

Dear UHS 2013-2014 administrative team,

We are a group of eight students that are in the social justice class, working together on one project. Our project is a Youth Participatory Action Research project (YPAR), which brings youth together to define for themselves what problems they face in their community, find solutions through talking with and gathering data from their peers and then implementing those solutions through strategic and informed actions. Our group is targeting the issue of the dress code, and how it affects people in our school. We decided that this is an issue because of the inadvertent discrimination that black girls feel.

We believe the dress code is an issue that predominantly affects black girls at UHS due to institutionalized racism and sexism. In a chapter of *Bad Boys* by Ann Arnett Ferguson, she mentions who was targeted by the school's disciplinary system. Ms. Ferguson writes, "It was typically unleashed against children who were black, poor, and already labeled as 'trouble'" (Ferguson 70). This quote means that the black, poor, and 'troubled' kids are picked on and get in trouble more. This is an instance of intersectionality, because different overlapping aspects of identity are being judged at the same time. This observation backs up our theory, because it states that the black kids were more prone to getting in trouble at school. Our theory is that black girls are more prone to receiving dress code infractions than anyone else because of this inadvertent discrimination.

To back up our theory, we distributed surveys, conducted live interviews with the deans, and emailed teachers. On the survey, we asked questions like "Do you think the dress code is fair?" and "Who do you think gets the most dress code infractions?" The questions for the teachers were similar. We also asked the deans why they thought the dress code is important and who what race and/or gender got the most infractions. To analyze the data, we highlighted trends we saw in the interviews and compiled the survey results into pie charts. Please see attachments to this letter for additional information.

After we analyzed and compiled the data, we got together as a group and recorded information we learned in accordance to the results.

1. We learned that our theory that black girls are affected more by the dress code is supported by the student surveys: 71% said that they

believed black girls get more infractions, while 44% of the people who returned surveys and had gotten infractions were black girls. This matters because students in the school notice this institutionalized racism and sexism as well, whether or not they're able to name it as such.

2. We learned that about 49% of students said that the dress code was not fair while 46% said it was fair. About 5% said it was maybe fair. This shows that almost half of the students we surveyed think the dress code is unfair in some way.
3. 71% said black girls got more dress code infractions and only 20 out of 235 said boys got more dress code infractions. Even boys notice that girls get more dress code infractions, so that show that girls really are being targeted more frequently. There is discrimination against girls and the things that they wear.
4. We learned that both of the male deans feel uncomfortable judging what the girls wear, because they could get in some sort of trouble. It matters because having the chance of getting in trouble changes the way male deans view and enforce the dress code, which makes it inconsistently enforced.
5. We learned about the rationale for the dress code. According to *The Latinization of US Schools* by Jason Irizarry, the dress code is in effect to "Prepare us for the real world and that you can't dress certain ways at work." We also heard something similar from Dean Morrow. He believes that dress codes are used for structure so we can't get too used to wearing whatever we want. We've learned that they don't have a dress code at UHS to be strict or mean, but to show us what to expect later in life. We respect that the dress code has good intentions, but in execution, it seems that only a certain group is targeted for disobeying the dress code.

To make the issue of the dress code less subjective, we also recommend that the UHS administration record data on who receives dress code infractions based upon race and gender. We believe that the dress code is strong, but to make it stronger, we suggest changing some of the wording in the UHS Student Handbook about the dress code. The "fingertip rule", for example, varies from student to student depending on body type and shape. It's not fair because some

people's arms are longer than others and some people have very short arms and some people are curvy vs. skinny. Although our group's focus is about black girls being unfairly affected by the dress code, we noticed a large trend in the returned surveys. Many students said that the fingertip rule is unfair, and because they feel so strongly about that, we have tried to reflect their wishes and make a compromise that will make them feel more fair. We believe that students will be more receptive of the dress code if they have a say in it. Determining if shorts are long enough by your fingertips isn't fair in the students' opinion. A way to fix this problem would be to change the ruling to no less than a 4- or 5-inch inseam, which is roughly the same as the length of a students' fist when hanging at their side. This way, when buying shorts, students know to get shorts with at least a 4-inch inseam and Deans can quickly and conveniently see if the length is appropriate. If this isn't feasible, then outlining the fingertip rule explicitly in the handbook and adding guiding photographs would also be a way to improve the fairness of the dress code. If students collaborate with administration, these recommendations would hopefully be executed in time for the 2014-15 student handbook.

Thank you so much for your time. We hope you consider our recommendations.

Sincerely,

The UHS Social Justice Class 2013