

# An Examination of Dress Code Policies Influencing Body Shame, Sexualization and the Learning Environment of African American Middle School Girls

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## Executive Summary

### Objective

The focus of this research is a literature review and environmental scan examining the historical and psychological factors associated with the culture of dress code, specifically within Durham city schools. This research will specifically pertain to North Carolina and city of Durham. Historically, dress code policies have not prioritized how girls feel in their clothing as opposed to how they look. Contemporary dress code policies promote negative body esteem, sexualize women, and do not maintain healthy learning environments. This research will culminate in the recommendation of more inclusive policies to support equitable education access and not reinforce gender stereotypes.

### Why Durham

Dress codes are currently a hot topic in North Carolina. In 2019, DPS named girls-only dress codes as unconstitutional. This case brings attention and much needed light to the change that Durham Public Schools are trying to bring about to their school system. "Tough decisions are made when it comes to dress code and it may not always be right the first time" - DPS Board of Education Vice Chairman Steve Unruhe.

### Methods

This research will be a policy status review by means of an environmental scan design. Using materials such as policy details, news articles, and other grey matter, the procedure will be a web search based on key terms, or keywords. The 2019-2020 dress code policy for DPS was a major, credible source for identifying problem areas and solutions.

### Conclusions

African American girls were two times more likely to be subjected to discipline for minor violations, such as dress code violations. The history of dress code policy, in general, had a consistent connotation of reinforcing gender specific stereotypes. The Durham Public School system has made gradual changes to their dress code policies, but more can be done to achieve higher inclusivity and protection of black middle school girls.

### Policy Recommendation

- 1) Include specific language that reassures student dress codes will not reinforce gender stereotypes, marginalization or oppression of any group.
- 2) Dress code enforcements should be consistent with Durham Public Schools overall discipline plan.

*\*special note to Oregon NOW Model*

