

to how we can improve education through higher standards and higher expectations, get higher performance. It is obvious that unless the school is a safe, disciplined, drug-free learning environment, it's impossible for learning to occur.

And what we have tried to do at the national level is to encourage all kinds of grassroots reforms and to make it possible for people to do what they think is appropriate in their schools, not to tell schools how they should go about improving learning and improving the environment but to support them when they wanted to do it. And because there were some legal questions raised, I did send the Attorney General out here.

As you know, I mentioned your school district in the State of the Union Address. And today just before I came here, I signed an Executive order instructing the Secretary of Education to send to all the school districts in the country this manual that we have just done up on school uniforms—that we're going to send to all the school districts in the country, not to tell them they should do what you have done but to encourage them if they want to do it and to show them how to do it.

I also wanted to say something else. As I said, I mostly want to listen to you, but I think

it's important to point out that if there is a school uniform or a dress code in a school, you not only have the chance of reducing the violence, I also think it sends a different message to the students. When young people are young, we should try to teach them to judge themselves and others based on what's inside them, not what's outside them. And in that sense, I think the school uniform policy is as valuable for students from well-to-do families as it is for students from poor families because of the message it sends.

And I'm very—I'm pleased to be here, and I wanted to come here mostly to honor you for your efforts and hopefully to publicize your efforts throughout the country. I'm also anxious to hear from the students. I have to tell you I got a lot of hot letters from students—[laughter]—after I bragged on your policy. The mail and the E-mail were burning up—[laughter]—for the next several days.

So why don't we start and just hear from everyone who is here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. in the library at Jackie Robinson Academy. In his remarks, he referred to Carl Cohn, superintendent, Long Beach School District.

Memorandum on the Manual on School Uniforms

February 24, 1996

Memorandum for the Secretary of Education

Subject: Manual on School Uniforms

Quality education is critical to America's future and the future of our children and families. We cannot educate our children, however, in schools where weapons, gang violence, and drugs threaten their safety. We must do everything possible to ensure that schools provide a safe and secure environment where the values of discipline, hard work and study, responsibility, and respect can thrive and be passed on to our children. Most schools are safe. But we must have zero tolerance for threats to safety in our schools. It is time to make every school the safest place in its community. Parents should be able to send their children to learn free

of fear. All of our schools should be permitted to focus on their original purpose: education.

Many local school districts have made school uniforms an important part of an overall program to improve school safety and discipline. Too often, we learn that students resort to violence and theft simply to obtain designer clothes or fancy sneakers. Too often, we learn that clothing items worn at school, bearing special colors or insignias, are used to identify gang membership or instill fear among students and teachers alike.

If student uniforms can help deter school violence, promote discipline, and foster a better learning environment, then we should offer our strong support to the schools and parents that try them. We should applaud parents, teachers, and school leaders when they take courageous

action to make our schools safe and free of gangs, drugs, and violence.

The Long Beach, California, school district recently found that after students started wearing uniforms, there was a substantial decrease in student drug cases, sex offenses, assault and battery cases, and fights. The learning environment improved as teachers could focus more on education and less on discipline. Many other schools—in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Memphis, Milwaukee, Nashville, New Orleans, Phoenix, Seattle, and St. Louis—have also adopted mandatory or voluntary school uniform policies with promising results.

I thus asked you, in consultation with the Attorney General, to develop information about how local school districts have made uniforms part of their school safety and discipline programs. The Department of Education, with input from the Department of Justice, has now developed a new “Manual on School Uniforms,” which sets forth the benefits of school uniforms; provides a road map for establishing a school uniform policy for schools interested in school uniforms; and describes various model uniform programs from a number of school districts across the Nation.

Because maintaining safe and disciplined schools is an urgent priority in every local community, I today direct you promptly to distribute the Manual on School Uniforms to each of the Nation’s 16,000 public school districts. I also direct you to provide copies of the Manual to appropriate organizations representing parents, teachers, and school administrators, and to make it available to interested members of the public.

School uniform programs are just one of the many initiatives undertaken by local school officials and parents to improve school safety and discipline. Other steps—such as truancy reduction programs, student-athlete drug testing, drug and gang prevention initiatives, zero tolerance for weapons, assisting teachers in addressing discipline problems, conflict resolution programs, and character education initiatives—have also been used to improve the education of our children. The Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Justice, should continue to develop guidance and information about these and other initiatives so that local organizations, families, and educators throughout the Nation have the tools available to make our schools safe, drug-free, and crime-free.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks to the Community in Long Beach

February 24, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you, Melissa Machit. Didn’t she do a good job? Give her another hand. [Applause] Mayor O’Neill; Superintendent Cohn; Chief Ellis; our host, the principal, Alexis Ruiz-Alessi, the principal of Jackie Robinson Academy, where we are now; to the president of the board of education, Bobbie Smith; to the JROTC groups from Wilson and Poly, thank you very much for being here. And to the Poly High School band, thank you very much for playing so well.

Just before I came out here I had a little roundtable discussion about the school uniform policy with Melissa and another fine student named Maurice Troutman and a number of—I thought he was going to run for office someday; he’s already seeded the crowd—[laughter]—and a number of teachers and parents and

the chief and your board president. I would like for all the people who were in our little roundtable to stand and be recognized; they did such a good job of educating me about what was done. Thank you very much. [Applause]

I’m glad to be back in Long Beach. It seems like only yesterday when I was here last. [Laughter] I do have my pin on today; it’s sort of my uniform. And I’m honored to be here. I came here today to applaud and support the efforts of this remarkable community.

Yesterday the mayor and community leaders briefed me on the remarkable plan that this community has to revive itself and deal with the impact of the defense downsizing of the last several years. Today I’m here to support what over the long run may have an even more profound impact on the future of this commu-