



SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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May 28, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

As we look toward to this upcoming commencement season, I want to address a topic of great community interest - tribal students wearing items of cultural significance, such as eagle feathers, during graduation ceremonies. I want to reaffirm my stance on this matter and encourage all high schools to adopt policies that allow for this form of cultural expression in their ceremonies.

I am heartened that many schools already recognize the appropriateness of Native American students wearing eagle feathers at graduation. These policies range from specifically accommodating Native American students to permitting student organizations to work with parent committees and/or Tribes to distribute eagle feathers for Native American students. It is important to recognize that since time immemorial, many tribal nations have viewed eagle feathers as sacred to cultural traditions. As such, to present an eagle feather is a high honor in recognition of a great accomplishment. The honoring of a student with the presentation of an eagle feather is held in high regard to family, community, and tribal leadership.

Further, what a tremendous opportunity schools have to recognize the diversity of their community in acknowledging this important honor. In my experience, the wearing of items of such cultural expression would not fall outside of a school's dress code for commencement. I call upon school district staff to work to foster inclusive commencement policies. Also, it is important to work to resolve matters of this nature toward an inclusive end much earlier than commencement day. This request reflects the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) commitment to fostering the vital government-to-government relationships with the 29 tribes whose boundaries fall within Washington state and the many other tribes who are represented in the public school system. Federally recognized tribes in Washington state are sovereign nations and OSPI fully supports policies that recognize a tribal student's ability to honor unique tribal cultures.

Our state strives to foster inclusivity, respect government-to-government relationships with tribes, and provide a high standard of educational equity. Thank you for supporting this effort. If you have any questions, please contact Laura Lynn, Office of Native Education Program Supervisor, at laura.lynn@k12.wa.us. The agency TIY number is 360-664-3631.

Sincerely,

Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction