



SANCTIONS FOR DRESS CODE VIOLATIONS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Standards for student appearance are provided via dress codes in school handbooks which also contain disciplinary consequences or sanctions for dress code violations. The purpose of the study was to identify and evaluate sanctions for dress code violations.

A single mailing requested the 1997-98 handbook from a sample (n=300) chosen from 803 secondary schools in a Midwestern state. Handbooks were content analyzed to identify sanctions for dress code violations. Sanctions were evaluated along seven dimensions: source, formality, retribution, obtrusiveness, magnitude, severity, and pervasiveness.

Responses were received from 183 schools; 98% had a dress code; all indicated sanctions for dress code violations. All sanctions originated from external sources (e.g., principals) and ranged from informal (e.g., verbal reprimand) to formal (e.g., suspension). All sanctions were negative (e.g., reprimand). Magnitude ranged from moderate (e.g., detention) to extreme (e.g., referral to law enforcement). Sanctions ranged from mild (e.g., change offending item) to severe (e.g., expulsion). Some sanctions were unobtrusive (e.g., confiscation of item); others were obtrusive (e.g., turning item inside out). Accrued violations (e.g., demerits) led to increased pervasiveness of sanctions, that is, increasing number of sanctions, duration, and number of sanctioners.

Identification and evaluation of sanctions is one step in determining the characteristics of sanctions which have power to compel conformity to rules. Explicitly stated sanctions for dress code violations could eliminate misunderstandings that lead to negative attitudes toward school rules.