

Students gripe, but accept dress codes

By Sean McNamara
Freelance writer

ROCHESTER — One of the many time-honored traditions among students at Catholic high schools is complaining about the uniform. Each year, it seems, a new crop of seniors finds it has matured beyond the restrictions of its school's dress code and sets out to champion the causes of personal liberty and individualism.

And equally predictable is the school's response, listening to students' concerns and balancing them against the rationale for uniforms.

"Every year the new senior class tries to get modifications in the dress code," according to Thomas Schaeffer, who is responsible for enforcing the dress code at McQuaid Jesuit High School. Schaeffer said that McQuaid's dress code, which calls for dress shoes, non-denim pants and sports coats, is an "evolving document" that has "definitely adapted along fashion lines" at the all-boys school.

At Our Lady of Mercy High School, student input has led the school this year to add walking shorts to its uniform of navy blue skirts or slacks and white blouses.

"The students wanted it," said Joan Hildebrand, the school's public-relations director. "If there are concerns, the administration is willing to listen," she said of the uniform change.

The recent trend at some schools has been toward relaxing of dress codes.

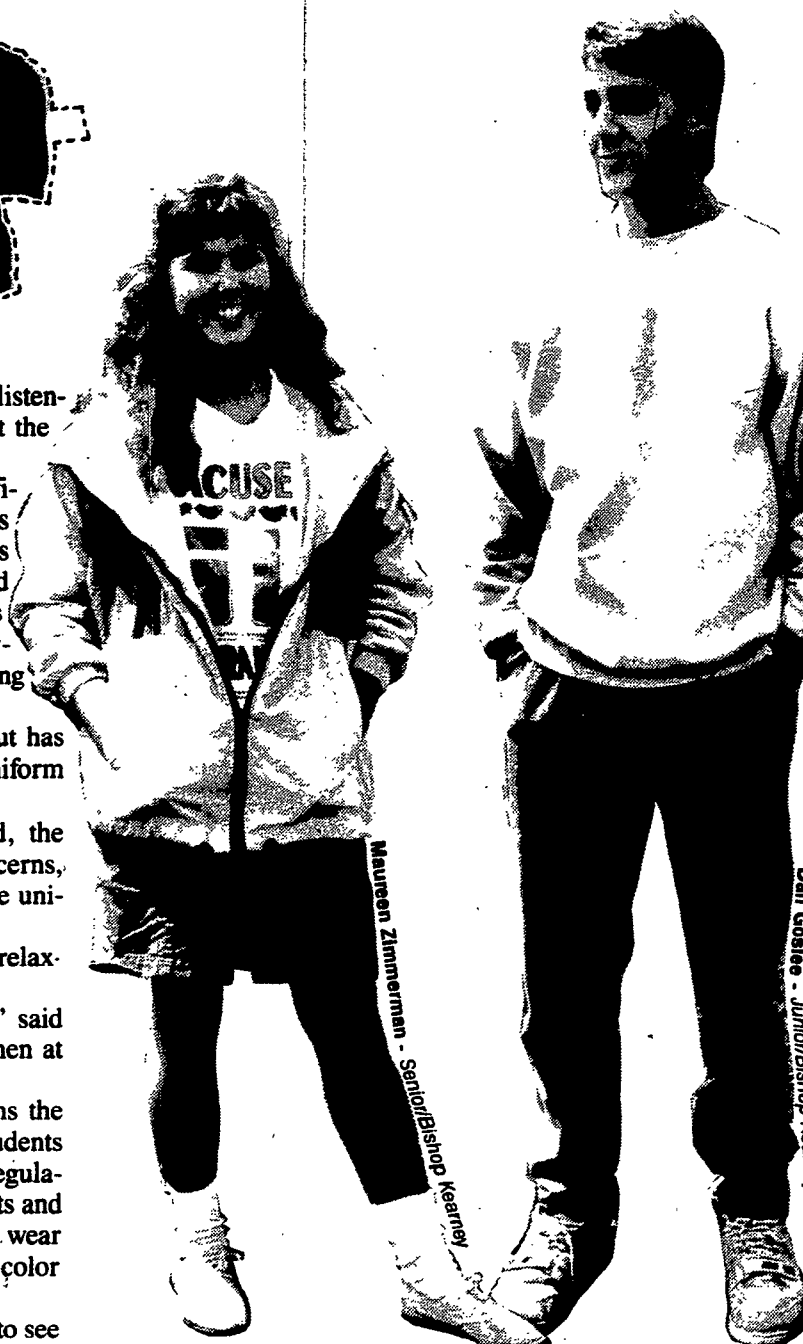
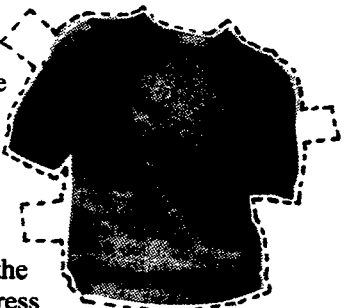
"Our dress code has deteriorated over the years," said Vilma Goetting, assistant principal and dean of women at Aquinas Institute.

"We have tried to give more options, but it seems the more options we have allowed, the more leeway students take," she said, adding that Aquinas is reviewing its regulations. Currently, Aquinas requires that boys wear shirts and ties, dress pants and dress shoes, while girls must wear pastel-colored blouses and certain solid-color slacks or skirts.

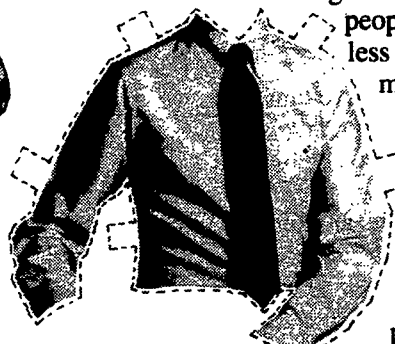
"Every kid would like to see it dropped," said Notre Dame High School spokesman Jeff Sobkowski of his school's uniform. ND's uniform consists of either polo or oxford shirts with the school emblem for both boys and girls; burgundy or blue ties and gray pants for boys; and uniform skirts for girls. Sobkowski said he tells complaining students, "It could be worse. There are quite a few options for them within the uniform."

Although DeSales High School "has a tradition of no uniform," Principal Ed Tracy acknowledged that his students would like the school's informal dress code to "deteriorate even further."

DeSales simply requires boys to wear ties, and forbids blue jeans for both sexes. Because the dress code is liberal, Student Council President Stacie Cook said, "there are not very many complaints."



Dan Goette, Junior/Bishop Kearney



Maureen Zimmerman, Senior/Bishop Kearney

Dan Goette, Junior/Bishop Kearney

Sister Mary Clouser, Nazareth Academy's assistant principal for student affairs, terms the academy's uniform functional as well as traditional, helping students eliminate the expense of "designer" clothes from their school budget.

The uniform is required "to cut down on the 'keep up with the Joneses in terms of clothing,'" she said; noting that without the uniform — navy blue slacks or skirts worn with white blouses and sweaters — students at the all-girls school would spend much more money on clothes to keep up with fashion.

Economic concerns also underlie the rationale for Bishop Kearney's dress code, according to school spokesperson Barbara Jablonski. One teacher remarked to her that in the classroom, teachers "have the opportunity to know a student regardless of their economic or social background." When she meets a class, "everyone looks the same."

Kearney boys wear dress shirts, black, blue or gray pants and dress shoes. Girls, meanwhile, wear white

blouses with plaid skirts in the summer, and gray, blue or black slacks in the winter. Both boys and girls must wear sweaters during winter months.

The dress code is a unifying factor for a diverse student body, Jablonski said. "The kids are coming from a lot of different backgrounds. (The uniform) pulls the kids together as a school. They have the opportunity to meet and get to know each other on the basis of 'If I like you' rather than (on) the clothes they wear," Jablonski explained.

"(A uniform) enhances the learning experience because students are not distracted by extremes of fashion and are trying to compete with that," Goetting explained. "In a school, students can certainly express their individuality in many ways other than clothes."

While many students dislike dress codes, some agree that they do help students see each other for who they are, not what they wear.

"I don't think an individual comes through in their clothes. It's not the clothes, it's the person," observed Deanna Sloan, student council president at Mercy High School. Students who want to express themselves through their appearance can do so and still stay in uniform, Sloan said. "There are so many choices in the uniform," she said.

"Basically, you can see who's who by the way they wear their uniform," said Mary Valeant, student council president-elect at Notre Dame. "Using their own physical factors, they can express themselves within the uniform. Everybody wears their uniform differently."

On a basic level, uniforms also make life easier, according to Sloan. "The majority of people I know like it. It's one less thing to think about in the morning," she said.

Dress codes and uniforms also teach students poise and how to dress well, Valeant remarked.

"Your peers dress nicely, and it's an example you follow. It's something you aspire to be,"

Valeant explained. "It instills in students some sense of self-discipline." Goetting explained. "They still need guidelines at the high school level." Yet student challenges to the dress code are not unusual, according to McQuaid's Schaeffer. Excuses for not wearing appropriate clothes "range from the sublime to the ridiculous," he said, recalling a recent incident in which a student arrived at school in a T-shirt, saying that he'd forgotten his dress shirt.

The consensus seems to be that the positive results of dress codes outweigh student complaints. "No one likes the process, but ultimately they understand and are grateful for the product," Schaeffer said.

HOUSE OF GUITARS

**Most New Album and Tape Releases Just \$5.98 & \$6.98
CD's From \$3.98 to \$11.98 Each**

We received 10 correct entries identifying *Hey Jude* as the biggest selling Beatles single.

The winner was Debbie White of Empire State College.

MUSIC

This week's question:

What Pat Boone song set the record for most weeks on the charts?

A: _____

TRIVIA

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____

School: _____

Rules:

Each week, the Catholic Courier, in conjunction with the House of Guitars will feature a Music Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon and send it in to the Catholic Courier. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn.

If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave.

All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

The Catholic Courier
Music Trivia
1150 Buffalo Rd.
Rochester, NY 14624

Aquinas Institute

Should Catholic schools require students to abide by dress codes?

Kevin Smith, junior:

No, because there is a need for individualism. Dress codes make it hard to be an individual. It teaches you how to dress well, but there are other ways to know how to dress for success.

AS TEENS SEE IT

David Montrois, sophomore:

No, because the more comfortable you are the more you learn. You end up thinking about your clothes and not about your work with an uncomfortable uniform on.

Tammi Korol, junior:

Yes, it's cheaper with a dress code. You can spend more money on things you want to wear for after school. You won't have to impress your peers. You don't have to think in the morning when you get dressed about what to wear.