

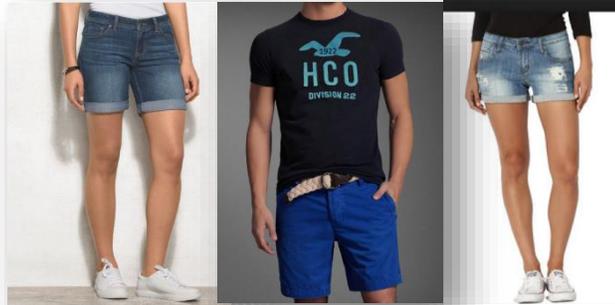
Gateway Dress Code Updates – Spring 2018

Over the last few years, we have heard a lot about “dress code” in the media as it applies in public schools. In this issue of the Gateway Page, we wanted to share with you our vision for our dress code to support our learning environment.

Earlier this fall, Mrs. Spear and I wanted to get some feedback about our current policies and what students thought about them. We opened up an invitation for our students to come and share their thoughts about the dress code. We had fifteen 8th grade students join us for a 45-minute student focus group where they could share their thoughts, concerns and suggestions with us. Through this discussion, we were able to gain more insight on how we could clarify our policy and respond to students in a more thoughtful way. The following are some of the key pieces of this discussion that we thought would be important to share.

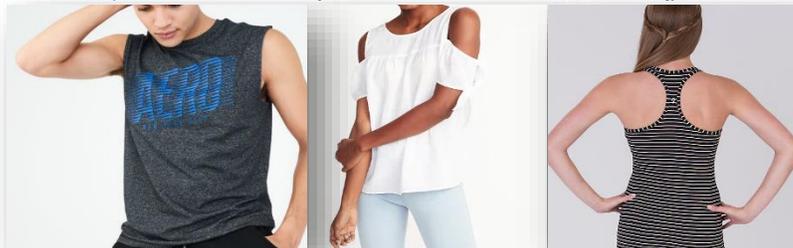
1. **It’s not about “distracting boys”.** When we talked with the students, they initially started with the statement, “we know you have a dress policy so that boys aren’t distracted...” and we stopped them right there. Too often in media, we have seen administrators or school officials telling students they can’t wear something because it “distracts boys”. At GMS, that is not and never has been our purpose for dress code. But somehow, that is what many of our students perceived as why we had a dress code. I took this time to be clear: our dress code is not about “distractibility”- it’s about helping students to learn to dress appropriately based on context. One example I gave is that a swimsuit or a mesh top may be appropriate for the beach, but not so much in math class. In school, students need to move appropriately and safely through the hallways, be able to bend over at their lockers to pick up their books or binders, and sit in a classroom comfortably without exposing themselves.

2. **“Fingertip” rule shorts are impossible to find!** One of the other things that the students shared with us is that the rule about shorts needing to be longer than your fingertips when arms are extended along the sides of the body is really hard to meet. They had all sorts of concerns about students with exceptionally long arms, long legs, and the dependence on genetics to help meet this criterion. They also shared that in the fashion market today, finding shorts to meet this standard was also a challenge. We explained that, in warm weather, we want our students to be comfortable, however, we also want students to be able to bend and sit without exposing their buttocks. They agreed with this, but thought that there could be some latitude with the fingertip rule. As a group, we discussed that perhaps modifying this to “shorts need to be at least mid-thigh in length”, which would accomplish both of these goals.



3. **Are shoulders really an issue?** When we talked with students, they had lots of questions about some of the trendier tops that have shoulder cut outs, along with tanks and spaghetti strap shirts. We shared that the concerns about “spaghetti straps” and camisole tops is that the straps often are impractical and not substantial- they often

Sleeveless, racerbacks and tops with shoulder cutouts are okay



break or snap, and do not afford enough coverage on the front. We did agree that shoulder cut outs, racer-back tanks (see the examples

that follow), and shirts or tops that have higher bodices would be appropriate options for students. Tank tops should come up under the armpit (so as not to expose the torso).

4. **The crop top.** This was an issue that the students brought up because it is very trendy right now. While crop tops (shirts that expose the mid-section of the torso) are stylish, when students bend to get into their lockers or raise their hands, the bottom of the shirts raise significantly, which leads to exposure. Crop top shirts are not allowed for this reason. One suggestion we made, however, is that students may choose to wear a camisole or tank *under* a cropped shirt to alleviate this issue.

5. **Ripped jeans** are all the rage right now. You can barely go shopping and find jeans that *aren't* ripped. Our policy in the past had been “no rips above the knee”, and our students shared that they thought this was more stringent than necessary. Mrs. Spear and I explained that the issues with rips higher up on pant legs would expose students’ bodies or undergarments. The students also

Ripped/distressed jeans are okay, as long as there is no exposed skin over mid-thigh

asked for clarification- some ripped jeans are “distressed” (meaning they have tears and worn spots) but they don’t expose any skin- where do those fall into the policy? We elected to modify our rule on ripped/distressed jeans to read



similar to the modification we did for shorts: Ripped/Distressed jeans are allowed as long as they do not expose skin over the mid-thigh line.

6. **Skirt length:** This also came up in discussion along with shorts length. I explained that while shorts could go up to mid-thigh and still provide adequate coverage when sitting down, skirts that short do not afford that same coverage. Skirts still need to follow the “fingertip rule”.

The other issue we tackled was on how we addressed issues with dress code. One concern these students had was about being “called out” in front of peers about their dress where it may embarrass them or create a disruption. As an admin team, we shared that our concern was that

issues of dress code should be handled professionally and privately with discretion. It should not be done in a way that calls out the student; part of our philosophy at GMS is that all issues should be handled to preserve human dignity, and speaking to students about dress code should be no differently.

The above list just covers a few of the changes to our policy; you can find the policy in its entirety in the student handbook section of the planner. A big thanks to our students help us think through some of these guidelines, and please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions at all. Thank you, again for your support and sending us the best students in the state of Washington!