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# Understanding the CROWN Act

In 2019, the [Dignity for All Students Act](#), or DASA, was amended by the CROWN Act to add the definition of race that includes traits such as hair texture and protective hairstyles such as locs, braids, and twists in order to protect students' access to their public education regardless of how they choose to wear/style their hair. The CROWN Act, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, prohibits racial discrimination based on hair texture and protective hairstyles. While DASA already protects the right of all students to learn in schools free of discrimination, harassment, and bullying, it is now clarified that those rights include self-expression through hairstyle.

Simply put, the CROWN Act protects students' rights to wear or treat their hair however they desire, without the threat of racial discrimination or loss of access to school, participation in activities, and inclusion in opportunities inside and beyond typical classrooms. School administrators can work to create a culturally responsive and sustaining school environment that reflects the diversity of its students, including their hairstyles, and supports student self-expression. The enactment of the CROWN Act provides the opportunity for districts and schools to engage students, staff, and the community in the process of revisiting and revising their codes of conduct and dress codes to include the provisions of the CROWN Act and the Commissioner's Regulations regarding DASA (100.2 (jj), (kk)).

Under DASA and the CROWN Act, schools are responsible for ensuring that:

- teaching staff and other school personnel are aware of the Crown Act;
- school personnel understand that formal disciplinary action against students based on their natural hair texture and protective hairstyles is prohibited;
- school personnel understand that, given their inherent position of authority over students, they are responsible for preventing racial discrimination and supporting all students' access to school, participation in activities, and inclusion for opportunities inside and outside of the classroom; and
- the CROWN Act helps to promote school belonging and engagement for all students; reduces disparities in school discipline; increases educational engagement and academic success; and protects students, regardless of gender or gender identity.

# Understanding the CROWN Act

In 2012, DASA was enacted in recognition of every student's right to learn in a safe and supportive environment so they are better able, and more likely, to meet high academic standards. The provisions of DASA challenge every school to educate each and every student free of the burden of discrimination, harassment, and bullying which occur all too frequently for many students across their school experience. In addition, DASA supports every school's ability to create a [diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational process](#).

DASA is intended to improve the culture and climate of schools to create spaces to promote learning, as well as healing. Its focus is not on disciplining children and reporting incidents. Instead, DASA focuses on respecting the dignity of the individual children and the families of **all** students involved in incidents of discrimination, harassment, and bullying. In response to these incidents, DASA requires schools to take calculated steps to eliminate any hostile environment, create a positive school climate, and ensure the safety of the student(s) impacted by the incident. DASA requires that any discipline for the student(s) who caused the incident are addressed through a progressive discipline approach, but best practices recommend that support also be provided for those students as a way to prevent further incidents and in recognition that these students often need resources and assistance themselves.

The CROWN Act acknowledges that hairstyles have been just one piece of a pattern of harassment for some students and makes it illegal to limit students' opportunities based on hair. It is about understanding how patterns of incidents demonstrate a need for school personnel to become the impetus for a healthy shift in school culture by creating positive school climates that promote a sense of school belonging.

School belonging is an important part of students', parents', and teachers' experiences, and is related to positive academic outcomes and academic persistence (Allen et. al., 2018).

Teachers and other school staff who interact with students and affirm students' identities, including racial and ethnic identities, gender and gender expressions, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) identities play the most important role in fostering school belonging and helping students feel welcome (Craggs et. al., 2018 & Poteat et. al. 2013). Students' feelings of safety, affirmations of their individual identities, and feelings of being understood and accepted are the most important ways that students feel safe (Craggs et. al., 2018).

## ***Why is the CROWN Act especially important to Girls of Color?***

More than a decade of national research shows that girls of color are more likely to be disciplined in school for how they wear their hair, and expressing themselves through culturally rooted hairstyles or hair coverings is a natural and important part of healthy adolescent development ([Martin & Brooks, 2020](#)). Despite the fact that many students use hair as a means of self-expression, the impact of formal school discipline due to hairstyles by far has the greatest negative impact on girls, and especially girls of color.

Hairstyle related harassment and exclusionary discipline happens – by far – most frequently and most incisively on school campuses ([Morris, 2016](#)). These discriminatory and exclusionary acts of school discipline have long-term impacts on the educational engagement, access, and future success of these children and their families - especially on girls of color. ([Morris, 2016](#) & [George, 2015](#)). The decisions to discipline girls of color are subjectively based, rooted in stereotypes, and unfairly distributed (i.e., a white boy with dreadlocks is far less likely to experience formal school discipline than is a black girl with braids, locs, or twists.) (Martin & Smith, 2017).

## **Resources for implementing and educating about the CROWN Act**

Conducting classroom small group discussions with students instead of large assemblies will enhance and support student understanding of the CROWN Act and lead to richer discussions and conversations.

The following age/grade appropriate books and films can be used in classrooms to engage students and build understanding of the impact of racial discrimination, harassment, and bullying based on hairstyles.

### **Elementary School**

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**Hair Love**, Matthew A. Cherry (book) | [Hair Love](#) (SONY Animated Short)



**Crown**, Derrick Barnes (book)



**Ask Uncle Neil: Why is My Hair Curly?** By Neil Thompson (book, STEM)



**Thunder's Hair** by Jessie Taken Alive-Recountre (book)



**Penny and the Magic Puffballs** by Alonda Williams (book)

### **Middle School**

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**Can I Touch Your Hair?: Poems of Race, Mistakes and Friendship** Irene Latham, Charles Qualls (book)



**Patina** by Jason Reynolds (book)



**The Big Chop** (film, TV-PG)

### **High School, Teachers and Parents**

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**Twisted: The Tangles History of Black Hair Culture** by Emma Dabiri (book)



**Hair Raising: Beauty Culture and African American Women** by Noliwe Rooks (book)



**Back to Natural: A Historical Look at the Global Policing of Black Bodies** (Documentary, 2019 13+)



**My Beautiful Black Hair** by St. Claire Detrick-Jules (book)



**Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Power in America** Ayana Byrd, Lori L. Thorp (book)



**Chris Rock, Good Hair** (Documentary, 2009 PG-13)



**Hair Piece: A film for nappy headed people** (Animated Short, 1984)



**Our Hairitage, A Natural Hair Documentary** (Documentary, 2016)



**No. You Cannot Touch My Hair!** (Mena Fobo, TEDx Bristol 2017)