

Periodically we are asked, to cite the research on correlations between how teachers dress and student achievement?

Although research suggests that teachers who dress professionally produce higher test scores in their classes, detractors argue that the research dates back to 1984, and is therefore no longer relevant. “Dressing for success,” they say, is “old school.”

In our experience, however, those people who bemoan professional dress codes do so out of self-interest; they point to “dated research” as an excuse to support their own preferences for “casual” clothing.

Perhaps the research is dated because it’s unnecessary to exhaust additional resources on a non-issue. After all, common sense tells us that we command greater respect when we dress professionally *wherever* we go. People who dress for success are more likely to get positive results—whether it’s being seated at a “good table” in a restaurant or inspiring students to achieve excellent test scores in a classroom.

Just as appropriate manners are widely accepted as preferable to rudeness, dressing professionally should be considered the norm among teachers. In fact, we state in Chapter 10 that it is always appropriate to say “please,” “thank you,” “you’re welcome,” and to smile. We have never received a question asking us for the research on the effectiveness of being polite. Isn’t it obvious that professional dress and appropriate manners are the same?

A *Teacher Magazine* story reported that a first-year teacher came to school in pig-tails and flip-flops and expected school to be *fun*. She said she wore the same clothes as her students and listened to their music because she wanted to be liked. As she reflected back on her first year, she wondered why the parents and other teachers did not accept her. As for the students, she said nothing about whether they learned anything in her classroom.

People do not learn because they like you. They learn because they respect you.

Remember, no matter where you go in your community, you are known as a teacher. If you teach in California, and especially in Silicon Valley, where the immigrant population is tipped toward Latinos and Asians, adults value and respect teachers. That’s their culture. The hopes and dreams for their children are in your hands. They want and expect their children to succeed. **They even dress their children to come to school to succeed. They know where they want their children to be.**

How would they view and respect you if they came to a parent-teacher meeting and you greeted them wearing a T-shirt and a pair of flip-flops?

You Dress Where You Want to Be

High school teacher Rebecca Morgan doubted her teaching ability. “I am a competent person, yet my students were not taking me seriously. Even the other teachers viewed me as kind of ‘flaky.’”

After gazing into her soul, and her mirror, Rebecca decided that her baggy pants and T-shirt were to blame. So she rounded up her realtor friend, Maria. She picked a good source, because most real estate agents know that it pays to dress well for their clients—and potential clients. Rebecca and Maria spent an afternoon at an outlet mall selecting a set of clothes. She emerged with a sophisticated new look—and something more.

“Left alone in the dressing rooms, I saw myself for the very first time as a person who could do anything she wanted to,” says Rebecca. **“If I had \$1,000 of therapy, I wouldn’t have felt anywhere near as good.** It was like a religious experience.

“A professional woman should dress at least two steps above her current position,” she says. “You do not dress where you are; you dress where you want to be.”

Reality of Dress

It is hard to overcome a poor first impression, regardless of skill or expertise. Your first impression will come as a result of how you dress. You are a professional—in a career that molds the future and saves lives. **Your professional credibility and your potential performance as a teacher will all be based on a first meeting with colleagues, administrators, parents, and children.**

There is a place for casual attire—when it is time to relax and have fun. School is a place of work and learning. Set that expectation with appropriate attire and you will find the students will measure up to the atmosphere you create. They will mirror your professionalism with their attitudes, habits, and behavior. Some of your students may even start dressing for success!