

Department of Public Instruction: In support of our Indigenous students and educators

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The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction released the following statements today in support of bipartisan legislation currently being considered in the Assembly Committee on Education.

David J. O'Connor, Wisconsin DPI American Indian Studies Consultant

“Many other states across the United States have enacted laws protecting Indigenous students’ right to wear items of religious and cultural significance at graduation ceremonies and other school events, and I look forward to Wisconsin being added to that growing list of states. We know denying a young person’s identity and culture is an act of harm; in contrast, embracing and celebrating that very culture creates great benefit to all students. I want to say Miigwech* to our Indigenous leaders, students, families, communities, and nations for lifting this area of concern and other issues to support Indigenous education in Wisconsin.”

Demetri Beekman, Wisconsin DPI Executive Director of Equity and Inclusion

“The time to listen and take decisive action in collaboration with our Tribal Nation leaders is long overdue. Indigenous students, educators, and leaders in Wisconsin have resoundingly endorsed legislation protecting the decision of graduates to wear traditional tribal regalia, as well as the bills regarding collection of data and lifetime licensure for teaching American Indian language. For years, State Superintendents, including Dr. Tony Evers, Carolyn Stanford Taylor, and now Dr. Jill Underly, have called on districts to work with Tribal Nations to develop policies that recognize the

cultural and religious significance of tribal practices. It is with an unwavering sense of pride and deep humility that I emphatically add my voice alongside their voices of support.”

NOTE: * *Miigwech* means “thank you” in the Ojibwe and Anishinaabe language.