

Some Uniform thoughts

From parents at Starr King & Jose Ortega Elementary Schools

Many San Francisco public schools require uniforms. They're usually quite simple: navy, black or khaki bottoms and white, collared shirts on top. Sometimes school T-shirts or sweatshirts are okay on top. Almost all allow different colored tights, socks and shoes.

To help incoming Kindergarten parents get their children ready for the start of school, families at Starr King and Jose Ortega gathered advice from current parents on what worked and what didn't when it came to uniforms.

The basic set-up you need (if you only want to do laundry once a week) is:

5 white shirts with collars

5 bottoms in your school's required color (pants, shorts, skirts, dresses)

For Kindergarteners who might have accidents, an extra set of underwear and a uniform stored at school in a labeled bag is often suggested, but check with your teacher.

Where do you get uniforms?

- Thrift Town for pants, shorts, jackets, and sweaters. They tend not to have white polo shirts, which I bought new.
- I ordered a bunch of stuff from www.thechildrenswearoutlet.com last year. The shirts were fine. I wish I had bought more of them. The bottoms were really variable in sizes- we bought a skirt that though it said it was a 6, seemed more like an 8.
- I also bought some jumpers/skirts at thrift stores (which were fine). Most thrift stores have a small stock of random uniform stuff all year, but I found that at the end of the summer Thrift Town had a big rack of things. I had a harder time finding good white shirts or pants there and after a year I see why.
- Target rolls out uniforms beginning in July/August.
- Ross/Marshalls also had a good selection of various brands in the fall. This might be a good inexpensive choice for non-standard sizes.
- Gap/Crazy8s/all department stores have uniforms in the late summer/fall. Sears ran a promotion that said that if they didn't have the size you wanted it would be free last fall.
- Burlington Coat Factory, They have white polo-style shirts available for boys and girls throughout the school year. Girls size 7 pants have been elusive at the Howard/5th Street store
- Note that popular mail order sites such as Land's End and French Toast often offer Preferred School programs that allow a school to get some money back from purchases made by parents. Get your PTA to look into it if you're interested.
- Last year my daughter was all about the Old Navy roll top yoga pant and white polo. Easy-peasy, cheap, washes well and they are comfortable.

What brands are good/bad?

- I would say Lands End, Polo. I got 6 or so shirts from Amazon; French Toast was the brand (cheap! like \$7 each). They are mediocre quality, tho' my son likes them.
- Regarding boys uniform pants and the problem with knees wearing thru the fabric- we

- found that “Dickeys” brand pants from Eriks on mission street (or orchard supply hardware) did last thru the end of the year. They have fabric reinforcement at the knees.
- Kindergarteners need elastic waistbands so that it's easier for them to handle the bathroom on their own! I liked the cargo pants from Children's Place for this reason, but they seem to wear out just before the year ends.
 - We like the polyester jumpers and skirts from French Toast (frenchtoast.com). They don't get all gnarly, curly and faded in the wash like cotton ones. Cute styles, too.
 - Though the French Toast white polo shirts don't hold up as well as Land's End.
 - Gymboree (my fave); French toast on line (runs small); Target; Kohls (my 2nd fave)
 - Lands End endures! Can last the whole year!
 - I have a hard time recommending Lands End -- the actual durability of their pants was very poor (although the appearance of durability was good, they actually wore out and tore at the edges of the doubled knee fabric and the inner "doubled" part peeled away, all within two months.)

Is there a good place to buy for different sized-kids (some uniform pants are too big if you've got a really thin kid, for example)

- Some of the Target skorts have adjustable waist bands which is helpful for my slim girl.
- Lands End clothes have adjustable waist bands

What will kids really wear (i.e. Skirts? Jumpers? Sweaters? Hoodies?)

- All the kinder girls seem to wear short skirts or short dresses with leggings underneath (or colorful tights).
 - My son refused to wear any long-sleeved white shirt. (button-down, turtleneck, polo-style -- nada.) He wears hoodie sweaters and jackets.
 - My son wore shorts for a few days, but EVERY time he wore shorts, he came home with skinned (bloody) knees. I don't know whether it was just unlucky, or my son is particularly clumsy, but be aware that very active kids + shorts = scabby knees. My son is OK wearing pants, so we just went w/that.
 - For girls, skorts and jumpers. Mine won't wear pants. In Kindergarten she loved the blue dresses w/ short sleeves (no white shirt needed) from Target. I bought a couple for first grade and she didn't wear them all year.
 - Hoodies or sweaters are a must but needn't be uniform colors at most schools (check with yours) I got a white hoodie and a navy sweater before learning that hoodies are free choice and my girl rarely wore those. She chose her pink or pink- hearts hoodies instead.
 - A few months into the school year my daughter decided that she really didn't want to wear skirts or dresses anymore - so I would advise if you have a girl being cautious about your selection.
 - What my daughter wants to wear are the knit yoga pants from Target and long sleeve, non-ruffle collared shirts. Every day.
- If you have a Kinder kid I would advise making sure that kids are able to get the pants on and off without assistance. I didn't think of this and we had an accident before she was able to get her pants off.
- I try and buy thicker pants for my active son, as we have problems getting holes in the knees. I look year round for stuff on sale and grab it when it is the next size up!

- I also recommend buying the long sleeved polos when they come out late July/ early August, as they are hard to find when it gets cold (unless you buy online).

What do you wish you'd bought more of?

- White short-sleeved shirts
- Pink tights and leggings
- More shirts set aside and reserved for after Christmas would have been a good idea. The shirts she's wearing now are funky-dunky, but I am not buying more until the fall.
- White collared tops, navy blue bottoms.
- For our daughter it is all about variety as you never know if she'll want to wear skirts/ dresses 5 days a week.
- A good, sturdy cotton zip up sweater (Lands End makes a nice one) is great and durable, one lasted two years. Darker colors held up better than white. My girls worn theirs to school almost every day.
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What do you wish you'd skipped?

- Long-sleeved white shirts, and maybe some of the shorts (due to the skinned-knee thing)
- This year, dresses
- Fancy long-sleeved shirts that buttoned for girls, which they consistently refused to wear, however cute they looked to me.

When did you buy?

- June - August (you gotta give it more time at a thrift store)
- In August. We went together and it was a fun getting- ready-for-school shopping trip.
- Online sites such as Land's End and French Toast tend to have better sales earlier in the summer, so check out their sites.
- Tip if you like the Lands End yoga flare pants, which are very popular – they tend to run out by Nov, so buy enough because otherwise you'll get the dreaded "out of stock until July" message
- Shortly before year started, the kids grow like weeds between ages 5-7.

How long do they last?

- The new shirts got stained right away. The thrift store pants are still fine. Nothing is torn or too small, so define "last"... :) However, when he entered K, he had some 4T garments -- those he outgrew by Feb/Mar (he turned 5 in Aug, so I figured I got an extra 6 months out of them).
- How long do they last? My daughter is still wearing some of the K skorts at the end of 1st grade. they're not as crisp but are fine.
- Boys will **destroy** white shirts. You just have to live with it. Stain sticks are your friend.
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How many of everything do you need?

- We got too much. I got seven or eight skorts/jumpers and some pants that she never ever wore, and probably even more shirts, in K. She outgrew some of the shirts midyear. I bought the larger size at the beginning of the year (on the advice of a 2nd grade parent)

and those she still wears a year later.

- In K my daughter was into tights. In 1st she's more into leggings. If your kid wears pants you can skip this step.

How many of everything do you need?

This depends in part on how often you do laundry. Variety is not your friend, because inevitably your child will become attached to one specific item of clothing that you only have one of and they'll want to wear it every day.

pants: 5 - 6 pairs

shorts: 1-2 (only if your kid is really a shorts kid)

short-sleeved shirts: 5 - 6

long-sleeved shirts: 1-2 (some kids refuse to wear them, no matter how cold it is)

sweaters/hoodies: 1-2

jackets: 1-2

- 5 outfits so that I don't have to do laundry mid week.
- At least five white, short-sleeved polo shirts as at a certain point they seem to stop wearing anything else, and they usually get them so dirty in one day that you can't get by with having them wear them twice.

Do kids outgrow stuff in Kindergarten? Will I need to shop twice?

- Only the 4 T stuff.
- A 2nd grade parent advised me to get larger sizes in august/sept bec they need them in jan/feb and uniforms are much much harder to find then.
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What about shoes?

- They need something they can run around in well on the playground.
- I see a lot of Kinders wearing crocs or sandals (boys and girls). My guy is not that guy. Early in the year he wore construction boots, slip on hiking-style (low) shoes, and now he wears basketball shoes (hi-tops). He is athletic and wants to RUN and play on the yard. Some of the girls, though, especially, wear cute girly shoes. Depends on temperament, I think.
- Before Kindergarten I got one pair of cute Mary Janes and my daughter wore them once. Her feet grew a lot over the last couple of years so we've gone through quite few tennis shoes.

Keeping clothes clean:

Some schools prefer that sweaters or hoodies worn in the classroom be in the same color as the uniform, some don't care. However many parents suggest a dark-colored sweater or hoodie for when it's cold, because it doesn't show the dirt as much.

Most schools let kids wear darker, long-sleeved shirts under a short-sleeved white collar shirt, which means they get warmth (and to wear an especially beloved shirt) while not getting white cuffs astoundingly dirty.

The ultimate cleaning solution, from Amy Dacyczyn's *The Tightwad Gazette*: Add one cup each powdered Cascade and Clorox II to a bucket of super hot water. Soak as many pieces of clothing that will fit. Leave them overnight and wash as usual the next day. Do not use this method for

fabrics that are not color-fast or are delicate.