

DON'T MESS WITH OUR DRESS

Education Minister Janet Ecker's decision last week to have schools enforce individual dress codes by September draws mixed reaction from students, parents.

BY JEROME WATT
Special to The Economist & Sun/Tribune

York Region students and parents are on opposite sides of the fence when it comes to the provincial government's plan for a school dress code.

On Feb. 12, Education Minister Janet Ecker announced at Markham's Armadale Public School that Ontario school boards must have a student dress code implemented by September.

The minister said a dress code or uniform promotes respect and makes for a good learning environment.

A dress code would also serve as a safety tool so school officials could easily identify who belongs in the school and who doesn't, she said.

"I think it's a fabulous idea," said Queensville's Mandy Goreski.

"I grew up in England where everybody had to wear a uniform."

Angie Bogardis agrees with her friend. She already finds it a struggle getting her fashion-conscious seven-year-old daughter dressed in the morning.

"There are more important things to worry about."

She can only imagine what it will be like once her daughter hits her teens.

Not all adults are convinced a dress code is such a good idea.

"There are more important things to worry about," Becky Brunton of Newmarket said. "Why bother? What's the purpose? In our school system, we have a lot more problems than what the kids need to wear."

Teenagers at Markham District High School don't see any merit in having a dress code.

"I'd fight that," said 18-year-old Andrew Norman.

"I know this school will erupt."

What you wear doesn't make a difference in how you learn, he said, and it takes away from the diversity of the school.

Clothing doesn't add to the learning environment, agreed 19-year-old Neil Hooley. By having a dress code, you will only anger students, making it less likely they'll pay attention, he said.

Markham District's Catholic counterparts, at Sacred Heart High School offered their experience with uniforms.

"I think it's a lot better than pre-planning what you have to wear," Barry Ho Sing, 18, said. "It stops the rivalry over the clothes you wear."

Seventeen-year-old Tom Lauder enjoys the days when he doesn't have to wear his uniform to school. Valentine's Day was a "civvies" day at Sacred Heart.

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Lauder admits he often breaches the school's dress code and finds the consequences minimal.

Joe Housam, a student at Rogers Public School, sees merit in the dress code.

"It's fine with me," the 13-year-old said.

He researched the topic and found students at schools with a dress code do better academically.

His peers, Shari Crawford and Nicole McKibbin, don't agree.

"They are going to rebel against teachers more," Crawford said. "I agree with Nicole."

And Ecker's claim that uniforms make it easier to identify people who don't belong in the school doesn't wash with McKibbin either.

"Have more security if you're that worried," she said. "I don't really think that's a problem here at Rogers."

Brad Allen, another student at Rogers, said a dress code would



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Sacred Heart High School students Lindsey Whitehead and Roberto Curado wear uniforms as part of their daily school life.

Education Minister Janet Ecker's announcement that dress codes should be enacted voluntarily in all schools draws mixed reaction from students and parents.

eliminate "name-brand" rivalry and make clothing cheaper, but added students will always find an opportunity to make fun of one and another regardless of clothing.

A short distance away, at Aurora Heights Public School, students aren't happy with the idea of a dress code either.

"I think we shouldn't have them," said Deena Hacker, 12.

Her classmate Nick Hamilton, 12, agrees.

"I basically feel we shouldn't have a uniform," he said.

"The clothes a person wears won't improve their attention in

class either," said Courtney Drodge, 12.

"It's not what you are wearing," she said. "If you are paying attention (you will learn)."

All three students agreed the school banned clothing with offensive language, in particular Southpark material, and there should be fashion limits.

Individual school boards, in consultation with parents, will be allowed to set the policy based on provincial guidelines, Ecker said.

York Region has already experimented with dress codes at Armadale Public School and found

it to be quite successful.

"They found it provided beyond the clean look," Lucia Cascioli, public affairs officer for the York Region public board said. "It provided school unity for them."

The uniforms also allowed school officials to easily spot visitors, she said, adding the school council and parents came up with the dress code, she said.

"Everybody seems happy with it because it was a collaborative effort," she said.

"Schools will be allowed to decide their dress code on an individual basis," Cascioli said.



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