

Statement on Graduation Accessories and Recent Decision on Rainbow Tassels

RE: Graduation Accessories

ATTN: Mrs. Amy Bataglia, President, Board of Education

Mr. Peter Bellanti, Vice President, Board of Education

Mr. Joshua Feldmann, Member, Board of Education

Ms. Marianne Jasen, Member, Board of Education

Mr. Scott Johnson, Member, Board of Education

Mr. Brian Liable, Member, Board of Education

Dr. Michael Ginestre, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Derek Baker, Building Principal, Sweet Home High School

CC: Mr. Raymond Bailey, Assistant Principal, Sweet Home High School

Mrs. JoAnn Balzas, Assistant Superintendent for Talent and Equity, DEI Committee
Chair

To our Building and District Administrators,

As students and alumni of Sweet Home High School, we wish to express our concerns and respectful dissent on the decision to not allow students to wear rainbow tassels and any other club affiliated accessories at the upcoming Class of 2024 Commencement Ceremony.

The current policy on graduation accessories (e.g. tassels, stoles, cords, etc.) has long been a point of contention for the student body. While we appreciate that this policy is put in place to ensure a cohesive appearance at our commencement, this particular policy has proven to be counterproductive and controversial in several ways. Specifically, it has led to students feeling undervalued and uncelebrated on one of the most significant days in their high school journey. This policy of prohibiting clubs, aside from academic honor societies, from providing graduation accessories to their students has diminished the student experience and the spirit and connection that students have with our school, which undermines our collective goals and values as an educational institution.

We understand that decisions on graduation attire and accessories are made with the intention of promoting school unity and uniformity. However, the recent decision on forbidding students who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community to wear a rainbow tassel as an expression and recognition of their identity has left many of our peers feeling unheard, undervalued, and unwelcome. This decision has significant implications for the emotional and mental health of our students, and discredits the courage and bravery these students have taken in embracing their identity.

The banning of rainbow tassels severely contradicts the culture of belonging that the district's DEI Committee and Subcommittees have strived to embrace for *all* students. The district has gone so far as to make belonging the theme of Challenge 2 Change 2024, where students learned about each other's identities and why it is important to embrace every unique identity they may have. Yet, the actions of the High School and District administrators have been profoundly disrespectful to the students who they stood in front of just a few weeks ago and told them that they are committed to DEI and increasing a sense of belonging in our schools.

It is this contradictory nature that has led our student body feeling betrayed and unwelcome by the administration charged with our safety and emotional wellbeing. These rainbow tassels and any other graduation accessories are symbols of the achievements each and every student has made not only in their academic pursuits, but also in their personal lives. Many of our students have overcome and battled different hardships in their high school years and it is a shame to see them not be able to celebrate their triumph over that struggle with accessories at graduation.

We respectfully request that the Board of Education allow the display of non-school or academic honor society accessories at the Class of 2024 Commencement on June 27th, with limitations only placed on vulgar and lewd material. We also request the Board reviews the current commencement attire policy and do so with a special commission made up of students, staff, community members, and parents who will provide their grievances and feedback in a constructive manner that allows for prompt reconsideration or rewriting of any clauses in the policy put before them.

With all due respect,

Hunter Tryloff, Senior

Erica Chan, Senior

Co-Signed

Isabella Klein, Senior

Ariana Minhas, Senior

Derek Woodford, Senior

Moth Rivers, Senior

Katherine Elmedawar, Senior

Nate Rosado, Senior

Emily Childerhose, Senior

Avery Gaume, Senior

Amanda Thorpe, Senior

Alexa Fadale, Senior

Alicia Reid, Senior

Megan Henel, Senior

Sara Stanar, Senior

Alexander Kosowski, Senior

Damarion Stone, Senior
Erin Clemens-Regan, Senior
Hailey Fisk, Junior
Joy Bado, Junior
Matthew Spence, Junior
Zoe Collins, Junior
Haley Starr, Junior
Lauren Silverberg, Sophomore
Naliaka Masika, Freshman
Sophia Vadnais, Alumni
Maxine Miller, Alumni
Solstice Edholm (they/them), Alumni
Hannah Schroder, Alumni
Ashleigh Lucina, Alumni
Shannon Lynch, Alumni
Paige Stauffiger, Alumni
Kendall Robbins, Alumni
Anna Laufer, Alumni
Sophia Stang, Alumni
Julie Nisbet, Alumni

Margaret Gembala, Senior
Camryn Smith, Junior
Gracie Fuqua, Junior
Julia Elmedawar, Junior
Lily Fisher, Junior
Nate Mackiewicz, Junior
Lily Carriero, Sophomore
Drew McNelis, Freshman
Matthew McGowan, Alumni
Hanna Tryloff, Alumni
Nikki Surdi, Alumni
Karina Cole, Alumni
Spencer Vadnais, Alumni
Adam Russell, Alumni
Bella Ippolito, Alumni
Cora Kubiak, Alumni
Adriana Szurlej, Alumni
Quinn Edholm, Alumni
Ashley Girdlestone, Alumni
Carl Edholm Jr, Alumni