



THE NAVAJO NATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Begaye-Nez Administration Send Letters to Sapulpa Public Schools in Support of Female Navajo Student



*Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Nez sent letters to the Sapulpa Public Schools in support of Navajo student Lisanne Yazzie, who was told she couldn't wear her traditional moccasins with leggings because they were considered "boots." As this photo of the 2017 graduating class of Window Rock High School clearly demonstrates, the moccasins and leggings are a big part of the commencement ceremonies across the Navajo Nation. (Photo courtesy of WRHS)*

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez are standing in support of Lisanne Yazzie, a Navajo student who was told by administrators at Sapulpa Public Schools in Sapulpa, Okla. that she could not wear moccasins to her commencement ceremony.

“The moccasins are known as *kénitsááigíí*. Our Navajo women, ladies have worn high-topped moccasins for centuries, during special ceremonies and to mark special occasions. You referred to the moccasins as a boot and they are not boots,” stated President Begaye and Vice President Nez.

The Office of the President and Vice President made numerous calls to the Sapulpa Public Schools and left messages, but no calls were returned by Principal Johnny Bilby and the administration. On May 18, the school released a statement that an exception would be made to allow for traditional native dress at the commencement ceremonies.

The Begaye-Nez administration said the initial ban was culturally insensitive and lauds the administration's decision to allow the moccasins. The graduation is set for May 20, 2016. The letters sent by the administration are attached.

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