

'I'm embarrassed and they're embarrassed.'

S.V. HIGH PRINCIPAL ON TALKING TO STUDENTS ABOUT OUTFITS

The skinny on minis



Santa Cruz High School students, above and below, enjoy good weather on campus Thursday.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

School dress codes can be tricky to enforce

By MATT KING

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Ah, summer — the girls are in mini-skirts and short-shorts and the boys are stripped to the waist.

And that's just at school.

Mercury hasn't exactly exploded through the tops of thermometers this week, but that hasn't stopped some local students from treating campuses like the hot tub on an episode of MTV's "The Real World."

"Once it gets warmer, the clothes start coming off," Scotts Valley High Principal Gregg Gunkel said. "The boys go to shorts and girls go to shorts and skirts. The skirts get shorter and shorter, and



because of their choice of undergarments, the short skirts are a bit of a problem."

School-appropriate dress is far from the most serious problem educators deal with, but it's one of the trickiest. There's only one way to describe a conversation

between a male teacher and a female student who hasn't left enough to the imagination.

"Awkward," Gunkel said. "I'm embar-

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Find it online: See the dress codes from a few county schools for yourself at www.santacruzsentinel.com/documents

Clothing

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ressed and they're embarrassed."

The dress codes at county schools are mostly aimed at preventing gang violence and accidents. Students are not allowed to wear certain colors and sports team logos or any type of jewelry that could double as a weapon. T-shirts promoting booze, drugs or anything else illegal also are forbidden.

Low-rise jeans and low-cut tops are covered by "distraction" clauses that range from the philosophically vague — Aptos High prohibits "explicitly sexual" attire — to the anatomically specific — the fourth commandment at Scotts Valley High outlaws "exposure of rear."

Educators and students alike say the provocative outfits are not so much acts of rebellion as a reflection of what's in fashion. Skin has been in for so long now that the new edition of the Collins English Dictionary released this week includes "muffin

top," which refers to the squishing effect on a naked midriff from a belly-baring top and tight, low-slung jeans.

"I think it's changed only because the styles have changed," Harbor High Principal Nancy Tocchini said. "I tell kids that the clothes they wear to the beach or to a party are not appropriate for school, and they look at me like I'm crazy."

Schools often keep sweatshirts on hand or send kids home to change, but it can be difficult to enforce "distraction" dress codes because an offense is in the eye of the beholder.

What bothers one teacher may pass unnoticed by another, and male students are not about to complain, so principals say they don't confront students very often. Still, many educators find themselves hoping for lousy weather to keep students' dress and antsy behavior in check in the last few weeks of school.

For students, the fuss about wearing next to nothing is much ado about nothing. They draw a simple line on school fashion dos and don'ts.

"It has to be something really extreme,"

Harbor High junior Amanda Smith said while wearing a code-flaunting, midriff-baring shirt. "If something is actually showing."

Smith didn't get busted for her shirt but said she has been sent home before — once for wearing a top that violated the ban on gang-related colors and another time for a skirt that was too short.

"I guess I could see where they're coming from, but I didn't think it was excessively short," Smith said. "I've seen girls with spike heels and little skirts."

And while the summertime skin show may get a lot of attention, there are plenty of other trends that bring out the inner fashion cop in educators.

"My biggest beef is not the girls, it's the boys with their pants around their crotch and they're flashing their boxer shorts," Gunkel said. "I guess I'm glad they have boxer shorts on, but at the same time this is not a prison yard, not gangland. Pull your pants up."

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