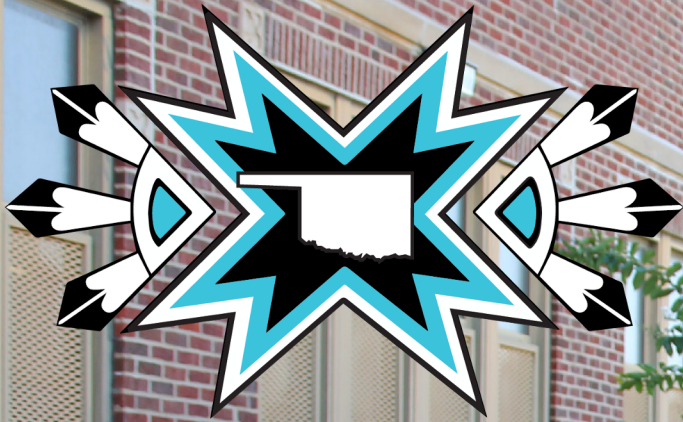


NATIVE AMERICAN GRADUATION ATTIRE

PRESENTED BY
NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENT SERVICES



NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENT SERVICES

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Oklahoma City
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Did You Know?

Spring is an exciting time for many high school seniors. For Native American Seniors, their families begin preparing months in advance for their upcoming graduation ceremony. Special outfits might be made or dinners and ceremonies might be scheduled in order to honor the graduate of this amazing accomplishment.

Some of these items, outfits and ceremonies have spiritual or religious meaning. Some might be traditional customs that have been done for generations. Whatever the item, outfit or custom, it's important that school districts across the country recognize, honor and allow this form of expression. It is a way for a school to demonstrate respect, diversity and inclusivity.

"I want to show that I have pride in representing my culture."

- Georgia Scott (Seminole), Class of 2019, US Grant HS

NATIVE
AMERICAN
GRADUATION
ATTIRE





"Wearing an Eagle feather and stole at graduation was important to me because it gave me a sense of pride and honor. Just like the students who wear a stole for their GPA that they worked hard for all four years or the club they participated in. It made me feel proud to be Indigenous and be a high school graduate knowing the statistics say we're more likely to drop out. It shows that we're still here and paving a way for our people."

- Brianna Maynahonah
(Comanche), Class of 2014, US
Grant High School

Eagle Feathers

Eagle feathers are sacred and religious items to Native American people.

Eagle feathers cannot be bought or sold. Eagle feathers have to be given to a person by someone who has the right to possess them. Eagle feathers are given only in times of great honor signifying a great accomplishment or deed. Some Native American graduates receive a feather in honor of their accomplishment of graduating from high school and moving into the next phase of their life. The graduate will typically wear it on top of their graduation cap. According to the ACLU, wearing eagle feathers and other Native American ceremonial items are protected by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.



NATIVE
AMERICAN
GRADUATION
ATTIRE



Beaded Graduation Cap

Many Native American seniors may have their graduation cap beaded

Beadwork in the Native American culture is a sign of love, wealth, respect and tradition. Wearing your best beadwork, is like dressing up or wearing your best jewelry. When a Native student is getting ready for graduation, typically a family member works tirelessly to bead the student's cap so that it is done by the time the commencement festivities begin.

Beadwork is a tedious and labor intensive art form in the Native American culture. The person who beads your cap demonstrates that they took their time and energy to do this for you. They typically put good thoughts and prayers when they are beading so that the person wearing it will receive those blessings.



"It was important for me to get my cap beaded because I wanted to represent the medicine colors. Receiving my NASS stole was more proof that I accomplished something big that I thought I couldn't."

- Zoe Wallace (Choctaw), Class of 2020, NWC HS

**NATIVE
AMERICAN
GRADUATION
ATTIRE**

**Seminole
and Creek**



**Caddo and
Delaware**

"My Stole was the mark that I made it, and my Eagle feather was my reward. With my Stole, it showed others that I am Native, I am proud, and that I am determined.

My mother had my Stole embroidered on both sides. The left, marked Caddo and Delaware, my Grandpa's blood, and the right, Seminole, and Creek, my Grandma's; the people who refused to let us think Graduation was an option.

It also reminded me of my JOM teachers and how much time and energy they spent to help me get to this day. The Stole, in and of itself, was the supportive hands of many who helped me get here."

**Lydia Gonzales-Romero
Class of 2010, US Grant HS**

Native American Graduation Stoles

Many Indian Education programs or Native American Parent Committees are now issuing their own graduation stoles to recognize all their Native American graduates. The stole typically has traditional significance in color, design and even in the way it is sewn. Native American graduation stoles are important because they signify to the audience, the families and to the graduate themselves that they finished despite what the glooming statistics may say about Native youth. The stoles also provide a visual reminder of how diverse our Native students are. Finally, it provides a sense of community, belonging and connection to their Native heritage.

Tribal Chords or Stoles

More recently, Tribes in Oklahoma have been honoring their tribal graduates with Tribal chords or stoles. The chord or stole is issued by the student's specific Tribe and not by the school district. The stole or chord signifies that they are Native American and a citizen of a sovereign Tribal Nation.



**NATIVE
AMERICAN
GRADUATION
ATTIRE**



Tribal Regalia Traditional Clothing Moccasins



Many Native American Graduating Seniors may choose to wear their Traditional Clothing or Tribal Regalia. For a Native person, regalia or traditional clothes are only worn for special occasions or during an appropriate time. It is considered formal wear or like wearing your Sunday's best church outfit.

Many students might have an entire outfit made specifically for their graduation which can take months to make. Some students might only chose to wear their moccasins or tribal footwear.

Whether a graduate is wearing their entire Tribal regalia or only their moccasins, its important to allow this form of expression, as it strongly identifies who they are at their core.

"As a Native Student, sometimes I felt invisible. For me, my mom didn't know how to bead. By receiving the beaded cap, it was such an honor and accomplishment to be recognized as a Native Student, and to be able to wear the cap and stole with Pride. It also helped us to stand out to peers that Native people are still here, and shows pride in our culture. Finishing high school is a big accomplishment, and it was rewarded with a beaded cap and stole."

- Kaleigh Edwards (CKiowa & Comanche), Class of 2016, NWC HS

**NATIVE
AMERICAN
GRADUATION
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NATIVE AMERICAN GRADUATION ATTIRE

Here are some tips and resources to review concerning Native American Graduation attire:

If you are a student or parent preparing for graduation, please ask questions early in the school year to your Principal or Senior sponsor about what is allowed.

Check your school board policy and student handbooks if you are denied the right to wear Native American graduation attire.

For support regarding NA graduation attire, you can reach out to:

- Your School District's Indian Education office
- Your School Board Member representing your area
- Your Tribe
- A surrounding Tribe near your high school
- Your State's Education Department or Indian Education Department
- Your State's Indian Education State Organization
- National Indian Education Association
- Native American Rights Fund
- American Civil Liberties Union

"Wearing your stole and feather isn't just to "stand out, or look cool" wearing these is a symbol of your dedication to high school and to celebrate this first milestone in the rest of your adulthood. Wearing these things at graduation is also a thank you to our ancestors who paved this way for us to be able to have the privilege of being able to wear these. And it is our job to represent our people and culture."

- Abbagael Cordova (Muscogee Creek), Class of 2017, US Grant HS

"When given my eagle feather it not only signified my passage into adulthood, it signified the prayers that are carried with this feather. For generations my family has used feathers to pray and wish well of others and their journeys. My own people sit up on their knees all night and pray with these feathers in honor of my life and my journey that I may go a long way in my educational journey."

- Sonia Hoffman - Williams (Cheyenne & Arapaho), Class of 2010, US Grant HS

MORE INFORMATION

VISIT THESE WEBSITES

For more information or resources, you can visit these websites:

<https://collegefund.org/blog/graduation-celebrating-your-achievements-and-your-culture>

<https://www.ncai.org/resources/resolutions/in-support-of-allowing-native-students-to-wear-eagle-feathers-at-high-school-graduation>

<https://tribaleddepartmentsna.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/00060910.pdf>

<https://tribaleddepartmentsna.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/00060909.pdf>