

Passing Grade for School Uniforms

*Rigler sees less
tension, fights*

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School uniforms may have reduced tensions between students and lessened conflicts at Rigler Elementary in northeast Portland.

Since becoming the first public school in Portland Public Schools to adopt the uniform dress code this fall, Rigler hasn't had a single fighting referral, according to school principal Kathleen Kaczke.

A major amount of school resource time sending kids home because they were wearing inappropriate clothing, such as low cut shirts and baggy pants, has also been eliminated.

Every one of the 560 kindergarten through sixth grade kids is expected to come to school wearing clean khakis, shorts or blue plaid skirts along with a plain navy blue or

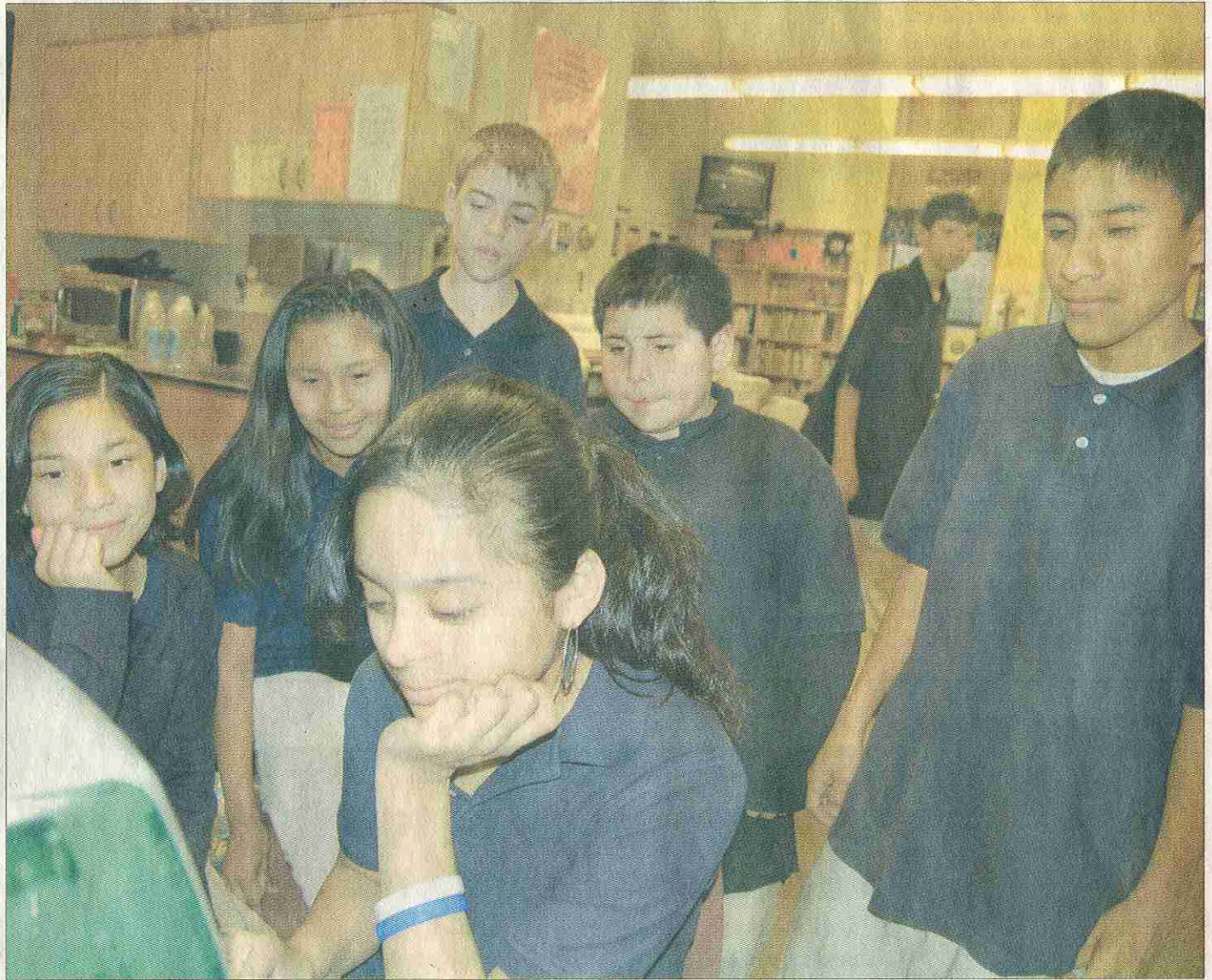


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

School uniforms at Rigler Elementary in northeast Portland make students look like they are part of the same team. Jackie Sanchez is at the keyboard with her sixth grade classmates (standing, from left) Jackie Pacheco, Irley Mejia-Uc, Josh Smithers, Carlos Decker-Martinez, Elias Pierce (background) and Miguel Cedillo.

ates a free clothing closet as well as an annual clothing exchange so growing kids can give their used clothes to the younger

"We also have some Vietnamese, Asian, and also some Somalian kids," says Kaczke, "We've even gone out of our way to make

kids already know that the distractions of clothing have decreased and they are putting more attention towards academics.

white shirt with a collar.

“We wanted to set ourselves apart,” says Kaczke. “It helps the image of the school to look more professional and it also helps the kids here that live in poverty.”

Ninety-two percent of the children that attend Rigler live on or below poverty level. Since each uniform can be bought new for as little as \$20 dollars per outfit, families can save hundreds of dollars from the prices of major brand clothing.

The school staff has also bought and donated clothing for families. Rigler oper-

students.

Rigler is one of the most diverse schools in the city with 60 percent of the students of Hispanic origin, 23 percent African American and 11 percent Caucasian.

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The school won't know for sure until later in the year if grades and test scores have improved because of the uniforms, but some

We've even gone out of our way to make sure some girls have long skirts because of their religion.

— Kathleen Kaczke, Rigler Elementary Principal

Francisco Bautista is an 11-year-old fifth grader that began attending Rigler in the second grade. He and his friends spent a considerable amount of time choosing clothes to wear to school before the uniform policy took effect.

“We would choose shirts that had drawings on them that looked cool,” says Bautista, “Now when I get ready for bed I don't have to think about what clothes I'm going to wear the next day. They are

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Passing Grade

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all ready for me.”

“I feel more comfortable in a uniform,” he adds.

Some students may have felt embarrassed wearing uniforms at the beginning of the year but now they are singing a different tune.

Alberto Ruiz, an 11-year-old sixth grader, has been a student at Rigler since he started school. He’s a fan of not having to wash a mountain of clothes every time the weekend comes along.

“I can be playing instead of washing my clothes,” says Ruiz.

Kaczke believes that the only downside to the new policy is keeping up with the occasional kids that come to school without their uniforms. But as the year has progressed that has become less and less of a problem.

“The uniforms have been so successful that even my own daughter wants to wear a uniform to school,” she says. “It’s just so much simpler for kids to not have to worry about what they wear every day.”

Amy Ridobock has been a teacher for the fifth and sixth graders at Rigler for

three years. She says the uniforms “calms things down a lot.”

Mia Thomas is 10 years old and doesn’t mind wearing her uniform to school but would definitely like to switch back to her regular clothing.

“It’s nice to wear uniforms because other people won’t comment on whether you’re wearing the right thing or not,” she says. “But when I see cute clothes at the store I get bummed when I know I can’t wear them to school.”

Occasionally, picture day will come around and the kids will have a choice of what they want to wear.

“I was shocked the last picture day when kids came in wearing skimpy shirts and baggy pants with their underwear showing,” says Kaczke. “It was really out there.”

Since Rigler’s switch to uniforms, three other schools have gained interest in the idea. The principal also believes the uniforms have calmed the kids, increased concentration on academics, and ultimately gave the school a better image within the community.

“I want people to walk into our school see our kids and say ‘wow,’” Kaczke says.