“As we have learned over the past three years, these institutions are not just part of our past. Their legacy reaches us today, and is reflected in the wounds people continue to experience in communities across the United States.”

- Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report - Volume II


The significance role of this initiative extends beyond historical acknowledgment; it has profound implications for our Native children today. By uncovering the lost histories and traumas of the boarding school era, the Initiative aims to foster healing and reconciliation. It offers a path towards understanding the legacy of these institutions their role in shaping current disparities, and charges our communities to continue to heal.

“For children and Indigenous communities nationwide, the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative represents a crucial step towards equity. By documenting and acknowledging the traumas of the past, the Initiative represents a critical first step towards reconciliation, and begins to strengthen the connection between Native peoples, our histories and education, ultimately fostering a more equitable future.”

-Rusty Creed Brown, Interim Executive Director, National Indian Education Association

Volume II of the Investigative Report includes key updates to the understanding of the Federal Indian Boarding School era:
- Updates the official list of Federal Indian boarding schools to 417;
- Identifies 1,025 other, similar institutions which did not meet the federal criteria;
- Confirms at least 973 deaths of children at these institutions, with 74 unmarked or marked burial sites at 65 different school sites;
- Estimates $23.3 billion in FY 23 adjusted dollars spent by the U.S. Government on the Federal Indian boarding school system.

An element essential to this investigation is the recognition of Indian Treaties, which remain valid federal law today. As noted in the report, many of these treaties, made between 1819 and 1868, prioritized education for Indigenous peoples. The initiative acknowledges that 171 such
treaties involve the Federal Indian boarding school system, emphasizing the historical and legal context of Indigenous education and its longstanding significance to this day for Indigenous communities.

Volume II also includes eight additional recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior in light of the further investigation. These include:

1. Acknowledge, Apologize, Repudiate, and Affirm.
2. Invest in Remedies to the Present-Day Impacts of the Federal Indian Boarding School System.
4. Identify and Repatriate Children who Never Returned from Federal Indian Boarding Schools.
5. Return Former Federal Indian Boarding School Sites.
6. Tell the Story of Federal Indian Boarding Schools.
7. Invest in Research.
8. Advance International Relationships.

Each of these recommendations will be critical for the federal government to pursue and require a serious commitment of all parties to respond to the historical and modern ramifications of the Federal Indian boarding school system. Many of these modern ramifications are experienced in the front lines of our schools, felt strongly by our Native youth.

Recommendation two includes five sub-recommendations for individual and community healing, family preservation and reunification, violence prevention, redress Indian Education, and Revitalization of First American languages. Each of these inform the continued work of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), acknowledging that NIEA, Native Nations, and our community leaders are all working to support our youth.

- Individual and community healing calls for funding to support cultural, community driven healing efforts, efforts which the NIEA Whole Child Initiative Remains actively involved in.
- Family Preservation and Reunification is directly offering support for the Indian Child Welfare Act.
- Violence Prevention is informed by each of the prior initiatives, NIEA’s Whole Child Initiative and the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)’s ongoing efforts.
- Redress Indian Education calls for the fulfillment of the trust and treaty obligations, across the federal government, to support Indian Education. This will require nothing less than full funding of the Bureau of Indian Education and programs such as Title VI and Johnson O’Malley in public school systems. Importantly, this also acknowledges the needs for supports in higher education—not only for full funding for Tribal Colleges and Universities—but nationwide in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities.
- Revitalization of First American Languages involves the critical coalition of ground-level efforts to support language revitalization and acquisition, as well as federal policy and advocacy initiatives to increase the funding and programmatic supports for language communities.
The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative is impactful for children and communities nationwide because it seeks to uncover and address the historical traumas inflicted by the boarding school system. With unification of healing and reconciliation and by acknowledging and documenting these past injustices, the initiative empowers Indigenous communities to reclaim their histories and fosters a deeper understanding of the systemic challenges they face today.

NIEA continues to look towards the passage of the S. 1723. H.R. 7227, the Truth and Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. This bill would expand upon the Initiative by allowing for a comprehensive review of all sites beyond just the Federal scope. This bill is currently awaiting a floor vote.