Seeing beyond what we're wearing

Albert Einstein once said, "I never think of the future. It comes soon enough." His words are resoundingly true when you realize in only a few short weeks, schools in our area will yet again open their doors to educate the young minds of tomorrow.

But some districts are already experiencing controversy before a new year begins, as a heated debate intensifies regarding the proposal of student uniforms in some public schools.

Other towns and states, which have already adopted such practices, have cited encouraging discipline, lessening peer pressure, diminishing economic and social barriers and increasing a sense of pride among the student body as reasons. But challenging anyone's traditional way of life is often met with opposition and criticism, and this issue is no different.

While some parents still remain divided, the greatest opposition comes from those whose wardrobes will be drastically altered — the students. Their strongest argument against standardized uniforms continues to be its infringement upon their freedom of expression.

When I was a teenager in the early 1990s, I remember the administration mulling over the idea of imposing mandatory uniforms at our high school. In truth, I was one of a handful of students who not only supported the idea, but also prayed it would come to fruition. I remember my peers thought I was crazy for supporting such a radical proposal — one classmate even told me, "Why would you wanna come in here looking like everybody else?"

Well you see, I was raised in a home that didn't support the trendiest clothes, nor did we possess the expendable income needed to afford them. So my wardrobe was often inexpensive and dated in terms of its style and design and classmates often took notice.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

BY CRAIG RUVERE

Let's face it, puberty can be a cruel and unjust time for many teenagers. From acne breakouts to awkward growth spurts to embarrassing voice changes, two months is a long time for a young body to change and your classmates will undoubtedly take notice when you report to homeroom on the first day of school.

One's outward appearance is a vital part of being a young teenager and I personally struggled for acceptance from those who were quick to make judgments simply because of what I was wearing. In my mind, the concept of uniforms would force my young classmates to do something they had never done before — judge one another based on character not on clothing.

Now as an adult, I'm thankful that my parents raised me not to blend in to a sea of mediocrity. But I'll never forget what it felt like to be dismissed by people your own age simply because you weren't wearing the most socially accepted clothing of the time.

Students opposing school uniforms today continue to stress how their individuality is being challenged. However, I find it somewhat ironic how often they strive to look just like each other — to wear the most popular fashions in an effort to be socially accepted by their peers. How is that an expression of oneself?

Furthermore, are we to believe that those who are allowed to dress any way they feel are expressing their individuality more than say a high school senior who spends their spare time rallying for a cause they feel passionate about? Clothes will never define who we are no matter what slick advertising campaigns might say. It is our actions that will speak volumes to the person we want the world to see us as.

Uniforms will not take anything away from a teen's individuality or the high school experience, believe me. What it hopefully will do is abolish our reliance on materialistic possessions and brand names that many cling to for acceptance as teenagers and adults. Maybe it will prevent those who have financial means from looking down and belittling those whose families are just getting by from week to week. And most importantly, it might just force impressionable teenagers to judge their peers based upon one's character, which has nothing to do with what they're wearing.

"The View from Here" runs every other week, alternating with guest columns.