

Running Head: Impact of School Uniforms on Graduation and Discipline Rates

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON
GRADUATION AND DISCIPLINE RATES IN A UNIFIED SCHOOL

By

JESSICA, VELDER

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The Educational Leadership Faculty

Northwest Missouri State University Missouri

Department of Educational Leadership

College of Education and Human Services

Maryville, MO 64468

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to analyze whether the implementation of school uniforms have an effect on discipline incidents and graduation rates. The research includes findings that answer the questions, “Do school uniforms have an impact on graduation rates?” and “Do school uniforms have an impact on school discipline incidents?” The research was conducted using data collected from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website on a school district in the Midwestern United States area. The findings were analyzed through Microsoft Excel and A Statistical Program (ASP) software utilizing t-test analysis. Findings indicate that there is no difference in graduation rates prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms and that there is no difference in discipline incidents prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms. Further data analysis of upcoming years and other impact areas is advised for the school district. The school district may also want to look at data from other districts that have implemented school uniforms at the same time of consolidating two schools.

INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues, and Concerns

Beginning in 2009, the HMSD started to consider consolidating the two high schools in the district to one to ease the financial tension of the district. The district had been experiencing a drop in enrollment over the past ten years and could face a loss of local and federal funds with the enrollment loss. To compensate this loss and to ease the districts fiscal troubles and to better educate the students in the board of education voted during the January meeting in 2010 to consolidate the two high schools to one. With a 4-3 vote in February 2010 the board decided which school would be kept as the one high school and what middle schools would be consolidated. The district believes a few benefits that could arise from the consolidation are that it will “provide exciting, challenging, and stimulating courses”, all students will have the same course offerings, after school activities will be stronger, and it will help the district financially (www.hickmanmills.org). School uniforms are also being used to create a sense of unity between the two high schools. This policy is going to be investigated and analyzed in this study to show if it has had an effect on the graduation rates and discipline incidents. Both of these areas have been a reason for concern in the district for many years prior to the consolidation.

Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation is whether uniforms have an effect on discipline incidents and graduation rates.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

To aid the consolidation of the high schools the district adopted a school uniform policy for the high school students. This policy is outlined in detail with the aid of pictures to clarify in

the HMSD handbook. By looking at the data reported to DESE on graduation rates and discipline incidents from previous years in comparison to the current year, officials will be able to determine if there is an improvement in those areas since adopting the school uniforms. School officials will be able to look at whether the uniforms are a positive or negative impact on those selected areas for the study for future policy decisions. Other school officials will also be able to use the data to determine if any such policy will help improve those selected areas at their districts/school buildings.

Conceptual Underpinning

As early as 2009 the HMSD school board considered consolidating the two high schools in their district. The main reasons for the consolidation were financial and academic success (www.hickmanmills.org). In January 2010 the decision was made by the school board to consolidate the two schools into one high school for the following year. The middle schools and elementary schools were also reconsolidated. Along with this decision to help with the transition the school district adopted a uniform standard for the new consolidated school district. The district looked to former uniform policies used in the district and at other schools around the nation to determine what policy was to be used. The policy was then posted on the website during the summer before school was to begin (www.hickmanmills.org).

In theory, adopting school uniforms will raise graduation rates and lower discipline incidents because students will be unified into one school, will be less distracted by dress, and will feel safer in the school building. The school uniforms will help students focus on their studies and not on what those around them are wearing. The students will not have to spend as much time worrying about what they look like in the mirror and more time worrying about their schoolwork. Faculty and staff will have an easier time identifying intruders or students who

should not be in the building because of the school uniforms. Anyone wishing to cause troubles at the school will be identified easier since everyone will be wearing the same thing. Students will have a safer school environment in which to attend school. There will not be as big a need for students to feel that they must defend themselves from intruders or other students, because anything out of the ordinary will be noticed sooner with school uniforms in place. With the implementation of school uniforms students will feel safer, with no need to act out, less distractions from dress and less competition with dress, and more time to focus on their studies.

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of evidence to show whether there is a relationship between school uniforms and graduation rates and discipline incidents. School uniforms have been implemented to unify schools that have merged, schools that want less discipline issues on dress code policies, and the affect the uniforms have on students. Students have fewer distractions to which they can focus more in the classroom reports many schools that utilize some form of uniform policy. School uniforms can also impact school and student safety. Uniforms in schools have made it more possible for staff and administration to identify intruders in the building or other students that should be in the building.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to ascertain if a relationship exists between school uniforms and graduation rates and discipline incidents at the high school level. The information gained will help administrators know if school uniforms will have a direct benefit on students and school environment in the future.

Research Questions

RQ: Is there a difference in graduation rates prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms?

RQ: Is there a difference in discipline incidents prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms?

Null Hypotheses

Ho: There is no difference in graduation rates prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms.

Ho: There is no difference in discipline incidents prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

The result of this study will inform school officials and administrators about the relationship between school uniforms and graduation rates and discipline reports during the first year of a consolidated school. It will help inform those officials whom are considering implementing a school uniform policy.

Definition of Terms

DESE: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

ACLU: American Civil Liberties Union

NSBA: National School Board Association

NELS:88: National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988

Summary

HMSD is a Midwestern urban school district with one consolidated high school. The schools uniform policy is in place to help aid the transition of students and staff into the new

consolidated school. The uniform policy varies slightly from the lower levels to the high school level. This research investigates the use of uniform policies in relation to discipline and graduation rates at the high school level. The research also looks at the previous relation in regards to discipline and graduation rates before the consolidation and implementation of school uniforms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

School uniforms have not been in the forefront of educational debate until recent decades. The only issues before the 1960's were that of specific dress codes violations which were dealt with internally and individually. Only private schools, mainly Catholic or preparatory schools had any type of formal uniform policy. In public schools, students were expected to dress in accordance with social mandates in place at the time. This continued in the United States until around the 1960's when high school students around the nation began to take notice of the happening in the world around them and decided to take a stand for what they believed was right. The 1960's saw the first of many court cases dealing with school dress codes and the legality of those dress codes. In 1968 a group of students wore black armbands in protest of the conflict in Vietnam. The students were expelled from school because the school district specifically banned the armbands. The resulting court case was *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*. The court's decision was made in favor of the students, stating the students were not interfering with the operations of the school and students. Freedom of expression was the main reason the court favored Tinker in this case (393 U.S. 503 (1969)).

Since that landmark court case, schools have been dealing with issues of dress code which has brought uniforms to the forefront of the debate. Public schools did not try to implement full school uniforms until the late 1980's and early 1990's. Schools saw the way uniforms were used in private schools, mainly Catholic schools, and the resulting academic achievements and lack of behavior problems. The way students had less time to focus on appearance and more time to focus on studies was what public schools saw (Hamilton 2008).

There were many issues coming up in relation to dress codes. Gang activity and the safety of all students were becoming a national discussion and resulted in schools coming up with ways to stop the problems in those two areas. Academic achievement, economic status, behavior problems, and graduation rates were also problem areas being discussed throughout the nation. Schools that had uniforms did not seem to have these same problems as evident as most public schools did (Cruz 2001).

Then in 1996 President Bill Clinton spoke about school uniforms in his State of the Union speech. “If it means that teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms,” said President Clinton (Brunsmas 2006, p. 151). This comment from the nation’s president sent waves through the uniform debate in the country. The Manual on School Uniforms was even written and the Department of Education distributed to all the school districts in the country (Wilkins 1999).

The view that schools were not safe because of gang activity was supported by a court case in 1987. In *Olesen v. Board of Education of School District No. 228* the court ruled in the favor of the school district saying that wearing gang related symbols or colors could be prohibited by school officials (Cruz 2001). Safety from gang related activities was seen as a major problem during this time period for schools in many areas around the country. Again in 1995 the case of *Biven by and through Green v. Albuquerque Public Schools* the court ruled in favor of the school for suspending a student after he wore sagging pants to school. This type of dress was ruled to be a form of gang-related activity/symbol which the school had the right to protect other students from (Cruz 2001).

Later in a 1998 case the issue of the constitutionality of school uniforms was discussed. The case of *Canady v. Bossier Parish School Board* established that a school has the right to implement a school uniform policy if it meets conditions the court laid out. The conditions were as follows, the first is that the board has the authority to make the decision of school uniforms, the second is that the uniforms “promotes a substantial interest of the board”, the third is that the uniforms are not adopted to hinder the expressions of the students, and the fourth is that “the policies incidental restrictions on students expression are not greater than necessary to promote the boards interest” (Konheim-Kalkstein 2006, p. 27). These are the conditions a school needs to consider when deciding on whether or not to adopt a uniform policy. This was the first time uniforms were considered in court to be constitutional legal or not. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has voiced its opposition to uniforms on multiple occasions. The ACLU urges schools to place an “opt-out” clause when adopting a uniform policy (Konheim-Kalkstein 2006). The opt-out clause would provide parents and students the choice in whether they will participate in the uniform policy or not. They argue that students have the constitutional right to express themselves in their dress. Many court cases opposing school uniforms have been supported by the ACLU.

During this time period there were court cases debating the issue of school uniforms but not much research on whether they had a positive influence in student behavior or academic achievement had been done on the topic. The leading researcher on school uniforms today is David L. Brunσμα, an assistant professor of the University of Missouri-Columbia. In his research of an urban elementary school in Florida, Brunσμα found that in the school with uniforms it had 50% less incidences of violence and crime (Brunσμα 2006). Brunσμα does caution those that want to use uniforms to review all data relating to the uniforms usefulness and target areas in a

specific school setting. Classroom size is one major factor that will also need to be taken into account when looking to implement school uniforms. Some schools that have used uniforms do not have to worry about classes being overly crowded which leads to behavior problems as well. Through a study looking at whether school uniforms had an effect on student attendance in two Texas middle schools, Eloise Hughes found that no correlation occurred (Brunsma 2006). In the same study though there was found a positive correlation between school uniforms and discipline referrals (Brunsma 2006).

The Long Beach Unified School District was the first district to have a mandatory school uniform policy. The school has been used as a standard in the uniform debate. Initially the uniform program was implemented to help alleviate fears from parents of gang activity in schools. Parents of the Long Beach students wanted a program to help in the growing gang problems the area was facing (Brunsma 2006). The uniform policy was implemented slowly starting with only one elementary school then working its way to more schools and higher levels over a period of time. Then the high schools were targeted. The district had to fight many battles with high school students over the uniform policy. In the end, the district made one high school a magnet school to make sure students wanted to be there for academic purposes. Only one other high school has adopted the uniform policy since then. If a student does not wish to participate in the uniform policy he/she has to attend a different high school (Brunsma 2006). The data taken after the program was started has shown that gang related activity and concern has gone down along with absenteeism, but no data has been conclusive on whether academic achievement was improved. Viktoria Stamison has also stated that the LBUSD has not taken into account the other programs, like peer mentoring and parent accountability, that were implemented at the same time as the uniform policy so the results are not conclusive (Brunsma 2006). Soon politicians were

choosing sides as well. The U.S. Conference of Mayors National Action Plan on School Violence and Kids supported the use of uniforms at the 1998 national summit (Wilkins 1999).

Brunsma and Rockquemore performed a study specifically to look at the affect school uniforms had on attendance, behavior, substance use, and academic achievement. The two researchers used the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) to test the comparisons mentioned previously. There were also three follow-up studies using the data from the study. At the end of the study Brunsma and Rockquemore found no “direct effect of uniforms on behavioral outcomes or academic achievement” (Brunsma and Rockquemore 1998, p. 9). After this data was presented, Ann Bodine contradicted the analysis’ Brunsma and Rockquemore had presented in their research. Bodine claims that by looking at the data from NELS:88 one can see the positive relationship between the uniforms and the test scores. Bodine believes the former researchers generalized the outcomes of the study sectors and thus misled the final data analysis (Bodine 2003).

More recently in 2000 a middle school in the Washoe County, Nevada area decided to pilot a uniform program to help with the growing crime rates in the area. The middle school had seventy percent participation at the beginning of the year, but then went down to only fifty percent by the end of the year. The middle school’s principal requested the district make the uniform policy mandatory for following years. The school did report that there is not enough research for conclusive data, but that many of the reasons they stated in the beginning for wanting uniforms have had a positive impact on the school environment (Daugherty 2002).

An article in the *Curriculum Review* in 1999 said that twenty-five percent of all students were wearing uniforms of some sort. In 2007 the case of *Lowry v. Watson Chapel School District* upheld that school uniforms were constitutional and it allowed uniforms to be mandatory. This

case determined that the school district is the one to decide if the dress is not in accordance with the rules of the school district policies (Darden 2008). The Philadelphia School Board voted in 2000 to adopt a uniform policy of some sort. Chicago has eighty percent of its schools with uniform policies and Miami has sixty percent of schools with a uniform policy as well. In New York, schools have the right to vote on whether to have uniforms or not, and in 1999 seventy percent of elementary schools voted to participate in a uniform policy. Kathleen Wade and Mary Stafford in a 2003 *Education and Urban Society* article claimed that in schools with uniforms teachers believed there was a more apparent lowering in gang activity than in schools without uniforms. Yet in Miami there are reports that fights doubled when some middle schools adopted a uniform policy (Kohheim-Kalkstein 2006).

There has been no state mandated uniform policy in the United States yet (Hamilton 2008). From 1997 to 2001 there was a nine percent increase in schools requiring school uniforms. Out of the public schools that have a uniform policy, about twenty-five percent are on a voluntary basis the other seventy-five percent being mandatory for students (Hamilton 2008). In survey performed by Classroom School Uniforms it was found that more middle school and high school students are wearing uniforms than in recent years. Respondents of the survey are active members of the National School Board Association (NSBA). The respondents stated that fifty-one percent of them have a school uniform policy in place. The majority of those schools are elementary schools. Out of those with a uniform policy eighty-one percent are a mandatory policy with only nineteen percent being voluntary. Seventy-one percent said they spent one to two years considering a uniform policy while twelve percent spent over three years considering the policy. Seventy-six percent said they thought the uniform policy helped prevent discipline problems within the school. Twenty percent thought the uniforms helped improve attendance and

sixty-nine percent did not see an improvement in attendance. Twenty percent said there was a decline in discipline referrals, twelve percent saw no change, and sixty percent were not sure of any change (Classroom School Uniform Survey 2011).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative statistical analysis of archived data served as the research design. The alpha level was set at 0.25 for all tests with this research. The independent variables are pre-uniform and post-uniforms. The dependent variables are graduation rates and discipline incidents. Test run will include a t-test.

Study Group Description

The HM School District is an accredited urban school district within the Kansas City area. In 2011, the HM school district has a total of 6,131 students. Of those students 77.6% are Black, 7.6% are Hispanic, and 12.9% are White. 82.0% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch in HM. The district has a 93.4% attendance rate with a 85.7% graduation rate. The student to classroom teacher ratio is 16:1. The average years of experience for professional staff are 10.3 with 38.7% of staff having advanced degrees. In 2011, 64.08% of graduates took the ACT. Those that took the ACT had an average composite score of 16.50. Out of the 2011 graduates in HM, 27.9% entered a four-year college/university, 33.3% entered a two-year college, and 3.1% entered a postsecondary institution (technical). There is a 48.1% placement rate for career-technical education students.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

For this research collected archived data was used from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website. The data was taken from the 2010 and 2011 school years. The data was on the previous two high schools in HM school district and then the one consolidated high school.

Statistical Analysis Methods

A Statistical Package (ASP) software was used to complete the statistical calculations in this study. A t-test was calculated.

FINDINGS

To determine the graduation rates for the two high schools before the uniform implementation and the one high school after the uniform implementation the data was collected from the DESE website.

Table 1

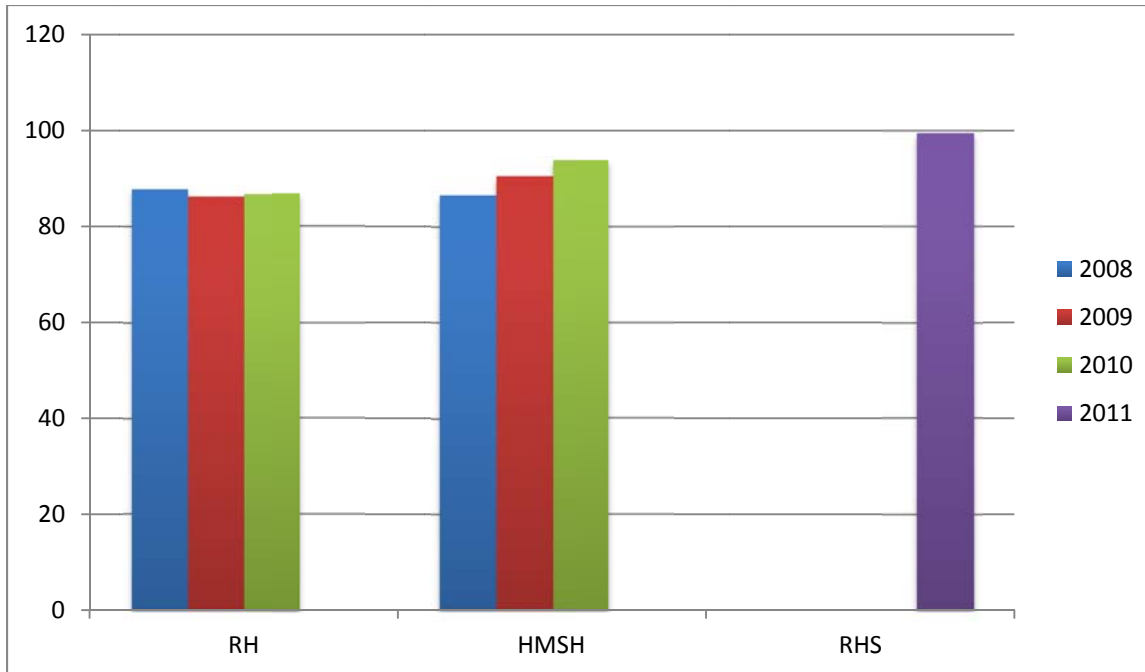
t-Test Analysis Results for Pre and Post Uniforms and Graduation Rates

Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Pre-Uniform	88.667				
Post-Uniform	99.500	10.833	-3.44637	-2	0.42265

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

Three high schools were included in this t-test to determine if uniforms impacted graduation rates in the HM School District. The data for pre-uniforms was from two separate high schools (RH and HMSH) within HMSD from 2008 to 2010. The post-uniform data was taken from the one consolidated school (RHS) in 2011. The RH graduation rates for 2008 to 2010 were 87.8%, 86.3%, and 86.8%. The HMSH graduation rates for 2008 to 2010 were 86.6%, 90.6%, and 93.9%. The RHS graduation rate for 2011 was 99.5%. The mean of the Pre-Uniform was 88.667%. The mean of the Post-Uniform was 99.500%. The Mean D, or difference between the two groups, was 10.833%. The t-test result was -3.44637 and the df result was -2. The null hypothesis states that there is no difference in graduation rates prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms. Since the p-value was 0.42265, and the Alpha level was set at 0.25, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is not a significant difference in pre-uniform and post-uniform graduation rates.

Table 2

Pre-Uniform implementation school graduation rates

In table 2 the graduation rates are shown for the years 2008 to 2010 for RH and HMSH along with the 2011 rate for RHS. The table shows RH had a decrease in graduation rates from 87.8% in 2008 to 86.3% in 2009 and an increase from 86.3% in 2009 to 86.8% in 2010. At HMSH the table shows an increase from 86.8% in 2008 to 90.6% in 2009 and from 90.6% in 2009 to 93.9% in 2010. The table shows a high graduation rate for RHS at 99.5% in 2011. This was after the two other high schools were consolidated and uniforms were implemented.

Table 3

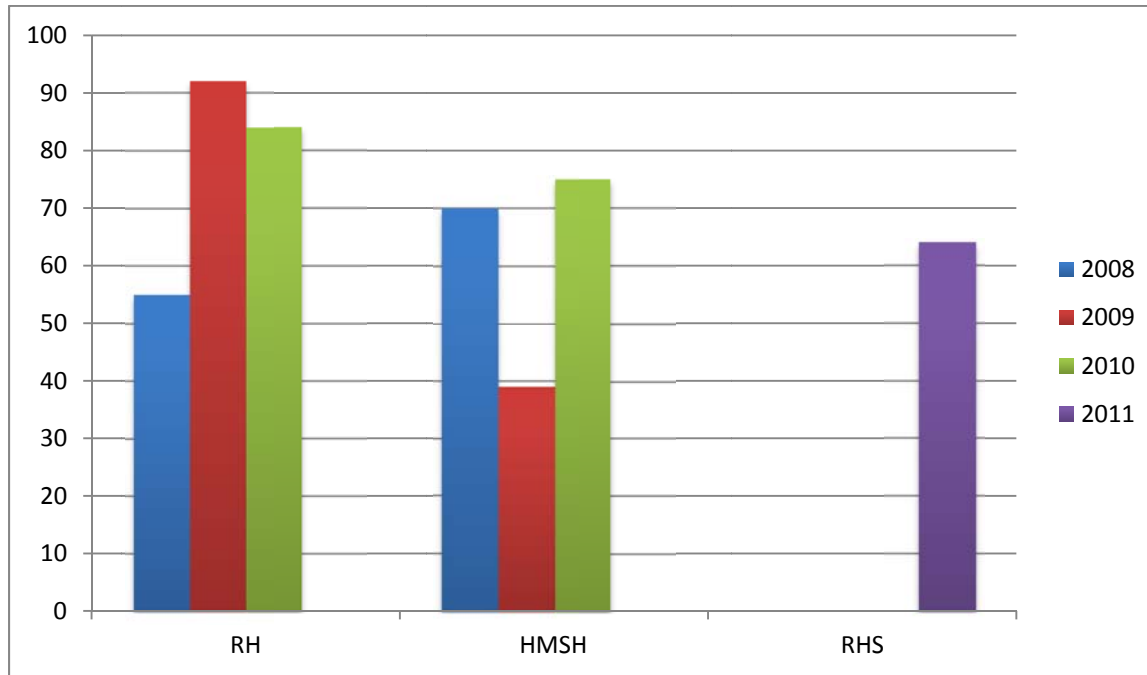
t-Test Analysis Results for Pre and Post Uniforms and Incident Reports

Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Pre-Uniform	70.667				
Post-Uniform	64.000	6.667	1.000	-2	0.42265

Note: Significant when $p < 0.25$

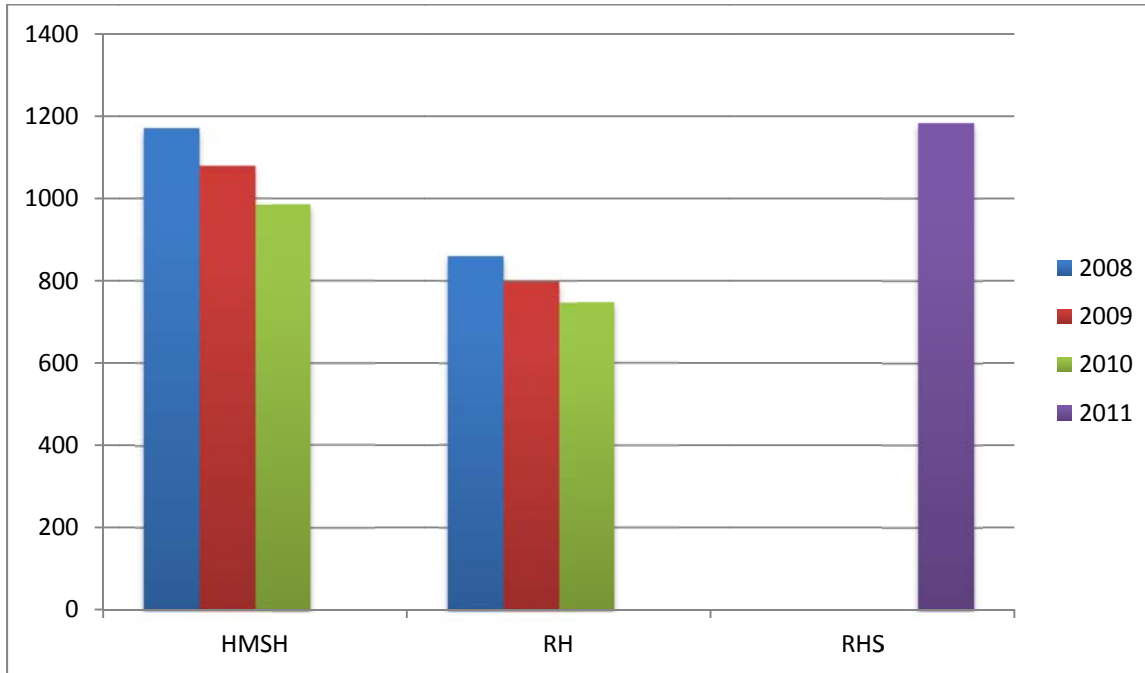
Three high schools were included in this t-test to determine if uniforms impacted building discipline incidents in the HM School District. The data for pre-uniforms was from two separate high schools (RH and HMSH) within HMSD from 2008 to 2010. The post-uniform data was taken from the one consolidated school (RHS) in 2011. The RH discipline incidents for 2008 to 2010 were 55, 92, 84. The HMSH discipline incidents for 2008 to 2010 were 70, 39, 75. The RHS discipline incident for 2011 was 64. The mean of the Pre-Uniform was 70.67%. The mean of the Post-Uniform was 64.00%. The Mean D, or difference between the two groups, was 6.667%. The t-test result was 1.000 and the df result was -2. The null hypothesis states that there is no difference in graduation rates prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms. Since the p-value was 0.42265, and the Alpha level was set at 0.25, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is not a significant difference in pre-uniform and post-uniform graduation rates.

Table 4

Pre-Uniform implementation school discipline incidents

In table 4 the number of discipline incidents from in 2008 to 2010 are shown for RH and HMSH. At RH there was an increase in discipline incidents from 55 in 2008 to 92 in 2009 and a decrease from 92 in 2009 to 84 in 2010. At HMSH there was a decrease in discipline incidents from 70 in 2008 to 39 in 2009 and an increase from 39 in 2009 to 75 in 2010. Table 4 shows the number of discipline incidents at RHS at 64 in 2011. The last number is after the two high schools were consolidated and uniforms were implemented.

Table 5

Pre-Uniform implementation enrollment totals

In table 4 the total enrollment numbers from in 2008 to 2010 are shown for RH and HMSH. At RH there was a decrease in enrollment from 1170 in 2008 to 1079 in 2009 and a decrease from 1079 in 2009 to 985 in 2010. At HMSH there was a decrease in total enrollment numbers from 860 in 2008 to 798 in 2009 and a decrease from 798 in 2009 to 747 in 2010. Table 4 shows the number of total enrollment at RHS at 1183 in 2011. The last number is after the two high schools were consolidated and uniforms were implemented.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first null hypothesis stated that there is no difference in graduation rates prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms. The second null hypothesis stated here is no difference in discipline incidents prior to the implementation of school uniforms and after implementation of school uniforms. The results of this study indicate that there is no difference in graduation rates and discipline incidents before and after the implementation of school uniforms. The number of graduation rates increased with the implementation of school uniforms in 2011 along with a higher enrollment with the two schools consolidated. Unconsolidated the two schools had lower enrollment and lower graduation rates. The number of discipline incidents went down in 2010 at RH and up in 2010 at HMH, which is the year before the implementation of uniforms and consolidation of schools. With the schools consolidated in 2011 the number of discipline incidents was lower than either schools in 2010.

The two high schools before the consolidation had lower numbers of students than when the two schools combined. The role of the enrollment rate may want to be looked at in future years. The enrollment had never been as high at RH or at HMSH as it was when they consolidated and implemented uniforms at Ruskin High School. It may also be ideal to look at school consolidation separate from school uniforms. Those two items may need to be compared to see if there is a correlation between them.

The school district may want to look at the use of uniforms in non-consolidated schools to see if it has an impact there. If the district looked at a school with no other program implementation as the same year as uniform implementation the data may show more precise conclusions. The district may also want to consider a study on the impacts that uniforms have

through the whole school system. Taking a look at students who have worn uniforms through elementary, middle and high school would be a better indicator as to the long-term effects that uniforms have on students. Another area to look at would be the discipline policies that the school put in place after the consolidation. If the policies were different before and after the consolidation then that would affect the students attitudes and decisions they make.

There are many other studies that could be done with the impact of uniforms in schools. Uniforms have been linked to behavior and graduation rates in this study, but this study did not look at test scores, school attitudes, or costs on schools. These areas would also be beneficial to districts considering implementing uniforms. The study did not ask the students and staff what they feel are the benefits of the uniforms, which could help with the attitudes it brings to the school.

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