

## NO SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY: IS IT A YES OR NO?

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Uniforms have been an essential part of private schools for many years but have significant increase in public schools. Schools claim that wearing a uniform improves discipline and leads to academic advantages. However, these compulsory school policies and guidelines that decide what students can or cannot wear to school, have led to free speech violation lawsuits. Students claim such policies are unconstitutional, as they limit their freedom of expression. A school uniform policy defines what clothes must be worn to school.

In the Philippines, school uniforms are not mandatory while school identification cards (IDs) are free of charge to all public-school students nationwide. This is stipulated in the Department of Education (DepEd) Order 65 s.2010 or the "General Guidelines on the Opening of Classes, Including Collection of School Contributions, Enrollment, student Uniforms, and Release of MOOE". According to regulations, uniforms are not compulsory in public schools. Students with existing uniforms may continue to use them if desired to avoid additional costs for new clothes. Former DepEd Secretary Jesli Lapus said students' right to study and learn is paramount and should always be respected and promoted. However, he cautioned that the attire defined by these guidelines should not be grounds for discrimination, especially against poor students. He then clarified that students must wear clothing that respects the school as an institution of learning.

In line with Duterte's stance to help the Philippine public, she advocates implementing a policy of banning school uniforms. Duterte said the move would reduce the cost parents have to bear each grade to buy at least two sets of uniforms for each child,

excluding uniforms for physical education and scouting. She added that school shoes, rubber shoes, and leather shoes are a burden. Duterte does not need to create a new policy to abolish school uniforms. This policy is an existing policy of the Department of Education. Janvic Mateo of The Philippine Star reported that as early as 2008 Former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo ordered then-secretary Jesi Lapus to issue two department orders abolishing uniform requirements in all public schools. This arrangement also allows students to wear their favorite shoes to school.

For students of low socioeconomic status, school uniforms should not be a reason for discrimination. Promoting personal hygiene and proper school decorum is part of the process of teaching and learning in schools, so the attire and appearance of students should reflect what they have learned from this process.

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