Creating a Dress Code

Chris Stogdill (cstogdil@esu8.org), the secondary principal and activities director of Stanton (NE) Community Schools, recently established a new dress code at his school and shared his process with PL:

I started creating a new dress code by consulting my student council, who came up with suggestions and things to address. Then my administrative team—along with the superintendent, the elementary principal, and the guidance counselor—discussed the list and made changes to address our concerns. I discussed the information with the staff at our monthly meeting and sent a copy to the board of education to get input before meeting with students.

We divided the student meeting by gender. The guidance counselor and student council adviser delivered a PowerPoint presentation that they had developed. In smaller groups by grade (4–6, 7–8, and 9–12), the students discussed items in the presentation. The counselor, meeting with the girls, stressed the importance of appearance and not being a distraction to others. I addressed similar concerns with the boys.

I also sent every student a letter about the new dress code to use when shopping for the following school year. It seemed to help the students understand the expectations and why the change was necessary. The new dress code will be in the handbook and will be reviewed again with the students to start the year.

Current Events

Cybersafety GOES NATIONAL

In late June, the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing on ensuring student cybersafety. Each of the six witnesses presented a different perspective on and approach to Internet safety, but all agreed on the importance of preventing cyberbullying. Principals may be particularly interested in the testimony of B. J. Paris, who is the principal of Canyon Vista Middle School in Austin, TX, and who began her term on the NASSP Board of Directors in July. Her testimony includes recommendations for other school leaders as well as recommendations for Congress. For more, visit http://edlabor.house.gov/hearings/2010/06/ensuring-student-cyber-safety.shtml.
Graduation by the Numbers

The annual Education Week graduation-rate report, Diplomas Count 2010: Graduation by the Numbers—Putting Data to Work for Student Success, is a blend of sobering news and reasons to be optimistic about the future.

According to the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center, the national graduation rate for the class of 2007 was 68.8%. That’s slightly lower than the 69.2% rate for the class of 2006, but that 0.4% decrease is 11,000 fewer students who earn diplomas. It’s the second year in a row of declining graduation rates, when the overall trend had been positive for about a decade.

Demographic differences among graduates are still troubling: the graduation rates are still higher for White and Asian students than they are for Black and Latino students. Females earn diplomas at a slightly higher rate than males. Graduation rates are still lower than average in areas where the levels of poverty or racial or socioeconomic segregation are high. But there is a glimmer of hope: the graduation rates are rising—if only by small increments—within each major racial and ethnic group.

One-fifth of the nongraduates—a quarter of a million students—had been enrolled in a small group of 25 school districts. On the other hand, there were 21 districts in large cities where the graduation rate was higher than the demographic circumstances would predict.

In addition to the data, the report includes articles about specific schools and districts where educators are working to increase data awareness, support struggling students, and clean up the data to increase accuracy. To read more, visit www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2010/06/10/index.html.

Girls and Delinquency

Delinquency is usually studied and analyzed from the perspective of boys, but the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention created the Girls Study Group to focus on exploring delinquency among girls, which resulted in the study Causes and Correlates of Girls’ Delinquency (April 2010). As the study states, “Boys and girls experience many of the same risk factors, but they appear to differ in sensitivity to and rates of exposure to these factors. For example, sexual assault is a risk factor for both boys and girls, but the rate of exposure to this risk factor is greater for girls” (p. 3). And physical differences play a role, too:

Although the timing of puberty is also a potential risk factor for boys, early maturation creates particular risks for girls because of the development of physical signs of maturity inconsistent with still largely undeveloped cognitive and emotional systems.... Several studies suggest that early maturing girls are more likely to engage in delinquency and other risk-taking behaviors. (p. 4)

The study also includes recommendations to decrease girls’ delinquency. It’s available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdf/files1/ojjdp/226358.pdf.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has posted more publications and resources on female delinquency at www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/girlsdelinquency.html.

Like it? Love it? Think we can do better? Write to Jan at plmag@principals.org to tell her what you think about this issue of Principal Leadership.

Not being able to govern events, I govern myself.

—MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE