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Schools Loosen Dress Codes that Targeted Girls

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Students can now wear tube tops, ripped jeans, and even pajamas to school in Alameda, California, where the district relaxed its dress code in response to complaints that girls were being shamed for what they wear. But not all approve of the policy.

The Associated Press

At Alameda High School, students can wear almost anything they want now as long as certain body parts are covered. Ripped jeans, tube tops, short shorts, and midriff bearing shirts are now acceptable for school in this Northern California city. Alameda is the latest school district to adopt a more permissive dress code after students complained the old rules unfairly targeted girls.

Girls were being pulled out of class more often than boys, which raises issues about equity in terms of access to the classroom and they also were saying that when they were having teachers or office staff comment on their clothing, or measure their bodies or their clothing that it was humiliating for them.

Who's your Spanish teacher?

Freshman Kristin Wong and Henry Mills advocated for the change after seeing their middle school classmates shamed and punished for what they were wearing.

We really wanted to make it equitable for all genders and between to have the same dress code that would apply to the same set of students.

I wouldn't say it's distracting personally, no. I haven't seen any of my friends say, "Oh did you see what she or he was wearing?" Like, this is a healthier dress code and it's benefiting a lot of people.

But some think the looser dress code is misguided.

I teach middle school and I see the kids coming with spaghetti straps and midriffs and it frankly breaks my heart.

Teacher Marie Hsu says students shouldn't be punished for being distractions, but some girls now feel more pressure to look sexy.

And if all of the messages around them are telling them that they're supposed to sex it up, that's what they think is most important and that strips them of everything else that they are.

Portland public schools adopted a similar policy two years ago after students complained the old dress code was sexist. Grant High School Principal Carol Campbell says the staff can now focus on teaching not on what students are wearing.

We were spending time like kind of deciding, is this too short? Or is this too revealing? The policies we had in place was actually making students feel unsafe and judged. So having that gone has really changed the culture.

The Alameda School District will assess how its culture has changed when it revisits the dress code next spring. Terry Chea, Associated Press, Alameda, California.

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