

New Law Expands Students' Rights at Graduation Ceremonies

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Assembly Bill (AB) 1369 was signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom on September 26, 2025. The bill strengthens and clarifies students' existing right to wear traditional tribal regalia or recognized objects of religious or cultural significance during graduation ceremonies and related school events.

Background

Under existing law, students are permitted to wear traditional tribal regalia or recognized objects of religious or cultural significance as adornments during school graduation ceremonies. However, local educational agencies (LEAs) retain discretion to prohibit any item they deem likely to cause a substantial disruption or material interference with the ceremony. Many LEAs also require students to obtain preapproval to ensure adornments comply with the law and the LEA's policies in advance of the ceremonies. The law previously defined "adornment" as something that must be attached to or worn with, but not replace, the traditional cap and gown worn at graduation. This restriction limited the types of items students were permitted to wear to graduation as adornments.

Overview of AB 1369

Effective January 1, 2026, AB 1369 amends Education Code Section 35183.1. Under the amended law, students and their families can determine whether an adornment constitutes traditional tribal regalia or a recognized object of religious or cultural significance. AB 1369 also now provides that LEAs cannot require a preapproval process for intended adornments.

In addition to graduation ceremonies, the law extends this right to other events "related" to graduation. Because AB 1369 does not define what constitutes a "related event," LEAs may need to adopt policies or regulations to identify which events are covered under this provision. The bill also revises the definition of "adornment" to ensure students cannot be required to wear a graduation cap if it is incompatible with their cultural or religious adornment. AB 1369 still preserves, however, an LEA's authority to restrict adornments which are likely to cause a substantial disruption or material interference with a ceremony.

Takeaways

AB 1369 significantly shifts the role of LEAs in determining what students may wear at graduation ceremonies. While LEAs may no longer require preapproval for traditional tribal regalia or recognized objects of religious or cultural significance, the law does not prohibit a voluntary pre-ceremony process by LEAs to assist in the sensible implementation of this law without unnecessary complications the day of graduation ceremonies. Additionally, while AB 1369 provides that a student and a student's family make the initial decision of whether an adornment is a recognized object of religious or cultural significance, it is easily foreseeable that not every desired adornment will be permissible and that some will constitute that which present substantial disruptions, violates the rights of other students, or is clearly not a recognized object of religious or cultural significance. As a result of AB 1369, LEAs should review and revise their existing graduation dress code policies and administrative procedures to ensure compliance with the law.

If you have any questions about AB 1369 or need guidance related to graduation adornments, please contact the authors of this Client News Brief or any attorney at one of our [eight offices](#) located statewide. You can also subscribe to our [podcasts](#), follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#), or download our [mobile app](#).

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