



May 11, 2022

Dear Colleague:

As we approach the end of the school year, I want to raise up an issue that remains a significant one for many tribal nations of Wisconsin - 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 on behalf of then State Superintendent Tony Evers 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. In May 2019, then State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor also encouraged connecting with tribal representatives regarding your policies.

I join my predecessors in encouraging you to look at your district policies, as you consider the importance and religious significance of eagle feathers and other cultural 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 have already recognized the importance of American Indian students wearing eagle feathers, traditional regalia, and other items. I hope you will take this opportunity to deepen your district's relationship with the tribal nations and communities in your area. Your policies can go a long way in recognizing the cultural and religious significance these specific items have to the students of these sovereign nations.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill Underly".

Jill K. Underly, PhD
State Superintendent

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