

Wear It Proud

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Eight-year-old Jonathan Brown, from Texas, rocks his dreadlocks proudly. It's a style he was looking forward to letting grow long. But in December 2019, he was sent home from school with a note from the assistant principal. It said Jonathan had to have his hair cut to comply with the school dress code. His mom, Tiffany Brown, refused to cut it. "On the way home, Jonathan cried," she told TIME for Kids.

Many schools have dress codes. The policies are supposed to help keep students focused on learning. Some include rules about hair. A policy might prohibit boys from wearing their hair long. This would prevent styles such as afros and dreadlocks. Some policies ban braids, twists, and other styles associated with Black culture.

Jonathan's story isn't the only one of its kind. In January, Texas teen DeAndre Arnold was told he needed to cut his dreadlocks to go to his graduation. In 2017, twins Mya and Deanna Cook were given detentions at their Massachusetts school because their hair extensions violated school code.

Esi Eggleston Bracey sees these types of rules as hair discrimination. She helped found the CROWN Coalition in order to end them. CROWN stands for Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair.

Act Now

Tiffany took the issue up with the school board, and after about six months, Jonathan's school changed the dress code in his favor. But the CROWN Coalition hopes to prevent other students from having to go through that process. That's why it's championing the CROWN Act. If passed, the act will prevent public schools, charter schools, and workplaces from discriminating against black people for wearing their hair in "natural styles."

Growing up, Bracey says she often felt like her own natural hair texture wasn't "good enough." She wants kids today to feel pride in their hair. "There have been far too many incidents of children being sent home, suspended, or expelled from school because of their textured hairstyles," Bracey says.

The CROWN Act has already been passed in five states. Efforts are also being made to pass the bill on a national level.

"I think it's empowering," Tiffany Brown says. "For so many people of different cultural backgrounds, hair is a symbol of strength, power, and individuality. . . . The CROWN Act is now saying 'No longer will we be forced to not be who we are, and our hair is included.'"