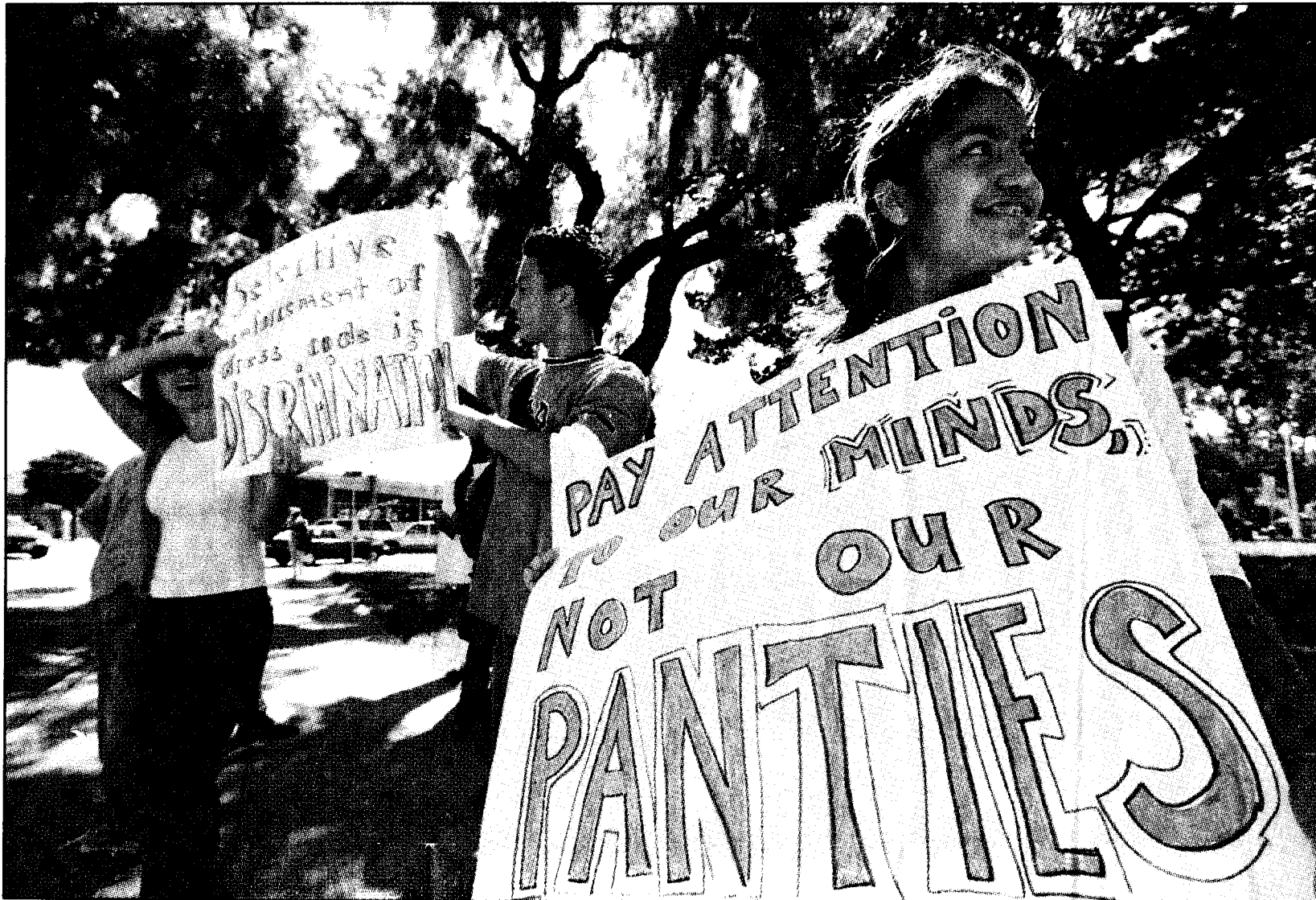


Thong throng protests school dress code



AARON SUOZZI/The Herald

AnaMarie Geck is one of a handful of students protesting the new dress code at Salinas High School concerning thong underwear. The group gathered at the southwest corner of the campus Monday.

Officials say underwear is not issue

By **ALEX FRIEDRICH**
Herald Staff Writer

Salinas High School student Ashley Nichols has a lot on her mind these days — school, modeling, volunteer work. The last thing she wants to worry about is who's eyeing her underwear.

But lately, she said, school administrators have been worrying about her thong just a bit too much. The school's dress code is being stretched to include the undergarment, she claims, and Monday afternoon she and a dozen other girls launched a protest in front of the school.

Hoping to give Principal Joseph Pawlick a political wedgie, the girls held signs saying things such as "Pay attention to our minds, not our panties," and hollered "We wear thongs!" to passing motorists. The thong throng complained that administrators are also unfairly cracking down on clothes — such as low-cut and spaghetti-strap tops — that show a little skin. And if a girl chooses not to wear a bra, said senior Jody Lasda, who should care?

"We're fighting the dress code as

a whole," she said.

The regulations are vague, they say, and should be rewritten — with the guidance of parents and students — to make them specific and easy to understand.

The emphasis Monday was on the thong, the underwear made infamous by Clinton mistress Monica Lewinsky, who once flashed hers to the president. Similar to a G-string in shape, it's a narrow, backless piece of underwear. It has become a staple in the fashion industry as clothing becomes tighter and more form-fitting. The thong, which costs anywhere from a few dollars to more than \$12 at Victoria's Secret, eliminates the embarrassing panty line that can appear when wearing a pair of particularly tight pants or skirt.

The thong gained even more status this year with the "Thong Song," an ode by rap singer Sisqo. Its video, which features women wiggling their behinds, snagged an MTV Music Video award Thursday.

One Salinas High girl said thongs are the only way to go: "We don't want to wear those granny panties."

And she's not alone. Most female students wear thongs, Nichols said, so "why is underwear an issue?"



Whether it really is remains to be seen. Administrators aren't exactly holding panty raids.

Assistant Principal Jenny Hirst said the school does not forbid thongs. But like any piece of clothing, she said, they might be inappropriate if worn incorrectly — in this case with a white or tight-fitting skirt.

"It's important that students are not dressing in a way that causes disruption or undue attention," she said.

Students' stories of how the

school has enforced the policy are sketchy, and they conflict. The students said the principal has sent several girls home for wearing thongs, but they could not substantiate the claims. They said teachers had warned them during class not to wear thongs, but faculty members such as girls' Athletic Director Merry Pratt say that's not true.

"What do I care?" she said. "Even my daughter wears a thong. There's

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no way anyone can enforce a lingerie policy.”

Parent Kimberly Boyd echoed those sentiments: “I think it’s ludicrous.”

Hirst said the principal on occasion has called parents in to bring their children proper clothing — standard procedure for a dress-code violation — but she said she did not

know enough about the cases to say what part of the dress code they had broken. The school’s three assistant principals, who handle discipline, have not sent any students home — especially not for wearing thongs, Hirst said.

Pawlick was out of town and unavailable to comment Monday.

According to the student handbook, Salinas High prohibits:

➤ bare feet;

➤ bare midriffs;
➤ strapless tops;
➤ torn or ragged clothing;
➤ and clothing “which disrupts the effective functioning of the school.”

Other banned articles include hats, caps, sunglasses, as well as clothing and accessories carrying profanity, obscenity, symbols of gang affiliation or references promoting drugs, alcohol or tobacco.

A directive in effect Monday also bans baggy clothes, short shorts, sexual graphics, wallet chains, spiked accessories or “other attire that disrupts the educational process.”

Principal Pawlick “is becoming too strict,” said Lindsay Vowell, a Salinas High senior. “On hot days, we don’t want to cover up.”

Vowell said she has taken the matter to the student senate and will talk

to other student leaders about it. Fellow picket Lasda said she plans to meet with Hirst today, and the group may launch a second demonstration today as well.

“I hope (Hirst) and Dr. Pawlick will be willing to work with us and be reasonable,” Lasda said.

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