



June 3, 2021

Colleagues:

As we continue to move through this exciting and celebratory time of the year recognizing the many accomplishments of our students and their families and communities, I urge you to allow American Indian students to wear items of cultural and traditional significance, such as eagle feathers, beaded caps, tribal insignias and stoles, in commencement and recognition celebrations and ceremonies. Your willingness to allow for these important cultural and traditional items provides the opportunity to deepen your relationships with our sovereign tribal nations and their self-identified students. If you, your school board, and your community have not yet reviewed district policies pertaining to the allowance of these items, I urge you to consider doing so by connecting with the sovereign tribal nations near you and discussing with them ways to recognize and honor tribal traditions and practices. Given the importance of reverence for eagles and the high honor of graduation, eagle feathers signify the traditions of achievement, leadership, courage and wisdom. Federal policy has long recognized this importance through the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1962, which prohibits the take, transport and possession of bald and golden eagles. This federal policy specifically allows for tribal members to continue to include eagle parts in their religious ceremonies.

If you decide to review your policies and practices, it is important to consider the religious aspects of eagle feathers and the legal protections given for religious practice in Minnesota. For example:

- The Minnesota Constitution (Article I, Sec. 16) protects the right of every person to worship their religion according to the dictates of their own conscience, unless doing so would endanger the peace or safety of the state.
- The Minnesota Human Rights Act (Minn. Stat. § 363A.13) provides that it is an unfair discriminatory practice to discriminate in any manner in the full utilization of or benefit from any educational institution because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or disability.

Our ability to support and honor the right of American Indian students in Minnesota to practice and express their cultural, traditional, and religious beliefs, including the right to wear an eagle feather and other cultural items at their graduation and achievement ceremonies is vital to ensuring that every student feels seen, valued, and heard. Thank you for continuing to foster the inclusion of all students, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Heather Mueller, Ed.D.'.

Heather Mueller, Ed.D.

Commissioner