



NATIONAL
FFA ORGANIZATION

Official Dress Guidelines

Created: 4/2016

Updated: 5/24/2016

BACKGROUND

Delegates at the 2015 National FFA Convention & Expo approved a set of recommended changes to Official Dress for the National FFA Organization. The intent was to provide greater clarity regarding items of dress and appropriate situations. The National FFA staff has reviewed those changes and provides the feedback below regarding them.

REQUIREMENT V. GUIDELINES

The National FFA Organization sets forth a set of guidelines for Official Dress, as detailed in the Official FFA Manual. If these guidelines become more restrictive and require students to wear the specified clothing, legal precedents could compel the National FFA Organization to provide the required clothing to every member. This would include all components of Official Dress (pants/skirt, shirt/blouse, shoes, socks/pantyhose, scarf/tie, and jacket).

Additionally, if the National FFA Organization requires members to wear specified items of clothing, adhering to the restrictive nature of the proposal set forth by the delegates, the FFA could be vulnerable to legal challenges on the local, state and national levels.

FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

The first and most prominent Supreme Court case regarding dress codes and uniforms is *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, which occurred in 1969. The details of the court case do not directly apply to Official Dress; however, the court decision and its implications do. The court found that First Amendment rights apply in all situations in which students seek to freely express themselves. However, a student may be prohibited from wearing certain insignia and items of clothing if they are viewed as a safety threat. The implications of this case apply to the National FFA Organization Official Dress by demonstrating that an attempt to limit a member's freedom of expression could result in a legal challenge.

Other relevant legal cases include:

Canady v. Bossier Parish School Board

Jacobs v. Clark County School District

Littlefield v. Forney Independent School District

These cases, all dealing with school dress codes and uniforms, demonstrate that any effort to require students to wear specific clothing could be subject to legal challenge.

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

Under the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, schools and public organizations cannot prohibit students from wearing particular religious attire such as yarmulkes and head scarves. Therefore, it would be acceptable for the National FFA Organization to state that "official garb of recognized religions may be worn with official dress."

GENDER NEUTRAL EXPRESSION

In order to lower the risk of costly legal challenges, it is in the best interest of the National FFA Organization to create guidelines that are gender neutral. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, a "model policy requires that students must be permitted to dress in compliance with the school's dress code consistent with their gender identity."

RECOMMENDATION

Based on legal precedent and current law, it is recommended that the National FFA Organization exercise prudence and caution when establishing guidelines for Official Dress. The more restrictive the guidelines become, the greater the risk of legal challenge. While the National FFA Organization has great respect for the proposal submitted by the official delegates of the 88th National FFA Convention & Expo, the recommended restrictions have the potential to infringe on FFA members' First Amendment rights. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the National FFA Organization to maintain the current Official Dress guidelines as outlined in the Official FFA Manual and, further, to remove gender headings, thus making the guidelines gender neutral. As a result, it is recommended that the following language be listed in the Official FFA Manual as "Official Dress Guidelines":

Official Dress for an FFA member includes:

- An official FFA jacket zipped to the top
- Black slacks or black skirt
- White collared blouse or white collared shirt
- Official FFA tie or Official FFA scarf
- Black dress shoes with a closed heel and toe
- Black socks or hosiery

Note - official garb of recognized religions may be worn with official dress

The National FFA Organization will observe the guidelines outlined in the Official FFA Manual in activities conducted at the national level unless otherwise noted for a specific competition or event. It is the responsibility of local and state advisors to ensure members observe these guidelines when participating in national events.

NEXT STEPS

- A webinar will be conducted for the 2015 leadership delegates for the Official Dress committee. National FFA staff will review the information provided in this document and the recommendation that will be presented to the 2016 delegate body. The intent is to help the delegates understand why the organization is not able to enact the recommendations they provided, and it demonstrates that their recommendations received serious consideration and contributed to clarity through the removal of gender references.
- During the 2016 State Presidents' Conference, the same information will be shared with the 2016 leadership delegates, as the recommendation will be a part of old business on the agenda for consideration by the delegates.
- During the 89th National FFA Convention & Expo, the delegates will discuss and vote on the recommendation. If the recommendation does not pass, the current guidelines published in the FFA Manual will remain in effect unless modified by the board of directors. If the recommendation is approved, it will be forwarded to the board of directors for consideration during their January 2017 meeting. Final approval by the board is required for the recommendation to take effect and inserted in the FFA Manual.