

## Dress Code FAQs

### Why is AUSD changing the dress code?

Over the last few years, school districts across the country have had problems with their dress code policies, including the following examples in AUSD:

- The rules were subjective in nature and resulted in inconsistent enforcement based on gender, body type, and maturity.
- The rules were inconsistent with AUSD's value of inclusivity.
- The rules did not support student wellness and positive body image.

Students also pointed out that the rules focused more on girls than boys and resulted in girls losing class time more often than boys (when they had to go to the office to change clothes or wait for a parent to bring alternative clothes, for instance). This raises education equity issues that we believe are important to resolve.

In addition, we now know that when student bodies and clothing are monitored and measured by school staff, students can end up feeling embarrassed or even ashamed. This can interfere with learning and contribute to negative body image.

### How did you decide how to change it?

A small work group examined the existing policy and how it was being implemented across the district. Then they researched model dress policies from across the country. Two of the most notable of those were implemented in Evanston, Illinois and Portland, Oregon and were based on the model developed by the Oregon chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW). The AUSD work group incorporated much of this thinking and language into its draft dress code. After conferring with stakeholders, the work group finalized the proposed changes and presented it to the Board of Education.

The committee was particularly inspired by the introduction to Oregon NOW's introduction, which states:

*Student dress codes should support equitable educational access and should not reinforce gender stereotypes. Student dress codes and administrative enforcement should not reinforce or increase marginalization or oppression of any group based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, household income, gender identity, or cultural observance.*

### **Does this mean there is no dress code?**

There is still a dress code. Students are still prohibited from wearing clothing with language or images that are hateful or related to gangs or pornography. Students also must still wear tops, bottoms, and shoes.

However, we will no longer ask teachers and staff to subjectively judge or measure students' bodies or clothing. We will no longer require students to change into someone else's clothes if they wear something against the dress code. And we will focus, wherever possible, on minimizing the number of times that students are called out or excluded from class because of their clothing or body.

### **What are some other key elements of the new policy?**

- It includes language that states the importance of students being allowed to wear attire that expresses their self-identified gender and to wear religious attire without fear of discipline or discrimination.
- It includes language stating that students should be able to dress comfortably for school without unnecessary discipline or body shaming.
- It states that all students are to be treated equitably regardless of gender/gender identification, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, body type/size, religion, and personal style.
- It removes specific language governing shoe type, hats and other head coverings, gym shorts, skirt/short length, type of top, and hair grooming.

### **If students can bare more skin, won't they be a distraction?**

AUSD rejects the idea that certain students' bodies are distracting and therefore must be monitored and covered. In our prior dress code, this was particularly problematic for girls and students who identify as girls. We believe that such thinking legitimizes inappropriate and/or unwelcome behavior and, by extension, normalizes sexual objectification and assault. We believe that students have the right to respect and the right to autonomy over their bodies, regardless of their physical appearance or clothing.

AUSD also believes:

- Students should be allowed to dress comfortably.
- Students should be free to dress without feeling responsible for minimizing distractions for other students.
- Students are responsible for concentrating on their own school work and managing their own actions.

**Shouldn't students learn to dress professionally at school?**

AUSD's prior dress code, like those of most school districts, did not mandate professional dress. And most high school and college students do not currently dress "professionally" when they are on campus.

We believe young people can learn to dress professionally with the help of their families, mentors, and experiences in the work place. We are aware that there is no universally accepted definition of "professional" dress, and we believe that students can learn to recognize and adapt to dress standards in the wide range work settings that exist in the world today.

**What if I don't agree with this new dress code and I want my student to wear different clothes?**

We believe the primary responsibility for a student's attire resides with the student and the student's parents/guardians. Staff are responsible for ensuring that student attire does not interfere with the health and safety of any student and doesn't contribute to a hostile or intimidating atmosphere for other students. But ultimately standards for individual student attire should be decided by families.

**How will AUSD staff be trained on the new policy?**

Principals will deliver training to teachers about the new policy and how best to implement it, including ways to avoid body shaming language and incorporate body positive language.

**How will feedback be gathered?**

The policy was in a pilot phase in 2018-19. Surveys were made available to students, staff, and parents/guardians in both the fall of 2018 and the spring of 2019. Staff presented the results of those surveys to the Board of Education in the fall and spring, and the Board approved the final policy language on May 28, 2019.