



Press Release

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Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Gov. Wassana Response to Clinton Public Schools Incident

Sept. 2, 2021

I read with great concern and sadness the news stories about the young man in the fifth grade whose long hair was cut by two other students at the Clinton Middle School. I respectfully request that all of the administrators and leaders at Clinton Public Schools take this situation very seriously. Hateful acts at school are dangerous, disturbing and disruptive. While one incident alone does not define a school, it is in many ways, a test of the school's culture and climate. How you respond is the true measure of a school's character.

It's up to school leaders and the community as a whole to set expectations. Everyone on staff, from the bus driver and custodian to classroom teachers and the IT department, must know that hate, disrespect and intimidation have no place on campus, and that every student should feel welcome.

As you may know, the Cheyenne and Arapaho people, and many other tribes as well, encourage our boys to wear long hair for religious and cultural reasons. Long hair also demonstrates that the young man and his family take pride in Native culture and heritage. Cheyenne and Arapaho cultures should be celebrated within the Clinton Public Schools, not denigrated. Violence toward our children because they are Cheyenne, Arapaho, or any other tribe should not be tolerated. School policies should reflect a respect for our Cheyenne and Arapaho children.

Nationwide, more than 90 percent of Native students attend integrated public schools near or on reservations, which have historically restricted tribal influence over curriculum, funding and staffing. Native American students have some of

the worst academic outcomes in public schools: They score lower than nearly all other demographic groups on national tests and less than three-fourths of Native students graduate from high school.

I was encouraged and inspired by the expressions of the Lonebear family members. While dealing with the anger and frustration of an assault on their child, they suggested a positive solution is possible: more Native culture and traditions taught in the Clinton schools. The Lonebear family demonstrates strength and integrity in their response to this difficult situation.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes have a very progressive Education Department that can help the Clinton Public Schools, staff, and community learn about the importance of cultural sensitivity and Native American culture. A school climate that encourages inclusion and promotes tolerance does not guarantee that bias or hate incidents won't happen. Instead, it creates an atmosphere in which these acts are less likely to gain momentum and more likely to be quickly and widely denounced. With this recent incident, it is more important than ever for the school district to take advantage of the assistance being offered by the Tribe and help bring an end to the long history of educational abuses of our tribal children and communities.

Me and members of my Executive staff will be meeting with the school district tomorrow, September 3, 2021 to discuss a path for moving forward. We will also be in attendance at the Clinton Public Schools Board of Education meeting that is scheduled on September 13, 2021. I look forward to working out a solution to address this critical issue and to working as a partner with the Clinton Public Schools.

For more information, contact the communications office at (405) 422-7928.