School uniforms have expanded to public schools of late. Having taken the idea from religious institutes, many public schools around the world require students to wear uniforms. The debate over whether or not uniforms are essential is ongoing. Some people say that school uniforms are an essential part of a functional learning environment. Other people say that they inhibit the creativity of the students. While uniforms can sometimes be beneficial, the world should dispose of their existence.

In a survey taken by the National Center for Education Statistics, it was discovered that eighteen percent of public schools required uniforms for the 2007-2008 school year. Supporters of uniforms argue that they cut down on violence and help student focus on schoolwork and reduce peer pressure. Focusing on schoolwork has nothing to do with what a student wears. Good students will focus on schoolwork no matter what they wear. Take weekend homework, for example, it is highly improbable that students go put on their school uniforms to do their homework. Also, some claim that uniforms make getting ready for school early in the morning easier. With uniforms, no one has to worry about what pants look good with what shirt or whatever dilemma unfolds. This is what some people tend to think; however, I for one still have problems deciding what to wear to school. As do many other students, we still have the choices of shoes, how our hair will look, and what accessories to adorn. No amount of dress code will make our mornings easier. Further, people say that uniforms make a student body look more orderly and well put together. This is a valid point; however, it is not always true. Many students go to school looking like they just rolled out of bed; boys still wear sagging pants and girls still wear entirely too short shorts or skirts. In these cases, students don’t look put together at all, making the whole point of the uniform invalid.

Ideally, uniforms were put in place to save parents money. The purpose was to stop parents from having to buy new clothes for their children at the start of the school year. This makes administrators seem very naïve. Parents buy their children new clothes anyway, so why make them spend more money on clothes that will only be worn to school? Casual clothes would be an asset because no one would have to spend that much more money on making sure their child has the right shoes, pants, shirts, etc. for school. Not to mention khaki pants are almost impossible to find, and when they are found, they are expensive because they are so hard to find, the distributors know they can charge however much they like for them. Parents can buy a whole new wardrobe of casual clothes for the same price as, or even less than, the price of one or two outfits for a school uniform. Therefore, uniforms do not save parents money.

Ultimately, being forced to wear uniforms quells the creativity and individualism of a student. Society tells us we should be different, but how can we be different when the people who control our environment five days a week for eight hours a day for nine months out of the year are forcing us to conform to their view of an orderly society? It is even hypocritical to make students wear uniforms when teachers don’t have to. Teachers have a dress code they must abide by to look professional, but students have to wear uniforms, setting a double standard between us. Even when schools already have uniforms, students try to set themselves apart from the crowd through their clothing. Administrators have shot these attempts down by making the excuse that they are too much of a distraction. For example, recently feathers worn in hair among girls have become popular. At the start of the school year, it was announced that feathers could not be worn because they are a distraction. The same goes with unnatural colors, body piercings, tattoos, visible long socks, and so on and so forth. If those things are distracting to students, there is a problem with their attention spans because I don’t find those things the least bit distracting. I might notice them once, but I won’t follow that person around gawking at their so-called distracting appearance. Calling these things a distraction is really just an excuse to make us all look the same; conformity at its finest can be found in schools around the world.

Parents think that the requirement of uniforms in schools will reduce bullying about economic social standing because we would all have to wear the same thing. That is not the case. Every child from middle school up can tell the difference between expensive school clothes and ones bought at discount stores. Not to
mention, accessories set those with more monetary assets apart. There are all kinds of ways to tell when someone has less money than someone else things such as shoes, handbags, jewelry, etc. It is impossible to stop students from seeing who has less and potentially making them a target for abuse, unless every freedom of expression we have is taken away, in which case school would be more like a concentration camp than a place of learning. We are already made to sit through boring classes all day, we are identified by numbers, we all look the same, and we are made to eat less than edible food. Nothing about our lives inside of school is individual. Enforcing a school uniform policy suggests that changing clothes will change behavior as well. Making us wear uniforms won’t change our behavior and it can’t keep us safe either. People are who they are no matter what they are wearing. Anyone can walk into a department store, buy clothes that match the school dress code, and walk around a campus like they belong there. Uniforms won’t keep us safe or give us a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, studies have shown that making students wear uniforms can cause developmental problems. According to Grace Chen of the Public School Review, forced conformity may leave students ill-prepared to enter the adult world where appearance matters even if uniforms are not required. Uniforms teach misleading values. “School uniforms only reinforce the notion that authority and obedience matter most, which does not factor into dressing appropriately for a job in an adult career field,” contends Scott Key of Fresno State University. As stated earlier, the enforcement of uniforms encourages conformity. Most work places don’t even require uniforms, but there may be a dress code for which the employee must adapt. However, unless a person is working in a lower-paying job, uniforms will not be required. “Well-paid work tends to reject uniformity, and for good reason. The demands of the future include qualities such as assertiveness, creativity, individuality, originality, a spontaneous personality, being a self-starter, taking initiatives, being able to cope with change, etcetera” explains Queensland Ombudsman in Australia. None of the values mentioned in the preceding sentence are taught by enforcing a uniform policy.

Uniform requirements are an outdated practice that needs to be done away with. They are not beneficial for students; in fact, they do more harm than good. They lead us to believe that conformity, obedience, and authority are the highest values among society. No one can thrive as an individual when all are forced to look the same. Free expression has been virtually abolished by public and private schools everywhere. The people who make up the rules for uniform requirement have false beliefs that the student body will be better because it has to look the same. That sounds more like a post-apocalyptic society in which we are all forced to think the same and have no choices in our lives from the day we are born, similar to novels such as Anthem and Fahrenheit 451. This generation needs to rise above uniforms before all of the creativity and individuality in the world are destroyed forever.