

Uniform policy meets opposition

► Continued from B1

does the implementation date. Several elementary and middle schools are urging students to comply beginning this week — three months earlier than expected.

In July, new Superintendent Johnny Brown announced a January start date, but he has encouraged principals to go ahead sooner if parents are on board. High school students were not supposed to be subject to the policy until next fall, but some are aiming for later this school year.

At least seven speakers at Tuesday's forum took issue with the new dress code, receiving vigorous applause from the crowd of 300. Parents passed out anti-uniform stickers. A Laurel Ridge Elementary mom propped up a sign that read "No kids left behind? Only those in jeans, plaids, stripes, etc."

At Henderson and Stephenson middle schools on Tuesday, school officials estimated that 96 percent of the students came to school decked out in the new look. The change in dress code was never formally voted on by the school board, whose members said it was an administrative decision the new superintendent could make.

DeKalb parents who oppose the mandate have organized an online discussion group and are gearing up for legal action. They say the district should at least allow parents to opt out.

But as DeKalb debates its



RENEE HANNAN / Staff

Stephenson Middle School student Kortnie Favors (left), 13, says she doesn't like wearing a uniform to school. Lloyd Mix, 14, is less critical of the new style already being worn by many students at the DeKalb school.

uniform policy, other metro and national school systems have quietly allowed the trend to die.

Uniforms seemed to hit their stride nationally in the mid-1990s as schools grappled with new ways to increase safety. Experts predicted that dressing kids in the same outfits would weed out gang colors, discipline issues and attendance problems.

And when President Bill

Clinton sang the praises of one uniformed school system in his 1996 State of the Union address, a tidal wave of others rushed to suit their students up in polo shirts and dress pants.

"We saw a real trend, a blip on the radar," said June Million, spokeswoman for the National Association of Elementary School Principals in Alexandria, Va. "It became quite the rage."

Schools in metro Atlanta, too, jumped on the bandwagon. While no system implemented uniforms districtwide, many schools polled parents and approved optional uniform policies. Voluntary programs have been in place in Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties. A few DeKalb schools required uniforms.

In Gwinnett, a handful of schools adopted "spirit wear," which matched students' clothes to school colors. But after a year or two, the initiative "petered out," said spokeswoman Sloan Roach.

Cobb and Rockdale also have implemented uniforms at a few schools.

David Brunnsma, a University of Alabama sociology professor, says he's not surprised that uniforms have lost their luster. Brunnsma published a national 1998 study that looked at whether uniformed students were better behaved, used fewer drugs or were higher achieving.

"The data just wasn't there," he said.

DeKalb phases in school uniforms

Continued from B1

of the school board because it is an administrative rule and not a board policy.

The plan appeared to be well-received by the seven-member board at Monday's meeting. Nearly every board member spoke or asked a question, but none objected to any element of it.

"At this time all of the feedback I've gotten has been extremely positive," board member Frances Edwards said.

Board member Elizabeth Andrews said she thinks the guidelines will create a

school environment geared toward reminding students that learning is their job.

"It's high time," board member Bebe Joyner said.

With the tighter dress code, DeKalb will join a national trend among school systems. In 1994, the district in Long Beach, Calif., became the first to require uniforms for elementary and middle school students. Memphis will require its students to wear uniforms this fall. Philadelphia schools mandated them last year.

The new standards won't be much of a change for students who already wear

uniforms at some DeKalb schools, particularly among the year-round, theme, magnet and charter elementary campuses.

For example, last year, for the first time, year-round Meadowview Elementary students had to wear either navy blue pants with white shirts or khaki pants with navy blue shirts, and black or brown shoes.

"The kids looked good. It's just a special touch that uniforms bring to the building," Principal Zandra Sherwood said. "They're on task. The behavior's great. It just made a difference."

DeKalb
Schools

get strict
on dress

School board likes
phasing in uniforms

By JEN SANSBURY
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7/9/02

DeKalb County students should rethink their wardrobes before they begin back-to-school shopping — no baggy pants, no shorts, no tank tops.

New Superintendent Johnny Brown will enforce a stricter dress code in the 98,000-student system beginning in August as a forerunner to districtwide uniforms that would be required starting in January.

No other metro Atlanta school system has such rigid mandatory dress requirements, though many districts restrict revealing or offensive clothing. Some individual schools, including several in DeKalb, have adopted campus-level uniforms.

during a board meeting Monday night. The plan would require uniform-type clothing for elementary and middle school students beginning in January, and for high school students in fall 2005.

Schools will have some flexibility.

The specific styles of clothing, two shirt colors and two colors for pants and skirts will be chosen at the campus level by school councils made up of staff, parents and community members. Particular clothing brands will not be required.

DeKalb's current dress guidelines simply prohibit students from wearing items that represent gangs, advocate violence, promote drugs, alcohol and tobacco or have messages that are vulgar or sexual or make derogatory references to race, religion, sexual orientation or disabilities.

Beginning next month, those restrictions will grow. Bare midriffs, netted or see-through clothes, halter and tank tops, baggy pants, short-shorts and skirts with high slits will be prohibited.

"There's a proper way to dress for school and it does affect the way you learn," Brown said.

In Brown's former district in Birmingham, colors and styles were determined systemwide.

According to the school district's two attorneys, DeKalb's new dress code does not need the approval

Champion 7-18-24-02

Brown Requires DeKalb Students to Dress for Success

by Ayana Glaze

On the heels of being sworn in as new superintendent of the DeKalb County School System, **Dr. Johnny Brown** announced stricter dress-code policies for all students.

The new dress-code policy, "Dress for Success," will be enforced when school begins on August 12. By the beginning of the second semester, which begins in January, elementary and middle school students will be required to wear the newly selected colors while adhering to regulations of the updated dress code. High school students are encouraged to participate in the plan during the 2002-03 school year; however, Dress for Success will not be a requirement for high school students until the 2003-04 school year.

During the first semester, parents and school council members of each school will determine the colors students will wear. Styles of dress and colors will be identified for adoption based on dress code requirements. Principals will then present their schools' Dress for Success plan to the executive director for their area for approval. Principals will work with students and parents with unique circumstances such as religion and cultural sensitivity.

According to Brown, Dress for Success will assist in reducing disciplinary problems, improving student security, morale and scholastic performance. Brown added that the policy would also reduce the cost of school clothing and reduce the competition among students.

Uniform dress will be limited to two colors for shirts and two colors for pants and/or skirts. This plan will replace the current dress standards in the Student Code of Conduct.

Regulations for Dress and Appearance effective August 9, 2002: If a student's attire or appearance represents a danger to his or her health or attracts undue attention to the extent that it becomes a disruptive factor in the school, the principal or his or her designee will ask the student to make necessary changes. In the event the change does not take place in the time allowed, the student may be charged with refusal to follow instructions. (This is offense #12 in the Student Code of Conduct.)

The following guidelines are in the interest of instruction, health, safety and cleanliness:

- At any time when a student's appearance endangers the student's health or safety or that of others or otherwise interferes with the educational process and mission of the school, the school will exercise its right and responsibility to intervene and take corrective action.
- Students are expected to follow all school rules governing safety in specialized programs that may require the wearing of protective clothing, safety glasses or other similar requirements.
- In all matters relating to individual dress and grooming, students are required to exercise good judgment, exhibit responsible behavior and endeavor to reflect respect for themselves, their school and their community. Therefore, the following are not

allowed: baggy pants, bare midriffs, halter tops/tank tops, short shorts, "net"/see through garments and dresses, pants or skirts with high splits.



Johnny Brown

- The wearing of clothing, insignia, symbols or adornments worn or carried on or about a student which may promote the use of controlled substances, including but not limited to, drugs, alcohol or tobacco are unacceptable.

- The wearing of clothing which shows offensive and/or vulgar words, pictures, diagrams, drawings or includes words or phrases of a sexual nature, or words or phrases that are derogatory regarding a person's ethnic background, color, race, national origin, religious belief, sexual orientation or disability is unacceptable.

- Body tattoos and body piercing (other than earrings) are unacceptable because of disruptions to learning and because of health concerns.

- The wearing of clothing or accessories that represents any group, gang, organization or philosophy that advocates violence or disruption, or has a history of violence or disruption is unacceptable.

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Surgeon General Box 50 General
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Program will promote excellence in education

By JOHNNY BROWN

As the new superintendent of DeKalb County Schools, I want to see all of our children succeed. With that in mind, I am initiating a stricter dress code for our students called Dress for Success. This is a revision of the existing dress code and many of the rules are already in place.

There is a very good reason for instituting Dress for Success. I want to create a better order in our schools so that our children can reach a higher level of achievement. Many excellent schools, both here and abroad, require students to wear certain clothing because this creates a school climate that focuses on the work at hand, and the work at hand is excellence in education.

Dress for Success will begin the first day of school. During the first semester our students will follow the revised dress code: no baggy pants, no short shorts, no bare midriffs or see-through clothing.

Phase 2 begins on Jan. 7, the first day of the second semester, when students in our elementary and middle schools will begin wearing colors and styles selected by their school communities. High school students will begin wearing the colors and styles selected by their school communities in August 2003.

This is not a uniform. Dress for Success includes a selection of colors and styles of shirts/blouses and pants or skirts. Each school's community, including parents, students, the school council and parent groups, will decide the colors and styles for

that school.

I am seeking support from every parent for this dress code, and so far the response has been very positive. Nationwide, the strongest push for stricter dress codes has come from parents. Parents will find that they pay less for school clothes, and there won't be any more battles over suitable school wear. About 30 of our DeKalb elementary schools already have mandatory



Johnny Brown is DeKalb County school superintendent.

or voluntary uniform policies, so the concept is not a new one.

According to the U. S. Department of Education, potential benefits include:

- Decreased theft of designer clothing or expensive sneakers
- Instilling students with discipline
- Helping students

- and parents resist peer pressure
- Helping students concentrate on their schoolwork
- Helping school officials recognize outsiders who come to the school without permission.

Students whose religious beliefs may require special consideration will be accommodated — that is one reason we are asking each school to help define what is best for its community.

I want our students to Dress for Success, and I know that they will. We will support and counsel our students, but we expect that all our students will follow the dress code.

After just one school year, I think we will find students and parents will be enthusiastic about the program and the benefits it will bring to our children.

DEKALB SCHOOLS' DRESS CODE

College of Arts and Sciences General

No reason to suppress students' personalities

By NNEKA CHUKWUELUE

I have been a student in the DeKalb County school system since kindergarten. Now going into my junior year, I find it preposterous that as a senior I might be forced to wear a uniform.

I agree with a stricter dress codes. I don't think students should be able to wear pants hanging off their behinds or have their stomachs out.

But I disagree with new Superintendent Johnny Brown's plan to phase in uniforms, especially for high school students. We are old enough to respect the dress code and leave our homes appropriately dressed.

The thing I love about the DeKalb County school system is its diversity. As I go to school, my world is expanded because I get to meet different types of people who express who they are in many ways, including how they dress.

I express myself through my clothes. How I feel shines through in what I wear. I purchase school clothes based on who I am, what I like and what makes me comfortable.

I have a favorite pair of jeans that I wear when I want to feel at ease when taking a hard exam or standardized test. I wear a lot of pink because it's my favorite color and it puts me in a happy mood. When I'm feeling especially calm or quiet, I stick to black and shades of blue.

I keep my style a little alternative, on the edge, and funky because those are all words that

describe who I am. If that right to express myself is taken away, I'll be sad, because my style is a big part of who I am.

You go to school to learn more than the three R's. As I look at the past 11 years and think about the lessons I've learned, many never came from a textbook. At school, I learn about the world and how to interact with different people and respect them for who they are.



Nneka Chukwuelue attends Martin Luther King Jr. High School.

About two years ago, I asked a school friend why she always wore a lot of clothing and white head wraps even when it was hot. She explained to me that she was a Muslim and in her culture women were supposed to stay covered, even when hot. Talking to her and seeing her dress informed me a lot more than reading about the Muslim culture in a book.

If everyone looked alike, the richness and the beauty of this diverse world would be stripped. Instead of school, I see a jail-like institution where who I am no longer matters and how I feel is no longer important. I want to go to school and be treated like a student and human being.

I understand Brown's position that uniforms will bring unity and help students concentrate more on academic achievement. But DeKalb school officials need to focus on the quality of education, not what the students are wearing. Many of the schools, especially on the Southside, are providing substandard education. That's the tragedy.

No policy about clothing will change that.

DRESS CODES

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Back-to-school fashions face limitations

By JEN SANSEBURY
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DeKalb County students facing the prospect of wearing uniforms to school say some of their classmates definitely need stricter dress guidelines.

But they don't really cotton to the idea of being told exactly what to wear.

"I've seen some girls with some see-throughs, and that's pretty much taking it to the limit," said Jamal Ward, a rising sophomore at Stone Mountain High School. "I like street clothes. I never have worn a uniform, and I don't want to."

New Superintendent Johnny Brown wants to crack down on inappropriate attire, build a sense of school team spirit and create a more disciplined environment where students are easy to recognize and more focused on their work.

The first step in Brown's plan is to immediately enforce tougher dress code guidelines that will prohibit baggy pants and

revealing clothes.

During the fall semester, school-level officials will meet with employees, parents and community members to determine more specific rules for Brown's "Dress for Success" uniform program. Each school will designate two colors for pants and two colors for shirts.

Students will be encouraged to start wearing them immediately, but they won't be required for elementary and middle school students until January and for high school students until August 2003.

"We really want to encourage them to start the first day of school because it's hard to do it once school has begun," said Barbara Dover, who oversees schools in south and east DeKalb. "The word is really getting out. People are talking about it."

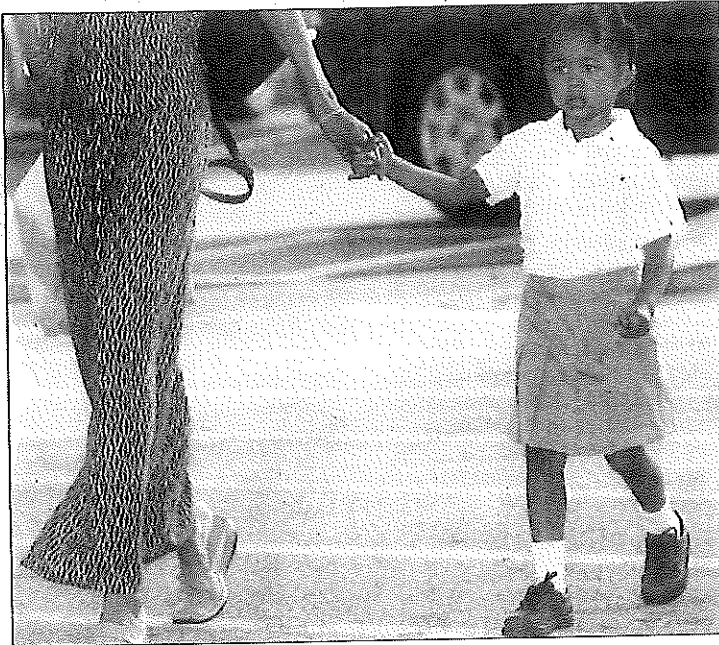
Brown said he will encourage employees to dress professionally but is not asking them to wear a

> Please see UNIFORMS, J4



RENÉE HANNANS / Staff
Chandler Wright, 7, and her brother Jamele Wright, 5, wear uniforms on the first day of classes Monday at year-round Meadowview Elementary School.

7-18-02



RENÉ HANNANS / Staff

Malika Beason, 4, walks toward her first day as a pre-k student at Meadowview Elementary School on Monday.



LUIS SANCHEZ SATURNO / Staff

Camile Hart (left) and Margaret Sale, freshmen at DeKalb School of the Arts, predict complaints.

Uniforms

► Continued from J1

uniform at this point.

The DeKalb student uniform plan actually will be more flexible than the uniform policy in Birmingham, where Brown previously was superintendent. There, the colors were set districtwide. The policy had begun before he arrived there.

"It contributed to a calm environment and fewer distractions than you might have otherwise," Brown said.

He said he also believes families will ultimately spend less money on clothes. Schools may be able to buy in bulk from vendors.

"It'll probably make it easier for my mom . . . not having to go out and buy so much stuff," said Connor Ball, a rising freshman at Druid Hills High School. "I wouldn't want to wear certain shoes, and I would hope they give us the option of wearing shorts or long pants."

Avery and Alex Cousins aren't wild about the uniforms they already wear at Nancy Creek Elementary: khaki or blue pants with red, white or blue shirts. But it's only fair that everyone else in the school system should wear them, too, Avery said.

get mixed response

DEKALB DRESS CODE

Beginning Aug. 12, students should leave these things in the closet:

- Baggy pants
- Shirts that expose bare midriffs
- Halter tops
- Tank tops
- Short shorts
- Net or see-through garments
- Dresses, pants or skirts with high splits

DRESS FOR SUCCESS UNIFORMS

Beginning in January for elementary and middle schools and next fall for high schools, students will be limited to:

- Two colors of shirts;
- Two colors of pants or skirts.

The specific colors and styles will be picked at the campus level this fall, and students will be encouraged to start wearing them voluntarily.

Their mother, Cheryl Cousins, thinks uniforms are great because they take the focus off brand-name merchandise.

"It takes a lot of guesswork out of dressing them for us, and it eliminates a lot of the peer pressure children put on each other," she said. "It happens in every school in every county — there are some children whose parents spend a lot of money on clothes, and there are some parents who can't afford it or choose not to."

Meadowview Elementary

School, a year-round school that started classes on Monday, first required a uniform last year. Principal Zandra Sherwood said it helped eliminate distractions among children and improved their behavior as well as their appearance.

The staff and PTA helped pay for extra uniforms to donate to families who couldn't afford to buy new clothes to meet the requirement: navy pants with white shirts or khaki pants with navy shirts.

"They can go to Wal-Mart, they can go anywhere they want," she said. "You don't have to go to Buckhead or Roswell to get your uniform."

About 30 DeKalb schools already have had uniform policies, but in many cases, they were voluntary or "strongly recommended."

Ninth-graders Sara Joss, Camile Hart and Margaret Sale said they think a uniform might be particularly hard to swallow at their school, DeKalb School of the Arts, where students study music, dance and theater.

"People are so individualistic," Sara said. "I think there would be a lot of complaints."

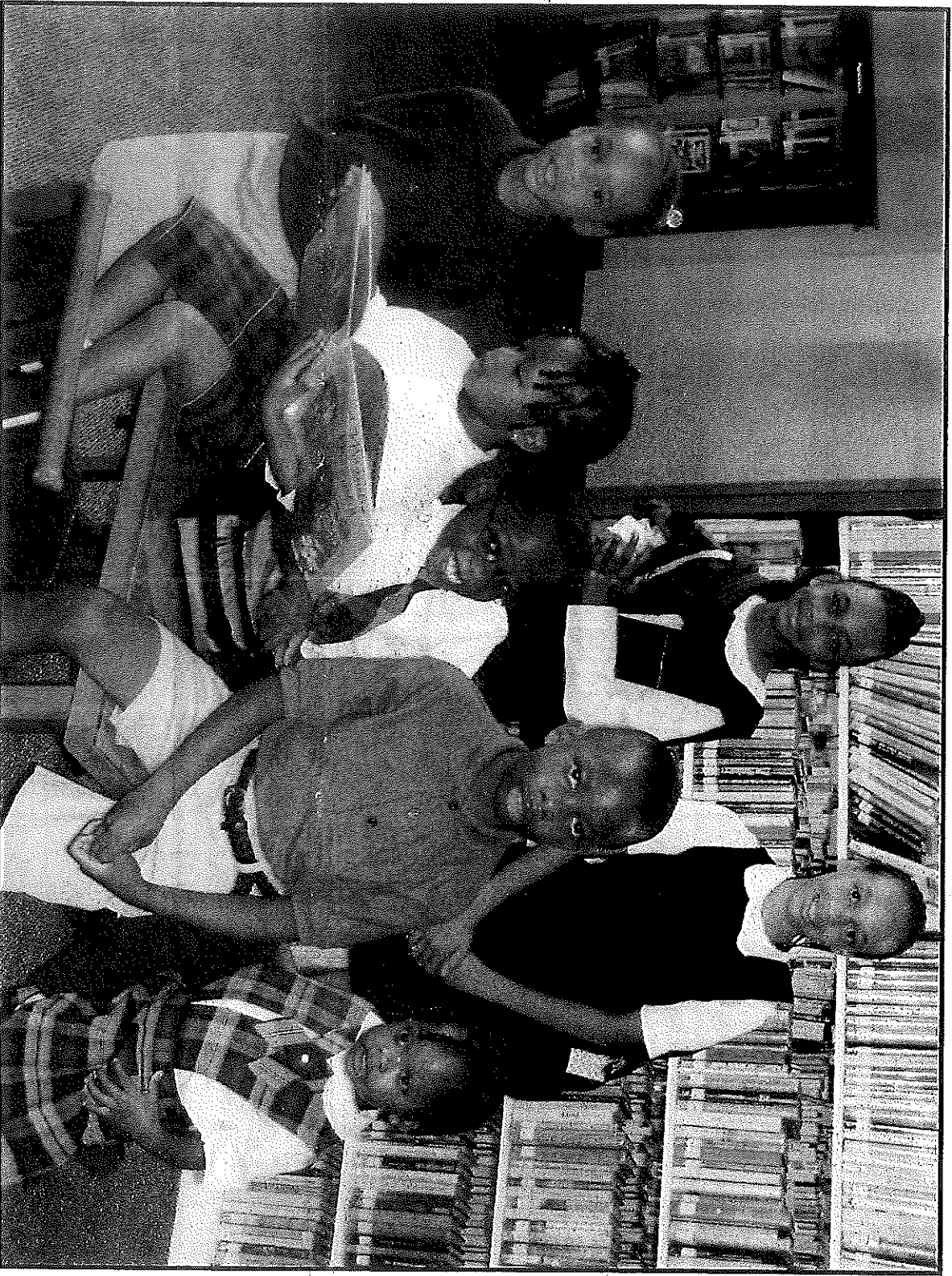
"I guess the colors [being limited] are OK, but not the style," Margaret said.

Several students said they don't think their peers will wear uniforms if there aren't penalties.

School officials don't plan to be heavy-handed, Dover said, but will promote the standardized dress as a way to help meet the system's other goals — especially student achievement.

"We don't want school uniforms to be the issue," she said. "Educating children is going to be our issue and our focus."

A uniform approach to excellence



Superintendent's call for dress code in all schools draws praise, ire

The biggest change in DeKalb schools this year, other than the coming of the new superintendent of course, is his "dress for success" policy.

On Aug. 12, Dr. Johnny Brown wants all students to be dressed for success.

By Jan. 7, the start of the second semester, he expects all elementary and middle school students to be wearing specific colors, selected by their school councils and parents.

Under the policy, each school is allowed to pick two colors each for tops and bottoms. Shirts are required to have collars, and be tucked inside the waist.

High school students, too, are encouraged to voluntarily fall in line. If they don't, the policy becomes mandatory for them in August 2003.

Though other school systems prohibit revealing and offensive clothing, no other

metro school system goes as far as DeKalb.

Brown, who took office July 1, says proper dress affects the way students learn and he is placing strong emphasis on students' achievement.

Spencer Ragsdale, a school system's spokesman, said principals feel that a dress code helps with discipline. He said the new policy has been well-received by most parents, though some have argued that it will stifle creativity.

"It sure simplifies shopping and it puts an end to the fashion parade at school," Ragsdale said.

Ragsdale stresses that the policy is a dress code, not a uniform policy. In a letter published on the school system's Web site, Brown writes that "initially this will be a Dress Code for students, who will be wearing the colors and styles selected by their school community by the start of the

second semester of the upcoming school year."

"The Braves and the Falcons wear uniforms," Ragsdale said. "Everybody looks alike. This is not the same thing."

Under the new policy, parents will be able to buy various types of professional clothing for their children, as long as they maintain the agreed-upon color schemes.

Thirty of DeKalb's 82 elementary schools already wear uniforms, Ragsdale said. The practice has gained momentum in recent years with the introduction of theme and charter schools. Year-round schools have also incorporated uniforms in their policies.

Uniform or not, the new dress code has banished some of the attire once common in many high schools.

Continued, page C3

Uniform looks in store for students

Subject Files - Box 80 General Info
FJC 8/1/02

By JEN SANSBURY
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Before taking advantage of Georgia's sales tax holiday this weekend to buy back-to-school clothes, DeKalb County parents may want to check with their schools.

Schools already are picking colors for the uniforms DeKalb students will be encouraged to start wearing when classes begin August 12.

The standardized dress for elementary and middle school students won't officially be required until January, but district officials are encouraging voluntary compliance beginning with the first day of school. The requirement for high school students takes effect next August.

But a revised dress code goes into effect immediately that prohibits baggy pants and revealing clothing such as tank and halter tops, shirts that leave midriffs bare, short shorts, netted or see-through clothing and dresses, and pants or skirts with high slits.

Under new Superintendent Johnny Brown's "Dress for Success" uniform program, schools are to designate two colors for uniforms, which should have a collar or turtleneck, and two colors for pants, skirts, jumpers or walking-length shorts.

A recent memo added more detail to the initial July 1 announcement: Shirts may include a school logo, and shoes should primarily be black, brown, navy or white.

Brown has asked the schools to involve their councils, PTAs and other committees of students, parents, teachers and administrators in making the selections. They can also determine the specific styles of clothing.

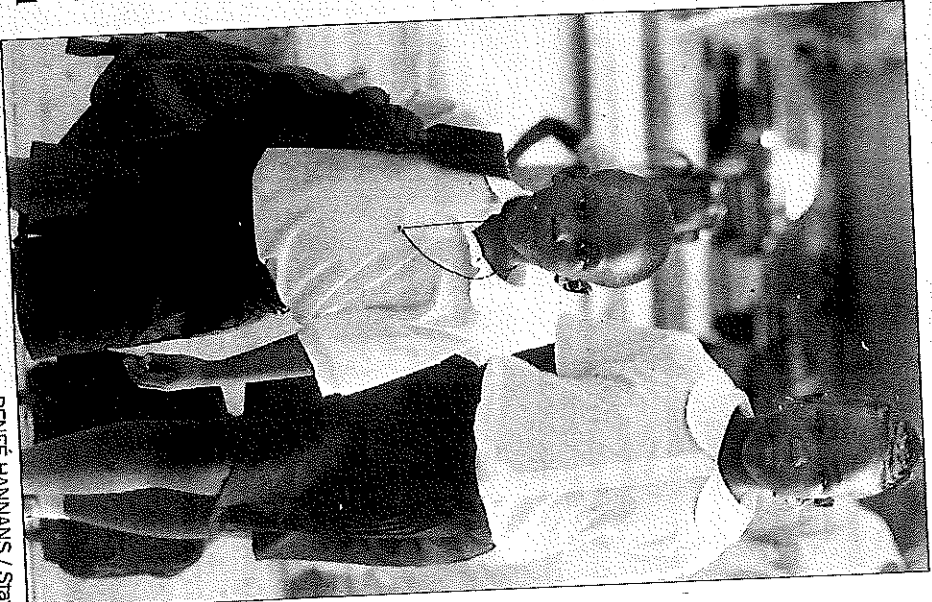
Some campuses have already held meetings to make their selections, or at least to begin the process. Others are likely to do so before school starts.

Brockett Elementary has a message on its roadside marquee directing parents to signs on the front door. The signs describe the school's uniform: white or red tops and navy or khaki bottoms.

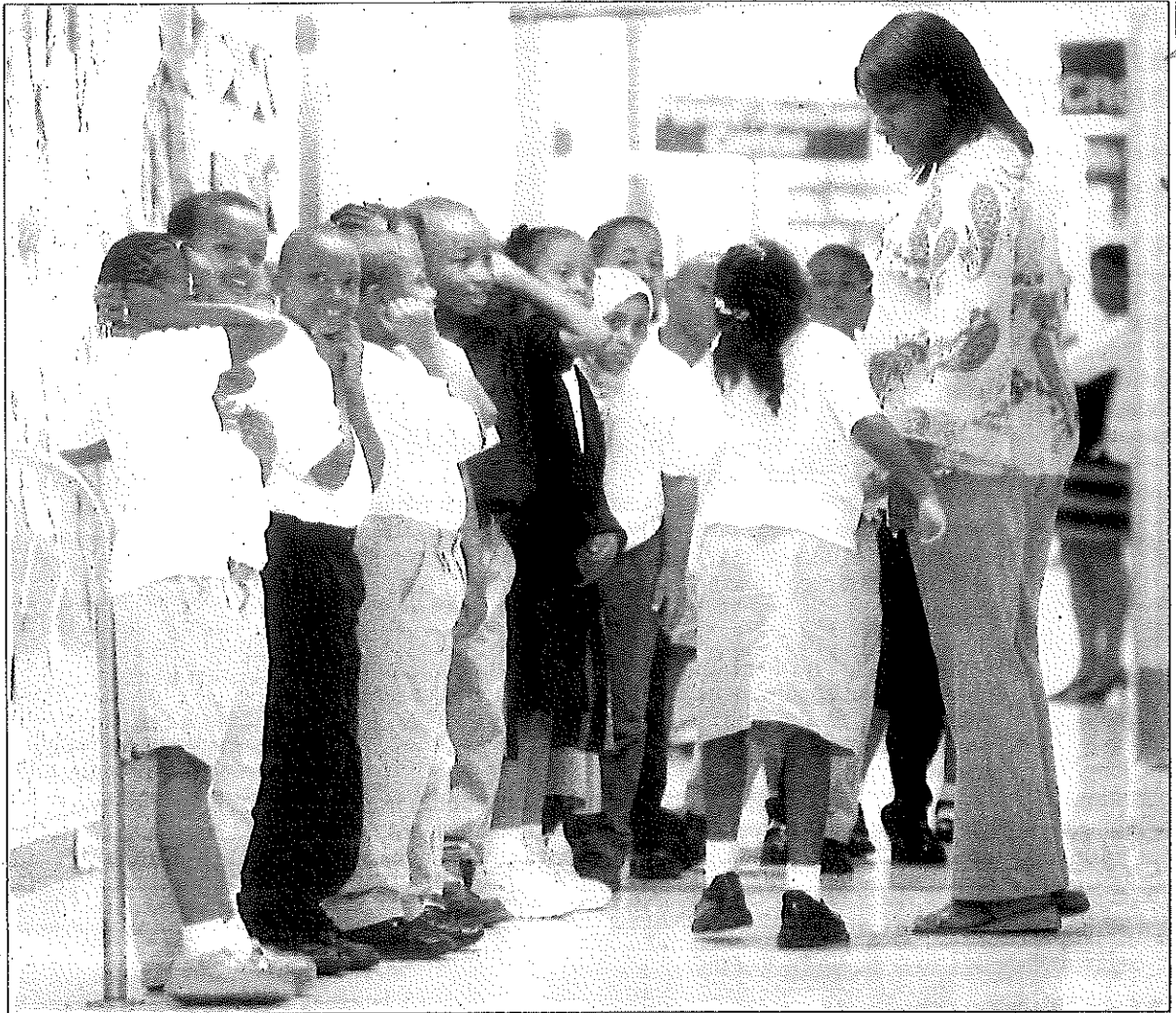
Vanderlyn Elementary's uniform, posted on the school's Web site, calls for yellow or blue shirts and khaki or navy pants. Any style is OK at Vanderlyn as long as clothes meet the general dress code.

About 30 campuses already had uniform guidelines last year, though many were voluntary.

The school system's Dress for Success standards and a press release can be seen at www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/newsroom.



RENÉE HANNANS / Staff
Kindergarten Christian Brown and his sister, fourth-grader Kayla Hagan, will attend Meadowview Elementary. Uniforms will be required in county elementaries starting in January.



JOHN SPINK / Staff

Second-graders in uniforms line up for Sherette Wright at DeKalb's Robert Shaw Elementary School Tuesday. Many students already are complying with the dress code, which becomes official in January.

No uniform solution

Some DeKalb parents oppose new dress code

By JEN SANBURY / jsansbury@ajc.com
and ANDREA JONES / ajones@ajc.com

Jasmine Brown, a seventh-grader at Chamblee Middle School, got the freedom to choose her own school clothes after spending seven years in a uniform at nearby Nancy Creek Elementary.

But her dad said Tuesday that his daughter won't be following DeKalb's countywide "Dress for Success" program until it's absolutely necessary. He's among a growing number of parents opposing the new plan for standardized clothing, many

of them angry they were left out of the decision-making process — even the ones who don't mind the concept.

"That's where my problem is . . . Come and ask us first," Donald Brown said outside a town hall meeting on improving DeKalb County's schools. "She will not wear one until January. Hopefully it will get overturned by then."

The new requirements limit students to certain colors for shirts, pants and skirts. The colors and styles vary by campus, as

► Please see **UNIFORM, B7**

On
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► Do you think the dress code being launched by DeKalb schools is a good idea or waste of time and effort? Let us know at www.ajc.com/metro/dekalb.

DeKalb to appoint panel on dress code

By JEN SANSBURY
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10/14/02

A panel of parents, students and staff will hash out details for implementing the new dress code for DeKalb County schools, Superintendent Johnny Brown announced Thursday.

Brown said a committee of both supporters and opponents of his "Dress for Success" plan will be appointed in the next few days to "search for common ground."

Brown's plan for uniform-type dress for students has drawn criticism from some parents who have been organizing and contemplating lawsuits to stop it.

The dress code was one of the chief complaints voiced by parents

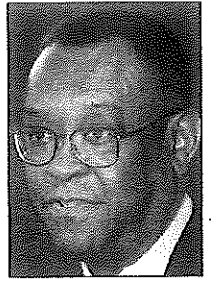
during a recent series of public forums on improving DeKalb's schools.

"We couldn't have known what they felt about it if we didn't have those kinds of discussions," Brown said Thursday. "We don't need to work it out in the courthouse and spend taxpayers' money on that."

The plan limits students to wearing certain colors and styles of clothing. Some schools are requiring it already, though it officially doesn't begin until January.

Supporters say the stricter dress standards help improve discipline and reduce distractions for students.

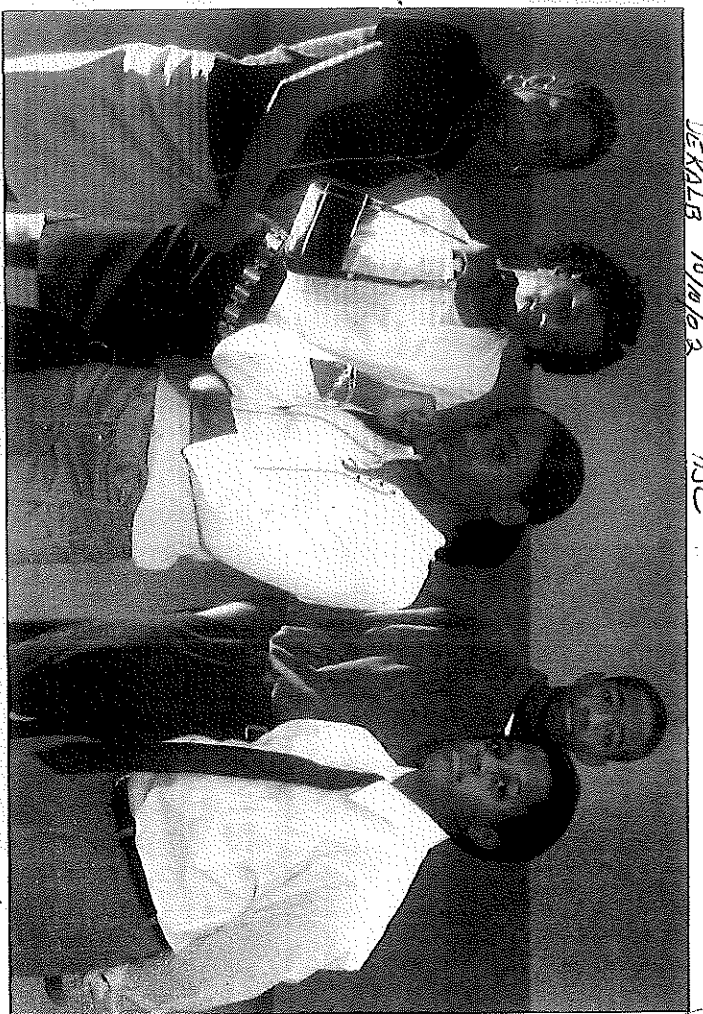
Atlanta political watchdog Harry L. Ross on Thursday said he will visit churches over the next month to rally support for the dress requirements.



"We don't need to work it out in the courthouse and spend taxpayers' money on that."

JOHNNY BROWN
Superintendent,
DeKalb County
schools

Dekalb 10/10/12 ASL



Stephenson Middle School students (from left) Kortnie Favors, Taylor Price, Imani Stargell, Vincent Smith and Lloyd Mix wear variations of the "Dress for Success" look. RENEÉ HANNANS / Staff

Students in the 'Dress for Success' look

Trying on dress code

Several schools implement policy on a voluntary basis

By JEN SANSURRY
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As about a dozen "dressed for success" Stephenson Middle School students gathered last week to talk about Dekalb County's controversial new dress code, two things were clear:

They had mixed feelings about the policy, and no two of them looked exactly alike.

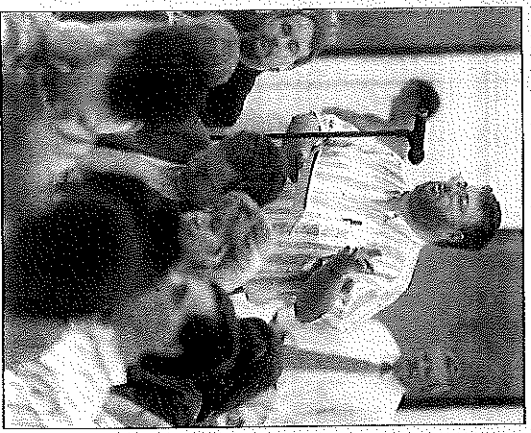
"It doesn't feel like we're wearing a uniform," said Joel Levin, sporting a black buttoned-up shirt. "When I looked around the gym [where students gather in the mornings], it looked like everybody was wearing different clothes."

Stephenson is one of several Dekalb public schools that last week implemented new standards called for under Superintendent Johnny Brown's "Dress for Success" plan.

Schools reported strong voluntary participation. "To me it's just clothes," said Joel, who previously attended schools in New York that had more rigid requirements.

Students and parents across the county say there was a subtle fear of punishment at work in some schools. Students were offered rewards, such as candy bars, for wearing the uniforms. Some schools also offered pizza or ice cream parties for 100 percent participation in a class. If some students don't follow the new guidelines, it could ruin the reward for the whole class.

Chamblee Middle School parent Donald Brown said "incentives" are unfair to students who want to wait until the official implementation dates. January for elementary and middle schools and next fall for high schools.



BRANT SANDERLIN / Staff

Students try on school

> Continued from 11

arning somebody, that's what I call it," he said.

Superintendent Brown said there should be no consequences imposed yet. "Certainly, never do. I think it's appropriate for a child to be embarrassed or feeling low on self-esteem because of an activity that has to do with school," he said.

Brown said the plan addresses concerns about order, discipline and inappropriate clothing that he heard last spring as he met with parents and community members.

"The whole idea was for kids not to be distracted by showing underwear or spaghetti straps or things of that nature," he said. "My expectation is that we ought to work hard to make the environment better for children."

Some students have circulated petitions, and a growing group of parents developed an Internet discussion group to oppose the mandate as a violation of constitutional freedoms. They want the district to allow parents to opt out.

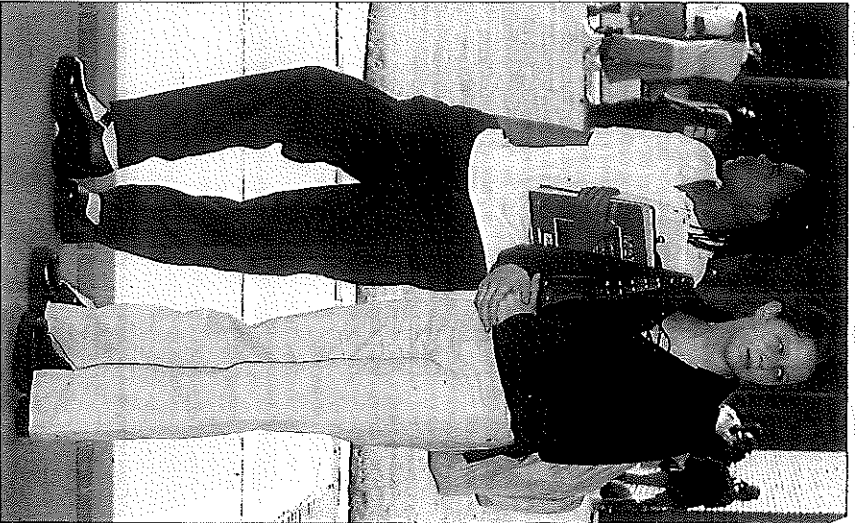
At a recent town hall meeting at Southwest Dekalb High, one mother said children shouldn't be dressed as "clones." A speaker who favored uniforms at a similar Lakeside High forum objected to imposing "cookie-cutter" answers at schools with different problems.

Brown last week announced the formation of a committee to find "common ground" between supporters and opponents of the dress code.

Stephenson parent Carey Hunter said existing rules against inappropriate clothing had not been enforced in county schools. He likes uniform-like dress standards.

"I think the kids look good like this. I really do," he said. But Hunter said many parents are more concerned with improving test scores, transportation and crowding problems.

"For most people, I think it's a nonissue, so they're not going to speak out one way or another," he said. Browns Mill Elementary



RENEE HANNANS / Staff
Seventh-grader Mercedes Pulling and eighth-grader Britany Sills wait for rides home from Stephenson Middle School. Both say they think school uniforms are OK.

objects, though. He said he thinks it's "contradictory to encourage our children to be free thinkers, leaders, and not give in to peer pressure, yet force them all to dress alike."

Brown came to Dekalb from the Birmingham city school system, which had adopted uniforms before he arrived. Mandatory public school uniforms have been fitting in some places but gaining steam in others. The New York Times reported recently that many schools are abandoning the idea, in part because it takes too much time and effort for teachers to police the policy.

However, Richmond County launched a mandatory uniform policy for elementary and middle school students in 1999, and Memphis schools instituted uniforms citywide this year. In those cases, the public had an opportunity to weigh in before school board members voted on the issue.

Brown announced Dekalb's change in July, and officials said it was an administrative decision he could make. Dress for Success initially called for two colors of pants and two colors of shirts. Some schools have added the suggested, districtwide colors, white and light blue, to two school-selected colors, providing a little more variety. District officials said they don't know how many schools already are phasing in the Stephenson Middle stu-

system's new dress code

flexibility than they realized. Their outfits ranged from casual to dressy, from simple to stylish.

Garrett Solomon wore a polo with the school's logo. Lloyd Mix put on a tie. Taylor Price had on a big silver belt to perk up her black skirt.

"I don't like it, but I'm going to try to be as creative as I can with my dressing," said Taylor, who prefers glittery T-shirts. "I'll do anything I can to jazz it up." Principal Phyllis Daniel said faculty members are encouraging students by wearing the standard colors themselves, and the changes already seem to have made a difference.

"The focus is not on what one is wearing, but on academics," she said. "It's not on who has on a Fubu or whatever."

► **ON THE WEB:** Read about Dress for Success on the DeKalb County school system's Web site: www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/

► Citizens Against Mandatory School Uniforms, primarily made up of DeKalb parents who oppose the new dress requirements, have set up an online discussion group: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/NoUniforms/

on ajc.com

► DeKalb School Superintendent Johnny Brown has launched a "Dress for Success" program. Students will be required to wear standardized clothing in specific colors. We want to know what you think about the program. Is it a good idea? Would you want your child to wear uniforms? Go to ajc.com/metro/dekalb/

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DEKALB SCHOOLS

Subject Files -
Box 20
General Info
✓

Dekalb Students May Opt Out of New Dress Code

11/7/02 Community Review

Dekalb School Superintendent Johnny Brown announced Nov. 1 that his Dress for Success plan will be implemented in elementary and middle schools in January 2003.

High schools will begin implementing the plan in August. Dress for Success calls for uniformity in color and style of clothing, but gives individual schools the option to choose specifics of dress. Brown also declared a tightening of the current dress code, decrying attire that reveals midriffs, shows underwear or displays offensive logos or words. In order to comply with a number of parents and students who oppose the new Dress for Success program, Brown will allow a waiver process for those families who

choose not to send their children to school in the dictated color and style. The waiver process is a two-part procedure that begins with a parent filling out an application for a waiver and progresses into a meeting between the family and school principal.

If denied, the family may appeal to the superintendent. If granted a waiver, the student must still adhere to the basic dress code in the school, which disallows such things as revealing and offensive clothing. Brown believes that his program will improve education in Dekalb. "This is about encouraging students to be successful in school," he said.

Also on Nov. 1, Brown discussed his High Hopes for High School Seniors

plan. The High Hopes plan will change the number and type of credits a high school student needs to graduate as well as the structure of the day. The program also gives students more opportunities to take elective courses. Twenty-eight credits will now be required for graduation. Students will now be required to complete four years of math, English, science and social studies. High Hopes mandates that all 7th graders take pre-algebra and 8th graders enroll in high school algebra. Brown also said that schools would be encouraged to offer more Advanced Placement courses to students. Brown is also looking to revamp the K-6 curricula to prepare the students for High Hopes.

DeKalb weaves waivers into student dress code

By JEN SANBURY
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11/2/02

On ajc.com

DeKalb County students will be able to request waivers, which will exempt them from uniform-like rules, Superintendent Johnny Brown said Friday.

The district's new dress standards limit students to wearing certain colors and styles of clothes. The Dress for Success plan officially takes effect in January for elementary and middle school students.

The new waiver form will ask parents to state the reasons they are asking for an

► What do you think of the compromise? Vote on ajc.com

exemption. It requires parents to state what alternate colors and styles their children will wear.

Parents must agree that children will otherwise follow the district's basic dress code and meet with their school's principal to discuss the waiver.

If the principal denies the waiver, parents may appeal to the superintendent.

► Please see **WAIVERS, G8**

Waivers ease rule on clothing

► Continued from G1

"We are not saying you don't have to follow the dress code," Brown said.

When Brown outlined the Dress for Success plan in July, he also tightened the restrictions on the district's formal dress code. He banned spaghetti straps, shirts that reveal midriffs, sagging pants and other revealing or offensive clothes.

Some parents objected to the Dress for Success plan's additional uniform-like limits.

Last month, Brown appointed an ad hoc committee of supporters and opponents of the plan to find a compromise. The group last week agreed that there should be a waiver.

The program has been the talk of parents, students and staff for months. Supporters have said it is the best way to keep students from wearing revealing and offensive clothing to school and to create an environment that is free of distractions. Critics said the district had gone too far in dictating what students could wear.

Complaints about the color and style restrictions escalated Oct. 1 after many schools began implementing it earlier than parents and students expected — including some high schools, which weren't supposed to begin until next fall.

Brown said he had not expected the outcry because he had heard from so many parents who wanted the change.

"I thought it would be simple to implement," Brown said, as scores of staff and community members attending Friday's press conference chuckled.

Sharon Riviere, a Stephenson-area parent who served on the ad hoc committee and opposed the uniforms, said she thinks many parents will be satisfied with the waiver option. But she remains a little leery because there will be no guidelines for denying the waivers.

"It gives them freedom ... [but] it still doesn't quite spell out everything," she said.

Peachtree Charter Middle School parent Sonny Jester had argued against a waiver because it might dilute the impact of the program. He said he thinks the waiver form is a good resolution to the debate.

"In mediation, if everybody leaves a little bit unhappy, it's a good compromise," said Jester.

Uniform waivers proposed

► Continued from B1

Allgood Elementary and Chamblee High mother Thelma Grier complained that even the summary parents were given of the first meeting last week didn't accurately reflect the discussion.

"I think it has become very clear that this is a train that is heading down the track no matter where anybody stands on it," Grier said.

The committee had 13 parents, five students, three

teachers and five principals. Five administrators listened or facilitated the discussion. Though the district has about 130 campuses, two of the principals are also serving on a committee that is looking at Brown's proposals for restructuring high schools. Three parents and two elementary principals represented theme and charter schools with uniforms.

Oak Grove Elementary Principal John Tippins said he would not have agreed to participate if he thought it was a "stacked deck."

DeKalb's uniform policy faces alteration

ASC

10-23-02

Success Club - Box 20 Journal Free

By JEN SANSBURY
jsansbury@ajc.com

A committee looking for common ground on the DeKalb County school system's controversial uniform policy agreed Tuesday to recommend students be allowed to opt out.

Getting exempted from the "Dress for Success" plan, which limits the colors and styles of clothes that students can wear, could be as complicated as submitting a written explanation and alternate plan and then meeting with a principal, which district officials proposed. Or it could be as simple as signing a form agreeing to uphold the district's regular dress code, which a parent pitched to the group.

"I think the devil is going to be in the details," said panelist Tom Fischgrund of Dunwoody, a member of a group called Citizens Against Mandatory School Uniforms.

Both sides expressed concerns they might be giving up too much. Proponents, including Southwest DeKalb High parent Jenice Brinkley, said they did not want the policy watered down.

"I hope that this waiver or opt-out does not allow [students] to dress below the standards," said Brinkley, an organizer of the new South DeKalb Parent Council.

Some opponents argued that the plan wasn't needed at all, just stricter enforcement of the student code of conduct.

Superintendent Johnny Brown said he will decide what to do once the recommendation officially lands on his desk — probably next week. He attended both of the committee's meetings.

"What a great lesson in democracy this has been," Brown said. He added that he had "been swayed to at least consider some sort of waiver process."

Parents who disagree with the policy questioned whether the group was tilted toward school district employees who wouldn't dare to speak against the plan and parents whose children attend schools that require uniforms.

► Please see UNIFORM, B7

Uniform debut seamless

Most comply with DeKalb dress code

1/8/03
By JEN SANBURY
jsansbury@ajc.com

As Idlewood Elementary School Principal Beth McCraw read aloud from the cafeteria stage Tuesday, she looked out over a sea of red and white sweaters, turtlenecks and polo and button-down shirts.

"We tried to give them lots of warning that this was coming," the principal said of the 700-student school.

Idlewood's new Dress for Success uniform pairs red or white shirts with navy blue, khaki or black pants, skirts or jumpers.

Thousands of DeKalb County students returned to classes Tuesday wearing uniforms in colors that are decided on a school-by-school basis.

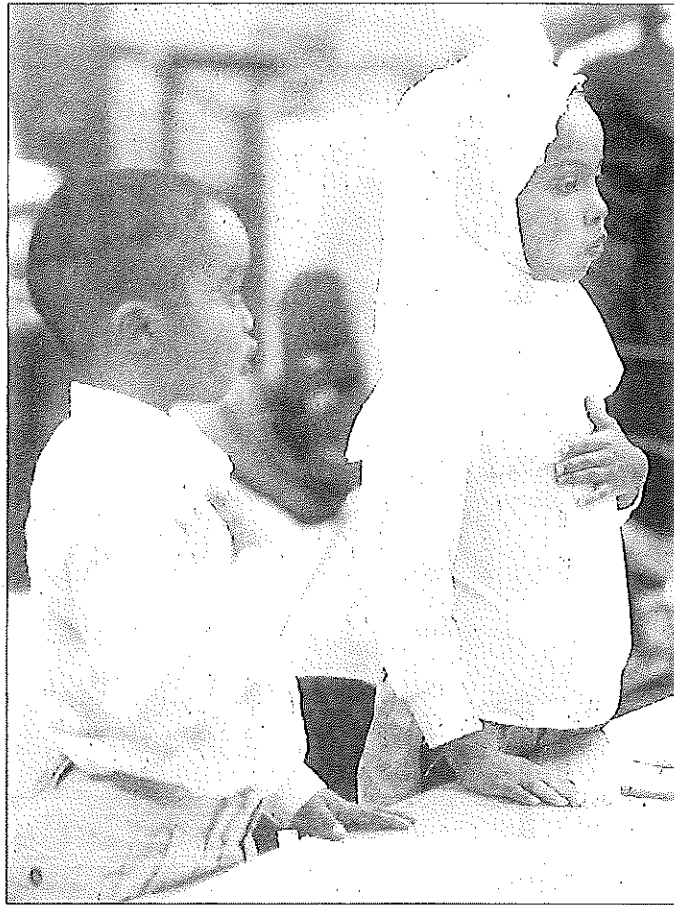
District spokesman Spencer Ragsdale said most elementary and middle schools had at least 90 percent compliance with the dress policy.

Students must wear the uniforms unless their parents obtain a waiver from a school principal. District officials said they expect to compile the number of waivers districtwide by the end of the week.

Idlewood third-grade teacher Cynthia Rhodes wore a khaki jumper and red shirt to support the students.

"I just thought they would get a big kick out of seeing me in uniform the first day back," she said.

Students in Rhodes' class said their main objection is



JOHN SPINK / Staff

Idlewood kindergartners Fuaad Ismail (left) and Zeynab Hassan Dress for Success Tuesday, as did most of DeKalb County's elementary and middle school students. Zeynab's headdress is not part of the uniform.

On ajc.com

► On ajc.com: Photo gallery and forum on the uniforms.

to tucking their shirts in. Otherwise, they generally like the uniforms.

"It kind of feels like you're a whole new person," said 9-year-old Dunia Moalim.

Ragsdale said a "positive reminder" was sent home to parents of children who wore regular clothes Tuesday. The reminder asked whether they need assistance complying with the dress policy.

Individual schools are

developing ways to help, such as clothes closets.

Kindergarten teacher Judith Lewis said one of her students cried Tuesday over not being dressed like the others, but most students showed up beaming with pride. "They walked in and said 'Let me show you my uniform!'" she said.

As Tanya Lewis dropped off her kindergartner, Na'imah, wearing a red peasant shirt, skirt and matching red tights, she said she doesn't mind the new policy as long as it's not rigidly enforced.

"I'd prefer that they'd be lenient because she's

already, at 6 years old, int expressing her individuality," she said. "She's like little 'Punky Brewster.'"

Superintendent John Brown proposed Dress for Success when he arrived last July. High school student must comply in August though some schools are phasing in the requirements.

"My sense of it is most people are ready for the change, and the school staffs and students and parents and community believe will be very cooperative," Brown said. "There will be some instances where consequences will be imposed but . . . to the extent we can handle those instances through counseling, we'll do that."

Parents may request waivers of the policy by obtaining a form from campus offices and meeting with the principal. They can appeal denials to Brown.

McCraw said no one had turned in a formal waiver request at her school, but several parents who said they couldn't afford the new clothes did inquire about waivers.

She and Assistant Principal Delores Brown have dug into their own pockets to buy some extra shirts and pants for students. She also hopes to get donations.

Roberta Cash, who has two children at Idlewood and two at Henderson Middle, took a cab to Idlewood Tuesday to ask about the waivers.

She said she doesn't like the policy because as a single parent she can't afford to buy new clothes for four children for one day, much less a week's worth.

"I have to live paycheck to paycheck," she said. "I have to buy their shoes two sizes too big. I do that with their clothes, too."



JOHN AMIS / Special

The dress code wasn't the only issue at the DeKalb school board meeting Monday. Viola Davis complained about the cleanliness of the schools: "With the amount of money being paid in taxes, these schools should be spick-and-span."

DeKalb again faces dress code fight

8/5/03 FJC

By MAE GENTRY
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 and JEN SANSBURY
 jsansbury@ajc.com

The DeKalb County Board of Education spent more than an hour Monday night debating whether Superintendent Johnny Brown's controversial "Dress for Success" program should be official policy.

Board member Simone Manning-Moon said references to the program, which requires students to wear colors and styles selected by their schools, appeared in the district's 2003-2004 Student Code of Conduct without board approval.

The board will have a special meeting Wednesday to discuss whether to take Dress for Success out of the code of conduct, which provides penalties such as short-term suspension for students who repeatedly violate the rules.

Brown proposed the uniformlike dress code when he arrived in DeKalb last year, saying it would eliminate distractions and promote learning. When some parents objected, the district decided to offer waivers as a compromise. Parents who got

"When we get into this much drama so close to the opening of school, that's not healthy for the district."

FRANCES EDWARDS
 DeKalb school board chairwoman

waivers approved last year must get them approved again this year.

Chris Patrick, a rising eighth-grader at Shamrock Middle School, said he objects to Dress for Success. "I don't like it," he said. "I don't like to be the same. Everybody I know doesn't like it."

His mother, Karrie Price, said she was unaware it was possible to get a waiver.

Too formal a policy?

Brown's initiative has been the subject of much debate among parents. Some are angry that officials appear to be making the program more restrictive.

Brown said the waiver and the process have not changed since last year. But some board members

believe Dress for Success needs to be revisited.

"I've got real issues with children being thrown out of school because they're not wearing the right color combinations," said board member Bebe Joyner.

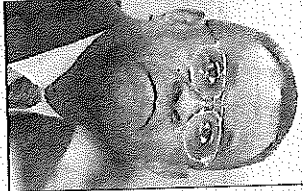
Manning-Moon proposed deleting from the code of conduct all references to Dress for Success and waivers because the board never took action and because of confusion about the waiver process. She said the code of conduct carries the weight of board policy.

But board member Zepora Roberts, a staunch Brown supporter, disagreed and questioned Manning-Moon's motives.

"This was brought to the board to destroy Dress for Success," Roberts said. "If you take that out of here, you've taken all of the teeth out of Dress for Success. I don't see what the problem is."

The dress code discussion followed a closed session where Brown provided an update on his job search, said board Chairwoman Frances Edwards.

"Dr. Brown has two years on his contract, and nothing has changed," said Edwards,



Superintendent Johnny Brown updated the board on his job search.

who said she could not provide more details on a personnel matter.

Brown's job search

Brown, who came to DeKalb a little over a year ago from Birmingham, is the sole finalist for superintendent in the North Forest Independent School District, an 11,000-student system in Houston. But the board there is split on whether he's the best candidate.

He was interviewed last week to head the Memphis school district but withdrew after board members asked about the Birmingham schools' finances under Brown and the fact that he has had three jobs in seven years, according to the Commercial Appeal newspaper.

Brown's job search has caused confusion in the district and prompted questions about the potential impact on the 97,000-student DeKalb school system.

"I just think we need to focus on the opening of school and not as much on whether he goes or stays," Edwards said. "When we get into this much drama so close to the opening of school, that's not healthy for the district."

Subject Files - Box 80, General File

Dress code goes into effect in DeKalb

Parents who object must obtain waiver

By MIKE MORRIS
mmorris@ajc.com

If DeKalb County elementary and middle school students got new school clothes for Christmas, they'll have to fit into the district's Dress for Success program or stay in the closet.

Unless their parents obtained an exemption from the dress code for their child.

Beginning Tuesday, students will be limited to wearing shirts in two school-selected colors and two districtwide colors. Acceptable colors and styles of pants, skirts and even shoes have also been determined on a campus-by-campus basis.

COMING TUESDAY

1/6/02

► DeKalb County school officials consider raising graduation requirements.

DeKalb school board member Terry Morris said the new program expects students to "come to school ready to go to work, not ready to go to the mall, or not ready to go on a date, or not ready to go to Six Flags.

"If IBM or Delta or Coca-Cola or UPS or any of our local big companies want to hire any of our students, they have told us to teach these children how to dress," Morris said. "We're expecting our kids to dress in a manner that would befit their job, which is to study and do well."

DeKalb School Superintendent Johnny Brown proposed Dress for Success to mixed reactions in July. Critics

said the district had gone too far in deciding what students could wear, while proponents hailed the plan as the best way to create a distraction-free learning environment.

Parents also objected to being left out of the decision-making process. The program was an administrative decision by Brown, not an official school board policy change, and did not require a board vote.

Waivers were proposed by a special task force formed to find a compromise to quiet the controversy.

Parents who object to the requirements have already begun opting out of the program.

Fernbank Elementary parent Stephanie Spiller, who served on the task force, said getting a waiver approved for her third-grade daughter

► Please see **NEW DRESS, B4**

New dress code goes into effect on Tuesday

➤ Continued from B1

was "relatively simple," and she's disappointed that the provision hasn't been more widely publicized by the schools.

"We just handed it in to the principal and she said 'That's fine,'" Spiller said. "I've talked to parents who didn't even know that was an option."

Waiver forms are available from campus offices. There are no restrictions on the reasons for requesting an exemption, but parents and students must agree to follow the district's regular dress code and put in writing what their objections are and what type of clothing children will wear instead.

High school students won't be required to comply with Dress for Success until next fall, but some campuses will be phasing in the requirements this spring.

— Staff writer Jen Sansbury contributed to this story.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS WEAR

Limits include:

- Two colors of shirts*
 - Two districtwide shirt colors (white and light blue)
 - Two colors of pants or skirts*
 - Styles (such as collars and logos)*
 - Shoe colors and styles*
- * Selected by school

Waivers:

To opt out of Dress for Success:

- Obtain waiver form from school office
- State reasons for objection
- Agree to follow the basic dress code
- State alternate colors and styles preferred
- Meet with principal

DeKalb: Uniform rule fades

► Continued from B1

2003-2004 Code of Student Conduct without board approval.

After discussing the matter for more than an hour and a half Monday, the board decided to take it up again Wednesday.

Manning-Moon had suggested deleting Dress for Success from the student handbook, but she withdrew her motion Wednesday. And the board asked the superintendent to review the code of conduct and make recommendations, which are to be presented by the October board meeting.

Brown called the compromise "a win-win for everybody."

Lee-Ann Williams, a member of the group Citizens Against Mandatory School Uniforms, had mixed feelings about the district's action Wednesday.

"On the one hand, if the principals are actually being told to accept the waivers, then I think that's a good thing," she said. "But I'm concerned that there was not a definite action by the board to mandate that and to make the opt-out part of the policy as stated by the superintendent tonight."

The move is a complete about-face for the district, which earlier had required parents to meet with the principal, explain their reason for seeking a waiver, specify what colors and styles their children would wear, and get the principal to OK their request.

Chairwoman Frances Edwards said it's time to focus more on instruction and less on dress. She endorsed Dress for Success as "a tool to help children become the best they can be."

"Our children will have clear guidelines of expectations," she said. "But the people who select what children wear are not the school system but the parents."

Dress for Success, which requires students to wear colors and styles selected by their schools, has stirred controversy since Brown proposed it last year, saying it would eliminate distractions and promote learning. When some parents objected, the district decided to offer waivers as a compromise.

Elementary- and middle-schoolers began wearing the uniformlike clothing in early January. High school students must participate when school opens next week, unless their parents choose to opt out.

Dress for Success became an issue again Monday, when board member Simone Manning-Moon noted that references to the program had appeared in the district's

► Please see DEKALB, B6



Superintendent Johnny Brown said parents no longer need to justify their stand against uniforms.

DeKalb schools fold on clothes

Brown leaves uniform policy up to parents

By MAE GENTRY
mgentry@ajc.com

8/17/03

DeKalb County School Superintendent Johnny Brown said Wednesday that parents — not principals — will decide whether their children must abide by his controversial uniform policy.

At a continuation of Monday's school board work session, Brown read a memo addressed to all principals informing them that parents who don't want to participate in "Dress for Success" simply need to put their wishes in writing, sign the letter and give it to the principal. Students who opt out still must abide by the district's existing dress standard.