

# Disparities In Dress Code Discipline Severity Among Students

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“Ultimately dress code violations are based upon Administrative judgement.” This very sentence opens up the question of whether or not the dress code can possibly be reinforced without any students being treated differently.

The most obvious issue is the way it's enforced; staff members clearly do not find many of the rules listed to be violations as worth actually coding students over. Just walking through the halls every day makes it more than evident that the expectations detailed in the student handbook simply aren't upheld. How could they be, in a society where mid-thigh shorts are nearly unheard of in the women's section, and in a school primarily without air conditioning during the summer?

1. **Shorts** - Appropriate shorts may be worn. Appropriateness is based upon length and decent fit. Appropriate length is mid-thigh. This also applies to skirts.

2. **Tops** should be respectable and non-revealing. Tops should cover the students shoulders and down to their pants. Bare midriffs, cropped tops, see-through tops, are not acceptable, nor are shirts with no sides. Clothing with drug, weapons, alcohol-related slogans, symbols, suggestive slogans, violent or obscene messages, or other designs or messages that are disruptive to the environment are not permitted.

3. **Jeans and other apparel** - Clothing with rips, tears or holes may be judged inappropriate for school dress. All pants must be worn at the appropriate waist level.

Think about it: how many of these rules seem to be actively followed at Oak Hills? How often do you see them being broken by many students, while only some are punished?

This is not an issue of making the dress code more severe or reinforcing it better; it is an issue of rewriting the dress code to reflect what truly poses a problem to staff members and sticking to it. There needs to be one uniform code—otherwise, intolerance of body type, gender, and especially race will too easily play a factor in which students are disciplined and which are not. This is due to the impossibility of upholding the current dress code—its severity renders it useless and leaves it entirely up to the staff's discretion. Many students get away with wearing clothes that break the dress code, while those who *are* coded for the same exact violation are singled out. The question is, why would some students be coded for the same dress code violation that other students are not coded for? Whatever the cause may be, this inconsistency by itself sounds unfair.

One Oak Hills student of color was dress-coded by the same staff member that I (a Caucasian student, of the same age and sex) was, claiming that she was grabbed by

the shoulder while walking down the hallway and yanked around. On the flip side, this same staff member got my attention verbally. She was nothing but polite; her exact words were, "Do you have a jacket by any chance? [I nodded and started to get it out.] Sorry, that's not okay today." She was completely toneless and walked away as soon as she finished talking. However, toward the other student, she was largely aggressive and her behavior caused hours of distress.

Her friend commented the following: "My friend could get dress-coded for wearing one of my skirts, but I wouldn't...they're a lot more aggressive with coding black people compared to white people." The current dress code leaves far too much room for opinionated selection; just from asking the girls of color I know, it looks like they're dress-coded up to 7 times more than other girls. This is far from a well-experimented statistic, but it certainly raises the question of what would appear if it *were* properly experimented.

"Got dress coded for a shirt that was showing less than two fingers of skin. Currently wearing that shirt, the lady that dress-coded me passes me multiple times a day...I'd argue the dress code is wildly inconsistent." It's more than evident that the dress code in the student handbook needs to be updated to reflect what rules are actually in place and actively enforced, not only to prevent the unequal treatment of minority members but to prevent unnecessary frustration for both students and staff members. There is currently no way for students to know what will get them dress coded, aside from wearing it to school and hoping for the best. If there were clear rules that the staff followed, the students could follow them, too.

Regardless of the root of this issue, the current Oak Hills dress code certainly enables discrepancies in treatment by allowing staff members to entirely decide which clothes are appropriate and which clothes are not. They are scrutinizing the appearance of students, and whether they're aware of it or not, they're taking body type, ethnicity, sex, and physical appearance into consideration at the same time. Is that what the dress code is about? If it is not regulation of all your *students*, and instead regulation of your female students, of your students of color, and of your students with different body shapes, then what is it really?