



# THE NAVAJO NATION

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 03-2024

## EXECUTIVE ORDER TO REQUIRE SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT SERVE NAVAJO STUDENTS TO ALLOW NATIVE REGALIA AT GRADUATION CEREMONIES

### WHEREAS:

1. The President of the Navajo Nation serves as the Chief Executive Officer for the Executive Branch of the Navajo Nation government. 2 N.N.C § 1005 (A);
2. The President shall have the power to issue an executive order for the purpose of interpreting, implementing or giving administrative effect to statutes of the Navajo Nation in the manner set forth in such statutes. 2 N.N.C. § 1005 (C)(14);
3. Under the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005, "It is the educational mission of Navajo Nation to promote the lifelong learning for the Navajo People, and *to protect the culture, integrity, and sovereignty of the Navajo Nation.*" 10 N.N.C. § 2 (emphasis added);
4. Through the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act, the Navajo Nation Council has empowered the Executive Branch through the Navajo Board of Education and the Department of Diné Education to oversee the operation of all schools serving the Navajo Nation, to develop and implement appropriate educational standards, and to require educational programs and curriculum on Navajo language and culture in all schools that educate Navajo children. 10 N.N.C. §§ 106 (A); 111; 112.
5. Through the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act, 10 N.N.C. §§ 107 (B)(3)-(4), the Navajo Nation through the Superintendent of Schools is empowered to:
  - a) Inquire into the educational situation of Navajo students in any school serving the Navajo Nation, and
  - b) Determine the impact of educational programs on Navajo students by inquiring into areas of concerns relevant to the educational situation of Navajo students;

6. The Nation through the Board and the Department of Diné Education authorizes local community-controlled schools to receive federal Bureau of Indian Education funding and has the authority to take control of such schools in specific circumstances. 10 N.N.C. § 106 (G)(1);
7. The Navajo Nation through the Board and Department of Diné Education funds state public schools serving Navajo students, both within and outside the boundaries of the Navajo Nation, through Johnson-O'Malley funding for Native cultural programs. State public school districts have executed funding agreements with the Department of Diné Education agreeing to create educational programs on Native culture under guidelines set by the Navajo Nation;
8. There have been recent reported incidents at several schools serving Navajo students where school administrators have prohibited Native students from displaying cultural or ceremonial regalia;
9. Native students have the fundamental right under Navajo, state, and federal law to display cultural and ceremonial regalia at graduation; and
10. Such rights cannot be infringed by allegedly facially neutral policies, which, as applied, discriminate against Native students by outlawing expressions of Native culture and beliefs.

**THEREFORE, I, DR. BUU NYGREN**, President of the Navajo Nation, by the authority vested in me, hereby ORDER the following:

All schools serving Navajo students, whether within or outside the boundaries of the Navajo Nation, shall allow the display of Native cultural and ceremonial regalia at graduation ceremonies. No school, school district, or local community-controlled school policy, whatever the alleged source of authority, shall be interpreted or applied to disallow such display.

**EXECUTED this 17<sup>th</sup> Day of May 2024.**



Dr. Buu Nygren, *President*  
**THE NAVAJO NATION**

**ATTEST:**



Ethel Branch, *Attorney General*  
**NAVAJO NATION DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**







The Navajo Nation  
Yideeskáadi Nitsáhákees

DR. BUU NYGREN **PRESIDENT**  
RICHELLE MONTOYA **VICE PRESIDENT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 17, 2024

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## Navajo President Buu Nygren signs executive order to direct schools to allow wearing of traditional regalia

**PAGE, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren today signed an executive order directing all schools with Navajo students, whether on or off the Navajo Nation, to allow them to wear traditional regalia at their commencement ceremonies.

“All schools serving Navajo students, whether within or outside the boundaries of the Navajo Nation, shall allow the display of Native cultural and ceremonial regalia at graduation ceremonies,” the order reads. “No school, school district, or local community-controlled school policy, whatever the alleged source of authority, shall be interpreted or applied to disallow such display.”

Executive Order 03-2024 is the result of a Farmington Municipal Schools graduating senior,

Genesis White Bull, a Hunkpapa Lakota of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, being ordered to surrender her beaded mortarboard which was replaced with a plain one to match those of other graduates.



*Following a sports award ceremony at Page High School, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren signed an executive order that directs schools with Navajo students to allow them to wear traditional regalia at their commencement ceremonies. With the President was Page Governing Board and Arizona School Board member Desiree Fowler, Navajo Nation Council Delegate Helena Nex-Begay, Page Unified School District Superintendent Bryce Anderson and Page High School Principal Leigh Guenther.*

The Tri-City Record of Farmington, N.M., reported a sacred feather plume called an “aopazan” was cut from Ms. White Bull’s mortarboard with scissors by an administrator, according to her mother Brenda White Bull, despite her request to remove it herself.

“You have probably been hearing on the news and social

media what happened recently at a school in New Mexico,” President Nygren said at before 200 cheering students and parents attending a celebration of Page Unified School District championship sports teams. “We asked permission of the superintendent and leadership if I could sign

an executive order here saying let's honor our students when they graduate."

The President said the executive order is a way to take care of Native students and to show them the respect they've earned and deserve, especially at a special time like a high school graduation.

"A lot of the times the eagle feathers, the plumes, the beated caps have prayers and ceremonies that went into them," he said. "Spiritually, that's what's really strengthening the students, and they want to use them because this might be the only time you ever graduated, so why should we take that away?"

Issuing an executive order sends a message to school district, states, Indian Country and the world that this is the Navajo Nation's position in support of its youth and its culture, he said.

Under the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005, the executive order states, "It is the educational mission of Navajo Nation to promote the lifelong learning for the Navajo People, and to protect the culture, integrity, and sovereignty of the Navajo Nation."

It states Native students have the fundamental right under Navajo, state and federal laws to display cultural and ceremonial regalia at graduation.

"Such rights cannot be infringed by allegedly facially neutral policies, which, as applied, discriminate against Native students by outlawing expressions of Native culture and beliefs," the order states.

On Wednesday, Navajo Nation First Lady Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren, who attended the Farmington graduation, issued a statement on Facebook objecting to the treatment of Ms. White Bull.

"We stand with our Native graduates this graduation season and their decision to wear their traditional tribal regalia or objects of cultural significance including eagle feathers, eagle plumes, and beaded graduation caps," she wrote. "Our graduates and families take immense pride in what they choose to wear on graduation day."

She said Native people will wear an eagle feather or plume during graduation as a symbol of their momentous achievement and the culmination of prayers and ceremonies done for them.

"Given the graduation rates of our Native students, it's incredibly important to remember how momentous a graduation ceremony is for Native communities," she stated. "I am deeply disappointed that this happened at a school where we have many Navajo and Native graduates. I hope the school learns from this experience and can take corrective measures."

An Arizona state representative, she wrote, she worked on legislation to allow Native students to wear traditional tribal regalia or objects of cultural significance at public school graduation ceremonies. It was signed into law by former Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey in April 2021.

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