



January 29, 2019

Dear Parents, Students, and Staff,

There has been much discussion the past week over the topic of graduation gowns for our commencement exercises. Our principals sent information to seniors and parents about students wearing one gown: a predominantly dark colored gown with lighter colored accents, incorporating **both** of the school's colors. This would be a change from girls wearing the lighter color, and boys wearing the darker color.

We did not communicate this decision very well, and we'd like a chance to correct that. Our communication came late to our students and parents, and didn't involve enough up-front discussion. We want to ensure that we are communicating thoroughly and openly with our community on this issue and whenever possible. This doesn't always mean that our community will like or fully embrace all of our decisions. As administrators, we are tasked with doing what we feel is right for the safety, welfare, and education of all of our students, even when it's not popular.

For the class of 2019, students will have a choice of **three** gowns: a predominantly dark-colored gown with the other school's color as an accent - for any graduate to wear, or, both of the solid colors - also for anyone to wear. This gives students a choice, and it offers options for all seniors to be comfortable wearing one of these gown colors.

Rather than move to *only* one single gown color for 2020 and beyond, we are taking a step back and will work more closely with this year's junior class, their parents, and our staff. We'll have deeper, more inclusive conversations about this decision, and take our time moving forward.

Our high school principals will be asking every member of the senior class to confirm their gown selection to choose either the darker gown with lighter accents, or either of the solid color gowns. Those orders will need to be submitted no later than Friday, February 8 so there is enough time for gowns to arrive in time for commencement. Sizes have already been collected, but we are asking students to simply confirm their name and their gown choice so that we are abundantly clear in our ordering.

A great deal of information that has been posted in social media and in news reports about this issue is inaccurate and incomplete. News reports have focused on gender *identity* as the reason for the change, but many factors drove this decision. The primary reason for the change, in my mind, was gender *equality*. We don't hand out boy diplomas and girl diplomas - we give out one single diploma. Our male and female sports teams also wear uniforms that incorporate *both* of the school's colors rather than having one color for boys teams and one for girls. The vast majority of colleges and universities in this nation offer one gown to their graduates. Increasingly, high schools in this country are following suit, and many of the highest achieving high schools in this area have gone to one gown. Our high school principals are in agreement that a graduation gown that includes both of a high school's colors is symbolic of the equality that exists today in education, and expresses school unity.

Reaction has been different in each of our high schools - from two quickly embracing it to another forming an online petition against it. It's clear that more conversation is needed on this topic. We certainly didn't intend to upset parents or students or divide our community.

Perhaps the one comment I have heard the most from community members about this issue is -- why all this fuss over a gown? The reality is that this is a politically charged topic. This isn't just about the color of a gown. It's about what we decide to say about ourselves as a community. I look forward to participating in those conversations.

Thank you,

Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent