

May 8, 2019

Dear Colleague:

As we approach the end of the school year, I want to revisit an issue that remains a significant one for many Wisconsin tribal nations - American Indian students being prohibited from wearing items of religious and cultural significance, such as traditional regalia and eagle feathers at graduation ceremonies and school-sponsored events.

In September 2017, the department sent a letter requesting districts review their policies, connect with the sovereign tribal nations, and discuss with tribal leaders ways to recognize and honor tribal traditions and practices. I encourage you to use this spring as a time to share your relevant policies with tribal representatives.

As you look at your district policies, consider the religious aspects of eagle feathers and other items for American Indian students and the legal protections given for religious practices, such as:

- Wisconsin Statute s. 115.28(31) requires rules to provide for the reasonable accommodation of a pupil's sincerely held religious beliefs with regard to all examinations and other academic requirements. Further, the related administrative rule, Wis. Admin. Code Chapter PI 41, requires all school boards to develop policies providing for such accommodations.
- Wisconsin Statute s. 118.13 provides that no person may be denied participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be discriminated against in any curricular, extracurricular, pupil services, recreational or other program or activity because of the sex, race, religion, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation or physical, mental, emotional or learning disability. Under the related administrative rule, Wis. Admin. Code Chapter PI 9, school boards are required to develop policies prohibiting discrimination against pupils.

Throughout Wisconsin, many school districts already recognize the importance of American Indian students wearing eagle feathers, traditional regalia, and other items, and many districts addressed their policies in response to the department's 2017 letter. I hope you will take this opportunity to deepen the relationship with the tribal nations and recognize the cultural and religious significance these specific items have to the sovereign nations and their members.

Thank you for your continued efforts to make school a welcoming, safe, and engaging place for all our students each and every day.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Stanford Taylor  
State Superintendent

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