

POLITICS AS USUAL: Whose Rights?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

At the risk of receiving multiple flaming emails, I will wade into the controversy over school dress codes and proffer my opinion on the alleged assault on students' 'rights' to wear whatever the heck they want to school. (Full disclosure ? I went to a girls' school and wore a uniform every day, so the idea of wearing whatever I wanted to school is a foreign concept to me)

I won't speak to specifics as the issue is the same across sites. There are multiple protests going on in multiple cities by students who feel their 'rights' have been violated by school authorities regarding their imposition of rules about what is appropriate clothing for school.

School administrators have taken some female students to task for wearing tops with spaghetti straps, crop tops, 'booty' shorts and ripped jeans. For the boys, there is the requirement that their pants sit at their waist instead of below their butts and not reveal their underpants.

A few students have been reprimanded about their clothing. One or two have been sent home to change into something more 'appropriate.'?

Cue the howls of protest, the indignation of a generation of kids who seem to think that they set the rules ? of which they feel there should be none.

There have been demonstrations such as 'crop top days?', petitions, letters of complaint, even a call for the firing of a principal for daring to tell teenagers to 'pull up their pants.'? What's worse is there are a significant number of parents who seem to support these protests.

I shake my head in disbelief. Just what are these parents supporting exactly?

Call me old fashioned, but does it not strike anyone else as outrageous we have a bunch of kids dictating to principals and school boards what rules they think apply to them, and which ones they do not?

Yes, I understand that school is not a widget factory, rolling out kid after kid to a life of conformity, but at the same time, a school is not a democracy. It exists to provide an education for the next generation of responsible citizens. Children are there to learn, to gain the skills necessary to be successful in life at whatever it is they wish to pursue.

That education is provided within a framework of expectations ? about achievement and, yes, behaviour. There are rules. The rules provide structure. We do not yet live in a society where anything goes. There are generally accepted norms of appropriate behaviour, dress, etc. As a consequence, you and I cannot show up to work in ripped jeans that expose our underwear. It's doubtful anyone would take me seriously if I gave a lecture in a crop top. Well I could, I guess, but I believe it would be a severely career-limiting decision on my part.

Should societal norms be challenged?

Absolutely. Without challenge, without change, society stagnates. However, framing every challenge of the rules, of social norms, as a fight for one's 'rights' is getting increasingly tiresome. Claiming it is a violation of one's 'rights' not to be able to expose your underpants or belly while learning algebra is an affront to the millions of people across the globe who fight a daily struggle just to have the one inalienable and universal right ? the right to live.

Actually, it isn't an affront. It is an appalling demonstration of self-entitlement run amok.