

My Hair is Against the Rules: *Activism Toward Equitable Dress Code Policies in K-12 Settings*

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NATURAL-HAIR DISCRIMINATION IS A PREVELANT FORM OF ANTI-BLACKNESS THAT HAS PERMEATED MANY DRESS CODE POLICIES

While there is a plethora of research around civic-engagement and activism, as well as dress codes, there is little research addressing activism specific to natural hair policies and schools.

Conducting this study is the start of closing the research gap as well as **IDENTIFYING AND SHARING ACTIONABLE STEPS FROM EDUCATORS** about their experiences with students, activism, and natural hair.



Why Should We Address Natural Hair Discrimination in Schools?



Discriminatory policies are part of systemic racism and do not belong in learning environments.



Natural hair should be a source of pride for children of color. They should not view their hair as inappropriate, unprofessional, or distracting, as it's been referred to in numerous dress code policies.



Children shouldn't be excluded from the academic program, extracurricular activities, graduation ceremonies, etc. due to wearing their natural hair.



Withholding the academic curriculum because of natural hair tells students that educators don't prioritize the students' best interests or genuinely care about them.



School should be a safe space for learning, and not a place focused on controlling black and brown bodies.



Prohibiting natural hairstyles oversteps the boundary of behaviors for which schools should discipline students.

➤ Why is Civic Engagement Important for Students?

Civic engagement enhances students':

- ability to navigate **complex issues**
- awareness of **political** landscape
- understanding of their place in **the world**
- ability to engage in **respectful discourse**
- agency** and use of voice
- connection to the **community and broader world**
- interest in becoming **world citizens**
- interdisciplinary** learning





Major Takeaways

Articles are the preferred resource for engaging students in activism and teaching about current events.

Podcasts
Guest speakers
2 Articles
News broadcasts
Flocabulary video
Documentaries
Public radio

The greatest challenge to activism and having meaningful discussions is **student apathy**.

The most important **teacher action** is **facilitating conversations** in a way that makes sure all students feel heard and respected.

Student says:

“

I like learning about the world and trying to **change things** that upset me.

”



Major Takeaways

The vast majority of participants deem it acceptable for students to wear their hair in natural styles such as **braids, an Afro, or locs.**

Most participants were **against schools implementing dress codes that prohibit students from wearing natural hairstyles**, but were conflicted about how students should appropriately address school or district leaders about these and other unjust policies.

Very few participants have **discussed natural hair** with students, formally or informally.

Educators interested in or committed to activism desire **collaboration with colleagues and support from leadership.**

71%

discuss politics or current events with students.

64%

think students should address school or district leaders about unjust policies.

63%

have engaged in activism with students.

17%

have discussed natural hair with students, formally or informally.

≧ Dress Code Audit

Biased dress code policies have come under scrutiny, and in some instances have become the subject of legal battles.

DRESS CODE POLICIES DO NOT HAVE TO REFERENCE HAIR AT ALL.

A Model Policy on Dress Codes from the Dignity in Schools Campaign indicates that **THE FOLLOWING HAIRSTYLES SHOULD NEVER BE PROHIBITED:**

braids locs beads Afros Afro-puffs
combs weaves extensions
hair worn naturally particular hair colors

Results from Dress Code Analysis of Randomly Selected Schools Nationwide
(protocol created by the Dignity in Schools Campaign)

Of the K-12 dress codes analyzed:

70% mentioned hair.

particular hair colors were mentioned in **30%** of the dress code policies.

20% forbid students to wear their hair in Afros.

20% forbid students to wear their hair in braids.



Action Steps for Educators



Use articles as biggest source from news sources and scholarly research.

Audit your school and district dress code policies for anti-black and other discriminatory language. Conduct a close read of the policy with students.



Challenge your own biases. Take the hair bias test, created by the Perception Institute.
<https://perception.org/goodhair/hairiat/>

Combat student apathy; students often maintain family's political views.

Create a school and class that nurtures discussion and inclusivity prior to facilitating conversations with students.



≡ Contact Us

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Other areas of study:

- ★ Secondary science education
- ★ Special needs interventions
- ★ Parental support

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Other areas of study:

- ★ Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
- ★ Character education
- ★ Reading interventions





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