



# Guidance on Display of Graduation Attire and Inclusion of Culturally Appropriate Regalia

Photo from: McHenry High School

Dear Administrators,

The Illinois State Board of Education is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in every aspect of our educational institutions, including the way they conduct graduation ceremonies. It is essential that all students feel celebrated, respected, and included in these ceremonies. The guidance below is provided in accordance with [Public Act 103-0463](#) to protect and uphold the rights of students to wear or accessorize their graduation attire with general items that may be used by a student to associate with, identify, or declare the student's cultural, ethnic, or religious identity or any other protected characteristic or category identified in subsection (Q) of Section 1-103 of the [Illinois Human Rights Act](#).

## 1. General Best Practices for Graduation Attire Guidelines

- Review and update dress code policies to align with principles of equity, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity.
- Communicate clearly with students, families, and staff about the expectations for graduation attire, emphasizing the importance of respecting diverse identities and expressions.
- Train staff members on how to support students who may have questions or concerns regarding graduation attire, including issues related to cultural, LGBTQ+, or religious inclusivity.
- Establish protocols for addressing any conflicts or misunderstandings related to graduation attire in a manner that upholds students' dignity and promotes understanding and respect.

## 2. Culturally and Ethnically Appropriate Graduation Regalia

- Recognize that students may wish to wear culturally or ethnically significant attire or regalia during graduation ceremonies to honor their heritage and identity.
- Encourage students to express their cultural or ethnic pride through their attire and ensure that they feel supported and respected in doing so.
- Allow for flexibility in dress codes to accommodate culturally diverse forms of attire, such as traditional garments, accessories, or symbols that hold ethnic or cultural significance.

### **3. LGBTQ+ Inclusivity**

- Acknowledge the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students during graduation ceremonies.
- Respect students' gender identities and expressions by allowing them to wear attire that aligns with their gender identity.
- Ensure that dress codes are gender-neutral and do not reinforce stereotypes or discriminate against LGBTQ+ students.
- ISBE's [Non-Regulatory Guidance for Supporting Transgender, Nonbinary and Gender Nonconforming Students](#) details the legal protections for students in Illinois, recommended procedures, and best practices for K-12 schools to support transgender, nonbinary and gender nonconforming students, including guidelines for special events like graduation.

### **4. Inclusivity of Religious Adornments**

- Acknowledge the importance of accommodating students' religious beliefs and practices during graduation ceremonies.
- Respect students' religious freedoms by allowing them to wear religious adornments or symbols that hold significance to their faith.
- Ensure that dress code policies are inclusive and do not infringe upon students' rights to express their religious identities during graduation ceremonies.

### **5. Specific Guidance on Words or Phrases on Graduation Attire**

- The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects students' freedom of speech, which includes the right of students to express themselves through clothing and accessories. Schools should recognize and respect students' constitutional rights to express themselves at graduation while ensuring that these expressions do not substantially disrupt or interfere with the ceremony or infringe upon the rights of others.
- Schools should have clear policies regarding graduation attire, including caps and gowns. These policies may address appropriate dress, symbols, and messages. Guidelines should be communicated to students well in advance of the ceremony.
- Schools can review proposed messages on graduation attire to ensure that the free speech rights of the student are balanced with the rights of others and with the overall solemnity of the occasion. This can be a difficult balancing act and legal counsel may need to be engaged.

### **6. Specific Guidance on Graduation Adornments Not Allowed**

- It is important to clarify that certain adornments may not be appropriate. Protocols for reviewing graduation adornment should be communicated to students and their parents and guardians prior to graduation day. Prohibited graduation attire or adornments may include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Adornments that promote hate speech, discrimination, or violence.
  - Adornments that are excessively distracting or disruptive to the ceremony.
  - Adornments that violate health or safety regulations, such as sharp objects or items that pose a risk to oneself or others.
- It is crucial to communicate these restrictions clearly to students and families to ensure a smooth and respectful graduation ceremony for all participants.
- While students may choose to personalize their attire with accessories, it is essential to recognize that these individual expressions are not intended to divert attention from the main event.

Implementing these guidelines can help ensure that graduation ceremonies are inclusive, respectful, and meaningful for all students. Thank you for your commitment to creating an educational environment where every student feels valued and supported. For more information on the guidelines for cultural or religious graduation regalia, please review the additional resources listed below.



1. [Evanston Township High School](#)
2. [Native American Rights Fund](#)
  - [Wearing Eagle Feathers at Graduation Information for Families](#)
  - [Wearing Eagle Feathers at Graduation Information for Schools](#)
3. [ACLU Know Your Rights: Tribal Regalia](#)
4. [Anti-Defamation League: Dress Codes and Religion](#)

The guidance provided by the Illinois State Board of Education regarding graduation attire is to give technical assistance to school districts in accordance with [Public Act 103-0463](#). It is not intended to serve as legal advice. Individual decisions regarding student graduation attire should be made in consultation with the district's own legal counsel or other qualified legal professionals. Each school district may have unique circumstances, policies, and legal considerations that should be reviewed when determining appropriate graduation attire for students.