



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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NIEA Resolution 2015-01

TITLE: IN SUPPORT OF ALLOWING NATIVE STUDENTS TO WEAR EAGLE FEATHERS AT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

WHEREAS, the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) was established in 1970 for the purpose of advocating, planning, and promoting the unique and special educational needs of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; and

WHEREAS, NIEA as the largest national Indian organization of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian educators, administrators, parents, and students in the United States, provides a forum to discuss and act upon issues affecting the education of Indian and Native people; and

WHEREAS, through its unique relationship with Indian nations and tribes, the federal government has established programs and resources to meet the educational needs of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, residing on and off their reserved or non-reserved homelands; and

WHEREAS, every year, American Indian and Alaska Native high school students from across the country are given eagle feathers to be worn at graduation ceremonies as a form of practice and expression of spiritual and religious beliefs; and

WHEREAS, the feathers are also given for the students' leadership and academic achievement; as a sign of maturity; to signify the achievement of this important educational journey; to honor the graduate and his or her family, community, and tribal nation; and for many other reasons; and

WHEREAS, these American Indian and Alaska Native high school students seek to express and practice their religious and spiritual beliefs and celebrate their personal academic achievement, leadership, and transition into adulthood, among other things, by wearing an eagle feather at their graduation ceremony; and

WHEREAS, graduation from high school is an especially significant occasion for Native students and families, considering that the American Indian and Alaska Native high school graduation rate is 67 percent, the lowest of any racial or ethnic demographic across all schools; and

WHEREAS, from time immemorial, many tribal nations have viewed eagles and eagle feathers as sacred elements of their religious and cultural traditions; and

WHEREAS, federal law and policy has long recognized the religious significance of eagles, eagle feathers, and eagle parts to Native peoples; and

WHEREAS, for example, Congress exempted American Indians and Alaska Natives from the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1962, which prohibited the take, transport, and possession of bald and golden eagles, and thus allowed tribal members to continue to include eagle parts in their religious ceremonies; and

WHEREAS, according to many Native religious and spiritual traditions, eagle feathers are given only in times of great honor and often to mark significant personal achievement; and

WHEREAS, for many Native students, receiving an eagle feather in recognition of high school graduation is as significant as earning the diploma; and

WHEREAS, while most public high schools permit Native students to wear eagle feathers at graduation, recognizing that commencement ceremonies are an appropriate setting for Native graduates to wear an eagle feather with dignity, some schools do not allow it.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the NIEA supports the right of American Indian and Alaska Native high school students to practice and express their traditional religious and spiritual beliefs and honor their academic and other achievements by wearing an eagle feather at their commencement ceremonies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NIEA urges all schools to respect traditional tribal religious and spiritual beliefs by allowing Native students to wear an eagle feather at graduation; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NIEA until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

I do hereby certify that the following resolution was dully considered and passed by the National Indian Education Association on October 17, 2015 at which a quorum of the membership was present.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Melvin E. Monette-Barajas".

Melvin E. Monette- Barajas
President