

OPINION: Female Dartmouth High School students question “airport security terminals” style inspections

By Kortney Gadbois

Dress codes have long been an issue in school especially those without uniforms, however Dartmouth High School’s approach to solving this issue is spreading into the territory of sexism and infringing on the rights and privacy of the female students.

The approach of the administration also directly disregards the Student Handbook Policies that they put forth. Female students are now being asked to dress “business professional” and to cover their collar bones so as not to be a “distraction” in the learning environment. Below is the Dress Code for DHS as printed in the Student Handbook:

DRESS CODE VIOLATIONS (Inappropriate attire)

Dartmouth High School’s dress code policy is enforced in order to maintain a safe school environment focused on the educational process. Students found in violation of the dress code will be sent to an administrator. Students will be expected to change their clothing to more suitable attire prior to resuming their school day. Students who refuse to comply with the dress code will face disciplinary action.

- Inappropriate attire: hats or any head cover, to include kerchiefs regardless of the manner in which they are worn; spaghetti straps, tube tops or other strapless shirts/dresses; shirts that expose midriff or cleavage; exposed undergarments; heavy duty outer garments between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 2:03 p.m.; any garment that displays weapons, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, sex or gang activity; shorts, skirts, dresses that are higher than 5 inches above the knee, sheer/transparent (see-through) clothing.

The outlined Dress Code does not include the issues of collarbones being covered or business professional wear, and it also does not state that students should be pulled out of class learning time or subject to inspection prior to classes starting in the morning via “airport security terminals” as the students have named this process.

Dress codes are necessary, there is no doubt about that, however they need to be equal for all,. It is the job of faculty to ensure that students are following the dress code in a manner that is not disruptive to learning time or sexist in their targets. There have been several cases of female students being “inspected” by administrators while male faculty observed, albeit from a distance – it is still inappropriate.

On Tuesday, June 3 the inspections of students were taken a step further when all female students were pulled out of class during learning time, to be inspected for inappropriate wear. One student, who wishes to remain anonymous, questioned the administration as she was pulled out of her English class during learning time to have her outfit inspected along with her other fellow female classmates. She asked, “Who are we distracting...the boys?” The administrator replied, “No, we don’t want to single out the boys as the only ones being distracted.” Upset and confused the student replied “But you are singling out the girls.”

This inappropriate removal from class during learning time to inspect the female students clothing is taking the issue of dress code a step too far as if the “airport security terminals” were not enough to shake up the students. John Nunes, the Dartmouth School Committee Chair, had no knowledge of these happenings on Tuesday at Dartmouth High nor was he aware of the “airport security terminals” system that DHS adopted. He did state that he hopes all students are being treated equally and fairly by administration regarding any issue within the school.

Newly elected School Committee member, Chris Garth, provided some great insight to the issue of the dress code within DHS although he was not completely aware of all the attempts to inspect the outfits of the female students’ clothing. Garth stated that he believes there should certainly be consequences when the dress code is violated, however the procedure of

inspecting the outfits of the students need to match the policies in place and not tread on the line of the students privacy and self-esteem. He offered the suggestion of a student written dress code that brings them closer to the issue and allows them to make decisions and will hopefully ensure they better follow the outlined policy.

This will not only allow the students to gain independence within the school community, but they will feel a boost in self-esteem and enjoy the ability to team up with administration on an issue that is so prevalent in their lives. Garth's ideas are on the right track!

We, as the community of Dartmouth, need to rally around our students and help them gain positive body images and the understanding of where and when certain clothes are appropriate without badgering or humiliating them. Whether it be in front of a full cafeteria or the privacy of an office the insensitive ways of the administration are not helpful nor wanted and should change immediately.

This is a global issue that we can conquer within our community. We need to boost the students esteem and teach them that certain clothing is appropriate at some times and not at others.

As well as reminding them that regardless of the clothing a student is wearing, they are still equal to everyone else and deserve the same respect as others. We need to stop shaming girls for wearing certain clothing and teach the boys that girls are not sexual objects to be gawked at while passing in the halls. There should be no name calling among students because of the clothing they are wearing but a sense of camaraderie among the students and faculty of the school.

With new administration for Dartmouth on the horizon, we need to gather as a community and make choices that will promote community within the school and equality for all. As a

graduate of Dartmouth High School, it saddens me to hear of this issue and makes me wonder where the community I once knew and grew up in vanished to. I hope that we can make a positive change for the future of the students in the Dartmouth Public Schools system so they can enjoy their years in school as I once did and experience a sense of community among each other and the administration of the schools.

Let us band together Dartmouth, to make the right choice for our students, to end this insensitive and unnecessary inspection of the students clothing, and focus on the positive within our schools including academic and extracurricular achievement.
