

Where are the Girls? Part Deux

By Kelly Clingan

Five years ago I nervously presented an article “The Educational Jazz Band: Where Are the Girls?,”¹ based on my experiences as a student and teacher in Seattle’s famous jazz programs.

I am proud of the conversations that this article inspired, but also, I feel some edits are urgently needed. Since original publication, our students have survived a worldwide pandemic, watched mass shootings become a daily occurrence, and protested with us through the Black Lives Matter and #metoo movements. Our structures and policies need to evolve to reflect our new landscape.

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reflection. What have you done to encourage and retain femme students in your music program? When hiring clinicians, are at least half of them femme? When programming a concert, are at least half of the composers and arrangers femme? How about posters on the walls in your music room? If you haven’t tried these methods of representation, I wonder... what in the world you could be waiting for?

This brings us to the main event: Performance attire. Let’s get into it!

Scenario one: The “we all wear the same thing” method

- polo shirt in school colors with kilts
- purple bow ties/cummerbunds with tuxedo shirt and black on the bottom
- military style marching band uniform

This method is equitable and fair BUT you’ll want to be mindful that students come in many shapes and sizes. Make sure that you have a wide range of size options and a rollout method that keeps sizing private. Also, remember that “gender neutral” is the goal. Putting everyone in a suit and tie is not the move.

Scenario two: The “girls wear this and boys wear that” method

- tuxedos for boys and black dresses for girls
- suits for boys and “whatever” for girls
- polos for boys and blouses for girls

This method IS A MAJOR PROBLEM. Stop what you are doing and immediately consult the ACLU’s handout “4 Things Public Schools Can and Can’t Do When It Comes to Dress Codes”.² There is a good chance that you are violating students’ civil rights and liberties.

Scenario three: The “personal expression” method

- concert black
- business casual
- school colors

This method is MY favorite. Fashion can be a major source of pride and expression for students. When they feel amazing, they play better. However, absolutely do not start regulating the length of skirts, amount of cleavage, or type of straps students can wear. Policing student bodies in the name of “professionalism” is sexist and harmful.

The bottom line folks, is that our students can and should be asking us to do this work. You’ll be hearing from them if you don’t, and they’ll be on the right side of history.

Links

1 Voice Article: https://www.lolagetsmusic.com/_files/ugd/43001c_4939a15a9d7f4f91be20f12a675557da.pdf

2 ACLU Handout: <https://www.aclu.org/news/womens-rights/4-things-public-schools-can-and-cant-do-dress-codes>

Inclusion is seen as a universal human right. The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance (removal of barriers). Jan 17, 2023

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