



Long Beach suffered the worst violent crime wave in the city's history during the 1993-1994 academic school year. Student achievement was at an all-time low. That year, the Long Beach Unified School District reported 2,087 school crimes. Violent crimes were occurring not only in schools, but they were occurring on the streets. Gangs and other criminals could not differentiate school children from the street kids. Superintendent of Schools Carl Cohn declared that student achievement could not be addressed until student safety was the number one priority with educators, parents, businesses, and community members. Superintendent Cohn challenged the greater Long Beach community to work together to reduce youth crime and improve student achievement.

The solution to youth crime and low student achievement must begin with school uniforms, according to Dr. Cohn. Parents endorsed the Superintendent and the Long Beach Board of Education and helped craft this new policy. Long Beach Unified School District became the first public school district in the nation to require school uniforms for its students. The school district piloted a test uniform policy at eleven schools in 1993. By January 1994, the school board moved to require uniforms in all K-8 schools effective with the new school year. **September 1994 marked the first time that students in grades K-8 were required to wear school uniforms. By 1999 school crimes had dropped 86%.**

In negotiations with parents over the uniform policy, the district made one concession: Free school uniforms would be provided to students who could not afford them. In 1994, the entire community wanted to help and donations overwhelmed district personnel who were unprepared to efficiently sort and distribute clothing. The need for an organized and reliable support system for this uniform policy was very evident. **Assistance League® of Long Beach and Operation School Bell® answered the clarion call of the Superintendent** – to provide a safety net for poor students that would allow the school uniform policy to successfully continue.

Since the 1970's, Assistance League of Long Beach's Operation School Bell program has clothed thousands of children in the Long Beach Unified School District in grades K-5.

When the school district decided that what students wore to school would become a top priority, Assistance League, a nonprofit organization with over 950 members, accepted the challenge and switched to providing new uniforms. As the policy grew to include middle and high school students, Operation School Bell grew to meet those needs as well. The 2006 Rick Rackers Chairman Vicki Vaught said, "When I first heard of Operation School Bell, my first thought was, "Yes, uniforms are important, but there are so many other issues. Is this the top priority? What I learned surprised me." Schools that mandated uniforms have fewer absences, tardy students, and suspensions. Student interactions improve and better grades are achieved.

Uniforms improve the learning environment and student safety. They improve discipline, self-esteem, and self respect. Security is improved by the ability of school staff to identify non-students entering the campus. Weapons or look-alikes are more difficult to conceal in a uniform compared to overcoats and baggy clothing. Uniforms create a unity amid diversity and they bridge income differences. Uniforms strengthen school spirit and pride, and children feel a sense of belonging to that school.

Last year, Operation School Bell clothed over 3,600 students at an average cost of \$60 per student. This year, their goal is to provide uniforms to 5,700 LBUSD children and youth. With community help, Operation School Bell will provide uniforms to 10,000 students annually in the Long Beach Unified School District by 2010.

"The Long Beach Way" is the distinctive way people, organizations, businesses, communities of faith, and elected officials work together to benefit residents. The results speak for themselves and the rest of the nation watches in awe. In 2003, LBUSD was awarded the Broad Prize for Urban Education for closing the achievement gap between ethnic groups and among socioeconomic levels. In 2007, LBUSD made history by returning as a top-five finalist in the running for the Broad Prize.

What makes Long Beach such a strong community is its people. **Please join the community in sustaining the visionary school uniform policy that supports achievement in our Long Beach schools.**