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'Got land?' sweatshirt sparks controversy among Saskatchewan school, First Nations



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Tenelle Starr, a Grade 8 student at Balcarres Community School, wears her "Got Land? Thank an Indian," sweatshirt. Starr and other students wearing sweaters bearing that slogan were initially instructed to wear them inside-out due to complaints.

Courtesy Tenelle Starr

School and First Nations officials in a Saskatchewan town have backtracked after asking students who wear sweaters with the phrase, "Got Land? Thank an Indian," to turn the clothes inside-out.

Several students at Balcarres Community School, about 90 kilometres northeast of Regina, began wearing sweaters with the printed slogan last spring, according to principal Brian Endicott.

Some community members have found the clothing offensive, leading school and First Nations leaders to initially ask students to wear it inside-out.

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"We never banned the shirt, but as a community we discussed the implications based on the concerns of some vocal community members," Endicott said.

The issue was raised again on Friday when Grade 8 student Tenelle Starr, 13, wore a sweatshirt bearing the words, "Got Land?" on the front and, "Thank an Indian," on the back.

The message alludes to land treaties in Saskatchewan in the late 1800s between aboriginals and the Crown, enabling Europeans to live on land historically owned by First Nations people.

"I think of it as a teaching tool that could help bring awareness to our treaty lands," said Starr, a Star Blanket First Nation member.

Many have praised what they see as Starr's bravery for continuing to wear the shirt, despite the controversy.

"I feel proud of what I have done and I'm just really glad to be sending the message out," Starr said.

A school assembly has been held with the reserve's chief, Michael Star, and its council to give students background on the message. Endicott said it "was very positive and allowed students to learn from the situation, and to ask any questions they may have had."

The school and the First Nation's leaders have since allowed students to resume wearing the clothing with the slogan on school grounds.

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