

# CLASSROOM

## connection

### Power, prestige, pitfalls— maneuvering modern fashion

Pick up almost any teen magazine and check out the fashion pages. Chances are you will find partially clad girls that more closely resemble adults than young teenagers. And although boys may deny being slaves to fashion, many are careful to wear the proper logo emblazoned on their shirts and athletic shoes. For girls and boys, the pressure to have the “right” look can socially divide students and distract them from their real reason for being in school—to learn. Parents and students who jointly decide to deemphasize fashion soon recognize that clothing is merely the outward packaging and what truly counts are the contents.

#### FASHION'S SECRET MESSAGE

Face it, when it comes to fashion, most adolescents consider their parents out of touch. Instead, kids are more likely to trust advertisers, modern entertainers, and their peers to determine “what’s in.” Unfortunately, those fashion role models often promote a look that is simply inappropriate for school. Take a look at the traditional mainstay of wholesome entertainment, Disney. You can find Miley Cyrus, singer and television star of *Hannah Montana*, photographed in a lacy camisole and “High School Musical” star Ashley Tisdale gyrating in a mini skirt in a sneaker ad. It’s only natural that young girls want that look too.

Stroll through the mall and look at the message major stores are sending preteens. Abercrombie & Fitch adorns their wall with half-dressed male and female

models. American Eagle’s Aerie and Victoria’s Secret sell the idea that it’s OK to show your lingerie. Sports retailers draw boys into their brands with the lure of sports teams and athletes.

Don’t think that retailers are consciously trying to influence your son or daughter?

Think again. One international marketing research firm said retailers are looking to solidify brand loyalty with consumers as early as they can. They want to convince consumers that a particular brand makes you smarter, more confident; it will transform your life. This is what marketing to the teenage consumer is about. It’s about providing an image, trendiness, a status.

Footwear manufacturer Nike spends millions of dollars each year to secure basketball great Michael Jordan’s endorsement. His name alone is enough to convince millions of kids that Air Jordan sneakers are the only sneakers they can wear on the court or around school. The ploy must be effective given the company’s successful January 2008 launch of a limited edition Air Jordan XX3 sneaker—

with a whopping price of \$230 per pair!

With these powerful influences, it is not surprising that fashion transcends everyday school life. Having the right look and the right brand plays an important role in social behavior. Clothes and accessories can determine which group an adolescent fits with or is excluded from.

University of Illinois research uncovered a growing trend of bullying related to clothes. A study of teens in more than 20 states showed that kids revere those people they perceive to have the best clothes. Having access to designer clothing affords some kids an opportunity to become popular, and that popularity protects them and gives them social power and leverage over others.

A middle school principal says that the majority of students come to school appropriately dressed, but admits that she occasionally is forced to call parents to address a problem.

Surprisingly, most parents are unaware that their children have chosen to wear a seductive outfit or a T-shirt covered in profanity. She concedes that if the trends continue,

she can foresee more school districts being forced to consider explicit dress policies or even dress codes or uniforms.

#### BEING A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

No parent wants a telephone call from school complaining of his or her child’s attire. A little parental involvement beforehand can be enough to prevent a major crisis. Consider the following suggestions:

► **Start a conversation** with your child about fashion and what it means. Ask your child his or her thoughts about style and image. Do other students ever comment on your child’s clothing? Find out what issues he or she feels are important and why.

► **Be a part of your child’s clothes shopping.** Don’t simply hand your children a credit card to wander the mall. It is easier to discuss fashion choices before the purchase is made.

► **Take a careful look** at your child’s clothing choices before school each day. Is the outfit appropriate? Does it meet your school’s dress code or policy? If not, this is time to change into something you both agree is acceptable.

► **Be aware** that adolescents can quickly change or modify their clothes. A brief stop in the school restroom can transform that modest button blouse and jeans into a provocative ensemble.

► **Look at your child’s friends and how they dress.** Their clothing choices will have a profound impact on your child’s sense of fashion.



# Schalmont Students Offer MS Fashion Insight

*This March, a stroll through the halls of Schalmont Middle School revealed students hustling to class, digging in their lockers and chatting with friends. Most girls and boys were clad in jeans and T-shirts, long-sleeved shirts or layered tops. They all seemed appropriately attired for a school day in early spring, so several students were interviewed to find out a little more about the complexities of MS fashion.*

## STUDENTS' SAY-SO

Popular fashion changes from generation to generation. In the early 1990s, middle school fashion staples included ripped jeans and plaid shirts, courtesy of the "grunge" phase. In 2008, several female Schalmont MS students said their fashion favorites include wearing Ugg boots, straight-legged pants, flat ballet shoes, hoop earrings, and layered shirts as well as mixing funky colors in with normal colors. However, they felt that fashion was a very individual choice. One student said, "It's mostly what I like."

Who inspires what they like? Popular media certainly plays a role. These students said they sometimes turn to magazines such as CosmoGirl, People and Seventeen for inspiration. Friends also influence their preferences.

"A lot of styles of clothing come from kids themselves," said one student.

Another added that, "It's not that people copy, though. It's just that they like the style." She felt that students could inspire others with new ways to express themselves, but that it shouldn't turn into fashion peer pressure. "Just because your friends do something, it doesn't mean you have to do it."

Parents may want to respect their children's desire to ex-

press themselves, but they still serve an important role in fashion decisions. "Some parents will get [inappropriate clothing] for their kids," said one student. She felt parents' can most influence fashion decisions by preventing the initial purchase of inappropriate clothing.

The MS Code of Conduct helps determine what's inappropriate for the school setting, but the line between good and bad taste in fashion can be harder to draw. "What your friends think and what your parents think is really different," said one student. She illustrated her point by mentioning a previous outfit - leggings worn under shorts - her friends thought was cute, but her mother thought looked silly.

MS students and parents may not agree on the most flattering fashions, but they could find some common ground over the reasons for fashion choices. As one student said, "You shouldn't wear a style that doesn't fit your personality."

## RULES TO DRESS BY

The MS Code of Conduct contains information to help students and parents traverse the tricky road of MS fashion. At the start of every school year, students are given a copy of the Code of Conduct in the Schalmont Middle School Student Handbook. Parents and students also can access the information

online at <http://www.schalmont.org/MS/MShome.htm> (look under "Quick Links"). Following are excerpts from the Student Dress Code portion.

## STUDENT DRESS CODE

All students are expected to give proper attention to personal cleanliness and to dress appropriately for school and school functions. Students and their parents have the primary responsibility for acceptable student dress and appearance. Teachers and all other district personnel should exemplify and reinforce acceptable student dress and help students develop an understanding of appropriate appearance in the school setting.

A student's dress, grooming and appearance, including hair style/color, jewelry, make-up and nails shall:

1. Be safe, appropriate and not disrupt or interfere with the education process.
2. Not include extremely brief garments which cause a disruption to the educational process.
3. Ensure that underwear is completely covered with clothing.
4. Include footwear at all times. Footwear that is a safety hazard will not be allowed.

5. Not include the wearing of hats in the classroom except for medical or religious purpose.
6. Not include items that are vulgar, obscene, libelous or denigrate others on account of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or disability.
7. Not promote and/or endorse the use of alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs and/or encourage other illegal or violent activities.

Each building principal or his or her designee shall be responsible for informing all students and their parents of the student dress code at the beginning of the school year and any revisions to the dress code made during the school year. Students who violate the student dress code shall be required to modify their appearance by covering or removing the offending item and, if necessary or practical, replacing it with an acceptable item. Any student who refuses to do so shall be subject to discipline, up to and including in-school suspension for the day. Any student who repeatedly fails to comply with the dress code shall be subject to further discipline, up to and including out of school suspension.

## Mark your calendar...

### MAY

- 12** Board of Ed. Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.
- 19** MS PTO Meeting, 7 p.m.
- 20** SCHOOL BUDGET VOTE, 6 a.m. - 9 p.m.
- MS Colonial Day
- 22** MS/HS Interim Reports Issued

- 23-26** NO SCHOOL - Memorial Day
- 27** Board of Ed. Meeting @ MS LGI, 7 p.m.
- 28** All-district 4th, 5th & 6th-grade Band & Chorus Concert @ HS, 7 p.m.
- 30-31** NYSSMA Solo Festival (MS Instrumental & Choral) @ Guilderland HS



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