Do Clothes Make the Student?

Written and Edited by
Kiana Hanna
Sherry Gustafson
Tyler Satterthwaite
Kim Satterthwaite

Perhaps one of the most radically thought out ideas in the public school system is the idea of dress codes. Recent research offers both sides of the argument for and against dress codes, often accompanying emotions and opinions. The number of public school districts adopting dress code policies are continually growing every year (NASEP 2000). Does the old saying the “clothes make the man” apply to public school students? There is a definite correlation between dress codes and positive changes within the public school system.

Why have a dress code in the first place?
⇒ Improved learning climate
⇒ Higher self-esteem
⇒ Helps students focus on schoolwork instead of what they are wearing
⇒ Reminds students that they are in school to learn
⇒ Brand names won’t make the person
⇒ Enhanced school safety (gang affiliation and hiding weapons)
⇒ Dressing alike/similar=less violence
⇒ Eliminates distinction or shame between peers
⇒ Positive effect on student achievement and academic performance
⇒ Improved campus morale
⇒ Reduced discipline issues concerning clothing
⇒ Increased school pride
⇒ Reduces costs of wardrobes
⇒ Correlation with improved attendance
⇒ Fewer distractions
⇒ Reduction of fashion statements
⇒ Teachers don’t have to worry about distractions in their classrooms
⇒ Male teachers would not have to confront female students (awkward)
⇒ Students are showing more and more skin!
⇒ Makes it easier to identify strangers/trespassers in schools

Why dress codes have NOT succeeded in public schools?
⇒ Did not protect religious beliefs of students
⇒ First Amendment Rights Violated (Freedom of Speech)
⇒ Fourteenth Amendment Rights Violate (Freedom of control over personal appearance)
⇒ Individuality and creativity issues- Schools should not be able to interfere with a form of self expression
⇒ Dress code not related to a pedagogical purpose-Why is there a want for this change?
⇒ Parents did not always support the change
⇒ Authoritarian Regimentation
⇒ Needs to be a combined effort with support from parents, administrators, students, and teachers
⇒ People involved were not 100% committed
⇒ Was a cosmetic solution to many other underlying problems within school
⇒ Money- Do students pay or does the school pay for the uniforms?
⇒ Did not allow students some alternative way of expressing themselves
⇒ Lack of communication between the administration and the students

Why dress codes HAVE succeeded in the public schools?
⇒ Got parents involved from the beginning
⇒ Protected students religious expression
⇒ Determined whether to have a voluntary or mandatory school uniform policy
⇒ When a mandatory policy is adopted, have an “opt out” provision
⇒ Did not require students to wear a message
⇒ Assisted families that needed financial help
⇒ Communicated to the students exactly the expectations of the dress code
⇒ District-wide employees all supported the dress code and enforced it
⇒ Teachers strictly followed the code
⇒ The dress code was made entirely for the students to improve particular situations and was not used to just control them

What are the four main benefits of having a dress code?
*⇒ More effective climate for learning
*⇒ Improved safety
*⇒ School unity and pride
*⇒ Decreased gang related problems

*If you can prove the four things above are being hindered by NOT having a dress code in your school district you could prove in the court of law that an implementation would be necessary!


