Parents and their teenage children have always fought about the way young people dress. Some schools are taking on the battle by making rules about what students may wear. Many school officials want to reduce skin exposure and ban t-shirts with offensive language. They argue that this type of clothing can be distracting to other students. Some schools want to make even greater adjustments to their dress codes by requiring school uniforms.

Many parents are in favor of a transition to stricter dress code policies. They believe that uniforms contribute to a more structured classroom environment and help students focus on their schoolwork instead of worrying about how they look. These parents think that requiring uniforms reduces the pressure on students to look like their peers. They point out that students who can't afford expensive clothes often feel left out when they can't keep up with the latest trends. Some students who have been teased and criticized for wearing the "wrong thing" agree that stricter dress codes are a good idea.

Many teenagers think it's not the school's business to monitor what they wear. They don't want the dress code to be modified because they like to express themselves through their clothing choices. For example, some students like to wear shirts that advertise their favorite musicians or sports teams, and others choose distinctive outfits to show their individual fashion sense. Young people sometimes dress in a certain way because it is required by their religion. They argue that schools should not be able to censor their clothing because they have the right to religious freedom.

Some also believe that it is important to be comfortable in order to stay relaxed and focus on learning. Some people say that dress codes tend to target girls by saying that clothes like skinny jeans and leggings are too distracting to boys. They argue that schools should focus on fixing bad behavior instead of treating outfits as the problem.

What's your opinion? Should your school have a stricter dress code? How could a dress code have an impact on a school's culture?

Questions for Classroom Discussion:
- Why do some school officials want to reduce skin exposure and ban offensive language on clothing?
- Why might some parents want a transition to stricter dress code policies such as requiring school uniforms?
- Why don't some teenagers want the school to monitor what they wear?
- Why do some students think a strict dress code is a good idea?
- Does having a strict dress code promote a positive school culture?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS  *and alternate parts of speech

**adjustment** *(noun)* small change

> **Sample Sentence:** I made an adjustment to my eating habits by replacing soda with water, and now I have more energy.

> **Turn and Talk:** What adjustments can you make to have healthier eating habits?

**exposure** *(noun)* display; attention; experience with something

> **Sample Sentence:** Many school officials want to reduce skin exposure.

> **Turn and Talk:** Where can you go to get exposure to art from around the world?

**modify** *(verb)* to make changes to

> **Sample Sentence:** Siya decided to modify the look of her room with some new paint and a small rug.

> **Turn and Talk:** How would you like to modify the content of your social studies curriculum?

**monitor** *(verb)* to check; to keep track of

> **Sample Sentence:** Jabari used his phone to monitor how long it takes him to walk to school.

> **Turn and Talk:** Is it important for parents to monitor their children’s computer use? Why or why not?

**transition** *(noun)* change process

> **Sample Sentence:** The transition from living with my mother to living with my father has been difficult, but it’s getting easier each day.

> **Turn and Talk:** Was the transition from fifth to sixth grade easy or difficult? Share a few details to support your opinion.

**transition** *(verb)* to adjust to; to change or move from one condition to another

> **Sample Sentence:** Our school is transitioning from textbooks to iPads.

> **Turn and Talk:** Why do you think it’s so hard for soldiers to transition from military to civilian life?
DO THE MATH

In the early 1990s, Long Beach Unified School District in California was in trouble. Students in its schools were violent. District-wide test scores were low. School officials thought about different ways to modify the schools. They wondered what kinds of adjustments would work best to fix their district. In 1994 they began a transition to school uniforms. Test scores improved. Violence decreased. Within a few years, school crime had dropped by 80%.

The uniform policy at Long Beach Unified got a lot of media exposure. President Bill Clinton praised school uniforms in his 1996 State of the Union Address. Groups that monitor education also took notice. The Broad Foundation, for example, awarded the school $2.14 million in prizes.

Option 1: In Long Beach, school crime fell by 80%. Which of the following means the same thing?

A. School crime fell by four-fifths.
B. School crime fell by three-quarters.
C. School crime fell by two-thirds.
D. School crime fell by half.

Option 2: Each year, the average American school spends approximately $10,000 per student. How many students could the Broad Foundation’s $2.14 million in prizes fund for one year? (Hint: To solve this problem quickly, use exponents.)

\[
\frac{2.14 \times 10^6}{1 \times 10^4} = 2.14 \times 10^2, \text{ or 214 students}
\]

Discussion Question: The media exposure of school uniforms in Long Beach sparked a debate. Some researchers pointed out that requiring uniforms was not the only adjustment made by the district. The uniforms were just one part of a larger transition. When the district modified the dress code, it also began to improve school security and closely monitor school attendance, among other changes. Did the uniforms fix the schools? How could we find out?
THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

“I heard that our principal, Ms. Jackson, was meeting with some parents who want us all to transition from the current school dress code to wearing school uniforms,” says Sumiko.

“Ew!” says Alyssa. “I hate that idea. We already have a dress code to keep skin exposure to a reasonable level—no shorts or skirts higher than our fingertips, no bare midriffs, that kind of thing. And we’re not allowed to have swear words printed on our clothes. I’m okay with that, but we should still have some right to express ourselves in the way we dress.”

“I don’t know,” says Ethan. “Deciding what to wear and trying to figure out what’s in and what’s out is a pain. Having to wear uniforms would take some adjustment, but it would make life simpler in the long run.”

“I don’t want my school to monitor every aspect of my life,” says Mario. “What I wear should be up to me. I definitely don’t want uniforms. And as for the dress code, there are bound to be cases where it’s unclear whether a certain outfit fits the rules or not. It’s not like a dress code can be as clear and objective as things are supposed to be in science, for example.”

“Hmm. What do you mean?” asks Ms. Kahn. “Why don’t you think a dress code can be objective?”

“Well, the rules are always going to be open to interpretation,” says Mario. “Students might interpret them differently from the way the administrators who wrote the rules meant them.”

“Can you give some examples?” says Ms. Kahn. “The class can think about how to modify the rules to be clearer.”

Mario made up some examples of rules and the ways people might misinterpret them (by accident or on purpose). Below are three of his examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Rule</th>
<th>Rule Violation</th>
<th>Intended Solution</th>
<th>Unintended Solution</th>
<th>Write a revised rule that makes the intended solution clearer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dresses must not have spaghetti straps.</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Example: Dresses must have sleeves or straps that are at least two inches wide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bottom hem of skirts or shorts must be below the fingertips.</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Example: The bottom hem of skirts or shorts must be below the fingertips, and there may be no bare midriffs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each boy must wear a tie.</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image8.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image9.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Example: Each boy must wear a tie in the conventional way around his neck.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you could modify your school’s dress code or uniform, what adjustments would you make?
DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A
☐ Schools should require students to wear uniforms.

B
☐ Schools should have a dress code.

C
☑ Schools should not monitor what students wear.

CREATE YOUR OWN
☐

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

___________________________________________________
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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

“Can you show me evidence in the text that...”

“You make a good point, but have you considered...”

“I believe that...”

“I agree with you, but...”
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

adjustment | exposure | modify | monitor | transition

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