



Elizabeth Hintz and Laura Sutton volunteer to show appropriate and not-so-appropriate dress and appearance for professional educators.

As a student teacher, what is your definition of professional or appropriate attire and appearance? Is your definition the same as the campus where you will be interning? A good general rule is that your attire and appearance should serve as a model for young students to emulate. While you want to be comfortable and perhaps express a distinctive or personal style, the classroom is not the place to wear provocative clothing or display visible body art and multiple piercings.

Dress Codes

Let’s face it. Over the past decades, the university environment has become increasingly casual. In many universities, jeans, tee shirts, and sandals have become the norm for students and faculty. The K–12 classroom, however, operates under a different set of rules. It is your responsibility to discover those rules and to abide by them.

Most school districts have written codes of conduct that include dress codes for educators. Before your first day of student-teaching, consult with your cooperating teacher and university supervisor about dress codes. The following is a brief compilation of faculty dress codes that seem to be common in

Appropriate Dress & Appearance

Pam Stephens

public schools and districts across the United States:

- For women: skirts, dresses, or slacks; blouses or sweaters
- For men: slacks, collared shirts, or sweaters (ties and jackets recommended)
- Closed-toe shoes

The following is a sampling of faculty dress codes that suggests attire that most public schools and districts prohibit:

- Torn, tight, short, or revealing clothing
- shorts or jeans (unless with permission or for special events)
- T-shirts without collars
- T-shirts with non-school logos
- hats (with the exception of those worn for religious or health reasons)
- jewelry that causes noise or is distracting to the wearer or others
- flip-flop sandals
- open-toed shoes
- sweat suits or other workout clothing (except for those who teach physical education)

A good general rule is that your appearance should serve as a role model for young students to emulate.

Personal

Appearance and Grooming

Remember that K–12 schools are, for the most part, conservative. In addition to dress codes, school districts expect that faculty will serve as role models with their personal appearance and grooming habits. Here is a list of personal appearance and grooming policies that are typical of those found in school districts across the United States:

- Hairstyles should be moderate, neat, and a natural color.
- Visible tattoos or other body adornment are not acceptable.
- Make-up should be minimal and natural looking.

- No excessive perfumes, oils, or other cosmetics with heavy scents should be worn.

Why All the Rules?

The tone of a school is set by the faculty. It is not unreasonable for a school to expect and require teachers to be exemplars of professionalism. This includes the manner of dress and appearance. Dressing and grooming in a professional manner will enhance your authority in the eyes of your students. Do not sabotage your own authority by appearing less than professional in your attire and grooming. You are more likely to be treated as a professional by your students if they perceive that you are.

The Bottom Line

If you cannot resist buying the newest low-rider jeans or comfortable jogging shoes, keep those items for after-school events. Save the wild hair color or style for summer vacation. Think twice before getting a visible tattoo or an unusual piercing. If you already have tattoos or multiple piercings, play them down. Wear long sleeves. Remove all but one earring in each ear.

Let moderation and common sense direct your professional sense of style, grooming habits, and physical appearance. Remember, you are a role model and the K–12 educational environment is, for the most part, conservative in nature. ☺

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