

BEST PRACTICES FOR COSTUMING DANCERS

When making costume decisions, always lead with values about students' health, safety, and confidence. Age-appropriateness is key; costumes should look like they belong to the right age group and be flattering on all body types and skin colors. Performance is your students' time to shine!

Costume measuring is a sensitive time for many dancers. Empower students to offer permission to be measured (ask a parent to help if a child is unsure) and approach the process with sensitivity, especially when working with preteens and teens. Try these steps to make measuring comfortable for all:

- 1 Hold the end of the measuring tape to the side of the child's body, rather than in the front.
- 2 Use encouraging phrases with younger dancers. When measuring girth, for example, you could say: "Let's see how tall your leotard is!"
- 3 Do not use words that could influence a negative body image, such as "too big," "too small," "skinny," "big-boned," etc.
- 4 Quickly squash any talk or gossip about classmates' sizes. Try a friendly but firm reminder: "We're not discussing measurements in class. Let's move on."
- 5 If a student asks what size they are, smile and say "Just right!"

When selecting costumes, be conscious about the various heights and body sizes among students: costume choices that assure all students are comfortable and can perform at their best will always be a better option than trendy styles that only a few students in a class can pull off confidently.

When the time nears for performance, explain to students and parents why, on stage, students need to do their hair differently (in the agreed-upon style, without distraction) or wear makeup (to counteract the bright stage lighting).

Allow concerned parents of little dancers to opt out of makeup requirements—those who stick with dance will have plenty of time to learn the ropes. Suggest flattering skin-tone color palettes for all students. Don't overdo the make-up: remember, even teens are just teens—they aren't little adults.

Source:
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