



Research Brief

Public Displays of Affection

Question: How are schools dealing with public displays of affection?

Summary of Findings:

Schools are challenged knowing how to deal with students' inappropriate displays of affection in hallways, on field trips, at school dances, and at other school events. There is no research on public displays of affection (PDA), and no relevant ERIC entries. A Google search reveals mostly high school student handbooks and a handful of news articles and opinion pieces.

Student opinion differs on this topic. In one My High School Journalism article, Jeremy views PDA as a form of expression and rules against PDA as just another example of administrators preventing teenage expression. In another My High School Journalism article, from another high school, Kaela is fed up with her classmates' displays. She writes, "I personally have encountered one couple in the same location and at the same time each day in the hallway enthusiastically "sucking face." Such a grotesque display is not something one wants to have blocking the way while rushing to get to a class on time."

In one district, a mother was distressed that her daughter was disciplined for hugging her boyfriend. Some recognized that it was a cultural issue, recognizing that students in the U.S. come from a wide variety of backgrounds, with very different ideas about "appropriate" behavior. Others see the rules as overblown and still others, including the superintendent, saw it a matter of simply enforcing the rules they had.

A 17-year-old honor student in Garden Grove, CA, was repeatedly suspended for kissing her girlfriend, while similar activity by non-gay students was ignored. The school had no policy concerning PDA in the student handbook. Discrimination lawsuits have been filed against the school system and although the case is not yet settled, the judge has refused to dismiss the case. This case shows the importance both of having a policy in the student handbook and of having one rule that applies to all students equally.

School policies range from the innocuous (several schools simply listed "Refrain from public displays of affection.") to the harsh ("Public displays of affection have no place at school. Students observed hugging, kissing, or displaying other forms of affection before, during and after school on school grounds will be subject to disciplinary action."). Many schools clearly allow hand-holding, brief hugs, and brief kisses. Others are good about clearly defining what is not allowed, for example:

INAPPROPRIATE DISPLAY OF PUBLIC AFFECTION (Public displays of affection deemed inappropriate by public standards) Lewd or inappropriate affection – kissing, touching, fondling, etc. – are not allowed and will result in the following: • **First Offense:** warning/reprimand • **Second Offense:** Saturday School • **Third Offense:** short term suspension

Several school policies tried to respect the views of their students while also setting reasonable expectations. One reads:

The school recognizes that genuine feelings of affection may exist between students; however, students should refrain from inappropriate intimate behaviors on campus or at school related events. Repeated or especially inappropriate behavior in this regard may result in disciplinary consequences.

Another reads:

The expression of feelings of affection toward others is a personal concern between two individuals and not of others surrounding them. Therefore, let good taste and respect for others be a guideline for public displays of your feelings toward your boyfriend/girlfriend. Being overly affectionate in school is not in good taste. This type of behavior will not be allowed and may lead to disciplinary action from the principal.

My favorite response to PDA: a school-based officer who sings:

"You may hear me breaking into song," Fanok said. "There are rules about public displays of affection and the way I handle it is to sing love songs to the couple." And it works. For some reason, when couples hear Fanok crooning sappy love songs at them, they turn bright red and run -- usually in opposite directions.



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Online Resources:

Public Displays Of Affection Important To Teenagers

By Jeremy Kauffman, My High School Journalism

Administrators are often accused of preventing teenage expressions. Individuals should make their personal choices, such as showing public displays of affection in school, and follow through with them. Others should understand it is a personal choice, and to let them be. "Being able to show your affection to a person you care for in public shows your confidence in the relationship with that person," said Lauren Zawilenski, junior. The freedom of expression is a good freedom to have. Love might be the strongest feeling among teenagers. It is critical to let teenagers express themselves in all dimensions including attractions to others.

<http://my.highschooljournalism.org/il/lakezurich/lzhs/article.cfm?eid=4330&aid=62472>

Public Displays of Affection; Let's Not, Shall We?

By Kaela Stuart, My High School Journalism

Public Displays of Affection, or PDA, are often seen around the school. However, these exhibitions are not met with much pleasure from the surrounding students. It seems to be everywhere. While you're eating lunch, while trying to open your locker, even when you're just strolling down the hall, couples appear as if literally liplocked. I personally have encountered one couple in the same location and at the same time each day in the hallway enthusiastically "sucking face." Such a grotesque display is not something one wants to have blocking the way while rushing to get to a class on time. "I think a little kiss before or after class is okay, but not hardcore making out," one student says.

<http://my.highschooljournalism.org/ny/goshen/ghs/article.cfm?eid=4298&aid=65528>

Policing displays of affection at school

by Elizabeth Armstrong Moore

The Christian Science Monitor: May 25, 2005

BEND, ORE.—When Leslee Swanson got word that her eighth-grade daughter was to serve detention, she felt a wave of panic. When she heard the punishment was over a hug, the panic turned to bewilderment—and ire at the school. She quickly backed her daughter, Cazz Altomare, who has been accused of engaging in a "lingering hug" with her boyfriend. As the mother, she says she's to blame for raising her child to be "huggy."

<http://www.queencitynews.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=3884>

'Best cop ever': HCHS officer bonds with students

By Beth Smith,

Gleaner: March 26, 2006

"You may hear me breaking into song," Fanok said. "There are rules about public displays of affection and the way I handle it is to sing love songs to the couple." And it works. For some reason, when couples hear Fanok crooning sappy love songs at them, they turn bright red and run -- usually in opposite directions.

http://www.courierpress.com/ecp/gleaner_news/article/0,1626,ECP_4476_4571471.00.html

Delimma: What do you do when students show physical affection for each other in school?

NEA Today May 2004

<http://www.nea.org/neatoday/0405/dilemma.html>

Disaffected feeling

By Fermin Leal and Nguyen Huy Vu

The Orange County Register: September 8, 2005

A gay high school student sues Garden Grove Unified, citing discrimination after her refusal to stop kissing and hugging. Garden Grove - A gay high school student filed suit Wednesday against Garden Grove Unified School District, claiming she was suspended several times and forced to temporarily transfer because she refused to stop hugging and kissing her girlfriend on campus. Charlene Nguon, a 17-year-old honor student, said Santiago High School Principal Ben Wolf discriminated against her and her girlfriend last school year because the couple was openly affectionate. Meanwhile, heterosexual couples who kissed went unpunished, she said.

http://www.ocregister.com/ocr/2005/09/08/sections/local/local/article_667204.php



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Judge Refuses To Dismiss Campus Kissing Lawsuit

ACLU Files Lawsuit On Behalf Of Student

SANTA ANA, Calif. -- A judge refused to dismiss a lawsuit claiming the Garden Grove Unified School District violated the rights of a high school student who was disciplined for kissing her girlfriend on campus, officials said Thursday.

Nguon, 17, filed the suit last September, saying she was unfairly disciplined by the district for kissing her girlfriend, also 17, while similar activity by non-gay students was ignored.

Nguon said she was suspended then forced to attend another school, even though there was no specific policy addressing displays of public affection in the school's student handbook.

<http://www.nbc4.tv/news/5446766/detail.html?subid=10101581>

High School Student Handbooks used in this Brief:

The International School Nido de Aguilas, Santiago, Chile

<http://www.nido.cl/parent&students/HighSchool/handbookpolicies2.html>

Columbia High School

<http://schools.gorge.net/whitesalmon/CHS/hndbk.htm>

Lake Stevens High School

<http://viking.lkstevens.wednet.edu/sph/behavior.html>

Mascenic Regional High School

<http://www.mascenic.com/shpage18.html>

IB and High School Program - Rights and Responsibilities of Students

<http://www.aislusaka.org/ib/rightsresponsibilities.htm>

Vail High School

<http://www.vailhs.net/handbook/dresscode.php#p2>

The Anglo-American School of Moscow

<http://www.aas.ru/academics/us/us-discoveryweek.php>

Blair-Taylor High School

<http://btsd.k12.wi.us/District/HandbookHS.htm>

Submitted Date: 4/3/2006 By: Mike Muir, Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning

<http://www.principalspartnership.com>

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