

# BOONE COUNTY WEEKLY

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## Belvidere School District considers uniforms

By Kevin Haas

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

**BELVIDERE** — Students like eighth-grader Nick Stone could be looking for new clothing if the Belvidere School District approves a dress code for 2009. Stone said he doesn't want administrators to decide what he wears.

"I'd be mad" if they enforced a dress code, Stone said. "We'd all just look the same."

The clothing requirements being considered by the board could be as simple as prohibiting suggestive and distasteful clothing or as stringent as outlawing jeans and requiring collared, crew neck or turtleneck shirtlines.

"A change in the dress code is the catalyst for the change in the whole attitude of everybody in the school," board member Lisa Gorman Perez said. "I don't think that standard student attire should be a reaction to a bad environment. I think it can be a proactive move to improving the schools."

Board members decided last month to pursue a dress code for kindergarten through fifth grade by the fall and the rest of the district the following year. This month, they chose to continue a dialogue with individual schools and research the effects of a dress code before adopting any new rules.

"I would like a full uniform policy. I've said that for 15 years," board member Julia Norem said. "I'm hoping that a few of our elementary schools would try to take on that initiative, and it would move throughout the district."

Clothing rules have been debated by districts across the nation. Proponents argue that dress codes instill discipline, prevent gang colors from being displayed, help students concentrate on classwork and make trespassers more easily identifiable.

Uniforms "create a cen-



REGISTER STAR FILE PHOTO | EDDY MONTVILLE

School Board members in the Belvidere School District are pursuing dress codes for students of all grade levels.

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ter of excellence focused on learning, not on whose parents can afford the best clothes," Norem said.

Detractors say dress codes aren't a solution to school violence or achievement issues and that purchasing new clothing could be difficult for lower-income families.

Parent Angel Saso said she sees students dressing too risque at her daughter's middle school.

"Ten- and 12-year-old girls don't need to be walking around with their belly buttons out," Saso said.

Parent Mike Rogers said dress codes can hide a student's individuality and don't

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— Lisa Gorman Perez, board member

have the benefits that many tout.

"One of the things about dress codes is that sometimes they disguise personality changes and things that we really need to recognize," Rogers said. "If you put everybody in the same clothes, how do you figure anybody out?"

He said similar clothing won't mean students concen-

trate more on classwork.

"You find a car that doesn't run and think, 'I'll put a nice coat of paint on it and try to make it run again.' But what you do to the outside doesn't make the inside run," Rogers said. "I think our time and money would be better spent looking at better programs."

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