

How to Select a Uniform Provider

Without quality products, the program will look worn by the winter holiday and your families will be disappointed that the uniform did not last through the entire school year. Without consistency and continuity, a uniform program looks — well, non-uniform. And without efficient service and delivery, students might outgrow their uniforms before they even arrive.

Once a school community has decided to move into uniforms, they need a set of criteria to help them select a uniform provider. Here are some uniform basics schools should consider when making the decision to choose a provider and implement a successful program.

- **Cost is important, but certainly not everything.** Beware of service programs that sound too good to be true. Some school uniform companies offer service programs or rebates that can be helpful to schools. In fact a great deal of cost goes into servicing schools well and providing high quality garments. I know many school administrators who chose a supplier based on large rebates and then were disappointed by the company's delivery, quality, and service. Make sure that you completely understand the benefits offered. Is the rebate simply tacked on to the price of the garment? Or is the company providing lower quality service to compensate for the rebate? Always ask for a written description of your benefit program.
- **Look for longevity and check references.** Don't underestimate longevity. If a school uniform company has been around for many years and has an established client list, then they are probably doing something right. I have seen dozens of new companies try to gain entry into the industry with unrealistic sales strategies. They tend to over-promise and under-deliver, which results in great frustration for school administrators. Always visit the store of a potential provider to evaluate its condition and convenience, and like a good employer, check references and review track records. You would be surprised how many schools forego these very important steps.
- **Choose a manufacturer.** There are two categories of school uniform providers: those that manufacture (or private label) and those that don't. P&C Uniforms takes great pride in the fact that we are a manufacturer. In our case, being a manufacturer affords us the distinct advantage of being able to better manage our inventory levels and guarantee quality control. This translates into a program that is in-stock, and year-round when families need it. In contrast, when a company purchases product from a second or third-party manufacturer, deliveries are dependent on that vendor. Avoid the "middle-man" and you will have direct accountability from your uniform provider.
- **Not all polo shirts are created equal.** Take the time to really learn about the products your students will be wearing and if they are guaranteed. The old adage "you get what you pay for" holds particularly true in the school uniform industry. School uniforms need to last, withstand rigorous wear and washings, and hold their size and color. They also need to be designed for growth and to complement all shapes of young people. Ask your vendor what sets their products apart. If you get the line, "they are the same as everybody else's, just less expensive", find another provider. A great uniform company should be able to clearly elaborate on the features of their line. You will learn quickly that there are vast differences between a \$10 polo shirt and one that is more expensive. Put simply, the quality is markedly better.
- **Don't be afraid to sign a contract.** Sign a contract once you have selected a provider. Agreements are intended to protect both parties by outlining the expectations and limitations of the relationship. They also exist to provide a transparent view of how a company conducts business and serves the customer. A good contract reflects the highest level of professionalism and a commitment to providing you with the best service possible.