



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

NIEA Resolution 2021 - #E02

TITLE: Back the Braid – Protecting Native Students from Cultural Discrimination

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 Native 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 Native 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, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 protects the rights of Natives to exercise their traditional religions by ensuring access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonial and traditional rites; and

WHEREAS, in Native communities, hair and other objects are sacred and serve an expression of pride and connection to culture, heritage and religious beliefs; for example, many Native people have specific traditions related to hair-cutting that correlate purposefully to designated life events, such as loss of family members; and

WHEREAS, Native youth are currently living in the wake of decades of trauma due to assimilation-era policies intended to "Kill the Indian in him and save the man" including boarding schools, where tribal members were forced to change their appearance and practices for the express purpose of cultural assimilation through the severing of cultural ties involving hair length, clothing, language and more; and

WHEREAS, there is no consistent policy enacted across school settings from early childhood to higher education to protect Native students from cultural discrimination; and

WHEREAS, numerous incidents of discrimination have affected young Native students throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, Native students, like all students, learn best in safe and welcoming school climates that support learning for all students and demonstrate commitment to diversity; and

WHEREAS, the NIEA works strategically to enhance and develop educational opportunities for Native students by supporting Native language and culturally-relevant education, putting kids first in Native education, and promoting Native student achievement and success; and

WHEREAS, due to a recent incident that received nationwide attention, it was revealed there is a great lack of understanding regarding the cultural and religious significance of long hair among Native peoples, which illustrates the necessity of immediate action within the next two weeks by the National Indian Education Association.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the NIEA will develop a policy template and related professional development materials to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of Native students by protecting expressions of cultural identity, such as the wearing of eagle feathers at graduation and having long hair, in order to foster a learning environment that enhances the safety and educational development of all students while honoring the cultural customs of Natives and all other protected classes; and

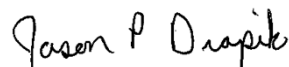
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NIEA will share this resolution and materials with the State Department of Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Governors Association; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NIEA will encourage leaders to take meaningful action to ensure students feel safe, respected and begin to foster relationships with Native communities.

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 duly considered and passed by the National Indian Education Association on October 16, 2021 at which a quorum of the membership was present.



Jason Dropik
President