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Fashion policing through the years

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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

In the pink? Depending upon what you believe, you are either ultra-hip or in violation of a school dress code. Last week, Newport Beach Ensign Middle School Principal Edward Wong banned six boys from wearing pink shirts in a class photo out of concern that the display could be connected with a party or dance crew, which have been known to evolve into gangs. (KIIS-FM's and "American Idol's" Ryan Seacrest encouraged people to wear the color to school or work this Friday in response). In the wake of this incident, here's a look back at school dress codes in the modern era.
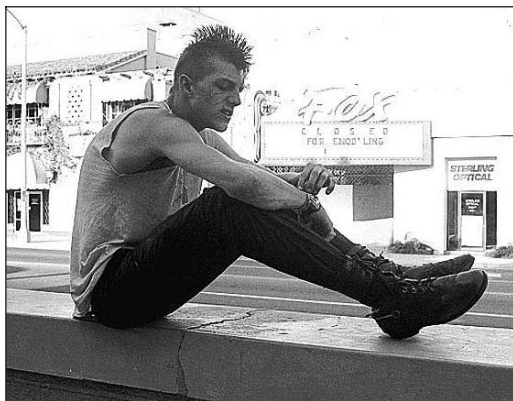
'60s

Dress codes at the beginning of the 1960s reflected the fairly conservative 1950s, although rock 'n' roll youth culture was beginning to show through in everyday fashions (the above picture is from "The Wonder Years.") By the mid to late '60s, however, emerging cultural trends toward individualism and nonconformity began to dominate the school landscape, with long hair, beards and radical clothing slowly gaining acceptance.
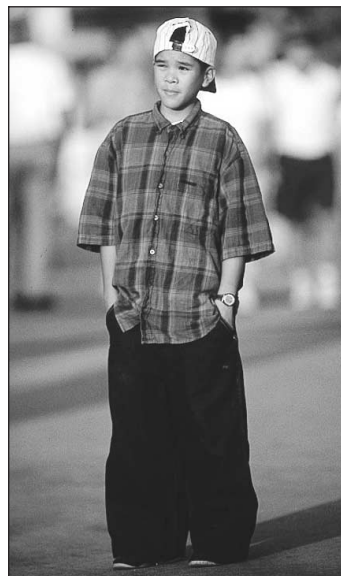
'70s

Radical changes in mass culture during the late 1960s and early 1970s carried through the whole decade, and many school dress codes went unenforced or were abandoned entirely. Enforcement that was done by schools was typically for clothing exposing the body rather than for grooming or politics. Micro-mini skirts, hot pants and tight-fitting polyester could all get a student sent home. (The photo above is from "That '70s Show.")

'80s

Dress codes that were lax in the 1970s began to come back in the 1980s, with some public schools beginning to experiment with uniforms and others cracking down on punk, goth and revealing styles. Action was often taken against boys with radically colored hair or mohawks, pierced lips, noses and eyebrows, as well as girls emulating the styles of musical acts such as Madonna and Cindy Lauper.

'90s

As gangs became a larger problem in schools across the country, dress codes changed to reflect this. Districts began banning "gang attire," including baseball caps, bandanas, exposed "Old English" style tattoos and baggy clothing. Many schools were criticized for going too far with their restrictions, as many of the styles banned reflected urban hip-hop culture as a whole, not only gangs.

'00s

In an attempt to put clothing controversies behind them and no longer worry about risqué styles and gang problems, a growing number of public schools reintroduced uniforms, typically for elementary students but also in some high schools. The above picture is from Newport Elementary School, where the dress code includes Hawaiian shirts.