

Relaxing the School Dress Code

ISSUE: A West Los Angeles high school has liberalized traditional dress and grooming policies. What are the advantages?

Campus disputes over what constitutes proper dress and grooming have become an out-of-proportion issue at many Southern California high schools.

In a few instances, the resulting mini-confrontation between student and teacher has gotten in the way of the more important educational process.

Some schools take a hard line and set strict standards. Others assume a more lenient stance. But it is the rare institution where the length of a skirt or haircut doesn't cause a small hassle.

There is no question that many students deliberately test the authority and patience of both parent and teacher by demanding the right to wear extreme garb. Finding the correct solution for this teen-age ploy isn't easy.

One West Los Angeles high school, however, is conducting an interesting experiment to determine whether almost

total relaxation of dress and grooming codes will provide an answer. Traditional regulations were dropped quietly four months ago at Hamilton High School in favor of what is believed the most liberal code in the city.

A student-parent-teacher committee agreed to let good taste set the campus standard. About the only outright ban was against bare feet.

Despite some early misgivings, the new code has not resulted in a further letdown of standards. School officials report most students do not dress any differently today than before the rules were relaxed.

An evaluation of the experiment will be made before the end of the current semester. Changes may be necessary. If so, they will be ordered. Recognizing that basic discipline must be maintained, its administration wisely retained its veto prerogative.

Hamilton High deserves an "A" for testing a theory that may point a way out of the dress code quandary. Its experiment should be watched closely by other schools.