



June 2, 2017

Dear GTACS Parents,

This communication is in reply to responses I have received about the school's adjustment in school uniform policy and vendor change. First and foremost, I want to apologize for my failure to communicate this issue in a way that was conducive to a more successful transition. I am hopeful that in this letter I can better and more sensitively communicate the recent changes.

I have received a high volume of responses of both a positive and negative nature about the school uniform policy and the new vendor, Dennis Uniform Company. While many people seem aware of the negative feedback regarding the uniforms, people are less aware of the many supportive comments that have come to the school, as those comments came to us through individual emails, phone calls, and visits.

The school has taken a great deal of time to hear and respect all vantage points. While respecting individual perspectives, it is the school's business to make operational decisions that allow the school to fulfill its mission. In a situation like this, when so many families have differing opinions, it becomes difficult to make decisions that are palatable to all families. I hope that this letter conveys the school's deep concern for all families, regardless of agreement on the final decisions.

Why uniforms, and why did the committee make the decisions that they did?

Uniforms in the United States Catholic schools have existed for more than 100 years. They were developed to provide modest and uniform clothing that would reduce distractions for all learners, decrease expenses versus fashionable clothing, and limit the power of clothing to communicate a person's socio-economic status. Uniforms are intended to protect the dignity of the human person. Today, approximately 85% of Catholic schools have a uniform policy (single vendor) and 10% more have a dress code.

I charged the uniform committee to make recommendations that would best support the original goals of a Catholic school uniform. They received my request, plus the parent feedback received via an email account established for that purpose (comments gathered between November and January). They did as they were directed. Their intentions were commendable, and I support their efforts. It would be a mistake for parents to hold the uniform committee accountable for recommendations they made with which you disagree. The purpose of the committee was only to make recommendations to the school. The school is accountable to its parents.

The main issues brought to my attention:

- ❖ **Cost and waste** Many people have concerns about the costs of the new uniform and the waste incurred by changing to a single vendor. Cost concerns are always valid, and need to

be of great concern to the school. The committee interviewed five of the largest uniform vendors in the country. Dennis Uniform prices were competitive with, or better than, all the uniform companies we interviewed. Different vendor's sales, TRIP credits, and promotions were calculated into the cost comparisons. The committee was aware of low-cost providers such as the GAP and Old Navy. These providers were not considered viable options based on the product they offer versus the uniform vendor products.

- **Common Ground** To uphold the uniform policy's purpose and goals yet also be sensitive to parent feedback, we are making the following modifications: Land's End skirts, skorts, jumpers or dresses labeled *at or below the knee* that are currently approved may be worn through their useful life, but no longer than three years. Currently approved Land's End chino uniform pants may be worn for one year (see FAQs). Previously approved pencil or A-line skirts or skirts labeled *above knee* are *not permitted* next year. No pencil leg pants, "skinny" and "jeggings" styles are permitted regardless of brand. Please purchase new pants/shorts from Dennis Uniform, but feel free to "use up" items you already have that meet the acceptable criteria by wearing them for the next year.
- Beginning in the spring of 2018 we will offer a school-coordinated used uniform sale. Because of the durability of the Dennis Uniform products, the sale should greatly help long-term costs of purchasing uniforms.

❖ **Comfort, fit, health and fashion** The comfort and fit of uniforms are often at odds with the desired durability of uniforms. Parents with students of similar shapes and sizes have expressed opposite opinions about the fit of Dennis products. Dennis does work hard to fit each student, but they have not been able to satisfy each student. Please remember that uniforms were never meant to be fashionable. They should, however, provide students with modest and utilitarian attire that promotes their self-dignity and solidarity with their peers.

- **Common ground** Since fitting days, Dennis uniform has added a skirt option (Tyler Plaid Center Box Pleat) for grades 6-12 and we are working with them to increase options in the future. Students may wear currently allowed Lands' End skirts, skorts, dresses, jumpers and chino uniform pants for one year (see FAQs).

- Side note: Students with sensory/tactile issues or have a need to accommodate medical equipment should contact Dennis Uniform regarding cotton pant options.

❖ **Enforcement at the upper grade levels** I received many concerns over enforcement of the current dress code, especially at the upper grade levels. On this issue, the school is being asked to tackle a problem that it is not best suited to solve. The primary educators of children are their parents. The issue of modesty must be addressed primarily on the home front. What the school *can* do is monitor and enforce that clothing that was, from the outset, designed to be modest, is being worn as intended. The work of enforcing the uniform policy must be reasonable; school employees should not be expected to spend countless hours dealing with uniform enforcement issues or compliance. Corrective action or discipline should be the exception, not the norm.

- **Common ground** Please send your children to school in modest clothing. In turn, the school employees will support you when a student is not in full compliance with the uniform policy.

- ❖ **Vendor** Dennis Uniform Company was selected as our vendor after the uniform committee interviewed various uniform companies. The committee found their price, product, and customer service to be the best available. Their selection was verified after extensive reference checks were completed at their different schools. Dennis Uniform Company provides uniforms to roughly 2,000 schools across the country. The schools that utilize their company vary from rural schools to inner city schools, from schools with very high socioeconomic means, to the poorest of the Catholic schools in the country. All their schools are outfitted in the same options that some families have found objectionable. This fact has been one of the most confusing factors during my reflection on the uniform issue. Despite all these things, I was as disappointed as many of you were with our uniform fitting days. There was a high amount of contradictory information between our families and sales associates, and there was a high level of misunderstanding between the school and Dennis Uniform Company. Please accept my apology if you had a poor experience on the fitting days. The experience does not jive with what we have learned about the company. I do know that both Dennis Uniform Company and I are assessing how to ensure that our next fitting day goes 100% better than our first.

- **Common ground** Our schools are working with Dennis Uniform to understand how to best serve GTACS families. We are clarifying points of conflicting information on a variety of issues (see FAQ which follows). Regardless of our rough start, I am hopeful that our partnership with Dennis Uniform Company can still prosper. They are aware of what is necessary for our GTACS community and their company to build a healthy relationship going forward.

I am aware that I have not addressed all the concerns that families have brought to my attention. However, I hope that my attempt to find common ground has helped many families with the upcoming transition. There is always time for listening, and there is also a time for action. I have spent a lot of time listening, and now, I would ask that you consider this letter a communication of action. **This is my response to all families that have asked me to reconsider the uniform policy, and with these adjustments, it will stand as the new policy.**

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Michael R. Buell
Superintendent