

The Issue:

We applaud the Baltimore City Public Schools for recognizing the difficulty many of our families have in providing uniforms for their children, and adopting a policy that prohibits keeping a child from attending school because of the lack of a uniform. With that said, our concern is that parents, school leaders and staff are not aware of the clear district policy that students are not to be sent home because they do not have a school uniform.

Baltimore City Public School District's policy on school uniforms clearly states "*while uniforms are required, students cannot be excluded from school or from school activities (for example, field trips) for not wearing their uniform.*" However, during this first month of school members of the Baltimore Attendance Collaborative that collectively work in dozens of Baltimore City schools have witnessed or been contacted directly from families whose children have been sent home because they do not have a uniform. In addition, some schools have learned from families whose children have yet to attend school this year, but are enrolled have not sent their kids because they do not have a school uniform.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

The Baltimore Attendance Collaborative recommends the District send urgent and clear communication to Principals reminding them about the uniform policy and asking Principals to also share this information with their entire school staff and families. We also encourage the District to consider the following recommendations:

- Schools select uniforms that are easily accessible and found widely across the city
- Uniform vouchers should be accepted by any and every business supplying school uniforms to Baltimore City Public Schools
- A standard of \$20 or less is set per uniform, so they are more affordable for families
- Uniforms are comfortable and conducive to physical activity
- Schools are provided with a set of talking points regarding school uniforms and the policy
- Clear and explicit language about school uniforms is included within the District policy in the code of conduct and information about what parents can do if they can't afford uniforms is added
- In the Code of Conduct and Family Handbook and Directory where resources are listed include resources specifically for uniforms
- Explicit language is included that states if families are struggling to afford school uniforms they should be referred to a member of the school support team

We also encourage the District to share examples from schools that have found creative ways to provide uniforms for their students. Some of these examples include:

1. Uniform bank at the school where students can turn in gently used uniforms that they have either grown out of or no longer need.
2. Many of our schools have washer and dryers in the school where staff are able to wash uniforms for students.
3. Some schools without laundry facilities have partnered with a local laundromat or community-based organization/faith-based organization to help washing uniforms.
4. Students who do not show-up in uniform are required to wear a hoodie from a college or university, and then research one or two facts about that university as a consequence for being out of uniform.
5. Through community partnerships, some schools are able to provide uniform vouchers to families who cannot afford school uniforms.
6. Involve students in the design and selection of school uniforms

Finally, it is important to note that students who are homeless (including those who are doubled up with friends or family, staying in shelter or transitional housing, or otherwise without a fixed and adequate place to stay) have a legal right to receive uniform assistance. Specifically, schools and/or the District Office must arrange for such students to receive upon enrollment a sufficient number of uniforms to last the school week. We applaud the District for addressing this requirement by establishing uniform closets in a number of schools with significant homeless populations, and creating a process by which other schools can obtain uniform vouchers to distribute to their homeless students and parents. However, we understand that many homeless students continue not to receive uniform assistance for a variety of reasons: uniform closets are not always well-stocked, staff at schools without closets are not always aware of how to apply for uniform vouchers, vouchers are sometimes unavailable because of insufficient funds, and vouchers are not worth enough money to purchase enough uniforms. Therefore, we also recommend that the District Office allocate necessary funds and provide needed training to school-based staff to rectify these gaps, and ensure that all homeless students are able to come to school each day dressed in uniform.

The Baltimore Attendance Collaborative is a strong partner of the School District and is eager to support information dissemination regarding school uniforms. For example the summer Mayoral sponsored block parties would be a great venue to share this information with families. Please do not hesitate to let us know how we can support this effort.