foundation for life, you know. All their friends are the same. So when the uniform idea came up, I jumped at it (Bodine, 2003b, p. 54).

According to one researcher, parents who were opposed to school uniforms generally are more affluent, have fewer children per family, and are more likely to have a stay-at-home parent (Bodine, 2003b).
Positive Community Perceptions

Supporters of school uniform policies believe that uniforms generate parental and community support for schools (Cohn, 1996; Peters, 1996). In the first week of a new uniform policy, one exasperated student told his guidance counselor, “If one more person tells me I look nice, I don’t know what I will do. I have never had so many people tell me nice things before” (Hoffler-Riddick & Lassiter, 1996, p. 27). James King (1996), a school employee with twenty years experience in law enforcement, agrees that school uniforms create a positive impression of students:

Off campus, a group of uniformed students walking down the street is perceived as entirely different by the public than a group of anonymous youths who are not in uniform. To many in the community, a school uniform is a symbol of education, projecting a positive rather than a negative image (p. 38).

Favorable School Climate

School uniforms promote a positive school climate, according to proponents (Pickles, 2000; Gullatt, 1999). The uniforms allegedly help students to have a more serious approach to school now that dress is a non-issue (Hoffler-Riddick & Lassiter, 1996). Other reasons to have school uniforms include promoting school unity, improving attendance (King, Minor, and Walker, 2002), reducing peer sexual harassment, preparing students for the job market (Daugherty, 2001), giving students higher self-esteem, preventing behavior problems (Gullatt, 1999), improving student learning (McCarthy, 2001; Pickles, 2000), and increasing school pride (Peters, 1996).
Problems with School Uniform Policies

Despite the possible benefits of school uniform policies listed in the previous section, researchers have not been convinced that school uniform policies actually impact these areas in a positive manner. Several researchers have suggested other explanations for these positive results that interface with other variables not previously examined (Lumsden, 2002; Evans, 1996; Wilkins, 1999; McCarty, 1999). Furthermore, there is serious debate concerning the motivation of proponents. An important concern centers on whether school uniform policies represent a legitimate school improvement policy or whether they are being promoted for other reasons. In this section, the researcher will examine several important issues related to school uniform policies to develop a more accurate picture of these policies and their effects on student behavior.

Problems with Research Studies

Research studies involving school uniform policies usually have problem areas that often affect the findings. On the surface, school uniform data seems to show a link between the uniform policy and lower levels of classroom disruptions, playground violence, and suspensions (Stanley, 1996). However, there are several other possible explanations for these impressive numbers (Paliokas & Risk, 1996). One explanation involves other changes the school may have put in place at the same time as the school uniform policy: these may include new community policing procedures and other new school safety measures (Stanley, 1996). Another possible explanation for the improved school safety numbers is that perhaps the number of violent acts had already reached their natural peak and was already starting to decline, despite any school sponsored
interventions (Stanley, 1996). A final alternate explanation centers on a phenomenon known as the “Hawthorne Effect”. The Hawthorne Effect describes a situation where favorable results are observed because of “the short-term visibility and attention associated with the new policy” (Stanley, 1996, p. 433).

The perceptions of adults (teachers, principals, and school staff) may also have an effect on school safety data when a school uniform policy is being studied. These favorable responses on behalf of adults “may reflect adult responses to the wearing of uniforms, rather than actual changes in behavior” (Stanley, 1996, p. 433). When students are wearing a school uniform, there is the possibility that adults will perceive the students, and their behavior, as less threatening. Stanley (1996) states:

Adults may also refrain from imposing stringent disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, because they are interpreting behavior, or the intent underlying behavior, differently due to the more socially acceptable appearance of youths wearing uniforms (pgs. 433-434).

Rights of Students

Some opponents of school uniforms believe that student uniform policies infringe on student rights. The main arguments have pointed out how student rights are limited when they cannot freely express themselves through clothing (Essex, 201; Thompson, 1999). Although the issue of student rights is not as pronounced at the middle school and elementary levels, the issue of student rights remains an important issue for opponents of school uniform policies (Thompson, 1999; Lumsden, 2002; Gullatt, 1999; McCarthy, 2001).
Presently, no school uniform policy cases have made it all the way to the Supreme Court (Thompson, 1999; Gullatt, 1999). However, the courts have established a number of precedents regarding a student’s right to freedom of expression in schools (Thompson, 1999). One of the most important cases involving a student’s right of expression in school was *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969). This case involved whether high school students could wear black armbands to protest the Vietnam War. In its ruling, the court decided that the students could wear the armbands stating that the students did have a right to symbolic speech on important issues of national concern; however, the court affirmed the authority of school officials to control the behavior of students in school in a responsible manner (Thompson, 1999; Essex, 2001; Gullatt, 1999; McCarthy, 2001). This case created the standard that schools need to show evidence of substantial disruption in order to limit the free expression rights of students. Other applicable court cases have involved student hair length, peace symbols, and male students wearing earrings in school (Thompson, 1999; Essex, 2001).

In recent cases, the courts have ruled that schools are not open public forums “and that school officials may impose reasonable restrictions on free speech” (Paliokas, Furtel, and Rist, 1996, p. 33). The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) has taken a leadership role in fighting against school uniform policies (Zirkel, 1998; Thompson, 1999). In 1996, the ACLU settled a case with the Long Beach Unified School District. This case resulted in the Long Beach Unified School District adding an “opt-out” provision (mainly done for religious reasons) and to address the needs of students who cannot afford to purchase school uniforms (Thompson, 1999). In this area of student rights, the courts generally allow school officials wide latitude as long as the school
explains how uniforms are necessary to fulfill the school’s educational purpose (Gullatt, 1999). Recently, the courts have developed several justifications for allowing a mandatory school uniform policy. These include “reducing distractions to learning, increasing campus safety and security, fostering school unity and pride and leveling socioeconomic barriers among students” (Zirkel, 1998, p. 2; Daugherty, 2002; McCarthy, 2001).

Enforcement Concerns

Many school administrators and teachers believe a school uniform policy will add more hours to their already full work-week (Pickles, 2000). Teachers have too much going on already without having to monitor student appearance and report students who attempt to modify their school uniform throughout the school day (Pickles, 2000). Due to the increased enforcement duties for teachers and administrators, one school hired a full time dress code clerk to handle students not complying with the school uniform policy, which created a strain on the school budget (Pickles, 2000).

Those opposed to school uniform policies believe that school uniforms are just another attempt by school leaders to further control and dominate students (Caruso, 1996; Gullatt, 1999; Stamison, 2003). Consequently, a student uniform policy could negatively affect teacher – student relationships and foster unnecessary hostility. Students could try to get back at teachers and principals in a number of negative ways that could ultimately erase any benefits that the school uniform policy was intended to provide (Wilkins, 1999).
Targeting Minorities

Another problem cited by opponents is that school uniform polices generally target urban, minority school districts (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998). In these districts, administrators apparently look at student uniforms as a quick solution for improving school safety. These inner-city districts (Baltimore, Chicago, Miami, New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.) are unfairly targeted for uniforms, according to Brunsma (2005) because of low test scores, poor students, and low parent involvement. “On average, the face of the uniformed student in U.S. public schools is one of poverty and minority status” (Brunsma, 2005, p. 4). Many suburban and rural school districts, however, have not looked seriously at school uniforms mainly because of a lack of parent interest and an absence of school violence (Brunsma, 2006; McCarthy, 2001).

Greedy Corporations

Greedy corporations are another problem in the school uniform debate, according to Brunsma. School uniforms are now a $2 billion dollar market mainly focused on a captive and disadvantaged constituency (2005). Forbes Magazine recently published an article advising businessmen and investors that school uniforms will be a rising and profitable market for the future. Large companies like Costco, Wal-Mart, Lands’ End, Target, and Old Navy are all involved in the school uniform market, which is expected to grow at a healthy rate of 15% a year (‘Uniforms’, 2000).
A Big Diversion

Some opponents of school uniforms believe the whole topic is a big diversion (Wilkins, 1999). Siegel (1996) maintains that the real issues that political leaders are unwilling to face are crumbling school buildings, crowded classrooms, and shrinking funds for education. Opponents also note that almost all of the schools with mandatory uniform policies are elementary or middle schools. If uniforms are such a good solution for school problems why are they not being used more in high schools? Siegel (1996) believes this is because the students in younger grades are easier to control, but high school students would quickly rebel if they were required to wear uniforms.

Brunsma (2006) likens a school uniform policy to putting a new coat of paint on a deteriorating building. At first, everyone notices the new coat of paint, but nothing really has changed other than the building’s appearance. Brunsma believes school uniform policies are “quick fixes” that cost schools little and are politically acceptable to school staff and parents. These simplistic changes, however, come at the expense of dealing with the real, difficult, and costly issues facing schools today (Brunsma, 2006).

Surprisingly, there are several alternate reasons school leaders may choose to adopt a school uniform policy. School safety is usually the main reason that is used, but are these school really safer because the students are now dressed differently? The existing research does not necessarily respond to these issues and, instead, creates more questions than answers. At the same time, the research suggests there are other variables that can have a positive impact on improving student conduct, thereby ultimately making schools safer.
How Clothing Affects Behavior

In order to understand the relationship between school uniforms and behavior, it is necessary to investigate what researchers have found about clothing and how it affects behavior. Joseph (1986) suggests that clothing is a sign (or symbol), which is defined as something that stands for something else. As a sign, clothing represents values, emotions, and beliefs. Stanley (1996) and Caruso (1996) describe uniforms as being a symbol of group membership. In this way, group members can easily identify each other and outsiders can be easily identified as well. In this sense, clothing can be an expression of personal identity or school identity in the case of uniforms (Joseph, 1986). School uniforms foster a hierarchy that clearly distinguishes students from faculty. In a way, uniforms provide a method of subtle social control within the schools (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998). Ultimately, by having a uniform policy, school officials can expect that students will develop behaviors that are consistent with school goals and expectations. This notion has the potential to improve attendance, limit behavior problems, and promote other positive values promoted by the school. Caruso (1996), however, maintains that forcing a school uniform policy on students limits their choices or free expression and restricts their development in school and later life.

The Symbolic Nature of Clothing

School uniforms are used to promote group identity and desirable behaviors (Caruso, 1996). Uniforms can be viewed as identifying roles, be the person a priest, security guard, student, or boy-scout. In another sense, uniforms promote expectations: uniformed police officers are expected to keep order, provide information, and assist those in danger or in need of help. A person in a nursing uniform is expected to provide
medical advice, care and support (Stanley, 1996). Another way to look at uniforms is to see them as promoting group goals and boundaries as opposed to individual goals. A football team, for example, works together to achieve the goal of winning. Members do not compete with each other but strive to accomplish team or group goals (Stanley, 1996).

“A uniform can build the same feeling of unity and belonging that many students get from team uniforms, cheerleading outfits, or school jackets” (Caruso, 1996, p. 2).

Another way of understanding the effects of school uniforms is to examine them in terms of a student’s future success: “Appearance is an important part of the nonverbal communication individuals use to establish their credibility in roles” (Stanley, 1996, p. 426). Students who feel that they are dressed to learn and be productive have a better chance to achieve their goals (Stanley, 1996).

Student clothing affects behavior in other ways. Parent supporters of uniforms frequently mention the value of protecting young girls “from being sexualized at increasingly younger ages” (Bodine, 2003b, p. 51). The result, unfortunately, is that these girls often send out suggestive messages they don’t intend or even understand. In this sense, school uniforms serve to distinctly put boundaries around the protected space of childhood (Bodine, 2003b; Brennan, 2005).

**Student Self-Esteem**

Student self-esteem is another important area that is impacted by student clothing. If students do not feel they have the “right clothes”, they can develop strong feelings of inferiority (Caruso, 1996). Consequently, students who have the right clothes “Are often prejudiced against classmates who do not have clothes with popular brand names or who wear hand-me-downs.” (Caruso, 1996, p. 2). Clothing, by itself, is unique among
economic identifiers: it is an ever-present symbol of value and worth that is apparent to most people at first glance (Bodine, 2003b). This notion increases the self-esteem damage a student can experience by not having the right clothes. Furthermore, schools, by their very nature, are institutions that unknowingly foster social exclusion, gender-inspired teasing, and peer pressure that can have negative effects on a student’s self-esteem (Bodine, 2003b).

Effects of School Uniform Policies on Student Achievement and Student Conduct

Inconclusive Evidence

The effects of student uniform policies on student achievement and student conduct have been mixed and inconclusive. One study at the 6th grade level found statistically significant positive differences in academic achievement for English and math. This study investigated student standardized test scores two years before the uniform policy was implemented and two years after (Williams, 2003). Other studies have found similar positive results for elementary and middle school students (Murphy, 1997; Elder, 1999; and Stockton, Gullatt, Parke, 2002).

David Brunsma, perhaps the most renowned researcher on the topic of student uniforms, has conducted several large, comprehensive studies using large national databases. Brunsma’s 1998 study found a weak effect for academic achievement, but his large studies in 2002 and 2004 found a negative effect for academic achievement. Brunsma believes more studies should be conducted on this topic that use statistical methods that control for other factors. In speaking about Brunsma, researcher Burt Reynolds (2005) states:
From 1998 to the present day, Brunsma is one of the only researchers who have [sic] taken a critical look at the empirical research conducted since Long Beach and concluded that our implementation decisions are being fueled by irrational fears in the face of scarce empirical evidence (p. 186).

Quantitative Studies

Many of the quantitative studies have found a variety of results when studying the effects of school uniform policies. In 1999, Jacqueline McCarty did her doctoral dissertation on the subject of school uniforms. McCarty studied how a mandatory school uniform policy affects student behavior at a middle school in an urban area. An important difference from earlier studies involved a focus on student perceptions of the mandatory school uniform policy. The author compared a school with a mandatory uniform policy to a similar school with no uniform policy. This study took place three years after the mandatory student uniform policy was put in place (McCarty, 1999). The author used counts of discipline violations that the schools provided, and she developed a new survey to gauge student attitudes of fear / harm, sense of belonging, and their feelings about the school clothing policy (McCarty, 1999). McCarty’s results showed no difference between the two schools in terms of student discipline violations. However, students at the middle school with the mandatory uniform policy reported having less fear of crime or violence; these students also reported a higher sense of community or belonging. Students at the middle school without the mandatory uniform policy reported higher levels of satisfaction with the school clothing policy than students from the school with the mandatory uniform policy.
A similar study, by Deborah Elder (1999), examined the effects of a mandatory school uniform policy on two middle schools in the Albuquerque Public School District. Parents were the driving force behind this school uniform policy. Elder used school records to measure the impact of a mandatory school uniform policy on discipline referrals and the number of students achieving honor roll status (Elder, 1999). The author also measured the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students on the mandatory school uniform policy. Interviews were conducted with 30 parents, 27 students, and 12 teachers from both middle schools. The overall results showed a positive effect on both schools. “The data showed that discipline referrals decreased, the number of honor roll students increased, and perceptions regarding school safety, climate, and focus became more positive among parents and staff” (Elder, 1999). These impressive results, however, have to be taken in context with the other changes the two schools implemented around the same time; this measure of uncertainty often accompanies research into the subject of school uniforms mainly because the U.S. Manual on School Uniforms makes the suggestion of combining school uniforms with other school improvement measures (1996). Some of the parent comments Elder relates seem especially revealing. One parent stated, “When I pick my son up, I see less sauntering around and acting cocky. The uniforms do change behavior” (Elder, 1999, p. 5). Other parents reported a decrease in parent/student conflicts over student clothing choices. The teacher comments were also positive. One teacher sees, “…less blatant sexuality with the girls and less macho gang boys. Uniforms have made them children again” (Elder, 1999, p. 6). Another teacher said, “It’s easy to forget that they are young kids when they’re dressed like thugs. Now the kids look like kids” (Elder, 1999, p. 6). Overall the group of teachers interviewed
reported an increased focus on learning, less gang activity, better student behavior, and less division between rich and poor students (Elder, 1999). The students who were interviewed generally had negative comments about the mandatory uniform policy in the group setting. These students usually expressed positive comments (easier to decide what to wear in the morning, less fighting, and better overall behavior) when they were alone and separate from their peers (Elder, 1999).

Kathy Samuels studied the mandatory school uniform policy at City Schools in Birmingham, Alabama for her doctoral dissertation. This research study was unique in that it is one of the few studies that focus on high school students. Samuels looked at how a mandatory school uniform policy affects student achievement, attendance, discipline referrals, and perceptions (Samuels, 2003). According to Samuels, the Birmingham, Alabama Board of Education implemented a mandatory school uniform policy for all students in August 1996. Samuels found that discipline referrals during the selected years of 1994-1999 decreased after the implementation of the new school uniform policy in 1996. Average daily attendance increased as well after 1996 by 3.5%. Samuels acknowledged that there may be other explanations for her findings including the use of a new standardized test, a new school-wide management plan, and other changes implemented roughly the same time as the new mandatory school uniform policy (Samuels, 2003).

Many researchers on the topic of school uniforms have suggested the effects of other variables that have not been previously studied along with school uniform policies. Several researchers have pointed to changes in school leadership, changes in parental involvement, and changes in discipline policies as possible causes for the reported
benefits of school uniforms (Stockton, Gullat, Parke, 2002; Woods & Ogletree, 1992). Other researchers have identified more community involvement as a possible cause for positive school benefits often claimed by school uniform supporters (Stevenson, 1999; Hughes, 1996; Elder, 1999).

Inclusive Nature of Qualitative Studies

Qualitative research studies have been mixed and inconclusive beginning with the first studies in Long Beach, California in the 1990’s. At first the results were impressive. In one typical study, a researcher interviewed school staff at the middle school level and found a dramatic impact: lower levels of discipline problems, increased academic achievement, and a new sense of calm in the school (Jones, 1997). These results, however, have been called into question by more than one researcher. Stamison (2003) conducted an in-depth case study on the Long Beach phenomenon and concluded their data was not substantiated, and there was no relationship between the uniform policy and the impressive gains being reported. Stamison suggested that there were other factors involved other than the school uniform policy, as the school made many other significant changes at the same time as the uniform policy was implemented (Stamison, 2003).

Several studies found a relationship between school uniforms and increased levels of school safety and academic emphasis (Elder, 1999; Tucker, 2004; Schwartz, 2002; and Washington-Labat, 2003). A few researchers noted the tendency of students to view the school uniform policy in a negative manner. Generally, in these situations, the students were not involved in the process of policy development and decision making (Elder, 1999; Morgan, 2007; Williams-Davidson, 1996). In these cases, students generally did not comply with the policy and worked to undermine its effectiveness (DaCosta, 2006).
Conflict Resolution Programs

Conflict resolution programs provide an alternative option to punitive approaches, so that schools may proactively respond to inevitable student conflicts (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000), and had they been in place at the time of the Columbine tragedy, perhaps that event might have been averted. We can only speculate; however, we know that school violence is an important issue that needs to be addressed before it spirals out of control. On April 20, 1999, two students entered Columbine High School and killed twelve students, one teacher, and injured twenty-one other students before taking their own lives. In the aftermath of this tragedy, it was thought that the two students who committed these horrific acts were victims of school bullying and intimidation (Snyder, 2007). Since this tragic event, other instances of school violence have become all too common. According to one study, 30% of students in grades 6-10 are either school bullies themselves or are victims of school bullying and intimidation (Snyder, 2007).

Unfortunately, school violence is on the rise and many times the students resorting to violence in school will carry this pattern into their adult lives (Johnson, 1998).

After Columbine, many schools adopted zero-tolerance consequences for students who bring weapons to school or engage in violent behavior. Zero-tolerance consequences, unfortunately, take students out of school, which is bad for the student and society (Tomczyk, 2000; Johnson, 1998; Daunic, 2000).

School leaders are reporting that violent behavior in schools is increasing (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000; Johnson and Nafziger-Johnson, 1998; Snyder, 2007). Unfortunately, the same punitive methods (alternative schools and suspensions) schools have traditionally relied on do not serve the long-term needs of students. Conflict
resolution programs provide an alternative method for schools to proactively respond to inevitable student conflicts (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000). According to Carlson-Paige & Levin, “conflict resolution programs generally include a curriculum designed to teach students to acknowledge individual differences, change win-lose paradigms to win-win solutions, and use negotiations to resolve conflicts (p. 95).”

Young people in schools need help in learning how to deal with conflict in healthy and constructive ways. Conflict resolution, as a relatively new school behavior modification program, has the potential to limit school violence and help young people solve conflicts themselves. Conflict resolution programs have the ability to help make schools safer, promote a positive school climate, help students develop positive self-images, and encourage students to solve conflicts in a peaceful manner as they grow into adults (Daunic, 2000; Tomczyk, 2000; Vollmer, 1999; Persico, 1996; Mantavani, 1999).

**Benefits of Conflict Resolution Programs**

According to Martinez (2009), there are three ways to limit behavior problems in schools: (1) teachers who successfully handle problems themselves, (2) exciting and worthwhile lessons, and (3) having high expectations for students. Another important consideration in preventing behavior problems is by school staff being proactive and preventing problems before they grow or escalate (Martinez, 2009). Schools that have implemented a conflict resolution program generally have positive results in lowering school violence and behavioral issues (Martinez, 2009; Yoon, 2004; Mantavani, 1999; Heydenberg, 2007).

Conflict resolution programs have benefits for schools and for students once they leave school. School leaders working with these programs take advantage of school
conflicts in order to have a ‘teachable moment’ with the students involved (Persico, 1996). This is especially important during the middle school years when students are still maturing and are often unsure how to handle conflicts with other students. By teaching conflict resolution skills, schools are not only focusing on academics, but on the future emotional health of their students (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000).

Conflict resolution programs have been shown to foster a positive school climate. Apparently, students appreciate having a non-threatening method they can use to resolve their conflicts. This gives the students a sense of empowerment and self-reliance: they begin to understand that they have choices in how they respond to conflict (Persico, 1996). In addition to making the school a safer place, conflict resolution programs promote a positive school atmosphere (Johnson and Johnson, 1995).

Middle schools students can especially benefit from conflict resolution programs. Students in middle school are going through so many changes physically, emotionally, and socially. According to Snyder, “Conflict resolution addresses the emotional issues that middle school students face on a daily basis” (p. 4). Group membership is a vital need at this age, and it is difficult for these students to navigate the minefield of interpersonal conflicts during this very influential time period (Snyder, 2007; Daunic, 2000; Yoon, 2004). Students at this age level are unsure of how to resolve a conflict; unfortunately, the conflict often escalates beyond the control of the students involved and the result is more school violence (Mantovani, 1999; Johnson, 1998; Vollmer, 1999). In one middle school in North Carolina, school suspensions decreased by 97% after the successful introduction of a conflict resolution program. This same study stated that
academic achievement also increased after the introduction of the conflict resolution program (Snyder, 2007).

Conflict resolution programs can be beneficial training for new teachers and can lead to positive outcomes for both victims of school intimidation and aggressors (Yoon, 2004). In one study of a conflict resolution program in Passaic, New Jersey, the high school dropout rate was reduced and there was a 67% decrease in the number of disciplinary violations. In the middle school, schools suspensions decreased over a four year period (Tomczyk, 2000). Teachers can benefit from conflict resolution programs because when students gain the skills to solve conflicts on their own, teachers can concentrate less time on behavior problems and more time on teaching (Johnson, 1998). Lower levels of teachers’ stress have also been reported as well as less discipline referrals to the school office (Daunic, 2000).

The benefits of conflict resolution programs go beyond making schools less violent for students. According to Heydenberk (2007), these programs help students to reflect on their choices more and to consider other views. Conflict resolution promotes emotional awareness, effective listening, and helps students to recognize and avoid racial prejudice. Other benefits include increased critical thinking, comprehension, and school attachment (Heydenberk, 2007). One of the most exciting results of conflict resolution programs is that students in these programs generally are more willing to take risks, challenge themselves, and feel empathy toward others (Heydenberk, 2007). All of these positive outcomes seem to be the results of a safer school where students are connected and have higher levels of confidence in resolving the inevitable conflicts that are a part of the middle school environment.
The research suggests a strong connection between conflict resolution programs and cooperative learning strategies. In cooperative learning, students work with other students to help each other accomplish a learning task. Students who benefit from conflict resolution have increased levels of school attachment and are more willing to take risks at school (Heydenberk, 2007). Teachers in these positive environments are more comfortable using cooperative learning strategies because students are better prepared to engage other students and deal with conflicts that may arise while working with others. Some teachers have noted an increase in moral and ethical reasoning (Heydenberk, 2007).

Types of Conflict Resolution Programs

Conflict resolution programs have been in existence since the 1970’s (Vollmer, Drook, and Harned, 1999). One of the main conflict resolution programs is called Peer Mediation. This program is based on the observation that in middle school, peer relationships are very important; these peer relationships can be used to help students solve conflicts in positive ways (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000). Student peer mediators are chosen by school staff and undergo a training program that prepares them for the role of a peer mediator. The challenge, students are told, is to find ways to manage and understand conflict in non-violent ways (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000; Vollmer, Drook, and Harned, 1999).

One conflict resolution program used by many schools is called Common Ground. This program relies on peer mediation to help students solve conflicts in peaceful ways. According to Johnson (1998), the Common Ground program has six main beliefs about conflict resolution:

1. Conflict is a part of life and is an opportunity to grow and learn.
2. Mediation can be more effective than suspensions and detentions in shaping student behavior.

3. Mediation can result in a reduction in violence, vandalism, and absenteeism.

4. Mediation amounts to less time for teachers and administrators to spend dealing with discipline issues.

5. Conflict resolution is a life skill that empowers students to solve their own problems through improved communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills.

6. Mediation promotes peace and justice through mutual understanding of individual differences in our multicultural world (p. 24).

“Rules for Fair Fighting” is another popular conflict resolution program used by many schools. “Rules for Fair Fighting” is produced by the Grace Adams Peace Foundation. This program emphasizes the following main ideas:

1. Focus on the problem

2. Attack the problem not the person

3. Listen with an open mind

4. Treat a person’s feelings with respect

5. Take responsibility for your actions (Persico, 1996).

In one school, these main ideas were emphasized in a particular school course. Students were asked to write skits that involved a variety of conflicts and to include two endings for the skit: one with conflict resolution and one without. Collaboration is stressed throughout the process, and any conflicts that surface are discussed and worked out (Persico, 1996). Students who are caught fighting at school are given three lunch
detentions with the school guidance counselor. In these sessions, students go through a variety of activities that emphasize the “Rules for Fair Fighting”. Persico (1996) reports successful results for the school that implemented this conflict resolution program. In the first year of the program, there were thirty-five instances of fighting with only one repeat offender.

One study conducted by Mantovani (1999) involved eighteen 7th grade students. Each student completed a survey that involved their attitudes on solving conflicts. The students were exposed to a curriculum involving conflict resolution lessons. Students received a journal to record their personal reactions to the curriculum and to describe some conflicts they have experienced and how they were resolved. A log sheet was filled out by students at the end of each school week that recorded their conflict resolution experiences for the week. The results of this conflict resolution program were positive. According to Mantovani (1999), “Data indicated significant changes in students’ attitudes toward conflicts and how to resolve them. Students became more effective in resolving conflicts once they participated in the curriculum” (p. 43).

The author of this study believes that students need to be taught the skills and the knowledge to successfully solve conflicts in peaceful ways (Mantovani, 1999; Yoon, 2004). In conflict resolution programs, students learn that conflict is a natural occurrence; they practice “I” statements which avoids blaming the other person. They begin to notice their own emotions, and they see the consequences of making healthy and unhealthy choices. Finally, they learn the importance of calming down and how doing so helps to solve problems (Mantovani, 1999; Johnson, 1998).
Ann Daunic (2000) conducted a study of middle school students after a conflict resolution program was introduced. Daunic found that the majority of participants involved sixth-grade girls. Most of the incidents involved name calling, spreading rumors, using threatening language, and talking about someone behind his or her back (Daunic, 2000). The author suggested boys did not participate as much because of a possible perception that conflict resolution may be perceived as a weaker method of working out disputes. For the boys who did participate in the program, their offences involved more hitting and pushing (Daunic, 2000). In this program, 95% of the disputes were resolved peacefully. The participants generally had three choices during the mediation session: (1) avoid the other person, (2) stop the behavior, (3) or agree to get along. More favorable results were found when the peer mediator was from a higher grade level (Daunic, 2000).

Researchers in this area generally find that conflict resolution programs are effective in limiting episodes of school violence. (Mantovani, 1999; Snyder, 2007). Students in these programs are trained in a variety of strategies to diffuse conflicts and to not respond in a physical manner. One exceptional third grader, who had been trained in conflict resolution techniques at his school, urged his arguing parents to “use the conflict resolution [program] that works so well at school” (Vollmer, Drook, and Harned, 1999, p. 2).
Policy Implementation

Conflict resolution and school uniforms are two policies that have the potential to improve school safety. The key to having successful results from these policies, or any policy, is to have a successful policy implementation. This issue of policy implementation is crucial for school leaders today. The following section highlights the important strategies for successful policy implementation.

Suggestions for Implementing a New Policy

Policy implementation is an area that most school administrators dread (Fowler, 2004, p. 289). Policy implementation, however, is considered to be one of the most important job functions of a school leader. Perhaps this is because policy implementation takes work and there is a long history of policy failures. Many teachers can recall reform efforts where the beginning in-service was led by an ‘expert’ who made a presentation and then handed out glossy materials to a skeptical group of teachers and principals. Many of these ill conceived reforms had little follow-up and the policy failed miserably (Fowler, 2004). Reeves (2002) writes about a phenomenon called the “Law of Initiative Fatigue”, which describes how school staff can grow weary when faced with a plethora of change initiatives. In these situations, school leaders need to have a “garden party” where the “weeds” are removed so new “flowers” can take their place. The “weeds” in this case are old reform efforts that have outlived their usefulness. A good plan for school leaders is to periodically review each initiative and add “sunset provisions” to others (Reeves, 2002). Wise school leaders know that top-down mandates are rarely put into
practice. Change is hard and school staff generally gravitates to the status quo. To make matters worse, research shows that school leaders continue to make the same mistakes in implementation that have been made for the last fifty years. Fortunately, there are research-proven strategies school leaders can use to develop a workable process that will greatly contribute to success (Fowler, 2004).

Developing an effective school climate that supports teaching and learning is an extremely complex matter. Senge (1999) suggests that many organizations seek symptomatic solutions, rather than addressing the fundamental solution. When this occurs, Senge (1999) observes:

Our nonsystemic ways of thinking are so damaging specifically because they consistently lead us to focus on low-leverage changes: we focus on symptoms where the stress is greatest. We repair or ameliorate the symptoms. But such efforts only make matters better in the short run, at best, and worse in the long run . . . Because we see the world in simple, obvious terms, we come to believe in simple, obvious solutions. This leads to the frenzied search for simple ‘fixes’ (p. 267).

The first step in successfully implementing a new school policy is to identify the problem or problems that are creating the need for the new policy. School leaders can conduct research, use a survey, or talk with stakeholders in order to identify the problem and develop a workable solution. The solution, however, must be in agreement with the school culture and the community values. A very effective program in New York City may be a disaster in a rural area of Maine, for example. Unfortunately, many important
school reforms fail because leaders did not have a good understanding of the school culture (Fowler, 2004; Owens, 1995).

*Phases of Policy Implementation*

Once a solution is identified, the school leaders need to be deeply committed to the new approach, the process of implementation, and should develop a plan for implementation. This beginning phase of policy implementation is often called the mobilization phase. Unfortunately, many well-intentioned school reform efforts are critically compromised at this stage because of planning mistakes. The mobilization phase, when it is done correctly, generally lasts from 14 – 17 months. A related issue involves the common practice of self-seeking school leaders who promote new policies in order to advance their own careers. Many of these ill-conceived reform efforts are doomed to failure from the start when the self-seeking leader fails to work on the new policy in a serious manner. This practice can disillusion school staff members and can make the job of policy implementation much harder for the next school leader (Fowler, 2004; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

According to Fowler (2004), there are three key questions that school leaders need to ask before adopting a new policy. (1) Is there a good reason to have the new policy? (2) Is the new policy a good fit for the culture of the school and community? (3) Is the new policy supported by key stakeholders in the school and in the community?

Successful school policy implementation is important for two reasons: (1) legitimate school problems are identified and met in reasonable ways. (2) School leaders build credibility and can successfully introduce other reforms as they are needed (Fowler, 2004; Owens, 1995).
A good idea for successful implementation is to have a steering committee. In leadership, the group is stronger than the individual (Reeves, 2006). The steering committee should include key school stakeholders like teachers, principals, parents, community leaders, and students. Unfortunately, many worthwhile school reform efforts have failed at this juncture because of a committed group of stakeholders who were adamantly opposed to the proposed change. Assessing support for a proposed new policy is very important in the early stages of the process. Having a broad group of key stakeholders will help to get crucial buy-in for the new policy and will also bring up potential problem issues that can be dealt with early in the process. For a school with a history of turmoil or dissension, a smaller steering committee works best. Effective school leaders will hold meetings with staff members where honest feedback is encouraged (Fowler, 2004; Louis & Miles, 1990). During these meetings, if disagreements arise school leaders should try and work out a compromise that doesn’t severely minimize the new policy. School leaders should work to persuade those who disagree with the proposed policy, and they should be ready with current research and recent results from similar schools that can be used to support the new proposal (Fiona, 2008; Fowler, 2004). Ultimately, the success or failure of the new policy will depend on getting buy in from teachers and principals, so it is a great idea to include these groups in the process early so they feel they are part of the process. However, school leaders should not believe that the new policy needs every staff member’s support. Reeves (2002) believes there are times when consensus is not required; in these cases, school leaders should be guided by student-centered values and other important principles. This does not mean that the leader should be heavy-handed, but that he or she should not hold back an
important policy change when there are a few dissenters. Of course, school leaders need to lay the groundwork for successful reform by giving staff members important information and research that supports the proposed change (Reeves, 2002). Effective school leaders can help colleagues by treating objections to the proposed policy as hypotheses that can be examined. This scenario creates an environment of mutual respect that makes the data the deciding factor on whether a new policy will be adopted or not (Reeves, 2002). Successful school leaders can set aside their own ideas and plans when a better solution is proposed or an important modification needs to be made (Fowler, 2004; Portner, 2000). According to Fullan (2001):

> Do not assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that should or could be implemented. On the contrary, assume that one of the main purposes of the process of implementation is to exchange your reality of what should be through interaction with implementers (p. 108).

**Essential Resources for Successful Policy Implementation**

Two essential resources that will contribute to the successful implementation of a new policy are time and money. School leaders should work to calculate the true cost of any new proposal, so they can avoid having to scrap a new policy mid-year because the funds have dried up. Successful policy implementation involves detailed planning to make sure that resources are available to fund the new program or policy. Eventually, once the policy reaches the institutionalized state, a line-item can be added to the budget to continually fund the new program (Gross et al, 1971). Time is another important element for a successful policy implementation. Training is the main issue that will impact time for school staff members, and the importance of relevant training on an
ongoing basis cannot be emphasized enough (Fullan, 2001; Louis & Miles, 1990; and Prestine & McGreal, 1997). Teachers, principals, and school staff are already busy. Adding something new to their daily work load is not generally welcomed. If the new policy requires these groups to work longer hours, they should be compensated in some way. Generally, school employees will work longer if they see the value of the new approach, but if the required hours are excessive, school employees will become disillusioned, uncooperative, and reach burn-out very fast. To avoid this problem, school leaders can be creative in using pre-established in-service times to complete necessary training so that the new policy does not add too much time to their already busy work day. One successful school mandated that staff meetings devoted to the new policy would last no more than 45 minutes (Fowler, 2004; Oswald, 2005; Owens, 1995).

Researchers advise school leaders to be prepared to have a rough start to the implementation process. According to Reeves (2006), “The reality of organizational change is that change never gets easier; it’s never convenient, universally popular, without opposition, or risk free” (p. 99). Huberman & Miles (1984) advise school leaders to expect the process to be difficult. Smooth implementations are often associated with minimal change or a negative staff response of ignoring or severely minimizing the new reforms. School leaders should be prepared for complaints from teachers, principals, and other school staff members concerning the new policy. This is to be expected in a typical policy change or innovation; however, school leaders must not give in to this pressure and critically modify a well-designed new policy. According to Huberman & Miles (1984), this process is very common. “Midgetizing” is the term that describes a policy change that has been downsized (because of negative feedback) into a smaller, less
meaningful policy change. According to researchers, having a difficult beginning in the policy implementation process is one of the strongest indicators of success in implementing a new policy (Huberman & Miles, 1984). As stated earlier, human nature is basically change resistant, and any new policy change will be met with some form of resistance. This expected negative reaction, however, can be minimized and controlled by school leaders who understand the policy implementation process and who understand the enormous benefits of successfully implementing polices that solve school problems.

Monitoring the Policy Implementation Process

Successful school leaders need to continually monitor the policy implementation process. According to Fowler (2004), “Success requires hard work and pressure” (p. 276). During policy implementation, school leaders cannot simply sit behind their desks and expect that the new policy will be successful. They need to be visible advocates of the new policy on a regular basis. According to Reeves (2006), “Plans without monitoring are little better than wishes upon stars” (p. 78). It is a good idea for school leaders to get honest feedback from those involved in the change process. If problems are detected, they should be dealt with and resolved early in the process. If additional training is needed, it should be made available as soon as possible. School leaders should avoid blaming others when problems arise; instead, they should work with others to resolve the difficult issues in a professional manner. A good idea is to designate staff members to serve on a task force to work on problems as they arise. Other strategies for promoting a new policy include using incentives to encourage participation, having frequent discussions and updates at staff meetings, having informal discussions with implementers, working to publicize the benefits of the new policy, working to improve
staff morale, and using motivational materials: slogans, logos, t-shirts, and banners (Fowler, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Louis & Miles, 1990).

Implementing a Conflict Resolution Program

When implementing a conflict resolution program, there are three main areas school leaders need to focus on: committed leadership, consistency, and logistics (Daunic, 2000). The overall effectiveness of a conflict resolution program depends on the priority it is given.

Leadership is the first critical element. Too often today, school leaders are under enormous pressure to make schools safer and, at the same time, increase academic achievement (Daunic, 2000). Conflict resolution programs have the potential to impact both of these challenging areas. Before rushing into a new change too quickly, as many schools do, it is better for school leaders to take the necessary time to plan for the new program and insure that resources are available (Daunic, 2000; Vollmer, 1999). A good approach is to form a team at each school to assume leadership of the effort. This creates the likelihood that the building leaders will buy-in to the new program and will work to get the support of the remaining staff members. Failure is the likely result if the building leaders are given responsibility for the program when they had no input in its creation (Daunic, 2000). This building leadership team will make important decisions related to appropriate curriculum choices, choosing leaders, and other logistical issues. Wise administrators will also provide appropriate time and resources that allow the school staff to implement the program in a reasonable manner (Daunic, 2000). It is a good idea to
pilot test the new program in a small part of the school before introducing it on a larger level (Vollmer, 1999).

As school leaders begin to select peer mediators in each building, a few suggestions are important to consider. First, avoid selecting only the “top notch” students. Sometimes the students with “rough edges” make the best peer mediators because of their experiences. Ensuring the there is student ownership of the program is important (Johnson, 1998).

In elementary classrooms, sometimes peer mediators can be chosen on a rotating basis so everyone has the opportunity to participate (Daunic, 2000). It is important for the school leaders not to expect the peer mediators to quickly become master peer mediators. An adult needs to be available nearby to help if needed, and peer mediators should have a chance to debrief, reflect, and evaluate the outcomes (Daunic, 2000).

Logistical issues are another important area school leaders need to consider. Daunic (2000) lists some important questions school leaders need to think about:

How and by whom will students be referred?
What types of conflicts qualify?
Who will supervise mediation?
How often will mediators miss class?
Where will the mediation take place? (p. 96).

It is necessary for school staff to follow-up on the peer mediation. Surveys work well to see how the program is working out and if it is accomplishing its purpose.

Deciding who has the final authority over the mediation is another important consideration.
One school found that Character Education programs work well in bringing a common language to Conflict Resolution programs. In other words, Character Education programs give schools standards of behavior that can be referenced (Vollmer, 1999). A final important element of a successful Conflict Resolution program is ongoing publicity. This can be accomplished by having daily announcements about the program, posters, t-shirts for peer mediators, and school or district recognition of the program (Daunic, 2000).

Implementing a School Uniform Policy

The implementation of a school uniform policy has many similarities to implementing a conflict resolution program. In both situations, the manner in which the policy is implemented can have a profound effect on the ultimate outcome of the policy.

School officials, who have experience with adopting a mandatory school uniform policy, offer several suggestions. One important step is to form a task force to spend time studying the issue and visiting schools with uniform policies. It is a good idea to have principals, students, parents, teachers, and school board members (one could be the chairperson) on this task force (Pickles, 2000). To avoid legal challenges, it is a good idea to have the school attorney carefully examine the uniform proposal. Usually a school will need to have an “opt-out” provision for students due to religious or financial reasons. One school required students who “opt-out” to wear business casual dress in place of the mandatory uniform (Pickles, 2000).

To solve the cost issue for some low-income families, some schools provide the uniforms at no cost. Other schools request donations from local businesses and large stores, and this process generally works very well—one school raised $10,000 for this
purpose (Hoffler-Riddick & Lassiter, 1996). In a different school, a large discount store offered to individually size each student and ordered all the uniforms at a discounted price. Students were able to buy pants that retailed for $20 for $12.50. Savings on other items were equally large (Daugherty, 2002). Having several presentations for parents is another good idea in this process. Parent surveys could also be used to gauge parent views on student uniforms (Hoffler-Riddick & Lassiter, 1996).

In one study, the researcher examined school implementation strategies as they related to the adoption of a new school uniform policy (Martin, 1998). Martin found that there was a strong connection between the implementation process and a successful school uniform policy. Participants reported the most success with the uniform policy when school leaders worked to get broad buy-in from school staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders. Another successful factor was when the uniform policy was uniformly enforced by staff members (Martin, 1998). As in other studies, the school leaders implemented other changes (more adult supervision, sensitivity training, and having a time-out room for disruptive students) along with the school uniform policy (Martin, 1998).

School uniforms usually involve students wearing shirts, ties, navy dress pants, and skirts for girls. These uniforms have been traditionally seen in private Catholic schools (Hoffler-Riddick & Lassiter, 1996). Some schools specify what colors can be worn while banning items such as denim, t-shirts, cargo pants, oversized clothing, etc. (Pickles, 2000). One school specified what dress items were prohibited (jeans, cargo pants, clothes with logos, necklaces worn outside shirts, etc.) and the material, length, and colors of clothes that are permitted (McCarthy, 2001). Another school allowed
students to choose tops in red or white (the school colors) and Khaki pants or skirts. During the first year, students could choose their own foot wear, but the school recommended white basketball shoes. Fridays were designated casual days where students could wear regular clothes (Daugherty, 2000).

Whatever requirements a school adopts for the school uniform, the experts advise that school officials get input and feedback from staff, students, and parents before choosing a style or type of school uniform. One school in Chicago created a requirement that before a mandatory school uniform policy was adopted, 67% of the school parents would have to vote in favor of the proposal. When the votes were counted, 99% of the parents voted in favor of school uniforms (Peters, 1996). This school was so excited about the positive effects of school uniforms that many teachers, and the school principal, started to proudly wear the school uniform on a daily basis (Peters, 1996).

School Uniform Policies and Efficacy of Conflict Resolution Programs

Several researchers have suggested a possible connection between school uniform policies and conflict resolution programs (Stockton, Gullatt, Parke, 2002; Stevenson, 1999; Elder, 1999). In many cases, the conflict resolution program was implemented at the same time as the new school uniform policy (Stamison, 2006; DaCosta, 2006). Unfortunately, none of these previous researchers has investigated this relationship; in each case, the researcher only suggested that the conflict resolution program may have had an impact.

Alfie Kohn, a noted educational researcher, discusses how other policy interventions were implemented along with school uniforms at a particular school:
Programs to promote conflict resolution, peer mediation, and parental involvement have also been implemented there recently and it is really hard to know exactly what is producing the positive effect—assuming a meaningful effect really does exist, and persists (p. 7).
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This quasi-experimental research study explored the effects of a conflict resolution program on student conduct violations in twenty inner-city public middle schools in the State of Michigan. The purpose of this research study was to gather quantitative data from these schools and use statistical procedures to test three research questions that pertain to the variables of interest. The quantitative data consisted of school records on student conduct violations for the time period between the 2005 – 2009 school years. In this study, quantitative research methods were used to determine whether there were differences in student conduct violations in schools that incorporated a conflict resolution program to their school uniform policy, compared to those schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

Research Design

According to Creswell (2003), the rationale for using a quantitative design is to use statistical procedures to answer one or more research questions that involve variables in an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

A quasi-experimental, *ex post facto* design was used in this study. According to Mertler & Charles (2005), quasi-experimental designs are used in studies where an experimental treatment is used in one of the populations. The other population serves as the control group for the study. In quasi-experimental designs, “Participants are not randomly assigned to treatments. Data analysis includes testing for significance of differences observed in the dependent variable” (Mertler and Charles, 2005, p. 325). In
In this study, the experimental group was public middle schools that had a school uniform policy and adopted a conflict resolution program, and the control group was public middle schools that had a school uniform policy with no conflict resolution program.

Quantitative research involves using surveys, experiments, or data analysis to test hypotheses and/or to respond to research questions. It usually deals with variables, statistical procedures, and numerical measures (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the independent variable was the implementation of a conflict resolution program. The dependent variable was student conduct violations as categorized by the following scheme: disobedience violations, attendance violations, and legal violations. Disobedience violations included such behaviors as bullying, discipline referrals, expulsions, and vandalism. Attendance violations included behaviors related to truancy and the overall attendance percentage for one year. Legal violations included unacceptable conduct related to physical assaults, illegal possession, weapons on school property, larceny/theft, and illegal drug use.

To collect the data used in this study, the researcher relied upon a publicly available database from The Center for Performance and Information (CEPI) that is owned and managed by the Michigan Department of Education. In this regard, Michigan schools are required to report school safety data as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the state’s accreditation plan, Education Yes.

The data from CEPI are organized into the total number of violations per school for each school year. The attendance information is given as a percentage and reflects the overall attendance rate per school for a given school year. School officials at each district report this information to CEPI each year. The data were gathered from the CEPI website.
and entered into Excel spreadsheets for each selected school and year in the study. These four excel spreadsheets were merged into one database using SPSS.

The Population

There are 664 public middle schools in Michigan (Michigan schooltree.org). In reviewing the relevant data, it was determined that seventy-seven middle schools in Michigan had a school uniform policy. Further investigation revealed that out of this group, fourteen of the public middle schools had a school uniform policy during the 2005–2009 school years. Six schools were identified that had both a school uniform policy during the desired time frame (2005–2009) and a conflict resolution program. All of these schools were located in large and urban school districts in the state. The population for this study involved students attending public middle schools that included grades 6 through 8. The total population consisted of twenty schools. Six inner-city public middle schools in Michigan comprised the experimental group (implemented a school uniform and a conflict resolution program) and 14 inner-city public middle schools served as the control group (implemented a school uniform but no conflict resolution program).

Procedures

This study investigated the effects of a conflict resolution program on student conduct violations in urban middle schools with a mandatory school uniform policy in the State of Michigan. After identifying urban middle schools that met the criteria of the study, the researcher obtained permission to conduct this study from Western Michigan
Public middle schools in large inner-city areas in Michigan were selected for the study depending on whether the middle school had a school uniform policy and possibly a conflict resolution program. In this study, six middle schools from urban communities that had a student uniform policy and an accompanying conflict resolution program were assigned to the experimental group. The control group consisted of fourteen middle schools that had a student uniform policy but no conflict resolution program.

Student conduct violation data were gathered at each school during the 2005 through the 2009 school years. Data were aggregated according to student grade levels (e.g., 6, 7, and 8) and participating groups (e.g., experimental and control).

The researcher contacted the school principals by phone in each identified middle school to determine whether the school had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program. In addition to this, additional information was obtained from the principal pertaining to the inception, and in some cases, the termination date, of the school uniform policy and conflict resolution program. This information was recorded for each individual middle school. Afterwards, student conduct data were collected from CEPI for the 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years and compiled according to whether the school was in the experimental or control group. Individual school descriptive data were collected and coded according to a scheme developed by the researcher (The reader is referred to Appendix B).
Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent is there a significant difference in disobedient behaviors of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

2. To what extent is there significant difference in attendance violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

3. To what extent is there a significant difference in legal violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

Data Analysis

Student conduct data for each school was recorded from the CEPI database for the four years of the study. This data was imported into an Excel spreadsheet for each year. Next, the data were combined into one Excel spreadsheet. Utilizing the SPSS statistical software, the data were analyzed by using appropriate statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations were used for describing nominal data. A t-test of Independent Means was used for determining whether there were
significant differences between population means. According to Keppel & Wickens (2004), t-tests are useful when comparing a new treatment or condition with an established one. In instances where a statistically significant difference existed between the population means of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, in comparison with schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, the investigator utilized the Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether the variances between the two independent populations were equal. If the variances in the population means were equal, then the assumption was made that the two independent populations were in fact equal. In all test applications, the 0.05 level of confidence was used for determining statistical significance.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS OF STUDY

Introduction

This study sought to determine whether school districts that adopted a school uniform policy had a greater impact on student attendance and conduct than those school districts that had not adopted such a policy. More specifically, this study sought to determine whether schools that had adopted a school uniform policy with a conflict resolution program, were more likely to influence students’ attendance and conduct in school than those schools that had adopted a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program.

To test the research questions in this study, the investigator relied upon the state’s student database that contained relevant information pertaining to student attendance and conduct. This section presents the results of each hypothesis tested.

Results of Statistical Testing

In this section the analysis of the data collected in regard to the three research questions is presented. The research questions are restated and appropriate tests are provided to determine whether the hypotheses are accepted or rejected. In all test applications, the 0.05 alpha level was used for determining statistical significance.

Q1: To what extent is there a significant difference in disobedient behaviors of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program?
program, compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

In order to address the first research question, disobedient behaviors were categorized according to four different types. They are discipline referrals, bullying, expulsions, and vandalism. An independent t-test was conducted for each type of disobedient behavior to determine whether there were differences between students in the experimental and control group populations.

Table 1 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedient behavior of discipline referrals for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, as compared to students attending a middle school with a school uniform policy with no conflict resolution program. In the tables, “N” stands for the number of schools in each group over a three or four-year period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>565.65</td>
<td>727.18</td>
<td>1.301</td>
<td>0.1984*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>355.6</td>
<td>495.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not significant.
The data in the above table indicate that there was not a significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedience violation of discipline referrals of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, as compared to the number of discipline referrals of students in schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program ($t(60)=1.301$, $p=0.1984$).

Table 2 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedient behavior of bullying for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending schools with a uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.1894</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.8502*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.*

The data in the above table indicate that there was not a significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedient behavior of bullying for students attending schools with a uniform policy that had a conflict resolution program as compared to the
number of bullying incidents of students in schools with uniform policies that did not have a conflict resolution program, \( t(79)=0.1894, p=0.8502 \).

Table 3 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals of the disobedient behavior of expulsions for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending a school with a uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

Table 3

An Independent t-test Comparing the Disobedient Behavior of Expulsions for Students in Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.9474</td>
<td>0.3473*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedience violation of expulsions of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of expulsions of students in schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, \( t(60)=0.9474, p=0.3473 \).
Table 4 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedient behavior of vandalism for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

Table 4

*An Independent t-test Comparing the Disobedient Behavior of Vandalism for Students in Middle Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.0302</td>
<td>0.9759*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.

The data in the above table indicate that there was not a significant difference in the number of referrals for the disobedience violation of school vandalism for students who attended schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to student vandalism in schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, ($t(79)=0.0.0302$, $p=0.9759$).
Q2: To what extent is there a significant difference in attendance violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

In order to address this research question, attendance violations were categorized according to two different types: truancy and attendance. Truancies are unauthorized absences from class or school. Attendance is the overall attendance rate of each group over a four year period. An independent t-test was conducted for each category of attendance violations to determine whether there was a statistical difference between the experimental and control group populations.

Table 5 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the attendance behavior of truancy for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.
Table 5

An Independent t-test Comparing the Attendance Behavior of Truancy for Students in Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73.79</td>
<td>87.27</td>
<td>0.3357</td>
<td>.7380*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63.80</td>
<td>133.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the attendance behavior of truancy for students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of truancies of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, (t(79)=0.3357, p=.7380).

Table 6 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the attendance behavior of attendance average for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.
Table 6

*An Independent t-test Comparing the Attendance of Students in Middle Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Attendance Average</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>88.97</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>1.1191</td>
<td>0.2679*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>86.76</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.*

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the overall attendance of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the overall attendance of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, (t(57)=1.1191, p=0.2679).

Q 3: To what extent is there a significant difference in legal violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program, compared to those students in schools with a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution program?

In order to address this research question, legal violations were categorized according to five different types. They are weapons, physical assaults, larceny/theft, drug possession, and drug use. An independent t-test was conducted for each type of legal violation to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two populations.
Table 7 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation weapons possession for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

Table 7

An Independent t-test Comparing the Legal Violation of Weapons Possession for Students in Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.1374</td>
<td>0.2588*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of weapons possession of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of weapons legal violations of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, (t(79)=1.1374, p=0.2588).

Table 8 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of physical assault for students
attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

Table 8

*An Independent t-test Comparing the Legal Violation of Physical Assaults for Students in Middle Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.08</td>
<td>24.49</td>
<td>0.1843</td>
<td>0.8542*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20.25</td>
<td>45.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.*

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of physical assault of students in schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of physical assault legal violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, (t(79)=0.1843, p=0.8542).

Table 9 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of larceny / theft for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as
compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.

Table 9

*An Independent t-test Comparing the Legal Violation of Larceny / Theft for Students in Middle Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.5413</td>
<td>0.5898*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of larceny / theft of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of larceny / theft legal violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, (t(79)=0.5413, p=0.5898).

Table 10 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of drug possession for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.
Table 10

*An Independent t-test Comparing the Legal Violation of Drug Possession for Students in Middle Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.8315</td>
<td>0.4082*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.*

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of drug possession of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of drug possession legal violations of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, \( t(79)=0.8315, \ p=0.4082 \).

Table 11 provides information to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of drug use for students attending schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to students attending a school with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program.
Table 11

An Independent t-test Comparing the Legal Violation of Drug Use for Students in Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Number of Referrals</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.4504</td>
<td>.6536*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Policy and No Conflict Resolution Program</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Significant.

The data in the above table indicate that there was no significant difference in the number of referrals for the legal violation of drug use of students in schools that had a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program as compared to the number of drug use legal violations of students in schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program, \( (t(79)=0.4504, p=0.6536) \).

Analysis of Findings

The findings in this study did not show any statistically significant difference in student conduct levels for schools with a school uniform policy that had added a conflict resolution program as compared to schools that only had a school uniform policy in each of the three research questions tested.
The findings in this study support previous research studies about the inconclusive evidence of school uniform policies on reducing unacceptable student discipline in schools (Reynolds, 2005; Woods & Obetree, 1992; Brunsma, 2001; Hoffler-Riddick, 2002; Shimizu, 2000, and Gonzales, 2000).

In recent years, incidents of violent behavior in America’s public schools have increased (Daunic, Smith, and Robinson, 2000; Johnson and Nafziger-Johnson, 1998, and Snyder, 2007). If our public schools are to realize their purported goal of providing a quality education for all children, then measures must be found to address the prevalent issue of disruptive behaviors in our classrooms. Over the past twenty years, there has been a preponderance of schools that have attempted to address this issue by instituting school uniform policies (Black, 1998; Stanley, 1996; Jones, 1997, Bollinger, 2002, and Williams, 2003). Unfortunately, however, these policies have not produced the anticipated results that were expected (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998; Washington, 2003; Kim, 1998; Hughes, 1996; Elder, 1999, Wilkins, 1999; Lumsden, 2002, and McCarty, 1999).

Many researchers have suggested that there are numerous variables that may contribute to lower levels of student discipline problems in schools with a school uniform policy (Hughes, 1996; Washington-Labat, 2003; Brunsma, 2001; Paliokas & Risk, 1996; Stanley, 1996; Morgan, 2007; Reynolds, 2005, and Gonzales, 2000). Some have hypothesized that the presence of a conflict resolution program may contribute to this difference (McCarty, 1999; Elder, 1999, and Samuels, 2003). These findings are supported by the findings of other investigators. For example, there are researchers who found a connection between conflict resolution programs and lower levels of school
violence and behavioral issues (Martinez, 2009; Yoon, 2004; Snyder, 2007, and Mantovani, 1999). Perisco (1996) reported impressive gains after a school implemented the “Rules for Fair Fighting” conflict resolution program. Heydenberk (2007) found that conflict resolution programs resulted in increased levels of school attachment and more students willing to take academic risks. This study, however, failed to find similar findings concerning the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in decreasing student discipline violations.

There are several possible explanations for the study findings that showed no difference between schools with a school uniform policy and a conflict resolution program and schools with a school uniform policy and no conflict resolution program. Conflict resolution programs, after all, have been shown to be effective in limiting student behavior problems (Snyder, 2007; Martinez, 2009; Yoon, 2004; Mantavani, 1999, and Heydenberg, 2007).

One possible explanation centers on the ways in which school policies are implemented. The research is replete with findings that suggest that the reason why new initiatives are not successful is because they are not implemented in ways proposed, and there is little, if any, monitoring of the initiative once it is implemented (Reeves, 2006; Martin, 1998; Fowler, 2004; Owens, 1995, and Huberman & Miles, 1984).

How school policies are implemented is very important to the success or failure of any new school policy. Having a successful policy implementation process seems critical to having a successful student uniform policy or a successful conflict resolution process. Several researchers in this area found that school administrators conduct few, if any, follow-up studies after policies have been implemented. The failure to conduct follow-up
studies leaves a great degree of uncertainty about whether these programs produce desired results (Fowler, 2004; Reeves, 2002).

A second possible explanation for the findings in this study may be related to the lack of buy-in from staff members. Some policies fail because important stakeholders were ignored or not invited to participate in formulating new initiatives (Fowler, 2004; Owens, 1995). In one study, Martin (1998) found a strong correlation between a successful school uniform policy and a successful policy implementation process. Martin defined a successful implementation process as one where there was broad buy-in from staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders. Successful initiatives are dependent upon staff receiving the prerequisite training to implement new policies and programs (Fullan, 2001; Louis & Miles, 1990; Senge, 1999, and Prestine & McGreal, 1997).

A third possible explanation for the results obtained in this study is related to the lack of leadership and how these policies were supported. The key ingredient in the overall implementation process is the active participation of the school leader (Fowler, 2004; Owens, 1995; Reeves, 2006, and Fiona, 2008). Fullan (2001) notes the crucial role school leaders play in this process:

Evolutionary planning requires flexibility and an experimental attitude, but it also depends on accurate knowledge about what is going on. Such knowledge cannot be gained by sitting at a desk; it can only be obtained by listening closely to the implementers and visiting them in the field. Only leaders who are in touch with the implementation will be able to revise old methods and develop new ones, making needed changes as the process unfolds (p. 283).
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This final chapter provides a summary of the findings based upon the research conducted in Michigan public middle schools that had adopted a school uniform policy. To facilitate this discussion, the researcher will revisit the initial purpose of this study and provide answers to the original questions. Afterwards, this chapter will conclude by providing summative remarks about how this study will add to the existing body of knowledge in regards to how the findings support and/or contradict what we currently know about the influence of school uniform policies, and particularly policies that have included a conflict resolution program, on reducing unwarranted student discipline behaviors (i.e., disobedient behaviors, truancy, and legal violations).

To further research in this important area, several recommendations will be provided to universities, professional organizations, and school districts about how to improve the social conditions in schools so that an environment is created that supports teaching and learning.

Summary of Findings

The original purpose of the study was to answer the following question: Do students who attend selected Mid-Western middle schools with a student uniform policy and a conflict resolution program have lower levels of student conduct violations than their corresponding counterparts that have a school uniform policy but no conflict resolution
program? The first research question examined the possible impact of a conflict resolution program on the disobedience behaviors (discipline referrals, bullying, expulsions, and vandalism) of middle school students in schools with a school uniform policy. A testing of this research question revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between schools that had a conflict resolution program and their corresponding counterpart. The second research question examined the possible impact of a conflict resolution program on the attendance behaviors (overall attendance rate and truancy) of middle school students in schools with a school uniform policy. There was no statistically significant difference found between the two categories. The third research question examined the possible impact of a conflict resolution program on the legal behaviors (physical assaults, weapons, larceny / theft, drug use, and drug possession) of middle school students in schools with a school uniform policy. The findings in this study did not reveal any evidence that schools that had a conflict resolution program had fewer violations in the areas of disobedient behaviors, attendance, and legal violations as compared to their corresponding counterpart.

Concluding Remarks

This study provides ample evidence to suggest that the implementation of a school uniform policy alone will not lead to a reduction in unwarranted student conduct. This study supports earlier conclusions that when differences are found between schools that adopt school uniform policies there are other factors that may contribute to this difference. When policy makers consider the adoption of school uniform policies, there is the need to consider the purpose for which the policy is being considered and that
appropriate measures are undertaken to ensure that the program is progressing in the
direction proposed, and that it is implemented consistently with acceptable standards.
Equally important is the need to monitor the program to see if the desired results are
attained. In the absence of these measures, it becomes impossible for policy makers to
determine whether new initiatives are effective, or whether they are “quick fixes.” In the
latter case, and as Senge (1999) suggests, “quick fixes” have the potential of misleading
and taking educational leaders further away from the fundamental solution.

Recommendations for Further Study

While the findings in this study did not provide conclusive evidence for the
support of conflict resolution programs as adding value to a school uniform policy, it
does support the need for further research in this area. Due to the wide use of school
uniform policies and practices in the United States, and the growing concern for
improving the culture and climate in our public schools, there is the need for further
research in this area to determine the relative impact of school uniform policies on
improving student conduct, attendance, and ultimately, student achievement in
elementary and secondary school settings. To this end, this investigator provides the
following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that this study be replicated. Future replication studies
   should consider increasing the sample size by making it more reflective of
   students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In addition to this,
   future replication efforts should involve students of different socio-economic
   background, and that it involve students that are more representative of
students who reside in urban and rural populations throughout the United States.

2. This study relied solely on data that were collected from the CEPI database. There was no information contained in this database related to how the conflict resolution programs were implemented in the various schools used in this study. Future studies should consider school staffing, training, staff buy-in, and program development in order to adequately determine whether new student conduct initiatives are being monitored and implemented as originally proposed.

3. It is further suggested that future research in this area must be based upon establishing a closer working-relationship between professional organizations, intermediate school districts, and universities. Future researchers may find that these institutions may be able to help allay the concerns school districts may have when it comes to the release of student data. These institutions may have established acceptable protocols for the systematic collection of student data that meet FERPA requirements.
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Date: September 28, 2009

To: Walter Burt, Principal Investigator  
    Edward Breitenbach, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for protocol 09-08-26

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project “The Influence of Conflict Resolution Programs on Student Conduct Violations in Middle Schools with a School Uniform Policy” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are using publicly available information from a Michigan state website and you are not gathering personal information about individuals. Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.
Appendix B

Data Collection Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. (    ) School Name</td>
<td>Name of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (    ) Type of School</td>
<td>1 is a school with no conflict resolution program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 is a school with a conflict resolution program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (    ) School Year</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006-2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (    ) Bullying Incidents</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. (    ) Discipline Referrals</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. (    ) Expulsions</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. (    ) Truancy</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. (    ) Yearly Attendance Rate</td>
<td>Actual Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. (    ) Physical Assaults</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. (   ) Illegal Possession</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. (   ) Vandalism</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. (   ) Weapons on School Property</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. (   ) Larceny / Theft</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. (   ) Illegal Drug Use</td>
<td>Actual Number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>