

EDUCATION: STUDENTS

Policy 502.1.2-G

Dress Code

The following district guidelines statement is intended to assist schools in the development of a school dress code as required by the Dress Code Regulations.

The purpose of the school dress code is to assist the school in achieving the provincial mandate to “enable all learners” and in enacting the belief statement in the district Philosophy that “schools should provide a social context which will reflect and assist the transition from child to adulthood, promote self esteem, and enhance learning.” In addition to helping to establish a climate that will maximize student success, the school dress code should assist students in becoming increasingly conscious, sophisticated, and capable in the decisions that they make about their manner of dress.

The school dress code should provide a level of clarity that will assist staff, students, and parents in their decision-making with respect to dress, but it is not intended to be prescriptive. The statement should represent a consensus that has arisen in the school community through discussion so that its implementation is eased by a high level of public support amongst staff, students, and parents.

In order for a school dress code to be effective in achieving its purposes, it must be based on a partnership between staff, students, and parents. In the elementary years, the active partnership may primarily involve the teacher and the parent, but the student should participate to an appropriate degree and should understand the reasons behind any restrictions or expectations to which he or she is subject. In the secondary years, the partnership may be primarily between the school and the student, but even as students become increasingly independent their parents continue to have an important role in the underlying partnership that is necessary for success.

While schools do have the authority to establish reasonable requirements with respect to dress, they do not have the authority to impose a uniform. In any event, this is not the intention of the dress code policy.

A school dress code should pay careful attention to the individual right of students, and their families, for the student to dress in a manner that they choose. However, this right of individual choice is tempered by a responsibility to the school community and a recognition that a school is a unique context in which students may be expected to follow reasonable rules. Moreover, by virtue of being a member of the school community, staff, students, and parents have a responsibility to exercise their individual right to choice in a manner that also respects the perspectives and sensibilities of other members of that community.

A school dress code should be based on the expectation that clothing will:

- be appropriate to, and safe for, the intended activity;
- demonstrate self-respect on the part of the wearer;
- demonstrate respect for the rights and perspectives of others; and
- demonstrate a respect for the school context and the wearer’s responsibilities as a member of the school community.

Clothing should be comfortable, so that it does not distract the wearer from learning. It should permit the wearer to adjust to temperature variations that typically occur in schools, and should allow him or her to participate in activities such as physical education, science experiments, or shop projects safely. This may require a change of clothing during the course of the school day.

Clothing should demonstrate the self-respect and dignity of the wearer. At a minimum, clothing should not be immodest. For secondary students, while there is neither need for nor benefit to formality, clothing should meet the minimal standards of propriety that are typical of the workplace.

Clothing should demonstrate an appropriate respect for the perspectives and sensibilities of others in the school community, recognizing that in a diverse community there will be a wide range of values and beliefs that may relate to clothing. Everyone should feel both welcome and safe. This does not mean that anyone should be asked to dress in a manner that someone else would dictate, but it does mean that the right of individual choice should not result in dress that is offensive or distracting to others. Articles of clothing that promote alcohol or drugs, that display offensive language or images, or that encourage racism or bigotry are not acceptable in a school.

The community should have confidence that schools are places where people conduct themselves with purpose, respect, and thoughtfulness. All members of the school community have a responsibility to contribute to a positive climate and public confidence in the school through their dress and demeanor.

All staff have a responsibility to assist students in understanding and abiding by the school dress code, both through words and actions. Staff should provide a positive model of responsible behaviour and mature decision making in this regard. Similarly, parents have a duty to help their children develop appropriate and responsible habits of dress.

When there are differences in perspective to consider and judgments to be made, all involved have a duty to seek common understanding in a mutually respectful manner. Ultimately, however, the principal has the authority to enforce the school dress code when necessary. If any person dresses in a manner that the school principal considers to be inappropriate, s/he should be advised personally and discretely of the inappropriate aspects of his or her dress and given an opportunity to correct it. This may require an immediate change of dress and/or non-repetition of the manner of dress in future.

Refusal to comply or repeated misconduct may result in discipline. When discipline is used, it should be constructive and should encourage learning as well as behavioural change. Parents should be informed and involved in a plan to assist the student in understanding what is expected and why.

The primary intention of a school dress code is to make expectations, and the underlying reason for those expectations, clear in advance so that there is no need for correction or discipline. Notwithstanding that intention, a school dress code is not expected to cover all possible circumstances and all members of the school community are expected to make responsible dress decisions consistent with the fundamental principles above so that they abide by the spirit and purpose of the dress code in areas that it does not directly address.