

## **BCL ep344 Uniforms: More than Matching Outfits with Joanna Haralson**

Uniforms are more than matching outfits. They're a cornerstone of a healthy school culture. They eliminate the daily, what do I wear stress and help form a high quality, less distracted learning environment where individuality is actually heightened.

There's also a practical side to uniforms from cleaning and maintaining to managing costs and keeping up with growing kids who always need a new size. Uniforms do take efforts. Today we'll explore the why behind uniforms plus practical tips for parents and schools to keep them organized, affordable, and stress-free.

Stay tuned for this episode of Base Camp Live. Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation. Get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings.

We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Base Camp Live. Now your host, Davies Owens.

Welcome to another episode of Base Camp Live. Davies Owens here with you. It's the start of another school year.

It's hard to believe that it is time to begin it all again. And I know it's been a lot to adjust back into the school year for parents and students, but it is a blessing to have this time to be back in our school communities and connecting with one another. Just as always, love to do a shout out to different schools.

In particular, a shout out to Kathy Troy, your head of school at the Caritas Christian Classical Academy there in Chandler, Arizona. I've had the privilege of speaking and visiting there with Kathy and your team. It's always a joy to have you as part of the Base Camp Live and Zipcast family, along with Daniel Bonsall, head of school at the Redeemer Classical Academy in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

We're so grateful that you guys are a part of this amazing community that we're in of raising up the next generation, and we're so grateful for you being a part of it. This particular episode is sponsored by Wilson Hill Academy, as well as Life Architects Coaching, and of course, our own Zipcast, which by the way, Zipcast at this point in the school year is, we have twice the number of schools as we did last year, which is good news. We had to kind of wait list a bit to get schools to start later into the fall, and it's never too late to start Zipcast, so maybe next spring, but there will be opportunities in October, November, even January, so it's not too late.

Reach out to us if you're interested. Go to [zipcast.media](https://zipcast.media) to learn more. Joanna Harrelson is a mom of three classically educated children and a wife of a board member.

She holds two master's degrees in telecommunications and information technology and has worked as a software engineer at Intel, and is now a freelance web developer, and she's been using her technical expertise to solve some real needs when it comes to managing uniforms as she launched Uniformi, a platform designed to help schools manage their internal uniform swap. She and her family live in Portland, Oregon, and have been a part of the St. Stephen's Academy community for over 20 years, so without further ado, here's my conversation with Joanna. Joanna, welcome to Base Camp Live.

Hi, Davis, thank you so much for having me on. It's so good to have you on, and I'm excited to talk about uniforms. Before we get into all that, tell folks a little bit about yourself.

Yes, so live in Portland, Oregon, Pacific Northwest, kind of our coming to classical education story. My husband and I were first married. We moved to the Pacific Northwest and joined a church that happened to have a fairly new classical school startup.

My husband was interested in homeschooling at first. I was really, didn't see myself as the homeschool mom, so it was just God's providence that the school was there, and my husband got involved in it right away. We didn't really know anything about classic education at the time.

We knew that we wanted to send our future children that we didn't have at the time to a Christian school, so we kind of learned about the classical aspects of it as we got more and more involved with the school and loved it more and more. It kind of came to us by God's providence at the perfect time. And you've been in the classical Christian world now for a couple decades, right? I mean, it's been a while.

That's right, yes, over 20 years. My husband- And I gotta ask, because you've got a very unique accent. It's not a Pacific Northwest accent, so tell folks a little bit about your earlier years.

I was born and grew up in Poland and moved to France for college, then took a year and a half detour to Sweden. That's where I met my husband. Wow.

So a little bit of moving around Europe for several years, and then my husband's American, and after we got married, both graduated, we moved back to the States. Wonderful, wonderful, yeah. Did you grow up in, what kind of schools in Europe did you grow up in? So my elementary school education was actually under the communist regime.

So there'll be a whole other conversation of how that education- Okay, that'll be a whole other podcast on that one. Yes. And then kind of my middle school, high school years through, lived through that transition.

So it was a hodgepodge of everything you can possibly imagine. Right. Well, again, that would be a fascinating story, and I'm sure there's a lot there in that.

Did you wear uniforms in those schools back in the day? There was kind of a navy color gown-ish item that you were supposed to put over your regular clothes. Oh, wow. That's a different

way to do a uniform.

Yeah. Just a gown. Might've gotten a little warm in the summer wearing the gown, but at any rate.

Well, let's jump into some conversation about uniforms. I mean, I think everybody listening is in a school that requires uniforms, and this is a topic that I think, on the one hand, is just kind of maybe an obvious question, like, well, why do we wear uniforms? And nobody's, I think maybe when you're new to the school, it's maybe a bigger set of questions, and you kind of get into the routine of it. But walk us through, just at a very basic level, if somebody came up to you and said, hey, Joanna, you've been in the school world for two decades now, why are uniforms, why should we wear uniforms? Why should my children be wearing uniforms? Absolutely.

I'll kind of break it down into maybe three points. I think the first one would be a sense of purpose. I would see a police officer in the street, you know exactly who they are, you know what they're doing.

Because of their uniform, there's no doubt about what their job is for the day. And I believe this is the same for our students. This gives them this sense of purpose.

They know when they walk out the door at home what they're going to do for the day. They're going to be going to school, and we're going to be students. So that's the sense of common purpose for everybody that is in that school building.

So let me, and I want to just kind of walk through these as you bring these ideas up, because I think that's a really important point. Again, sometimes it just feels like it's obvious, but I mean, that's a great, I mean, imagine walking up to a police officer and they're wearing like a Hawaiian shirt and their favorite shorts, and it's kind of wear what you want. I mean, you would be, and they had a little badge on.

You wouldn't take them seriously. And I wouldn't think they would take themselves super seriously. I know there was a phase years ago in kind of corporate America where it was kind of the dress down thing got very popular.

And as I seem to recall, there was a lot of changes in just work ethic and attitude, because when you are wearing your Hawaiian shirt to the bank it definitely changes your orientation to your work. So say more about that, because I think that's a really important point. Yes, and that actually goes straight into the second point that I was going to make.

That was a perfect transition. The sense of higher calling, right? Because our uniforms, they are exactly what you're saying. We are dressing up to go to school.

It's not the Hawaiian shirt. So we dress up for things that are important, that are things of value. You know, we dress up for a wedding, we dress up for church maybe, depending where you live.

We dress up with things that are important in our lives. So that would be another aspect of the uniform. That makes sense, right.

Yeah, what else? What are some other reasons you would give somebody catches you in the parking lot, and goes, why do I have to wear a uniform? Why does my children have to wear a uniform at this school? I think this is a common, I would say, complaint about uniform that there's certain loss of identity because everybody seems to look the same. And I would challenge that perspective because I think it's a loss of shallow understanding of identity. Your identity is that you wear the SpongeBob t-shirt every day.

And that's how I remember, recognize you. That's maybe not the type of understanding of a human that the classical education is trying to develop. So we need to look a little bit more at the person who they are as a human with their personality traits, their skills, talents, and what makes them unique as a human being, not just the outward appearance of the person.

And I think it might be a little more of a challenge, but the value of it is immense. And why do you see it as a challenge? Because as a person, you need to go a little bit deeper in meeting the other, the student, or the other human, just see them beyond just of their outward appearance. It's a really, I'm glad you brought that concern because if, I mean, over the years, I would say when I do hear parents question it, that is generally their point of concern is that their child is losing their individual identity and expression.

I mean, this is such a core value for Americans that we have to individually express ourselves. And I think even in Christian circles, there's that sense of we don't wanna just kind of become faceless or become part of a robot regime of just a bunch of children in this machine, if you will, as opposed to them being individuals. So how, so uniforms, the claim then is that a uniform, like, I don't know how many people actually would think to put their child in a SpongeBob shirt, but you're absolutely right, there is, I would argue there is a uniform at every school that we don't think of it that way.

But I often tell the story, one of the more stressful days for me as a high schooler, I was at a private high school in Atlanta, not Christian, but it was private, so you had to wear uniforms. And they had one of those Friday wear what you want days, bring a can of soup or whatever for the homeless, and then you get to wear what you want. Well, I've told this story before, but it made such an impression on me that my best friend John and I were a week in advance on the phone talking with each other about, what are you gonna wear? I don't know, what are you gonna wear? What are you gonna wear? And then we ended up going to the mall, dating myself again, and wandering all the stores at the mall to find the perfect shirt, because we had to find something to wear that we thought would be acceptable and among our peers, among ourselves.

And the irony of the whole thing is we both ended up buying a Tommy Hilfiger button down shirt, again, welcome to the 80s. I got the blue one and he got the red one and we showed up and I'm like, for crying out loud, we're back in our uniform, we just made a new one up. So, I

mean, so is that a fair statement that everybody wears uniforms? SpongeBob is acceptable at that public school, so therefore you have to wear, yeah, say more about that.

Yeah, yeah, just a fantastic illustration. And from my experience as a mom, not having that even morning off or day before questions about what are we gonna put on, because especially when you get to middle school and high school age, that conversation is completely off the table. Even my children tell me that they find that a great relief.

This is not something, out of all the things a teenage child needs to worry about in their life, their clothing at school is not part of it. It makes their life a lot less stressful. It's so true, yeah, for the parent and the child and that constant need of, you know, I've gotta go buy the latest and the greatest and it's expensive and that's, you know, we'll get into, hold on, that's thought on the expense because I wanna talk about that, but just to go back to a point you made earlier, which is really important and that is the loss of, the fear is that they're losing their individual identity.

I actually remember a conversation a number of years ago with one of our faculty members who said, you know, interestingly, because they're all in uniform, my eyes actually go to their face, not to what they're wearing. And so I'm actually more drawn to the distinctives of their facial expressions and their unique identity and who they really are, to your point earlier, is actually magnified because everybody's not wearing some totally different showy thing on their body. So do you see that? That is exactly it, yes, yes, yes, that's spot on.

Well, I wanna take a break in just a moment. Before we do, I wonder, let me just set up this question because I often see schools, you know, uniforms mean a lot of different things in a lot of schools and there's a lot of types of, I guess, on the rigor of the uniform. There are schools that it's like everybody wears a very basic golf shirt and you can wear whatever else you wanna wear or there's schools that prescribe pretty much the entire uniform except for the shoes.

There's a lot of different ways that uniforms get implemented. My question and or concern is it seems like because we all at heart wanna be individualistic, there's a tendency to try to still be in an unhelpful way self-expressing and here's what I'm getting at. Back to my high school that I went to, we had formal days and you'd have to wear a tie but they didn't regulate the tie.

That was the one thing they didn't, you didn't have a uniform tie and so, of course, you give an inch, people take a mile. So everyone would go out and get the most obnoxious, loud, you know, SpongeBob tie and wear that tie just because that was their one little place they could kind of do their self-expression. So what are your thoughts on it? I mean, that's the problem I think with, or what's your advice on that? Because it does seem like if you give them freedom to wear whatever kind of shoes they want or whatever tie they want, are you at risk of undermining the whole value of the uniform? I think you absolutely are.

I think there's a value to giving parents freedom for certain pieces to purchase between different vendors because of the question of kind of fit for a personal child but there needs to

be guidelines. So, for example, if you allow the student to wear any shoe they want, they need to be some guidelines for the style and color, for example, that they need to be whatever, all black or non-athletic. I think for certain pieces of uniform, I think it's value to have a little bit of freedom because the children do come in all different sizes and maybe some tactile needs that need to be addressed that will be the same with a polo shirt.

Some children can be very sensitive to certain types of tags or buttons or a fabric, color fabric, and I think that's important for a school to understand that potentially could be a challenge for some child but having the guidelines, I mean, style and color are essential because otherwise you're in a situation that exactly suits you. And it does, like everything we do, and we'll take a break on this, but it seems like uniforms, like everything we do in schools, are opportunities for forming of culture and forming wisdom and virtue in our students. And I think an example that I, when I was an upper school dean, you see everything, uniforms are always the place where you end up coming back to having to make some, get involved.

I can think of some high school boys that were trying to come in under the letter of the law but not the spirit of it. So the letter of the law said wear black shoes. Their interpretation was let's go get the latest kind of hip, high top tennis shoes and get a Sharpie and we're gonna make everything black on it and wear those.

And I even had some student try to pull off black Crocs, arguing with me that they technically are within the scope of the law. So why don't we take a break? Cause I'd love to hear your thoughts on how do we help guide the law and the spirit there? Cause there's a little bit of that that goes on in the uniform land for sure that we have to think about. So we'll take a quick break and be right back to continue our conversation.

Hey, Base Camp Live listeners, a recent Pew research study revealed that only 30% of millennial and Gen Z parents live within a 100 mile radius of extended family. That means that many families are missing the wisdom and support of older generations. And more than ever, we need strong, consistent school communities to walk next to us, providing rich connection and helpful weekly tips.

That is exactly why I created Zipcast. Zipcast gives schools a proven platform to communicate more personally and effectively with their parent community. Imagine as a parent receiving a short weekly audio message from your school leadership, not just announcements, but real insights into what's on their hearts and minds, paired with practical wisdom from national parenting and educational experts like Keith McCurdy and Justin Early, along with experts on classical Christian education.

We even include short testimonials and parenting tips from fellow parents all around the country. You can listen anywhere and at any time. And now with Zipcast 2.0, schools can customize their messages even more, offering a truly personal and engaging way to build connection and shared vision.

If you're a school leader not yet using Zipcast, I wanna encourage you to consider it for the 25, 26 school year. And if you're a parent at a school that is not yet using Zipcast, take a moment and encourage your leadership to explore it. It's easy to use, affordable and effective.

And in today's fast-paced world, Zipcast is a proven tool used by over 60 schools this past school year to deliver encouragement, insights and connections in just 10 minutes a week. We like to say it's about encouraging you on the go with what you need to know. Check it all out at [zipcast.media](http://zipcast.media) to hold your spot as we have limited spaces available for the upcoming school year.

Janet, right before the break, we were talking about the, you know, throughout the Bible is the idea of the spirit and the letter of the law. And there's plenty of schools have handbooks and here's exactly how you have to wear the uniform. And I was saying earlier, you get folks that don't understand or don't even buy into the spirit behind it.

And it's just sort of, let's see how much we can push the edges. Let's get the Sharpie out and make black shoes that aren't really supposed to be worn. Or the other thing related to this is even hairstyles.

You'll see students with just these ridiculous hairstyles that are very self-focused. Look at me, look at me. I'm wearing my mohawk while I'm wearing my uniform.

And it's like, well, you kind of missed the whole point here. Uniformity is, there is an element of conformity that comes with uniformity, but it's not meant to cause you to lose who you are. Talk a little bit about this tension and where you see it kind of played out in schools, because you definitely want students to own and value the reason behind it and to do so joyfully and with appreciation.

But how do you balance that? I think it starts with a good communication for school with the parents to explaining the why and just the bigger picture of where the school's going with developing the child's idea, their love for what's good and beautiful. So obviously the children, they're gonna struggle with it. And the child that is pushing the boundaries is learning and struggling and developing.

And it's just part of the growing process. But for the school to be in good communication with the parents first, but also with the students so that the students themselves understand what kind of virtues are being developed in them through the exercise of wearing a uniform. I can bring up a very, very common example, which is the girls skirts that tend to be rolled up frequently.

And I've noticed there's usually one or two reasons that the skirt gets rolled up. The first one is a poor fit, where it just slides off the girl's hip and the garment needs to be attached to the person. And it's the easiest fix to make that happen.

So in that case, it's not a malicious on the part of the child, on the contrary, they're trying to

make sure they do look proper. So the solution. I was gonna say, I think that's a real, I'm glad you brought that up because I think it's certainly fair.

And it's kind of, we do want things that are true, good and beautiful. And I think there are times where schools, maybe I'm blaming on us guys, we're just very pragmatic. Like, I know that uniform shop has got the best deals.

Let's just order our uniforms from there. And here comes a burlap sack dress thing. And we're expecting everybody to put this thing on and wear it with joy.

And then we get upset with them when they don't. So that's a really good point. Like, how do you, without falling into the, let's try to just wear the latest quote styles.

How do you make sure that the uniforms actually do fit, especially because of all different body shapes and styles or sizes that are out there? I mean, you do have folks that, you know, maybe have a hard time physically wearing the uniform. Again, how do you work around that? This is a fantastic point. That will be actually, I'll put that on the school, creating their uniform policy and selecting the vendors to carefully look at the sizing options that are offered and maybe give a little bit more flexibility, especially for the garments that really need to fit properly, the pants and the skirts.

It's easier to wear a sweater that doesn't quite fit exactly. That the vendor either offers all the sizings and styles that are gonna be needed or to open those items up to other vendors. Actually, it happened to our school once in the past that made a uniform policy change.

And there were several students that could not find the pair of pants that would fit them from the approved vendor. And it's really not a place you would like your- Yeah, it's a pretty awkward place to be, right. Exactly.

So this is just wisdom for the person selecting the policy and selecting the vendor to do their diligent homework to see if there's really the variety that's needed that's being offered. That's a really good point. And I think, and then where is reasonable grace? Like I know schools, like boys wear khaki pants and again, are they skinny jeans looking khaki pants? Like, I mean, cause again, this is where it's, you just have to use discernment.

I mean, is there a legitimate, this particular vendor doesn't make something that fits my child's body style and shape or is this just my kid being a little snarky and not liking the fit of the khaki pants and wants the latest style version of khaki pants. And so again, like everything, to get back to the girls rolling up their skirts, is it because it really isn't, they physically it's not working or as I've seen more often, and I remember when I was in high, working at high school, upper school Dean, it was like, well, it seems like every week these skirts are getting shorter. It was like, everybody kind of had a, how many rolls to put on the skirt thing.

So I mean, there's, these are hard issues, which is what we're there to help form. There are issues around authority. And I mean, if they're not willing to wear the uniform and do so with



confidence, I mean, there's issues.

And I think, again, comparing this to other places in life, if you can, I mean, imagine the police officer showing up and like, why are your pants so, but well, I'm just, I rolled them up on the bottom. It just looks better. I don't like the way they have to come down to my shoes.

I mean, you just, that would become an authority issue, wouldn't it? Within like the police force, if you had an officer that just thought it looked better to wear it a certain way, that's not really the decision of that individual officer. Exactly, exactly. And the, you know, there's, especially in that skirt situation, there's issues of modesty.

And I think communicating those to the girls when they are in the middle school age, I think would help them for the rest of their life to understand the impact of dressing immodestly for attention, what impact it has on the community around them. Do you, are you aware of schools that have done a good job or can you point to kind of models of how to best communicate to students? Because to your point, my sense is, that's one of the things that like, nobody ever really bothers to explain, especially because they start out in kindergarten and you don't have a big talk with the kindergarten. In fact, they're probably actually the ones that are most excited about getting a school uniform.

In fact, I can remember a story, kind of a sweet story of a parent with I think four kids and their youngest, who was not even pre-K level, would watch their older siblings get a uniform so the mom went and got a uniform just so the little one could wear one because they wanted to be a part of it. Like there's that, like don't we all wish that season stuck around forever? But yeah, how do you, you know, what are, I guess, advice or best practices around communicating it, especially as they get a little bit more independently minded to actually understand why, as we started talking about. There are reasons that are, they may not love the reasons, but there are reasons.

I think sitting down with your students and having a uniform talk, I don't think that's gonna be very productive. If some of those values are not part of their daily education, when we talk about beauty and we talk about who we are as a human being and some of those principles, like we mentioned, the modesty, are not infused into their daily conversations and all sorts of topics, when we talk about literature and, you know, anything else that can happen in the classroom, if it's not there infused in daily life, I don't think it's gonna go anywhere. Right, that just sounds like another law, kind of without any spirit behind it, yeah.

I have had, I've been a part of schools that have really leveraged the house program and I think this is where having peer-to-peer can be so powerful. In fact, every year when we were at Ambrose, this is what we would do where we had the, on a school retreat, we'd start the year out with an overnight retreat up in the mountains and we would have as part of all of that, the house leaders would put together kind of this little skit that they would do every year on kind of the do's and don'ts of uniforms and so, you know, they would, you know, have a girl, it was kind of the right way and the wrong way. So you'd have a student, two students on the stage and

one had the skirt rolled up and one didn't and one had their, you know, tie half undone or whatever and it was just, it was kind of an exaggerated problem to make it funny and then to talk about it that way and so there are ways I've seen like that where it's not only like physically how you have to wear it but then have the students, you know, affirm that this is not some punishment, this is actually a, you know, we should wear these proudly.

I mean, we're like being, we're part of an organization where there is uniformity and we're part of a community that we're proud of and so that's, I think that's the spirit there. I think that's a great point. Your high school students might be your seniors, they might be the best advocates and role models for the younger students.

If they wear their uniforms, you know, properly and without grudge, then that sets a certain tone for the culture of the school. That's a great point, that's a really good point and, you know, we'll go take another break here. I think another just side point to that is just how uniforms are even a part of the entire school's culture and this is, again, probably a whole nother podcast but you think about just what's the dress code for teachers and for administrators and most of our schools, you know, I think do very well with this.

I think there are times where I've seen maybe younger and more casual new teachers that are, you know, kind of wearing beachwear almost to school and it's like, it's a little bit too casual to the point that I could see where students are kind of looking around going, well, other teachers are dressing up and you're dressing down so it's almost like you're not actually modeling your uniform. So to think of it as we all have uniforms, it's just some of them have, you know, are only blue and tan and have a logo on them but a teacher and administrator, I mean, I don't think I would have thought it reasonable to be an administrator at a classical Christian school and not have my tie on and probably my jacket depending on, maybe I'd take the jacket off occasionally. So the point is like we're all wearing uniforms, we're all part of this shared experience.

Why don't we take another break? I wanna come back, we're gonna get real practical. I'd love to get your just some advice on schools with how to organize uniforms, how to address used uniforms. It's a lot of the work that you're doing, help parents maybe think about just everything from, is there a special way to do laundry with uniforms? I mean, what's the best way to make uniforms as easy as possible as part of our routine? So we'll be right back and continue the conversation.

I'm here with my friend Joanna Hensley, head of Lower School at Wilson Hill Academy. To tell you about their exciting new program, maybe you already know about Wilson Hill Academy. We talk about Wilson Hill all the time on Base Camp Live.

They're known for their really effective and helpful online classical Christian education they offer. They have lively courses for students in grades three through 12, but what you may not know is that Wilson Hill is now offering a rich early learning program they call Forma for students in K through second grade. I'm here with Joanna Hensley, Joanna, Joanna, Joanna, tell

us more.

Oh, thanks Davies. Forma is such a wonderful way to begin a lifelong love of learning. You know, we talk often about the cautions of technology.

So let's just go ahead and get this out of the way. Are you encouraging kindergartners to be on Zoom all the time? Is that what this is? Absolutely not Davies. Forma does not involve putting five-year-olds on Zoom.

Forma is a program that gives to parents valuable guidance from an experienced mentor teacher who walks them through a carefully curated curriculum for teaching reading, math, nature study, and enrichment like picture study and music all within a like-minded encouraging community. I love what you guys are doing, especially for children in those younger ages. How can folks learn more about what you're doing with Forma? They can visit our website, [wilsonhillacademy.com slash forma](http://wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/forma), F-O-R-M-A.

Fantastic, thanks so much, Joanna. Joanna, thinking about parents that are listening and just the both advantages and sometimes disadvantages of having to manage and keep up with and keep clean and organize uniforms. I mean, that's, I can think of my own family with our three kids kind of that, oh my goodness, we're supposed to be leaving in 10 minutes and you can't find your belt, you know, or you can't figure out where you're in.

Oh wait, you didn't tell me there was a tear in the knee of your pants. Oh gosh, what are we gonna do now? What advice do you have to parents just to lower this uniform stress? My first advice would be maybe attitude towards some of those wear and tear of the uniform, the stains and rips. I think they're a sign of a healthy child that actually was active and playful at school.

They're not a failure. If there is, you know, a touchdown pass and recess that ended up with a ripped knee, yes, the pair of pants needs to be fixed, but I think it's something that necessarily needs to, not a failure of the child per se. So that would be kind of my first advice to give the children grace in their uniform wear.

Having some, getting some skills on how to treat different stains can be very, very useful over the lifetime of the garment and your student in the school. Learning some basic alteration skills for a mom, I think they can save you also a lot of money long-term, being able to add the button or fix a little tear or adjust the length of the hem. Which, by the way, I love this idea because we often talk about just the need to reclaim the common arts.

And I think, gosh, we can, you know, quote Plato's Republic, but we have no idea how to put a button on a garment. It seems like maybe we've missed something. And so I think that's a great idea, especially as children get older, use it as a, you know, well, you know, let's learn how to put this button on, or here's a way to put a patch on this.

Or, you know, you're talking about just the expense of the uniforms and only buying the uniforms, but then it's getting them altered. So certain alterations, you know, you can make

yourself. It doesn't take a professional seamstress to put a hem in a pair of pants, right? Exactly, and I think for, you know, a mom of a younger students, they obviously need to do it for them.

But eventually as the student becomes able, these are fantastic skill for both boys and girls to gain. And just, because you mentioned the moms, because we dads, you know how we would hem pants, which I don't recommend. I dare not even tell you this.

You can use a stapler, but I wouldn't really recommend that. So I just, I've seen dads like, you know, in a dad moment, like, all right, dude, we gotta get out the door. Give me that stapler.

Yes, yes, yes. Maybe one, for one day to get through, but I don't, they will rust in the laundry. So don't do that.

But safety pins. Safety pins could work too. There are ways around these things, but I loved your point, that let's don't, the very thing we want, we want boys to be boys.

And if they get grass stains on their pants, I know it's a little inconvenient, but I'd rather have a boy that's being a boy than, you know, just always have the perfect uniform. So maybe part of the practical would be, should you have, how many pairs of things should you have? I mean, you just, you don't wanna have one or only two pairs of pants, or what do you recommend? How does that work for most families? I can speak for my family. Usually try to have enough items to last us through the week.

And then we do laundry at the end of the week. Okay. So it depends, child.

Some of my children would need a fresh pair of pants every day. Right. And other can re-wear the same pair of pants multiple days in a row.

So you would need to kind of adjust that to your, the wear and tear for the particular child in your family. That's a good point. And there's always that problem of like, wait, my fifth graders' pants don't fit.

We just bought them in August and now it's November. And well, they grow very quickly. So that's the other challenge.

That's why you wanna learn how to let the hem out, I guess. Exactly. Yes.

Yes. A lot of the work you're doing, so just help schools. If I'm in, you know, you're talking to educators now and you commented earlier, just finding a really good, you know, vendor to work with because you need, you know, somebody that can provide the uniforms affordably and with variety.

And so just talk about some best practices for school leaders. I think when you put together a uniform policy, really taking into account, like we talked about the various shapes and sizes of your student body, take the weather into account. I've seen schools that require, you know, living in a really warm climate and require a very warm dress uniform so that poor child's

wearing long pants and a cardigan sweater, 100 degree weather outside.

That might just, might look very good, but it really makes the child miserable. By the way, I've seen it go the other way where I can remember in Atlanta having a shorts policy that would go, you know, far into the late fall, even early winter. And of course, you know, middle school boys will wear shorts, you know, at negative 20 just because they can wear shorts.

So I guess some of that, you gotta save them from themselves with your policy. Yes. And then obviously on the winter weather side, allow the students to wear layers in the winter.

Like oftentimes the girls would have work shifts and like not being able to put layers of either leggings or just other warm things on their legs in the winter time when they go outside. That's just not serving the health of the student very well. Keeping all these things in mind when you put the uniform policy, I think it's important.

My second point to the schools would be welcome the new families with a lot of grace and communication with just, you know, the details of the uniform policy where they can really understand it well. I remember my first year, my oldest daughter doing kindergarten. It was overwhelming for me to understand there's dress uniform, everyday uniform, different vendors, things don't go, you can't wear this item with that item.

It was a lot to process for somebody who's never seen it before. So having some kind of a point person, parent that can guide the new families through that process, I think that would really facilitate the onboarding process. That's a really good point because it seems so ordinary to us but somebody new coming in, it's very daunting.

And having, I think host families can sometimes help with that process, explaining it, but really good point. I even see schools put together little videos where it's an upper schooler again, back to the house leaders going, hey, we're gonna explain today how, you know, I'm standing here with my little brother wearing the grammar school outfit, let's talk about what he's wearing, you know. Exactly, exactly.

Another call to the schools, having a process put in place ahead of time for communicating uniform violations to the families and to the parents so you're not caught in the moment on how to process certain things. I think that requires a school to put thought ahead of time and kind of front load that particular aspect of enforcing. That's a really good point back to the spirit and the law.

I mean, there's certainly a need to have some kind of a punitive response to consistent violations or maybe they just forgot their belt, you know. But again, these things all, when done well, can lead to, I think, very healthy and important conversations about, you know, either forgetfulness or, you know, rebellion. Like, what are we dealing with here? So it's good to see those as teachable moments.

Other advice to schools, and maybe just share a bit, if you will. You've, you know, one of the real

challenges, of course, is the cost of a uniform that parents have to incur. And then the reality is, you know, joking about the boy's pants are already too short two months into the school year.

I mean, usually it seems like, other than the kids that, you know, play a little too much football, the uniforms will outlast the growth stage of that child. So then what do you do with the uniform? And, you know, you donate it to the thrift store. I'm not sure that's the first item people wanna wear is some other school's uniform with their kids.

So you've seen a real need. Talk about the need you've seen and how you're addressing it with helping schools with used uniforms. Absolutely, I think I made the joke before.

My daughter, her kindergarten sweater probably was the most expensive garment that I purchased after my wedding dress. Wow. Yes, so having a well-run used uniform swap at the school is just a huge blessing to your school community because this is where the biggest cost savings are gonna be, exactly like you said.

A lot of those vendor, you know, specific vendor purchase items, they are indestructible and they're all gonna outlast the growth of the child. So being able to pass them from family to family it saves money for the families, obviously. It builds community because it gives the sense of, you know, we are all in it together and we can help each other to get through that process.

And if it's well-run, it can actually be even a blessing to the school itself. So this is kind of where I stepped in and started with. Yeah, share about what you're doing because you just saw a huge need and you've solved, I think, it very well.

So talk about that. Yes, so obviously started my uniform journey as a parent, purchasing uniforms for my children and then came alongside our school's uniform coordinator that was running our uniform swap and she's doing a fantastic job at it but just needed help with the technical logistics of it. So that's kind of where my program came in place, building a platform for the school to be able to manage their inventory that makes it available to parents online or from a mobile app.

They can see what's available in a school community in terms of the, you know, hands, polos, what sizes, what colors are available in inventory without having to go into the school building or dig through a bin. That's just a huge blessing to the parents. Is it just to clarify, and this is called uniform-y, is that? That's right, yes, uniform with two E's at the end.

Me. Yeah, because you think about the, again, the inconvenience that the used uniform rack is back in that closet over there and your kids are running around, you're trying to like thumb your way through all these, they're not even organized and, you know, is there a large in here, I can't find it. Basically, you've figured out a way to just give a school a simple tool to inventory and then make that available online so you can see it more easily, is that the? Exactly, yes, yes.

And the other kind of benefit of that tool is that the parents that donate uniforms, they get

extra credit. Okay. In the parents purchasing, they can either use the credit if they have any or just pay cash for the items.

Makes the transactions very easy. Takes the kind of the charity aspects away from it. If you have a free bin, people are gonna be hesitant to look through it because they think there's somebody else that maybe needs the free uniforms more than I do.

That's a really good point, too. Yeah, that's a good point. And they just sit there.

It really encourages participation because every family knows if they put something in to the school's uniform swap, they will be able to benefit from it as well. That is a, I mean, it just gets stewardship, it's efficient, makes a ton of sense. I think that, I mean, I don't know if anybody's done that yet.

And I know of a lot of schools that have, you know, the eager parent volunteer and then they change and something comes up and somebody else comes in and they have a different system and it's just a constant revolving challenge. So I think this is a really great idea. So typically then the schools, so if two parents are online, obviously whoever gets that medium golf shirt first is theirs.

And then does somebody take it off? You know, I guess, what does it normally look like? Then you go to the school and you're like, hey, I ordered the medium golf shirt. And then some school staff member goes back and associates it back to an inventory number and then pulls that particular shirt. Is that typically how it's done or volunteers managing that? Yes, so there will be a contact volunteer that kind of manages that program.

I really try to design the program with that volunteer in mind to make their job as easy as possible. I think for schools to value and honor their volunteer time. And you know, facilitate their work as much as possible.

Which again is part of the, I love this because that's, I hear that all the time. So how do you get volunteers? I mean, that's a pretty, raise your hand if you wanna manage the used uniforms at our school. I mean, that is not an easy volunteer ask.

This would certainly make it a lot easier. And even if there's some turnover or multiple volunteers, it seems like it would work well. So I just love that you're, saw a need and solved the problem.

And again, it's called Uniform Me. So you emphasize, it's uni for me. You could pronounce it that way, I guess.

U-N-I-F-O-R, for, and then me, M-E-E. So there'll be info in the show notes about it. But Joanna, thank you so much for just helping us look at the big picture, the practicals, the philosophy behind what we do.

And hopefully we will just continue to help families lean into this very important part of our school culture is the wearing and embracing of wearing uniforms well. So thank you so much. Well, you did it.

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