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## Who Wears Short Shorts?

By Sophie Braccini



Camille Santi measures Ashley Tang's shorts to make sure they meet JM's dress code; Anya Morrill (left) already passed the test Photo Sophie Braccini and we are still listening. Most kids want to be heard and validated, and they can turn around, but they will stay angry if we just say no."

It's hard to get dressed in the morning when you are "Tweenager." Choosing attire that will be perceived as "cool" by your classmates, will feel comfortable, is approved by your parents (and possibly by an insensitive sibling), that's compatible with the weather conditions (a minor consideration, if any) and on top of it all, deemed appropriate by the school's standards. As the first spring sun started warming the blacktops, out came spring bulbs and the first "short shorts" of the season. And, as a number of middle-schoolers have experienced, some of those fashionable pieces of attire were a bit too skimpy to pass staff scrutiny.

"We've had to ask some of our students to change if their shorts do not have the required 12-centimeter inseam length as is stated in the student handbook," says Joaquin Moraga Intermediate (JM) Secretary Camille Santi, "some changed into their longer P.E. shorts, others called their parents or borrowed a piece of clothing from their friends." Some parents were upset by the phone calls in the middle of their busy days, and several students felt that the school was infringing on their rights. "We heard of a petition circulating," confirmed Santi.

"We do not want to infringe on our students' freedom of speech," said JM Counselor Heidi Felt, "this is a learning experience for them, and we are still listening."

The schools maintain that there are very good reasons behind these policies. Orinda Intermediate School's (OIS) student hand-book states: "School is a place of business and students should wear clothing that is suitable... Shorts must be mid-thigh length or longer." The distraction of other students, and adults as well, is one of the main concerns in every school. "School is the job for kids, and they need to dress appropriately for their job," says Jeanne Cusack, OIS Associate Principal.

David Schrag, the principal at Stanley Middle School, wants rules that are very clear, that the kids understand and can self-monitor. The rule at Stanley is that the length of shorts must reach the tips of the student's longest finger when arms are at rest at a student's side.

On the website of Stanley's PTA is a text written by JM Principal Bruce Burns that explains the rationale behind the rules. "The short answer is that it's about self-respect and distraction," reads the document, "...The longer answer is based on psychological research. Middle school is a pivotal time in cognitive development and identity formation. Just at the time when adolescents begin to construct their identity, they are more likely to suffer losses in self-esteem. Tight-fitting 'belly shirts,' miniskirts, short shorts, plunging necklines and sagging pants require regular body monitoring and a kind of chronic vigilance about whether everything is in place. This kind of clothing tends to sexualize and objectify the student. Sexualization and objectification undermine confidence in and comfort with one's own body, leading to a host of negative emotional consequences."

Felt shares that perspective. "It's become harder and harder to enforce these rules during this narcissistic stage of life," observes Felt, "at this age most students are concrete thinkers seeing everything as all white or all black, and when they are questioned about their behavior they become extremely defensive." Felt believes that it takes a village to raise a child, and that it would be nice to have parents and staff get behind the same reasonable message.

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