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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

January 28, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

As we look forward to this upcoming commencement season, I want to address a topic of serious and important interest for the citizens of Washington state — students who are citizens or descendants of sovereign tribal nations wearing traditional regalia and other items of cultural significance during graduation ceremonies and other public events celebrating the important academic achievements of our American Indian/Alaska Native students. I want to reaffirm my stance on this matter and encourage all public and private high schools to adopt policies that allow for and honor this form of cultural expression in their commencement ceremonies and other public events.

I am heartened that many schools are already beginning to recognize in intent and action the inherent significance of tribal sovereignty and the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indian/Alaska Native students and the meaningful nature of these students wearing their traditional regalia and items of cultural significance at graduation and other public events. It is important to recognize that, since time immemorial, many tribal nations have viewed the wearing of traditional regalia and items of cultural significance, such as eagle feathers, cedar, beadwork, and other items as sacred to cultural traditions. Particularly, the presentation and wearing of an eagle feather is a high honor in recognition of a great accomplishment. The honoring of a Native student with the presentation of an eagle feather is held in high regard to family, community, and tribal leadership. It's vital to note only citizens and descendants of tribal nations are legally able to own and care for eagle feathers. This is a tremendous opportunity for schools to acknowledge this important honor and legal right of Native students and tribal nations and also recognize the diversity in our shared community.

The wearing of traditional regalia and items of cultural significance should not fall outside of policy and/or a school's dress code for commencement and other public events, and in the event it does, important policy change should and must occur.

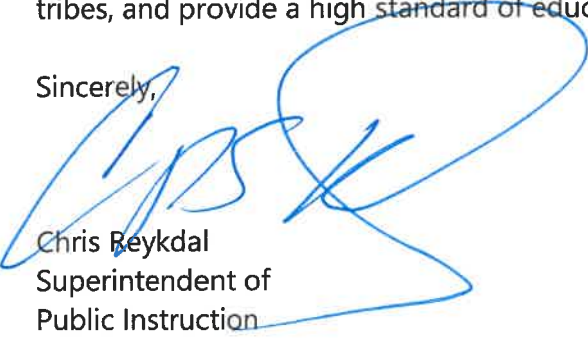
I call upon school district system leaders and staff to work to not only foster inclusivity and cultural responsiveness within commencement but to develop and adhere to policies underscoring the sovereign and singular rights of our first peoples — citizens and descendants of tribal nations. District policy regarding the wearing of traditional tribal regalia during commencement should be developed well in advance of the commencement date, and be clearly and thoroughly

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communicated to students, parents, and community members. In addition, it is critical that districts work in a timely manner to resolve any potential issues regarding cultural inclusivity during commencement. This request reflects the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) legal obligation and 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 tribal students' specific rights to honor their tribal constitutions, citizenry, and unique tribal cultures.

Our state strives to foster inclusivity, respect government-to-government relationships with tribes, and provide a high standard of educational opportunity and equity for all.

Sincerely,



Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction